Agatha Christie: A Look Into Criminal Procedure and Gender

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Agatha Christie: A Look Into Criminal Procedure and Gender

University Honors Program Thesis
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Submitted by

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Abstract

With 2020 being the 100th year since Agatha Christie’s first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, was published, it seems fitting to celebrate such an accomplished author with a deeper look into the inner workings of her novels. While she wrote mystery novels that involved many detectives, the two most popular are Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. This paper will examine these two detectives in regard to the criminal procedure each uses to solve their respective cases. Would her detectives’ work hold up in court then or even today? Additionally, the difference in gender between Poirot and Marple and how that affects their crime solving methods will also be examined.
Introduction

While many have tried their hands at detective fiction, there is one individual who stands above them all: Agatha Christie. Dubbed “The Queen of Mystery,” Agatha Christie published sixty-six novels between 1920 and 1975. Christie was able to continuously produce gripping novels that also speak to the criminal procedure of her times. Her detectives are constricted to the technology, resources, and criminal justice system of the 1900s. More often than not, the ways in which her detectives solve mysteries are outdated, which leaves modern day readers to wonder whether or not the criminals in her novels would have been able to be prosecuted today. Is enough probable cause established in her novels to convict the offenders today? The modern day United States criminal justice system and that of Europe’s -- more specifically the United Kingdom’s -- in the twentieth century is vastly different. There is no doubt that Christie published some of the best detective fiction that will ever exist, but determining if the criminal procedure used was technically sound requires information that is not found in her novels. In looking at the correctness of the procedure used, first that of the settings of her novels, and then in the United States today, will show how much Agatha Christie understood what she endeavored to write about and if her novels are truly able to transcend both time and space.

Another aspect of Agatha Christie’s novels that deserves further analysis are her two most popular detectives, Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. Poirot is Christie’s most well-known detective. Often described as a small man with a big ego and even bigger mustache, Poirot is everything most readers want from a traditional detective. As a retired Belgian police officer, he brings years of experience to the table. While his methods are not always conventional, he is able to use what he describes as “little grey cells” to arrive at answers that no one else would have been able to reach. On the other hand, Christie also created Miss Marple, who is a very
independent woman. She is an older, unmarried woman who lives in a little English village. She, unlike Poirot, has no formal detective training and just uses her natural busybody tendencies, observation skills, intuition, and feminine knowledge to solve crimes. Both are extremely successful at what they do, but the difference of gender in the detectives invites readers to examine if Christie created the two with equal skills and opportunities. In comparing Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, it is seen that Agatha Christie creates two capable people of opposite genders with unique skill sets that allow them to be successful detectives, in their own right.

In examining three Hercule Poirot novels (Murder on the Orient Express, The ABC Murders, and Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case) and comparing them to three Miss Marple novels (The Murder at the Vicarage, The Body in the Library, and A Caribbean Mystery) both criminal procedure and gender roles in Agatha Christie’s great detective novels can be recognized and interpreted.
Chapter One:

Biography of Agatha Christie

Outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare, Agatha Christie’s novels are the most widely published of all time and in any language. Yet Gillian Gill points out in her biography, *Agatha Christie The Woman and Her Mysteries*, “Millions of fans have enjoyed her work and have not cared much about the woman behind the words” (2). This may be because readers of detective fiction “look for an absorbing puzzle, a well-paced plot, and a brilliant denouement. They are not much concerned with an author’s biography or self-analysis or ideological speculation” (Gill 1). Even so, although Christie may have seen detective fiction as a perfect vehicle to write, but still keep a private life, many have wondered about the woman behind the pen.

Life Before Writing

How an author grows up plays an important role in how they see the world, which subsequently influences their future writing. In her autobiography, *An Autobiography* (1977), Agatha Christie writes about her childhood, “Looking back I feel that our house was a truly happy house” (15). Christie was born in 1890 and grew up in Torquoy, Devon, England with parents who were happily married and two siblings. She was raised in the Victorian era, which was from 1837-1901. During this period, gender roles were enforced, so men went to work while the women stayed home. Women were to be married early, raise a family, and ensure the happiness of their husband. However, upper-class women participated in afternoon tea, which was often their chance to engage socially with other women during the day. The class system was also a great societal divide, with the upper-class and upper middle-class separating themselves from the lower classes. She later died in 1976, just a year after her last novel was published. Being brought up in England will later become important for her detective fiction, as
it is usually the setting for many of her novels. In The Gentle Art of Murder written by Earl Bargainnier, he notes:

Agatha Christie belonged to the English upper middle-class, and the world of this class forms the social scene of her fiction. As with physical setting, she avoided what she had not experienced…Her values were those of her class: trust in reason, desire for stability, belief in civilized conduct, faith in property and a strong sense of morality. (30)

Readers can see how Christie’s upper middle-class upbringing shapes her characters and setting. Poirot, for example, is the pinnacle of trust in reason. He is constantly searching for the answers that are reasonable. This can be seen in The ABC Murders (1936) when he tells his companion, “Until I get at the reason for those letters being written to me, I shall not feel that the case is solved” (209). His desire to not accept a case is complete until there is a reason behind every action fits into Christie’s upbringing. As Christie grew up in the Victorian era, many ideals from the Enlightenment in England, which ended in 1815, were still important. One of the main principles of the Enlightenment era, or the Age of Reason, was prioritizing reason over science and faith. Poirot exemplifies reason over intuition and blind faith by seeking an explanation for every single aspect of his cases. Likewise, Miss Marple is the picture of civilized conduct. In The Murder at the Vicarage (1930), she is first pictured attending tea in a garden and described as “a white-haired old lady with a gentle, appealing manner” (13). Along with going to tea being a traditional way for civilized European ladies to see each other, these gathering also provides them with an excuse to gossip, something Marple is also skilled at. Agatha Christie’s childhood provides her with the expertise to write about murders happening in upper middle-class settings.

In the Hercule Poirot novels being examined, Christie’s personal childhood setting shines through. For example, in The ABC Murders, the settings and characters are all reminiscent of
Christie’s own upper middle-class surrounds. One victim lives in a recently built bungalow with her parents and works at a café, and another lives on two acres of land that overlooks the sea. Another victim owns a tobacco shop that she bought with a small inheritance. The victims are all what would be considered of middle-class families or possess middle-class wealth themselves. The places where the murders occur (Bexhill, Churston, and Doncaster) were all towns with middle-class settings when Christie was writing about them, with the exception of the crime at Andover which is described as happening in a poorer class neighborhood. *Curtain* (1975) also has a particularly Victorian setting and characters. The novel takes place in the village of Styles St. Mary at a large boarding house that is dilapidated but has plenty of character. The characters, most of which are of middle-class, have dinners together, play bridge, and take walks around the garden. * Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) does not take place in a middle-class town, but is comprised of very wealthy characters, like a famous actress and a Russian aristocrat. They all partake in extremely upper middle-class and upper class activities while on the Orient Express. However, fine dining and men smoking pipes is something Christie would have experienced or witnessed. Christie draws influence from the towns she lived in and activities she participated in or saw when she was younger to create the setting and characters of Poirot novels.

Similarly, Christie creates the setting and characters of Miss Marple novels with the influence of her upbringing, especially because she is a female. Miss Marple partakes in activities like drinking tea with the other women, knitting, and gardening. All of these things are indicative of a middle-class lifestyle. Additionally, the settings of her novels are in English villages, similar to the one the Christie grew up in. *The Murder at the Vicarage* takes place in St. Mary Mead where a Colonel is murdered. The women in the village have tea together and gossip and varying families have maids and butlers, just like Christie’s family did. The integration of
military veterans in her literature is indicative of her life, as she lived through two world wars and was surrounded by many members of the military in her life. There is a continuance of military veterans and maids as characters in *A Caribbean Mystery*. As well as characters resembling those Christie would have grown up around, the settings of her novels also pay tribute to the era in which she lived. In *The Body in the Library* (1942), again the setting is St. Mary Mead where a young woman is found dead in a large Victorian style house called Gossington Hall. In fact, the library itself has “one or two good old family portraits on the walls, and some bad Victorian water colors” (563). This is, no doubt, a setting Christie encountered during her lifetime. Butlers and maids are once more seen as working for an upper class family. Also, the younger characters are somewhat reminiscent of a young Christie in Cairo, where she and her friends spent their evenings dancing and going to parties. Just like Poirot, one Marple novel being examined, *A Caribbean Mystery* (1964), takes the female detective away from any setting like the one Christie would have grown up in, but having the luxury of being able to afford a vacation at a resort, the characters are of higher wealth. It is especially in this novel that Miss Marple is seen using skills that she has obtained through being a middle-class woman, like observation and intuition, as she is removed from her usual setting. Christie largely projects characteristics of her childhood into Miss Marple novels because she has lived in the setting that she desires to write about.

Even though Christie admits in her autobiography that she led a considerably privileged childhood, that does not mean it was void of anything negative. At the age of five, Christie says she discovered what fear was. While trespassing in a field of flowers, an angry man yelled at her, “Trespassing, that’s what you’re at. Get out of it. If you’re not out of that gate in one minute, I’ll boil you alive, see?” (Christie 37). She says this is the first time that she knew real terror, as “I
had visualised it. A great steaming cauldron on a fire, myself being thrust into it. My agonized 
screams. It was all deadly real to me” (37). This event could be at the core of Christie’s 
fascination with the macabre. She tells of nightmares following the trespassing event, recalling, 
“I called him The Gunman because he carried a gun, not because I was frightened of his shooting 
me, or for any reason connected with the gun” (37). She continues further on, “It was his mere 
presence that was frightening…suddenly a feeling of uneasiness would come. There was 
someone – someone who ought not to be there – a horrid feeling of fear” (37). From a young 
age, then Agatha was visualizing the concept of violence in her dreams. She was not afraid of the 
gun, but instead she was afraid of the person holding the gun. It is as if she realized that it is the 
person who is inherently bad. According to Gill, the Gunman illustrates:

The idea that people are not what they seem, that the most beloved and familiar person 
can turn suddenly into a sinister and threatening stranger. Agatha Miller had this 
nightmare perhaps because she seems to have been unusually aware from early childhood 
of a split between her boy and her observing consciousness and knew that she herself was 
not what she seemed. (16)

Throughout her novels, there is rarely a character that is exactly what they seem to be, 
illustrating Christie’s idea that the Gunman, or evil person, can be anyone, especially the person 
that is least expected. There is a hidden secret, connection, or identity for almost every character 
Christie has created. Even her detectives have deceived those around them. This may be why she 
writes complex criminal characters instead of criminals who are shallow and foolish.

Christie also writes in her autobiography that her childhood books were not always filled 
with rainbows and butterflies. She says, “Illness and early death pervaded even children’s books” 
(49). She read books like Little Women, where sweet, young Beth dies of illness. Another family
favorite was *Our White Violet*, where “a saintly invalid on page one, died an edifying death surrounded by her weeping family on the last page” (49). Christie goes on to describe other childhood books that had similar themes, but she comments, “All these gloomy books I read with great satisfaction” (49). She also writes about being captivated by the Old Testament, especially David and Goliath. It is not surprising that she was mostly interested in David and the “deadliness of his weapon” (50). Growing up with death as a common theme in literature might have increased Christie’s interest in the subject even more. The way she writes about death is respectful, though. There is no unnecessary action taken, it is very cut and dry. Someone is stabbed in a calculated way, victims are calculatingly drugged, or a string of murders is carefully planned. The description of the bodies is never too gruesome; leaving room for readers to appreciate the true art of the crime rather than focusing on the gory depiction of the body. Agatha Christie, from a young age, masters the art of death in literature and therefore, writes about death as if she has a passion for it.

