Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers.
Detecting Community in their Public, Private, and Fictional Lives.

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This thesis examines the detective fiction of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers in the context of their public and professional lives. Both women became professional detective fiction authors in the same social milieu while utilizing the same social and cultural productions which surrounded publishing popular fiction in this interwar period.

To consider how these women re-imagined the detective fiction genre, this thesis examines embodied social communities in Christie's and Sayers's fiction. It further examines how both of these writers in their representation of women push the gendered expectations of roles for women in their social and cultural settings. Building upon Benedict Anderson's theory in *Imagined Communities*, and the role which the cultural artefacts of the newspaper and the novel play in establishing imagined communities, I examine how the rise in popularity of detective fiction also coincided with a r/evolution in a type of print culture, which contributed to the rise of a 'golden age' in the British interwar period for both newspapers and popular literature, including detective fiction (Mayhall "'Indecently Preposterous': The Interwar Press and Golden Age Detective Fiction", 145). The Introduction establishes the social, cultural, and critical background to my examination of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L, Sayers, their lives and their fiction, in the interwar years. Providing the social and cultural background, Chapter 2 first examines how women were targeted by the press to become readers, and yet, in turn, how women writers could reach a further reading community through participating in celebrity culture in the press; specifically, the ways in which Christie and Sayers could serialize their novels in the press. Chapter 3 compares/contrasts how Christie and Sayers each dealt with personal trauma and how this was reflected in their public lives and the types of advertisement which they performed for the reading public. Moving into textual analysis, Chapter 4 focuses on Agatha Christie's 1930s travel novels to show how characters abroad or back home can

imagine social communities built upon these cultural artefacts of the newspaper and the novel. Ultimately, these imaginings are forced to be re-examined once murder exposes the anxieties of these communities and social structures. Building upon this, Chapter 5 turns to Dorothy L. Sayers's *Gaudy Night* to examine how social imagined communities – academic and professional – can be reconstructed as places which can offer 'equal citizenship'. Chapter 6 takes the detective fiction trope of the sidekick, and through the characters of Miss Climpson and Harriet Vane, examines how Sayers navigates expanding genre expectations in her conversation surrounding women in the interwar society.

Understanding the ways in which Christie and Sayers built these communities – in their lives and in their fiction – allows us to further re-evaluate and assert that Sayers's and Christie's writing(s) can be seen as "serv[ing] as the vehicles for the articulation of feminist goals and challenges", and thus one can find the "compelling evidence of the pluralisation and diversification of interwar feminist discourses" (DiCenzo "Feminist Media and Agendas for Change: Introduction" 313), throughout the interwar period and within the various texts of the newspapers and the novels. Additionally, it allows us to increasingly understand and examine the literary, cultural, social, and lasting impact of these two women detective fiction authors whose contributions extend far beyond their influence on the detective fiction genre.

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Dedication

To my best friend and ‘equal partner’, to my husband. In thanksgiving for our ‘joint venture’.

To Brendan.

For our family.

Table of Contents

Author's Declaration iii

Abstract iv

Acknowledgements vi

Dedication viii

List of Figures xii

Chapter 1 Introduction: The Case for Detecting Community in the Detective Fiction of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers 1

1.1 Methodology 4

1.2 Social and Cultural Milieu 13

1.3 Women and the Detective Fiction Genre 21

1.4 Auto/Biography 29

1.5 An (Un)Suitable Job for a Literary Critic 35

1.6 The Middlebrow 48

1.7 Conclusion and Chapter Overviews 55

Chapter 2 Interwar British Literary and Cultural Context. The Popular Press, (Middlebrow) Women Authors, and Readers of the early Twentieth Century 63

2.1 Re-evaluating the (anti-)Feminist Agenda in the Popular Press 67

2.2 The Twentieth Century Popular Press 71

2.3 Fictional Representation of the Popular Press 73

2.4 Women and the Popular Press 78

2.5 Women Writers 86

2.6 Crossing Genres and Literary Demarcations: Detective Fiction and Modernism 89

2.7 Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers: Professional Writers 101

Chapter 3 The Public, Professional, Private and Literary Lives of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers 111

3.1 Detective Fiction Authors: "Accessed Voices" and Publicity Stunts (gone wrong?) 114

3.2 Agatha Christie(?): "Mrs. Archibald Christie"; "mother of a charming little daughter Rosalind"; and "brilliant writer of detective fiction and creator of Hercule Poirot" ("The Maker of 'The Grey Cells of M. Poirot'" 467) 133

3.3 Dorothy L. Sayers: Detective Fiction Author, Oxford M.A. 152

3.4 Conclusion 175

Chapter 4 Detecting Agatha Christie's Imagined Communities at Home and Abroad 177

4.1 Agatha Christie's Private and Fictional Escape 181

4.2 Detective Fiction and the Imperial Project 190

4.3 *An Autobiography*, *Appointment with Death*, and *Murder in Mesopotamia* 195

4.4 *Death on the Nile* and Abroad 203

4.5 Agatha Christie's England: *A Murder is Announced* and *Ordeal By Innocence* 221

Chapter 5 Discovering Belonging in the Public, Private, Professional, and Academic Communities in Dorothy L. Sayers's *Gaudy Night* 231

Chapter 6 '*Chercher les Femmes*': Dorothy L. Sayers's Miss Climpson and Harriet Vane 277

6.1 Alexandra Katherine Climpson 286

6.1.1 The Spinster Detective 288

6.1.2 Detective or Sidekick? 296

6.2 Harriet Vane 304

6.2.1 Love Interest: *Strong Poison* (1930) 309

6.2.2 Sidekick: *Have His Carcase* (1932) 313

6.2.3 "Admission of Equality": *Gaudy Night* (1935) and *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937) 319

6.3 Conclusion 332

Chapter 7 Conclusion 334

Primary Texts: Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers 338

Bibliography 342

Appendix A Figures 371

Appendix B Timeline of Events 1900-1950 383

List of Figures

Figure 1: “The Pursuit of Crime”. *Pall Mall Gazette*, Friday, January 20, 1922.

Figure 2: “The Missing Novelist”. *The Civil and Military Gazette*. Lahore - Tuesday, December 14, 1926.

Figure 3: “The Ideal Sleuth and Mrs. Christie”. By Dorothy L. Sayers. (Author of “Whose Body?” “Clouds of Witness,” etc). *The Daily News*, Friday, December 10, 1926.

Figure 4: “Writer of the Most Brilliant Detective Novel of the Day”. *The Sketch*, Feb. 28, 1923.

Figure 5: “The Maker of ‘The Grey Cells of M. Poirot’.” CREATOR OF THE MOST INTERESTING DETECTIVE SINCE SHERLOCK HOLMES: AGATHA CHRISTIE. *The Sketch*, March 7, 1923.

Figure 6: “A Family Study”. The Creator of Hercule Poirot, with her Daughter: Mrs. Agatha Christie and Rosalind. *The Sketch*, April 4, 1923.

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Case for Detecting Community in the Detective Fiction of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers

In Dorothy L. Sayers's *Gaudy Night* (1935), detective fiction author Harriet Vane is at an undergraduate party whilst revisiting Oxford. A swarm of students gather around her, "young men and women who wanted to talk about detective fiction" having "read a good deal of this kind of literature, though very little of anything else" (126). Harriet thinks to herself that a "School of Detective Fiction would…have a fair chance of producing a goodly crop of Firsts" (126). These young people would have grown up reading detective fiction, a genre which itself 'grew up' alongside these young Oxford students. The interwar years in England also overlap with what is known as the "Golden Age" of detective fiction which became increasingly popular during this period.[1] By 1937, according to a press survey, crime was one of the most popular sources of serialized reading material (Bingham, "Cultural Hierarchies" 63).[2] Alison Light also notes that "[b]y 1939 one-quarter of all fiction published was detective fiction" (65).[3]

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[1] The term "Golden Age" is difficult to define and various critics point to different years for this period. Many critics such as Heather Worthington, John Curran, and Susan Rowland agree at its beginning in 1918 or 1920, but separately suggest 1930, 1945, and 1937 for its ending respectively (Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie* 3). Detective fiction author P.D. James sees *Trent's Last Case* (1913) as "falling within the Golden Age", declaring that the "well-known description 'Golden-Age'…taken to cover the two decades between the First and Second World Wars" is "unduly restrictive" (50). Bernthal offers a definition outside of dates and declares that "more universally accepted is that Golden Age detective fiction is both puzzle-based and highly artificial, usually featuring murder and an amateur, rather than a professional, detective. The detective discovers who committed the crime and how; the solution is often outlandish but the reader should have access to sufficient clues to solve it" (*Queering Agatha Christie* 4).

[2] In "Cultural Hierarchies" Bingham writes that "The debates promoted by the rise of the newspaper, and more broadly by the emergence of mass culture, have received considerable attention. The lamentations of the Leavises are familiar in works on the interwar period, as are the anxieties of leading modernist authors. The commercial influence of the press – and particularly leading reviewers such as Arnold Bennett – is widely acknowledged. Yet in contrast to the various modernist magazines, or leading weeklies such as *Time and Tide* and the *Listener*, the precise manner in which the main national daily and Sunday newspapers helped to shape taste and define literary value has been largely neglected" (56).

[3] In *Snobbery with Violence* Colin Watson cites a list of popular fiction available through the W.H. Smith library: "Its hundred and fifty pages contained some thirteen thousand five hundred titles. About half were romance, a quarter were adventure stories, and a quarter were crime novels" (31).

Harriet reflects on the reason for detective fiction's popularity: "The pre-War solemnity and the post-War exhaustion were both gone; the desire now was for an energetic doing of something definite, though the definitions differed. The detective story, no doubt, was acceptable, because in it something definite was done, the 'what' being comfortably decided beforehand by the author" (Sayers, *Gaudy Night* 126). Harriet's thoughts thus prompt one to ask what these detective fiction authors 'comfortably decide' within their representation of 'something definite done', in addition of course to their plots which provide puzzles for the reader, or a "challenge to the [*sic*] ingenuity" (Christie, "Detective Writers in England" xiii).

This thesis brings together the detective fiction of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers in the context of their public and professional lives. Agatha Christie's first detective fiction novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* was published in 1920 and Dorothy L. Sayers's *Whose Body?* was published in 1923. Both of these women became professional detective fiction authors in the same social milieu while exploiting the same social and cultural productions which surrounded publishing popular fiction in this interwar period.

This thesis is about social communities in Christie's and Sayers's fiction. It further considers how both of these writers in their representation of women – mainly women in the middle-class to upper-middle classes of England – push the gendered expectations of roles for women in their social and cultural settings. Sayers was particularly concerned with how people as a society could learn to live in community with one another and especially how this could be implemented. She wrote in her 1941 *Begin Here: A War-Time Essay* that a central difficulty of Western society "has been that of inventing and maintaining a kind of state in which every man and woman should enjoy freedom and equality while yet sharing in an orderly communal life which should ensure the control of a means of livelihood for all" (33). Sayers thus connects Western, national, and then social communities together, arguing that these can

obtain a "delicate internal and external balance of freedom, equality, and the means of livelihood" through men and women 'enjoying freedom and equality' (33).[4]

I argue that the detective fiction of both Christie and Sayers presents examples of what this "kind of state" could look like in maintaining this "freedom and equality" of life for women and men through their representations of types of community in their detective fiction. I demonstrate that their fictional communities are influenced by their own struggle to become professional women writers through their interactions with the public press and newspapers for advertisement and expanding their reading public. Understanding their experience of attaining professional status as women thus informs my discussion of the social communities in their detective fiction. Murder in detective fiction produces an anxiety about the state of the community; detective fiction allows for discussion of this state. I focus on the ways such representations of communities could expand opportunities for women, and how communities are formed or imagined has direct implications for its members, especially the women of the early twentieth century. Establishing this aspect of their detective fiction, and bringing together their detective fiction with their professional lives, this analysis argues that we can reaffirm the feminist potential of their popular detective fiction. This is a reappraisal of interwar popular fiction written by women. It offers new ways to examine how they inserted a feminist potential for social change which could reach a large reading audience.

In order to bring together the relationship between community and representations of women, I consider the characters in their fiction within the context of communities that are established through

[4] My thanks to Christine Colón's series of essays, *Choosing Community*, which drew my attention to Sayers's explicit connection of community in her writings as a whole. Colón approaches Sayers's oeuvre to understand how Sayers "articulates three particular qualities she believes are essential in order to successfully perform this ritual of community", that is "action, faith, and joy" (2). Colón does this as it shows a "good sense of Sayers's artistry" as well as giving a "deeper understanding of some of the theological foundations of her work" (3). Colón is interested in the movement of Sayers's theological progression and thought and argues that this began in her detective fiction and was completed later in her life through her theological workings.

female relationships. These are present in social imagined (or embodied) communities in their fiction as well as how characters respond to presentations of women in fictional/real representations of the public press. The fictional representations in the novels and newspapers in the novels mirror and comment on how women in Christie's and Sayers's own lives were presented in the public press. This can be seen through how Christie and Sayers themselves were presented and chose/had to represent themselves to their reading public, which in turn is reflected in their fiction. Understanding the types of community making which was influenced by the press, as well as the ways in which Christie and Sayers referenced this in their fiction, allows us to examine how these communities operate and the ways in which they represent this and these communities in their fiction.

1.1 Methodology

To examine how Sayers and Christie created social and feminist communities in their fiction, I employ the community theory of Benedict Anderson as outlined in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* and his notion of community as that which exists in the minds of a group of likeminded people bounded by place, space, and cultural forms. Anderson considers the question of national identity and how people within finite boundaries come to consider themselves part of what he calls "an imagined (political) community" (6). He identifies an imagined national community through emotional attachment of the public to certain cultural productions, such as reading novels and the newspaper. The nation, the community with which Anderson is centrally interested, is "*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (original emphasis 6). The nation is "imagined as a *community*" because of the "deep, horizontal comradeship" which its members have with one another (original emphasis 6), connected in part through their understanding and participation with specific cultural artefacts. Two of these are the novel and newspaper, which, Anderson

argues, "provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is nation" (original emphasis 25). The novel shows how the author represents and refers to a community which the reader understands; there is an assumed knowledge of traditions or society: "we see the national imagination at work…through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside" (Anderson 30). Arguing that the newspaper goes further into the national consciousness than the novel, Anderson states that "the newspaper is merely an 'extreme form' of the book" (34), or "one-day best-sellers" (35). In its consumption, he reasons, each reader is "aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion" (35). The imagined community comes from the readers of the newspaper being aware that others are given access to the same information. Moreover, "the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the *imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life*" (emphasis added, 35-36). That which is read in the newspaper and then the novel is seen to be read by many others around. The readers become part of a community which in turn leads them to admit or dismiss various social/cultural acceptances of issues, often through what is relayed through the press. David Humphries in *Different Dispatches* argues that Anderson, in "[h]ighlighting the intersections between the newspaper and the novel…also shows how authors can portray fictional characters as a means of representing shared national aspirations through individual acts of identification" (11). Anderson posits that this access to print culture made it possible for many people to think about themselves and relate themselves to others in new ways (36). As sociologist Tim Philipps states regarding Anderson's theory of imagined communities, "For Anderson, the social conditions that made this national form of community 'imaginable' for the individual were the emergence of 'print-language' (1983: 122), in interaction with capitalism and human linguistic diversity (1983: 46)" (600).

Anderson traces this 'print-language' and culture from the revolution of the printing press to present his theory on imagined political communities. Yet there was another r/evolution in a type of print culture which contributed to the rise of a 'golden age' in the British interwar period for both newspapers and popular literature, including detective fiction (Mayhall, "'Indecently Preposterous': The Interwar Press and Golden Age Detective Fiction" 145). Colin Watson writes that "The 1870 Education Act that formally decreed schooling for all is still widely believed to have been akin to vaccination. It 'did away' with illiteracy just as vaccination 'did away' with smallpox" (27). Watson claims that "by 1920, virtually everyone [in Britain] could read…Reading, clearly, was no longer for the privilege of a few but an established habit of the majority of the population" (27, 28). Towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth there was a corresponding rise in the number of readers with the availability of reading choices both in newspaper and novel form. As Watson states, "Newspapers were for the greatest number the main source of reading, sometimes the only source. The million and half who took a daily paper in 1900 had swelled to more than two millions by 1914… In 1920, there were five million daily readers and thirteen million readers of the Sunday press" (28). Similarly, press historian Adrian Bingham, in "Cultural Hierarchies and the Interwar British Press", argues that "[i]n the first half of the twentieth century, national newspapers became an inescapable and almost irresistible force in British culture", declaring that British readers were amongst the most "avid" newspaper consumers in the world (55).[5]

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[5] See Bingham *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918-1978* (2009) as well as *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (2004). See also Victoria Stewart's *Crime Writing in Interwar Britain*.
By the 1930s the common habit of reading the newspaper – if not dailies then weeklies – had spread to men and women of all classes of society (Bingham, *Gender* 23). For a cultural example, one can determine that the response of the British people to the Second World War was part of what Anderson called the deep comradeship which could induce people to die for "limited imaginings" (7). As Bingham writes in *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, "There is no reason to dismiss as unimportant the content of these papers…Millions of people read the *Mail* and the *Express*…The war that eventually broke out after the failure of 'appeasement' relied on the service of British men and women from across society, and it is impossible to understand their support, especially after the horrors of the First World War, without some knowledge of how the international crisis had been presented in the media" (8-9).

Indeed, cultural critic Q.D. Leavis noted (with disdain) the complete takeover of the popular British press upon the British people. At the beginning of *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932), she seemingly confirms Anderson's theory regarding the newspaper and its effects upon the reading public, with its status as a "one-day best-seller[s]" (Anderson 35). As Leavis observes, by 1932, "even the poorest households take a newspaper, though it may be of a different type from that favoured by the educated" (*Fiction* 3). She continues:

> A Sunday morning walk through any residential district will reveal the head of the family 'reading the paper' in each front window; in the poorest quarters the *News of the World* is read on the doorstep or in bed; the weekly perusal of the *Observer* or the *Sunday Times*, which gives a large proportion of their contents to book-reviews and publisher's advertisements, is in many cases the only time that even the best-intentioned business man or schoolmaster can spare for his literary education (*Fiction* 3).

Leavis's observations affirm Anderson's claim that each newspaper reader is "aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion" (35).

The rise in newspaper availability also coincided with a similar surge of options of popular fiction such as romance and detective fiction: this in turn was often serialized in the press (discussed in Chapters 2 and 3). Its popularity grew and by the twentieth century, as Laura E. Nym Mayhall, in "'Indecently Preposterous': The Interwar Press and Golden Age Detective Fiction", states:

> Similar market forces operated on the production of fiction between the wars. New publishing techniques resulted in levels of production akin to that seen in the world of newspapers. Approximately 2,500 book titles had been published each year in the 1850s; by the early 1920s, that number had reached 12,500, peaking in 1939 at 17,000. (147)

As already noted, and as Watson further reiterates, about a quarter of available popular fiction titles were "crime novels" (31).

Corresponding to this rise in literacy, and with the demand for newspapers and popular fiction, was a rise in women writers. By the interwar period, Andrea Trodd notes, "The term 'lady writer' was frequently used…as a synonym for the amateurism which made the definition of professionalism possible.[6] Confusingly, it was frequently applied to the market leaders, the star romantic novelists whose earnings could hardly be described as amateur" (36-37).[7] Nicola Beauman calls the interwar period "the heyday of fiction written by women" (6); this interwar period also coincides with a new type of literary demarcation of the 'middlebrow' as well as the rapidly expanding popular detective fiction genre. Often this middlebrow fiction, including detective fiction, was labeled conservative and anti-feminist (discussed below). Yet, as Carla Kungl notes, citing Reynolds and Humble's *Victorian Heroines*, "women writers used certain narrative strategies to express their desire for independence", and Kungl points to the ways in which women detective fiction writers "created women who came from the same economic class and who faced difficulties in the job market that women from their class often faced" (13). Thus, Kungl claims, further citing Reynolds and Humble "these strategies 'helped to accustom the reading public to changes in the feminine ideal' (6-7)" (13). Using fiction to advance expansions for women in society is not a new concept, literature was already being used or had been used by women writers in previous centuries as a way of normalizing opportunities for women.

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[6] See Chesterton's "Our Notebook" in *The Illustrated London News*, Aug 17, 1929, p. 280. He refers to Christie and Sayers as 'lady writers'. Further discussed in Chapter 2.

[7] Anthea Trodd writes that "later nineteenth century writers were increasingly engaged in organizing themselves as professionals" (36). Detailing several lists and organizations which brought about copyright laws and publishing series such as Oxford's World Classics (in 1901), these activities "enhanced the concept of the writer controlling the supply of literary expertise" (36). She goes on to argue that "Within this climate of intensified consciousness of professional status, the professional claims of women writers were often questioned. The Society of Authors admitted women as members from 1889 [founded in 1883], and to its council from 1896, but the time-lag was indicative; women were not inevitably regarded as professionals" (36).

