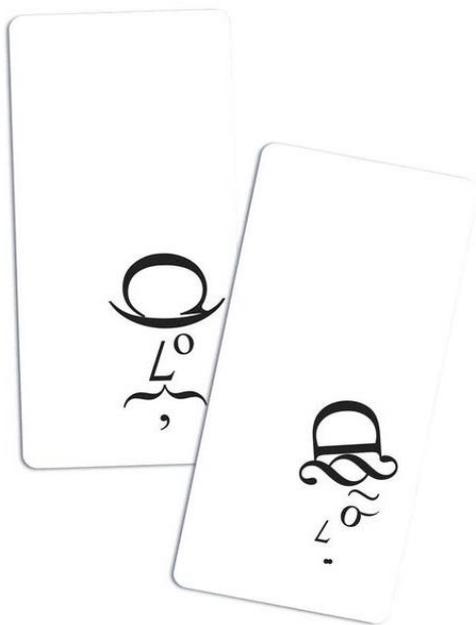


AGATHA CHRISTIE'S DETECTIVES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN MISS MARPLE AND HERCULE POIROT

TWO LEGENDS OF THE QUEEN OF CRIME



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“People never stop writing to me nowadays to suggest that Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot should meet. But why should they meet? I'm sure they would not like meeting at all. **They are both stars and stars in their own right.**”

— Agatha Christie

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ABSTRACT

This research project analyses how different Agatha Christie's most known detectives Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot are. It intends to focus on Miss Marple as a feminine point of view in contraposition to the popularity of Poirot, as well as to determine if Agatha Christie's sex, also female, plays an important role in the construction of the character Jane Marple. To answer this question, the paper compares three books of each author and reflects the evolution of the characters from the first book to the last. In order to do this, every novel is divided into different aspects to take into consideration: character's descriptions, interactions, language used, methods of investigation and interesting facts and ideas. The results showed that Christie's influence of her own life and the social context in that moment were conveyed in the two characters. Moreover, the research project identifies many different patterns in the two characters, mostly by the archetypes they represent. The study emphasizes the importance that Miss Marple and Poirot had and have in literature.

En aquest treball s'estudien els dos personatges més importants de les novel·les detectivesques de l'Agatha Christie: la Miss Marple i l'Hercule Poirot. El focus d'atenció del treball recau en el personatge de la Jane Marple, tant pel seu punt de vista femení que s'oposa al Poirot, qui representa el detectiu més famós de Christie; com per intentar determinar les característiques de la Marple que s'han vist afectades pel fet que l'autora dels llibres fos una dona, sobretot en el context social en què vivia, marcat per una forta tradició literària de protagonistes masculins com a detectius principals. Per tal d'aconseguir-ho, es comparen tres llibres de cada personatge i se n'analitza la seva evolució. Per això, el treball comparatiu es divideix en diferents aspectes a tenir en compte de cada novel·la: descripcions, interaccions, llenguatge usat, mètodes d'investigació que utilitzen i curiositats. Després d'aquesta comparació, s'ha observat que el context i la pròpia vida de l'autora han influenciat els detectius, així com s'han relacionat diferents trets que s'identifiquen amb l'arquetip que representen. El treball posa un gran èmfasis en la transcendència que aquests dos personatges han tingut per l'actualitat.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN MISS MARPLE AND HERCULE POIROT

En este trabajo se estudian los dos personajes más importantes de la autora Agatha Christie: Miss Marple y Hercule Poirot. Se centra alrededor de la figura de Miss Marple como una de las primeras detectives femeninas dotadas del rol principal, con el objetivo de poner en evidencia la diferencia de mentalidad de un personaje desde el punto de vista femenino en contraposición a Poirot, el detective más famoso de la autora. El trabajo también pretende establecer conexiones entre las características de Miss Marple con Agatha Christie, no solo por el hecho de ser mujer, sino también por lo que esto implicaba en su época, en la que se había forjado una gran tradición literaria de protagonistas detectives masculinos. Para conseguirlo, se analizan tres libros de cada personaje y su evolución en la obra. Para ello, el trabajo comparativo se divide en diferentes aspectos a tener en cuenta: descripciones, interacciones, lenguaje usado, métodos de investigación que utilizan i curiosidades. Una vez terminada esta comparación, se ha observado que el contexto i la propia vida de la autora han influenciado en el comportamiento de los detectives, y sobre todo se ha visto que muchos de sus rasgos se identifican con el arquetipo que representan. El trabajo pone un gran énfasis en la trascendencia que estos dos personajes han tenido para la actualidad.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

All I knew when I was given the task to do this research was that it had to be about literature. But that was all. From the very moment this thought came to my mind, it followed many days of searching topics and different types of studies because I could not decide. I discovered many interesting researches which compared books to their film adaptations, others about linguistics and more. However, I didn't want to repeat the ideas and therefore focused on one type of literature. I chose to write about classic literature, as I find it quite intriguing. So when this was settled I asked myself, now what? I didn't have to look much further since the answer was right in front of me.

One of my favourite authors is Agatha Christie and I had already read some of her books, so deciding on analysing her work was not a tough decision. Moreover, the genre of crime and detective fiction has also been an interest of mine. I used to read Sherlock Holmes' stories and many others.

At first I was unsure whether the topic of the research would be a study about Poirot or Miss Marple, the two most famous characters of the author and whose novels I had read the most. I decided on combining both characters on my research but focusing on Miss Marple for the reasons that I will give afterwards. Thusly, my initial idea was to write a comparative study between the two most important sleuths of Agatha Christie's stories.

After thinking thoroughly, however, I thought that Miss Marple's character was much more interesting and if I wanted to analyse her insightfully, I would have to focus on her books. My purpose was also to see how a female author living in the early twentieth century as Agatha Christie would write her female protagonist in contrast to her most famous detective Poirot, who is in fact a man. Miss Marple is also one of the precedents of modern detective fiction and is one of the first female detectives of the history. Her importance relies in her gender and the difficulties that women had to face in the past, as well as in the present. She therefore plays a very important role in the development of detective novels.

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To achieve my objective, I had to choose if I would base my research entirely on Miss Marple's books, but I decided that Poirot also plays an important role to detective fiction and is essential to see the differences between the two characters and hence both genders. To analyse their behaviours, I read six books (three of each character) and papers written by other authors on this subject. It astonished me that, while many papers focused on Poirot and others on Miss Marple, none compared the two detectives directly. Therefore, it seemed a good idea to do it myself. This research relies on observation and comparison.

Finally, my hypothesis is that Agatha Christie's social role and female condition has influenced Miss Marple's behaviour. I do not expect a modern thinking, as it is ordinary for a woman as Agatha Christie in her era to have a backward view over some matters highly discussed in the present. I also believe that a big difference between the construction of Poirot and Miss Marple's character will be visible.

CHAPTER II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. THE GOLDEN AGE OF DETECTIVE FICTION

1.1. Background

The Golden Age of Detective Fiction is the era comprised between the 1920s and 1930s, a phase of a certain type of detective fiction, although it had already been written since the 1911 with authors as important as Howard Haycraft, who is credited with introducing the phase which would afterwards gain popularity and reach new heights thanks to the publication of a great number of works from Agatha Christie and her contemporaries.

The first stories in English that are truly detective fiction are three short stories published by the American writer Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), of which is important to draw attention to *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, as it is regarded by many as the world's first detective crime fiction. The novel features the young detective named Auguste Dupin. There are included essential elements for modern detective fiction: a crime is committed, the suspects are presented, the detective collects all the information necessary and he ends up solving the crime and saving the day. By its characteristics it has also been said to be a progenitor of the crime fiction novels which would afterwards follow his path.

Classic murder mystery novels had gradually become more popular in the previous decades as a result of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes' fame. This early stage of crime fiction was written in short stories usually published in magazines, which would encourage new female writers to publish their own stories. Therefore, it is natural to find that some of the best writers in this age were women, such as Agatha Christie herself.

Nevertheless, this form of publishing was not successful because it did not allow the writer to extend the story, present the suspects adequately and develop its plot. However, Arthur Conan Doyle managed to establish what, in effect, was a new genre

and to give his detective hero a distinctive stamp of individuality that has been imitated by countless writers in the century afterwards.

The short-story genre started to die out as magazines lost interest in publishing short stories, partly because the expansion of libraries gave readers easier access to books. Thus, the readers of Poe and Doyle stayed loyal since their stories and characters had a great significance but other many authors were forgotten in their shadow.

1.2. The Golden Age of Detective Fiction: Its history and characteristics

The Golden Age of mystery fiction takes place between the World War I and II, the so-called interwar years. Even though the name has remained, many critics argue if this is the best term, as there has been a fair amount of detective novels and authors since then.

The main authors who dominated this period were British women —Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham and Ngaio Marsh— the latter being New Zealander. Due to their influence in modern literature they were dubbed as the “Queens of Crime”. Other female writers from this time were Elizabeth Mackintosh—who wrote as Josephine Tey— and Gladys Mitchell. As a result of the introduction to more innovative features, they all continue to be well known, and their works can still be found on libraries and bookshelves.

In contrast, many American writers fought for the title of best mystery author for the hard-boiled school of American crime fiction, which is a sub-genre of this age that shares many characteristics with detective fiction in particular. As the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes: “Hard-boiled fiction, a tough, unsentimental style of American crime writing that brought a new tone of earthy realism or naturalism to the field of detective fiction. Hard-boiled fiction used graphic sex and violence, vivid but often sordid urban backgrounds, and fast-paced, slangy dialogue.”

This type of novels used to be more popular among the male readers. A great hardboiled author is James M. Cain, who is seen as one of the creators of the *roman noir*. One of his best novels is *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, which is actually the first novel he ever published.

An alternative term is the 'cluepuzzle' novel, which are mystery novels where the reader as well as the detective are provided with the same information, in order to allow the reader to solve the mystery by itself. Therefore, the purpose of the writer is to outsmart the reader's intelligence by giving an astonishing solution. Although in practice, it is not always so. The reader goes along the detective step by step but is also possible that many clues are being hidden from it.

It was a man, though, who took a major step in de-heroizing the detective. In his autobiography, E. C. Bentley said that, in turning to crime fiction in *Trent's Last Case* (1913), he was able to introduce a detective who was "recognizable as a human being"¹, which is a huge step coming from a genre that has Sherlock Holmes as a leading role. His setting in an English country house is also a location influence for Agatha Christie's stories.

The traits of the detective fiction as we know it nowadays was set during this period, inspired by some of the famous Sherlock Holmes' features, for instance the fact that the stories are often told from a friend or assistant of the detective.

¹ Bentley, E.C., *Those days: An Autobiography*, 1940, p. 252

1.3. The Ten Commandments by Ronald Knox

Ronald Knox was a mystery writer in the early part of the 20th century who belonged to the Detection Club, a society peopled by such legendary mystery writers as Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, G. K. Chesterson, and E. C. Bentley. Among his novels: *The Viaduct Murder*, *Double Cross Purposes*, *Still Dead*.

Knox was also a Catholic priest, which is perhaps why he was tempted to write a 10 Commandments of detective fiction. If you write such stories, thou shalt obey these laws:

1. The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow.
2. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.
3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.
4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.
5. No Chinaman must figure in the story.
6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.
7. The detective must not himself commit the crime.
8. The detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader.
9. The stupid friend of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.
10. Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.

In truth, most of these rules have become outdated in current mystery fiction. Even Christie herself has broken these “laws” in many of her books, as in one of her most beloved novels: *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Staying away from this rules is what gave her originality and therefore more readers.

2. AGATHA CHRISTIE

Dame Agatha Christie (15 September 1890 – 12 January 1976) was a mystery writer who was one of the world's top-selling authors with works like *Murder on the Orient Express* and *And Then There Were None*. In fact, she is the most widely published author of all time, outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare. Her books have sold more than a billion copies in English and another billion in a hundred foreign languages. Christie's success as an author of sleuth stories has earned her titles like the "Queen of Crime" and the "Queen of Mystery."



IMAGE 1: Agatha Christie, 1937

Agatha Christie was born in Torquay, Devon on September 15, 1890 to Clarissa Margaret Boehmer. She was brought up by both her mother and her sister. The youngest of three siblings, she was educated at home by her mother, who encouraged her daughter to write. As a child, Christie enjoyed fantasy play and creating characters, and, when she was 16, she moved to Paris for a time to study vocals and piano.

In the First World war, she trained and worked as a nurse helping to treat wounded soldiers. She also became educated in the field of pharmacy. She recalled her time as a nurse with great fondness, saying it was one of the most rewarding jobs she ever undertook.



IMAGE 2: Agatha Christie with her second husband Max Mallowan

In 1914, she wed Colonel Archibald Christie, a Royal Flying Corps pilot, and took up nursing during World War I. She published her first book, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, in 1920; the story focused on the murder of a rich heiress and introduced readers to one of Christie's most famous characters—Belgian detective Hercule Poirot.

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In 1926, Christie released *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, a hit which was later marked as a genre classic and one of the author's all-time favourites. She dealt with tumult that same year, however, as her mother died and her husband, with whom she had her only daughter, revealed that he was in a relationship with another woman. Traumatized by the revelation, Christie disappeared only to be discovered by authorities several days later at a Harrogate hotel, registered under the name of her husband's mistress.

Christie would recover, with her and Archibald divorcing in 1928. In 1930, she married archaeology professor Max Mallowan, with whom she travelled on several expeditions, later recounting her trips in the 1946 memoir *Come, Tell Me How You Live*. The year of her new nuptials also saw the release of *Murder at the Vicarage*, which became another classic and introduced readers to Miss Jane Marple, an enquiring village lady.

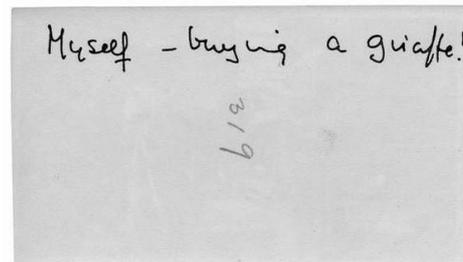


IMAGE 3: Agatha Christie travelling

However, Miss Marple and Poirot were not her only famous sleuths, she also wrote many stories with other characters such as:

- Tommy & Tuppence
- Ariadne Oliver
- Harley Quin
- Parker Pyne

During the Second World War, Christie worked in the pharmacy of the University College London, which gave her ideas for some of her murder methods.

After the war, her books continued to grow in international popularity. Christie was a renowned playwright as well, with works like *The Hollow* (1951) and *Verdict* (1958). Her play *The Mousetrap* opened in 1952 at the Ambassador Theatre and—at more

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than 8,800 showings during 21 years—holds the record for the longest unbroken run in a London theatre. Additionally, several of Christie's works have become popular movies, including *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974) and *Death on the Nile* (1978).

Her success led to her being honoured in the New Year's honour list. In 1971 she was appointed Dame Commander of the British Empire. In 1974, she made her last public appearance for the opening night of the play version of *Murder on the Orient Express*. Christie died on January 12, 1976 aged 85.



IMAGE 4: Miss Marple surrounded by a pile of books

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research is to identify characteristics, patterns and correlations between two characters created by the same author, Agatha Christie. I have decided to analyse Poirot and Miss Marple, as they are her most popular sleuths.

In order to do so, I have chosen six books, three of which are from Miss Marple, while the last three belong to Poirot. Therefore, the first step was to decide which books could lead me to a closer approach to their actual way of behaving, so they had to be representative of the characters. Considering this, the first books ever written by Christie from Poirot and Marple respectively seemed an obvious choice. As my objective is to identify the changes in their behaviour which have modelled both detectives into becoming a reference at that time until nowadays, the last book of each sleuth was necessary to observe how they had progressed from the first ever published. Even though these books alone would have given me a great amount of information, it was also important to consider that, from the first book to the last, there had been many situations that challenged them and had a big impact on their way of behaving. Moreover, between the first publication and the last there was a considerably long time. By choosing a third book, I was able to see more concretely the path they followed in order to arrive to the final destination.

Hence, the analysis is made first about each separate individual and afterwards, with the completed investigation done, the comparison between Poirot and Miss Marple.

The following books are the first that Christie ever wrote about their favourite and most bold sleuths:

- *The Murder at the Vicarage*
- *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*

As for the last ones, there were some peculiar situations to take into account. For instance, Poirot's last book published was actually written in the beginning of Christie's career, four decades before its publication. This influences that they might lack some characteristics which were developed during the course of her career.

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However, this was only a supposition, so I decided to choose it, regardless. On the other hand, Miss Marple's adventure finishes in the form of short stories (*Miss Marple's Final Cases*). What I intended to do at the beginning was to analyse them through their novels, hence I maintained my initial purpose of following the correct timeline for literary matters.

This was my final decision:

- *Sleeping Murder*
- *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*

At first, my idea was to choose a book from the years between the other mentioned, nevertheless the options given were not always representative of the characters, which was my main aim. For this reason, I selected Poirot's novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, one of the most famous work of the author, which was actually written as the fourth in Hercule Poirot's collection.

In the case of Miss Marple, I opted for a novel which complied with the fact of being considered as a book which represents the essence of the famous spinster detective, yet not being a remarkably early project of hers. Agatha Christie titled her detective story *A Murder Is Announced*.

MISS MARPLE	HERCULE POIROT
<i>The Murder at the Vicarage</i> (1930)	<i>The Mysterious Affair at Styles</i> (1920)
<i>A Murder Is Announced</i> (1950)	<i>The Murder of Roger Ackroyd</i> (1926)
<i>Sleeping Murder</i> (1976)	<i>Curtain: Poirot's Last Case</i> (1975)

After deciding which books were going to be used, the next step was to organize which structure would be followed in order to analyse different aspects about the characters.

I therefore made a list of the most important aspects to bear in mind:

- Descriptions: Useful tool because it allows the reader to judge the character objectively, as it is a direct thought of the writer, generally impartial. In the case of Poirot, for instance, the narrator is usually his dear friend Hastings, who gives a critical view of him, as he is aware of his virtues as well as his flaws. I will analyse their personality traits as well as the physical appearance.
- The characters surrounding the main character: The family, friends and people who interact with the main character are an important factor in life, which may consequently transcend and influence people's behaviour. The surroundings and setting also affect them directly. In this point, is also important to consider the role of the narrator which is usually a familiar person who is the one in charge of leading the story alongside Poirot or Miss Marple.
- Language used: Their backgrounds have contributed to their final presentation in society. Poirot is a Belgian detective and uses French as his way of expressing his emotion in countless times. Meanwhile, Miss Marple's Victorian background is emphasized by her nice manners.
- Methods of investigation: What each sleuth uses as investigative techniques also defines their personalities and highlights their skills. It is therefore important to analyse all strategies and correlate them to their usual human behaviour.
- Interesting facts and ideas: Other facts that do not belong in the rest of the categories will be collected in this point. For example, the feminism of Miss Marple's character is discussed.