Christie did not always want to be an author, however. As a teenager, Christie spent time in France where she studied music. She writes, “My own serious study was music, of course, both singing and piano” (159). She remembers improving quite rapidly and really believing that she could be a pianist. This self-confidence is a result of the positive relationship she had with her mother. Gill notes, “Agatha says that her mother was convinced that her daughters could do anything they seriously put their minds to, and none of their achievements ever took her by surprise…Agatha drew a store of self-esteem from the love and respect she and her mother offered each other” (22). The confidence her mother inspired in her led Christie to chase her dreams of becoming a pianist. She pursued this career path for almost a year until she was told by an expert pianist that she “had not the temperament to play in public” (164). Even though the
world has benefitted greatly from her failed attempt to become a pianist, one must look back at the reason Christie was able to pursue that dream so deeply, the relationship she had with her mother. Gill argues, “the confident sense of female identity it gave her [Christie] is at the heart of the relationships and power structures of Christie’s detective fiction” (22). This relationship almost certainly led Christie to develop strong female characters, including Miss Marple.

Before Christie began writing, it should be noted, she did what every good Victorian woman was expected to do: she got married. She remembers being in Cairo, around the age of seventeen, with her friends and they were all excited about the prospect of being courted by a young man. Christie remembers, “Those were still great days for the purity of young girls. I do not think we felt in the least repressed because of it” (169). Courtship brought a whole new level of sexual anticipation, although premarital sex was heavily frowned upon. She was young and at the teenage years where girls start to become curious about the opposite sex. Christie was a desirable young woman and received her fair share of marriage proposals, or as she refers to them, “near escapes from getting married” (199). She turned them down, remarking to one particular man, “And I don’t believe you really want to, either” (175). She was smart enough to know that most men proposing after a short period of knowing each other were being unrealistic in their marriage desires and, therefore, Christie did not waste her time. However, she was engaged a man who was assumed to have died in war.

Agatha Miller ended up marrying Archibald Christie in 1914, because “she may have seen in Archie the best personification yet of that dashing, inscrutable Byronic hero so beloved of women in romantic literature” (Gill 27). The two were married on short notice even though they did not have the approval of many people (Gill 28). Even though they did not have much money or familial support of their relationship, they were happy.
It is while her first fiancé was deployed that Christie and her sister read the newly popular detective novels. Growing up, she read Sherlock Holmes, but it was not until around the age of twenty that this genre of literature started to resonate with her. Christie believes the first detective novel she ever remembered impacting her was *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* by Gaston Le Roux, published in 1907. Her sister was reading the book too and the two often discussed how they felt about it. One day her sister told Christie, “I don’t think you could do it. They are very difficult to do. I’ve thought about it” (Christie 211). To that, Christie responded with, “I should like to try” (211). Although there was never a formal bet made, the challenge pertaining to Christie’s ability to write a detective novel was formed. From then on, Christie notes, “At the back of my mind, where the stories of the books I am going to write take their place long before the germination of the seed occurs, the idea had been planted: *some day I would write a detective story*” (211). Little did she know, she would some day write more than just one detective story.

**Behind the Pen**

In 1916, Agatha Christie began writing her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920). During this time, fiction writing was “one of the rare ways that educated women could earn a living, and by the early twentieth century detective fiction was already a lucrative genre” (Gills 32). With the detective fiction genre blossoming, this left the door wide open for Christie to flourish. At the time, Christie had recently gone through a career change. Beginning in 1913, Christie had worked as a nurse. Nursing classes were popular in 1913, but with World War I beginning in 1914, the classes became practical. Nursing was idealized because of the belief that young women would be tending to the injured men and soothing them (Christie 222). However, around 1916, Christie had switched to working in a dispensary, which inspired the source of
death in her first novel because she was constantly working with pharmaceuticals. She remarks, “Since I was surrounded by poisons, perhaps it was natural that death by poisoning should be the method I selected. I settled on one fact which seemed to me to have possibilities. I toyed with the idea, liked it, and finally accepted it” (254). She writes many of the characters in *The Mysterious Affairs at Styles* to have occupations that give them knowledge of poisons. However, she created these characters as red herrings to throw readers off the scent of the real criminal (Gill 35).

Christie believed in having multiple suspects with potential motive for murder, but did not ever want to write a novel where she felt the murder and motive were unprecedented. In doing this, Christie showed that she did not want to create “a very unusual kind of murder for a very unusual reason,” as that did not appeal to her (255). Instead, she argues, “The whole point of a good detective story was that it must be somebody obvious but at the same time, for some reason, you would then find that is was not obvious, that he could have possibly done it. Though really of course, he had done it” (255). The conclusion of Christie’s novels are arguably the best part because she is able to consistently trick readers throughout the narrative and then lay out a perfectly obvious explanation that could have never been guessed.

Anyone who has read an Agatha Christie novel will agree that the sentiment Christie expresses regarding what makes a good detective story is the exact feeling one has after the conclusion of any one of her novels. The sensation of, “Of course it was them! How could I have missed that!” while simultaneously feeling, “There is absolutely no way I could have seen that coming,” is how the majority of people will feel. This may be the best part of reading a Christie mystery. She fulfills the necessary requirement of giving her readers sufficient evidence to solve the mystery, but in the most discreet way.
It is fitting that in her autobiography, Christie can remember her exact thought process while creating the finer details of her first detective in 1916 while working at the dispensary. Appearing in thirty-three of her sixty-six novels, Hercule Poirot is Christie’s most famous creation. He even appears as the detective in her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920). She wanted to make him a little man, who was very tidy and always organized. Most importantly, she thought, “And he should be very brainy – he should have little grey cells of the mind – that was a good phrase: I must remember that – yes, he would have little grey cells” (256-257). She did, in fact, remember that phrase and it would go on to become Poirot’s trademark. In fact, Christie bases the way Poirot solves crimes on these little grey cells and psychology. Earl Bargainnier writes of this method of solving crime, “The detective is not concerned with just the motive, but with the kind of person who would commit the crime” (60). This is true of Poirot, except Bargainnier also argues that since Christie’s own knowledge of psychology is limited, so is her detective’s (60). Although this may be true, Christie still writes Poirot to be able to do the most basic acts involving human psychology, like listening “to gossip, to ordinary conversations, to quarrels, to any type of speech that may give him a clue as to how the speaker’s mind works” (Bargainnier 60). This is ultimately how he is successful.

Agatha Christie created one of the most celebrated fictional detectives in Hercule Poirot. As he is most certainly derived from Sherlock Holmes and Auguste Dupin, in “The Detective’s Method: Holmes, Poirot, Father Brown and the Influence of C. Auguste Dupin,” Lydia Navajas Martín says, “It is inevitable that all these characters have connections and similarities between them” (33). Similarly to Holmes, Poirot is presented through a narrator, making the inner workings of his mind inaccessible to outsiders, unless he lets them in (Martín 30). Like Dupin,
Poirot uses psychology as one of his main methods for solving a crime (Martín 34). However, Poirot takes it a step further and becomes a master at psychology and analyzing every single detail to finally piece together a crime. In Poirot, Christie created the perfect detective, that is to everybody but her. She had one regret when it comes to writing his character, and that was in making him old. She joked when talking about the process of creating him, “Why not make my detective a Belgian? I thought…A retired officer. Not too young a one. What a mistake I made there. The result is that my fictional detective must really be well over a hundred by now” (256).

Gill also points out Poirot’s very slow aging process, commenting:

Physically, Poirot will remain astonishingly the same. By the time of The ABC Murders in 1935, Poirot is admitting to dying his hair and whiskers…In Curtain, written during the Second World War and published in 1975, Hastings finds Poirot confined to a wheelchair and contemplating death. (50)

Christie’s overlooking of Poirot’s age, as he would be over 120 years old by his final appearance in Curtain, actually ends up working out in her favor. Hercule Poirot would not be half the detective he has turned out to be if his age did not help him in garnering the respect of almost every fictional character he encounters.

Poirot’s maturity is not the only aspect of him that aides him in his detective work. Christie depicts Poirot as a less than extraordinary looking man in physical appearance, which should not be overlooked as one of his assets. It might be said that, “Physically, Poirot is instantly recognizable in the way a cartoon character is. The egg head, the mustache” (Gill 53). His fellow characters’ descriptions of him are enough to crush any man, as it is not uncommon of someone to think of him as “a ridiculous-looking man. The sort of little man one could never take seriously” (Murder on the Orient Express 7). Gill argues that Christie creating him to not be
physically impressive works in his favor, writing, “Murderers tend to underestimate Poirot, with fatal consequences. Moreover, the discrepancy between Poirot’s ridiculous appearance and his formidable intellect makes a certain elementary appeal to the public’s sympathy” (53). As Earl Bargainnier points out, “He is five feet four inches, but carries himself with dignity – the usual term is ‘immense dignity’” (46). Christie does create Poirot to be an extremely likable character as, “All these physical elements combine with his personality to form a comic exterior, which Poirot uses when necessary for his own purposes. At the same time, they set him apart from ordinary humanity” (Bargainnier 47). Agatha Christie knew she created an extraordinarily human with an unreachable level of intelligence in Poirot, so she brought him back to humanity with his physical appearance. Another element that makes Poirot seem somewhat unreal to audiences is the lack of personal information that is given about him. Christie might have been intentionally vague when she created Poirot, as the bulk of what readers know is that he was a highly decorated Belgian policeman. Poirot’s inability to relate to other fictional characters may be a large part of why readers are unable to relate to him.

**The Creation of Jane Marple**

Agatha Christie’s second detective, more commonly known as Miss Marple, also garners the respect of the public. Although Miss Marple does not have as many novels to her name, she holds her own as a female detective. In *A Talent to Deceive*, Robert Barnard even goes as far as to argue, “There is no doubt that most Christie addicts prefer Miss Marple as a detective to Hercule Poirot” (108). Christie herself even eventually favored Miss Marple over Poirot. One potential reason for this, other than their obvious connection as Victorian female women with an interest in crime, is that “Miss Marple was always a rather more human character than Poirot: if she was, like Poirot, basically an observer of life, she still allowed herself, in later
manifestations, much more warmth and feeling in the way she regarded the frailty and failings of others, and so came to embody the impulsive and generous sides of her author’s nature” (Barnard 111). In theory, Agatha Christie, through Miss Marple, writes the life she would have liked to have lived. Instead, she lives vicariously, for Miss Jane Marple, although an underdog in many ways, manages to impress people case after case.