I argue that feminist potential in the fiction of Christie and Sayers, through showcasing the ability and freedoms of women from driving cars to presenting women in professions, in academia, or other milieus, demonstrates a literature which normalizes women's ability and freedom to participate in these and many other activities and professions. When women are presented or imagined in certain professions, or social engagements in fiction, their readers can in turn imagine these scenarios in their own lives. To borrow Maria DiCenzo's phrase with which she describes periodicals, journals, and texts in the interwar years, Sayers's and Christie's writing(s) can be seen as "serv[ing] as the vehicles for the articulation of feminist goals and challenges", and thus one can find the "compelling evidence of the pluralisation and diversification of interwar feminist discourses" ("Feminist Media and Agendas for Change: Introduction" 313).

Examining this articulation of feminist goals and challenges in these texts is also taking into consideration the cultural background of the rise of the newspaper and popular fiction such as detective fiction. That is, how these women writers advertised themselves in the press, and how they employed these cultural productions which were available to them, firstly to attract readers through publicity, and then to place within their fiction arguments that support women enjoying "equal citizenship" with men (Sayers, *Gaudy Night* 26). At the same time they also established emotional attachment with their readers through the newspaper and their novels. This draws upon Anderson's theory of the relationship between what he calls the cultural artefacts of the newspaper and the novel and how the reader's interaction with these creates an emotional attachment to representations of social communities discussed within them. As Anderson writes, for any community larger than those which can be tangibly seen, "communities are to be distinguished…by the style in which they are imagined" (6).[8]

[8] Anderson writes: "In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined". Thus, "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (6).

Although Anderson's theory describes how a specific national community can be imagined in the minds of its citizens, critics across various disciplines have used his theory of imagined community to represent or comment on the ways different imagined communities can create, include, or exclude other members of a specific imagined social community. Both Tim Philipps's "Imagined Communities and Self-Identity: An Exploratory Quantitative Analysis" and David Humphries's *Different Dispatches: Journalism in American Modernist Prose* use Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities in their studies to analyse a social imagined community which is within a specific national and changing social context. Their use and expansion of Anderson's theory shows the strong critical connection which Anderson's imagined community in national terms can be used for presenting, representing, or finding an imagined social community within a specific context; "From its original application to national forms, a more expansive and general usage of imagined communities has developed in contemporary social analysis" (Philipps 600). Philipps's article cites various critics who have all used Anderson's theory and whose analyses "conceive of imagined communities in a wide array of social forms" and who include "Religion, place, gender, politics, civilization and science" as "bases for the formation of imagined communities" (600).[9]

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[9] Here is Philipps' overview: "Since its publication, *Imagined Communities* has had a strong impact in the nations and nationalism area. It has provided a cornerstone for analysis and debate, and been a recurrent point of reference in leading sociological contributions on the national form (Greenfeld, 1992; McCrone and Keily, 2000). Reviews of the field have described it as a 'classic study' (McCrone, 1998: 102); 'having had an enormous influence in the study of nationalism in various disciplines' (Schudson, 1994: 67); and 'providing a crucial explanation for why the nation can demand such extraordinary sacrifices and commitments from its members' (Calhoun, 1993: 232). In total, the collective response to Anderson's work suggests that the idea of the nation as an imagined community is well established, albeit not always uncritically accepted" (Schlesinger, 1991).
"From its original application to national forms, a more expansive and general usage of imagined communities has developed in contemporary social analysis. The term has been seen as contributing to a tradition of sociological studies of 'ideological community' (Thompson, 1991: 341), possessing strong affinities with Toennies' 'Gemeinschaff'; Durkheim's 'collective conscience' and 'collective representations'; Cooley's 'larger mind'; Althusser's 'ideological state apparatus' (ISAs); Shils' 'tyranny of tradition'; and Foucault's 'discursive ensemble' (Shils, 1991; Thompson, 1991). In this line of work, the idea of imagined communities is part of the conceptual apparatus required for analysing 'the constitution of society' (Shils, 1991: 128). The construction and dismantling of imagined communities is treated as a key process in the emergence and reproduction of modern and postmodern societies (Bauman, 1992; Hall, 1992). These analyses conceive of imagined communities in a wide array of social

While Philipps's study is sociological in foundation (examining imagined communities in contemporary Australia) he identifies two broad themes throughout Anderson's work, and though historical in application, *Imagined Communities* addresses "(1) the complex nature of self-identification with imagined communities; and (2) the consequences of feeling connected to imagined communities for other aspects of social life" (601-602). Building upon and employing Philipp's reading of Anderson, this thesis discusses how this self-identification with a community is created through an author's or reader's connection with newspapers and novels, as well as questioning what representations of social life, particularly in its representations of and for women (mainly those of the middle-class to upper middle-classes), are found in newspapers and novels. Moreover, it examines the consequences of this connection for members of a certain social community, or, the emotional attachment and choices of a character who identifies with a specific community: Harriet Vane's loyalty to the female academic community in Sayers's *Gaudy Night* is such that Harriet is prepared to risk her own safety and security to avoid a scandal being broadcast in the public press (as discussed in Chapter 5).

Like Philipps, albeit through a literary critical lens, David Humphries in *Different Dispatches* engages with Anderson to also examine imagined social constructions of community and the effects of cultural artefacts such as the use of the newspaper within novels.[10] He determines how American modernist texts interact with mass culture through looking at popular American interwar authors (such as Cather, Sherwood Anderson, and Hemingway among others). Humphries "consider[s] how… they coupled art and journalism as a means of negotiating the expectations of their critical readers and the

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forms. Religion, place, gender, politics, civilization and science have all been specified as bases for the formation of imagined communities. While detailed analysis of the different manifestations of imagined community is still at an early stage, discrete research concentrations have been emerging, especially in the areas of ethnicity and territoriality (Albrow et al., 1994; Schlesinger, 1991). (600)

[10] He firstly bases his work on Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Humphries states that "While Habermas shows how the print media makes it possible for individuals to shape abstract communities, Benedict Anderson…shows how the regularly printed newspaper and the print media actually help such communities to be imagined into existence" (11).

demands of a popular audience" (5). He argues that these authors in a modernist context, "deployed recognizable features of popular journalism as the basis for experimenting with issues of perspective, narration, plot, and genre, thereby constructing works that were at once accessible to a broad public and appealing to a select audience of sophisticated readers" (5). These authors reimagined their public in their own social/historical context. They did this, as Humphries argues, through their engagement with print culture and journalism, or the newspaper and the novel. Although Anderson uses his theory to imagine the national identity of postcolonial nations, Humphries declares that Anderson's "analysis sheds light on the ways that the authors considered here draw on the form and reception of the newspaper as a means of calling attention to questions of national identity and the way that literature can participate in imagining—or re-imagining—how communities are defined" (11).

This thesis is not concerned with how national identity is formed through the detective fiction of Dorothy L. Sayers and Agatha Christie. But it does consider the importance of the specific and national settings as they are represented in their novels. Anderson states that "we see the 'national imagination' at work in the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside" (30).[11] The setting of the detective fiction of Christie and Sayers represents the social milieu in which they lived – interwar Britain.[12] There is reference to a justice system

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[11] Examining a Latin American novel, *El Periquillo Sarniento* (1816), Anderson uses the descriptions provided by the hero as an example of how a novel can create an imagined sense of community. When the hero provides a "picaresque *tour d'horizon*" consisting in part of "hospitals, prisons, remote villages, monasteries" and various inhabitants, it is not, as Anderson states, a "*tour du monde*" (30). Rather, he argues, "Nothing assures us of this sociological solidity more than the succession of plurals. For they conjure up a social space full of *comparable* prisons, none in itself of any unique importance, but all representative (in their simultaneous, separate existence) of the oppressiveness of *this* colony" (30). Anderson is discussing anti-colonial novels which allow an imagined anti-colonial perspective to occupied places. He includes a footnote which states: "This movement of a solitary hero through an adamantine social landscape is typical of many early (anti-)colonial novels" (30).
Furthermore, he explains, "Contrast prisons in the Bible. They are never imagined as typical of this or that society. Each, like the one where Salome was bewitched by John the Baptist, is magically alone" (30)

[12] Sayers more particularly represents specific settings (Freedman 384). This has led critics to state that that her fiction has not 'aged' as well as Christie's (see Ian Stuart 29). While Christie's are set in certain places, there is a sense of universality to them. Sayers describes specific communities, such as the Scottish landscape, an Oxford community. Christie's big houses and villages could be any big house or village across England (Stuart 29).

and police system, which presumes readers know details of. There is an interaction, though not always overt, with the traumas experienced in particular by the British people coming out of their specific involvement in the First World War and then moving into the Second. When a village is described by Agatha Christie, such as in the beginning of *Death on the Nile*, it could be any typical representation of an English village: the novel takes for granted that its readers understand the social and community connections outlined by the dialogue and setting. The representation of the class systems in Sayers and Christie presupposes the understanding of, and anxieties concerning, the class systems of the interwar years in England (which prompted critics to assume this fiction was conservative, discussed below). Similarly, when female characters are searching for jobs, driving cars, detecting, or inhabiting certain social situations, there is an understanding of the certain social structures which they are working within or against. There is an assumption that women, as a class (see Chapter 5), will be commented on in certain ways, by other characters of the novels, by readers, or by newspaper accounts both within and outside of the novels, as I will show.

1.2 Social and Cultural Milieu

The world of interwar Britain, the world which is reflected within the novels of both Christie and Sayers, was a rapidly changing one. The early twentieth century and the era between the world wars was rife with political, cultural, social, and gendered changes which were included and represented in literature, and the popular press, all of which in turn discussed these issues.[13] Social historians Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, in *The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939* published just after the beginning of World War Two, write that after the First World War there were only two classes of people

[13] The *Encyclopedia of British Women's Writing, 1900-1950* (2006) is especially helpful for contextualizing literary history, as it offers a timeline of political/historical events alongside the literary. See Appendix III "Timeline" pp 314-320. I have reproduced this timeline in my own Appendix alongside important dates in the lives of Christie and Sayers as well as key detective fiction moments (see Appendix B).

– those who had fought in the war - "Fighting Forces" - and those who had not: "the Rest, including the Government" (5). Yet they omit the women from those who had fought, even though there were women who had participated on the front lines, albeit in a non-combatant capacity (in addition, of course, to the women who worked in munitions factories, the nurses, and the myriad jobs they did as part of the war effort). Relationships between men and women and between generations of women were also shifting, defined in the context of the war and one's participation in it (such as between Christie, her mother, and even her sister, (to be discussed in Chapter 3) and in turn highlighted in the newspapers and the novels of the time.

A key way of generating news was in commenting on these changing relationships and women's entrance into the public sphere during the years of the war and afterwards. Graves and Hodge note that Press Baron Lord Northcliffe advised his editors to discuss in his papers "all problems involving women" (41), while a book of advice for young journalists in 1926 suggested articles on sexual difference rather than discussions of class for drawing in readers (Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* 39). Harriet Vane in *Gaudy Night* sadly reflects that "Women, of course, were always news" (Sayers 57). The anxiety surrounding women's place in the interwar years, and its corresponding discussion in the press – which was concerned with women's place in society especially after men in the war were returning home from the front and looking for jobs – has prompted feminist critics to accuse the interwar press with being anti-feminist and promoting a 'back-to-home movement' (discussed below and further in Chapter 2).

Part of this accusation originated from the ability of Edwardian suffragettes to advance their cause in the burgeoning popular newspapers. Even though prior to the Great War, in spite of the rise of the 'New Woman' (women going out to work and moving out of home), the education of women, particularly those of the middle-class, had primarily focused on their presumed future status as wives and mothers (Makinen, *Agatha Christie* 4-5). Yet as Maggie Andrews and Sallie McNamara argue in *Women*

and the Media, the "Edwardian Suffragettes were exceptionally media-savvy", and they were able to effectively utilize the many daily newspapers which came about at the beginning of the twentieth century ("Introduction" 3). The events of the First World War, however, soon became the primary concern of the British newspapers, while many feminists turned their militant energies towards the war effort. McGregor and Lewis, in *Conundrums for the Long Weekend: England, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Lord Peter Wimsey*, state that the First World War "had the effect of darkening memories, making the prewar past seem distant and beyond reach" (3).[14] Thus the First World War became an obvious break, or moment, through which to identify advances (or pauses) of feminism and helped to forever change perceptions of marriage, education, and types of work for women, especially when they worked during those bleak war years.[15]

With the changes that the Great War brought about, women were anxious to continue with the jobs which the war had allowed them into. While working-class women had always worked, now middle-class women were earning money and becoming socially and economically independent from their home, aware of their ability in performing important economic and social tasks (Makinen, *Agatha Christie* 4-5): this is especially apparent in Agatha Christie's life (discussed in Chapters 3 and 4). There were social anxieties about their occupation of this working space however (Storm Jameson's trilogy starting with *Company Parade* (1934) is a good example of this), as many women, wanting to continue to work or to find work, were excluded from jobs they were well qualified for in favour of men returning from the Front (as Dorothy L. Sayers experienced, see Chapter 3). Though women actively contributed to the war effort, the return to peace brought up discussions once again of women's place in the public and private sphere, with anxieties that they were taking up places and excluding the returning men from finding

[14] As McGregor and Lewis discuss, the social movement "so obvious in the twenties" and the movement for women's rights did not "suddenly erupt in 1918", it had its beginnings happening around the 1870s, even further, they argue, to the 1790s (3).
[15] See Kungl on "World War I and Women's Employment" for an overview of the work women did, the new work they were brought into do – such as police work – and the way this continued or discontinued after the war (41-51).

jobs.[16] Christie's *Autobiography* states it rather inadequately: "At that time the City firms were being forward in offering postings to young demobilised officers" (268). Yet the very experiences of these men in war often left them physically or mentally unable to hold down employment in peace times, in a greatly changed society (Graves and Hodge 15; McGregor and Lewis 16-17).[17] The newspapers printed calls for women to leave the work place. The anxiety about taking the place of the men (a question more readily understood perhaps, given the depression and economic status of England, as well as the psychological damage suffered by so many) while women were additionally trying to support themselves, made the after years of World War One difficult, especially for this war generation, to navigate.

The supposed 'back-to-home' narrative purported by the newspapers has recently been challenged by feminist critics, exemplified by the 2018 anthology *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture In Britain, 1918-1939: The Interwar Period*. As Maria DiCenzo argues in her chapter, "[t]he tendency to characterise reform efforts in these years as conservative, compared with the insurgency of the pre-war suffrage campaign, has obscured the breadth of feminist activism and the attempts to politicise the domestic sphere in the aftermath of war and suffrage" (Feminist Media" 313). DiCenzo asserts that "[r]ather than deactivating feminism, the war generated new problems and complicated old ones (313). Andrews and McNamara liken the campaign for suffrage to that of the "tip of an iceberg; beneath the surface the fluid and instable discourses of femininity were being contested in a range of areas and media texts" ("Women and Media in the Era of Enfranchisement, 1900-1939" 11). Bingham states that "Rather than trying to confine women to a narrow domesticity, newspapers generally embraced modernity,

[16] Rather negatively, Graves and Hodge wrote of this 'dilemma' just twenty years after this first demobilization that these men returning home "had been led to believe that the fact of having served honourably at the Front would be a safe coupon for employment; whereas, on the contrary, the more exhausting their service had been, the smaller was the peace-time demand for them. A million men found that their old jobs had either disappeared or were held by someone else – usually a woman, or a man who had escaped conscription" (15).

[17] Dorothy L. Sayers explores the psychological problems of this for men and women in *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* (1928).

encouraged women to become active citizens, and included careers advice for those unable or unwilling to achieve marriage and motherhood" ("An Era of Domesticity?" 232). He emphasises in *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, that gender historians, in taking specific editorials and debates out of context, assume that the "press simply championed domesticity and opposed single women trying to break out of their 'separate spheres'" (5). He goes on to argue:

> The popular press did not unthinkingly champion housewifery and motherhood; its pages debated and explored what these roles meant for women and society, offered a range of perspectives, and explicitly and implicitly contrasted them with other possible roles. The task of the historian is to trace how these multivocal debates developed around particular themes and interacted with each other. (*Gender* 16-17)

Anderson's statement, that print culture "provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the kind of imagined community that is the nation" (25), makes it clear that it is important to examine *what* is placed in those papers, and why, as this shapes the imagination of its readers. The popular press was a forum both for popular fiction to be published and for an author to publicise their work. I examine the productions behind how one came to be published as an author, and what these meant especially for the woman author who was trying to make enough money from her writing to live on. Importantly, the popular press also created a celebrity culture around popular authors in order to sell newspapers and which in turn helped authors to sell their work. Yet an author's interaction with this new type of celebrity culture also risked their fiction being demarcated as 'lowbrow' or 'middlebrow' (discussed below). The popular press became a site of debate for genre fiction, literary demarcations, and women's roles. This is the cultural and social context through which Christie and Sayers became professional women authors in the interwar years. In order to consider the complex relationship between the fiction of these writers and their professional lives, I examine the cultural context of Christie's and Sayers's interaction with the burgeoning twentieth century popular press and popular (detective) fiction market, while comparing how

these women presented themselves to their public. I then explore how they integrated representations of this achievement, and the benefits of achievements for women, into their fiction.

I contend that Christie and Sayers, using the cultural productions I outline and which they represent within their fiction, created fictional social - embodied - communities and presented opportunities for women which in turn could be represented, imagined, and related to their British interwar cultural world. I employ Anderson's theory as it provides a way of examining the emotional attachment of people to the newspapers and novels in creating an imagined community. 'Imagined' is used to mean the ways that characters in their fiction interact with cultural artefacts to imagine types of social communities that they see themselves as belonging to. Christie and Sayers examine social expectations of what communities should look like through or in relationship with their female characters. Through their fiction, Christie and Sayers subvert these expectations and instead offer new roles for 'freedom and equality' for all. Thus when Sayers and Christie represent women's achievements and places within their novels, they are offering a "landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside" (Anderson 30).

Alison Light importantly claims in *Forever England: Femininity, literature and conservatism between the wars* (1991) that study of such (so-called) 'conservative' genre fiction especially that written by women shows an exciting social history for women of its period. While Graves and Hodge ironically open *The Long Weekend* with the statement that "This book is intended to serve as a reliable record of what took place, of a forgettable sort, during the twenty-one year interval between two great European wars" (3), they write a very long book of 'forgettable' information. Conversely, Alison Light draws attention to an androcentric view of history which tends to see the interwar years "as a kind of hiatus in history" (9), placed between the two historically significant occurrences of the World Wars. Light argues that these years were especially significant for women and need to be fully examined in their cultural context as "different groups of women" experienced a "buoyant sense of excitement and release" through

their engagement in a whole range of new "cultural activities" (9). Merja Makinen in *Agatha Christie: Investigating Femininity* (2006) states that between the two world wars "was a period of intense gender negotiation" (4). Women over thirty were given the vote in 1918, women were allowed to enter certain professions in 1919, and in 1928 the 'Flapper Vote' entitled all women to vote at the same age as men in England. This was thus a time of particular change especially for middle-class to upper-middle-class women (as represented by Christie and Sayers): the invention of modern household appliances and shifts from live-in servants to the 'dailies', gave these women more time for "cultural activities", such as sports, theatre, driving, travel, and writing (Makinen, *Agatha Christie* 4).

Movement and travel were becoming more accessible, inevitably changing the landscape of England and lifestyles of people after the First World War. As McGregor and Lewis note "[t]he automobile firmly claimed the roadways, bringing greater independence of occupation and movement to the masses. Faster and more efficient trains, ships, and even aircraft heralded a new era in transportation" (3). This was also an era, moreover, where information was more easily traded, and technological advances were expanding, shown clearly in these detective fiction stories: "Technology makes itself felt in every story. Racing cars and motorcycles, airplanes across the Atlantic (in 1923!), constantly ringing telephones, persistently clicking cameras – this is a society increasingly reliant on the wonders of modern technology" (McGregor and Lewis 6).