Initially, my idea was to do this analysis about both sleuths, but once I started doing Miss Marple's book analysis, I discovered that her character had much to be told. It was so interesting that it mesmerized me and I decided to focus the analysis on her. This study will therefore explain Miss Marple's behaviour in each book with detail. Poirot, who is really important to the writer's story and key to understand Miss Marple as well as Agatha Christie, is also needed in this paper to compare the female detective to him. That said, the analysis about the three Poirot books that I have chosen will be summarized in one single section. Each aspect aforementioned will be discussed.

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The procedure which I am going use to use to analyse each characters is explained in the following steps:

- 1- Read every book in depth
- 2- Highlight the important phrases and thoughts of the detectives to determine what is important
- 3- Classify all phrases and paragraphs into a certain category²
- 4- Relate concepts and ideas

² The categories are the aspects abovementioned such as descriptions, language use, methods of investigation and more.

CHAPTER IV. COMPARATIVE STUDY

1. WHO IS MISS MARPLE?

An English old lady who loves crime resolution, Miss Marple, is a character created by the English writer Agatha Christie and protagonist of numerous novels of intrigue and mystery. The elderly spinster acts as an amateur consulting detective.

With an absolutely normal appearance, dressed in a stereotyped way as the classic older woman in the interior of England, Miss Marple's first appearance was in 1927,



IMAGE 5: MISS MARPLE (TV SERIES)

in *The Royal Magazine*. From that moment on the character, one of the most famous created by her author, starred in twelve novels and a large number of stories collected in at least three anthologies. The novel that puts an end to Miss Marple's series is *Sleeping Murder*, a work that was published posthumously, even though there is a collection of short stories about the famous sleuth called *Miss Marple's Final Cases and Two Other Stories*.

Miss Marple lives in a small town, St Mary Mead, although she usually travels to London with her nephew, and only family, Raymond West, who is a writer. The old sleuth has a great analytical capacity, but also a great knowledge of human behaviour thanks to the observation of the bad habits of her neighbours, which end up being fundamental for the resolution of their cases.

The character of Miss Marple was very popular and numerous adaptations were made to the cinema, television and theatre. Among the actresses who played the character should be noted the work of Margaret Rutherford, which marked her debut in the cinema, and the work of Angela Lansbury.

2. THE MURDER AT THE VICARAGE

The Murder at the Vicarage is the first book which introduces her spinster female detective Jane Marple as a new character in a series of books that follow her most brilliant discoveries and her character development.

The book is narrated in the first person but, though Marple is the main amateur detective who has the task of resolving the case, the function of narrating the story is carried by another character in the book. In this case, the vicar of the town. Agatha Christie used this method in order to confuse the reader, who doesn't know what the detective thinks. Therefore, the mystery is unravelled in the last part of the book to maintain the enigma and surprise the reader.

Miss Marple is first mentioned on the first chapter of *The Murder at the Vicarage*, in where it early states her observation skills which helps her finding out about all that goes around her. She is always in other people's affairs which do not concern her. Hence, some people from the village find her annoying up to a certain point whereas others find her interesting and funny to be around with.

Text 1

"[...] Who is coming?"

Griselda ticked off on her fingers with a glow of virtue on her face.

"Mrs. Price Ridley, Miss Wetherby, Miss Hartnell, and that terrible Miss Marple."

"I rather like Miss Marple," I said. "She has, at least, a sense of humour."

"She's the worst cat in the village," said Griselda. "And she always knows every single thing that happens— and draws the worst inferences from it." (Christie, *Vicarage*³, p. 5)

³ *Vicarage* is the title which I used to refer to "*The Murder at the Vicarage*" from this moment on.

In this paragraph, the village's Vicar and his wife Griselda discuss who is coming for tea, or "tea and scandal" as Griselda refers to it, at their house and mention many old ladies. One of these is Miss Marple herself, the shrewdest of them all. Griselda is not that fond of Miss Marple, as she is rather a young lady who enjoys not constantly being looked at and Miss Marple does exactly the contrary: always in constant awareness of her surroundings.

As far as her appearance in the book, she rarely appears, although they mention her often. When she appears, it is usually done to lighten the case and help those leading it to resolve it or creating a new path. In fact, in the book *The Moving Finger*, Marple does not come in scene until fifty pages before the ending, in which she unravels the mystery. Many people consider her appearance more of a cameo due to her delay, even though she ends up solving the case.

In this book specifically, her appearances are sporadic. This discontinuity is broken at the end of the book when her theory about the murder is presented. She exposes her thoughts in the form of a monologue and she is the centre of the scene for the last two chapters.

2.1. Character's descriptions

The Vicar, who profoundly admires Miss Marple for her intelligence and cunning, presents the reader how Miss Marple is from his viewpoint. The descriptions of the character will thus be marked by his opinion, which is normally not shared by other people.

It is important to take into account the power that Jane Marple holds, even if externally she seems inoffensive. The Vicar, Leonard Clement, who can see through her, explains this in their first meeting in the book.

Text 2

“Miss Marple is a white-haired old lady with a gentle, appealing manner —Miss Wetherby is a mixture of vinegar and gush. Of the two Miss Marple is much the more dangerous.” (Christie, *Vicarage*, p.13)

This “gentle, appealing manner” of Miss Marple is a distinctive trait of the typical Victorian lady. Her way of behaving and treating others is characteristic of this era, but on the matter regarding the position of a Victorian lady she differs from the norm. While Victorian women are expected to possess feminine qualities such as innocence and be limited to childbearing and housewife, as it is explained in Charles's Petrie's article *Victorian Women Expected to be Idle and Ignorant*, Miss Marple does not follow this rules.

What she does keep from this archetype is the regular habit of celebrating tea parties (text 1) and, even though we do not have a definite description of her past, it is seen that she has been very well-educated.

She does not represent a professional detective but rather an amateur consulting detective. Nevertheless, she is not always thanked for her work nor paid. It can also be considered as a hobby of hers, as she does not have any professional experience. This is the reason why she wants to progress in her area. With the intention of achieving the expectations that some citizens have of her, she researches detective books in the library and hopes to find a similar situation to the current one to be aware about what role she plays.

She is also mentioned as a truthful and intuitive person and comes across as being wise. It is important to consider that this is not always the case because in some situations they describe her as cocky.

In the first meeting between Marple and the other old spinsters from St. Mary Mead, gossip about a possible couple in the town is discussed, which scandalizes those

who comment on it. Miss Marple, by contrast, is not amazed nor affected by the rumour. This is because she is already knowledgeable about the truth.

She even reveals some information: “[...] He had quite a serious quarrel with Colonel Protheroe the other day.” (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 15). Shortly after saying this, all attention gathers around her and all the other women lean forward interestingly. She continues to give her opinion about whether one should be trusting, as otherwise one looks naive.

It is interesting to remark how she refers herself to be too trusting and even relying, which, as Griselda points out, is far from the reality.

Text 3

“Colonel Protheroe accused him of being an ignoramus.”

“How like Colonel Protheroe, and how absurd,” said Mrs. Price Ridley.

“Very like Colonel Protheroe, but I don't know about it being absurd,” said Miss Marple. “You remember the woman who came down here and said she represented Welfare, and after taking subscriptions she was never heard of again and proved to having nothing whatever to do with Welfare. One is so inclined to be trusting and take people at their own valuation.”

I should never have dreamed of describing Miss Marple as trusting.

(Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 15)

Marple repeatedly describes herself differently to what others observe. Furthermore, she detracts from being a crucial element to the case solving process, remarking that she has merely helped, as if finding the murder was not even done by her. No sooner has the trial of the murderers taken place, than Miss Marple gives all credit to Inspector Slack. The Vicar expresses Marple's humble thoughts: “Naturally, nothing was said of Miss Marple's share in the business. She herself would have been terrified at the thought of such a thing.” (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 294). It can be observed as, in the end, she does not mind the public opinion and prefers not to be considered the “busybody” lady she is known for.

Nevertheless, at the time of providing her theory, she urges the others to listen closely to what she has to say because she is certain that she has discovered the murder. Her wish is to speak first, even before than the police, since she fears that one doctor, Mr Hawes, could lose his life and this would therefore be her fault. She worries about her friends' safety. She cannot bear to risk human lives. Hence, even though I have mentioned before that she does not like to compete with the police about who is praised and who gets the merit, she still thinks that she draws conclusions at a faster pace and more accurately than them. However, her natural reaction is to always respect the police. In fact, she thinks that they do a great job.

In addition, Miss Marple tends to be negative when dealing with people because she always thinks the worst of everyone due to her imagination. This fact contrasts with what I mentioned early about her "trust issues". Generally, she follows her instincts and does not allow the first impressions to rule her critical view.

On another matter, the vicar defends Miss Marple from the word of the Colonel Melchett, who generalizes that old ladies don't know about time. Mr Clement says that she has a really acute sense of time, more than even himself. This skill combined to her observation method makes of her quite a detective. He also says that she is usually right, which causes her unpopularity among others.

2.2. Interactions

Miss Marple is a popular woman in her little village. Therefore she connects with many friends of her. They mostly consider her a nice trustworthy woman who is always willing to give advice to others no matter the reason why, although this is not always the case.

2.2.1. *Miss Marple and the village people's relationships*

Even though Miss Marple is often discredited by some of the villagers, others respect her and defend her, because they know her ability to see beyond the surface. Griselda, the vicar's wife, knows how intelligent and sometimes dangerous Jane Marple may be. In some situations she refers to her abilities in a negative way because she does not like that she always has a finger in every pie, whereas in other situations, the skills aforementioned have a big impact in her way of seeing reality, as she thinks that Marple tells unquestionable truths. Thusly, she often defends her in front of his man, Len, who at the end also believes her words more than anything. In one of their early discussions, we can observe the first positionings of these two characters:

Text 4

"[Vicar] If he's in love with Lettice Protheroe —"

[Griselda] "Miss Marple didn't seem to think he was."

"Miss Marple may be mistaken."

"She never is. That kind of old cat is always right." She paused a minute and then said, with a quick sidelong glance at me [...]" (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 20)

At the end, in spite of the quarrels between the two ladies, Griselda trusts Miss Marple's knowledge and experience, while the vicar is sceptical. In another occasion, Griselda mentions that she is a "nasty old cat". This summarizes the contradictory relationship between Miss Marple and Griselda, two characters that care about each other in many occasions, but that have a really different personality, which leads to some disagreements. In truth, Griselda respects her deeply.

On the contrary, the vicar, who is also the narrator and therefore the one who comments more on Miss Marple's behaviour, begins the story doubtful about Miss Marple's abilities. He soon sees how wrong the first impression was and admires her.

He states: "I paid a grudging tribute to Miss Marple. She had not been deceived but had evidently suspected the true state of things with a fair amount of accuracy. I had entirely misread her meaning glance at Griselda." (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 25). The vicar is astonished and amazed simultaneously.

For this reason, he admires her and has a lot of respect for her: "Of all the ladies in my congregation, I consider her by far the shrewdest. Not only does she see and hear practically everything that goes on, but she draws amazingly neat and apposite deductions from the facts that come under her notice. If I were at any time to set out on a career of deceit, it would be of Miss Marple that I should be afraid." (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 254). In fact, when she explains how she has arrived to the conclusion that Lawrence Redding is the murderer, she admits her mistakes and this trait is praised by him: "I had never liked Miss Marple better than at this moment, with her humorous perception of her own weakness." (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 285).

Moreover, the vicar leads the investigation apart from the police and throughout his path, he remembers statements made previously by Miss Marple. His interrogations are deeply influenced by her. As a consequence, the lack of Miss Marple in the investigation process is compensated by her guidance.

We have to bear in mind that they have been neighbours for quite a long time and therefore know each other well. Miss Marple trusts him and he is her eyes in an investigation in which any citizen of the town can be accused. She even proposes to him the possibility of working together in order to uncover the truth, to what Len responds: "I think each one of us in his secret heart fancies himself as Sherlock Holmes" (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 257). This phrase has a double meaning. On one hand, it illustrates Arthur Conan Doyle's influence in Agatha Christie's entire work, although it is in Poirot's character where the resemblances with Sherlock Holmes are highlighted. On the other hand, it shows her position, which is more linked to a kind of consultant detective like Sherlock Holmes than a "private" detective as Poirot. In Miss Marple's case, the police have the urge of consulting her opinion in order to move forward with the conflict.

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On the other hand, Marple's bond with the other ladies is quite different because they share this interest in knowing all the secrets and the rumours of the town where they have all lived most of their lives. They could be qualified as friends, even though their conversations tend to be superficial. Many of these ladies are also unmarried and hence implies that they have more time for tea parties and gossiping. Thus, other people envision them as unaware detectives: "In St. Mary Mead everyone knows your most intimate affairs. There is no detective in England equal to a spinster lady of uncertain age with plenty of time on her hands" (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 33).



IMAGE 6: Miss Marple with friends at a tea party in *Miss Marple: Murder at the Vicarage* (1986)

An example of this behaviour, is their intricate effort to discover everything:

Text 5

"Miss Wetherby's just rung up," she said. "Mrs. Lestrangle went out at a quarter-past eight and hasn't come in yet. Nobody knows where she's gone." "Why should they know?"

"But it isn't to Dr. Haydock's. Miss Wetherby does know that, because she telephoned to Miss Hartnell who lives next door to him and who would have been sure to see her."

"It is a mystery to me," I said, "how anyone ever gets any nourishment in this place. They must eat their meals standing up by the window so as to be sure of not missing anything."
(Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 36)

The relationship between the spinsters is built in the rural atmosphere of St. Mary Mead. They therefore share many characteristics in common from the time spent together, for most of them a lifetime in the same village. They know other people better than themselves, as all their lives revolve around the latest gossip.

2.2.2. Marple's cooperation with professionals

At first, police are sceptical of Miss Marple's success as a detective because she has never worked for them and is not a professional crime expert. Nevertheless, many officers need her help and advice to discover the truth.

The Murder At The Vicarage presents two important officers:

- Colonel Melchett
- Inspector Slack.

Firstly, Colonel Melchett does not show a lot of respect for her and calls her repeatedly "the old lady" instead of her own name. He does not believe in her abilities because he thinks that she is too old to be fully aware of what surrounds her. He also thinks that her age condition can interfere in the process of solving a murder. At certain times he presumes that Miss Marple is a little deaf and ignorant because of her age and she cannot be considered as a proper witness. He considers her simply a "typical elderly spinster".

In his first visit to Miss Marple's house, encouraged by himself, the police's presence does not fluster her. Quite the opposite is the case: she is calmed.

Regarding Colonel Melchett, he uses his military charm and nice manners to approach the woman. They talk in a professional way. Also, Miss Marple is full with excitement and is eager to tell the police her findings, so she describes the day of the murder insightfully. As a consequence, Colonel Melchett remarks how good she is at observing, even at remembering minimal details such as the expressions on people's faces.

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Afterwards, when Melchett is stuck in the investigation, she suggests a good idea and also reveals her suspicion that more people are involved in the murder. However, her thoughts on the case are not revealed because she says that it wouldn't be right to name other suspects. She just states that there is a lot of wickedness in this world. This shows that she does not trust him completely, nor the vicar in some occasions, and that she does not like to reveal all her information in case she might be wrong.

After his visit, Melchett's true colours appear. He is not very complimentary.

Text 6

"I really believe that wizened-up old maid thinks she knows everything there is to know. And hardly been out of this village all her life. Preposterous. What can she know of life?"

I said mildly that though doubtless Miss Marple knew next to nothing of Life with a capital L, she knew practically everything that went on in St. Mary Mead.

Melchett admitted that grudgingly. (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 85)

Her intelligence bothers him because even though he knows that she is a good and loyal observer, **he rejects the idea of the old spinster, as they are often mistaken**. But as one character says in the novel: "Miss Marple is not the type of elderly lady who makes mistakes. She has got an uncanny knack of being always right." (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 113).

Melchett connects life with experience and he thinks that living only in a concrete place does not provide other insights. On the contrary, her immobility is what allows her to notice any different behaviour around the village. Furthermore, Colonel Melchett believes that Slack and himself will discover the truth without the help of the men in Scotland Yard and that this case will be Slack's *chef d'oeuvre*. They believe that they are "real" detectives, and therefore need no one to guide them.

But eventually the one who finds the murderer is Miss Marple and not the officers, to what Colonel Melchett has a succinct response. As well as the narrator, Melchett “was impressed with the logical certainty of Miss Marple’s conclusions. But for the moment he was not willing to admit it.” (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 287).

Inspector Slack, the other officer, is disliked by other people because of his arrogance, but he soon sees that Miss Marple is right about the case and her suspicions are also true. And even though he calls her also “old lady” and is not always nice, he shows respect for her because of her ability to see beyond.

In some aspects, Miss Marple and Slack’s opinion concur, for instance, that one can never know how others are in private. Accordingly, we must suspect of everybody until the innocence is proved.

At the end, he gets the credit for resolving the case, even though he failed at discovering the murder.

2.2.3. *Miss Marple's family*

Jane Marple is an unmarried woman. She lives alone in St. Mary Mead with her maids, who she taught in her characteristic Victorian style. She mentions her grandmother when she offers her guests cherry brandy, a recipe from her grandmother, but she is never shown.

In the second part of the book, her nephew Raymond West is introduced. He is a well-known author and one of her closest living relatives. Due to their difference of age, sometimes their vision of life does not coincide.



IMAGE 7: Richard E. Grant as Raymond West with Geraldine McEwan as Miss Marple in *Agatha Christie's Marple* (television series)

He thinks that people are unpleasant, while Marple has a more positive feeling. Nevertheless, Marple cares about him and is often concerned, as he is one of his last close relatives. Under her rough shell, she loves him and says that he is clever young man. For this reason, according to her, he knows almost nothing of life.

When Raymond talks, she listens to him interestingly as a good aunt. He, in his turn, also has a tolerant affection for “Aunt Jane”. But Miss Marple also likes having fun, and she sometimes quotes his words of his books against him about the matter of life. While Marple talks about the life stages, he emphasizes the death of it.

2.3. Language used

Miss Marple’s Victorian style is well represented in *The Murder At The Vicarage*. She uses euphemisms to soften terms such as “wickedness” or “nastiness” instead of “evil”. Some people argue that this is caused because the two first terms are not as linked to religion itself. She also mentions that things and people are “terrible”, but never crosses the line marked by her nice manners, even with the police, who often despise her. For instance, she always begins a sentence with “dear” and addresses her opinions with an appealing manner.