It is fitting that someone like Christie would create a female detective. This is because, “For much of her childhood and youth, Agatha’s life was dominated by woman – her mother and grandmother, her mother’s women friends, the female servants, and her sister” (Gill 20). It is probably because of the normalcy of having a life filled with strong woman the Christie says, “Miss Marple insinuated herself so quietly into my life that I hardly noticed her arrival” (435). In fact, she started out writing Miss Marple to be like some of her grandmother’s old cronies. Ultimately she drew inspiration from her grandmother herself, as “she always expected the worst of everyone and everything, and was, with almost frightening accuracy, usually proved right” (435). Where Christie says Marple steers away from her grandmother is that “she [Marple] was far more fussy and spinsterish than my grandmother ever was” (435). Through Miss Marple, Agatha Christie aims to create a more human character, one that any reader could relate to or have in their life. Miss Marple becomes the embodiment of the typical village gossip, for the majority of the novels she is featured in. Female detectives were not prevalent in literature at the time Christie began to write, however the first Nancy Drew novel was published in the same year as the first Miss Marple novel, 1930. These two detectives both go on to have successful fictional careers and pioneer the way for future female detectives in literature.

Another feature of Miss Marple that Agatha Christie drew from her grandmother and emphasized is the power of female intuition. Christie writes Miss Marple to expect the worst of
people and this is due to her feminine intuition. In the very first novel Christie writes featuring Miss Marple, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, her untrusting nature is evident from the beginning, as she remarks to some fellow village women, “I’m afraid that observing human nature for as long as I have done, one gets not to expect very much from it” (18). The same untrusting nature is seen in *A Caribbean Mystery* when she does not leave the death of Major Palgrave go untouched, even though everyone else at the resort concludes, without a second thought, he fell victim to his failing health. One of the best aspects of Miss Marple is this untrusting nature, as it leads her to have much success. As she tells a peer in *The Body in the Library*, “You simply cannot afford to believe everything that people tell you. When there’s anything fishy about, I never believe anyone at all. You see, I know human nature so well” (630). The reason she knows human nature so well is all thanks to her creator, Agatha Christie because she created Miss Marple to be a Victorian woman who excels in communication and the observation of others.

Miss Marple is a typical Victorian lady, but that is what makes her an amazing detective. Christie creates Marple this way intentionally, as being a Victorian is all she has ever seen in other women. In some cases, Marple is a mirror for Christie, as according to Gill, “After the 1950s, when Christie herself was in her sixties, Miss Marple novels became more frequent, no doubt because an increasing congruence had developed between the aging author and her elderly female sleuth” (181). Agatha Christie confesses that she did not learn much from the mistake she made with creating Poirot as an older man, as she initially wrote Miss Marple as a lady of sixty-five to seventy years old. Christie desired to write about someone she connected with and that is why Poirot was “in great disfavor with Christie” (Gill 181). She was happily trying to rid her writing of him around this post World War II era. It is through the creation of Miss Marple that Christie shows her readers just what a woman who is “tall, slender, dignified late-Victorian of
great shrewdness” can do (Bargainnier 67). This Victorian portrayal will later play into how Christie uses Miss Marple as a vessel for gender in detective fiction.

**Response to Fame**

Much of Agatha Christie’s response to fame can be attributed to the turbulent end of her marriage to Archie Christie. At one point in her *Autobiography*, Christie writes, “I had married the man I loved, we had a child, we had somewhere to live, and as far as I could see there was no reason why we shouldn’t live happily ever after” (275). However in 1926, Christie was told by her husband that he loved someone else and had been seeing her for a while, finally concluding, “I’ve fallen in love with her, and I’d like you to give me a divorce as soon as it can be arranged” (Christie 351). Shortly after the news of the divorce broke, Christie disappeared, but nothing is directly mentioned of this in her *Autobiography*, as she skips to February of the following year. Barnard writes of this, “Agatha Christie, in the *Autobiography*, says nothing whatsoever about the disappearance, though references in later sections of the book to the horrible newspaper publicity she had received suggest that she may have intended to say something, if she could bring herself to do so” (60). The disappearance of the famous author is almost straight out of one of her mystery novels.

On the evening of December 6, 1926, Christie was driving home after a quarrel with Archie. Her car was later found overturned in a chalk-pit, without Christie inside. Barnard says, “At first everything seemed to point to murder, and not surprisingly the police involved in the case…focused their attention on Colonel Christie as the obvious murderer” (58). The case received so much publicity that “Leading ‘crime experts’ such as the famous detective novelist Edgar Wallace were encouraged to speculate on the case. Wallace analyzed Christie as a brilliant woman intent on ‘mental reprisal’ on someone who had hurt her” (Gill 109). It is likely he made
this comment because news of Christie’s divorce was public knowledge. The police were becoming desperate for any leads as to where Christie was. They were searching everywhere, including “The nearby Silent Pool, which Agatha had featured in one of her novels” (Gill 109). Gill also notes that, “Reporters besieged Styles, plagued anyone involved in the case for interviews, haunted the police headquarters of two counties” (109). While Christie being located at the scene of one of her novels, the searches turned up no body or clues and Agatha Christie was later found at a nice hotel, having stayed there during the duration of the search for her. However, during the search, Archie had allegedly told reporters “that he doubted that his wife had committed suicide but thought it quite possible that she had deliberately staged a disappearance. Agatha had claimed that she could successfully do so, and she seemed to be substantiating her claim (Gill 110). It was the claim that Christie had staged her disappearance as a hoax that made Christie sever her relationship with the press in the years to come. Christie writes in her *Autobiography*:

> but I knew that the only hope of stating again was to go right away from all the things that had wrecked life for me. There could be no peace for me in England now after all I had gone through…From that time, I suppose, dates my revulsion against the Press, my dislike of journalists and of crowds…I had always hated notoriety of any kind, and now I had had such a dose of it that at some moments I felt I could hardly bear to go on living. (354)

Although Christie does not give a reason for her disappearance, it is quite obvious that the defamation of her name that came with it had a strong effect on her mental health. This would deter her from coming wanting to be in the spotlight for the remainder of her career.
There are still plenty of speculations as to why Agatha Christie really disappeared. Robert Barnard lists many explanations, one of them being that it was a publicity stunt, but that did not hold merit, as her novel published in June of 1926, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, was a sensation and, “a rather conventional, well-brought-up, middle-class young lady might bring herself to indulge in a publicity stunt, but surely not one based on the painful break-up of her own marriage” (Barnard 58). This brings up the second explanation that the disappearance was “‘staged’ by a woman of undoubtedly ingenious mind as a piece of revenge on the man who had humiliated her” (Barnard 58-59). This is exactly what Barnard thinks happened, but Christie denies this in her autobiography and blamed this line of thinking as the reason she left England for the Canary Islands in 1927. Lastly, there is the idea of amnesia or another mental illness. Archie even told the press that Christie, “had suffered from amnesia and remembered nothing of the vents of the previous eleven days” (Gill 112). Gill continues, “Agatha then went for a course of treatment with a London psychiatrist, who helped her to recover her memory of much that she had done in the missing days” (112). It was this story that brought the scrutiny of the press. However, in her *Autobiography*, Christie remembers being quite ill the entirety of 1926, especially after the death of her mother. She recalls, “I began to get confused and muddled over things…Sometimes I would sit down, put my hands to my head, and try to remember what it was I was doing…I was upset one day when I was just about to sign a cheque and could not remember the name to sign it with” (348-349). These experiences, if true, do point to signs of a mental illness in Christie and could explain amnesia as the reason for her disappearance.

The larger takeaway from the disappearance is that Christie pulled away from and distrusted the press from that point on. Barnard writes, “From that time on she was an obsessively private person, unwilling to give even the most innocuous kind of interview or make
public appearances” (61). Interestingly, Barnard believes this is one of her greatest strengths as a writer, as “Agatha Christie feels no emotions towards any of her creations: perhaps Poirot rouses a flicker of irritation, Miss Marple a flicker of affection…each character is surveyed, analysed, dissected as murderer-potential, without an ounce of involvement” (61). This is a brave stance to take in regard to Christie’s writing as it could be argued that she delves deep into the minds of all characters. She must do this in order to create intricate backgrounds for each of her characters and especially the murderer, as motives are not ever accessible without the detective’s thorough analyzation. Something that can be agreed upon is “that an innate shyness in Christie became, after the disappearance, a strong need to withdraw, hide herself, cover her tracks” (Barnard 62). However, Christie did find happiness again with another man named Max Mallowan whom she married in 1930.

The two were married for the rest of Christie’s life. Towards the end of her life, Gill notes that Christie continued writing. Christie beings “experimenting with the character and role of the powerful, successful, professional older woman – a woman, that is, like herself” (Gill 200). Christie was aiming to create a character which could potentially be seen as a parallel to her own life. This woman is Miss Marple. Christie had herself overcome so many boundaries that were set in place when she first began writing. Just as Miss Marple is one of the pioneers for female detectives in literature and media, Agatha Christie pioneered the way for women authors of all genres. Agatha Christie died of natural causes in the peace of her house.
Chapter 2:

Hercule Poirot and His Criminal Procedure

Hercule Poirot is a unique detective. At the culmination of many of Agatha Christie’s novels starring the former star of the Belgian Police Force, readers are left stunned at how Poirot is able to identify the murderer in one thoughtful speech. Christie, via Hercule Poirot, does take readers through the actions of solving a crime, but it is easy to get lost along the way. This makes the ending even more suspenseful, as the evidence has usually not been pointing to the person responsible. Instead, the evidence has been pointing as far away from the offender as possible. While the description of how Poirot comes to the realization of who the culprit is seems chaotic and haphazard, it is filled with nothing but order. In fact, Poirot preaches addressing all situations with orderly procedure. In The ABC Murders, for instance, he holds a gathering for the family members of the deceased and encourages them by saying, “We must approach this matter with method and order in our thoughts” (154). This is how Poirot keeps himself and those he is working with in the right frame of mind to identify a murderer. It is through method and order, conversation, keen observation, and the help of his little grey cells that Poirot is able to solve many criminal cases.

At the onset of many of Christie’s novels including Poirot, the crime has yet to occur. However, Poirot is always aware or suspicious that something horrible is about to happen. In Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case (1975), he plants himself at Styles because he believes “A murder will shortly be committed here – here” (20). In The ABC Murders, he receives a letter and he tells Hastings, his friend and colleague, “It is my knowledge – my experience – that tells me that something about that letter is wrong” (7). In another foreshadowing moment in Murder on the Orient Express, Poirot and M. Bouc, a fellow Belgian man, are discussing how strangers from all
walks of life are brought together when travelling and Poirot comments, “Then, perhaps, all
these here are linked together – by death” (25). Poirot’s sharp instincts can sense a crime before
it has even occurred. An event like these are followed by Christie setting the scene a little further
and the crime occurring. This is when Poirot’s personalized criminal procedure begins.

There are fundamental steps that Poirot follows in each case he undertakes. In an essay
entitled “Hercule Poirot and Criminal Psychology: Crime and Detection in Selected Novels of
Agatha Christie” by Esmaeil Najar and Fatemeh Salehi Vaziri. They write, “The truth is that
detectives devote the majority of their time and energy to psychological profiling, filling in the
blank spaces of the puzzle of evidences and communicating with suspects and people who are
overall involved in the case” (174). This is exactly how Poirot approached solving a crime. He
can be seen first looking into the psychological state of the criminal, profiling the person so he
knows who he is looking for. Poirot also carefully analyzes every piece of evidence, so he can
spot the gaps. He is quick to realize that not everything is as cut and dried as it seems. Finally,
Poirot has superior oral skills at eliciting information. He is able to obtain the information he
seeks by tailoring his tone and messages to the person he is speaking to. He goes into
conversation knowing what he is searching for, which makes him extremely effective. It is
through these three elements that Hercule Poirot achieves detective supremacy.