As Light claims, instead of seeing these interwar years as 'antiprogressive' for the lack of overall suffrage movement, these interwar years, as study of the fiction shows, exhibit this 'buoyant sense of excitement and release'. Women were moving and utilizing these new technological advances in their homes, jobs, and lives. Following in and furthering Light's critical footsteps, Makinen argues that "we need a way of charting these as important changes and emancipation" (*Agatha Christie* 5). She examines the detective fiction of Agatha Christie to do so; citing Earl F. Bargainnier, she agrees with him that Christie presents the "effects of these changes on the everyday world of her characters" and therefore "left

a social history of fifty years of upper middleclass English life" (*Agatha Christie* 6). McGregor and Lewis similarly assert that "The fiction of Dorothy L. Sayers has become an essential source for the historian and literary analyst" (4).[18]

The world of Christie's and Sayers's novels is represented for its readers to recognize, yet the social world is subverted and challenged. Christopher Yiannitsaros in "Displaced Persons: *A Murder is Announced* and the Condition of Postwar England" uses Benedict Anderson to argue that Christie "deliberately play[s]" with the notion of England as a nation, imagining instead that "one's fellow countryman can be as treacherous as any dangerous 'foreigner'" (125). I use Anderson's theory to show how Christie and Sayers "deliberately play" with their own social order such as controlled or influenced by the cultural artefacts of the newspaper and the novel, to then subvert these to show that feminist change is possible. Reconsidering Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers alongside one another (their first detective fiction novels were published within three years of each other) and in conjunction with their detective fiction presents a unique and new understanding of these professional women detective fiction authors within their historical, social, cultural, and fictional place of the British interwar years as well as a fuller picture of the types of social constraints that they were under.

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[18] McGregor and Lewis state that "The women in the novels run the gamut of English society, from traditional housewives to freewheeling Bohemians to fully independent professionals. Sayers took the time to examine their lives, to penetrate their feelings, and to gauge the public's reaction to their activities…she was perceptive enough to recognize that whatever revolution was taking place in English society affected all women and affected women far more than it did men" (4).
They further state that each of Sayers's detective novels presents a different type of community – aristocratic, bohemian, small town, or academic – and examine how it was impacted by the war and modernity (5). In doing so they posit that Sayers "provides the reader entry into each microcosm, sympathetically displaying the degrees of common cohesiveness and the impact of the modern" (5-6). They then ask "How do these communities function? What threatens their survival?" Answering these questions, they claim, is "to approach understanding a Sayers novel" (6). This is acknowledged and further discussed in Chapters 3 and 5 of this thesis.

1.3 Women and the Detective Fiction Genre

Regarding the 'Golden Age' of detective fiction, and the mark that women authors made on it, Martin Edwards highlights in *The Golden Age of Murder* that "If, as Sayers joked in an unpublished essay, 'there is no profession so freely open to men and women…as that of murder,' it is also true that reading detective fiction is an equal-opportunities occupation" (236). Edwards goes on to state:

> Women readers borrowed detective novels in large quantities from libraries, whereas men often preferred to read or write thrillers. Even the great male detectives, Wimsey, Poirot, and Father Brown, were not remotely macho compared to John Buchan's Richard Hannay and to crude action men such as Sapper's Bulldog Drummond and Sydney Horler's Tiger Standish. For all the innovations of Berkeley, Wade and Kennedy, for all the industry of Rhode, Connington and Punshon, the Thirties would eventually be remembered as the decade of the Crime Queens. (236)[19]

Much happened in the history of detective fiction for the 1930s to be known as the 'decade of the Queens of Crime': these 'Queens' are Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham, and Ngaio Marsh.[20]

This study deliberately separates Christie and Sayers from other women detective fiction writers of the twenties and thirties as they were at the forefront of opening up the detective genre as well as

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[19] Yet the Thirties were not always remembered as the decade of the Crime Queens. Writing in 1971, Watson excluded these women authors from his chapter "The Golden Age of Detective Fiction", mentioning Christie once and Sayers twice, both in relation to criticism by Raymond Chandler.
Eric Sandberg writes that the "notable male writers of detective novels" from the Golden Age (such as in Edwards's list above), have "by and large, not fared as well over the past century as their female competitors and collaborators" (*Dorothy L. Sayers* 1).

[20] Margery Allingham published her first of the Albert Campion series in 1929, *The Crime at Black Dudley*, and would write 9 more Campion novels as well as publish two short story collection during the next decade (The Margery Allingham Society "The Book"). Ngaio Marsh introduced her detective Roderick Allen in 1934 with *A Man Lay Dead*, writing 8 of her 32 detective fiction novels in the following 6 years (she published into the 80s and also wrote plays) (Danna, "Ngaio Marsh").

defining its parameters.[21] Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* is credited for both feminising the detective fiction genre as well as opening it up for other women authors (Light 64; Trodd 130). Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920) and Sayers's *Whose Body?* (1923) appeared in print just three years apart; both of these women were roughly the same age as they wrote and then published their first detective fiction novel.[22] The historical timeline which links Christie and Sayers allows for a closer examination of the burgeoning opportunity which detective fiction writing offered for women (especially those of the middle to upper middle-classes in England) as well as providing a case study in the types of professional publicity utilized by women, and especially women detective fiction authors at the beginning of the 1920s.

After their beginning as detective fiction writers in the 1920s, during the 1930s both Christie and Sayers wrote extensively (Edwards states that by 1928 "[f]inancial pressures meant the two women felt under pressure to write without let-up" (*Golden Age* 84)). Agatha Christie published seventeen mystery novels, seven short story collections, two novels under her pseudonym Mary Westmacott, and had three of her stories adapted for films (Evans and Bernthal, "Introduction and A Chronology" 22-23).[23] Dorothy L. Sayers introduced her heroine Harriet Vane in *Strong Poison* in 1930, and then wrote eight detective fiction novels in the next seven years, completing her detective fiction career with *Busman's Honeymoon*

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[21] There were of course other women writers of detective fiction besides these four 'queens', including: Clemence Dane, M. Cole, Helen Simpson. We recognize these four women as the 'Queens' of Crime' for their output and contribution to the genre and they were certainly popular in their own time. However Christie and Sayers were the forerunners of these other two women and moreover they both hold the distinction of having two of their books published in the popular paperback format (see "Timeline", Appendix B).

[22] Although Margery Allingham published a novel in 1923, *Blackkerchief Dick*, this was an historical fiction novel. Her first detective fiction novel featuring Albert Campion was not published until 1929 (The Books", The Margery Allingham Society").

[23] Bernthal writes that "The 1930s form the most typical decade of Golden Age crime fiction and the decade in which Christie reached the peak of productivity, producing up to six books in any given year. She published under the Christie name but also wrote under a pseudonym, Mary Westmacott, to produce physiological novels without crime, exploring often personal themes and ideas. Some of her most iconic titles were published in the 1930s, including *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Death on the Nile*, and – at the end of the decade – *And Then There Were None*, which has become the world's second best-selling novel of any kind (after Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*) and likely the most heavily adapted" (*Agatha Christie* 5).

(1937).[24] She edited and wrote her Introduction for *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror* (published in the United States as *The Omnibus of Crime*) (1931), her detective play *Busman's Honeymoon*, and three other dramas ("Dorothy L. Sayers: A Select Bibliography"). Two collections of her short stories were published in the thirties, and she reviewed and printed articles in the popular press (Gilbert 169-210).

Both Sayers and Christie were original members of the Detection Club which was officially started in 1930 by Anthony Berkley and Dorothy L. Sayers although there were informal meetings which Christie attended held as early as 1928 (Edwards, *Golden Age* 82). The Detection Club was for serious detective fiction authors, from all types of political and literary backgrounds, to come together and compare notes on the elevation of the detective fiction genre. Sayers explained that it was "a private association of writers of detective fiction in Great Britain, existing chiefly for the purpose of eating dinners together at suitable intervals and of talking illimitable shop" ("Introduction", *The Floating Admiral* xvi). She goes on to note that "If there is any serious aim behind the avowedly frivolous organisation of the Detection Club, it is to keep the detective story up to the highest standard that its nature permits, and to free it from the bad legacy of sensationalism, clap-trap and jargon with which it was unhappily burdened in the past" ("Introduction", *The Floating Admiral* xvii). G.K. Chesterton, author of the Father Brown short stories, agreed upon request to be the Club's first president, and its first twenty-eight members included Sayers, Christie, Berkeley, E.C. Bentley, the Coles, Clemence Dane, R. Austin

[24] Sayers started another detective fiction novel, *Thrones, Dominations*, but this was never finished. In Alzina Stone Dale's chapter, "*Thrones, Dominations*: Unfinished Testament to Friendship?", she notes that Sayers had written a plot outline (now lost), and had sent an outline of the story to fellow detective fiction writer Helen Simpson who agreed that "the whole diagram would come in handy when Sayers actually wrote the mystery" (67). Stone Dale gives as much of the plot outline as is known and offers speculations as to why the story was never completed, citing the abdication of King Edwards VIII in 1936 as a possible reason as being too close to the type of story with its themes that Sayers was hoping to write about and explore (72).

Freeman, and Ronald A. Knox (Edwards xix).[25] The Club produced several collaborated works together; both Sayers and Christie wrote chapters for the Club's round robin detective novel *The Floating Admiral* in 1931, while Sayers would be involved in the other Club publications. Sayers became Club president from 1947 until her death in 1957.

The establishment of a Detection Club meant that by the 1930s, the genre of detective fiction had evolved from Edgar Allen Poe's stories in the 1840s, the Newgate Calendar of crime,[26] and Wilkie Collins's experimentations.[27] The history of the popularity of detective fiction is in itself a topic for critical study: this short summary focuses specifically on major events in Britain (see Appendix B for a timeline) where it was increasingly popularized by the Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories which appeared in *The Strand* near the turn of the century. As Mayhall outlines:

> Detective fiction in the nineteenth century took the form of the short story,[28] published primarily in newspapers, beginning in the 1840s. By the end of the century, both newspapers and

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[25] The first members of the official club in 1930 were: G.K. Chesterton (President); H.C. Bailey; E.C. Bentley; Anthony Berkeley; Agatha Christie; G.D.H. Cole; M. Cole; J.J. Connington; Freeman Wills Crofts; Clemence Dane; Robert Eustace; R. Austin Freeman; Lord Gorell; Edgar Jepson; Ianthe Jerrold; Milward Kennedy; Ronald A. Know; A.E.W. Mason; A.A. Milne; Arthur Morrison; Baroness Orczy; Mrs. Victor Rickard; John Rhode; Dorothy L. Sayers; Henry Wade; Victor L. Whitechurch. Helen Simpson and Hugh Walpole were Associate Members. Margery Allingham was invited and joined in 1934 (Edwards, *Golden Age* xix)

[26] The Newgate Calendar was a "collection of factual criminal biographies…the name given to a number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts that comprised collections of criminal biographies and it derives from London's Newgate Prison, where criminals were lodged before their trial and (often) execution. The Chaplain…produced reports, or 'Accounts,' of the lives, crimes, confessions, and executions of the criminals under his care, which were published as cheap pamphlets" (Worthington, "From The Newgate Calendar to Sherlock Holmes" 13). See also Lauren Gillingham "The Newgate Novel and the Police Casebook".

[27] In her Introduction to *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror*, or *The Omnibus of Crime*, Sayers wrote a history of detective fiction. Edwards writes that it "broke new ground, paying tribute to the contribution to the genre made by older members of the Club, and signalling how the modern writers could take it to fresh heights" (*Golden Age* 93), (see Reynolds *Her Life and Soul* 191-192). She argued that the ground rules for the genre were "set forever in the United States, in the 1840s, when Edgar Allen Poe wrote five seminal tales of mystery and imagination" (Edwards, *Golden Age* 97).

[28] Writing on the short story for detective fiction, Christie reflects in her *Autobiography* that "20,000 words for a long short story is an excellent length for a thriller. Unfortunately there is less and less market for stories of that size, and the authors tend not to be particularly well paid. One feels therefore that one would do better to continue the story, and expand it to a full length novel. The short story technique, I think, is not really suited to the detective story at all. A thriller, possibly – but a detective story no" (original emphasis, 341).

> magazines published detective fiction, culminating most famously with Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes's stories in *The Strand*. By the 1890s, the success of the detective story in periodical literature had transformed crime stories from a dangerous diversion for uneducated readers into a respectable form of entertainment for the middle classes. ("Indecently Preposterous" 150)

Sayers and Christie began writing as the detective novel emerged as a mass market genre written by professionals. The detective story evolved from the short story to the novel, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is an example of someone who was able to turn writing short crime stories, which he began to supplement his income (as a struggling doctor), into a full time profession. As Stephen Knight explains, "When Doyle was trying to make a living as a doctor he took up freelance writing to earn more – the artistic activities of his male relatives were a stimulus and a model. He had some success with short stories and as a writer in search of sales he naturally enough came upon the detective story" (*Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* 67). The evolution of detective fiction took place even during Doyle's lifetime: he "opened his literary career as a Victorian…At its close, he was rich, and enormously respected by a generation that already used Victorianism as a term of scorn" (Watson 25).

While social historians Robert Graves and Alan Hodge in *The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939* (1940) claim that in 1919 "Detective-novel writing was not yet an industry; Sherlock Holmes stood alone" (34),[29] it is clear that many other authors were writing and experimenting with the popular format as noted above. G.K. Chesterton published his Father Brown short stories beginning in 1910. E.C. Bentley's *Trent's Last Case* was published in 1913 and was written as a spoof of the detective fiction of its decade: dedicated to his friend Chesterton, Bentley's detective is introduced on

[29] Also rather suspect given the way in which Graves and Hodge were also part of the literary culture and perhaps had their own agendas about notions of literary demarcations.

his last case and is ultimately unsuccessful in discovering the motive and truth of the crime. Yet its popularity and ingenuity were such that it is now recognized as beginning the Golden Age of Detective Fiction.

Trent's Last Case was reprinted in 1929 by which time detective fiction had become an area of discussion in the papers amongst reviewers and authors. Sayers comments on this in her article "Gaudy Night" (1937). Looking back on the publication of *Whose Body?* in 1923, she writes that the detective fiction of that period "enjoyed a pretty poor reputation" (76). She concludes however, that "during the next ten years the technique of detective fiction did improve out of all knowledge in the hands of a number of brilliant writers" (76), who "preach[ed] at every opportunity that if the detective story was to live and develop it must get back to where it began in the hands of Collins and Le Fanu, and become once more a novel of manners instead of a pure crossword puzzle" (76).[30] Chesterton was part of this 'preaching': upon the reprint of *Trent's Last Case* he wrote an article in *The Illustrated London News*, commenting on its notoriety and lauding its writing technique. He classifies *Trent's Last Case* above such sensational thrillers written by Edgar Wallace. He celebrates both the detective story and the writing of the story itself, noting that Bentley is "a story-teller understanding style and distinction and the deeper philosophy that is never a fad or an *–ism*; and, above all, understanding that weight and movement of words, in which style and distinction and philosophy and experience are one" ("Our Note Book", Aug 17, 1929, 280). As Chesterton notes, many popular detective fiction authors - who "are some of the finest specialists in the department of the crime novel" - express their debt and admiration to Bentley "for writing a real detective story that was also a real book" (280). Moreover, these authors are also "some of the first minds in the domain of general thought and culture" (280). Detective fiction, as Chesterton

[30] Sayers singles out Chesterton, whom she admired. She wrote that "G.K. Chesterton had, indeed, succeeded in making [detective fiction] the vehicle of a reasoned philosophy; but then, he was an acknowledged genius, renowned for fantastical paradox, and a philosophical detective story was just one paradox more to his credit" ("Gaudy Night" 76).

comments in this article, can also offer thoughts on philosophy and culture. Amongst the reviewers of Bentley, who have also done much to elevate the crime novel, there are:

> [R]eal experts in the scientific and exact treatment of such police problems, like Mr. R. Austin Freeman and Mr. Freeman Wills Crofts. On the other hand, they include men brilliant and distinguished in totally different fields of serious speculation and controversy, like Father Ronald Knox and Mr. G.D.H. Cole. Last, but the very reverse of least, they include those writers, rather especially lady writers, who, without any special show of specialism, have written quite perfectly constructed crime stores that are also entertaining comedies; notably Mrs. Agatha Christie and Miss Dorothy Sayers. ("Our Note Book", Aug 17, 1929, 280)[31]

Although by 1929 Chesterton showcases Christie and Sayers as notable 'lady writers' in the detective fiction genre, when Christie first published *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* in 1920, women authors of detective fiction were publicly considered unique. A 1922 news article discussing Agatha Christie, "Stories that Thrill", comments that "Policewomen are no longer a novelty; the sight of a woman lawyer excites no comment; but a woman writer of detective stories is still somewhat of a pioneer".[32]

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[31] Note the use of 'lady writers' here, even in 1929. As I acknowledged above, Trodd wrote that "[t]he term 'lady writer' was frequently used in this period as a synonym for the amateurism which made the definition of professionalism possible. Confusingly, it was frequently applied to the market leaders, the star romantic novelists whose earnings could hardly be described as amateur (36-37).
Also of importance are the names used for Christie and Sayers. Christie was known as a married woman and continued to use 'Agatha Christie' even though she and her first husband Archie had formally divorced in 1928 (see Chapter 3). Sayers, married Mac Fleming in 1926, still went professionally by her maiden name (see discussion in Chapter 3 when she would use Mrs. Fleming and gives her reasons in a letter to her son). In *Busman's Honeymoon*, after Harriet Vane was married, she answers a news reporter who wants to know if she will continue to write under Vane or adopt her new title. Harriet responds that she will continue to write under Harriet Vane: "Oh, and by the way, I forgot to ask, do you intend to go on writing now you are married?" "Yes, of course." "Under the same name?" "Naturally" (229).

[32] Historically, this was probably not the case – policewomen were popular and utilised during the First World War – "in Britain the war became the catalyst for the appointment of women police" (Kungl 46) - but, as Kungl notes, by 1922 an 'expenditure report' suggested they be disbanded (50). In the following years only 20 of the original 110 positions originally created in the London Police force would be retained (51). Victoria Stewart in *Crime Writing in Interwar England* comments that women may have been drawn to writing in the detective fiction genre, as "it was a means of engaging with a field in which women had otherwise limited opportunities to participate" (6).

Both Christie and Sayers published poetry before they published their first detective fiction novels and experimented with other types of writing (see Chapter 3). They both separately acknowledged that their motivation to write detective fiction was partly from its potential for earning money.[33] Yet, while their literature offers examples of women's achievements and places for women, and they both were part of middle-class/upper middle-class society, they had divergent life experiences. Though each became professional writers in the 1920s, Christie was a war bride, a woman who travelled the British Empire with her husband on a celebrated tour, and then an author and mother whose marriage fell apart and who then relied on her writing to support herself. Conversely, Sayers was a graduate of Oxford University and a young single woman with a jealously guarded secret trying to establish herself as a professional writer so that she could live in London independently of her parents' (who themselves were not financially wealthy) financial support. Thus while both provide examples of changing gender negotiations and societal change within their texts, and participate in the same interwar British cultural and social context, their own lives and books are necessarily varied, which in turn influences how they marketed their literature and themselves. These necessarily varied life experiences can provide the opportunity to compare and contrast the effect/influence of their public and private lives on their professional ones as well as their fictional social communities (see Chapter 3).

Contributing to the expanding genre of detective fiction gave Christie and Sayers a space to write and become professional authors. In order to suggest the feminist potential which they inserted in their fiction, it is also necessary to examine how Christie and Sayers were aware in their own lives of the power and reach of the newspaper and novels and the ability of these cultural artefacts to reach and

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[33] Dorothy L. Sayers explained in a letter that she "'began writing detective stories in the hope of making enough money to live on' (Ltrs 4, 242)" (as qtd in Downing, *Writing Performances* 78).
Agatha Christie stated in an interview for *The Pall Mall Gazette* that "Sometimes people who like the poems that were published in various reviews and in 'The Bookman' reproach me. I tell them I have a sordid mind; there is no money in poetry and lots in criminals and their ways – provided you have a sense of humour!" ("The Pursuit of Crime", Jan 20, 1922, 11). See this interview further referenced in other chapters this thesis.

influence a community of readers as well as create communities. Thus their fiction then opened spaces and communities for women both within fiction and within their own cultural place of England between the two world wars. Christie and Sayers created representations of communities which both re-evaluated roles for women as well as increasing options of what these roles could be within and outside their fiction through engagement with the public and the expanding print and then broadcasting media. They managed this through both their writing and the representations of their books and themselves in the public/professional world. As Carla Kungl in *Creating the Fictional Female Detective* argues, the detective fiction of women authors is a "record of women's struggles to maintain their own sphere of influence while expanding what that sphere could contain" and further, "it is an example of the way women extended the scope of their authority, from a moral authority arising from the domestic sphere to a professional authority in the public sphere" (173).