Nevertheless, when it is needed, she expresses exactly her feelings without complicating the language, normally at the end of the book, where she exposes her hypothesis. In this final paragraph Christie breaks her predominant use of brief dialogues and paragraphs. Hence, the language used by Agatha Christie in her novels is an uncomplicated, accessible and straightforward language, which probably contributed to the popularity of her books, because she reached a wider audience with her interesting new characters: some belonged to the Upper Class, others to the Middle Class, and a few even to the Working Class.

Despite showing respect for other people, she often refers to them as “stupid”, without caring about the social position they have been given. From the police to a simple neighbour can be called “stupid” if their actions do not correspond to Miss Marple’s ideas. Nevertheless, the person to whom she refers the most with this expression is herself. We are all human and therefore commit mistakes, even Miss Marple. When this happens, she has the ability to react rapidly and change the fate of the concrete case, but never without a brisk “stupid” that has already left her mouth. For instance, Marple discovers that she has been studying the case from the wrong perspective, to what she says that she has to think it all over again and that she has been “extremely stupid”. The vicar is not convinced by this statement and refuses to believe it.

2.4. Methods of investigation

Miss Marple is not an ordinary sleuth and nor are her strategies to find out the truth. I will present some of her most known methods below.

2.4.1. *Parallelisms*

Miss Marple is a woman which is often guided by her senses, which she does by recalling her memories of similar past situations. In other words, she usually finds a parallel of the situation that has happened and compares it in order to draw conclusions such as the type of people who can commit a murder or simply to look in more depth some details. This method is based on prediction.

Even though she does not take part in most of the professional investigation nor the ones which are held by the Vicar, in the beginning of the novel the reader can explicitly recognise this trait of hers:

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Text 7

Miss Wetherby said tersely:

“No nice girl would do it,” and shut her thin lips disapprovingly.

“Do what?” I inquired.

“Be a secretary to an unmarried man,” said Miss Wetherby in a horrified tone.

“Oh! my dear,” said Miss Marple, “I think married ones are the worst. Remember poor Mollie Carter.”

“Married men living apart from their wives are, of course, notorious,” said Miss Wetherby.

“And even some of the ones living with their wives,” murmured Miss Marple. “I remember...”

I interrupted these unsavoury reminiscences. [...]

Miss Wetherby murmured to Miss Marple in a low voice:

“And all the bedrooms on the same floor...”

They exchanged glances. (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 14)

In the fragment, it denotes the gossiping that characterizes the typical woman on the village, most of them being elderly women except for Griselda, who is the young wife of the Vicar. They are being friendly and sharing secrets in confidence. Miss Marple's participation in this exact paragraph is highlighted by the use of the “I” in italics, which states her point of view, as an opposite thought to the other women's.

She also recalls details from past situations which share a resemblance. Since she has lived a lot of experiences, mostly in this little village, she is capable of connecting similar personalities to people who at first seemed “average”, from the past to the present.

At the end these experiences do not have to be epic, but provide an insight into the psychology of the characters. This method can be observed throughout the novel and her complete series.

For instance, Mary S. Wagoner, an English author who has studied profoundly Christie and whose remarkable novel is called *Agatha Christie*, associates Miss Marple's accumulated experience in life as her greatest asset in solving cases:

"Unlike Poirot, who solves a mystery by realizing how pieces will fit into a pattern, Miss Marple relies on her observation of human nature from a lifetime spent in the village of St. Mary Mead, on analogies between persons involved in the murder and those she has known in the past, on her ability to see through disguise and surfaces, and on her conviction that the worst about people may well be true. In other words, she sees pieces as parts of an already familiar pattern." (Wagoner, Mary S., *Agatha Christie*, 1986, p. 48)

More examples can be observed throughout the whole book, as this method is the most important that she uses. The position that Marple has as an actively participant of the people's life and the community in general allows her to investigate from a double standpoint: she is the curious yet friendly Miss Marple, with whom people can trust and rely on, and on another hand, she is the amateur detective who helps the police by using the knowledge previously revealed to her by her spinster friends and adapting it to a model of a similar case from the past, similar to a reminiscence.

Another good example of this method occurs on the first half of the book:

Text 8

"I wish you'd solve the case, Miss Marple, like you did the way Miss Wetherby's gill of picked shrimps disappeared. And all because it reminded you of something quite different about a sack of coals."

"You're laughing, my dear," said Miss Marple, "but after all, that is a very sound way of arriving at the truth. It's really what people call intuition and make such a fuss about. Intuition is like reading a word without have to spell it out. A child can't do that because it has had so little experience. But a grown-up person knows the word because they've seen it often before. You catch my meaning, vicar?"

"Yes," I said slowly, "I think I do. You mean that if a thing reminds you of something else — well, it's probably the same kind of thing." (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 98)

It is very representative of Miss Marple's personality and the intuition that leads her to the truth. In order to be a successful detective, one should combine one's personal instincts, proof and boldness. Moreover, the older we are, the wiser we become, and therefore more reliable. This comes from the conviction that true wisdom emerges from previous experiences and failures that have made a person realize past mistakes to amend them in the future.

Regarding the parallel in "text 8", Miss Marple is asked which parallel comes to her mind in the present situation, to which she answers that too many remind her about it. This problem can be caused to the age that supposedly gives her more clarity. We have to also bear in mind that too many experiences lived can be negative if the character is not capable of arranging her mind.

The relation between old and wisdom, however, is opposed to the idea given by the police in "text 6", in which is stated that she is ignorant about Life and her only occupation is being in other people's business. Melchett, in turn, thinks that young or middle-aged policemen are destined to be the ones who save the inhabitants from criminals, and this is not a task that should be left to an inexperienced spinster.

2.4.2. Gardening

On another matter, she is fond of knitting and gardening. In this book, this last hobby is used at times as a means to observe what other do. Observation is, in fact, one of the most powerful tools or qualities that she has. The vicar explains in an early stage of the story how she acts while gardening:

Text 9

"Did dear Lettice tell you of the trouble?" asked Miss Marple of me.

"Tell me?"

"Yes. I saw her pass through the garden and go round to the study window."

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Miss Marple always sees everything. Gardening is as good as a smoke screen, and the habit of observing birds through powerful glasses can always be turned to account. (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 17)

He also says that “in the art of seeing without being seen, Miss Marple had no rival”.

In addition, even though the previous example was a mere observation with no actual valuable information, her contribution to the rest of the story is crucial and often her findings force the investigation to take a new and undiscovered path. As the vicar says: “she had just contributed such a valuable new outlook to the problem that I felt highly respectful towards her”.

Despite the absence of Miss Marple throughout the novel, she continues to provide the turning points, and not the police, who often despises her, as we can observe at the end of chapter seventeen.

Text 10

“It's just rather a curious thing that happened last night,” she explained. “I thought you would like to hear about it, though at the moment it doesn't seem to make sense. I felt very wakeful last night — wondering about all this sad business. And I got up and looked out of my window. And what do you think I saw?”

I looked, inquiring.

“Gladys Cram,” said Miss Marple, with great emphasis. “As I live, going into the wood with a suitcase.”

“A suitcase?”

“Isn't it extraordinary? What should she want with a suitcase in the wood at twelve o'clock at night?” (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 166)

After this, she uses this sixth sense of her which tells her when things are not ordinary. She refers to these as “Peculiar Things” that we are bound to take into account. Even if this clue is not attached to the figure of the murderer, it might lead to other clues, which in this specific situation, it does. Combining this feeling with her observation skills, nothing can go unnoticed by her. Although some may consider Miss Marple’s discoveries as simple luck of being in the exact place at the exact moment, this statement is far from the truth. To the majority of people, such things are unimportant and we do not pay attention, whereas Marple is like a filter, in whose surface remains all the lies that she detects. To give an example, the murder occurs and a note accompanies the dead man. While most of the people did not see it as a meaningful clue, Miss Marple finds that it is an important hint, as she feels that it is an odd letter and “exceedingly peculiar” as she describes it. Eventually, her suspicion turns out to be the correct one. “I stared at the old lady, feeling an increased respect for her mental powers. Her keen wits had seen what we had failed to perceive. It was an odd thing-a very odd thing” (Christie, *Vicarage*, p.101)

Furthermore, with regard to the garden, Miss Marple relates it to a source of information, because the people with whom she is tend to talk there more:

Text 11

“Miss Cram came to see me this afternoon,” said Miss Marple. “I met her in the village and I asked her if she would like to see my garden.”

“Is she fond of gardens?” asked Griselda.

“I don't think so,” said Miss Marple, with a faint twinkle. “But it makes a very useful excuse for talk, don't you think?” (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 198)

But apart from this function, it also provides her a space where others know for certain that she can be found. Miss Marple “listens attentively” to her visitors and, in contraposition to other detectives such as Poirot, she is the one being questioned,

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rather than the one who interrogates others. In fact, in this book, she plays the role of the detective and the witness simultaneously. Though she is not a direct witness of the crime, she observes minor crimes or “peculiar things” that cause the visit of the police and other people interested in knowing her version.



IMAGE 8: Miss Marple talking to Mrs Protheroe, a suspect, in Miss Marple (TV series)

Other people, who are aware of the crucial position of the garden, like the vicar, describe it in the following way: “the danger point of Miss Marple's garden”. The author provides some drawings of its position.

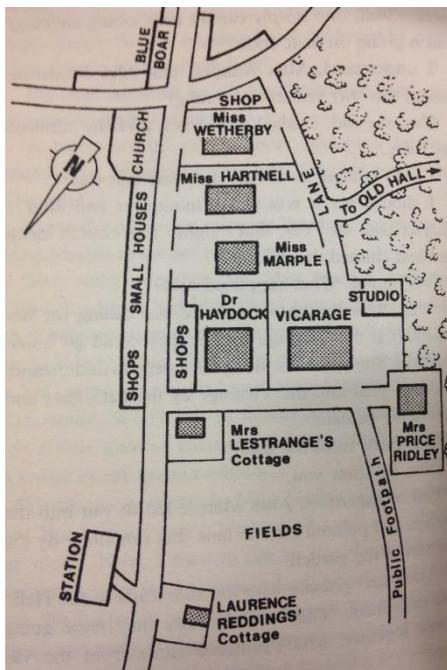


IMAGE 10: Position of Miss Marple's garden from the book *The Murder At the Vicarage*

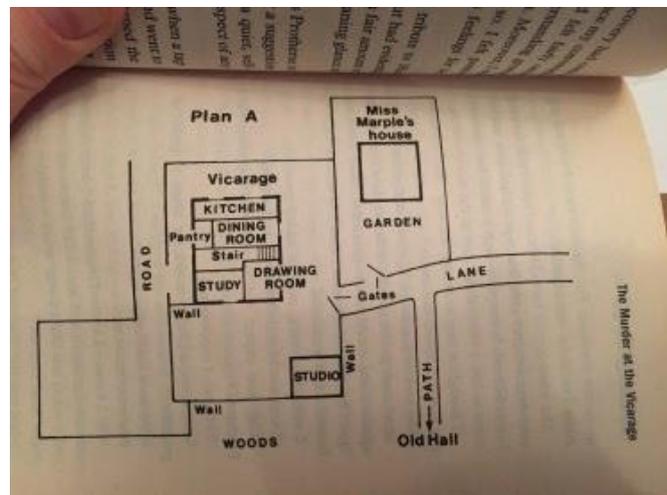


IMAGE 9: Overview of Miss Marple's neighbourhood from the book *A Murder At The Vicarage*

But for Miss Marple, her interferences from the garden are not intentioned, because, as she says, “one simply cannot help seeing anything that is going on next door”.

By doing so, she is always updated about the latest gossip: “Few things are hidden from her” (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 283).

Therefore, she has two perspectives: the closeness to the suspects allow her to have a more accurate knowledge and she can also observe from a certain distance without being seen.

2.4.3. Gossiping to collect data

Miss Marple is always in the right spot at the proper time. It is not a coincidence. Sometimes, due to her gardening tasks, it is usual to see her involved in the investigation, yet other times, she meddles in people’s matters. In *The Murder At The Vicarage* this trait is emphasized because of her house position in the neighbourhood, exactly next to the vicarage and its vicar, the narrator. However, when she interferes, she has nice manners:

Text 12

Before Griselda could reply, a shadow fell across the breakfast table, and a very gentle voice said:

“I hope I am not intruding. You must forgive me. But in the sad circumstances — the very sad circumstances —”

It was our neighbour, Miss Marple. Accepting our polite disclaimers, she stepped in through the window, and I drew up a chair for her. She looked faintly flushed and quite excited.

“Very terrible, is it not? Poor Colonel Protheroe. Not a very pleasant man, perhaps, and not exactly popular, but it's none the less sad for that. And actually shot in the Vicarage study, I understand?” (Christie, *Vicarage*, p.56)

She uses this excuse to interrogate those who are involved with the crime, instead of waiting in the garden, as it is not always as effective as addressing the matter directly.

Owing to this method, she attains a wide popularity, which is not always a positive one, as she has to be in other people's affairs in order to discover new information.

2.4.4. Human Nature

Even though this is not exactly a method, it is a strategy often used by Miss Marple to understand the social background of the murderers and fit in the prototype on one of the suspects.

Miss Marple herself explains this method thoroughly:

Text 13

"I feel that you must be wondering why — why I am so interested in all this. You may possibly think it's very unwomanly. No — please — I should like to explain if I may."

She paused a moment, a pink colour suffusing her cheeks.

"You see," she began at last, "living alone, as I do, in a rather out-of-the-way part of the world one has to have a hobby. There is, of course, woolwork, and Guides, and Welfare, and sketching, but my hobby is — and always has been — Human Nature. So varied — and so very fascinating. And, of course, in a small village, with nothing to distract one, one has such ample opportunity for becoming what I might call proficient in one's study. One begins to class people, quite definitely, just as though they were birds or flowers, group so-and-so, genus this, species that. Sometimes, of course, one makes mistakes, but less and less as time goes on. And then, too, one tests on oneself. [...] It is so fascinating, you know, to apply one's judgment and find that one is right." (Christie, *Vicarage*, 255)

As stated by her, human nature is a key element in Marple's formula. It provides descriptions of credible patterns of human behaviour, with some exceptions that

have been criticized by some literary critics, as the lack of really interesting antagonists who are not easily fooled.



IMAGE 11: Miss Marple having tea and gossiping in the garden, *They Do it With Mirrors* (1991)

Jane Marple only plays the predetermined role that an old woman does in a town where there isn't much else to do for people her age. But whereas many elderly women gossip but do not have what is needed to be a detective, her area knowledge and the accumulated experiences are what makes her a distinctive spinster. She stands out for being a calculating character who worries about the other people and, even sometimes exceedingly nice, she soon becomes one of the most dangerous characters in terms of intelligence and cunning. Miss Marple describes her status as “proficient” and her amateur detective work as “study”. We can therefore observe that, although she calls this just a hobby, she values it utterly because the different types of people and all their possible classifications fascinates her. As she says: “Human nature is always interesting... And it's curious to see how certain types always tend to act in exactly the same way.” (Christie, *The Herb of Death*, p. 167). This method is linked to the parallelisms used throughout the story in order to assimilate one past situation to the current one. Human nature, in turn, applies the same concept, but in people’s behaviour and prototypes. She illustrates in a comprehensible way: “a tiny working model of a torpedo is just the same as a real torpedo” (Christie, *Vicarage*, 256) Comparison is, indeed, her logical path to know people accurately.

While theory is useful to classify different behaviours, Marple also deploys her own judgment, which guides her and, at many times, strengthens her new ideas or suppositions.

Nevertheless, Miss Marple thinks that saying that she tends to be right is a little *conceited*. That is why she is humble and hopes that the training she does in solving the little crimes could subsequently help her to solve severe and more difficult crimes. Despite her age, she wishes to grow wiser and become a better expert in this area. And indeed, she ends up being right. She explains that when she first heard about the murder, she had already thought who the killers were, but then they surrendered themselves to the police and other clues appeared. At the end, her first impression is the correct one, which she attributes to her natural flair for observing human nature. She also regrets having to turn them in but the contrary would go against her morals: “I was very sorry to believe what I did—very sorry. Because I liked them both. But you know what human nature is.” (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 281).

Human nature is curiously related to gossip as well. Being able to tell how people are requires quite an expertise in common behaviour. And this is accomplished by observing other people’s actions on a daily basis. Miss Marple also thinks that it is essential, which contradicts the opinion of the vicar who says that “Inestimable harm may be done by foolish wagging of tongues in ill-natured gossip.” (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 18). She, in turn, although she admits that rumours can often be wrong and not nice, sees that it is the only way to observe human nature for so long as she has done it.

2.4.5. *Blending with the background*

What makes Miss Marple so effective is her ability to approach other people as a friend and get information in craftiness. She may be overlooked and therefore she gets the chance to pursue the culprit, because the murderers are not aware of her capability of solving a murder while knitting a scarf.

We must take into account that she is widely known in the town, although not so much further away, with the result that she can hold informal conversations and draw conclusions about these. It is rarely seen that someone is unaware about who Miss Marple is.

These strategies aforementioned are part of her process to solve a crime. To sum it up, her first step is observation, as well as seeking for a motive to commit the crime. Secondly, she thinks of suspects who fit the possible murderer, which are seven in this specific book. Thirdly, she investigates, combining the direct and indirect investigation, although it is mostly the latter. In this step she uses the methods that we have previously seen.

Then, when she has already a formed idea about who the killer is, she looks for proof to incriminate him or her. This step is vital: "I dare say everyone thinks it is somebody different. That is why it is so important to have *proofs*. I, for instance, am quite *convinced* I know who did it. But I must admit I haven't one shadow of proof." (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 57). The author underlines the words "proofs" and "convinced" in order to emphasize the fact that Miss Marple is already aware of the situation from an early stage but that the ordinary proceedings of crime solving prevent her from jumping into conclusions. Above all, she wants to catch the correct murder and this is only possible with coherence. Thus, she knows that suspecting someone is not enough and "that one must provide an explanation for everything. Each thing has got to be explained away satisfactorily. If you have a theory that fits every fact — well, then, it must be the right one." (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 259). Facts have to be taken as they are because there are many ways of looking at one simple hint otherwise. And this case is rather complex for this exact reason. Due to the lack of proof Miss Marple finds herself in a tricky position, and has to draw on proofs in a majority. She claims that "One's own belief—even so strong as to amount to knowledge—is not the same as proof." (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 280).

Afterwards, she makes sure that her supposition fits and is similar to her own belief. Finally, in this novel it occurs that there is no evidence and she sees convenient to set a trap, as it is needed. Her idea and the way she presents it, sheepishly, surprises the police and the vicar but she manages to outline a very ingenious plan to catch the culprit.

However, as she is constantly observing and gossiping, one can also consider that her task as a detective begins even before the crime has been committed. This is a parallel to the last Poirot's book (*Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*), in which he has to deduce the murderer and the victim before it has taken place.