Method and Order

Hercule Poirot’s individual investigative process revolves heavily around method and
order. He is consistent with the way he views the investigative process, saying, “We must
approach this matter with method and order in our thoughts. We must look within and not
without for the truth. We must say to ourselves – each one of us – what do I know about the
murderer? And so we must build up a composite picture of the man we are going to seek” (The
ABC Murders 154). Poirot usually obtains evidence from the suspects, obtains evidence from the crime scenes, and the sits back to think. Once he sits back to think, however, Poirot becomes very selective about the details he chooses to divulge, and those around him are left in the dust. When confronted with a theory, often “Poirot took no notice of the suggestion” (The Murder on the Orient Express 86). He does sometimes acknowledge things as being a possibility, but never confirms or denies explanations given by others. In Curtain Poirot offers one explanation for this, telling Hastings, “Do you not realize, my friend, that such knowledge may be dangerous?” (45). Whether or not Poirot keeps information to himself to protect those around him or so that he can take sole responsibility for providing the solution of a crime, it is part of his method and order. Poirot’s method and order usually concludes with him gathering all of the suspects in a room and explaining to them what he believes to be true. He lays out the who, what, where, when, and why of the crime. This elicits an uproar, because until then, the true criminal has been able to hide in plain sight.

Profiling the Murderer

One characteristic that the murderers Hercule Poirot pursues have in common is their intelligence, which makes his job significantly harder than that of a regular detective. Najar and Vaziri delve into the concept of intelligence in criminals. The article explains, “Hercule Poirot’s cases are often fairly intelligent criminals, so that he has to strive beyond the ordinary to deal with them. The level of intelligence is directly related to the amount of time it takes for a criminal to commit a crime” (169). In all three books being examined here, the criminals patiently wait for the right time before committing their crimes. The best examples of this are the Orient Express passengers in Murder on the Orient Express. The guilty parties, all connected through the kidnapping and murder of little Daisy Armstrong, plotted for many years to perfect
their revenge against Casetti, the man who carried out the original crime. While trying to sort through all of the evidence, Poirot even admits to his peers, “I do not understand myself. I understand nothing at all, and, as you perceive, it worries me” (68). At the end of the novel, Poirot almost applauds the group’s intelligence, as he tells them, “I was particularly struck by the extraordinary difficulty of proving a case against any one person on the train….The whole thing was a very clever jig-saw puzzle, so arranged that every fresh piece of knowledge that came to light made the solution of the whole more difficult” (278-279). The caliber of criminals Poirot is working to apprehend are above the average human.

While the offenders Poirot chases are intelligent, they are also somewhat impulsive. This impulsivity is the reason Poirot is able to pinpoint the murderer in many cases. In *The ABC Murders*, the culprit, Franklin Clarke, is still unbelievably intelligent and has Poirot confounded for some time. He has an alphabetical killing scheme, but notifies Poirot before committing each murder via mail, while framing an innocent man all along. In a case like this, it would be easy to get lost with all of the red herrings, but Poirot tells Hastings, “It is not the facts I reflect upon – but the mind of the murderer…*When I know what the murderer is like, I shall be able to find out who he is*” (117). This is a tactics that Poirot often uses, as it lets him inside of the mind of the madman and get to know the type of person they are without knowing who it is. Poirot is able to shift from looking for “a man who prints clearly and well – who buys good-quality paper – who is at great needs to express his personality…I see him growing up with an inward sense of inferiority…I see that inner urge – to assert himself – to focus attention on himself becoming stronger,” (49) to “a man with a boyish temperament, an attractive man to women, and a man with a ruthless disregard for human life” (239). Poirot realized he was looking for an outsider, when all along he should have been looking for someone connected to one of the crimes. He
finds this man in Franklin Clarke. Franklin Clarke, “mistakenly and out of sheer impulsivity, commits a murder, the record of which does not correspond with the alphabetical order that he has initially aimed to create. This causes the destruction of his master plan in the end as Poirot succeeds in seeing right through him (Najar and Vaziri 171). This mistake allows Poirot to shift his focus away from the madman he thinks he is dealing with to someone more impulsive and boyish. Clarke’s impulsiveness in committing one final crime as to not come off as a potential suspect is actually what gives him away. Hercule Poirot lets no mistake, no matter how miniscule go untouched.

Arguably the most lawfully untouchable criminal Hercule Poirot faces is Stephen Norton in Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case. In Ming-fong Wang’s essay titled “Seeing Through the Curtain: Agatha Christie’s Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case,” Norton is often described as the perfect murderer and is also described as such by Poirot in the novel (203). He instigates and facilitates five known murders before Poirot finally tracks him down. Norton is often overlooked as a person, which he despises until “He discovered how ridiculously easy it was, by using the correct words and supplying the correct stimuli, to influence his fellow creature” (206). This means that Poirot has to shift his usual criminal procedure because he is normally hunting down criminals who have, with their own hands, committed homicide. He works through Hastings, as Poirot is supposedly confined to a wheelchair. He does not tell Hastings who he is looking for, but rather, what he is looking for, saying “You have to guess exactly how and when the blow is timed to fall and you have to be ready to step in at the exact psychological moment. You have to catch the murderer, if not quite red-handed, then guilty of the intention beyond any possible doubt” (Curtain 22). This leaves Hastings to look for someone who is in the vulnerable position to be emotionally manipulated into committing murder. Poirot gives Hastings two possible options as
to how this mystery criminal, called “X,” is to be stopped. He says, “The first is to warn the victim” (Curtain 21) and “The second course is to warn the murderer” that their intentions are known (22). As he physically ages, Poirot shows just how sharp his mind still is in a case that can only be described as a psychological race. Will Norton get to his next victim before Poirot gets to him? Poirot may have found Norton’s plans so impenetrable because he himself works in a similar way. Norton and Poirot share many qualities, like being able to manipulate the minds of those they talk to, or knowing what stimuli to present to a certain person in order to elicit the response they are looking for.

Analyzing the Evidence with “Little Grey Cells”

More than any other element, Hercule Poirot relies on psychology and his “little grey cells” to solve crimes. Of these little grey cells, Martín explains, “One of the most famous facts about Poirot is his constant references to grey cells, which is the term he adopts to say that his mind is working” (33). In fact, he so often references his little grey cells that others know they are his main resource when investigating. In Murder on the Orient Express, M. Bouc even prompts Poirot, “Lie back and think – use (as I have heard you say so often) the little grey cells of the mind – and you will know” (50). These grey cells are magical, as when Poirot employs them, all the pieces of the puzzle start to fit together. All Poirot has to do to engage the little grey cells is sit back and think. Arguably, these grey cells are the reason that Poirot continually takes on cases. He tells Hastings, “If the little grey cells are not exercised, they grow the rust” (The ABC Murders 4). Poirot is able to keep mentally in shape by solving crimes, which in turn, aides him to solve later crimes. He even encourages those he works with, like Hastings, to use their little grey cells, as it would alleviate some of the burden Poirot carries while investigating a crime. However, no one ever measures up, as he criticizes Hastings, “Since you cannot use your
grey cells as you do not possess them, at any rate use your eyes, your ears and your nose if need be in so far as the dictates of honour allow” (*Curtain* 71). Most of Poirot’s colleagues lack the mental capacity to properly use their little grey cells. This leads Poirot to do most of his work on his own, as he can always rely on his little grey cells.

Poirot relies on these cells so much because he believes in using science, more specifically psychology to lead him to his answers. Martín quotes a thesis written by Andrea Havlíčková who says when Poirot investigates, “he builds upon several principles: logic, sense, knowledge, feelings and psychological examination of the suspects. He deduces and then selects thoughts as one might select pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. He believes that all crimes are psychological and having clues is not everything” (34). Poirot is constantly examining his suspects, but more importantly the criminal, even though he does not always know who that person is. Just as Havlíčková states, Poirot does not always reflect on the facts of the case, but rather the psychology of the criminal. He does this perfectly in *Curtain* by profiling Norton for Hastings at the end of the novel. Poirot writes to Hastings, “*He was a good listener, he had a quiet sympathetic personality. People liked him without, at the same time, noticing him very much. He resented this – and then made use of it*” (206). As well as using psychology to profile the criminal, he uses it to rule out suspects. In *Murder on the Orient Express*, after interviewing Colonel Arbuthnot, Poirot tells M Bouc, “And one must respect the psychology. This crime has a signature and it is certainly not the signature of Colonel Arbuthnot” (143). Even though the Colonel did participate in the murder, it is later revealed “he didn’t like the idea of stabbing much” (285). It is because Poirot is constantly using his little grey cells and taking the time to psychologically analyze the crime that he is able to pinpoint these finer details, even if he does not have all of the answers.
Poirot does the same thing in *The ABC Murders*, except this time, he has been chasing someone he believed to be the murderer. It is because Poirot takes the time to psychologically profile his criminal that he knows Alexander Bonaparte Cust, the man who is arrested, is not the man he is looking for. Poirot quickly shifts his focus and tells the group of people he is with, “No, I had to deal with a very different stamp of man – a man with a boyish temperament…an attractive man to woman, and a man with a ruthless disregard for human life, a man who was necessarily a prominent person in one of the crimes!” (239). It is because of his ability to use his little grey cells to pinpoint the psychological state of criminals that he is able to notice that certain people could have never committed the crime, and this is an attribute of Poirot’s procedure that makes him so successful.

In most cases, Poirot is able to objectively use his little grey cells to prove the guilt of criminals, but in one instance, he ignores the cells he trusts more than anything. In *The Murder on the Orient Express*, his little grey cells help him uncover that every single person on the train is involved in the murder of Ratchett, however he tells them, “There are two possible solutions of the crime. I shall put both before you” (270). He then lets them choose which one of the solutions to present to the police, to which they select the one that does not incriminate anyone on the train and pins the murder on an unknown person who snuck on and off of the train. This goes against Poirot’s practice of method and order, yet he does it anyways. Poirot’s little grey cells lead him to solve crimes that no one else is capable of solving, so his willingness to dismiss the real solution for the crime is to ignore his grey cells. Poirot is, therefore, capable of being subjective in his deliverance of justice if he deems the terms to be justifiable.

One aspect of Poirot’s investigative skills is that he never takes evidence at face value. Poirot is ahead of many of his peers in this respect and that is because he knows, as Najar and
Vaziri point out, “It is important to note that not all of the clues are of the same importance. Some of the clues are merely out there just to mislead the detective and affect the final outcome of the investigation process” (175). In his eyes, just because some aspect presents itself as a fact does not mean it is as it seems. Poirot is rarely fooled by faulty evidence for long, as “he does not take the evidence at the face value and analyzes and reanalyzes it until it makes absolute sense” (176). The perfect example of this comes when Poirot and his colleagues are examining Ratchett’s compartment after his murder in Murder on the Orient Express. After finding multiple pieces of evidence, Poirot turns to the Dr. Constantine and tells him, “See you, my dear doctor, me, I am not one to rely upon the expert procedure. It is the psychology I seek, not the fingerprint or the cigarette ash. But in this case I would welcome a little scientific assistance. This compartment is full of clues, but can I be sure that those clues are really what they seem to be?” (69). While analyzing the clues from the compartment, Poirot questions everything. Was the pipe cleaner actually dropped by a man who smoked a pipe or a woman who was trying to frame a man? Did a woman drop her handkerchief or was it a man trying to frame a woman? Were there multiple people involved in Ratchett’s murder who were both too careless and left clues to their identities. In a situation where a regular detective might see a pipe cleaner and automatically assume it was a man’s, Poirot stops to lay out all possible scenarios. This creative outlook on evidence and presumed facts leads Poirot to his conclusions. He never limits himself; any explanation is plausible until he can prove it is not.