1.4 Auto/Biography

This thesis is not a joint biography of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, yet the scope of its argument means that it must take into consideration their lives: private, public, and professional. Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers each experienced a personal traumatic event which influenced how they presented themselves to their public. There was a key difference, however, in how these events shaped Christie's and Sayers's lives. Agatha Christie's traumatic experience was very public: overwhelmed by grief at the death of her mother, and her marriage falling apart, she suffered a breakdown and disappeared for eleven days in a blaze of notoriety fueled by press speculations. Conversely, Dorothy L. Sayers kept secret the birth of her son (in January 1924 a few months after *Whose Body?* (November 1923) was published) after a brief affair, a secret which was only revealed after her death. These events become especially important given the cultural time period in which they occurred: Christie's divorce in 1928

happened only a few years after the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923,[34] while Sayers was frightened that she would lose her job and livelihood if the existence of her child became known (both events further discussed in Chapter 3). How they presented or hid these life experiences in order to gain a reading public, and how this helped them to become professional authors is reflected in their literature.

This is not to say, however, that this study focuses on these instances of these women's lives to take away from their professional and writing accomplishments. Nor it is simply entering into another conversation where these women's private lives are commented on or brought in to overshadow their work as a whole. Rather, the focus is on how the cultural and social context of these women's lives created a specific need for them to carefully curate their press, media, and public presence which would then create a community of readers who would know them both through their novels and their publicity in the newspapers. Understanding the motivations and how they used writing to make their living then allows for an informed assessment of their representations of spaces for female characters and communities within their fiction. Christie and Sayers provide new spaces for women both within and outside their novels. My study does not use either Sayers's or Christie's personal lives to make assumptions about them or the meaning of their works, but rather focuses on how the movement of their professional choices influenced how their work was presented, as well as how they included representations of female accomplishment into their fiction.[35]

There are a myriad of opportunities for examining the lives of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers separately, ranging from Christie's *An Autobiography*, biographies of both women,

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[34] See Worsley p. 167 for details of the divorce and how the Christies presented it in court.

[35] Martin Edwards states that some critics have arbitrarily assumed Sayers was a lesbian from her types of dress and actions (*Golden Age* 29). He also notes, writing about Christie and Sayers and other detective fiction authors of the interwar years that "Appearances are deceptive. When we look at pictures of Christie and Sayers today, we usually see the women in their later years: respectable, well-upholstered, grandmotherly. …How tempting to fall into the trap of dismissing them as strait-laced middle-class English people. Yet in private, they led extraordinary lives and endured disastrous marriages… [They] took secrets to the grave" (8).

correspondence, and their own presentation of themselves as authors in the British public press. Disseminating this information presents a few challenges, as my thesis is not using autobiography and biography in order to read their fiction. Rather I try to understand their life and choices which promoted their professionalism to in turn find examples of this professionalism in their fiction.

Many critics have fallen into the assumption that Agatha Christie was a conservative 'cozy' British writer from reading her *Autobiography* published in 1970, or just focusing analysis on one or two texts (discussed below).[36] Yet "[t]he large number of texts that needs discussing, in any comment about Christie's fiction," Merja Makinen declares, "prevents monolithic statements ever being completely accurate, for every claim there is always one text that could be used to argue the opposite" (*Agatha Christie* 65). She asserts that "it is now less possible for critics to argue that Christie's novels show a 'dislike of career women', because of one reference in the *Autobiography* written in her seventies" (*Agatha Christie* 1).

Unlike Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers did not write an autobiography. She worried that she would misrepresent her past self with her present writing. Crystal Downing in *Writing Performances* (2004) notes that Sayers was aware of the expectations which inhibit auto/biographical writing: "the problematics of…biographical and autobiographical endeavours…is not an innocent activity; our perceptions often perform according to pre-established scripts" (16). Sayers wrote that she did not "approve much of biographical details" and Downing claims that Sayers "anticipated what her biographers would later demonstrate: that historical details are subject to writing performances – performances that stage rather than reflect 'reality'" (16). Carolyn G. Heilbrun (also detective fiction

[36] In "Contemporary Cozy Mysteries, Agatha Christie and the 1990s" Marty Knepper notes that "Christie's novels create the illusion of coziness because the dark side generally reveals itself on the last few pages" (21). As she points out, "the end of a Christie mystery reveals not just the murderers but also the secrets and crimes of other characters. The end of *There Is a Tide* (1948) reveals not only poisoning but also perjury, embezzlement, gambling, drug-taking, violence, blackmailing, living a false identity to inherit an estate, spiritualism, suborning perjury, a possible faked death, eavesdropping, and hiding crimes" (21).

novelist Amanda Cross) in her article "Dorothy L. Sayers, Biography Between the Lines" quotes a letter of Sayers to her son wherein Sayers writes:

> People are always imagining that if they get hold of the writer himself and, so to speak, shake him long enough and hard enough, something exciting and illuminating will drop out of him. But it doesn't. What's due to come out has come out, in the only form in which it ever can come out. All one gets by shaking is the odd paper clip and crimpled carbons of his wastepaper basket…What we make is more important than what we are, particularly if making is our profession. (1)

While Sayers twice started autobiographies she never did complete them, abandoning "My Edwardian Childhood" after a month of writing thirty-six pages, and turning the other into a manuscript for a novel, *Cat o'Mary*, which was never published (Downing 16).

Even though Sayers did not leave an autobiography, her readers were interested in the life of this extraordinary woman. As Heilbrun comments, following up on Sayers's letter to her son, and regarding scholarly interest in Sayers's life, "But for women something exciting and illuminating may indeed drop out; the world is scarcely replete with models of female achievement" (1). The consequence of not leaving an autobiography, and having her estate discourage one, then enabled a range of unsatisfactory biographies: "the result was several American biographies, sound but incomplete, and one English one, unsound, unfair, and distressing" (Heilbrun 2). Heilbrun does not list the authors or titles. As Downing details, each biography focused attention on Sayers's son and speculated as to his father, as Sayers never officially recognized John Anthony as her own child. This fact was finally authorized to be revealed in Barbara Reynolds's biography, *Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul* (1993). According to Downing, the list of biographies "may explain why Sayers repudiated biographical criticism; with each new revelation she has been *reduced* to her sexual indiscretion rather than *expanded* to fill the multiple stages of her

subversive perceptivity" (emphases added 9).[37] This is not because biographers were unable to write meaningful biographies, but rather, Downing notes, "in the process, they often perform their own assumptions as they imbue biographical facts with meaning" (9).

Biographies of Agatha Christie often face the same problem of centering in on her 'indiscretion' and tend to emphasize the events of December 1926 when she disappeared: Gwen Robyns's *The Mystery of Agatha Christie* (1978) claims Christie disappeared purposely and Agatha's family refused to authorize the biography (Worsley 153).[38] Other biographies, however, present a much more empathetic and realistic story. Laura Thompson's *Agatha Christie: An English Mystery* was published in 2007. Janet Morgan wrote her excellent *Agatha Christie* (1984) upon request by Christie's daughter Rosalind and Morgan had the benefit of family letters, which Lucy Worsley in her recent *Agatha Christie: An Elusive Woman* (2022) sadly concludes were probably then destroyed (119). Regarding Christie's disappearance, Worsley proclaims that "[i]t's time to reveal what really happened that night" (127) and gives a detailed and fair account of the known facts to conclude that Christie was probably depressed and also briefly suffered from a period of 'fugue state' (135).

What we cannot escape, however, is the fact that both Christie and Sayers had private lives which must have surely influenced their professional ones. Thus I want to be clear that my use of their personal lives for my argument is not to 'drag up the past' or focus on their 'bitter sins' (as Martin Edwards

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[37] Downing comments that Sayers's contemporary and friend, C. S. Lewis, "has generated over 150 biographical and critical books" while meanwhile, "full-length studies of Sayers could be counted on one's fingers and toes". She goes on to state that there is "worse", quoting Catherine Kenny who claims that "'It is a great irony that a writer who repeatedly asserted the limitations of the biographical approach to literature has been the subject mainly of biographical studies'". Thus Downing declares, "Each new biography on Sayers signals the desire for a script that more 'accurately' stages the performance of the author's life", rather than focusing on the importance of her work. (*Writing Performances* 8-9)

[38] Unfortunately Robyns's biography is part of the collection of Agatha Christie's 'Collected Works' published through arrangement with The Bodley Head. It is the famous set with red binding and gold filigree which adorns the hard covers. If you look closely, what appears to be a representation of this set is in the new film, *See How They Run*, in the room of stage writer Mervyn Cocker-Norris.

entitles his chapter on Sayers's son (*Golden Age* 13)). Instead, my intention is to present how these women established their professional writing careers even amidst personal turmoil and how they presented themselves to their public. Though they interacted with their public they also jealously guarded their privacy; the brief reference Christie makes to her disappearance in her *Autobiography* includes her comment, "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" (353-354).[39] Though she had 'always hated notoriety' she had engaged with the press and its publicity before her disappearance, she was aware of the power of publicity for a new author (discussed in Chapter 3).

The public lives of Christie and Sayers show an awareness of the potential for newspapers and novels to create social communities which in turn they represent in their fiction. These fictional social embodied communities in turn can create imagined communities for their readers which open up new possibilities for professional, public, and private roles for women. Then I determine how they inserted these achievements for women within their novels. For as Heilbrun notes in reading/writing Sayers's biography, "we seek to know about women whose lives include risk and the desire for individual achievement, as well as love. We have learned, in short, to search the accounts of women for exemplary lives: we need examples of female endeavor" (2). The detective fiction of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers presents fictional communities which enable female achievements.

[39] It is worth noting that Christie also gave a follow-up interview to the *Daily Mail* about this disappearance before her divorce with Archie went to court. This interview often seems to be ignored (see Worsley 166-167).

1.5 An (Un)Suitable Job for a Literary Critic

Despite earlier declarations that the Golden Age detective fiction was more focused on plot, or was 'algebraic' in its construction and thus beneath the literary critics notice,[40] justification of the study of the detective fiction of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers has occurred, especially in the last few decades.[41] While both of these authors have always remained in print, and Agatha Christie especially has always retained 'best-seller' status, the benefits of examining their fiction had often been ignored with assumptions made about their literary talent, conservatism, or anti-feminism, because of the genre of their fiction.

As detective fiction authors, Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers were both writing in a specific and newly expanding and defined genre. Agatha Christie's books became known as her own brand, "an Agatha Christie",[42] and she never deviated much in her detective fiction writing from her

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[40] As Mary Anna Evans notes at the beginning of her chapter, "Reading Christie with a Feminist Lens": "Literary criticism came late to Agatha Christie. Little scholarship was done on her work for decades, although Edmund Wilson's famously devastating 1945 critique – 'Her writing is of a mawkishness and banality that seem to me literally impossible to read' – prefigured the decidedly half-hearted commentary of many critics to come (59). In 1966, Francis Wyndham equally famously called her mysteries 'animated algebra,' written to a formula that was 'a basic equation buried beneath a proliferation of irrelevances' (25). In 1975, John Leonard riffed on the mathematics theme, writing that her plots were 'elegant, as a balanced equation is elegant. Who complains about the x or any other quantity, in an equation?' (60-1). Soon after, Julian Symons dismissed her popularity as 'the comfort of the familiar' (1980: 29) and Robert Barnard wrote that '[t]he surprise at the end of a really good Christie" is "a childish ingenuity beneath serious consideration' (1980:44)". (85)

[41] Even using 'detective fiction' as a demarcation labels my study. Further reading can be found in *The Companion To Crime Fiction* (2010) edited by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley. This book dives into the history of the literary criticism of 'crime fiction'. Rzepka states in his Introduction: "If the term 'crime fiction' is a bit vague, 'detective fiction' is downright slippery" (2).

[42] Janet Morgan writes of Agatha Christie's books: "Popular middle-class taste was increasingly for the sort of work with which she was experimenting – novels with a simple shape, a small cast of characters, short chapters and no long, convoluted sentences, with an emphasis on the facts and mechanics of situations and considerable importance given to psychology. Agatha [Christie]'s thrillers and detective stories were stylistically unpretentious but intellectually interesting. She was not, and never became, a writer whose work could intimidate a nervous reader but nevertheless she made welcome demands on her public's attention and perceptiveness". (112)
Christie wrote of the proper length for a detective novel: "Of course, there is a right length for everything. I think myself that the *right* length for a detective story is 50,000 words. I know this is considered by publishers as too short. Possibly readers feel themselves cheated if they pay their money and only get 50,000 words – so 60,000 or 70,000 are more acceptable. If your books runs to more than that I think you will find that it would have been better if it had been shorter" (*An Autobiography* 341).

original writing style. She continued to publish detective fiction novels up until her death in 1976 and additionally published six other novels under the pseudonym Mary Westmacott (published between 1930 and 1956).[43] She also wrote mystery plays which she found extremely lucrative and fulfilling: the success of these gave her a second career which "established her as the most successful female playwright in history" (Bernthal, *Agatha Christie* 5). Conversely, Dorothy L. Sayers's detective fiction, though utilizing a flippant detective in the manner of P.G. Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster, had a more serious underlying aim which reflected her concern for providing education in her popular fiction, and her attempt at writing a 'serious' novel, or, "more a novel of manners instead of a pure crossword puzzle" (Sayers, "Gaudy Night" 76). Sayers eventually moved on from detective fiction (her final full-length novel was *Busman's Honeymoon* 1937), pursuing other writing interests which also included playwriting.[44] Her final years of writing were dedicated to theological considerations and translating Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Indeed, Sayers was often dismissed by literary critics for the entirety of her writing career because she did not, as

[43] Lucy Worsley dedicates a chapter of her book to these novels and this time period of Christie's life. She writes that the reason anyone would read these books now is for "what [they] reveal about the life and opinions of Agatha Christie" (254). She also notes that "the blurred line between fact and fiction in these novels is also a reminder that the autobiography itself is a compendium of a novelist's dramatized memories of people and places" (254). While these novels might be more convincing in what they reveal about Christie's thoughts, I am choosing not to include them in my study so that I can focus on the detective fiction of Christie and Sayers together. The study would become too broad if I included other fictional genres. Thus my rationale for not including these works or the plays of Christie and Sayers, even though I do include reviews or other types of their writing as commentary such as Christie's "Detective Writers in England", their letters, and various articles by Sayers.

[44] These plays included *The Zeal of Thy House,* and a radio play, *The Man Born to Be King*, which aired during WWII. A modern version of the life of Christ, this play brought about what Downing calls the "horror of fundamentalists for the sacrilegious language of her plays" (Downing Writing Performances, 8). Yet as Sayers herself noted about a review for *The Zeal of Thy House*, that this was part of a conviction "still lingering in many people's minds, that a detective plot cannot bear any relation to a universal theme" (87-88) and thus a detective fiction writer cannot write a play which explores any other universal or religious theme. She further states that she is "[C]onfirmed in this conclusion by the quaint reception given in the Press to my Canterbury play, *The Zeal of Thy House*. Even the kindliest critics feel it incongruous that a writer of detective stories should write a play about Christian dogma, and one of them goes as far as to say, 'Not by one line or phrase can we recognize the creator of…Lord Peter Wimsey.' Yet the theme of the play – the 'integrity of the work' overriding and redeeming personal weaknesses – is the theme of *Gaudy Night* view from a divine standpoint…But, *Mutatis mutandis*, novel and play deal with the same problem and offer the same solution, and it is only the 'detective' label on the one and the 'religious' label on the other that has put them into different critical pigeon-holes" ("Gaudy Night" 88).

Downing notes, "stage her writing performances according to the privileged scripts of her time" (*Writing Performances* 8). Thus Sayers "garnered… disdain from belletrists for her mystery novels, dismay from her fans when she dismissed detective fiction, horror from fundamentalists for the sacrilegious language of her plays, contempt from positivists for her Christian apologetics, and disgust from orthodox Dante scholars for her translation of *The Divine Comedy*" (*Writing Performances* 8).

Part of the reason that both Sayers and Christie "garner[ed]… disdain from belletrists for [their] mystery novels" was because they were writing detective fiction/popular fiction. This type of fiction was labeled middlebrow (discussed below) in the interwar years, while literary critics have, since the 1940s, argued that this genre fiction was both conservative and anti-feminist.

These assumptions began even as they were writing their fiction. W.H. Auden's 1948 article "The Guilty Vicarage" states that the "interest in the detective story is the dialectic of innocence and guilt" and each story has "five elements – the milieu, the victim, the murderer, the suspects, the detectives". The milieu must be a "Great Good Place" for the more "Eden-like" the more shocking the crime. The detective comes in and solves the crime, thus returning the milieu back to its original state of grace. Yet as Colón explains, for Auden the question which arises is "whether this final state is actually normal, or if it presents a problematic view of the world" (9). Detective fiction author and critic Julian Symons claims of the Golden Age, "these things", such as war, economic depression, strikes, and unemployment – "were ignored in almost all the detective stories of the Golden Age" (*Bloody Murder* 108). He states that "the fairy tale land of the Golden Age was one in which murder was committed over and over again without anybody getting hurt" (*Bloody Murder* 109).[45] This understanding of the 'Golden Age' of detective fiction

[45] In his Preface to *Agatha Christie: A Companion to the Mystery Fiction*, Bernthal writes that "There remains a certain cliché about Christie: the image of the vicarage tea party, abstract and artificial, removed from real life's grim realities. The story goes that, in Agatha Christie Land, a corpse is not real but a pretext for a puzzle. Two-dimensional characters pepper her pages, more concerned with the intricacies of a railway timetable than the horrors of murder. At the end of the book, order is restored, and all the characters have tea, in a blissful haze of faux-Edwardiana. This kind of view of Christie and her work was not helped by the kind of scholarship that existed at

has led many critics to claim that the genre itself and especially the detective fiction written between the two world wars was "unrelievedly conservative" (Rzepka, *Detective Fiction* 3). This was a sentiment voiced by Symons as well as hardboiled detective fiction author Raymond Chandler and one which has been often assumed since. Yet the very occurrence of a murder happening in this 'Eden-like' community, shows that these detective novels were able to represent an anxiety about the community they portrayed. Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers were (and sometimes are) seen to be conservative and anti-feminist authors who wrote within the confines of the popular 'middlebrow' detective fiction genre.[46] Symons even claimed that Christie was not likely to be read by "feminists" or "radicals" (Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie* 1).

The 1970s saw a rise of serious critical study of detective fiction.[47] Yet there was a hierarchy imposed within the genre itself: the hard-boiled era was seen as more radical than the Golden Age

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that time: generally light, deliberately so, and often not even bothering to engage with the texts but written in general terms, allusive and from memory" (1).

[46] In *Agatha Christie and the Guilty Pleasures of Poison*, Sylvia Pamboukian includes a footnote where she notes some critics still wonder about Christie's feminist contributions to the genre: "In her introductory essay, Julie H. Kim (2012) rejects the notion that Miss Marple or any Christie work has feminist potential akin to that of the 1980s, an era, she argues, freed from Christie's stagnating influence" (2). Kim's Introduction is from her edited collection, *Murdering Miss Marple: Essays in Gender and Sexuality in the New Golden Age of Women's Crime Fiction* (2012). It is necessary to state, however, that Evans in "Reading Christie with a Feminist Lens" writes of women's mystery fiction scholarship that "it is important to note that Christie's influence on literary scholarship extends beyond the study of her work, as it has influenced recent feminist crime fiction criticism that does not directly address her work at all" (93). She mentions Kim's book which "offers [Christie] as a foil to the writers featured, featuring Miss Marple in the book's title while asking whether Christie's death in 1976 'gave birth to a new generation of women writers freed at last from the influence of the long established mistress of classic mystery genre' (Kim 2012: 2)" (93).

[47] *British Murder Mysteries, 1880-1965: Facts and Fictions* (2022) opens:
"Over the last several decades, detective fiction has become a rich arena of inquiry for literary critics, generating a virtual industry of articles and books analyzing its engagement with modernism, its function as a form of middlebrow fiction, and its renegotiation of social, gender, and genre norms, to name only a few of the most recent themes explored" (1).
It is important to note however, that during the interwar years the authors of detective fiction and critics were writing about this increasingly popular phenomenon. I will discuss this throughout the thesis and especially in Chapter 1. See also Victoria Stewart "Defining Detective Fiction in Interwar Britain".
Heta Pyrhönen's essay "Criticism and Theory" "outlines how scholars have approached this genre as a mode of literature" (43).

period.[48] Even amongst the Golden Age authors a further gendered hierarchy was imposed with male authors firstly examined (see Watson and discussion in Chapter 2) before Sayers or Christie. J.C. Bernthal states that "Academic treatments of other Golden Age writers were justified on the grounds that there is more to their works than to Agatha Christie's" (*Queering* 5).[49] Bernthal, like many other critics who have returned to Christie, is of course influenced by Alison Light's 1991 *Forever England* where she examined several British women writers of various genres of the interwar period, labeling them 'conservative modernists' whose "reputation for superficiality was more a stereotype than a reality" (Bernthal, *Queering* 5). Light was one of the first feminist critics to challenge claims regarding the conservative and political nature of popular fiction genres – including detective fiction – positing instead that these assumptions are based on the "looming presence of literary modernism" in which critics were "content to work with a map in which what they call the popular and what they deem the high cultural are seen as poles apart" (ix-x). Light focuses on Christie (as well as du Maurier, Jan Struther, and Ivy Compton-Burnett) and argues against the notion that Christie (and, we can extrapolate, Sayers) is a "fictional reassurance for the Bourgeoisie", instead claiming that she offers a "feminisation of the [detective] genre, [a] modern recasting of ideas about the sexes" (64). Marty S. Knepper, also in 1991, offered a follow up to her 1983 article – "Agatha Christie—Feminist?" – noting that a closer analysis was needed of her fiction.[50] Since the early 90s, there have been several monographs on Christie, including Makinen's

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[48] There is still an assumption of hierarchy. See Betz's edited collection, *Reading the Cozy Mystery: Critical Essays on an Underappreciated Subgenre* (2021), for this hierarchical breakdown. See also the opening of Kathleen Gregory Klein's *Women Times Three*: Klein notes that the genre has its own hierarchies, and the designations of these – such as cozy, Golden Age, or hard boiled – often coincided with political moments such as women's movements and western acceptance of women's suffrage (4).