2.5. Interesting facts and ideas

When Miss Marple discovers who the murderer is and tells her ideas to the police, they think that her supposition cannot be correct because the man that she accuses had already confessed to the crime at the beginning. Marple, then, enlightens them by saying that she distinguishes the books' stories from real life and the rules from one are not specific to the other. She thinks that sometimes, in the real life, "There it is so often the obvious that is true" (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 279). This is the formula known as the less likely becomes the most likely, which pretends to bring realism into the story. This is related to the figure of Miss Marple and her everyday life in the same town. Thus, Marple approaches the reader and becomes more human. She makes supposition that anyone could do, as she is not a "true" detective. This is typical of the *cluepuzzle*. For instance, she points out to one officer that he had taken a witness' word as facts, but one should always be suspicious and doubt the statement.

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Miss Marple is an elderly woman and she is aware of her state. She is in good condition, but her age has made her see the world differently. She is proud of being old because she realizes that all the experiences lived have made her the woman that she is in the present: intelligent, aware of her surroundings...

She attributes the innocent minds to the younger people, who, according to her, always see the best of everyone. Her relationship with her nephew Raymond is a good case in point. Even though they take care of each other, they have a rather ongoing competition about who is right about the case. Raymond offers a slight psychological analysis of the crime, which is opposed to the idea of her aunt. When the narrator points out the possibility that she is right, the most likely, she then recalls the words of her Great Aunt Fanny: "The young people think the old people are fools; but the old people *know* the young people are fools!" (Christie, *Vicarage*, p. 292). She, in her turn, notices how when you get old, you perceive things in another way. For instance, she remembers being sixteen and quite foolish, and now she is an upright woman. The age has made her wiser. Moreover, although she is somewhat old, she does not show any form of weakness, especially not those related to the mind.

To summarize, this book is the first glimpse of Miss Marple and St. Mary Mead, a character who has much more to offer and a town that has many mysteries waiting to be unravelled.



IMAGE 12: Miss Marple's cottage in St Mary Mead

3. A MURDER IS ANNOUNCED

A Murder Is Announced, launched on June 1950, begins with the newspaper in Chipping Cleghorn, *The Gazette*, and a big announcement: "A murder is announced and will take place on Friday, October 29th, at Little Paddocks, at 6.30 pm. Friends accept this, the only intimation." The odd thing is that the murder has yet to take place. This surprises Letitia Blacklock, owner of Little Paddocks; however, she takes it in stride and prepares for guests that evening. Unable to resist the mysterious invitation, the locals arrive at Little Paddocks at the appointed time when, without warning, the lights go out and a gun is fired. When they come back on, a gruesome

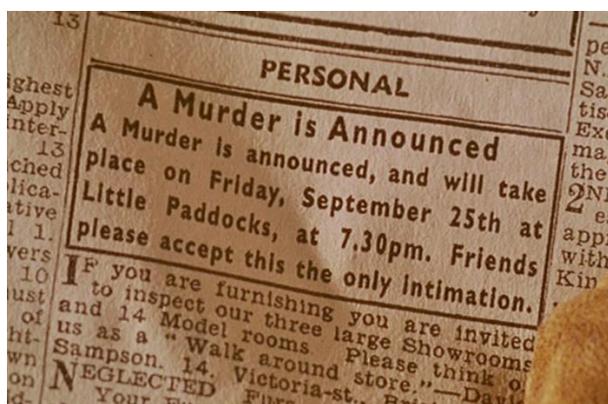


IMAGE 13: Extract from the *Gazette* newspaper in Agatha Christie's *Marple* (2005)

scene is revealed. It suggests to the police that this is a strange suicide or accidental death, but Inspector Craddock is not satisfied. It seems like an impossible murder but only Miss Marple is capable of unravel the mystery.

The book was well received by the critics and was highly praised for its originality and the characteristic Agatha Christie's plot twist. Julian MacLaren-Ross in *The Times Literary Supplement* conveyed his admiration of her work in the issue dated 23 June 1950: "A new novel by Mrs Agatha Christie always deserves to be placed at the head of any list of detective fiction and her fiftieth book, *A Murder is Announced*, establishes firmly her claim to the throne of detection. The plot is as ingenious as ever, the writing more careful, the dialogue both wise and witty; while suspense is engendered from the very start, and maintained skilfully until the final revelation: it will be a clever reader indeed who anticipates this, and though Miss Christie is as usual scrupulously fair in scattering her clues, close attention to the text is necessary if a correct solution of the mystery is to be arrived at before the astute Miss Marple unmask the culprit." The review concluded, "Miss Christie has several surprises up her sleeve besides the main one, and (this much may be said

without spoiling the reader's pleasure) she once again breaks new ground by creating a weak and kindly murderer who is yet responsible for the deaths of three people: that such a character should, in the last analysis, seem credible, is a tribute to the author's psychological acumen and originality of concept." (*The Times Literary Supplement*, p. 385)

Technically, we can highlight the use of an omniscient narrator, which provides a well-paced story. The narration does not focus on a single character but the storyline of the Inspector Craddock, the Little Paddock's scene and the incredible detective Miss Marple is explored.

3.1. Character's descriptions

Jane Marple is introduced in the eighth chapter of the book called "Enter Miss Marple". She appears rather late because the action takes place in another village, instead of St. Mary Mead. As she is not a citizen of this particular village, her apparitions are irregular.

After the terrible event occurred in Chipping Cleghorn, she gets in contact with the police by sending a letter in which her sudden intention of helping with the procedures of the case is stated. This is one of the first signs of her busybody personality.

Her nose-y ways are established and she is presented as an "old Pussy" by Inspector Craddock, with whom she will be having an interesting relationship. Marple is staying at a nearby hotel called the "Royal Spa Hotel" and claims to have information that would help clarify some doubts about the situation. In the letter her modesty is shown by how she tells the police that "[...] she hopes it won't be taking up our valuable time, but might possibly be of some slight assistance." (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 95).

The disclosure of the writer's identity excites Sir Henry, an old and dear friend of Miss Marple. Even though he first says that they "speak all evil", he praises her and her ability of being capable of meddling in foreign affairs:

Text 1

"Ye Gods and Little Fishes," said Sir Henry, "can it be? George, it's my own particular, one and only, four starred Pussy. The super Pussy of all old Pussies. And she has managed somehow to be at Medenham Wells, instead of peacefully at home in St. Mary Mead, just at the right time to be mixed up in a murder. Once more a murder is announced—for the benefit and enjoyment of Miss Marple." (*A Murder Is Announced*, p.96)

He describes her as the queen of nosey parkers, the one and only Jane Marple. He also expresses her excitement regarding mysteries, which in some situations is out of place. For instance, in her first visit at the scene of the crime in Little Paddocks (the home of Letitia Blacklock in the village of Chipping Cleghorn), where Rudi Scherz tried to kill Letitia Blacklock during the hold-up stage announced in the local newspaper in the morning of the day of the incident: "Did it all happen in this room then? [...] I'm afraid you must think me sadly curious, Miss Blacklock—but it really is so very exciting—just like something one reads about in the paper—and actually to have happened to someone one knows... I'm just longing to hear all about it and to picture it all, if you know what I mean—" (*A Murder Is Announced*, p.139). Sometimes she fails at masking her true enthusiasm, such as when she is shown the real bullets used in the hold-up: "What a marvellous - what a providential escape." (*A Murder Is Announced*, p.140).

Julia, a murder suspect, also thinks that Marple observes too much and is relieved to find out that she is taking her own path: "I'm glad she and that old Miss Marple couldn't come," said Julia. "That old woman is the prying kind. And a mind like a sink, I should think. Real Victorian type." (*A Murder Is Announced*, p.190).

In *The Body in the Library* Miss Marple addresses this matter and adds that her nephew Raymond also says that her mind is like a sink, which refers to a "nasty mind", as she always meddles in unpleasant businesses.

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Raymond thinks that this is a unique trait from most Victorians, and while she does not dismiss his opinion, she takes this as a compliment because “Victorians knew a good deal about human nature.” (*The Body in the Library*). Thus, we can affirm that the Victorian style applies to Miss Marple’s behaviour.

Regarding her physical appearance, she has the typical look of elderly people with her characteristic nice and jolly presence. The author captures her essence when she is introduced:

Text 2

Miss Jane Marple was very nearly, if not quite, as Craddock had pictured her. She was far more benignant than he had imagined and a good deal older. She seemed indeed very old. She had snow white hair and a pink crinkled face and very soft innocent blue eyes, and she was heavily enmeshed in fleecy wool. Wool round her shoulders in the form of a lacy cape and wool that she was knitting and which turned out to be a baby's shawl. (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 96)

Besides providing her overall presentation, this paragraph also remembers the reader some of her hobbies, such as knitting (which is also typical from elderly



IMAGE 14: Miss Marple's clothing style in the BBC series performed by Joan Hickson

ladies). In this book, this activity becomes the most important hobby because she is not at home and gardening is therefore not an option. She is versatile and uses it as a method to sit back and observe people, as well as to have conversation with the people who come in the vicarage. It also allows her to feel in a state of calm needed to think and solve problems like she does. In most of the meetings with the police Miss Marple is found knitting: “Miss Marple had her chair pulled close to the fire and was knitting.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 219), because they reach out to her seeking her help. Even though she gives the impression that she is one of these ordinary spinster

ladies who like chatting and are not very lively, she does not follow the rule. Inspector Craddock, on the other hand, when he consults her already knows that this facade is not the real one and that a very powerful woman lies beneath it. Moreover, the impression that she gives is not a thing that worries her because she connects with people and their emotion, in which physical appearance does not often play a role.

But this also happens even when friends come to visit her: "She lifted the small reading lamp to the other side of the table where it would throw light on Miss Marple's knitting as she sat in a wide highbacked chair." (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 229). Then, the people find her in a comfortable place and are more likely to talk about their concerns. Additionally, these talks open her mind and build critical reflection to become conscious about the mistakes which have led the investigation to another path. The tranquillity of the room and the repetition of the knitting movements are her solution to reflect upon her new steps.

Text 3

"Oh, dear," said Bunch. "It's fused. Now I suppose all the lights in here are off." She tried them. "Yes, they are. So stupid being all on the same thingummibob. And it's made a burn on the table, too. Naughty Tiglath Pileser—it's all his fault. Aunt Jane—what's the matter? Did it startle you?"

"It's nothing, dear. Just something I saw quite suddenly which I ought to have seen before..."

"I'll go and fix the fuse and get the lamp from Julian's study."

"No, dear, don't bother. You'll miss your bus. I don't want any more light. I just want to sit quietly and—think about something. Hurry dear, or you won't catch your bus."

When Bunch had gone, Miss Marple sat quite still for about two minutes. The air of the room was heavy and menacing with the gathering storm outside.

Miss Marple drew a sheet of paper towards her.

She wrote first: Lamp? and underlined it heavily.

After a moment or two, she wrote another word.

Her pencil travelled down the paper, making brief cryptic notes... (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 230)

As the title of the chapter states, this is a “Reconstruction of the Crime” and a new beginning. She is aware of her mistake by listening closely to her friend Bunch and decides to verify her whole information once more. This attention to detail, which will be discussed afterwards, is the reason why she always is one step ahead.

Furthermore, she is so amiable that it is easy to be friends with her from an early stage. For instance, her friend Dora Bunner and her meet in this book but she is already fond of her and cares about her. In one point Miss Jane Marple is missing and Bunch, Miss Marple’s niece, is worried for her state and “nearly frantic”. The other people from the house of Little Paddocks also worry and do think that there is a bad reason behind why she has disappeared. They think that she is not capable of making it alone because they see her as an old and rather confused lady. She is referred to as “That poor old thing from the Vicarage.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 264). Even she sometimes does not have a high esteem and does not value herself as she should: “I express myself so badly” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 100). However, this description does not apply to her, since she is a courageous woman with the boldness needed to investigate on her own with the knowledge that there is a murderer on the loose.

3.2. Interactions

3.2.1. Other characters' attitude towards Marple

Jane Marple is no longer in St. Mary Mead and therefore has no friends in the town of Chipping Cleghorn. In spite of her recent arrival, she manages to connect with many people in the place and builds important relationships. Due to her many ties across the UK, she finds a place to live temporarily within a day: “I gather she is taking up residence at the Vicarage in Chipping Cleghorn [...]. It seems that Mrs. What's-her-name is the daughter of an old friend of Miss Marple's.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 190).

Regarding her new network of friends, we have to draw emphasis on Miss Dora Bunner, a close friend from Miss Blacklock. Miss Bunner is also an old spinster and says dear, since she is influenced by the Victorian language as well. Although meeting in a short time, Bunner instantaneously trusts her and treats her with respect. In return, Miss Marple answers sympathetically to her doubts so she does not feel threatened and makes various pauses to think which phrase could connect both women better, which is a method to get her more information. She can do it because she knows how to “read” other people’s emotions. And even though she does it with respect and without forcing the witnesses, it is understandable that many people consider her methods unethical. But she is just able to do it because her positive attitude instils confidence in them. This sense of safety occasionally lacks from the police.

Sociability is the basis of her personality, although in her private life she is rather solitary. Thus, she contributes in other people’s lives and, in return, they “return” this favour with a friendship and company, a more human one. A village where she goes, a connection that she has formed. They compensate for the absence of many of her family members and end up being her chosen family.

3.2.2. *Marple’s cooperation with professionals*

- Chief Constable of Middleshire (George Rydesdale):

He is introduced in the fourth chapter of the book: “George Rydesdale, Chief Constable of Middleshire, was a quiet man. Of medium height, with shrewd eyes under rather bushy brows, he was in the habit of listening rather than talking. Then, in his unemotional voice, he would give a brief order—and the order was obeyed.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 40). Despite this imprecise description, he is the most curious about what Miss Marple has to offer and acknowledges her ability as a detective. The first thing he says to her is “Now, Miss Marple, let’s hear what you have to tell us” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 97). Their relationship is based on mutual respect and listening to what the other has to say.

Miss Marple feels embarrassed at first because she usually not heard by members of the police but soon feels comfortable around him because of his kindness. Moreover, she expresses her wish of not bothering him nor the investigation, because she thinks highly of him: “And the Chief Constable himself—indeed I never expected—so afraid I shall be taking up his time—” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 97). But this Marple fools nobody. Although seeming coy, she starts gaining confidence and explains all her thoughts in a moment.

Text 4

“Somebody might try again.”

“That would certainly prove the truth of the theory,” said the Chief Constable dryly. “By the way, look after Miss Marple, won't you?”

“Miss Marple? Why?”

“I gather she is taking up residence at the Vicarage in Chipping Cleghorn and coming into Medenham Wells twice a week for her treatments. It seems that Mrs. What's-her-name is the daughter of an old friend of Miss Marple's. Good sporting instincts, that old bean. Oh, well, I suppose she hasn't much excitement in her life and sniffing round after possible murderers gives her a kick.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 109)

This conversation between the Chief Constable and Detective Craddock explicitly shows how deeply he cares and respects her. He does not underestimate her and lets her investigate but in moderation, as he thinks she is fragile in a way. And Miss Marple ascends from being this “old bean” to whom the police have to look after to being a crucial piece of the puzzle. Even though Rydesdale already respected her from the beginning, towards the end of the book he says that she is their ally (p. 197), which is a powerful person for the police. This is important if we bear in mind that Rydesdale is one of the highest police rank that appear in this book and has a big amount of authority. People treat him formally and address him in the form *sir*.

Finally, he takes her advice for the rest of the case and is aware of her ways of being active around the village, which consists basically in visiting any person around the area and chatting with them. His answer to many questions about the criminal affair is “She’d know” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 200), which summarizes the entire case.

- Detective-Investigator Dermot Eric Craddock:

The Investigator, also known as Inspector Craddock, is in charge of the case officially. Rydesdale has a good opinion of him: “He not only had brains and imagination, he had also, which Rydesdale appreciated even more, the self-discipline to go slow, to check and examine each fact, and to keep an open mind until the very end of a case.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 40).

When they are introduced, Miss Marple is coy and Craddock is unsure about her skills: “[...] Craddock, here, is looking highly sceptical” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 96), although he does not want to admit it. She likes to attract his attention by complementing his abilities and physical appearance and making him feel shy, hoping that he follows her hint to gain more information about Rudi Scherz from a waitress working with him in the Royal Spa Hotel. But in spite of the first impression, when she starts speaking about how interesting the human nature is and the way they express it, Craddock loses a bit of interest in the woman: “Craddock felt a twinge of disappointment. Just for a moment or two, he had wondered if Sir Henry might be right about this funny old lady.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 102), as what she was saying was based solely on generalities. Soon afterwards, but, he sees the value and potential she has: “[...] She’d got it! She was sharp, after all.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 103).

At the time that Craddock and Rydesdale comment the day with Miss Marple and the latter one expresses his wish to keep her safe (text 4), he shares his view and hopes she wouldn't come along because he thinks that the situation is threatening: "[...] she's a nice old thing. I shouldn't like anything to happen to her...". Regardless of this, he is not always nice to her and specially in the beginning:

Text 5

"Were you at the tea party here yesterday afternoon?"

Miss Marple said, nervously: "No - no, I wasn't. Bunch drove me over to call on some friends."

"Then there's nothing you can tell me." Craddock held the door open in a pointed manner, and Miss Marple scuttled out in a somewhat abashed fashion.

"Nosey Parkers, these old women," said Craddock.

"I think you're being unfair to her," said Miss Blacklock. "She really did come with a note from the Vicar." (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 207)

He embarrasses her in front of other people, but this is simply a mechanism to shift her focus away from the case and prevent a catastrophe, even though his aversion for the elderly who gossip is real. He cares deeply about her: "[...] He didn't want the next person bumped off to be Jane Marple" (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 208). When Miss Blacklock continues defending her and saying that she is just a harmless woman, Craddock points out her true nature: "Dangerous as a rattlesnake if you only knew" (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 207), but he still thinks that she is in danger and worries about her throughout the novel. For instance, when she disappears, he knows that something is wrong and his priority is to find her and bring her home, because it is dangerous being alone when a killer is on the loose: "Anyway, they don't matter now. It's Miss Marple that matters. We've got to find her." (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 257).

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Moreover, when the police are stuck, she is the one responsible for giving clues and help the case progress. Miss Marple investigates on her own and then explains it all to him, so that he follows her advice, which he typically does. Notwithstanding her significant contribution, Jane Marple does not want any credit and expresses the good qualities of Craddock that helped him solve the case. On the other hand, Craddock has a personal involvement and is amazed by Miss Marple's capacities, which, in his view, have to be recognized:

Text 6

"I think it's your story, Miss Marple," said Craddock.