**Social Skills**

If there is one skill that Poirot has mastered, it is the art of perceptivity. Poirot is observant of people, as is evident in his ability to quickly profile criminals. His profiling of potential offenders translates into being able to alter his conversations depending on whom he is
talking to. Poirot is so well known for this particular skill because, “Throughout all of the novels of Agatha Christie that features Hercule Poirot as the chief detective, we can see how his tone and manners change interacting from one person to the other” (Najar and Vaziri 176). Poirot describes his interrogation methods in *Murder on the Orient Express* to Mary Debenham because she is acting contemptuous during her interview. He explains to her:

I look first at my witness, I sum up his or her character, and I frame my questions accordingly. Just a little minute ago I am asking questions of a gentleman who wants to tell me all his ideas on every subject. Well, him I keep strictly to the point. I want him to answer yes or no, this or that…I see at once that you will orderly and methodical. You will be brief and to the point…I ask of you quite different questions. I ask what you feel, what you thought. (160)

Through his questioning methods, Poirot is able to elicit the answers he desires from people in a very effective way.

Poirot also defaults to subtle interrogations when he has hit a lull in his investigation, or when certain pieces are not fitting together. He does this for two main reasons. The first, is because he is able to guide the conversation in the direction he desires. The second is because Poirot is a great listener, so one small detail can connect a whole crime together. Listening might be one of Poirot’s more underrated skills. In many cases this skill is what leads Poirot to solve crimes because his “intellect is such that in some cases he only needs to listen to the different testimonies of those involved in the crime to solve the case” (Martin 33). In *The ABC Murders*, Poirot expresses this idea to the group of people helping to solve the crimes by saying, “It is necessary to pool reminiscences, to compare notes – *enfin* to talk the thing over – to talk – to talk – and again to talk. Out of some innocent phrase may come enlightenment” (124). It is in
listening to the testimony of Franklin Clarke’s sister-in-law, during which she brings up Clarke’s boyish tendencies, that Poirot connects the murderer to his crimes.

In *Curtain*, communication is the only tool that Poirot appears to have left. Poirot is confined to a wheelchair, which Hastings assumes is due to old age, but assuming anything in regard to Poirot is dangerous, as he reveals, “*All the time that I was pretending to be helpless...* I was not helpless at all. *I could walk – with a limp*” (213). Due to his supposed ailment, Poirot is confined to only using his little grey cells for the majority of the case to finally contain Norton. This novel showcases Poirot’s talents in a more simple environment. The only thing he and Hastings have is the ability to communicate with each other. While confined to a wheelchair, Poirot tells Hastings, “You are active, you can get about, you can follow people about, talk to them, spy upon them unobserved – You can listen to conversations, you have knees that will bend and permit you to kneel and look through keyholes” (71). Of course, Hastings protests and thinks that the measures Poirot is asking him to go to are extreme, but this is insight into how Poirot himself goes about solving a crime. He is willing to go as far as listening through keyholes to obtain information. Hercule Poirot knows that when information is not coming to him, he has to go out and find a new lead. The combination of knowing how to make any person feel comfortable in a conversation and being a great listener, makes Poirot lethal once he knows what he is searching for.

**Gender**

If there is one identifying trait of this particular male detective, it is his infamous mustache. Agatha Christie makes sure to mention Poirot’s love of his mustache in every novel. In *Murder on the Orient Express*, published in 1934, the mustache is brought up on the very first page of the novel when Poirot is being described as “a small lean man, muffled up to the ears, of
whom nothing was visible but a pink-tipped nose and the two points of an upward curled moustache” (1). The mustache is also described as “enormous” (6). In *The ABC Murders*, published in 1936, again Poirot’s mustache is the topic of conversation early on when Hastings notes, “His [Poirot] mustaches had always been his sensitive point. He was inordinately proud of them” (3). Poirot sees his mustache as a point of pride, especially as a way to assert his masculinity. Men, in general, take pride in their facial hair and use it to portray their dominance. In Poirot’s case, he uses it to show his superiority as a detective. During his investigation in *The ABC Murders*, Poirot starts to neglect his mustache, so much so that Hastings notices. He notes, “He [Poirot] was, I knew, deeply unhappy over the case…In those hot dog days even his mustache drooped – neglected for once by their owner” (93). This is a direct symbol of Poirot’s masculinity declining as his confidence in his abilities dwindle. He derives so much of who he is as a man and detective from his mustache that he even as his body frails, “His mustache and hair, it is true, were still of a jet black colour…There comes a moment when hair dye is only too painfully obvious” (*Curtain* 10). Hastings points out that even though Poirot is crippled and aging, he still cares for the one aspect of himself that defines him as a man, his mustache.

It is not surprising that Poirot also has an ego, as he lives in a time period where men are seen as superior. In most instances, he does not even try to act humbly, accepting praise in a not so subtle fashion. In *Murder on the Orient Express*, M. Bouc compliments Poirot, saying, “But you – you are at the top of the tree nowadays” (17). His responds to this, “‘Some little success I have had, perhaps.’ Hecule Poirot tries to look modest but failed signally” (17). This shows that Poirot enjoys being praised by others. He is confident in his work, as he should be, because Christie writes him to be a character that always wins. There is a difference, though, between confidence and having an ego. In *The ABC Murders*, Poirot’s ego is on display, as he is working
with the police. Poirot is not shy about how he feels about working with the police, confessing, “I am better than the police” (81). This theme of Poirot versus Inspector Crome is an undertone throughout the novel. Franklin Clarke immediately prefers Poirot and “his appeal to the older man was not well received by Inspector Crome (102). Hastings even picks up on Crome’s dislike of Poirot, noticing, “Crome, I thought, looked at him [Poirot] with a tinge of dislike adulterating the usual calm superiority” (87). There is a battle between two people who are used to being the patriarch, and ultimately Poirot wins, solving the case and identifying the real killer. Poirot’s ego gets in the way of him working with people like Crome who actually have experience solving crimes and questions Poirot, thereby questioning his masculinity. However, he is able to work with Hastings because he relies on Poirot for answers. Poirot likes to be relied upon for answers and information because it inflates his ego, amplifying his patriarchal role.

In Curtain Poirot’s ego or refusal to be stopped by a criminal that ends up costing him his life. Poirot makes it his dying goal to stop Stephen Norton. In fact, Ming-fong Wang explains, “It is the first time for Poirot to be defeated by a perfect murderer, and Poirot even pays the price of his life in order to render Norton’s deserved punishment” (96). Poirot even writes in his letter to Hastings, his long-time friend and partner in crime, “By taking Norton’s life, I have saved other lives – innocent lives” (223). The distinction Poirot makes here is that Norton’s life was not an innocent one. So, the question becomes did Poirot become the thing he spent his life fighting against? In his eyes, no. Poirot justifies his actions by saying, “But on the other hand, I am the law!,” (223) and also, “I, Hercule Poirot, might come to believe myself divinely appointed to deal out death to all and sundry” (214). Wang expands on the first quote, noting, “Saying ‘I am the law’ (214), he [Poirot] projects his personal justice and cannot stand a cunning criminal who always remains untouched by the law and escapes the lawful punishment in framing scapegoats
to kill for him” (100). In making himself the gatekeeper of what murder is morally acceptable, which is also seen in *Murder on the Orient Express*, Poirot is able to maintain his reputation and die knowing he has stopped yet another infamous criminal. Hercule Poirot sees himself as above the law that has been established by men that are below him, so his actions, regardless if they are illegal, can be morally justified by him, which is enough.
Chapter 3:
Miss Marple and Her Criminal Procedure

As Miss Marple is not a formally trained detective, her methods might not have been classified as aligning traditional criminal procedure techniques. However, this more unassuming and laid back type of criminal procedure is probably intentional on Christie’s part. As the village busybody, most of her skills lie in her ability to observe the comings and goings of others and to gossip. It is because Marple is known for her keen observation and ability to gossip that cases fall into her lap. It is not even necessarily her love of crime that inspires Miss Marple becomes involved in cases, but instead her desire to restore her village community to its former, tranquil environment. One of the most substantial qualities that Miss Marple has that makes her such a great detective is her genuine distrust of almost everyone she meets. This may speak to her feminine intuition that leads her to follow her gut when it comes to people’s true intentions. She even admits when asked at the conclusion of The Body in the Library, “I’m afraid you’ll think my ‘methods,’ as Sir Henry calls them, are terribly amateurish. The truth is, you see, that most people – and I don’t exclude policemen – are far too trusting for this wicked world. They believe what is told them. I never do. I’m afraid I always like to prove a thing for myself” (646). This is why Marple is always able to solve her cases. Even though she may only have her feminine intuition as evidence, she trusts herself because she knows she cannot trust anyone else, and trusting her gut is what leads her to validate her theories. In order to prove her feminine intuition is correct, she is prone to set a trap to catch the murderers, either in the act of committing another crime or divulging evidence that leads to their arrest. By the end of the novels, the culprit walks straight into the hands of Miss Marple.
While she may not solve crime in a conventional way, Miss Marple holds many attributes of a real detective. Even though she may not think she has a method behind her crime-solving techniques, she consistently uses the same set of tools to outwit criminals. Bargainnier gives Miss Marple the credit she deserves, as he attests:

To solve her cases, Miss Marple uses analogy, role-playing, careful observation, and, to use Poirot’s phrase, order and method. Combined with her basic distrust of other’s statements, her ability to see through those statements, and her ruthless determination to see justice prevail, these abilities are the essentials of her skill as a detective (74).

It is through role-playing and gossip, her keen observation skills, distrust of people, and feminine intuition that Miss Marple is able to establish herself as much more than an amateur detective.

Method and Order

While Miss Marple’s techniques regarding criminal procedure may not be as showy as most detectives, that does not take away from the fact she is constantly able to solve murders. Her method revolves around gossip and observing irregularities in people’s every day habits. In “Introduction to fiction: Characterizations and literary techniques in Marple novels,” Anson Yang writes:

Thus the village of St. Mary Mead functions because of Miss Marple…When a murder rocks the serenity of the village, Marple emerges quite naturally as a likely amateur sleuth…Her Victorian upbringing, her conviction of the presence of evil, her feminine intuition, her methods of perceiving analogies – all prepare her for her role. And her inclination for gossip puts her steps ahead of the police.” (24)

This is especially true in her first novel, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, where showcases Marple’s method in solving a local crime as just her normal, busybody self. It is in Miss Marple’s nature to
know the details of the lives of the villagers. For example, on the day of the murder, Anne Protheroe stops to talk to Miss Marple in her garden and the two have an innocent conversation. When the police come to question Marple about this and Anne’s confession, Miss Marple automatically knows the story does not add up, as she explains, “She wasn’t carrying a handbag…She hadn’t so much as a handkerchief in the top of her stocking” (78). This is what sends off immediate red flags in Miss Marple’s mind. Miss Marple proves that she requires no formal detective training to solve crimes as life in the village has already equipped her with the necessary tools required to successfully investigate a murder.