[49] Bernthal references Alison Light pp. 63-64

[50] In a footnote Bernthal states of Knepper's 1983 article, "Agatha Christie – Feminist", in *The Armchair Detective*, that "Knepper's somewhat polemical defence of women in Christie, including her insistence that the author should incontrovertibly be considered "a feminist", belongs to the pre-Light era of scholarship in which passages are generalized and cited from memory. Her subsequent work in the same field, specifically relating to Marple, exhibits a welcome turn to textual analysis" (*Queering* 154).

Agatha Christie (2006) and Bernthal's *Queering Agatha Christie* (2016). In 2023, *The Bloomsbury Companion to Agatha Christie* was published, compiling aspects of the notable criticism to date. There have also been other prominent feminist criticism of twentieth century women's middlebrow and genre writing in general (I focus on British authors here). These include Makinen's *Feminist Popular Fiction* (2001); Nicola Humble's *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel* (2001); Carla Kungl's *Creating the Fictional Female Detective* (2006); Melissa Schaub's *Middlebrow Feminism in Classic British Detective Fiction* (2013); and Megan Hoffman's *Gender and Representation in British Golden Age Crime Fiction* (2016).

Some of the above mentioned feminist studies include a consideration of Sayers, whose detective fiction had a larger feminist following before Christie's. As yet, however, there is not the same more recent compiling of Sayers criticism which Christie scholarship has received. Elizabeth A Trembley's 1995 article, "'Collaring the Other Fellow's Property': Feminism Reads Dorothy L. Sayers", provides background to early feminist critics of Sayers. As Trembley notes, criticism before 1970 focused on Sayers's Peter Wimsey and when attention turned to her Harriet Vane, "Critics with feminist leanings seem[ed] to feel that in her joining of Harriet Vane and Lord Peter Wimsey [in *Busman's Honeymoon*], Sayers betrayed the feminist design of the first three novels" (81). While feminist critics had celebrated Harriet Vane, her ultimate marriage to Peter felt like a betrayal and solidified the notion that women's interwar popular writing was conservative and "traditional in both content and form" ((Joannou "The Woman Writer in the 1930s", 7-8) see further discussion in Chapter 6).[51] Kathleen Gregory Klein's 1980 examination of Harriet ignores *Busman's Honeymoon* when Harriet is married (Trembley 81). Margot Peters and Agate Krouse claim that Harriet's marriage to Peter is a capitulation, a sentiment similar to that

[51] Conversely, Diana Wallace in "Revising the Marriage Plot", argues that "One of the most prolonged treatments of the marriage theme may be observed in the detective novels of Dorothy L. Sayers". She notes that "the six-year courtship of Lord Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane, from *Strong Poison* in 1930 to *Busman's Honeymoon* in 1937, can be read as a meditation on marriage and its possibilities for the educated woman, and as a plea for women to be able to continue the work they do best after marriage" (68).

of Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan in *The Lady Investigates* (1981). Further, Nina Auerbach argues that Harriet's role in *Busman's* is to simply satisfy Peter's emotional needs, and as Trembley notes, Craig and Cadogan state that "'Harriet's purpose in this book is to keep him cheerful and reassured' (188)" (Trembley 82). Trembley instead insists that feminist critics misunderstood Sayers's full representation of Harriet and posits that "the novels are androgynous, not feminist". She bases this reading on Carolyn Heilbrun's definition of the type of androgynous novel in *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* that allows characters to identify with both male and female characters,[52] in feminist novels one identifies with the female character (Trembley 96).

Part of the difficulty in discovering a feminist political orientation in the so-called formulaic detective plots (detective fiction as a conservative genre will be discussed below) arises because neither Sayers nor Christie would have labeled themselves as feminist, especially as it was a contested term in the interwar years.[53] Virginia Woolf responded to the various types of feminism during the interwar period, and in her controversial *Three Guineas* (1938) which linked the patriarchy with fascism (as she also had in *A Room of One's Own*), declared that "the word 'feminist' is destroyed: the air is cleared" and instead she wants to see "Men and women working together for the same cause" (155).[54] Similarly, and in the

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[52] See Chapter 5 this thesis where I discuss feminist community in *Gaudy Night*. Peter often makes what seem to the overt feminist statements.

[53] For discussion of the term feminism in the interwar years in relation to Christie and Sayers, see Laurel Young "Dorothy L. Sayers and the New Woman Detective Novel"; Susan Haack "After My Own Heart"; J. C. Bernthal *Queering Agatha Christie* (2016) pp. 123-124; Merja Makinen *Feminist Popular Fiction* (2001) and *Agatha Christie* (2006); Elizabeth A Trembley "'Collaring the Other Fellow's Property': Feminism Reads Dorothy L. Sayers" (1995) pp. 82-86.

[54] Trodd states that Woolf's *Three Guineas* was responding to two feminist questions of the interwar period: "how to mediate between the rival claims of equality and distinctiveness, and how to justify the centrality of feminism to national life" (6). Trodd outlines the divisions within the feminist movement in the interwar period, focusing attention to how it is portrayed in Olive Schreiner's *Woman and Labour* (1911), Ray Strachey's *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (1928), and Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938) (Trodd 1-7). She notes that this was "a period of intensive reassessment of women's situation, reassessments continuously revised in response to the suffrage movement, the two World Wars, and the Depression" (1). On Woolf's abolishing the word feminism, Trodd notes that "her controversial essay on the intimate links of patriarchy and fascism, *Three Guineas*, which appeared in 1938, the year of Munich, and proposed the abolition of the word 'feminist', was responding to the shifts and divisions in feminism in the period between the wars" (1-2).

same year, Sayers proclaims in "Are Women Human" that she does not want to 'identify herself as a feminist' as the time for the "old-fashioned sense of the word" feminist "had gone past" (106).[55] Sayers instead would call herself a humanist: by that she meant that she was interested in fighting for equality between both men and women; "a woman is just as much an ordinary human being as a man, with the same individual preferences, and with just as much right to the tastes and preferences of an individual" ("Are Women Human" 107). Laurel Young (2005), building upon Trembley, argues instead that Sayers was writing within the realm of second generation 'New Women' (39). Merja Makinen's *Agatha Christie: Investigating Femininity* (2006) recognizes the more explicit feminist implications of Sayers's writing, yet argues that they are apparent first in Christie:[56]

> In concentrating on Christie as a puzzle-plot writer, or only on Poirot and Miss Marple as detectives, the majority of critics seem to have overlooked her innovations from 1920 onwards in relation to detective genre or the challenges to femininities. While not discounting the gendered focus of [Sayers's] Vane trilogy [beginning with *Strong Poison* (1930)], and *Gaudy Nights* [*sic*]

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[55] Part of the dismissal of the word feminist also came from anxieties about what it meant between the lower and middle classes. Sayers writes in "The Human-Not-So-Human", a follow up for her "Are Women Human":

> There has never been any question but that the women of the poor should toil alongside their men. No angry, and no compassionate, voice has been raised to say that women should not break their back with harvest work, or soil their hands with blacking grates and peeling potatoes. The objection is only to work that is pleasant, exciting or profitable – the work that any human being might think it worth while to do. The boast, 'My wife doesn't need to soil her hands with work,' first became general when the commercial middle classes acquired the plutocratic and aristocratic notion that the keeping of an idle woman was a badge of superior social status. Man must work, and woman must exploit his labour. What else are they there for? And if the woman submits, she can be cursed for her exploitation; and if she rebels, she can be cursed for competing with the male: whatever she does will be wrong, and that is a great satisfaction. ("The Human-Not-So-Human" 119-120)

The questions of whether women can enter the work force or professional world do not surround the backbreaking work that women have always done, but rather whether or not women should be admitted into the professional spaces which have been seen to be kept for middle-class and upper-middle-class men.

[56] Merja Makinen's introduction to *Agatha Christie* is an excellent resource for going through the Christie scholarship in its relation to gender. Makinen notes that in the 90s and beyond anti-feminist assumptions start to be questioned, albeit "always in dialogue with [Christie's] conservatism" (15). She goes on to state that "Feminist readings were so large a part of the decade's literary analysis that they necessarily became a significant part of Christie scholarship and the nineties feminist pieces tend to question the earlier dismissals of Kaplan and Craig and Cadogan" (15).

> in particular, the claim for shifting Golden Age genre traits and for innovation needs to be given not to Sayers, but to Christie, writing some ten years earlier. (66)[57]

Makinen opens *Agatha Christie* by stating that her intention is to 'find a way' of arguing that "Christie was writing during a period of intense gender renegotiation in relation to the modern world and that a political conservatism did not necessarily rule out a questioning and even subversive attitude to cultural gender expectations" (1). As noted above, Makinen focuses attention on the whole of Christie's full-length detective fiction works, rather than making assumptions of her writing based on one or two texts (1).

Mary Anna Evans's "Reading Christie with a Feminist Lens" (2023) is the most recent overview of feminist criticism on Christie (at the time of this writing) and offers the background to how feminist critics have come to be able to use the word feminist, itself what Gill Plain calls an "unstable term" whose "categories are evolving" (47), towards the fiction of Christie, and by extension therefore, Sayers. Beginning with criticism which focused on the puzzle-aspect of Christie's work as early at 1945, Evans notes that much of the scholarship on Christie was by men. She declares that "Perhaps it is not coincidental that the rise of serious interest in Christie's work in the 1980s was coincident with landmark works of feminist criticism like Elaine Showalters' *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), and bell hooks's *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984)" (87). She highlights Marty S. Knepper, Gill Plain, Merja Makinen, and Susan Rowland as critics who puzzle out how to use the word feminist to apply to such texts by authors who would not declare themselves one. Knepper "laid out the central problem in evaluating an author as feminist or anti-

[57] Makinen provides examples of Christie's early heroines, such as Anne from *The Man in the Brown Suit* (1924), Tuppence Beresford in *The Secret Adversary* (1922), and even stogy Captain Hastings's (the 'Watson' to Christie's Poirot) eventual wife in *The Murder on the Links* (1923). She further notes heroines and feminist implications in such novels as *The Sittaford Mystery* (1931), *Why Didn't They Ask Evans* (1934), *Murder is Easy* (1939), and then *The Pale Horse* (1961).

feminist, which is that the valuation is subjective" (Evans 88). While Knepper opens her article "Agatha Christie—Feminist" by stating that "To a greater or lesser degree, detective fiction writers Dorothy L. Sayers, Josephine Tey, P.D. James, Amanda Cross, and Anna Katherine Green can be considered feminist writers", she then asks, "[b]ut what about…Agatha Christie?". Knepper declares her definition of a feminist author, (which Evans also cites in full), as:

> a writer, female or male, who shows, as a norm and not as freaks, women capable of intelligence, moral responsibility, competence, and independent action; who presents women as central characters, as the heroes, not just as 'the other sex' (in other words, as the wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, lovers, and servants of men); who reveals the economic, social, political and psychological problems women face as part of a patriarchal society; who explores female consciousness and female perceptions of the world; who creates women who have psychological complexity and transcend the sexist stereotypes that are as old as Eve and as limited as the loves of most fictional spinster schoolmarms.[58]

Building upon this definition, then, Evans also references Rowland, who "continu[ed] Knepper's questioning of the definition of a feminist author, and also continu[ed] the work of the other scholars mentioned above in distinguishing an author's personal politics from their work's feminist potential" (Evans 90). Thus Rowland notes (in a chapter entitled "Feminism is Criminal"), that "[a] writer need not call herself a feminist nor be female for her writing to be concerned with 'feminist' questions of power, gender and the social roles of women" (*From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendall* 157; also qtd in Evans

[58] "In contrast", Knepper declares, "the anti-feminist writer is a man or woman who depicts women as naturally inferior to men in areas such as intelligence, morality, assertiveness, and self-control; who dismisses strong women as ridiculous or evil anomalies of nature who presents only males as heroes and only a male view of the world; who characterizes women exclusively in terms of their relationships to men and in narrowly stereotyped ways; who is concerned not so much with reality (women as victims of sexist society) but with fantasy (men as 'victims' of powerful, predatory women)" ("Agatha Christie – Feminist").

90).[59] Therefore Evans defines her own position as a critic interested in exploring feminist themes in the works of Agatha Christie by stating that "My position is that writers can and do explore feminist issues without considering themselves to be feminists and that Christie did so throughout her career. Thus, I define a text to have 'feminist potential' when it explores – whether overtly, covertly, intentionally, or unintentionally – feminist questions of power, gender, and the social roles of women" (95).

Thus although as critics we can identify that these texts have feminist potential, in addition to the fact that neither Christie nor Sayers would have called themselves feminist, they were writing in a genre which even by the 1940s – according to Raymond Chandler – was seen as conservative.[60] Detective fiction, developing from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth, became "stunningly popular", yet was mostly male-dominated and women had to "establish their presence in this new market" (Kungl 7). This often meant seemingly complying with generic formulas, or concluding with a 'happily ever after', yet Kungl writes that this is of "lesser importance" than these authors' "forceful act of construction" of their plots (6):

> Christie and Sayers were able to comment on the genre itself, self-consciously playing with its formulas, parodying its conventions, and analysing its structure, nature and codes. Through writing detective metafiction, "fiction that includes within itself commentary on its own narrative

[59] Evans notes that "This is an essential point in viewing Christie's work through a feminist lens, as she makes well-known statements in her autobiography to the effect that women had been foolish to begin earning their own livings, rather than seeking to retain a system – never in effect for all women – in which a husband financially supported a wife who 'accepted as her destiny his place in the world and his way of life" (Christie [1977] 2011: 132). However, it should be noted that, despite arguments that she was not a feminist based on statement like this one, her statement that women's lot in life was preferable when they were supported by their husbands should be weighed against the fact that she herself worked well into her eighties, long after it was financially necessary for her to do so" ("Reading Christie" 90).

[60] Symons declares that "It is safe to say that almost all of the British writers in the twenties and thirties, and most of the American, were unquestionably Right-wing" (*Bloody Murder* 109). Commenting upon this exact statement, Edwards states that "even the distinguished historian of the genre, Julian Symons, who should have known better, thought it 'safe to say…'" (*Golden Age* 68). Edwards writes that "a tediously repetitive complaint about Sayers and other Golden Age novelists is that their books were dominated by 'snobbery with violence'. This is a neat phrase, but a lazy criticism" (*Golden Age* 68).

> conventions" (Greene, *Changing* 1), they established themselves as innovators within the genre and were able to change the path that detective fiction would take. (17)

Or, as Todorov suggests, "One might say that every great book establishes the existence of two genres, the reality of two norms; that of the genre it transgresses, which dominated the preceding literature, and that of the genre it creates" (43). Yet the generic conventions which Christie and Sayers experimented with at first ensured that they were labeled conservative: first by some contemporaries and then by feminist critics of the detective fiction genre in the 1980s (who evaluated feminist hard-boiled fiction which birthed the 'female dick' as exemplified by female detectives written by authors such as Sara Paretsky, Patricia Cornwall and Sue Grafton (see Linda Mizejewski *Hardboiled and High Heeled*)).[61] The difficulty of disputing this 'conservatism', as Merja Makinen writes in *Feminist Popular Fiction* (2001), lies in debate between theorists and genre historians. She questions the assumption of whether the genres often written by women, such as detective fiction or romance, were "inherently conservative format[s]" (*Feminist Popular Fiction* 1). Giving a concise history of feminist criticism of detective fiction up to the end of the twentieth century, Makinen posits that Kathleen Gregory Klein, in *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre* (1988), has a "conspiracy theory" of popular culture which "prevents her theorising detective fiction as potentially transformable": as all popular genres are inherently conservative there can be no true feminist writing within them (Makinen 4).[62]

The popular fiction writing accomplished in the interwar period by women authors was often assumed to be conservative or middlebrow because of its interaction and reliance on assumed generic

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[61] According to Mizejewski, serious women investigators appeared in the early 70s, but fans of the genre insist that 1982, with Grafton and Paretsky's novels, is the year to note as the turning point for feminist detectives. These heroines were "hard-working women with domestic and financial problems. They were loners, wise about taking care of themselves, skilled with a gun and ready to use it if necessary" (Mizejewski 17).

[62] This is not to call out Kathleen Gregory Klein. She was doing important feminist work in the eighties and it must be noted that her more recent work has nuanced her claims in *The Woman Detective*. It is helpful to include these ideas however as it shows just how much criticism has shaped thinking and further grown in the past decades.

formulas and genre conventions (Schaub 11). As Melissa Schaub explains in *Middlebrow Feminism in Classic British Detective Fiction* (2013):

> Conservative and feminized are the same positions detective fiction scholars assign Golden Age authors in relation to the rest of the genre. The two terms are seen to go hand in hand; that is, a literature that is feminine must be conservative. The equation of the two terms, I believe, is an artifact of the long dominance of high literary modernism, with its almost violent insistence on the masculinity of avant-garde expression as alienated from the mainstream of cultural life. (11)

Yet recent critics such as Maurizio Ascari in *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction* (2007) have presented the case for similarities between detective fiction texts and modernism. Ascari argues that in defining the genre of detective fiction, critics emphasize genre conventions instead of recognizing similar modernist techniques and experimentations which were employed by both modernist writers and detective fiction authors alike.[63] He claims that modernist works and detective fiction are similar with both of them having an "emphasis on technique and on the rendering of time" (170). As Victoria Stewart has convincingly argued in "Defining Detective Fiction in Interwar Britain", the detective fiction genre itself was discussed and argued about in the same way as modernist texts were. She posits that "Both kinds of writing have been seen as a response to the First World War," noting that "modernism attempt[ed] to depict a new understanding of fragmented subjectivity in the war's aftermath and reject[ed] previous literary methods as inadequate to this task" (102). Moving away from a literary realism, "Modernism's stylistic

[63] Ascari states that "While impressionist and modernist writers – ranging from James and Ford to Mansfield, Woolf and Joyce – were experimenting with narrative techniques, detective novelist were working in the same direction, as is shown by Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926)" (171). Further, he asserts that with the trick Christie played on her readers with her murderer committing a second crime in his dissembling of the narrative, she draws attention to the role of the writer or author in creating texts. Dr. Sheppard he notes, "may be ashamed of his failure as a murderer but he actually calls the readers' attention to the passages where he deliberately misled them, commenting: 'I am rather pleased with myself as a writer'" (172). Ascari claims that "Christie's deft use of the point of view in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* highlights the occasionally subversive quality of [what he calls] her fundamentally conservative novels" (172).

inventiveness and often deliberate obscurity meant that it was deemed, at its inception, to be elitist" (102), while "detective fiction, especially of the "Golden Age" variety, is condemned as conservative and resistant to change" (103).

Yet, the malleability of the genre of detective fiction allowed for a wide range of writers as well as readers. For example, Cecil Day Lewis, poet Laureate from 1968-1972, also wrote detective fiction under the pseudonym Nicholas Blake. Detective fiction authors ranged from socialists such as G.D.H. and Margaret Cole, and Christopher Caudwell, liberal intelligentsia such as Romilly and Dorelia John, and then so-called conservatives G.K. Chesterton and Dorothy L. Sayers (Light 65). The very fact that authors experimenting with modernist ideas and techniques as outlined above (and seen to be exemplified in the writing of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and T.S. Eliot) also were participating in defining and writing in the detective fiction genre opens the discussion as to the importance of detective fiction for examination as well as effectively dismissing the notion that this genre writing is necessarily conservative or feminised. Indeed, such range of writers also offered opportunity for a wide range of readers, being one of the few genres whose readers encompassed all classes: as such "detective fiction in particular was often thought of during the modernist period, as during our own, as a special case between middlebrow and highbrow" (Schaub 12).