"Oh no, my dear boy. I only just helped a little, here and there. You were in charge of the whole thing, and conducted it all, and you know so much that I don't." (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 279).

But Craddock is eager to let her shine because he knows how much she has done and her skills leading the whole case were outstanding:

Text 7

"[...] And the case would have been closed. That it was kept open is due to Miss Marple here."

"Oh, no, no." Miss Marple shook her head energetically. "Any little efforts on my part were quite incidental. It was you who weren't satisfied, Mr. Craddock. It was you who wouldn't let the case be closed." (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 292).

Thus, they both compliment each other's work and respect the different power that they both hold. Craddock is a good investigator and makes a fair amount of crucial discoveries, but he has different methods than Miss Marple. For some situations the old lady is the indicated and the bravest of the two, and he appreciates her special talents.

This book sets the beginning of a recurring friendship. In many of her following Miss Marple novels he is there besides her and work together to solve mysteries. His evolution as a character is clear: he becomes one of her dearest friends who supports her the most instead of the sceptical man he is at first.

- Detective Sergeant Fletcher:

He is assisting Craddock but does not appear often. For this reason, their interactions are also few. He helps her achieve her final plan to catch the culprit, which consists in risking the “lady-help” Mitzi. She knows the truth and therefore must be silenced, but the police did not believe her words when she spoke because she was a foreigner. Miss Marple, however, agrees with her and wants to stop the killer. It is a risky and crazy idea. Although sceptical at first, he is persuaded by her and is finally there working alongside Jane Marple and trusting her guts. To show how much he believes in her he prepares this operation without Craddock’s agreement: “He'd no business to go agreeing to your plans without reporting first to me.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 300). Fortunately, Miss Marple covers for him.

- Sir Henry Clithering:

Henry is a retired commissioner of Scotland Yard and an old friend of Miss Marple. He is responsible for providing a good initial overview of Miss Marple’s persona. And since he is not active but had been a member of the police, he has maintained some contacts and Miss Marple can be therefore more attached to them. This was not the case in the first book, and thus, she is now given a little more credibility.

Sir Henry and Miss Marple are intimate friends that respect each other. Sir Henry describes Marple as his “own particular, one and only, four starred Pussy” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 95).

She is many times referred to as “Sir Henry’s old Pussy” or “Sir Henry’s Miss Marple”, connecting this sense of property to the way they interact with each other. On the other hand, Miss Jane Marple, aware of his praises to her, wants to detract from his kind words:

Text 8

“George,” said Sir Henry. “Would it be very unorthodox if Miss Marple were allowed to read the notes of the interviews Craddock had with these people at Chipping Cleghorn.”

“It may be unorthodox,” said Rydesdale, “but I’ve not got where I am by being orthodox. She can read them. I’d be curious to hear what she has to say.”

Miss Marple was all embarrassment. “I’m afraid you’ve been listening to Sir Henry. Sir Henry is always too kind. He thinks too much of any little observations I may have made in the past. Really, I have no gifts—no gifts at all—except perhaps a certain knowledge of human nature. People, I find, are apt to be far too trustful. I’m afraid that I have a tendency always to believe the worst. Not a nice trait. But so often justified by subsequent events.”

Despite her fame around important people, she is modest about her accomplishments and tries to be always humble and real. For this reason, their friends are able to know her really well and be familiar with her investigation strategies. Sir Henry does this when he points out the parallelisms that must have come up in her mind when a man tried to fool her by altering a cheque: “And perhaps he reminded you of someone?” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 98).

3.2.3. Miss Marple's family

The relationship between Raymond West and Jane Marple is followed in this book because this subplot defines the human traits that characterize her. While talking with her old friend Sir Henry, she mentions Raymond and his achievements as a writer, which were few in the beginning. He uses a part of his success to return the hospitality of her aunt and to ensure that she has the best accommodation and company.

Text 9

“Of course I couldn't have afforded this hotel (really fantastic what they charge nowadays) but Raymond—my nephew, Raymond West, you may remember him?”

“Everyone knows his name.”

“Yes, the dear boy has been so successful with his clever books—he prides himself upon never writing about anything pleasant. The dear boy insisted on paying all my expenses. And his dear wife is making a name for herself too, as an artist.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 206)

She is indeed proud of his accomplishments but the rivalry between them is still present. They maintain a friendly scuffle as relatives do and argue about the same topics repeatedly, such as their vision of the world: Raymond has a dark vision of reality and Miss Marple is optimist about the world and the future, which is directly opposed to both of their jobs. Whilst a writer or an artist have to see the two parts of the world, to define its beauty and its flaws, a detective (professional or amateur) usually finds itself in situations of conflict and evil where the bad aspects of life predominate. Jane Marple, but, who has seen all sorts of wickedness (revenge stories, rivalries, blood, lies...), does not lose hope in humanity and tries to make the world a better place for the future generations. This conflict between the two perspectives is also due to the age difference. They belong into two distinctive generations who see the world differently, and Agatha Christie reflects this matter in most of Miss Marple's books, being her the wise old woman full of experiences and the representation of a Victorian lady.

But despite having Raymond West, she admits that she feels alone because she lives by herself and her closest family is no longer with her. Thus, she has no one from the past to ge attached to. This book shows a melancholy and sentimental side of Miss Marple that we had yet to discover.

Text 10

[...] “Now that she's gone I'm quite alone.”

“I know what you mean,” said Miss Marple. “One is alone when the last one who remembers is gone. I have nephews and nieces and kind friends—but there's no one who knew me as a young girl—no one who belongs to the old days. I've been alone for quite a long time now.”
(*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 206)

She shows vulnerability and, in return, she feels the love and compassion from her friends. By remembering the past and the beautiful past memories with her loved ones, she also sends a message to enjoy the present and live life to the fullest, how she does every day. Being a “detective” is her way of boosting her morale and living in her own terms.

Moreover, she does not feel exactly at home in Chipping Cleghorn: “I am only a stranger.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p.206). It is understandable if we consider that she rarely moves from her hometown where, even with few family members, she has created her own big family of friends and neighbours. But despite feeling alone, she is sentimental and becomes attached to photographs and souvenirs connected with her family: “[...] Now I like to keep all the pictures of my nephews and nieces as babies—and then as children—and so on” (*A Murder is Announced*, p. 141).

3.3. Language used

The language used by Miss Marple is carefully chosen, as she is dealing with a complex situation and her words mark the witnesses' desire to share their viewpoint.

For this reason, she talks closely to other people and addresses them always with a formal manner. The pattern is similar to her first book to some extent. She keeps using the word “dear” to reach out to friends and also strangers. In fact, she is one of the few people who speaks with a foreign “lady-help” called Mitzi in a considerate attitude. By being so open, opportunities to catch the culprit arise and in the process she makes a group of friends who can help her on the case later.

The people with whom she speaks are also carefully selected, as we shall see later, because this provides her more specific information. For example, she gets most of the material about each person concerned with the situation from Dora Bunner, Miss Blacklock's closest friend. Their conversations are really important and Miss Marple is aware of this fact, and therefore talks consciously and precisely to make her feel comfortable. When Dora Bunner has explained a lot from their past, Miss Marple takes a moment to think exactly her next words in order to continue having a moment of being truthful with each other: "Miss Marple paused to select a phrase" (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 164). This exact choice of words reveals her intentions perfectly because she "selects" the sentence that she will be using, just as if it was one more of her weapons. Agatha Christie also describes her way of communicating and talking as "sympathetically" in this same page, which enhances it.

3.4. Methods of investigation

3.4.1. Observing

In this book, Miss Marple appears as a newcomer who observes the life in the small and peculiar village of Chipping Cleghorn. Therefore, during her stay in the town's Vicarage, she roams the streets and looks into various shops in order to understand their mindset correctly. Throughout her stroll around the village, most of the citizens recognise her at first sight, in spite of her short stay. She is already famous among the people.

Furthermore, her observation skills come in handy in this particular mystery because the murderer has supplanted her sister's identity and small details between the two sisters are the only things that sets them apart. She is able to look further than the police.



IMAGE 15: Angela Lansbury as Miss Marple observing people in *Mirror Crack'd* (1980).

Text 11

“You ought to have seen that, Inspector Craddock. You showed me that letter from Letitia Blacklock to her sister. It had the word 'enquiries' in it twice - each time spelt with an e. But in the note I asked Bunch to show you, Miss Blacklock had written 'inquiries' with an i. People don't often alter their spelling as they get older. It seemed to me very significant.”

“Yes,” Craddock agreed. “I ought to have spotted that.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 299)

3.4.2. Informal conversations

All detectives have to approach the suspects, either in a formal way or informal. Many professionals base this strategy primarily on interrogations to the neighbours, the suspects or the people involved. Miss Marple, for instance, chooses to hold informal conversation. Thus, the interrogation is disguised as an ordinary conversation.

She purposely selects the easiest targets who can provide her information, such as Dora Bunner. Miss Bunner, rather forgetful and naive, is too talkative, which leads to secrets being revealed. Therefore, Miss Marple takes advantage of her loose lips as a source of information. When she finds Dora alone inside a coffee shop she cannot resist the unique opportunity of having a private conversation with her. She presents herself sympathetically and asks about the people involved in the murder as well as all the possible suspects, and Miss Bunner offers the personal information about each individual.

Moreover, the choice of Dora Bunner as the key informant in her informal interviews is not fortuitous, but deeply thought, because she has emotional ties with the target of the murderer, with whom she had spent her childhood.

She uses this method also when she needs an “accomplice” to play a trick to the murderer. She selects a brave and fearless person who listens to her words and a faithful partner for her plan appears. She does this with Mitzi, a foreigner girl who is misunderstood by the rest of the house. Miss Marple takes hold of the situation and makes her believe that she has to volunteer to be a sort of guinea pig for her plan to catch the killer:

Text 12

“And I have had Fletcher on the carpet for it!” said Craddock. “He'd no business to go agreeing to your plans without reporting first to me.”

“He didn't like it, but I talked him into it,” said Miss Marple. “We went up to Little Paddocks and I got hold of Mitzi.”

Julia drew a deep breath and said, “I can't imagine how you ever got her to do it.”

“I worked on her, my dear,” said Miss Marple. “She thinks far too much about herself anyway, and it will be good for her to have done something for others. I flattered her up, of course, and said I was sure if she'd been in her own country she'd have been in the Resistance movement, and she said, 'Yes, indeed.' And I said I could see she had got just the temperament for that sort of work. She was brave, didn't mind taking risks, and could act a part. I told her stories of deeds done by girls in the Resistance movements, some of them true, and some of them, I'm afraid, invented. She got tremendously worked up!” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 300)

She uses her facility to talk to strangers to get their attention. Even the police (Fletcher) obey her. She knows how human nature works and uses it to her advantage. This way, Mitzi does all the dirty work without complaints and exactly as Jane Marple has told her.

An important trait of Miss Marple which helps her to get more clues is the fact of being an attentive listener. She can thus connect emotionally with the witnesses and be understanding and supportive about the situation. Moreover, as the storyline progresses, she is able to remember all the conversations and topics perfectly to reformulate her hypothesis. Every detail counts, no matter how small it is.

Then, she can simulate the situation on her head and imagine where each object was or fit the different stories told by each person in the scene.

All this tricks are mostly revealed at the end of the book, when Miss Marple exposes her theory and how she has arrived to her conclusions. For instance, we discover that the real Miss Blacklock had died years ago and her sister Charlotte has taken her identity. Throughout the book we are given hints and clues particularly by the language used. Dora Bunner, with whom Miss Marple has many conversations, refers to Letitia Blacklock as *Lotty* (Charlotte) instead of *Letty* sometimes, which causes her death. This small detail is only seen by the great Miss Marple.

In another situation, she also recalls another past conversation, mostly the way the words were used by a victim, and realizes that she has made some mistakes: "I'd understood what Dora Bunner meant by saying it had been the shepherdess the night before," said Miss Marple, "but I fell into the error of thinking, as she thought, that Patrick had been responsible. The interesting thing about Dora Bunner was that she was quite unreliable in repeating things she had heard - she always used her imagination to exaggerate or distort them, and was usually wrong in what she thought - but she was quite accurate about the things she saw. She saw Letitia pick up the violets -" (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 290). And the same happens when she listens attentively: "That day we had coffee together in the Bluebird, I had the oddest impression that Dora was talking about two people, not one - and so, of course, she was." (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 294).

The perfect example is when she makes Miss Murgatroyd (a witness) repeat a sentence with different intonations. Then, she recalls that there was indeed a particular word that was emphasized:

Text 13

“Oh, dear, how can I explain? You said it like this. She - wasn't - there. An equal emphasis on every word. You see, there are three ways you could say it. You could say, '*She* wasn't there.' Very personal. Or again. '*She wasn't* there.' Confirming some suspicion already held. Or else you could say (and this is nearer to the way you said it just now), '*She wasn't there...*' quite blankly with the emphasis, if there was emphasis on the there.”

“I don't know,” Miss Hinchliffe shook her head. “I can't remember... How the hell can I remember? I think, yes, surely she'd say '*She wasn't there*'? That would be the natural way, I should think. But I simply don't know. Does it make any difference?” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 242)

To this small hint many of us would not notice the difference, which is what also happens to Inspector Craddock: “Now that's too subtle a point for me”. Miss Marple reacts eagerly to his statement as she thinks that this is an obvious clue that can be discovered if one is enthusiastic to find out the truth. But in order to do so, she recommends thinking like the murderer does, being inside its thoughts at any moment to anticipate its next move.

3.4.3. Parallelisms

This method is used in most of Miss Marple's books similarly. In *A Murder Is Announced*, however, it is explored more in depth. She does not only use it as her own resource when she tries get her ideas organized but also to speak to an affected person and sympathize with its struggles. Hence, it becomes a method to extract information than rather analyse it. One of her approaches is to connect with the person with whom she is talking by using the parallelisms to create a comical situation with some jokes and improve the atmosphere.

Text 14

“Well, really, dear, you are very much like yourself. I don't know that you remind me of anyone in particular. Except perhaps -”

“Here it comes,” said Bunch. “I was just thinking of a parlourmaid of mine, dear.”

“A parlourmaid? I should make a terrible parlourmaid.”

“Yes, dear, so did she. She was no good at all at waiting at table. Put everything on the table crooked, mixed up the kitchen knives with the dining-room ones, and her cap (this was a long time ago, dear) her cap was never straight.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 167)

And she herself makes fun of her situation when she says that “one elderly woman is so like another” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 284) because, although she is speaking about two different people, she is part of the type of people around this certain age and does most of the things for what the elderly are criticized. She also criticizes the inherent characteristics of the servants because “they go to everybody in turn and pass the news round” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 139), which is what she does when she gossips.

It is all a matter of understanding human psychology because as Miss Marple says: “People are really very alike, everywhere.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 166). Thusly, making parallelisms is tightly related with human nature, which is her most famous investigation strategies.

As she has seen many crimes, she is aware of how the people cross the limits and can see a crime happening beforehand. But this also provides us an inside look to Miss Marple's mind. Although always a nice woman with a gentle manner, the atrocities that happen around her shapes the way she sees reality and many times her mind is occupied by horrid acts perpetrated by awful people: “I'm afraid I know only too well the really terrible things that people will do to lay their hands on a lot of money.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 172).

However, in this book the technique of thinking parallelisms appropriate for each situations is also used as a way to discover the truth as it is used in other novels. Miss Marple is attentive to the moment and thereby sets a very high standard among professionals.

3.4.4. Human nature

Human nature is, and will always be, Miss Marple's real forte and strongest feature. It sets her apart from mediocre policemen who do not care about her, but also from professionals who respect her.



She makes her own ideas about unknown people to her based on human nature, psychology and their previous actions. She does it, for instance, when she talks about the shooter Rudi Scherz, a man who has recently died and with whom she has never had a conversation: “[...] He'd never have done a thing like that - not for a moment! He wasn't that kind of person. It doesn't make sense.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 100). However, in the next page she contradicts herself by admitting that without real proof all words are just conjectures: “[...] One can make conjectures, of course, but one has no accurate information.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 101).

Through the whole of the book she gives many examples of this method, with the result that I will be commenting on a few of them. A great example is the way she spends most of the time inside the killer's head trying to anticipate its next movement and the qualities it should have: “Of course they'll try again,” said Miss Marple, almost absentmindedly. “If they tried once, they'll try again. If you've made up your mind to murder someone, you don't stop because the first time it didn't come off. Especially if you're fairly sure you're not suspected.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 171). All her moves are influenced by intuition and human nature at its best.

This fact is summarized in one chapter of the book: “[...] That kind of instinctive belief was often justified, or so Miss Marple believed. Because, if you knew people fairly well, you knew the kind of things they thought of...” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 205).

She is so incredibly inside the mind of the murderer that she feels for it because she understands her motive and sympathises with her situation:

Text 15

“[...] She was actually a kindly, affectionate creature.”

“That's an odd description of a murderess,” said Edmund. “I don't know that it is,” said Miss Marple. “Weak and kindly people are often very treacherous. And if they've got a grudge against life it saps the little moral strength that they may possess.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 282)

But even though her understanding, she thinks that what the killer has done is dreadful: “[...] People with a grudge against the world are always dangerous. They seem to think that life owes them something” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p.298).

When she explains the resolution of the case her most used word is “human”, because she believes that our psychology and environment are what influence our actions. However horrible the actions may be, there is a reason behind, and it is her job to find it.

In addition, she likes to play with people's emotions and uses her peculiar skills to mimic the voice of the murderer's dead best friends and force her to confess. Miss Blacklock loses her composure and surrenders: “You shouldn't have done that,” she said. “Not made Dora's voice come. I loved Dora. I really loved Dora.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 277).



3.5. Interesting facts and ideas

In this book her age also plays an important role in the character, not just to justify her behaviour but also to give her another dimension, a melancholy one. She thinks that “Time’s so short. So terribly short.” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 171) and that we may die any moment. But despite this fact, Marple is a tough and lively woman whose age is not an obstacle to live in the present. It is also understandable that she has these thoughts because she lives practically alone with no children of her own. These feelings are what Christie uses to create a more human character from the beginning. Moreover, we learn that she suffers from rheumatism and it does not seem really good as it is “very bad of late” (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 96). Thereby, her health is a bit fragile but she still has plenty of adventures to live.

Regarding some new facts, as I have mentioned before, she is able to mimic people’s voices and even some she has not heard constantly. She has plenty of these skills which she keeps to herself until the right opportunity appears.

To her, murder isn’t a game (*A Murder Is Announced*, p. 241), though she plays a little trick to the murderer, which shows a similar pattern to *The Murder at the Vicarage*. It also indicates that Miss Marple does not always follow the rule accurately because she tries to do what is best for the safety of others.