Another method regularly employed by Miss Marple is that of playing into gender stereotypes that society has set for older women of the time. This is evident in The Body in the Library where, “In the corner of Superintendent Harper’s office sat an elderly lady. The girls hardly noticed her” (633). As an elderly woman, it was not uncustomary for Miss Marple to blend into the scenery, but this is how she is able to gather so much information. If she were not able to sit in a corner unnoticed, she would not see how people act when they believe that they are not being observed.

The last part of Miss Marple’s method in solving a murder case revolves around her feminine intuition. Her intuition is what leads her to the discovery of the murderer. She is, however, not able to prove someone’s guilt on just her intuition alone, so she must catch the person in an incriminating act. In A Caribbean Mystery, her feminine intuition leads her to stop another murder just seconds before it occurs. In the middle of the night, she wakes a fellow vacationer, explaining, “I think we may have to act quickly. Very quickly. I have been foolish…I ought to have known from the beginning what all this was about…Another murder may be committed any moment now” (254). It is her intuition that tells her something is amiss and
prompts her to set a trap to catch the murderer in the act of attempting to kill another person. Although Miss Marple does not ever have much proof, she has her intuition, which may as well be as good as having concrete evidence.

**Role-Playing and Gossip**

In every novel featuring Miss Marple, it is probable that she is going to use her uncanny ability to gossip, with a purpose, as her main method of obtaining information. As an active member of her village, Miss Marple is always up to date with the latest information. She even has set hours where the majority of her plans to meet with fellow villagers are put in place, saying that “Nine o’clock to nine-thirty was the recognized time for the village to make friendly calls to neighbors. Plans for the day, invitations, and so on, were always issued then” (*The Body in the Library* 562). It is from these tea times, meetings, or just quick chats with those who live in St. Mary Mead that Miss Marple becomes knowledgeable of all the local gossip and happenings.

In *The Murder at the Vicarage*, Christie writes Marple as the local village gossip who, at first gets a lukewarm depiction from some other females in the village. On one hand, she is a very likeable old woman, but Griselda describes her as “the worst cat in the village. And she always knows every single thing that happens – and draws the worst inferences from it” (5). The latter part of this statement proves Marple’s distrust of human nature, but the first part of it shows that everybody expects her to be meddling in the business of others. This ends up being a huge advantage to Marple in her crime solving endeavors as “She realizes that people expect old women to gossip and snoop; it would be noticeable if they did not. People may be bored by an old lady’s rambling conversation, but they do not suspect her of an ulterior motive” (Bargainnier 75). The challenge Miss Marple faces is concealing her true intentions in her interactions with
people. If her investigative identity is even the least bit different from how she normally acts, she would never be able to have the conversations she does.

In theory, Miss Marple has to become an actress in order to elicit information out of people. One example of this comes from *A Caribbean Mystery* where Miss Marple has to play into her gender stereotypes and insert herself into the lives of complete strangers. It is said that “She had one weapon and one weapon only, and that was conversation. Old ladies were given to a good deal of rambling conversation. People were bored by this, but certainly did not suspect them of ulterior motives” (*A Caribbean Mystery* 172). While it can be debated as to whether or not this is Miss Marple’s only weapon, solving this mystery will take the most masterful acting performance. In one scene, right after the murder has occurred and she decides she is going to investigate, she even says to herself, “(‘What a fool I sound’)” (176). She knows how ridiculous she has to act to come off as the old spinster. Especially in *A Caribbean Mystery*, she fulfills this role exceedingly well. It depicts, “Miss Marple, intent on her knitting – or so it seemed – stretch out a foot, then hastily she apologized,” and “As Miss Marple resettled herself, she went on talking in a childish and garrulous manner” (176). Again, all of her actions are completely expected from a woman of her age. No one would think twice about a woman, like Miss Marple, sitting by herself knitting.

In *The Body in the Library*, gossiping with the people in her town gives Miss Marple an insight that the police do not have. Upon arriving at the scene of the crime at Gossington Hall, the inspectors assigned to the case have no idea where to start. Miss Marple, however, arrives with intel from a neighbor about a young man in the village, Basil Blake. He had just had a party and Marple recounts of it, “Shouting and singing – the most terrible noise – everyone very drunk, I’m afraid – and the mess and the broken glass next morning simply unbelievable – so old Mrs.
Berry told me – and a young woman asleep in the bath with practically nothing on” (566). While Basil Blake does not end up being the culprit, the initial investigation of him as the prime suspect leads Miss Marple to uncover that the real criminals intended to frame Blake for at least one of the murders. Miss Marple nearly always has a place to start when she begins investigating a murder because of the gossip she hears from others.

**Keen Observation**

It is Miss Marple’s emphasis on noticing and partaking in the everyday village activities that allows her to observe things other people might miss. In *The Murder at the Vicarage*, it is said that she “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” (17). Although Marple may actually enjoy gardening and birdwatching, it allows her an excuse to be extra vigilant. This is how she first observes Mrs. Protheroe and Lawrence Redding. She is able to put Redding at the vicarage at the time of the murder with Mrs. Protheroe, telling the investigators, “Because, you see, just at that minute I was bending right over – trying to get up one of those nasty dandelions, you know. So difficult. And then he went through the gate and down to the studio” (76). She also observed another person join them because, as she For the criminals, passing Miss Marple in her garden proves to be a vital mistake as, “Just before twenty past six she passes my garden and stops and speaks, so as to give me every opportunity of noticing that she has no weapon with her and also that she is quite her normal self. They realized, you see, that I am a noticing kind of person” (271). However, because Miss Marple has now seen Mrs. Protheroe disappear into the vicarage, the two murderers “realize that I [Miss Marple] shan’t leave her garden till they come out again!” (271). Miss Marple plays into the stereotype set for
older women by employing hobbies like gardening and birdwatching as ways to observe others and gather information.

Another activity that Miss Marple partakes in during her first novel is going to tea with the other village ladies, allowing her to have an established social life, while also allowing her access to the female gossip network in St. Mary Mead. In “Gender and Detective Literature: The Role of Miss Marple in Agatha Christie’s The Body in the Library,” Berna Köseoğlu states that this village life enables Marple to become closer to her community:

Thus, it should be emphasized that her being a member of the society illustrated in Christie’s novels, is also of great importance and strengthens her ability to reveal the criminals. Since she comes from the village and belongs to the setting in which the crime has been committed, she can see the inner world of the ordinary characters, their life style and their typical characteristics (133).

Specifically in The Body in the Library, Marple’s social integration pays off. Although the murder that has happened did not occur in her village, that does not prevent Marple from being a fish out of water, as the police officer assigned to the case imagines. In fact, Inspector Slack, without realizing it, hits on the reason Marple can be successful no matter the setting of the crime when he says, “The old lady knows everything that goes on in the village, that’s true enough” (565). This has given Miss Marple the skills to solve crimes anywhere, “For Miss Marple had attained fame by her ability to link up trivial village happenings with graver problems in such a way as to throw light upon the latter” (The Body in the Library 565). Such is evident in A Caribbean Mystery where she admits to herself, “and many of the persons with who she had conversed here had had regrettable resemblances to certain persons at St. Mary Mead, and where did that lead you?” (246). Living in and acquiring knowledge of her small Victorian
village only helps Miss Marple conduct criminal investigations in environments more foreign to her. It can be argued that she is able to do this because human nature is the same no matter the location, and as Miss Marple would conclude, she can distrust people in her village just as much as those people in the Caribbean. Marple’s keen sense of observation of village life translates into her keen sense of observation in any setting.

**Female Intuition**

A large part of Miss Marple’s success can be accredited to her female intuition that leads her to solve the cases she is involved in. While she does not let others see inside of her head, which is contradictory to her title of the town gossip, she lets them aide her in traps to catch the criminals. Her ability to know what the next actions of the murderer or murderers will be is due to her feminine intuition and busybody nature. As she rarely has any concrete evidence of someone’s guilt, she must set traps for the criminals to fall into to prove their guilt. She needs to catch them in the act of committing a crime or trick them into confessing. For instance, in *The Murder at the Vicarage*, Miss Marple early on believes she knows who has committed the crime, telling Griselda, “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” (54). Especially near the end of the novel, her female intuition is leading her straight towards the murderers, Lawrence Redding and Mrs. Protheroe, but she has to connect the dots.

Miss Marple’s feminine intuition takes the front seat in *The Body in the Library*. The fact that Ruby Keene had been murdered is undeniable, but Marple is the first one to suggest that Pamela Reeves was also a homicide victim. When Sir Henry asks why she possibly thinks that Pamela, who was found in a burning car in the quarry, was also murdered, Marple responds, “Why not? When anyone has committed one murder he doesn’t shrink from another, does he?
Nor even a third.” (612). Miss Marple makes this comment right after it has been announced that
the car was found with a body inside. With no hesitation, she correctly identifies whose body
will be in the car and that it was not on accident. She even predicts the attempted murder of
Conway Jefferson. It is from her ability to predict what is coming next, that she is able to stop
the offender in the act of committing a crime. She knows that the next logical step for Josie and
Mark to inherit Jefferson’s money is to kill him too, but make it look like heart failure. Thus, she
sets a trap to prove out her intuition because, as she later tells Jefferson, “It’s so nice to be sure,
isn’t it?” (649). In saving Jefferson’s life is it not hard to look back and condemn him for
brushing off Miss Marple’s past successes, skeptically saying, “Woman’s intuition, I suppose”
(601). While her feminine intuition sometimes leads to dramatic finales that are close to the wire
in terms of stopping a crime, Miss Marple is almost always able to prove that she knows the truth
of the crime.

**Gender**

One prime aspect of Miss Marple’s life that should be noted is that she is has never been
married and has no real love interests throughout her novels. Yang says, “Relieved of sexuality
and undistracted by close emotional bonds, such a figure cannot but see things clearly and act
impartially as an agent of moral law” (28). With the exception of a nephew, Raymond, that is in
and out of the picture, Marple remains void of familial or emotional ties. Of course, she has
friends, as that is who she spends time gossiping with, but she never seems to spend quality time
with them outside of gossiping. Not having a spouse or a family allows Miss Marple to
completely immerse herself in the crimes she encounters. This is especially true in *A Caribbean
Mystery*, as she is on a tropical vacation by herself. Her views of gender and sex can even be
seen in this novel when she is reading a book and a young man is astonished that a young girl has
had non sexual experiences. Marple thinks to herself about sex, “Though usually labelled Sin, she couldn’t help feeling that that was preferable to what it seemed to be nowadays – a kind of Duty…To have sex experienced urged on you exactly as though it was an iron tonic! Poor young things (153-154). Miss Marple seems to put a negative connotation on the word sex and sexual experiences, especially when it comes to the pressures young women feel about having to experience these acts by a certain age. Although Christie never explicitly states whether or not Miss Marple engages in sexual activities or even has romantic relationships, it is made clear that she is, first and foremost, an independent woman who has become successful in her own right.