1.6 The Middlebrow

The 'middlebrow' was often a pejorative label attributed to genre fiction, popular fiction, and fiction written by women. Christie and Sayers, as women detective fiction authors, were writing in a genre which was also often assumed to be middlebrow although, as Melissa Schaub notes about discussions of detective fiction in the interwar period, "[w]hether detective fiction should be included in the category of middlebrow is slightly less clear. Detective fiction was certainly popular and bestselling" (13). The term middlebrow came into public discourse in the interwar years and was (and is) often described in contrast

to ‘highbrow’ or ‘lowbrow’, or by way of classifying an item or lifestyle. Rebecca Mills notes that for critics of the middlebrow, “[t]he terms ‘popular’ and ‘middlebrow’ are considered by some scholars to be overlapping, if not identical, categories – the ‘middlebrow’ inherently suggests a broad appeal, or popularity, as opposed to the selective appeal of the highbrow” (“The Middlebrow Woman Detective Author” 51).[64]

Middlebrow, in the context of fiction and literature, was a demarcation which separated it from Modernist literature or from ‘highbrow’ literature.[65] The discussion surrounding these terms was deemed the ‘Battle of the Brows’ and occurred between the 1920s-60s. Often this ‘battle’ was conducted via newspapers where the terms of highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow additionally were used as an advertising tool and ways of labeling a work of literature to signal to readers what they would enjoy. These terms were publicly debated in the newspapers and then on the radio with the beginning of the BBC and its public broadcasting.

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[64] See Mills’s chapter “The Middlebrow Woman Detective Author” for an overview of middlebrow definitions and scholarship and how they apply both to Christie’s texts and criticism. She concludes her chapter by noting that: [T]his chapter has fleetingly offered an insight into the opportunities afforded by close-reading and contextualization. The middlebrow as a category, however, remains porous. This fluctuation and recategorization does not only depend on contemporary framings of the text by publicists and reviewer and reader responses; in retrospect, authors, particularly women and genre fiction writers between the wars, slip in and out of this midway point, even as their relationship with the modernist avant-garde, and the popular lowbrow, is reevaluated and renegotiated by scholars. This work is by no means finished. (64)

[65] In *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* Humble likewise expounds upon the dominance of the literary modernism which in turn necessitated the label of middlebrow. Humble claims that the shift from poetry as the space for literary experimentation and debate of the nineteenth century shifted with Henry James’s influence and the “coming of modernism concentrated the attention of the avant-garde on the novel” (11). Humble (like Schaub and Makinen) also comments on her debt to Alison Light. Bernthal states that since Humble’s 2001 book “the rise of ‘middlebrow studies’ has meant that Christie, the best selling popular novelist of the twentieth century, has been under constant discussion” (*Queering Agatha Christie* 5).

In the past few decades feminist critics have done much to bring female and popular writers more into critical examination and to remove the assumptions surrounding modernist masculine canonical importance. Yet Christie and Sayers are often further removed from this bringing back because of the very genre of detective fiction in which they were writing as I noted above. As Downing explains in *Writing Performances*, “Academic contempt for these types of writing might explain why the three volume *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* relegates Sayers to single sentences only twice in twelve hundred pages” (9).

The terms highbrow and lowbrow came about in the late nineteenth century and stemmed from racial prejudices; the term 'middlebrow' was newer and usually identified as coming into use in the 1920s: a word was needed to delineate the space between the other two brows.[66] Erica Brown and Mary Grover note in the introduction to their critical anthology *Middlebrow Literary Cultures* (2012) that 'middlebrow' "is the product of powerful anxieties about cultural authority and processes of cultural transmission" (1).[67] Melba Cuddy-Keane sees the beginning of the BBC in 1922 as intensifying the differences of highbrow and lowbrow with public broadcasting: "highbrow pleasures came to be protested as the imposition of the interests of a dominant minority upon the general public" (18). A *Punch* column from 1925 is commonly referred to as the first instance of serious circulation of the term middlebrow.[68] The column states that "the BBC claim to have discovered a new type, the 'middlebrow'. It consists of people who are hoping that someday they will get used to the stuff they ought to like" (as qtd in Brown and Grover 4; Cuddy-Keane 18-19, Driscoll 7).

The 'Battle of the Brows' was shaped by these literary reviews, articles, interviews, and opinions. Various periodicals, publications, and newspapers entered into battle, with writers and editors replying

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[66] Most critics and their discussions surrounding the historical legacy of the 'brows', including Joan Shelley Rubin's in *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (1992), Melba Cuddy-Keane's in *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (2003), and Beth Driscoll's in *The New Literary Middlebrow* (2014), acknowledge that the use of this 'brow' language originally stemmed from the now-discredited pseudoscience of phrenology: with racial connotations, phrenology attributed intellect to skull shape (Cuddy-Keane 16, Driscoll 5; Rubin xii). Rubin notes that this 'brow language' however, was "[t]ransformed into a description of intellectual caliber, 'highbrow' was, in the 1880s, already synonymous with 'refined'; twenty years later, 'lowbrow' came to denote a lack of cultivation" (xii). As Driscoll writes, this brow language "continues to influence the way we think about literary culture" (5).

[67] Brown and Grover write in the introduction to their critical anthology that they want "to demonstrate that the middlebrow *matters*" (original emphasis 1). That it does matter is clear; the debate and discussion surrounding the middlebrow highlights that the middlebrow focuses on public readership (with texts that are often devoted to a female public), contributes to public moral guidance and systems, and has an adherence to traditional narrative styles, in addition to how the publication, advertisement, and the influence of profit on the middlebrow books were sold to an expanding reading public. As Brown and Grover declare, "[n]umerous and diverse projects demonstrate the ways in which readings communities and cultural classifications have been shaped by publishing history, marketing and specific national contexts" (17).

[68] Brown and Grover give the social context for the importance of this word appearing in *Punch*; "Traditionally [*Punch*] satirized both the pretentious (the aesthete in the late nineteenth century, the highbrow in the 1920s) and the less educated" (4).

and conversing with each other through various medias. So-called 'highbrow' Virginia Woolf's letter "Middlebrow" is often cited as the definition of middlebrow, which she describes as not a highbrow or lowbrow, the middlebrow is rather "betwixt and between", a busybody who copies the highbrows and attempts to tell the lowbrows how to live (198, 199). She concludes by adding that if anyone dared to call her one she would rise up with her pen and "stab him, dead" (203). This letter was never published in her lifetime however; it was only after her death that her husband published it in a collection of essays entitled *Death of the Moth and Other Essays*.

Interestingly, as Heilbrun comments, perhaps Woolf was protesting too much in her own letter in trying to align herself with the highbrow when some critics did not see her as one. Heilbrun writes that while Virginia Woolf and Sayers "had little enough in common", they both "shared the dubious honor of being chosen by Q.D. and F.R. Leavis for passionate attack" (10).[69] The Leavises, along with Woolf, were concerned with the influence of popular culture on the habits of the reading public. Downing calls Q.D. and F.R. Leavis 'disciples' of Cambridge don I.A. Richards, who was the 'Solomon' of literary critics who believed that they needed to protect the 'temple' of literature: the Newbold Report on teaching in 1921 "sounded a religious call" Downing writes, claiming that "literature is not just a subject for academic study, but one of the chief temples of the human spirit, in which all should worship" (*Writing Performances* 9). The Leavises "railed against the mind-numbing power of advertising, bestsellers, and radio broadcasting – three stages upon which Sayers excelled" (Downing, *Writing Performances* 9).

Dorothy L. Sayers brings herself into the Battle of the Brows through her various articles and indeed, some of her novels themselves, and especially in her juxtaposition between the works of Harriet

[69] Alongside Virginia Wolf as critics of the middlebrow were husband and wife F.R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis. The Leavises were concerned with mass-production and mass-culture and were both educated at Cambridge in the 1920s. Their journal *Scrutiny*, first appearing in May 1932, was intended to be the written declarations of the "armed and conscious minority" which was resisting the "apparently endless erosion of minority culture" (Deane 174).

Vane and Philip Boyes.[70] She is assertive about her discussion of this battle in her fiction. Indeed, this assertiveness comes to mark Sayers's books. While Christie presents assumptions of equality, politics, and female participation in society for her readers without lengthy conversations surrounding these ideas, Sayers uses her fiction to argue her way through philosophical discussions. Sayers was concerned about the role of popular culture in educating those whose work did not leave them time after their work day to study (perhaps justifying, ironically, Woolf's claim about middlebrow authors telling so-called lowbrows how to live).[71] Mo Moulton, in *The Mutual Admiration Society* (2019), includes an early 1920s letter exchange between Sayers and her friend Muriel 'Jim' Jaeger, wherein Sayers writes that there was a needed "link between mass democracy and education" (84). Sayers and Jaeger wrote an article about the fictional detective Sexton Blake, who was popular in the interwar years, his adventures and exploits portrayed in comics and pulp fiction. They compared the Blake series to the Robin Hood Ballads and old romance cycles, as well as likening him to a Christ-hero figure, analyses which proved that the Blake series were in effect their own period's folk stories.[72] Moulton writes that their work points to a contemplation of breaking the division between art with a capital A and what was seen as 'trashy'

[70] It should be additionally mentioned that Rebecca Mills posits that the relationship between Miss Marple and her nephew Raymond West, the highbrow writer, "is a mini 'Battle of the Brows'" ("The Middlebrow Woman Detective Author" 64).

[71] Auden's "The Guilty Vicarage" claims that the detective fiction genre creates a sense "phantasy" for the reader and takes them back to this 'Garden of Eden' and state of innocence without actually having to contend with the problems in their own life ("The Guilty Vicarage"; Colón 9). Colón writes that Sayers in *Mind of the Maker* (1941) was similarly apprehensive about the genre of detective fiction for this very reason and worried that readers would simply, when finished the story, "sit back in our chairs and cease thinking" (as qtd in Colón, 9). Sayers was concerned with the role that popular culture and literature could play in the education of a mass public (Moulton 84), and additionally, as Colón states, always "recognized the potential for detective fiction to be more than escapism" (10).

[72] Later, in her "Introduction" to the *Omnibus of Crime*, Sayers would reference Sexton Blake again, which was written in the "Holmes tradition, adapted for the reading of the board-school boy and crossed with the Buffalo Bill adventure type...the quality of writing and the detective methods employed vary considerably from one author to another. The best specimens display extreme ingenuity, and an immense vigour and fertility in plot and incident". She states that "[t]he really interesting point about them is that they present the nearest modern approach to a national folk-lore, conceived as the centre for a cycle of loosely connected romances in the Arthurian manner. Their significance in popular literature and education would richly repay scientific investigation" (16).

literature (84). This link, Moulton states, Sayers offers through making "sociology and economics, as well as ethics, accessible to the ordinary person through clear writing and popular culture" (84).

Thus in Sayers's 1930 *Strong Poison*, Lord Peter Wimsey declares that mystery stories are "the purest literature we have" (165) as a defense for detective fiction author Harriet Vane who is on trial for the murder of her ex-lover, highbrow writer Philip Boyes. Harriet Vane could not have committed murder for the moral reason that she writes detective fiction even though the judge, newspapers, and many of the jury are convinced she has because she has transgressed social codes in living with a man and then refusing to marry him when he 'deigns' to offer it.[73] The reader is not to have sympathy for Boyes and he aptly though quite negatively exemplifies the very ideals of the highbrow which Woolf had outlined in her own "Middlebrow" letter. Boyes is shown to think that as he is an artist it is incumbent upon others to support him for the work that he is doing. Harriet indeed pays for most of their living expenses even while Boyes looked down upon the fiction that she was writing (see discussion in Chapter 2). His life is an example of the instances that Woolf gives of all the life failures of the highbrows – they cannot be expected to be able to support themselves, in fact, they cannot and make a mess of life (Woolf, "Middlebrow" 197). Humble writes that "Middlebrow fiction laid claim to the highbrow by assuming an easy familiarity with its key texts and attitudes, while simultaneously caricaturing intellectuals as self-indulgent and naïve" (29). Though Woolf's letter was originally written in 1925, it was not published until 1942, while *Strong Poison* was published in 1930. The sentiments and discussion of highbrow writing, however, are similar, and reflect the decade they were both written in.

Thus interwar genre classifications and anxieties help to contribute to the dismissal of the detective fiction of Christie and Sayers. Yet in Sayers's short 1936 essay *Aristotle on Detective Fiction*,

[73] In my article "Bending the Genre" in *Clues* (see Bibliography) I argue that Sayers subverts the notion that simply because Harriet breaks social convention by living with a man outside of marriage does not mean that she committed murder – an assumption made by the judge, newspapers, and several of the jury.

she humorously argues for an affinity between detective fiction and ancient Greek tragedies, linking the hitherto "middlebrow" genre to the classical tradition and making a place for detective fiction within literary and cultural studies. Aristotle critiqued Greek tragedies, she wittily argues, simply because they were "the most readily available, widespread and democratic form of popular entertainment" (167). Therefore, Sayers claims, it is necessary to critique and study popular entertainment and popular culture, since they provide a narrative of change and understanding of the time they were written for us to contemplate. *Aristotle on Detective Fiction* was written towards the end of Sayers's career as a detective fiction author, she was working on her last full detective fiction novel *Busman's Honeymoon* which first was a stage play produced in 1936 and then became a novel published in 1937 and she would only write a few more short detective fiction stories afterwards. While I further discuss her reasons for writing detective fiction in Chapters 5 and 6 as well as her additional anxieties about writing a novel that "really matters" ("Gaudy Night"), her article can be seen as a consideration of her career as well as a reflection of the cultural anxieties discussed in newspapers and by literary critics as I introduced above and will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

The Battle of the Brows came about from an anxiety concerning the larger classes of people who would be influenced by the rapid rise of the popular press as well as the rise of popular fiction. The anxiety was centered around "the targeting of particular audiences" (Trodd 32):[74] women, lower classes, and a greater mass of people who would then impact cultural change, politics, and societal shifts, once mostly influenced by those in power. The Leavises were especially concerned that whereas culture had begun at the 'top of the house down to the lowest', now the reading habits of the working classes were influencing those in the upper and upper-middle classes (see Chapters 2 and 3).[75] Detective fiction authors

[74] Trodd writes that "although the unified Victorian period [of journals and newspapers] was largely a myth, a powerful regret for its supposed loss is pervasive in the early twentieth century" (32).
[75] Thank you to Victoria Lamont who drew my attention to the fact that class anxiety in this context of interwar Britain can overlap with racial anxiety as well.

were presenting their work in a specific social and cultural context which needs to be understood in order to examine these authors' subversions or uses of these contexts.

1.7 Conclusion and Chapter Overviews

As Charles J. Rzepka argues in *Detective Fiction* (2005), "the tendency of the detective fiction genre over the long run has been toward ever greater self-criticism, inclusiveness, and breadth of appeal" (3). Noting the genre's interaction with a cultural appeal, as well as a culture's impact on the types of detective fiction which come from it, Rzepka asserts that "Culture is propagated in and by individual responses to the prevailing customs, *modes of communication*, *material artefacts*, and bodily displays (gesture, dress, ornament) by which its codes are expressed" (emphasis added, *Detective Fiction* 3). Philosopher Louis Althusser claims that no person living in a society with these codes is free from what he calls 'interpellation'. Rzepka instead argues that what notable works of detective fiction "demonstrate is that such processes [as Louis Althusser's 'interpellation'] can never be total and are often far from it", clarifying that these processes of "'interpellation' (socialization, enculturation, indoctrination)" are not able to "fully control the idiosyncratic process at work in any particular individual's response to what Mill and others of his generation termed 'the spirit of the age'" (3). Therefore, he posits:

> The most interesting and lasting works of detective fiction … do not simply reproduce the values of their cultures or the inherited formulas, clichés, and truisms of the best-sellers that preceded them, but pursue the individual writer's unique, often critical vision of what the Gothic crime writer William Godwin called 'Things as They Are'. (3)

He further clarifies:

> This may sound like an easy thing to do, until the writer realizes that no one will pay much attention to, let alone money for, his or her critical vision of 'Things as They Are' unless that

> vision is informed by the literary tradition that has attracted readers and shaped their expectations over the course of many years, perhaps centuries. (3-4).

Agatha Christie, despite having died over 50 years ago, is still one of the top-selling mystery novelists in the world, Bernthal calls her "more than a popular author" instead stating she is an "institution" (*Agatha Christie* 1). Her novels have been translated into over 70 languages and her books sales come in just under those of Shakespeare's and the Bible (Bernthal, *Agatha Christie* 1). While Dorothy L. Sayers's detective fiction has been less popular overall than Christie's, in the interwar years she was one of the top selling detective fiction novelists, and her detective novels have never been out of print.[76] Eric Sandberg emphasises that her work, especially the novels with Peter Wimsey, are "touchstones of Golden Age detective fiction" (*Dorothy L. Sayers* 1). The lasting effect of these novels, as well as their cultural value when first published argues that Christie and Sayers did not just "simply reproduce the values of their culture", nor did they write in "inherited formulas".

Rzepka's discussion of culture being 'propagated by modes of communication and material artefacts' reflects my use of Benedict Anderson's theory – when he asks how cultural artefacts such as the newspaper and the novel can produce "such profound emotional legacy" (4) – with that of the modes of communication exemplified by the way in which detective fiction became increasingly popular in interwar Britain. This popularity in part came from advertising in the popular press and an author's interaction with the new celebrity culture, as well as the increasing market for popular fiction (novels). Detective fiction, though often seen as conforming to certain cultural views, and while making use of such cultural artefacts as the newspaper, both in order to be published and then commenting on them in the novels themselves, perhaps could be seen as further exemplifying such 'interpellations'. I argue

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[76] Although this is not the case for some of her other theoretical works and theological discussions which are much harder to find although there is renewed scholarly interest in her writing oeuvre as a whole (see Christine A. Colón and Crystal Downing, for example, while biographers try to incorporate her critical vision into their representation of her life as in Barbara Reynolds's *Her Life and Soul*)

instead that Christie and Sayers were aware of these cultural artefacts and specifically worked to subvert such interpellations (subvert their cultural significance) by exposing them in their texts, doing so within the detective fiction genre which is ideally suited for this type of commentary as murder exposes the anxieties of these communities built upon such cultural artefacts. They make clear to readers the way in which social assumptions can harm or even tear apart their own society. Instead they offer new ways of imagining what these communities could look like, such as the academic community of Oxford letting in women as Sayers explores in *Gaudy Night*.

In order to subvert social expectations and offer suggestions for social change, the detective fiction of Christie and Sayers portrays a middle-class culture of stifling albeit changing gender norms that is underwritten by societal lies which obfuscate and kill. This genre exploits, relies on, and finally reveals the culture of lies. Sayers writes in *Aristotle on Detective Fiction*, that Aristotle's "Paralogism— the art of the false syllogism" (174) is key to the art of writing detective fiction. After elaborating upon this syllogism, she concludes: "There you are, then; there is your recipe for detective fiction: the Art of Framing Lies … —but mark! of framing lies in the right way" (174). Thus the importance of the 'big reveal' at the end of the detective story. Framing lies in the right way allows the detective fiction author to fool the reader and produce a work of fiction where the identity of the murderer, once the shock of their reveal is over, makes sense to the reader; as Sayers writes: "Even though at the end we are to feel surprise on discovering the identity of the criminal, we ought not to feel incredulity; we should rather be able to say to ourselves: 'Yes, I can see now that from the beginning this man had it in him to commit murder, had I only had the wits to interpret the indications furnished by the author'" (*Aristotle on Detective Fiction* 178). Alongside determining who the murderer was, the discerning reader can also by extension, I argue, say 'Yes, I can see now that from the beginning Sayers or Christie was writing about matters other than murder, do I have the wits to interpret what she is indicating in her stories?' That is, that they are also creating a cultural movement, offering for their readers a way of imagining community which can be

obtained through a "delicate internal and external balance of freedom, equality, and the means of livelihood" for all (Sayers, *Begin Here* 33).