Most relevant changes in relation to *The Murder at the Vicarage*:

- Steps outside of the comfort zone: The author puts Miss Marple in a different context, which challenges her skills. This situation affects her mostly in terms of having friendly relations with the inhabitants, because she has no garden to control them nor to approach them. At the end it is easy to accomplish her goal of interacting because all the people know who she is and some even approach her instead.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN MISS MARPLE AND HERCULE POIROT

- Age plays an important role: Not only to Miss Marple's state but also to the crime itself. The main people engaged in the situation are of the same age than her and this implies that this topic appears in many conversations. In regard to Miss Marple, a more melancholy side to her character is shown. She worries about the past but is optimist about the future, a really human characterisation.
- Lack of methods: Most of her strategies are already seen on the previous novel but she tackles the issues with new more in depth versions of the prior methods. For instance, she uses her skill to develop parallels in other ways and thus gives the book more originality and a different insight. Despite this fact, some of her recurring ideas express her immobility in terms of approaches.

4. SLEEPING MURDER

Miss Marple's last case, *Sleeping Murder*, was written over 30 years before it was published and sees Miss Marple solve her final mystery.

Soon after Gwenda moved into her new home, odd things started to happen. Despite her best efforts to modernise the house, she only succeeded in bringing up the past. Miss Marple is the only one to wake this sleeping murder up.



IMAGE 16: Miss Marple and Gwenda in Miss Marple TV Series

Marple appears early in the story, in the third chapter. She appears regularly but is not the main detectives. When she is not mentioned, Gwenda and her husband Giles take the role of detective in spite of their lack of professional background. In a way, Marple is not as needed as in the previous books. However this case is different because there is “not” a murder.

I have chosen this book as the last because the last ever published about Marple was a collection of short stories, which was not ideal for this type of analysis research.

4.1. Character's descriptions

The person in charge to introduce Miss Marple to the scene is her nephew Raymond West, who admires her profoundly.

Text 1

“You'll adore my Aunt Jane,” said Raymond. “She's what I should describe as a perfect Period Piece. Victorian to the core. All her dressing-tables have their legs swathed in chintz. She lives in a village, the kind of village where nothing ever happens, exactly like a stagnant pond.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 23)

Her already seen characteristics are established and Raymond follows his explanation about why Miss Marple is a significant lady. Moreover, we take a look at the past, to the first book concretely, to understand the path that has driven her to where she currently is:

Text 2

Anyway, Aunt Jane distinguished herself over that murder.'

'Oh, she's no fool. She adores problems.'

'Problems?' said Gwenda, her mind flying to arithmetic.

Raymond waved a hand.

'Any kind of problem. Why the grocer's wife took her umbrella to the church social on a fine evening. Why a gill of pickled shrimps was found where it was. What happened to the Vicar's surplice. All grist to my Aunt Jane's mill. So if you've any problem in your life, put it to her, Gwenda. She'll tell you the answer. (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 22)

Regarding her physical appearance, the narrator describes Miss Marple as “an attractive old lady, tall and thin, with pink cheeks and blue eyes, and a gentle, rather fussy manner. Her blue eyes often had a little twinkle in them.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 23).

She adopts the role of a “mother” to the young couple who want to investigate the crime by themselves. She even says that “[...] I feel I ought to be there to look after them.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 45), as if her aim is to take care of the inexperienced marriage.

She is aware of the atrocities that humans have done and therefore wants to protect them. Even though she does not fear many things, when it comes to other people's lives, it is not a game. She repeats to Giles and Gwenda many times that they have to “leave the whole thing alone” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 39) and “please—please be careful” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 179). She explains her fixation to them hoping that they will listen to her words: “[...] Murder isn't—it really isn't—a thing to tamper with light-heartedly.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 39). She is really caring and concerned and with reason, as the killer is in fact after them. But Miss Marple is not sure about what is the solution: “I don't think, my dears,” she said, “that you have given quite enough thought to the matter. Oh dear—I am really very worried. If only

I knew exactly what to do..." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, 221). It makes her more likeable to the reader and not just a simple know-it-all.

And her concern is not only related to the murder itself, but also to their health and well-being:

Text 3

She did not hear the sound of fresh arrivals downstairs, but after about five minutes the door opened and Miss Marple came in. She had two hot-water bottles tucked under her arm and a cup in her hand.

Gwenda sat up in bed, trying to stop her shivering.

"Oh, Miss Marple, I'm frightfully sorry. I don't know what—it was awful of me. Are they very annoyed with me?"

"Now don't worry, my dear child," said Miss Marple. "Just tuck yourself up warmly with these hot-water bottles."

[...] "Just lie down now and go to sleep," said Miss Marple. "You've had a shock, you know. We'll talk about it in the morning. Don't worry about anything. Just go to sleep."

(Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 25)

It is astonishing that she brings a feeling of homeliness and familiarity when they have actually just recently met. The couple, on the other hand, have also known her for some days but realise that she is right about the danger and that she wants to help them.

Text 4

"He knows something he won't tell us," said Gwenda, as they got into the car. "There's something—oh, Giles! I wish—I wish now that we'd never started..."

They looked at each other, and in each mind, unacknowledged to the other, the same fear sprang.

"Miss Marple was right," said Gwenda. "We should have left the past alone." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 68)

For them, Miss Marple's words are a sign of proof, in other words, if she thinks something is true, it must be. In the middle of the investigation, when Marple is travelling across Britain, they remember her past words: "There was something. Miss Marple thinks so, too." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 50), which tend to be true.

As in the previous book, Miss Marple considers her life rather boring and ordinary, and therefore a good murder gives her a kick: “My life, you know, has so few excitements. I hope you won't think me very inquisitive if I ask you to let me know how you progress?” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 59). Moreover, she asks them to be informed in order to draw her own conclusions, but at no time she requests to work together, which contributes to her feeling of loneliness.

Concerning her desire to keep investigating, others may consider that she is obsessed with murder.

Text 5

[Dr Haydock] “So that's why you're going. To look after them! Can't you ever leave murder alone, woman? Even murder in retrospect?”

Miss Marple gave a small prim smile.

“But you do think, don't you, that a few weeks at Dillmouth would be beneficial to my health?”

“More likely to be the end of you,” said Dr Haydock. “But you won't listen to me!” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 45)

This text also relates the idea of end with the fact that this is the last novel⁴.

One of Miss Marple's most known hobby is retaken in *Sleeping Murder*: knitting. It helps her engage in many informal conversations (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 26), point which will be discussed afterwards in her most used investigation strategies. She spends quite a lot of time sitting in her chair and listening closely to other people's situations.

However, in contrast to Miss Marple's first book, she is very busy and is constantly moving and travelling. This is a sign that she is in good condition and the health problems that come with age do not affect her as badly.

⁴ It's the last full-length novel (12 in total), but not short stories. Christie published a final book collecting all the last short stories about Miss Marple called *Miss Marple's Final Cases and Two Other Stories*.

Text 6

“Oh, thank you, Miss Marple. You've been frightfully kind. And I do hope what you've suggested is true. Because if so, well, it's quite all right. I mean, it won't be anything supernatural.”

Miss Marple smiled.

“I hope it turns out as we think. I am going to stay with some old friends of mine in the North of England the day after tomorrow. I shall be passing back through London in about ten days. If you and your husband are here then, or if you have received an answer to your letter, I should be very curious to know the result.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 34)

It shows a character evolution, as she does not necessarily think that it is imperative for her to be investigating herself. She relies on her friends and hopes to guide them when her help is needed. Moreover, she travels more and this is a difference with regard to her long stay in the beloved town of St Mary Mead.

But her help is not always requested and she does not listen if others want her on the spot, for instance, when she comes to Gwenda and Giles' house unannounced: “[...] I came in whilst you were away, as you kindly said I might, to do a little weeding.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 171). To this, Giles does not react so positive: “It might be kindly meant, but Miss Marple's action savoured, very faintly, of interference. And interference was unlike her.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 172). Because of her nice manners and sweet intentions, they let this kind of behaviour slip, which is a good idea, since she ends up helping them a lot. Sometimes it is better to let her interfere, as she takes care of their safety. For instance, the killer tries to get rid of Gwenda for being a witness but fortunately Miss Marple has not left the house to return to St Mary Mead, but instead she has stayed nearby in the garden to make sure that all is alright: “So fortunate,” said Miss Marple's voice, rather breathless, for she had run violently up the back stairs, “that I was just syringing the greenfly off your roses” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 236). And she adds: “I should never have dreamed of going away and leaving you alone in the house, [...] I knew there was a very dangerous person at large, and I was keeping an unobtrusive watch from the garden. (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 237).

Furthermore, she does not always meddle in their affairs. She knows when sometimes it is not her place, such as in family reunions. She then disappears from scene and gives them the spotlight.

Regarding her age, her good old friend Haydock examines her while she visits St Mary Mead in a brief time and gives his conclusions, which are quite positive: “For a woman of your age,” he said, “and in spite of that misleading frail appearance, you're in remarkably good fettle” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 41). Her good health status is another reason why this book does not have a feeling of closure.

4.2. Interactions

4.2.1. Other characters' attitude towards Marple

Miss Marple instils respect in her friends, and that is how it is. Without forcing her fellow “investigators”, they feel the need to do whatever she tells them and explain her their discoveries obediently, despite Giles not wanting it (*Sleeping Murder*, p. 84).

However, when they are stuck on the process and have no apparent way of leading the case, Miss Marple comes in action requested by Giles and Gwenda and gives them new hints in which to think. Giles does not understand the meaning of some letters and his first thought is: “[...] let's call round on Miss Marple.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 194). He knows the power that she holds and how she never rests:



IMAGE 17: Miss Marple on the right, Gwenda in the centre and Giles. *Sleeping Murder* (1987).

Text 7

'I wonder what she's doing now, the dear old thing. Sitting in the sun on the front?'

'Up to something—if I know her! Poking here, or prying there, or asking a few questions. I hope she doesn't ask too many one of these days.'

'It's quite a natural thing to do—for an old lady, I mean. It's not as noticeable as though we did it.' (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 149)

But as an old woman, her advice is often not followed because people attribute her words to simple chattering and gossip. She does not like to be degraded and therefore makes her voice heard.

In this book, there is a recurring apparition of Miss Marple's old friends: "Miss Marple hastened to oblige with details of their mutual acquaintance's ailments. It was fortunate, she thought, that amongst her many friends and relations scattered over England, she had managed to find a woman who knew Mrs Fane and who had written explaining that a Miss Marple was at present in Dillmouth, and would dear Eleanor be very kind and ask her to something." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 135).

Moreover, her old friend Dr Haydock, who was a character on the first book, makes an appearance as well (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 41). Miss Marple benefits from their closeness to make him say exactly what she wants to hear. She suggests that he sends her to Dillmouth for fresh air (where the murder happened) and tells the others that this was exclusively his idea: "Dr Haydock thinks it would be advisable." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 46).

4.2.2. Marple's cooperation with professionals

The professionals are not a main plot of the storyline because the murder is no longer current and the case is already closed. Therefore, the police appear only at the end of the book when Miss Marple has solved the crime. Additionally, the conflict about who gets the recognition for closing the case, which was present in all her past novels, is no longer a problem.

Nonetheless, Inspector Primer excels among the people from the police for his admiration:

Text 8

"Excuse me, Mrs Reed. That lady wouldn't be a Miss Jane Marple, would she?"

Gwenda had come to stand beside him. At the bottom of the garden Miss Marple was still waging a losing war with bindweed.

"Yes, that's Miss Marple. She's awfully kind in helping us with the garden."

"Miss Marple," said the Inspector. "I see."

And as Gwenda looked at him enquiringly and said, "She's rather a dear," he replied: "She's a very celebrated lady, is Miss Marple. Got the Chief Constables of at least three counties in her pocket. She's not got my Chief yet, but I dare say that will come. So Miss Marple's got her finger in this pie."

"She's made an awful lot of helpful suggestions," said Gwenda.

"I bet she has," said the Inspector. (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 227)

He respects her because is aware of her incredible "career", which has followed closely. One of the Chief Constables about which he talks can be seen in *A Murder Is Announced*: Chief Constable of Middleshire (George Rydesdale).

Later, when the they meet he brings up the name of a character seen in the first book (*The Murder at the Vicarage*) and this allows the reader to return to Miss Marple's origins and appreciate the long path that has taken her to the exact moment in which she finds herself:

Text 9

The Inspector gave a soft little laugh, and went down to stand by Miss Marple. He said: "I don't think we've been introduced, Miss Marple. But you were pointed out to me once by Colonel Melrose."

Miss Marple stood up, flushed and grasping a handful of clinging green. "Oh yes. Dear Colonel Melrose. He has always been most kind. Ever since—"

"Ever since a churchwarden was shot in the Vicar's study. Quite a while ago. But you've had other successes since then. A little poison pen trouble down near Lymstock."

"You seem to know quite a lot about me, Inspector—"

"Primer, my name is. And you've been busy here, I expect." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 228)

However, his expression “She's not got my Chief yet, but I dare say that will come.”⁵ indicates that this is not the end and the series continue despite not being written by Agatha Christie. This is one of the reasons why this book does not have the perception of a conclusion.

4.2.3. Miss Marple's family

Raymond West, Miss Marple's nephew, is present in almost every book, or at least the three that have been commented. This shows her attachment to family, although she does not have many left. Therefore, she cares a lot for the few that she still has. In this book we discover that Raymond has married Joan, a famous painter who is also sympathetic to the old lady. The affection for her aunt is a recurrent theme in his brief appearances. He cares for her and wants her to feel always welcomed. He also admires her and her work: “[...] tomorrow we've got a birthday party on for my quite incredible Aunt Jane [...]” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 22). He is one of the people who know her better because of the time spent together⁶.

This admiration is mutual and grows increasingly in the course of the collection of novels. Miss Marple always tries to bring up his name in any conversation, despite not having any correlation to the actual topic: “Oh yes, indeed. My own nephew, I remember—” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 137), and then again: “Oh, I know. My nephew—” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 138), but with few success.

As we have seen in the other books, Marple has a lack of close family ties but has an extended family scattered all over Britain. In *Sleeping Murder* this point is addressed in a comical way: “It's lucky that Miss Marple's cousin's sister's aunt's brother-in-law or whatever it was lives near here...” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 143). Thus, Agatha Christie releases the accumulated tension, which is characteristic of the majority of her books and provides a fresh environment to bid her farewell adequately.

⁵ See text 8 in *Sleeping Murder* analysis.

⁶ See text 1 and 2 in *Sleeping Murder* analysis.

4.3. Language used

The kindness and gentleness of Miss Marple's words are a frequent aspect of her speech. As before, she applies the Victorian manners in her conversations and has a friendly tone. For instance, when she meets the frightened Gwenda she comforts her, although having seen her only for a few minutes: "Now don't worry, my dear child," said Miss Marple. "Just tuck yourself up warmly with these hot-water bottles." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 25).

In addition, the typical words used to express terrible things in a softened way from *The Murder at the Vicarage* appear often, such as "wicked", "evil" and "devilish" (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 243).

As John Douthwaite explains in *Agatha Christie and the social function of the detective fiction of the Golden Age – A linguistic analysis*: "[...] it should be noted that the beauty of Christie's writing is that it seems so straightforward, so simple, so "empty", hence so-easy-to-enjoy, second-rate literature, lowbrow literature, literature of distraction, as crime fiction was held to be until relatively recent times, yet hiding unsuspected depth, both linguistically and conceptually."

This type of writing stands out especially in Miss Marple's stories, in which she speaks quite plain but in fact uses many metaphors and literary figures. Poirot's situation is different because he draws on the originality of using a foreign language such as French.

4.4. Methods of investigation

4.4.1. Observing and listening closely

Miss Marple is mindful of all the affairs that happen around her. Nothing can be hidden from her watchful eyes, which is a good strategy if you are willing to find a killer and its tricks. She accomplishes her mission in this way.

Before arriving to a final conclusions there are a few steps that every detective has to follow. Firstly, she has to know the facts and interview the affected people. In this talks one has to be aware of every small detail in order to question the former story and come up with other reasonings. For instance, Miss Marple has a long chat with Gwenda, who tells her a detailed story of her memories when she was a child and her background. By using her ability to listen carefully, she realises that while her heart is telling one story, her mind is telling a different one: "Now that's very interesting, dear, because you see you are mixing up two different voyages. In one, the Captain had a beard and in the other he had a red face and a scar on his chin." (Sleeping Murder, p. 31).

For this matter, she has to have a solid knowledge of word usage. During the talk with Gwenda, she discovers another interesting use of words: "[...] you used a very revealing turn of words. You said you seemed to be looking "through the banisters"—but normally, you know, one doesn't look down into a hall through the banisters but over them. Only a child would look through." (Christie, Sleeping Murder, p. 33). This fact leads afterwards the rest of the investigation because it means that they are dealing with a real past memory and not a delusion.

Then, when most of the facts are gathered, it is important to get to know the surroundings and the people living there. She visits the crime scene and the town frequently. In fact, there is a chapter (chapter 11) which provides her activity of roaming through the streets of the village insightfully. She spends some time looking inside each shop. She thusly has her finger on the pulse of the town.

Miss Marple, despite being rather noticeable, does not like being continuously in the spotlight. She prefers listening to the other people's stories and drawing conclusions from them. Therefore, in most of her appearances she listens to the long monologues and simply agrees (p. 102). Finally, when they have argued all facts, it is time for her to express her point of view (p. 103). This way, she can be more aware of all problems and discussions.

The difference between those who observe and the ones who do not is clear in Miss Marple's conclusions against Giles and Glenda's thoughts:

Text 10

She stopped. Giles looked at her curiously. "I don't quite understand—" he began.

"Don't you? It seems so horribly plain to me. But perhaps it's better that

you shouldn't understand. And anyway—perhaps I am wrong. Now do tell me how you got on in Northumberland." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 177)

4.4.2. Informal conversations

Unlike many true detectives, Miss Marple's approaches are not official, which provides a feeling of safety. She sits in a chair knitting and has ordinary talks with Gwenda, who has suffered a terrible shock. In a comfortable feeling and full of patience, Miss Marple waits for the witness to speak when she is ready. She mentions the problem and when the girl starts to open, her questions begin. If the



IMAGE 18: Miss Marple knitting while listening to her friend

other person is not willing to accept to talk, which happens frequently, she insists until a positive answer is given. This strategy is used on Gwenda: "Miss Marple patted the sofa invitingly" (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 27).

Miss Marple has two different effects on people with her questions: some feel invited to express their emotions, and others reject her offer of listening to them, thinking that a personal aim is hiding beneath her kind words.

Regarding the opinion of the protagonists in *Sleeping Murder*, which can be seen due to the expressed point of view from Gwenda throughout the book, sometimes they lean towards the first reaction, and other times towards the latter (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 83).