One advantage that Miss Marple has as woman is being able to spot pieces of evidence that only a female would know to look for. Miss Marple is in tune with the outward appearance of other women, which is something often overlooked by her male counterparts. This is especially evident in The Body in the Library where the two murder victims are young females. Köseoğlu explains, “Miss Marple’s analyzing the clues about the victim’s physical appearance, her clothes, and the parts of her body also plays a very important role in her deducing significant information” (135). Marple is able to accurately derive important pieces of evidence from the outward appearance of these girls because she is a woman. When explaining what was wrong with the appearance of Ruby’s body, Marple says, “There was the dress. It was all wrong…it was an old dress…Well, the idea is, isn’t it, that Ruby Keene changed her dress and went off to meet someone on whom she presumably had what my young nephew calls a ‘crush’…I think she’d wear her best dress. Girls do (The Body in the Library 625). This is in stark contrast to Sir Henry’s explanation of Ruby’s old dress, as he argues, “Suppose she was going outside to this rendezvous. Going in an open car, perhaps, or walking in some rough going. Then she’d not want to risk messing a new frock and she’d put on an old one” (625). If it was left to the male
detectives, it would not have been revealed that the murderers tried to swap the identities of Ruby and Pamela once they were dead. Köseoğlu explains, “Her remark justifies that a female detective has more power than a male in terms of observing the trivial things that can explain a hidden truth” (135). There are certain capabilities that come from being a female and Miss Marple highlights one in her ability to make sense of every trivial detail.

One final trait the Miss Marple possesses that makes her feminine is her ability to be empathetic and provide a sense of comfort to the people she around. Male detectives, like Poirot, can be described as harsh, direct, and conceited, which limits them considerably in forming relationships with other people and even in obtaining information from other people. This is the exact opposite of Miss Marple. She has the strong ability to elicit information out of young woman, in particular. Superintendent Harper realizes this in The Body in the Library and tells the other inspectors, “I feel Miss Marple’s the person to get it out of these girls. I’d say she knows a thing or two about girls” (624). Marple is then taken to question Florence Small, a friend of Pamela Reeves, who she is at first quite direct with, but then comforts her, saying “There, there. It’s quite all right. No one will blame you Florence. You’ve done the right thing in telling me.’ She devoted some minutes to cheering the child up” (636). Although she does not have children, Miss Marple is reminiscent of a mother in this scene. The ability to nurture is often attributed to women, which Miss Marple clearly exemplifies and uses to advance herself as a female detective.
Chapter 4: Comparison of Detectives

Relationships with Authority Figures

One stark difference between Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple is their relationship with the police, or people who also have investigative authority. Hercule Poirot is not known to play nicely with other detectives. This is largely due to the pride he takes in his work and the praise he regularly receives from others. Despite this, “The police have learned that in spite of his appearance and his eccentricities, or by his using them, he can be depended upon to solve what they cannot” (Bargainnier 49). This does not diminish the tense interactions that the two parties have with each other. In *The ABC Murders*, this is especially evident in Poirot’s relationship with Inspector Crome. He tries to question Megan Barnard and Donald Fraser before Crome realizes they have arrived and tells Megan, “Bring him [Donald] on here. I would like a word with him before our good inspector takes him in hand” (78). At discovering what Poirot was doing, Crome shoots him a glance, which reveals how he feels about the secret meeting. Later in the novel, Crome was talking to a subordinate about a theory that Poirot has and says, “One of Mr. Hercule Poirot’s ideas. Probably nothing in it…He’s a mountebank. Always posing. Takes in some people. It doesn’t take in me” (162). The problem is that Poirot’s theories are almost always correct, but the way that he pridefully carries himself, as if he is above them. To that, Poirot would respond that he is.

On the other hand, Miss Marple recognizes that the police may have more experience than she does when it comes to solving a mystery. This gives her the chance to establish good working relationships when they are jointly investigating a case. The prime example of this is the relationship Miss Marple and Inspector Slack have. Slack does not really come off as extremely friendly at the beginning of *The Murder at the Vicarage*. Marple, observant as always knows it is
because Inspector Slack is thought to be a failure by his Colonel. At the end of the novel, all of the credit for solving the crime “was reflected upon Inspector Slack, whose zeal and intelligence had resulted in the criminals being brought to justice” (281). Miss Marple, whether purposely or indirectly saves Slack’s reputation. Although, the fact that nothing was said about Miss Marple may just point to the misogyny of the Victorian period in England. Nonetheless, when the two have to work together again in *The Body in the Library*, the Colonel and Slack respect her abilities to solve crime, even if it does not come off as such at first. In fact, other inspectors in that novel refer to her as “an expert” and say, “she’s very sharp…Nothing much gets past her” (624). According to Robert Barnard, Marple has decent relationships with police figures she encounters, describing them as her “entourage,” that “consists mainly of policemen and Chief Constables – professionals whom Miss Marple has acquired over the years, mere names whose function in the story is to express admiration and affection, nothing more” (107). As a female detective, having what society would deem powerful men ready to sing her praises, Miss Marple has truly established herself as a detective. However, none of these men are in the least bit threatened by Miss Marple and there are notable amounts of male detectives in her novels to aide her, whereas Poirot is sometimes the only police figure in his novels.

*Attention to Detail*

One key similarity that Poirot and Miss Marple share is their attention to detail. Both are able to notice the slightest nuance in body language or tone of voice, and are able to put importance to the smallest overlooked piece of evidence. Hercule Poirot’s attention to the finer details pays off most noticeably in *The ABC Murders* when he pieces together that the person going to be murdered is visited by a man selling stockings just days prior to the crime. He exclaims to the group of colleagues, “Andover. The shop. We go upstairs. The bedroom. On a
chair. A pair of new silk stockings. And now I know what it was that roused by attention two
days ago…You spoke of your mother who wept because she had bought your sister some new
stockings on the very day of the murder” (156). Not many people surveying a crime scene would
place importance on a new pair of stockings on a chair. It is more important how Poirot came to
discover the information about the stockings. He usually discovers details like this through
conversation. He tells Hastings, “By discussing a certain happening, or a certain person, or a
certain day, over and over again, extra details are bound to arise” (The ABC Murders). This is
what makes Poirot such a great detective. No detail can be too insignificant in his mind, so once
two small details connect, the whole crime starts to come together.

Miss Marple’s attention to detail comes from her being a woman, as she is able to notice
key details that are only significant to other women. A prime example of this is the issue of the
nails in The Body in the Library. Miss Marple is confident that the body found in the library
cannot be that of Ruby Keene because she notices that the girl bit her nails. This belief is further
amplified by the fact that nail clippings are found in Ruby’s waste basket. Miss Marple explains
this, saying, “I realized that girls who are very much made up, and all that, usually have very
long fingernails. Of course, I know that girls everywhere do bite their nails…But vanity often
does a lot to help…her nails had been long, only she caught one and broke it. So then, of course,
she might have trimmed off the rest to make an even appearance” (625). Discovering this detail
is one of the key piece of evidence that ties the case together for Miss Marple, as she later
explains, “Bitten nails and closecut nails are quite different! Nobody could mistake them who
knew anything about girls’ nails…Those nails, you see, were a fact…The body in Colonel
Bantry’s library wasn’t Ruby Keene at all” (647). While this highlights Miss Marple’s
femininity, it also goes to show that she has an eye for detail. This speaks to the fact that, even
without formal training, Miss Marple is able to function in the same way as a detective that Poirot does. It is in comparing Poirot’s attention for detail with Miss Marple’s that one begins to see how similar the two really are and that women are capable of the same accomplishments as men, possibly even more naturally.
Chapter 5:

Modern Day Procedure

The investigative proceedings of Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple are never once seen being brought to the courtroom. This leaves some speculation surrounding their respective procedures and if they would have done enough to bring about a guilty conviction in the courtroom because even a confession of guilt is not taken as concrete evidence of a person’s involvement in a homicide case. It is no secret that criminal procedure has changed since the time Agatha Christie was writing her Poirot and Marple novels, but the question is how much? When analyzing Christie’s criminal procedure, one also has to take into account the fact that Christie was writing from a European’s view of investigative procedure. For the purposes of this comparison, the modern day procedure will be taken from the United States.

The success of a homicide investigation is measured in clearance. According to the essay, “What Factors Influence Whether Homicide Cases are Solved? Insights From Qualitative Research With Detectives in Great Britain and the United States” written by Fiona Brookman, Edward R. Maguire, and Mike Maguire, who are all professors of Criminology, clearance is defined as “Investigative success is based on identifying a clear suspect and gathering sufficient evidence to justify a charge of murder or manslaughter” (147). So, in today’s society, Poirot and Marple need only be able to bring about a murder or manslaughter charge through their investigation for it to be considered cleared. This means that their investigation must be either, “cleared by arrest,” meaning the offender is arrested by the police and will be prosecuted, or “cleared by exception,” meaning there is some reason why the offender cannot be prosecuted, for example, their death prior to an arrest (Brookman et al. 147). If a guilty verdict is not the
measurement for what is considered to be a successful investigation, both Poirot and Marple would have increased success rates as detectives.

One factor given in Brookman et al. as a major factor in how major day procedure turns out is the detective. In general, the detectives who had higher clearance rates exhibited, “a robust work ethic, resilience, and attention to detail. Relevant experience, knowledge, and skills were also highlighted as important facets of an effective investigator” (156). One category of work ethic, known as the “Columbo-style” work ethic fits both Poirot and Marple very well, which fits with the results of the study, as “many British detectives tended to place a Columbo-style work ethic of meticulous attention to detail and a determination to follow every lead as the defining characteristic of the most effective detectives that they had worked with” (Brookman et al. 157). In *The ABC Murders*, Poirot shows that he is willing to follow every possible lead handed to him when he says, “we must neglect no avenue of research” (50). This concept that anything is a possibility until proven impossible helps Poirot clear many cases. Miss Marple’s attention to detail is what helps her in criminal investigations, because “As a female detective, she pays attention to the details about girls and their wearing styles,” as well as small details about the regular comings and goings of people, so much so that sometimes she cannot sleep (Köseoğlu 135). The actual procedure of Poirot and Marple may not be as important as the fact that they are determined to close a case and have every piece of the puzzle fit together.

Another key factor of modern day procedure clearance found in the qualitative study is the knowledge and experience of the investigator, as this time in the field is what helps them to solve challenging cases. This was found to be especially true in the case of interviewing skills. Brookman et al. concluded, “American respondents as important to the success of investigations was interviewing skills, with a particular emphasis on the craft of interviewing suspects to secure
confessions. By contrast, British detectives rarely discussed this” (158). If true, Poirot exceeds what would be expected of a highly qualified, modern day, British detective, and may be more comparable to an American detective. The majority of Poirot’s cases are cleared by the confession of the guilty party, including all three being examined in this paper. While it is less of an interview and more of an intervention that brings about the guilty confession, a large part of Poirot’s information is gathered through subtle interrogation. It is through his prior experience as on the Belgian police force that he has obtained such skills and uses them to prosper as a private detective and clear many cases. On the other hand, Miss Marple, while she does know how to talk to people, is not in the habit of interviewing people without the aid of other detectives. Therefore, she is not eliciting guilty confessions from people in this manner and this may be due to the fact that she is an amateur detective. Of this fact, Barnard writes:

At the end of a Miss Marple book the villain tends to be brought to confess by a trick, or he commits suicide, or he is killed by another character. It is rare for Miss Maple actually to have anything that could be described as proof of anyone’s guilt – something that could be produced in court in order to make a case.” (109)

According to Brookman et al., the fact that Miss Marple is not gathering enough physical evidence to prove an offender’s guilt in court does not invalidate her investigative efforts. The traps she sets are enough to arrest the murderer, especially because she always arranges to have witnesses to the event, and that will clear her case by arrest.