These 'matters other than murder' are also suggested by Harriet in *Gaudy Night*, when she stated that 'something definite is done' by the authors of detective fiction (where murder is a symptom of community in crisis), prompting her reading audience to ask what *was* done. I argue that Christie and Sayers were creating specific communities within their fiction, utilizing their knowledge of readers' emotional connections to the cultural artefacts of the newspaper and the novel. They built these fictional representations of social communities upon their own experiences of building their communities of readers. In turn, these fictional communities offer alternative representations of women in their fiction, and for their readers. In order to fully explore these communities and how they imagine them, one must first examine the cultural context of the community in which these women authors were writing, becoming professional, and building their own community of readers. Chapters 2 and 3 build upon the social and cultural context described in this Introduction, such as the difficulties in becoming a woman writer, advertising in the press, and Christie's and Sayers's interaction with these new cultural phenomena. These chapters further clarify the importance of the interwar British press and its effects on its reading public alongside the lives of Christie and Sayers. Chapter 2 discusses how these papers specifically targeted women readers: part of its targeting included a type of literature such as detective fiction which was advertised, reviewed, and then recommended to a reading public. Newspapers created a celebrity culture around popular writers which included authors of middlebrow literature and thus the detective fiction of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. As such, the mutability of the detective fiction genre is also discussed in context with the Battle of the Brows and other authors of the interwar period. Furthermore, the discussion also shows the potential for the types of remuneration which came from interacting with this celebrity culture. Chapter 3 specifically examines the rise and public presentation of the professional writing lives of Christie and Sayers alongside their private ones. It examines their public

'performance' of the types of 'masks they wear' for their reading public. This is discussed with references from their fiction which shows how their professional lives directly influence the fictional ones of their characters, creating instances of fictional social communities for their readers. In addition to critical and theoretical readings of the texts themselves then, I investigate the relationship between the role of serialization and the daily and popular press in establishing and/or reshaping the community of readers who read detective fiction penned specifically by women of the inter-war period. Anderson writes that novels help verify communities by providing empathy with the hero – "Here again we see the 'national imagination' at work in the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside" (30); one consequently wonders, how do the characters within the novels help to shape its community of readers? If there is a strong emotional attachment to the types of imagined communities which characters inside the novel and those outside the novel have, and which Anderson argues is the key aspect for creating these imagined communities (4) – then representations of them can create emotional attachments for both the characters and the readers of the novel.

Chapter 4 engages with Benedict Anderson's theory of national community in Agatha Christie's writing. There are various threads surrounding the establishment of community which tie Christie's work together: first within the national context of Anderson's theory, and then in bringing together social communities within her fiction from characters' interactions with the newspaper and novels. Christie and travellers abroad – in her life and in her fiction – have access and communication back to England and home through newspapers and the novels. As some of Christie's novels are set abroad, she participates in the escapist notions of detective fiction both personally and within her writing. Yet, in this escape, she never leaves off being 'Agatha Christie' English detective fiction writer; as her work was becoming increasingly famous, she was known even when she travelled outside of England. What did these cultural connections mean for Christie and for her work. How did her characters' representations of assumptions

concerning British culture abroad highlight the dangers and importance of acknowledging these cultural artefacts of the newspaper and novel for cultural communities and inter/national imaginings. This is examined through the contexts of her 'colonial novels' of the thirties specifically *Death on the Nile*. I then bring this examination of social embodied communities back to England, with local instances such as presented in *A Murder is Announced* and *Ordeal by Innocence*.

Building upon the theoretical work I present in Chapter 4, within a national and then local context, Chapter 5 examines specific social embodied communities in Dorothy L. Sayers's *Gaudy Night* and Harriet Vane's relationship to them, communities which are imagined through gender and place. When Sayers presents a women's college within Oxford, filled with individuals who assert their right to belong there, and at the same time has them terrorized within the very walls of that College, the emotional attachment of the characters to belonging to this space, or, as women re-imagining the masculine Oxford as a place for female scholars, is both threatened and yet paradoxically firmly established. Within this College then, the imagining of the women's place there is created within the minds of the characters as well as Sayers's community of readers. Anderson states that a nation is "imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevails in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (original emphasis 6). The central character, Harriet Vane, is willing, in this sense of deep comradeship with her fellow female academics, to risk her life to ensure the position of women at Oxford, women in 'universities everywhere', can stay secure. This chapter explores the anxieties for women at university as well as their fear of being exploited by the press for news.

Chapter 6 engages with the feminist representations for establishing community with 'equal citizenship' which Sayers integrated in her fiction. It does this through examination of the characters of Miss Climpson and Harriet Vane, and in their relationship with the male detective, Lord Peter Wimsey. It argues that in their portrayal and subversion of standard detective genre character conventions, Sayers

engages with her feminist philosophy which she presented for her readers. As Eric Sandberg asserts, "[Sayers's] work also offers a classic example – it is no exaggeration to say the best interwar example – of the way the detective genre can exceed its ostensible limitations by integrating social material with its mystery plotting. Add to this Sayers's sheer ability to write, and what results is a powerful literary package" (*Dorothy L. Sayers* 2).

As noted above, the ability of women in this interwar era to participate in a varied range of cultural activities and receive an education enabled the authors of contemporary detective fiction to create characters with more worldly experience and knowledge than previous fictional detective heroines. Sayers, in her "Introduction" to *The Omnibus of Crime* (1929), deplores the young and beautiful female detectives – such as Baroness Orczy's Lady Molly – whose success was based on their use of "feminine intuition" rather than knowledge and "personal experience" (15-16). Sayer's own heroine Harriet Vane is, quite fittingly, a graduate from Oxford University: women were only formally allowed to graduate from Oxford in 1920. Sayers makes it clear that this intellectual formation allows Harriet to be a successful detective fiction novelist, while it also positions her as an equal to other male detectives of her day: not only Sayers' other detective hero, Peter Wimsey, but also Freeman's Dr. Thorndyke, Christie's Poirot, and Marsh's Roderick Alleyn. Similarly, Christie's heroines display a spirit of adventure and an unwillingness to live in the past; they eagerly embrace the new lifestyles that post-war culture permits. Tuppence Beresford takes up detective work to support herself since she cannot go home to her father who has "that delightful early Victorian view that short skirts and smoking are immoral" (Christie, *The Secret Adversary* 196-197). These female characters successfully challenge the cultural gender norms of their day; their decisions, education, ability to drive a car, the partners they choose for themselves, and their lifestyle choices contribute to their 'personal experience' and social knowledge that Sayers had found lacking in previous detective heroines, and thus create feminist social imagined communities for their readers.

The representations of communities found both within and outside the detective fiction texts of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, through their employment/exploitation of these cultural artefacts of the newspaper and the novel, emphasises the importance of their writing as detective fiction authors, and professional women. Further, they create social imagined communities for women within and outside fiction with a myriad of representations.

Chapter 2

Interwar British Literary and Cultural Context. The Popular Press, (Middlebrow) Women Authors, and Readers of the early Twentieth Century

> "We owe a great debt of gratitude to the press," said the Dowager Duchess, "so kind of them to pick out all the plums for us and save the trouble of reading the books" (Sayers, *Strong Poison* 164)

Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers became professional women detective fiction authors within a specific cultural and national context: one which saw a corresponding rise of both the popular press and popular fiction. It was a period which saw a rapidly expanding audience for reading material. This chapter presents the background for understanding the cultural context of the rapid rise of the press and fiction, its specific targeting of women readers, and its effects on its reading audience. This underscores the importance of the emotional attachment of these readers to the cultural artefacts of newspapers and novels: examining what Anderson calls "the profound emotional legacy" of how "these particular artefacts have aroused such deep attachments" (4).

As already discussed in the Introduction, the newspaper became increasingly popular in England from the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth: by the 1920s over thirteen million readers read the Sunday press while the daily papers had an approximate readership of five million. Periodicals were also increasingly popular; often owned by the same people as the newspapers, similar strategies to attract readers were used in both (Watson 28). Furthermore, as Watson notes, "book publishing had kept pace with the expansion of newspapers and periodicals since the mid-nineteenth century" (29). While over six thousand new books were published in 1901, this number had doubled by the eve of the First World War. The interwar years, after a slump during the First World War due to paper rationing, saw a continued increase in book publications and thus by the beginning of the Second World War, the annual total of new

titles was more than seventeen thousand (Watson 29). Of these "detective fiction was accounting for one quarter of all new novels published in the English language" (Watson 96), a phenomena (as noted in the Introduction) which Adrian Bingham and Alison Light also emphasize.[77]

Building upon Victoria Stewart's work in *Crime Writing in Interwar Britain* (2017), Laura E. Nym Mayhall asserts, in "'Indecently Preposterous': The Interwar Press and Golden Age Detective Fiction" (2022), that during the interwar period "the periodical press was critical to the development of the detective novel" (150). Part of this development came about through how detective fiction was published in the press, how this fiction was reviewed, and the intersection between press reports of sensational murders and crime alongside such fictional accounts of crime in detective stories. As such, there are some aspects of this interwar period which can be seen to have a relationship with one another: Agatha Christie weekly published short mystery stories in the illustrated weekly journal, *The Sketch* between 1923 and 1924 (discussed below and in Chapter 3). Ten years later, beginning in June 1933, Dorothy L. Sayers, by then a well-known detective fiction author whose own stories had been serialised in the press, reviewed detective stories in the *Sunday Times* for the next two years (Edwards *Taking Detective Stories Seriously*, 3; 7). The rapid increase of popular reading material then necessitated trusted reviewers who could help guide readers as to what books to choose. So-called 'middlebrow' works were popular for their accessible appeal to a wide reading audience (Bingham "Cultural Hierarchies" 63, 64), an audience who "read for pleasure rather than education" (Watson 29). Yet such rapid expansions by both the popular press, periodicals, and new books published, as well as an author's relationship with this popular press, led to concerns that there was a leveling down of culture. By the 1930s, the common habit of reading the newspaper – if not dailies then weeklies – had spread to men and women of all classes of

[77] Detective fiction was also increasingly popular in the United States, and the hard-boiled sub-genre – exemplified by Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett – arose in the 1930s. Other popular detective fiction writers were Rex Stout and Earle Stanley Gardiner. Sayers wrote of Stout's writing style in his first novel, *Fer-de-Lance* (1934), as "good in the colloquial American kind" (as qtd in Edwards, "Commentary" 31).

society (Bingham, *Gender* 23).[78] Victoria Stewart notes that within these papers there was an increasing overlap between crime reporting in the press and crime fiction: "the readers of newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Evening Standard* could move between fact and fiction in the space of a few pages of newsprint, with information and entertainment shading into each other" (*Crime Writing in Interwar Britain* 104). The 1930s, moreover, was labeled by Martin Edwards as the decade of the 'Crime Queens' (*The Golden Age of Murder* 236). There was an increasing amount of reading material of a similar type in both newspapers and novels for an ever increasing reading audience, eager for the type of fiction written by Christie and Sayers.

As Anderson notes, some novels can reference a specific cultural community which readers recognize; this helps in creating an imagined community for readers as they understand their own social context from the world inside the novel (Anderson 30).[79] In turn, the newspaper is the 'one day best-seller', further reiterating and establishing this cultural community (Anderson 34-35). When the one-day bestseller reports on crime and the readers of the novels recognize the fluidity between the novels and the newspaper, there is a crossover of reading audiences eager for this type of reading material. Both Stewart and Mayhall discuss the relationship of detective fiction to crime writing in the interwar years. My contention in this chapter is that the rapid expansion of the popular press and its mutually constitutive interaction with the popularity of popular fiction both influenced and then was subverted by Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers in their detective fiction writing and professional careers. Bingham notes that newspapers "operated as suppliers of fiction by serializing books" and additionally "did much to turn some authors…into celebrities" ("Cultural Hierarchies" 56, 62). To establish how this one day best-seller could be utilized by Agatha Christie and Dorothy L Sayers in creating an eager reading community, it is

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[78] As Bingham argues, "Newspapers were not necessities of life, and the habit of reading them only became widely entrenched in this period because they offered good value and appealing material" (*Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, 9-10).

[79] See Note 11 in my Introduction which gives the example Anderson uses in *Imagined Communities* (30)

necessary to determine how these newspapers and publications could interact with and influence their professional lives. As such, this chapter discusses the rise of the popular press and its targeting of various audiences from all social classes and its specific targeting of women – as exemplified by 'press baron' Lord Northcliffe. It emphasizes the popular press's expanding relationship with women, as authors, writers, and readers, and further, how types of celebrity culture surrounded popular authors, and women authors, and the power of the newspaper in publicizing an author. As part of this, I provide background as to why critics have called for a re-evaluation of the popular press for feminist conversations. I outline the potential for earnings which serialization could bring an author, using examples from Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. This interaction and serialization with the press in the interwar years also meant that these authors (often women) were dismissed by "upholders of culture". Yet as the history of the detective fiction genre shows, detective fiction is not so divorced from the avant-garde and 'highbrow' modernist literary culture as some would like to suggest. This relationship was discussed in reviews of fiction and detective fiction, which in turn could make an author more well-known to a reading public. These reviews were important for the woman reviewer and the woman reader. This chapter re-evaluates the notion that the interwar press was anti-feminist in promoting a 'back-to-home' movement for women in the interwar years. It presents the context of how this pertained to the careers of Christie and Sayers, who became detective fiction authors in the interwar years, and concludes with the type of earnings which serialization and interaction with this public press could bring them.

This chapter presents the broader context for my overall argument that Christie and Sayers were aware of and worked with the cultural artefacts of the newspaper and the novel to both present and then imagine social communities within their fiction with 'feminist potential' (see Evans "Reading Christie with a Feminist Lens" 95). It further provides specific context for Chapter 3, which questions how and why Christie and Sayers determined their public identity as professional writers to make a living; how Christie and Sayers interacted with and acknowledged the influence of the press in their own lives, within

the serializations of their stories and reviews; and how they acknowledge this influence in their fiction with discussion of these types of media expansion and awareness of celebrity culture in their stories themselves. Understanding their manipulation of the expanding popular press to advertise their fiction provides the approach behind my argument that they both understood the cultural weight of the press, as well as its influence on reaching a community of readers, in order to subvert it in their fiction.

2.1 Re-evaluating the (anti-)Feminist Agenda in the Popular Press

As I noted in my Introduction, the interwar years experienced a myriad of social changes which directly affected women: the discussion of and opinions about these changes in the press has led some late twentieth-century feminist critics to argue that the interwar popular press was anti-feminist and conservative. Press historian Adrian Bingham gives critical context to the narrative of feminist critics who have claimed that during the interwar years the popular press was pushing for an anti-feminist agenda. In "'An Era of Domesticity?' Histories of Women and Gender in Interwar Britain", Bingham cites Deirdre Beddoe's 1989 *Back to Home and Duty: Women between the Wars, 1918-1939* wherein she claims that "the climate of opinion was 'anti-feminist'", blaming mainstream media as only presenting positive images of womanhood as being that of "housewife and mother" (Bingham 225).[80] Bingham critiques this view, arguing that feminist and gender historians in the 1980s and early 1990s characterized the interwar period as a "time of reaction and 'domesticity'", claiming that a "postwar 'backlash'" after the First World War re-established "traditional gender dichotomies" and thus "an ethos of 'domesticity' pervaded

[80] On the antifeminism of the interwar years, see Bingham's outlines of Beddoe, Harold Smith, Martin Pugh and Susan Kent ("An Era of Domesticity?" 226-227).
It is worth noting that Elizabeth Prevost in her 2022 chapter "Agatha Christie in Southern Africa" does cite Megan Hoffman and Deidre Beddoe who claimed that there was a "cultural and political moment" in this interwar era, they "deemed [it] a new 'cult of domesticity' which in turn tried to confront an intensifying crisis of female 'redundancy'" (175).

popular culture" (225).[81] Yet in "'An Era of Domesticity?'", as indeed the general thrust of most of his work aims to establish, Bingham cites three new fields of study which are challenging this narrative of 'backlash': the reassessment of the effectiveness of the interwar women's movement such as that by Cheryl Law, Maggie Andrews and Caitriona Beaumont; the understanding of the significance of changes in social opportunities as highlighted by Birgitte Soland, Claire Langhamer, Catherine Horwood and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska; and rejection of the common assumption that "mainstream media were hostile to single women and 'modernity' and that they 'imposed' regressive gender notions on society" ("An Era of Domesticity?" 225-226).

In a similar vein, Maria DiCenzo maintains that "Feminist history has been critical in recovering and situating women's activism and dispelling myths about this period of supposed containment or abeyance", accomplished, she contends, through examining the "*communicational strategies of print media*" (emphasis added, "Feminist Media and Agendas for Change: Introduction " 313). DiCenzo further argues that "By recovering and analysing the periodicals which served as the vehicles for the articulation of feminist goals and challenges … [critics can] counter traditional views by providing compelling evidence of the pluralisation and diversification of interwar feminist discourses" ("Feminist Media" 313).[82] DiCenzo and Bingham both insist that critics need a wider gaze when examining the popular press and periodicals to determine the scope of feminist accomplishments. Thus this chapter provides an overview of these communicational strategies which were employed by the interwar print media in gaining readers, as well as how authors could utilize these strategies available to them thorough their interaction with these public print media forums of the popular press and periodicals. As I argue, we can

[81] Not unlike the feminist criticism from this time of the Golden Age of Detective fiction as I outlined in my Introduction.

[82] DiCenzo's chapter is from *Women's Periodicals and Print Cultures in Britain 1918-1939* (2018), which is an excellent resource for commentary on these periodicals and re-evaluating them in entirety for feminist conversations.

re-evaluate this print media and the ways in which authors worked within this framework in order to promote their work. This use of the popular press in turn gave authors a reading audience whom they could influence through their fiction. Examining how Dorothy L. Sayers and Agatha Christie presented themselves within this cultural milieu further complicates claims about a 'backlash' which has been suggested is found both in the popular press and periodicals of the interwar years, as well as in their fiction. This backlash does not take into consideration the cultural and social context of the interwar years and the rapidly expanding reading public of popular fiction, the popular press, and periodicals. In order to reach readers, and become professional authors, Christie and Sayers needed to interact within the constraints of the system provided by the popular press and its publicity, yet their fiction presents the tension of this practice for the author, and additionally subverts these cultural expectations for their readers (see Chapter 3). In order to understand how they did this, and their relation to it in their own professional, public, personal, and fictional lives, this chapter provides the background of how these papers were attracting readers and promoting their own rapid expansion.

Part of redefining the feminist narratives of the popular press of the interwar years comes through examining how women were targeted by the popular press and additionally the interactions within the press of advertisements, fiction, and celebrity culture and articles concerning women. Distinctive "Women's Pages" (revolutionized by Press Baron Northcliffe in the late nineteenth century, discussed below) in the daily and weekly papers were used to attract women readers and could offer a range of information and content such as society gossip, book reviews, and advice for what to pack for lunch when commuting to work. Barbara Green in "Documentary Feminism" calls these women's pages a "varied menu" which offered women readers both "the stuff of dreams and the raw material of reality", a

presentation which "refuses to cohere, thus speaking to the contradictions, disappointments, and schizophrenia of modern life" (268).[83]

The January 20, 1922 "Women's Page" in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (a London daily paper),[84] and including similar content as listed above, also featured an interview with the newly popular detective fiction author Agatha Christie. A bold header "For and About Women" is centered in the middle, with sub-titles "Yesterday's Happenings and Tomorrow's events" on the left and "The Pursuit of Crime; Home-Packed Lunch Ideas; and The Slim Silhouette" on the right (see Figure 1 "The Pursuit of Crime"). Alongside advice of what to pack for a commuter lunch is Christie's interview, under the heading "The Pursuit of Crime".[85] An opening paragraph details:

> Mrs. Agatha Christie, who leaves England today for a trip round the world – South Africa, Ceylon, Australia, New Zealand, Canada – all our Dominions, in fact – is leaving just a few hours after the publication of her second 'detective' book – "The Secret Adversary." Her first was "The Strange Affair at Styles" [*sic*]. (11)

Although Christie was already becoming a popular detective fiction author, and detective fiction was read by all classes and sexes, her 1922 interview regarding her books is relegated to the Women's Page. The

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[83] Fiona Hackney comments on the criticism surrounding these print cultures in her edited collection *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture In Britain, 1918-1939: The Interwar Period*. She writes that "Bingham, observing that in reality the majority of goods advertised in women's pages would have been beyond the means of most readers, refers to historian Sally Alexander's assessment of advertising as a site of fantasy and desire as much as an invitation to consume (1995). Interwar domestic magazines, these chapters argue, offered readers a space in which to imagine their lives differently. As such, they afford scholars of print culture unique insights into the many and varied dreams of domesticity that were shaped so powerfully in the period". (Hackney, "Reimaging Homes, Housewives, and Domesticity: Introduction" 209)

[84] *The Pall Mall Gazette* was started in 1865 and ran most years until 1923 when it was amalgamated with the *Evening Standard*. At times supporting the Conservative party, while others the Liberal, this paper was known for engaging with important issues of its day: for example, according to the British Newspaper Archive, one of the editors was instrumental in raising legal sexual consent from 13 to 16 after he exposed the problem of child prostitution in London. Authors such as Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, and Robert Louis Stevenson were published in this paper.