In another situation, Miss Marple is allowed to choose an assistant. She therefore thinks that an elderly woman may give her more information about the town's gossip and decides to pick her: "Miss Marple thanked her, took the parcel, and went into the draper's next door. Here, again, she selected an elderly assistant." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 95). This preference works in her favour and discovers many little secrets that she can use in the conversations that she has with other people afterwards.

Moreover, her facility to extend herself is useful to her in order to hide the true reason of the conversation. And if the talk turns to another topic, with her communication skills she comes indirectly to the interesting point for her investigation: "She reverted to the former topic." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 140)

4.4.3. Parallelisms

Making parallelisms is one of Miss Marple's most important techniques to apply the human nature which she has learned during her life to a practical case study. This method is used differently in this book because it is a form of assuring that what once was a memory, in the present must be one too. They regard it as a mathematical equation: "[...] I think we must face the position that if the other things are memories, that is a memory too..." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 32).

Apart from this, this strategy is not used henceforth.

4.4.4. Human nature

A murder in retrospect with no apparent traces left from the killer is almost an impossible case. It is therefore imperative that the detective possesses a great knowledge of human nature to trace its steps from years ago just by imagining which moves would be more likely to do from the prototype of the murderer. For instance, from the first moment Miss Marple notices that there is something strange about the case and how it was carried out in the past: “[...] You know, there's a great deal of—well, queerness about—more than people imagine. I have seen some of it...” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 101). With her knowledge of different crimes and especially the motives which cause crimes to be committed, she is capable of understanding human nature.

She describes jealousy as one of the motives which move people to commit crimes. And she can do it because she sees beyond the plain surface: “Jealousy, you know, is usually not an affair of causes. It is much more—how shall I say?—fundamental than that. Based on the knowledge that one's love is not returned. And so one goes on waiting, watching, expecting... that the loved one will turn to someone else. Which, again, invariably happens. So this Mrs Erskine has made life a hell for her husband, and he, without being able to help it, has made life a hell for her. But I think she has suffered most. And yet, you know, I dare say he is really quite fond of her” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 177). She understands the suffering between human beings, as well as the feelings and situations which lead to it, without us avoiding it.

Her knowledge of the human mind is also used in her advantage. It is really helpful when she wants to contact with somebody and therefore needs to find a connection. For example, she makes Gwenda talk with Edith Pagett, a former cook at St Catherine when the murder happened, because she knew Gwenda as a child: “[...] I think it would be quite natural, Gwenda, for you to want to see her. She may be able to tell us a good deal.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 107).

For her age, some of her thoughts are slightly current. She does not shudder when thinking of horrible crimes: “[...] It occurred to me as a possibility—yes. "Helen" might very well be a young stepmother—and in a case of—er—strangling, it is so often a husband who is involved.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 85). To her, facts are facts, no more.

In addition, in this book childhood is treated insightfully, which is rare for Miss Marple as she normally does not interact with kids. She does not only know how murderers may react based on human nature, but also victims: “[...] It would be a very severe shock to a child. Children are odd little creatures. If they are badly frightened, especially by something they don't understand, they don't talk about it. They bottle it up. Seemingly, perhaps, they forget it. But the memory is still there deep down.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 33). She has some understanding of this area, because her senses never turn off. She also observes children because they will be the ones becoming adults and acting in different ways the humans do. She discusses what is natural and what is not: “One is really astonished sometimes, with children. A sudden outburst from some child that one has thought didn't care at all. A sensitive nature that can't express itself until it's driven absolutely beyond endurance.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 139). But she does not just comment on children's behaviour, but also talks about women and elderly women's nature. It is easier for her because she is aware of both perspectives, as she is both.

When she has discovered the murderer's identity, Miss Marple talks about his intentions, plans and thoughts to perfection throughout the case and murder as if she was in his mind during all the process: “You were very dangerous to him, you and Giles. Fortunately you never told him about your memory of seeing Helen dead in the hall. He never knew there had been an eyewitness” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 246). She barely had a long conversation with him but, by understanding his nature, his behaviour is completely explained. However, she also thinks that one cannot rely entirely on her instincts as “the most unlikely people do things.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 178).

Sometimes, having seen numerous violent events, she is apprehensive when it comes to younger people investigating on their own: “Not hinting, dear. Just advising you (because I've lived a long time and know how very upsetting human nature can be) to let well alone. That's my advice: *let well alone*.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 40). She understands their will but cannot be fully in terms with their mission: “I imagine that most young men of spirit would feel like that. I even sympathize and almost admire you for it. But I wish—oh, I do wish—that you wouldn't do it.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 40).

However, despite being surrounded by horrible crimes, she thinks that “One always has hope for human nature.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 178).

4.4.5. Gossiping

As an old spinster it is inevitable that most of her life revolves around town gossip. It is most times the only distraction, so it is not out of place that it plays an important role again. Similarly, Miss Marple finds herself in Dillmouth, where some old friends of her live, as well as in Plymouth, a still undiscovered village by Miss Marple where the real action happens, just as in the previous book. Therefore, her knowledge of the town gossip is minimal and must enter the community and mingle with the local people, which she does easily: “I've been gossiping a little. In shops—and waiting for buses. Old ladies are supposed to be inquisitive. Yes, one can pick up quite a lot of local news.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 104). People trust her and not because of the familiarity that she used to have in St. Mary Mead. With just a few conversations, she discovers most of the little secrets which the town conceals. She also makes many new friends and is invited to their houses: “[...] He lives with his mother. I'm going to tea there at the end of the week.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 104).

She achieves a fair amount of information by talking with her “gentle gossiping voice” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 83) and sharing her knowledge with other citizens. Even her new landlady is a source of information because “she knows a great deal of the local gossip” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 84) and this is pleasing to her.

4.4.6. Follow the facts

In this book, Jane Marple adopts a more laid-back attitude that contrasts her constant action. This duality is common among detectives because they must take the case step by step, hint by hint. Thus, Miss Marple warns Gwenda: “[...] don’t rush to conclusions, my dear—” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 29).

Her method based on obtaining facts is explained elaborately: “[...] you can always do that when you've exhausted every other line of approach, but I always think myself that it's better to examine the simplest and most common place explanations first. Let me get the facts quite clear. There were three definite incidents that upset you. A path in the garden that had been planted over but that you felt was there, a door that had been bricked up, and a wallpaper which you imagined correctly and in detail without having seen it? Am I right?” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 30). She uses this strategy in the case and soon achieves good results. She thinks that this is possible due to the “common-sense explanation” (p. 38) mixed with a feeling of certainty (p. 99). However, a detective cannot rely on solely hunches, because it could be counterproductive for the case: “One's feelings are not always reliable guides” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 178).

Thusly, the problem can be easily deduced if the right tools are being used: “The unknown factor,” said Miss Marple. “Someone, shall we say, who hasn't appeared yet—but whose presence, behind the obvious facts, can be deduced” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 85). Her work is to provide new hypothesis and prove them, as she does in chapter 11. Her following investigation is clearly affected by the search of facts and reasons behind a complex case. Finally, but, her instincts have to guide her path because “[...] unfortunately there was nothing in the way of evidence to go upon. Just indications, nothing more.” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 237). To remark the importance of some of the facts and hints she follows, the author highlights them in italics (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 238).

Another advice that Miss Marple gives to Gwenda and Giles is to think by themselves and do not be influenced by other people's words. This is the key to a good observer and a great thinker. False facts are everywhere and one must doubt them and be suspicious of what people say. This sometimes works:

Text 11

"But don't you see, Gwenda, that the way we must look at it now, we can't depend on anything anyone says."

"Now I'm so glad to hear you say that," said Miss Marple. "Because I've been a little worried, you know, by the way you two have seemed willing to accept, as actual fact, all the things that people have told you. I'm afraid I have a sadly distrustful nature, but, especially in a matter of murder, I make it a rule to take nothing that is told to me as true, unless it is checked. For instance, it does seem quite certain that Lily Kimble mentioned the clothes packed and taken away in a suitcase were not the ones Helen Halliday would herself have taken, because not only did Edith Pagett tell us that Lily said so to her, but Lily herself mentioned the fact in her letter to Dr Kennedy. So that is one fact. Dr Kennedy told us that Kelvin Halliday believed that his wife was secretly drugging him, and Kelvin Halliday in his diary confirms that—so there is another fact—and a very curious fact it is, don't you think? However, we will not go into that now." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 210).

And sometimes the protagonists do not take Miss Marple's advice and fail in their tasks: "My dear Giles, you've fallen into the trap again—the trap of believing what is said to you. There is only Dr Kennedy's word for it that Halliday ever had that hallucination. He himself never says so in his diary." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 241).

She is already experienced with this type of people and their lies and her manner is usually distrustful, which contradicts Miss Marple's words in *The Murder at the Vicarage*, where she states that her problem comes directly from thrusting people too much. There has been a development in her way of thinking all over this years that have made her toughen: "[...] You believed what he said. It really is very dangerous to believe people. I never have for years." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 244).

Just as once Arthur Conan Doyle, the writer of the Sherlock Holmes series which inspired to a great extent Agatha Christie's novels, said: "Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth."

Miss Marple thinks similarly, which is an indication of Doyle's influence in Christie's writing: "It's not impossible, my dear. It's just a very remarkable coincidence—and remarkable coincidences do happen." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 32). However, the similarities between Agatha Christie's characters and Sherlock Holmes are more significant in the construction of the detective Poirot.

4.5. Interesting facts and ideas

Miss Marple has generally a good opinion about people around her age but also acknowledges that sometimes "Old people can be rather a nuisance" (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 58). She is too nice and does not want to bother other people, particularly if the people in question are recently married, because she understands that they need to spend time alone.

The passage of time discussed in this book as one of the main topics (time between the past crime and the discovery of the murder in the present) is also a parallelism or metaphor of Miss Marple's own passage of time, her personal journey and an end that approaches.

Taking into account the above-mentioned points, Miss Marple states that the years with which they deal are not so many, which does not correlate to her story being brief, except if we compare it to Poirot's: "Nineteen years is not such a long time" (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 99). Thus, she still has time left to enjoy herself and simply live. This is possible for her fairly good health compared to the younger people: "[...] general poor condition of most of the younger generation." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 136).

Moreover, she is more positive about the end of life and does not see death as a thing to worry about: "[...] And of course a great shock, but interesting, one must admit. And of course I am so old that death doesn't shock me as much as it does you—only something lingering and painful like cancer really distresses me."

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(Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 207). She is also more calmed than other people (mostly young) because she thinks that the clue to find out new information is to “think with time and patience” (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 104).



In my view, this book is a parallel to Poirot’s book *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, when he is “retired” and living peacefully but then the excitement of a murder makes him come back. Miss Marple also does a similar thing, as she is traveling to visit her extended family and friends without a fixed destination but the thrill of a good murder is above her will.

Interestingly, Jane Marple has a more feminist side to her character. She is not a characteristic feminine woman, but when it comes to ethics she stands out for her morals. She does not prejudge the murdered girl for being a nymphomaniac as the other people think. She investigates her case and corrects her friend Gwenda’s mistakes and thoughts. The rumour that she was a sex addict and promiscuous is, in fact, invented by her brother, the person responsible for the crime, which is a man indeed.

Text 12

“The tennis net?”

“Yes, that seemed to me very significant. Think of that girl, young Helen, coming home from school, and eager for all a young girl wants out of life, anxious to meet young men—to flirt with them—”

“A little sex-crazy.”

“No,” said Miss Marple with emphasis. “That is one of the wickedest things about this crime. Dr Kennedy didn’t only kill her physically. If you think back carefully, you’ll see that the only evidence for Helen Kennedy’s having been man mad or practically—what is the word you used, dear? oh yes, a nymphomaniac—came actually from Dr Kennedy himself. I think, myself, that she was a perfectly normal young girl who wanted to have fun and a good time and flirt a little and finally settle down with the man of her choice—no more than that. And see what steps her brother took. First he was strict and old-fashioned about allowing her liberty. Then, when she wanted to give tennis parties—a most normal and harmless desire—he pretended to agree and then one night secretly cut the tennis net to ribbons—a very

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significant and sadistic action. Then, since she could still go out to play tennis or to dances, he took advantage of a grazed foot which he treated, to infect it so that it wouldn't heal. Oh yes, I think he did that... in fact, I'm sure of it." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 239)

When a man wants to undervalue and humiliate a woman for no apparent reason, Miss Marple is ready to defend those girls who need it.

The most astonishing thing is that she has to explain it to the young girl, denying the myth that claims that older generations are ignorant about more progressive matters. She is more open minded than what she presents herself to be at first.

At another time, Marple admits that she thinks that women are sometimes more involved in important matters and do a lot of work on their daily life, while men do not tend to take charge of tasks regarding children or other things: "[...] But I must confess that gentlemen do not seem to me to have a great regard for duty in so far as their wives are concerned—public service is another matter." (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 178).

Furthermore, her and Gwenda share some moments which Giles does not understand for his gender:

Text 13

"Something he did—" Giles was suggesting vaguely, when Gwenda chipped in sharply. "Of course," she said. "Another man!"

She and Miss Marple looked at each other with the assurance of those admitted to a freemasonry from which men were excluded" (Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, p. 105)

There is two reasonings to this phrase: they may imply that most of the problems come from men and incompetent actions, or they mean that the answer that Giles gives is too simple and brief, because they search for a good motive and his explanation is simply "something he did".

Taking all this into consideration, I do not consider this book the proper ending for the book series, as it does not have a feeling of closure. The end of the last chapter does not bid her farewell, it talks about other characters of the book and their own ending. However, we see a calmer and happier Miss Marple, which leaves us a good memory of her character. It is maybe due to the posterior short stories written by Agatha Christie in *Miss Marple's Final Cases*. Anyways, the end of this collection of short stories does not mention her either.

Whatever the cause, one thing for certain is that Miss Jane Marple is an immortal character. Not just by her importance in past and modern detective crime fiction, as she was a good female precedent and role model, but also because, in contrast with Poirot's ending (*Curtain: Poirot's Last Cases*), Miss Marple does not die in the last book. Her death is never shown and therefore gives a sense of unfinished business, as if her story is longer and does not end with the death of the writer.

5. WHO IS HERCULE POIROT?

“A complete egoist.”

— *Agatha Christie*⁷

Poirot is the main character of the detective novels of Agatha Christie (1890-1976), he is responsible for solving the murders in which, in most of the times, he becomes entangled by chance. Egypt, London, Baghdad, among others are some scenarios in which Hercule develops his skills as a crime investigator and lives amazing adventures.

The renowned chubby Belgian detective, has an egg-shaped head, sports an impeccable moustache and blue eyes full of wisdom; his dress is always neat and scrupulously cared. He is always courteous in dealing with others but never leaves any detail unanalysed around him, and wherever the crime goes he pursues.

Hercule Poirot, the retired Belgian police officer who turned a world famous private detective, first appeared in chapter two of Agatha Christie's first published novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, which was completed in 1916 but not published until 1920.



IMAGE 19: David Suchet performing as Hercule Poirot

⁷ Agatha Christie's assessment of Hercule Poirot in *“Agatha Christie: A Biography”*.

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He is the only fictional character to have received an obituary on the front of The New York Times in 1975, following the publication of *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*, because they considered that deserved an obituary in the *New York Times*.



IMAGE 20: Copy of the New York Times front page obituary for Agatha Christie's detective, Hercule Poirot after his goodbye in *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*.

There were many film and television versions with actors such as: Tony Randall, Albert Finney, David Suchet and Peter Ustinov.

5.1. Character's descriptions

Poirot is most described as a little⁸ man with a black moustache, his trademark. To Hastings, Poirot's best friend and the narrator, Poirot reminds him of a cat: "His green eyes and his finicking habits" (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 114).

His mood changes from time to time, the reader never knows which Poirot will be in the chapter. At first, he is calmed, especially when he has to be discrete. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, it is clearly asserted that "his self-control was astonishing" (p. 58), which, I believe, cannot always apply to reality.

When he is mistaken, he generally accepts his failure and works on the case immediately, but this is not always the case. If not all goes according to plan, he can start to insult people or the world around him, which is normally poor Hastings. He always shouts to him "*inutile*" or "imbecile" (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 107). Sometimes, from the narrator's perspective, Poirot acts like a mad man who cannot control his feelings. (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 168). Other times, his humour attracts those around. Poirot is definitely a rollercoaster of emotions.



IMAGE 21: Poirot's typical clothes. Portrayed by David Suchet.

Poirot is his biggest admirer. He loves himself and is confident. Many times, this is not a good characteristic on his favour, as he appears too insolent, and not humble enough. It also depends on his mood, since he can be the sweetest man.

For this reasons, he is much more human than what we could imagine.

In *Curtain*, Poirot and Hastings are very affected by the course of time. However, it is not the weight of age that makes it difficult to carry, but life.

⁸ In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* his height is said to be exactly five feet four inches.

5.2. Interactions

5.2.1. With Arthur Hastings

Hastings is the usual narrator of Poirot's stories. He joins him on all his cases and stands beside him trying to help. Then, when the murder is discovered, he writes the adventure in a book. Therefore, some descriptions of Poirot are biased.



IMAGE 22: Arthur Hastings and Poirot in the TV series Agatha Christie's Poirot.

Luckily, in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* their relation is not shown, as Captain Hastings is in Argentina, and the prototype of Poirot which we see is genuine. They are close friends. For this reason, as well as many others, some people seem to agree on the fact that Hastings is the Watson of its Sherlock, in this case Hercule Poirot.

In fact, when we are first introduced to Hercule's character, Hastings also does the comparison abovementioned:

Text 1

[Hastings] "Well, I've always had a secret hankering to be a detective!"

[Mary Cavendish] "The real thing--Scotland Yard? Or Sherlock Holmes?"

"Oh, Sherlock Holmes by all means. But really, seriously, I am awfully drawn to it. I came across a man in Belgium once, a very famous detective, and he quite inflamed me. He was a marvellous little fellow. He used to say that all good detective work was a mere matter of method. My system is based on his—though of course I have progressed rather further. He was a funny little man, a great dandy, but wonderfully clever." (*Christie, The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 8)

When they meet again, they hug and kiss, showing their affection to one another, which continues throughout his career. However, sometimes Poirot's behaviour and confidence is too much to bear. Poirot wants to challenge him mentally and always dares him to solve the case. And even though he does contribute with new ideas and hints, the final links are all thanks to Poirot.

Sometimes Hastings feels defeated because he thinks that Poirot, though always repeating him that he should: “Do not fear. Speak your mind. You should always pay attention to your instincts.” (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 130). And when he does speak, he says to him “you have no instincts.” (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 143). For this reason Hastings feels left out at times:

Text 2

“There, mon ami, you will be of great assistance to me.”