**At the Crime Scene**

There are several important procedural aspects of investigating a homicide that can decide whether or not the crime will be cleared. In “The Influence of Investigate Resources on Homicide Clearances,” Anthony Braga, Brandon Turchan, and Lisa Barao, who are all
criminologists, conclude that the fundamental procedural factors are: “the actions of the first officer on scene, a detective responding to the scene in less than 30 min, the notification of the crime lab and medical examiner’s office, the number of detectives assigned to the case, and the documentation of the crime scene” (343). Braga et al. go on to explain that once an officer arrives at the crime scene, those initial factors will largely determine if the case will be cleared. For example, the first officer should be focused on getting information to a medical examiner and looking for any witnesses. It is also important to survey the crime scene for any potential murder weapon or DNA evidence.

Both Poirot and Marple are successful detectives in respect to the handling of a crime scene. In Poirot’s investigations, it is common for him to go to the scene of the crime after getting to know the general details of the criminal event. For example, in \textit{The ABC Murders}, he goes back to the crime scene at 5:30 PM because, “He had wished to reproduce yesterday’s atmosphere as closely as possible” (30). This also speaks to his practice of discovering the psychology of the murderer. As he investigates the crime scene at Andover, he takes in every fine detail, asks questions of the other investigators to whom the crime was first reported, and also consider if fingerprints were found, as the science and technology to process other kinds of DNA was not accessible. In many cases, like that of \textit{The Murder on the Orient Express}, Poirot is the first investigator on the crime scene, so the body has not been touched. As he examined the crime scene, “Poirot’s eyes were darting about the compartment. They were bright and sharp like a bird’s. One felt that nothing could escape their scrutiny” (66). Poirot is known for his thorough examination of crime scenes, as he does not leave a witness to go unquestioned or the smallest scrap of evidence to be overlooked. The way that Poirot discovers evidence at the crime scene would not be able to be deemed inadmissible in a court of law.
In contrast to Poirot, Miss Marple is hardly ever the first investigator to arrive at the scene of the crime. In fact, she sometimes has to coerce her way into viewing the crime scene, as she is not a traditional detective, although it could be argued that it is because she is a woman. In *The Body in the Library*, when Miss Marple is told that “I’m afraid nobody is allowed in,” her friend responds with, “You know Miss Marple perfectly well. It’s very important that she should see the body” (563). At the actual crime scene, Miss Marple does not seem to make many observations that she shares with people around her. In *A Caribbean Mystery*, Miss Marple never actually gets to see the crime scenes or bodies associated with the victims deaths, so this critical piece of investigative procedure is missing for her. What she does do however, is speak the medical examiner to try to piece together the cause of death, which is stated as the next step in investigative procedure.

**The Next Steps**

After the initial observation of the crime scene, there are multiple routes an investigator may go. Braga et al. states that the next steps include, “follow-up work on information provided by witnesses, interaction with the medical examiner or coroner involved in the case, the role of prosecutors in the investigation, and computer checks on any guns” (343). Only some of these are viable options for Poirot and Marple. Many times, prosecutors are able to help investigators conduct themselves in ways that are in cooperation with the law. This means issuing Miranda rights to a suspect before questioning them, obtaining evidence in a legal way, and aiding in getting warrants to search certain places that could be related to the crime. Christie does not introduce attorneys into the investigative process. Her novels focus on the actual investigation of the crime rather than the prosecution of the offender that is to follow.
Additionally, there were no computers in the time that Christie was writing. So, in that sense, both Poirot and Marple were at a disadvantage, as “running computer checks on suspects in a homicide increases the likelihood of clearance” (Braga et al. 343). While it may increase their clearance rate, both Poirot and Marple are equally successful without the use of modern day technology that investigators now have available to profile suspects.

The next step Poirot usually takes is interviewing potential witnesses. The best example of this is The Murder on the Orient Express, as he sits down with every person who had access to the train car where the murder happened. As there is a large amount of people present, “Poirot converses with all of them and tries to build enough trust for them to trust him with whatever information that they have. His way of talking differs from the men to the women, the elderly to the youth, the British to the foreigner, and the extrovert to the introvert” (Najar and Vaziri 177). This showcases the sheer amount of communicating and interviewing that Poirot is able to conduct for just one case. At the beginning of the investigation, Poirot has to take into account the fact that all of these people present may have been a witness to the murder. It is because of this that “when witnesses are present for a homicide, there is a greater probability of the incident being cleared than those without witnesses” (Braga et. al 343). It is through interviewing that Poirot finds the information to base his criminal investigation on, and therefore clear his case.

Miss Marple uses gossip as her interview tool and that can be seen as a substantial part of her investigative procedure. She does not use regular interviewing techniques, as that would raise suspicion from others. While in the midst of solving a crime, she is described as “sharp-eyed, sharp-tongued, a vicious gossip with an incomparable information service and a desire to believe the worst” (Barnard 107). Miss Marple’s brain functions as a hub for information that she slyly elicits from “meetings, her concentrating on the gossips in the village revealing the psychological
mood of people and her realizing the wrongs with these people by questioning their statements, make her more powerful than the professional male detectives, who are unable to recognize the complexities of human nature and the relationships among these people” (Köseoğlu 134). However, because procedure in “America puts particular emphasis on the craft of interviewing suspects to secure confessions,” Miss Marple’s procedure regarding how she personally gathers information will probably not bring about the highest clearance rate (Brookman et al.158). This is the reason why Miss Marple must catch the offenders she is chasing in the act of committing a crime, otherwise all of her evidence would be hearsay.

**Science and Technology**

One large difference between criminal procedure of Christie’s time and that of modern day America is the use of science and technology. As Brookman et al. writes that the investigators they interviewed said, “scientific evidence brought with it a certainty that other evidence lacked, and this in turn helped them to close cases” (161). Modern day investigators are able to pursue offenders using “DNA profiling, ballistic imaging, mobile telephone tracking and analysis, and other forensic tools” (Brookman et al. 152). This is miles ahead of what Poirot and Marple were working with. Poirot occasionally will make references to dusting for fingerprints, as in *The Murder on the Orient Express*, he goes over the crime scene, more specifically the window frame by blowing powder over it that he kept in his pocket (62). This is about the only scientific evidence that could immediately link a suspect to a crime scene. Miss Marple completely avoids the scientific path, choosing to focus on the strengths being a Victorian grants her. The closest she gets to DNA is in *The Body in the Library* when she notices that the nails of the body in the library could not be that of Ruby Keene. One might like to think that the lack of technology available to Poirot and Marple actually makes them proficient detectives.
While, Poirot and Marple would both clear most of their in today’s society, the same success is not guaranteed at an actual trial. Poirot is likely to have more success than Miss Marple. In all of the novels, Poirot is able to obtain a confession from the offender or offenders. With the exception to Curtain, he also has witnesses to these confessions. The confession, however, would not stand alone under the corpus delicti rule, which does not allow extrajudicial confessions, or confessions made outside of the courtroom, to stand alone. That being said, Poirot is also able to find enough evidence to logically place his murderer at the crime scene, with a weapon and with a body. Having a body present at the scene of the crime is one of the most vital criteria for getting a murder conviction at trial. If Poirot was trying his in Nebraska, for example, for murder in the first degree, according to Nebraska Revised Statute 280-303, he would need to prove there was malice and a requisite mental state. The criminals in Murder on the Orient Express will never see the courtroom because Poirot let them go, but it is likely he would have been able to prove that both actus reus, or malice, and mens rea, or the requisite mental state, existed. Poirot undoubtedly would have been able to do the same for Franklin Clarke.

Curtain is probably the only novel being examined that would never have seen a criminal conviction. This is why Poirot kills Norton himself. All Poirot would have been able to prove in a court of law is, “It means that where X was present, crimes took place – but X did not actively take part in these crimes...the perfect criminal” (Curtain 203). It is fitting that Poirot’s last case is one that he could never prove in court.

Miss Marple, on the other hand, would most likely have a hard time trying to prove her cases in court. As she mainly relies on her feminine intuition to guide her to the answer, her tangible proof is almost nonexistent. She would be hard pressed to prove receive a guilty
conviction for first degree murder off of just her gut feeling. However, she might be able to prove attempted first degree murder. Again, looking at Nebraska’s statute, “The statutory elements of attempted first degree murder are a substantial step in a course of conduct intended to culminate in the commission of a purposeful, malicious, premeditated killing of another person” (State v. Al-Zubaidy, 253 Neb. 357, 570 N.W.2d 713 (1997)). This is especially true in The Body in the Library and A Caribbean Mystery, where Miss Marple catches the offenders in the act of trying to commit another murder. The attempted murder charge may lead to the investigation of the criminals involvement in the other deaths in the novels.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

After analyzing the extensive meanings and intricate theories that Agatha Christie packed into only six of her sixty-six novels, it cannot be denied that she truly is the Queen of Mystery. Her name and stories have lived on long past her death, as there have been many film adaptations of both Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple mysteries. Christie is a pioneer not only for women, but for all authors of detective fiction. She created Poirot in the image of already prevalent male detectives, like Holmes and Dupin. Society was able to quench their thirst for a proper male detective in Hercule Poirot. Now, Poirot can be utilized as an outline for future exemplary male detectives, as male heroes are always going to be desirable. As iconic as Poirot is, Marple is the unsung hero. Miss Marple battles the misogyny and stereotypes set before her by the Victorian period. There is no doubt that Miss Marple is a strong, independent female who is much more than the elderly woman façade she conveys to the public. Miss Marple has even paved the way for modern day female detectives in literature, film, and TV. Without Marple, there might have not been Olivia Benson from Law and Order: SVU, or Velma Dinkley from Scooby-Doo, or even Camille Preaker, from Gillian Fylnn’s Sharp Objects. She also is undoubtedly the model for one of the longest-running television shows in America, Murder, She Wrote. In today’s society, Miss Marple would find a world that is much more open to her brilliance. A world that is much more supportive of the success of females, both authors and those in the criminal justice field.

The very last lines of her Autobiography read, “What can I say at seventy-five? ‘Thank God for my good life, and for all the love that has been given to me’” (532). The sentiment is one of gratefulness of a life well lived and a life well loved. By the end of her life, Christie might have guessed that she would be successful for years to come. Could she have imagined her
novels to still be impacting the lives of so many avid detective fiction readers over a century after she published *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* in 1920? Poirot and Marple solve a mystery every time someone opens one of their novels. They have had fictional lives that have been well lived and well loved. It is quite possible the world has Agatha Christie’s sister to thank. In response to her sister’s challenge, there is no doubt that Christie fulfilled and transcended all possible expectations that could have ever been imagined.
Works Cited


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