I was pleased with the compliment. There had been times when I hardly thought that Poirot appreciated me at my true worth. (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 138)

Furthermore, Poirot challenges him but does not express his own opinion with the aim of letting his imagination and intelligence flow, which Hastings does not quite like. (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 131). Poirot also accuses him of being too talkative, and therefore he cannot allow that he tells or acts different around the murderer. But to be in the same positions, Poirot shows Hastings the hints he has.

Captain Hastings is also useful for many other things. For instance, he pulls some strings and is in the case. Poirot even says to him in one occasion “[...] I will be guided by you.” (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 84). As he has good contacts, Hercule Poirot sends him to investigate on his behalf (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 133). He does most of the work regarding the human contact, excluding the interviews.

For this reason, when he is not there with him, he misses his company and mentions his name every time when he feels lost: “Also, I had a friend—a friend who for many years never left my side. Occasionally of an imbecility to make one afraid, nevertheless he was very dear to me. Figure to yourself that I miss even his stupidity. His *naïveté*, his honest outlook, the pleasure of delighting and surprising him by my superior gifts—all these I miss more than I can tell you.” (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 20). Their friendship is beautifully portrayed. Poirot is the leader who brings confidence to others and Hastings is his faithful friend, always there no matter what, as he has an undeniable admiration towards him and his work.

In the last book their friendship is enhanced, and despite Poirot's rudeness and constant insults, they learn to appreciate each other.

5.2.2. With other people

Poirot rarely works alone, almost never. If it is not with Hastings, Dr Sheppard is there; and if not, he has alliances with people within the conflict.

As he meddles in the case and therefore in people's private life, some people prefer him not to be there. However, the general reaction to his presence is positive: "Hullo, Hastings. Have you seen the little fellow safely back to his cottage? Quaint little chap! Is he any good, though, really?" (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 151).

Poirot even assumes the father figure with some of the suspects to get them to trust him: "[...] Papa Poirot is always at your service" (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 178).

Moreover, people admire him wherever he goes (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 82) and knows a lot of important and well-known people.

5.2.3. With professionals

Policemen, such as Inspector Japp, acknowledge him as a true detective, as he used to work for the Belgian police: "Me and Moosier here have met before—and there's no man's judgment I'd sooner take than his. If I'm not greatly mistaken, he's got something up his sleeve. Isn't that so, moosier?" (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 111). Others think that he is an amateur. However, he is nothing of the kind.

The police need his help: he has seen the case from the inside and knows the people involved. Japp lets him stay with pleasure. Poirot, but, feels like their methods are too different and Japp does not show him his true value: "[...] I am disappointed in Japp. He has no method!" (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 127).

In the other book, as he wants to remain unknown, the police don't recognise him. It is difficult for him to fit in because they say that "Not the least need for amateurs to come butting in" (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 80). But Poirot always has connections and ends up being in the case: "I know M. Poirot's great reputation" and the Colonel Melrose says "I've heard of some very remarkable successes of yours" (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 81). Sometimes, he is even cheered by members of the police (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 215).

Poirot wants to make it clear that he has no intention of being recognised as the detective who solved the case: "[...] I must beg, that in the case of my being able to contribute something to the solution of the mystery, my name may not be mentioned." (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 81).

5.3. Poirot's family and background

The story takes place just after the war, which has had a negative impact for his life. Poirot left Belgium for England as a refugee during World War I and is now living in a house full of other Belgian refugees: "The house which the Belgians occupied in the village was quite close to the park gates." (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 37).

Regarding his family, he does not say much. One thing is for sure: he is also a solitary man as Miss Marple. His entire life has been dedicated to fight against murderers and has never settled down with anyone.

5.4. Language used

Poirot expresses himself usually with politeness: “[...] most polite spoken gentleman.” (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 21), although he also insults continuously and shouts *inutile* in French to people with whom he is confident enough.

His Belgian origins are present throughout his life. As his first language is French, when he wants to express himself he does it in this language. When he is excited, he shouts “*mon ami*” (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 21); and when he is desperate, people can hear his “*mille tonnerres*” from a mile away (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 81). He also uses many French idioms, metaphors and English phrases:

- *En voilà une affaire* → Here is a case. (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 81)
- “A good laundry does not starch a handkerchief” (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 103)
- *C’est dommage!* → It’s a shame! (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 153)

Thus, Agatha Christie shows her rich language and usage of words, while simultaneously providing more dramatism to the story.

5.5. Methods of investigation

To Poirot, the methods he uses to investigate are essential because it shows what kind of detective he is. He has a preference: “I am old-fashioned. I use the old methods. I work only with the little grey cells.” (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 268). Moreover, his motto is “**method, order, and the little grey cells**” (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 96), as we will analyse thereafter. He affirms that in order to solve a crime, a good method is needed, then the detective

has all to solve it. So, although feelings and instincts are important, the rational and logic answer is always preferable to human behaviour as an indicator.

His most used tactics are the following:

- Examine proof: Contrary to Miss Marple's behaviour, his analysis of the situation revolves around the proof and observing. He can afford it because he has access to the evidence. Moreover, order and method are closely related and an essential part of the crime solving process.
- Conversation: Is also a tool they both deploy in their investigations as well. He asks a lot and in form of interrogation. Many times he is aware of things which the people interviewed expect him not to know, as he is a stranger. But he is one step ahead. Even though proof is important, he is also interested in people's behaviour and psychology.
- Interrogations: These are frequent in Poirot's books. As he normally works with the police, he has more contacts and credibility. He does not need to resort to unofficial talks as Miss Marple. (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 50).
- Recapitulate and re-enact: Poirot, as Miss Marple does before in *A Murder Is Announced*, like to put himself in the killer's position to discover his moves. This characteristic has to be an inherent trait of all detectives.
- Facts are not enough: Facts are useful to arrange one's ideas but after this, the detective has to use his own intelligence in order to draw possible conclusions. Poirot says to Hastings, who is lost in the crime and does not know how to continue, that "Every fact that I know is in your possession. You can draw your own deductions from them. This time it is a question of ideas." (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 143). He always has "ideas", of which many are bizarre. Even he agrees with this statement: "A little idea of mine, that was all. Me, I am famous for my little ideas" (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 220) .

- Asking the right questions to the right people: This point has no explanation more, one has to be aware of the information that each person is allowed to give:

Text 3

“One must always proceed with method. I made an error of judgment in asking you that question. To each man his own knowledge. You could tell me the details of the patient's appearance - nothing there would escape you. If I wanted information about the papers on that desk, Mr Raymond would have noticed anything there was to see. To find out about the fire, I must ask the man whose business it is to observe such things.” (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 85).

In another situation, Poirot also uses his friend Dr Sheppard (as he did with Hastings earlier) and sends him to speak with some certain people, as he is more approachable. In a way, he works for him, as he can get the information easily. Poirot, in contrast, doesn't always instil trust (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 119).

- Focus on the objects: Not all the information from a case comes from the people, as objects and furniture may sometimes tell the truth and reveal many more secrets (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 95). It is the detective's work to interpret them.
- Study the psychology: Every good detective has to have a good knowledge of human behaviour (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 96). As Miss Marple, Poirot uses this tactic on the suspects, although it is not as important as in Miss Marple's storyline. Poirot sometimes even sends his friend Hastings to do the more “human” work. Towards the end of each book, he always analyses their behaviour to match it with the murderer.
- His little grey cells: This is the feature in which Poirot takes more pride. They represent the knowledge or the power to think critically, something that he specifies, have not many people. As a thinker, his brain is vital. His superior attitude is highlighted with the way he refers to people who not use their cells, and hence, are not intelligent enough.

- Confront the suspects: He addresses the suspects to warn them about the time left that they have to confess their secrets. He sits them all in a table and delivers a speech, in which he says that if they do not speak, Poirot himself will discover all the truth (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 148). Finally, by putting pressure on them, results are clear: “I was to have a further proof that day of the success of Poirot's tactics. That challenge of his had been a subtle touch born of his knowledge of human nature. A mixture of fear and guilt had wrung the truth from Mrs Ackroyd. She was the first to react.” (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 176). He also does experiments, complots and traps with them.

5.6. Interesting facts and ideas

One interesting fact is that Sherlock Holmes and Poirot share many similarities, since Christie based her character on the first. It sometimes seems like one is watching a mirror. Poirot follows therefore the archetype created by Arthur Conan Doyle that a lot of writers copied in his time. In fact, in the first and second book analysed, Hastings and Poirot express their wish to be like the famous detective and to succeed (Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, p. 8). Christie also shows a correlation between their roles and the ones from Conan Doyle in the words of the narrator: “I played Watson to his Sherlock” (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 163).

I would also like to point out how the books in which Poirot takes part, usually end the chapter, and even the final phrase as it is seen in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, with a reference to him. He has a greater present compared to Miss Marple, who in her last book was not even mentioned in the final part.

In analysing Poirot's urge to investigate, a pattern within his many books is found. His main reason is simply justice. This is all he desires. However, this is contradictory, as many times he breaks the law and in *Curtain* he is about to commit a murder himself.

Regarding his evolution as a whole, it is not notorious. He begins the story as a remarkable and famous detective, and ends it in the same way. Moreover, as the time goes by, all his “worst” traits escalate and becomes an almost unbearable character. Nevertheless, Agatha represents him humorously and it is easier for the reader to enjoy.

Finally, a matter that should be discussed is the character in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* called Caroline. Agatha Christie creates a spinster who fancies crime stories and is almost like a detective. Her strategies are mostly gossiping and human nature. At this point of this research, one can see that this description is the same as Miss Marple. Yes, in fact, Christie based her on Caroline and her own grandmother. The interesting part about Caroline is that she interacts with Poirot. Therefore, we can say that this book is the closest that Agatha Christie has been in making the two characters (Poirot and Marple) meet. To Poirot, Caroline is a really interesting woman whose most important skill is her psychology knowledge (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, p. 154).

I also have to say that Caroline’s character is more naïve and not effective, since her own brother is the murderer and she never discovers it. Even Poirot tricks her into thinking that he had not the fault.

6. COMPARISON CHART BETWEEN POIROT AND MISS MARPLE

“Hercule Poirot, a complete egoist, would not like being taught his business or having suggestions made to him by an elderly spinster lady. Hercule Poirot—a professional sleuth— would not be at home at all in Miss Marple’s world.”

— Agatha Christie

As Agatha Christie expresses in *Agatha Christie: A Biography*, her two most famous detectives do not share some thoughts and would probably not get along. I therefore want to prove if her assumption is correct by comparing some of their characteristics.

TERMS TO COMPARE	POIROT	MISS MARPLE
Frequency of appearance	He is a recurring Christie character. He carries more weight of the story. It is also influenced by the fact that the narrator is his best friend, who admires him and requests his help in numerous occasions. He appears in 33 novels, one play (<i>Black Coffee</i>), and more than 50 short stories.	Appears in twelve novels and twenty short stories. Moreover, her presence is not ongoing. Sometimes it feels as she is a background or secondary character, just the “detective”.
Physical traits	Described often as a little man with fierce green eyes, Poirot	Typical elderly spinster, with a big influence of the Victorian era.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN MISS MARPLE AND HERCULE POIROT

	stands out for his magnificent black moustache.	Furthermore, she dresses “Victorian” ⁹ and rarely updates her wardrobe.
Personality traits	Poirot is notably meticulous in his personal habits and his professional methodology. He thinks he possessed the absolute truth and therefore his character is often arrogant.	She has a gentle and appealing manner which helps her to approach others. Marple understands other people’s suffers and empathises with them.
Language level	He curses a lot for his position. His use of the language is a mixture of English and French.	She carefully chooses her words and always addresses her thoughts in a kind way to influence the people’s thoughts.
Social role	An important characters that interacts with others. He casts himself in the role of "Papa Poirot", a benign confessor, especially to young women.	Marple elevates the archetype of the spinster. She acts as a guide in the story.
Intellectual capacity	He has a perfect understanding of the criminal mind and an	Her intelligence is more focused on knowledge of human behaviour and her

⁹ Her clothing is described so in *Thirteen Problems*.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN MISS MARPLE AND HERCULE POIROT

	<p>unsurpassed intelligence thanks to his little grey cells. He stands out for his observing and analysing proof skills.</p>	<p>familiarity. Her most remarkable intelligence is the interpersonal intelligence.</p>
<p>Evolution</p>	<p>Not a highly remarkable evolution. He has many layers to his personality but is normally a flat character.</p>	<p>She changed from a mere spinster to “detective”. Also, she becomes more modern and a kinder person in comparison to her gleeful gossip character in her first book.</p>
<p>Position among professionals</p>	<p>Semi-official and formal Belgian police member, works with the police and has the full access to the evidence and testimonies of the witnesses.</p>	<p>Amateur detective or sleuth, not official.</p>
<p>Types of murders</p>	<p>Normally, he works in cases that are in the public domain. He has many contacts that request his help.</p>	<p>She is usually involved as an interested bystander in more domestic crimes. Most of the victims she sees are female, possibly because women at this time had a more domestic role than now and had to take care of the household.</p>

A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN MISS MARPLE AND HERCULE POIROT

Marital status	Single.	Single, and rather solitary.
Investigation strategies	He has access to all the evidence, which he can analyse calmly.	Without evidence, her strategies are a mere act to rely on the information which she collects from the people by means of gossip or just a friendly talk by the cup of coffee.

I now wonder myself what would happen if they ever met. Would it be so disastrous as Agatha Christie thinks?

Actually, they did meet one time, although not through Agatha Christie's books as one may suppose. Poirot and Marple met for the first time in 1990 for Agatha Christie's centenary celebration in her hometown of Torquay. David Suchet portrayed Poirot at the time (he recently finished portraying Poirot on television). Joan Hickson here portrayed Miss Marple, as well as on the television series between 1984-1992.



IMAGE 23: Joan Hickson and David Suchet at an event for Miss Marple

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS

After having read the books and having done a detailed analysis of each character and their actions, I have come to the following conclusions:

- Taking into account the hypothesis previously determined, which said that a big difference between the two characters would be seen and that the main cause would be inherent of Miss Marple's female sex, I can partly agree. Comparing their characteristics and the role they play in the book, in spite of always being the detective who solves cases, they present significant distinctions. Consequently, it affects the way they are treated towards society. An example is their range within the police. Poirot is a professional, not Marple. Poirot has more help and access to information by being—again—a professional and by having worked many years with the Belgian police, where he managed to succeed and make a name for himself. In the first book he is already referred to as the famous detective (name that is never attributed to Miss Marple). People of influence contact him, they even beg him to collaborate. In contraposition, Miss Marple has to gain her position. She starts in her series of books being a simple spinster with too much free time. With her effort, she evolves and becomes a true detective. Moreover, she stays in her village of St. Mary Mead whereas Poirot travels around the world.
- If we analyse Miss Marple in detail, her success as a lead character can be understood. Here I would like to emphasize the importance of having female representation as a lead role in a detective story, a character which used to be represented by famous detectives such as Sherlock Holmes, with a definite male archetype. Agatha Christie moves away from this trend and makes a character completely different. However, she ends up writing another archetype: a typical Victorian spinster woman. Even though she has many characteristics attributed to the female sex, one can perceive the progress on the character. For being a lady who in certain ways lives in the past, she is open minded and expresses opinions more characteristic of a

modern person. In the aspect that I discussed in the introduction about her modern thinking I have been proven wrong.

- During the research, I have also identified many similarities between Marple and Poirot. As one can deduce, Christie has the tendency of writing solitary characters. They are both alone and old. The ways in which they overcome these obstacles and interact with others is what defines them. However, in Miss Marple the lack of close relationships with family are an important thing. This provides a more human side to her character. She also acts many times as a secondary character, she works from behind and, although making the most discoveries, never asks for recognition. Actually, her modesty in contraposition of Poirot's overflowing self-confidence, is what connects her with society. In many aspects, Miss Marple is a real person.
- In this matter I would also like to point out that Poirot is sometimes an exact copy of Sherlock Holmes. In fact, in many points of the story, Captain Hastings and him express their wish of becoming the famous detective. This contributes to his archetypical character.
- Regarding the influence of Agatha Christie's life in her characters, we can observe that many of her characteristics are represented in them. But despite Christie's approximation to the physical appearance of Miss Marple and the fact that she is also a sort of female detective in her own way (with knowledge of medicine and poison), she sometimes shares more traits with Poirot. For instance, Christie's desire to travel and discover the world, goal which she accomplished with her second husband, is mostly seen in Poirot's attitudes. He is a character that is originally from Belgium, moves to Britain, visits the Nile, passes through the Balkans and experiences Egypt, as well as many more places. This may be due to Christie's feelings. Poirot is what she wants to be, while she resembles more to Miss Marple. The women in that time did not have many opportunities, and when these came, they used to be thanks to a man. It is sad, but realistic. In Christie's life, for example, she began to travel the world by her second husband, what she could not do as freely by her own. However, the background of Agatha

Christie and the necessity of outgrow the social rules that the society imposes are clear in Miss Marple. Just as Christie publishes with her name written, unapologetically, and showing that her value goes further away than being a woman, Miss Marple also does not listen to the critics and is faithful to her true essence.

- This project has helped me to always observe details. I have also discovered that all is not what it seems in the first moment. Through research and hours of work, I have comprehended how many layers Miss Marple and Poirot have.
- Taking all this points into consideration and after comparing the two characters, I can affirm that, as Agatha Christie once said: "They are both stars and stars in their own right." One has the merit of captivating millions of fans and whose fame is still current, while the other was an important turn in her time, which expressed the way Christie wanted the world to move forward, to not conform, and most importantly, to think.

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IMAGES

IMAGE 1: <<https://www.pinterest.es/pin/392094711290211059/?lp=true>>

IMAGE 2: <<http://dovane63.blogspot.com/2018/01/la-reina-del-crimen.html>>

IMAGE 3: <<https://www.pinterest.es/pin/593349319627651276/?lp=true>>

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IMAGE 5: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joan_Hickson>

IMAGE 6:

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IMAGE 7: <https://agathachristie.fandom.com/wiki/Raymond_West>

IMAGE 8: <<https://www.pinterest.ch/pin/442478732116947181/>>

IMAGE 9: *The Murder At The Vicarage*

IMAGE 10: *The Murder At The Vicarage*

IMAGE 11:

<https://66.media.tumblr.com/cdc29fcd05c49fb7b2d16d56a2d26171/tumblr_ok54pydqqU1tmci27o1_250.gifv>

IMAGE 12: <<https://www.pinterest.cl/pin/134263632618553869/>>

IMAGE 13:

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IMAGE 14:

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IMAGE 15: <<https://www.criminalelement.com/miss-marple-everlasting/>>

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