[85] See further reference to the rest of this interview in Chapters 3 and 4. Also interesting, 'around the world' is equated with the dominions. The reach of the British Press, to its dominions, was thus equated with 'world-wide'.

assumption is that (mainly or only) women readers will be interested in the life of this woman author. The reader transitions from reading her interview – as Christie sets off on a world tour – into an article entitled "Modes of the Moment", which discusses the silhouette of various dresses alongside a full-length picture of a woman in the new 'over-dress'. These easy transitions from various topics were part of the scheme which pioneering 'press baron' Lord Alfred Northcliffe used to attract women readers. They were also a cause of anxiety, in that readers were being reduced to passive consumers of advertisement, fiction, celebrity culture, as well as news.

2.2 The Twentieth Century Popular Press

Agatha Christie's and Dorothy L. Sayers's rise to popularity coincided with the transformation of the popular press in just a few decades, from the Victorian newspapers to a 1922 popular newspaper which Green states speaks to the "contradictions, disappointments, and schizophrenia of modern life" (268). This transformation was an important site of cultural change and anxiety;[86] as Andrea Trodd argues, "the twentieth century opened on a boom in fiction and in periodicals" and there was "an increasingly fragmented market where specialized audiences were targeted" (32). With society becoming more literate and the habit of reading newspapers spreading to more classes, newspapers also started to target women readers more specifically, while the "proliferation of periodicals…offered larger opportunities for writing,

[86] Andrea Trodd and Adrian Bingham both separately claim that by the early twentieth century, Victorian daily newspapers were remembered by elitists as being confined to the public world where women were mostly excluded. Trodd writes that "Although the unified market of the Victorian period was largely a myth, a powerful regret for its supposed loss is pervasive in the early twentieth century" (32). Bingham concludes that in the Victorian press women were 'invisible in the columns': separate and specific women's magazines addressed the concerns of the private/domestic or women's sphere (Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular British Press* 23). While many Victorian newspapers concentrated on wielding political influence at Westminster, the evolution of the daily press meant that by the interwar years the main agenda of the press was rather to influence British society at large – commercially and culturally – which in turn helped to impact politics (Bingham *Gender* 24; 44).
My thanks to Kate Lawson for pointing out that there was in actuality a broader focus to Victorian Newspapers despite the twentieth century nostalgia which Trodd discusses. Lawson points to *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* by Barbara Onslow as a scholarly example which discusses female journalists writing about prison reform, vivisection, fashion, astronomy, and etc.

in articles and reviewing, and in the flourishing genre of short stories" (Trodd 32). This targeting of women readers offered greater opportunity for women writers to contribute to pages in the popular press and periodicals.

The papers of Alfred Harmsworth, or Lord Northcliffe, such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror,* were some of the first to consistently pursue the woman reader and he was ultimately one of the more successful 'Press Barons' to do so.[87] His contribution to the change in the evolution of the British Popular Press is important to clarify for a few reasons: he "revolutionized" the daily and popular press's "gender dynamics" as well as its form and production (Bingham, *Gender* 23). While this revolution of gender dynamics will be further discussed below, it must be noted that he additionally contributed to the proliferation of popular newspapers which specifically targeted various social classes. His success in this direction, and the popularity of sensational newspapers, further led to his being attacked by husband and wife F.R. and Q.D. Leavis, as part of the Battle of the Brows for his new journalism and mass-circulation press which "mobilise[d] the people to outvote the minority, who had hitherto set the standard of taste without any serious challenge" (Leavis, Q.D., *Fiction and the Reading Public* 185).

The Leavises argued in their first issue of *Scrutiny* (1932) that the press had assisted in the 'levelling down of culture' in the first decades of the twentieth century. This was done in the name of increased circulation and profits, not for the increased education of its ever expanding reading public. This was an issue Sayers was also concerned with.[88] Yet instead of attacking popular fiction, she tried to use her fiction to educate the public and proclaim that popular fiction could still include "good writing" ("Gaudy Night" 76).

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[87] These Press Barons were Lords Northcliffe, Beaverbrook, and Rothermere (Bingham, *Gender* 3).
[88] For example, see Sayers's articles, "The Lost Tools of Learning" and "The Creative Mind".

Discussing the popular press and its way of attracting readers, F.R. Leavis quotes Lord Northcliffe's biographer Hamilton Frye, who approves the way in which Northcliffe was able to both see what the reading public wanted and then give it to them. Frye admires how Northcliffe "broke down the dignified idea that the conductors of newspapers should appeal to the intelligent few. He frankly appealed to the intelligent many…He did not aim at making opinion less stable, emotion more superficial. He did this, without knowing he did it, because of increased circulation" (as qtd in Leavis, F.R. 20). Leavis goes on to note that Frye shows how Northcliffe's paper, the *Daily Mail* (which also specifically targeted women readers) "had made its way from the kitchen and the butler's pantry of the big country house up to the hall table" (20). The regret was that the influence was no longer in the other direction.

2.3 Fictional Representation of the Popular Press

Sayers and Christie both connect newspaper reading, social and class anxiety, and the impact of this rapidly developing phenomena in their fiction. The type of paper one read was seen to be a marker of social status (Bingham "Cultural Hierarchies" 55-56). Yet the concern was that the power of the sensational press was influencing the culture from the working classes up. Christie seems to mock this in her novels, when sometimes her characters either show sympathy for or pretend to be part of certain classes and members of society according to the type of newspaper they subscribe to. In *A Murder is Announced* (1950), Edmund is reading the *Daily Worker*, to which his mother's housekeeper, takes great offence: "I do wish you wouldn't read that horrid paper, Edmund. Mrs. Finch doesn't like it *at all*…And it isn't," pursued Mrs. Swettenham, "as though you were a worker. You don't do any work at all" (original emphasis 11). Indeed, Mrs. Swettenham is more concerned that Mrs. Finch will be offended by Edmund (the supposed higher class), than that Edmund will be 'influenced' by the working class paper. Conversely, in *Death on the Nile* (1937), while a young lord – who renounced his title at Oxford – pretends to be working class and a communist agitator, Poirot recognizes him from his picture in the

newspapers. At first he is snubbed for his supposed class and ideals by a distinctly snobby and tiresome older woman, yet when Poirot tells her who the young man really is, she regards him as simply quirky, and changes her opinion of him. While the young Lord Dawlish had hoped to continue the masquerade by stating certain political ideas, Poirot's recognition of him from the papers turns Dawlish's supposed 'dangerous' and 'low-class' behaviours into aristocratic eccentricity (Christie 231).[89]

Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey also reads papers across a variety of social classes. In *Clouds of Witness* (1926), Sayers portrays a quixotic Wimsey as a "respectable scholar in five or six languages, a musician of some skill and more understanding, something of an expert in toxicology, a collector of rare editions, an entertaining man-about-town, and a common sensationalist" (as qtd in Mayhall, 158). He is a 'common sensationalist' because "he had been seen at half-past twelve on a Sunday morning walking in Hyde Part in a top-hat and frock-coat, reading the *News of the World*" (as qtd in Mayhall, 158).[90] As Mayhall notes, Sayers's description of Wimsey "is jarring here" as it juxtaposes "scholarship, expertise, investigations, and the sensational" which is exemplified by his reading such a

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[89] Miss Van Schuyler trembled with rage. "Leave this room at once, sir, or I'll ring for the steward."
I've paid for my ticket, said Mr. Ferguson. They can't possibly turn me out of the public lounge. But I'll humour you"…
Choking with anger Miss Van Schuyler struggled to her feet. Poirot, discreetly emerging from retirement behind his magazine, sprang up and retrieved the ball of wool…
"Rather eccentric, I'm afraid," said Poirot. "Most of that family are. Spoilt, of course. Always inclined to tilt at windmills." He added carelessly, "You recognized him, I suppose?"…"Calls himself Ferguson and won't use his title because of his advanced ideas"…"Yes, that's the young Lord Dawlish. Rolling in money, of course, but he became a communist when he was at Oxford."
Miss Van Schuyler, her face a battleground of contradictory emotions, said, "How long have you known this, Monsieur Poirot?"
Poirot shrugged his shoulders.
"There was a picture in one of these papers – I noticed the resemblance." (Christie, *Death on the Nile* 231)

[90] "Founded in 1843, aimed at a newly literate working-class and lower-middle-class audience and competitively priced (3d even in the age of newspaper stamp duty), the *News of the World*, even in its early days, got by on the source material of the penny dreadful – murder, sexual indiscretion, salacious court-reporting and the ever-enticing world of "crim con" (ie "criminal conversation", that is adultery.) Even in the early post-war era, before the collapse of censorship and the age of sexual liberation, the *NOTW* kept up the salacity count by offering sexual assault-trial transcripts ("What was the defendant's next action, Miss X?" "He asked me to remove my knickers, Your Honour" etc.) (Taylor, D.F. "For 168 years News of the World was as English as roast beef").

paper (158). Mayhall clarifies that "Wimsey's attire while perambulating Hyde Park points to his place among the urban elite, while his choice of Sunday newspaper, the *News of the World*, known for its titillating accounts of crime and passion, locates his taste in an entirely different social register" (158-159). Watson claims that "working class allegiance lay substantially with Sunday papers, in particular the *News of the World*" (28).

As in *Clouds of Witness*, Agatha Christie's *The Hollow* (1946), also references the *News of the World* for its sensationalist reporting. Indeed, reference to this paper becomes part of the red herrings for motive for murder. A murder occurs at the stately family home of Sir Henry and Lady Lucy Angkatell. The cast of upper-class characters both delight and bemoan the experience that they are living in what they call a '*News of the World*' event. They know of this weekly newspaper, as they ostensibly bring it in for the servants, but read it themselves:

> Lady Angkatell got up.
>
> 'I think we shall all want to go to bed early to-night,' she said. 'So much has happened, hasn't it? One has no idea from reading about these things in the paper how *tiring* they are. I feel, you know, as though I had walked about fifteen miles. Instead of actually having done nothing but sit down – but that is tiring too, because one does not like to read a book or a newspaper, it looks so heartless. Though I think perhaps the leading article in the *Observer* would have been all right – but not the *News of the World*. Don't you agree with me, David? I like to know what the young people think, it keeps one from losing touch,'
>
> David said in a gruff voice that he never read the *News of the World*.
>
> 'I always do,' said Lady Angkatell. 'We pretend we get it for the servants, but Gudgeon [the butler] is very understanding and never takes it out until after tea. It is a most interesting paper, all about women who put their heads in gas ovens – an incredible number of them!' (original emphasis 98)

Perhaps Christie was poking sly fun at those who mourned the new direction of cultural influences; originally moving from the upper classes down to the serving classes, they were now going the other way. The house owners are enjoying the material under the pretense that it is to be brought in for the servants. While reading the *Observer* would not be seen as heartless, relishing the gossip of the *News of the World* would be, especially so now that they were all living in such an event, Lucy even enjoying it: "What do you think it's been like all the evening, sitting round, with John dead and nobody caring but me and Gerda! …and Lucy delicately enjoying the *News of the World* come from print into real life!" (102).

Nevertheless, in order to understand the world in which Wimsey and Christie's characters are living, reading such papers is also necessary. In *The Hollow,* the red herrings in the story depend on the reader believing that there must be another motive for murder other than that of the overwhelmingly prosaic and rather nasty commonplace event of a wife shooting her unfaithful husband: surely the story cannot be just another sordid affair to be printed in a paper such as *News of the World*. Thus in *The Hollow*, the similarities between the murder and the type of gossip which would be printed about it in such a paper as the *News of the World* becomes part of the plot. Poirot must look beyond what the gossip headlines could and would print to understand the people who were actually involved. As the investigator, he must not be influenced by the potential of sensational headlines. The murdered man's mistress, Henrietta, exclaims to Poirot:

> 'No, no, *no*! Not what you are thinking. That's what I mind most of all! The false idea that everybody will have of what John was like. That's why I'm here talking to you – because I've got a vague, foggy hope that I can make you understand. Understand, I mean, the sort of person John was. I can see well what will happen – the headlines in the papers – A Doctor's Love Life – Gerda, myself, Veronica Cray. John wasn't like that – he wasn't, actually, a man who thought much about women. It wasn't *women* who mattered to him most, it was his *work*. (original emphasis, Christie 134)

Such stories would have been common in papers such as the *News of the World*: during the interwar years there were many high-profile murder cases which were enthusiastically reported on by the press (Mayhall 152). Victoria Stewart, in *Crime Writing in Interwar Britain: Fact and Fiction in the Golden Age* (2017), and Adrian Bingham, in *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918-1978* (2009), both note the increasing presence of such stories in the popular press, and their influence on the people who read them.[91] Stewart draws comparison to these press stories to the detective fiction of the time. Mayhall builds upon Stewart's argument, showing the similarities of crime journalism and Sayers's references to this type of journalism in *Clouds of Witnesses*. In *The Hollow,* Christie constructs a plot which the reader – aware of such stories in the press – is led to believe that the murder has a motive other than sex or jealousy. Ultimately, however, Christie constructs a story based upon the human reactions of emotions as exemplified through such sensational happenings. She shows that these happenings can involve any type of person – not just those who would read the *News of the World*. As Mayhall argues, Sayers (and I would include Christie too) seem to suggest that "the seeker of truth, whether detective, journalist, or reader, requires an *ability to read across a variety of forms* to apprehend the modern world" (emphasis added, 159).[92] Thus, Mayhall concludes, "to disdain the press, or detective novels, for that matter, is to fail to see the permeability of genre and the presence of clues in unlikely places" (159).

[91] Q.D. Leavis, in *Fiction and the Reading Public,* had already drawn comparison between popular novel writing and journalism. She compares the novels of Dickens, Marie Corelli and Edgar Wallace to the type of writing found in the papers: "the line between journalist and novelist can no longer be drawn. The typical bestseller is also a successful and regular contributor to the magazines (*e.g.* Gilbert Frankau) or has been trained on the staff of a big daily paper (*e.g.* Philip Gibbs). And both journalist and bestseller are now closely akin to the copywriter" (185).
[92] Sayers was concerned with modern education which taught everyone how to read, but not how to discern and disseminate what they read. She wanted to use her popular fiction to discuss philosophical ideas and present them to the working person who did not have time for education at night but would rather enjoy fiction (see "The Lost Tools of Learning" and "The Creative Mind").

2.4 Women and the Popular Press

Finding these clues in unlikely places begins with understanding the way in which the popular press influenced a type of fiction for its reading public as well as expanding opportunities for women writers of popular fiction. The early twentieth century, exemplified by the rise of 'Press Baron' Northcliffe's papers, sees the explicit targeting of women by the popular press as a specific and yet undeveloped commercial market.[93] Both Andrea Trodd in *Women's Writing in English* and Matthew Engel in *Tickle the Public: One Hundred Years of the Popular Press* reference the literary success of popular fiction author Marie Corelli's 1895 sensationalist and romantic novel, *The Sorrows of Satan,* as being a catalyst for change in the popular daily newspapers and the literary productions of the early twentieth century.[94] Engel focuses on how Corelli's book inspired a new era of the popular press through their targeting of readers of fiction such as that of Corelli. Trodd notes that Corelli's success was partly through her use of publicity through the popular press and refusal to send advanced copies of her books for review in the paper – earlier books had previously been denounced – which "increased the visible gulf between her popular audience" and those of authors who depended on successful reviews (33). As Engel elaborates in his chapter on the beginnings of Northcliffe's *Daily Mail* era, *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895) was an extremely popular book – "read avidly in the servants' hall and surreptitiously by middle-class ladies" (51) – yet its literary efforts were denounced in *The Times*. Thus, as Trodd claims, there was a supposed "gulf between the traditional elite and the new popular audiences" which was now "often perceived in gendered terms" (33). Further, Engel records that while "probably hundreds of thousands of people bought this book" (52), the result of

[93] With this targeting also came a further anxiety surrounding what women were reading. This anxiety surrounding women's reading habits were not new (see Kate Flint's *The Woman Reader*). Stella Deen also notes this in her article on reviewer Clemence Dane (discussed below in this chapter) (58).

[94] Carla Kungl argues that the women writers of detective fiction in the twentieth century were continuing on in the uneasy tradition of the women sensationalist writers of the later nineteenth century, although she does not specifically reference Corelli (8-9).

successful marketing techniques by Corelli, there was not a single morning paper targeted towards her readers. At the end of the nineteenth century, with a population of almost 40 million in the United Kingdom, sales of the morning newspapers were only at a million (Engel 52). Engel writes that "the man who realized that there was a market in selling newspapers to the Corelli-reading classes created a revolution that transformed the nation" (52).[95] This was the readership that Lord Northcliffe attempted to gain, which in turn would supply many other authors (such as Christie and Sayers) – similarly labelled popular fiction, middlebrow, or lowbrow – with a community of eager readers. In "The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers", Q.D. Leavis would come to compare Sayers with Corelli, shocked that amongst an "educated reading public" Sayers is valued with "some esteem as a literary figure" (334). Leavis's analysis of Sayers's *Gaudy Night* and *Busman's Honeymoon* leaves her surprised that there are those who think that Sayers's literary talent and plots were above Corelli's: "for it is not, as you might have thought, as a successor to Marie Corelli and Ouida that Miss Sayers is valued" ("The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers" 335). Many of these readers of Marie Corelli were the 'middle-class ladies' and Northcliffe set out to target all classes of women readers.

Lord Northcliffe created separate women's sections within his daily papers and these included various topics and serialized literature. Bingham argues that in creating a section with articles written specifically for women, Northcliffe was "challenging established conceptions of what constituted news and what was important enough to be reported in a morning newspaper" (*Gender* 28). In *The Long Weekend*, Graves and Hodge wrote of Northcliffe's *Daily Mail* – from which can be construed "important features…of middleclass thought" (41) – that among its "leading features" were "Spiritualism, the

[95] In much the same way that critics state that examining popular fiction gives one a social history of the time, and detective fiction in particular, Engel writes similarly about the evolution of the popularity of specific newspapers: "Thus *The Times* led from the Napoleonic era until 1855, when the *Daily Telegraph* overtook it by appealing to the middle classes. In 1896 that was in turn overwhelmed by the *Daily Mail*, which was beaten by the *Daily Express*, which was beaten by the *Daily Mirror*, which was beaten by *The Sun*. The process by which this happened is not just the history of a few newspapers; it is a sort of history of the last hundred years in Britain" (17).

question of whether religion was decaying, the question of what moral attitude to adopt toward bottle-parties, night-clubs, revues and chorus girls, and *all problems involving women*" (emphasis added 41). "Northcliffe, indeed," they state, "advised his editors always to have a woman's story in the headlines" (41).[96] Fiona Hackney affirms in "Woman Appeal: A New Rhetoric of Consumption: Women's Domestic Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s", that even after his death, Northcliffe's legacy "put women and their magazines at the forefront of popular publishing in the interwar years" (294). Bingham quotes novelist Rose Macaulay, who wrote in 1925 that "If a future chronicler were to study the files of our newspapers…he would get the impression that there had appeared at this time a strange new creature called woman who was receiving great attention from the public" (*Gender* 48-49). Women were seen as a vast consumer group which could be influenced through the press and thus newspapers sought to make themselves attractive to them. Of course, targeting such a large and diverse group based solely on an idea of 'women' was (and is) a type of stereotyping, relying on types of news/conversations which was thought to attract women readers. Such specific targeting, as Roger Fowler maintains in *Language in the News*, makes the product of newspaper not the news itself, but rather the readers, which newspapers could then turn around and sell to advertisers (20).

These efforts of the *Mail* to target and attract women readers and achieve mass circulation helped to industrialize the press. Newspapers could increasingly charge advertisers for every inch of space in the

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[96] Graves and Hodge conclude that Northcliffe eschewed "[T]he convention that news was only what men talked about in clubs. He knew it to be also what people talked about in the kitchen, parlour, drawing-room, and over the garden wall; namely; other people – their failures and successes, their joys and sorrows, their money and their food, their peccadilloes. The *Daily Mail* was thus the first to cater for women readers" (41).
They also mention children: "The *Daily Mail* was thus the first to cater for women readers, and for children too – Folkard's 'Teddy Tail' was the first children's feature in the popular Press" (41). Andrea Trodd devotes a section to children's writing, in addition to popular fiction, as a way in which women entered into niche markets and ensured a type of professional writing status (136-145). She additionally shows that classifications of literature were becoming more apparent, tracing the movement of E. Nesbit's *The Railway Children* which was first serialized in the *London Magazine* (1905) but by 1936 (as mentioned in Christie's *The ABC Murders*) was confirmed as children's literature and found on nursery shelves (136-137).

paper if they could confirm breadth and number of readers, thus the consumerism of the press despaired of by the Leavises and the 'battle' for readers. And not just any readers were wanted, but those likely to spend money on what was advertised in the press; just as more affluent readers were preferred, so were female readers who spent more for domestic reasons and thus were sought after by retailers (Bingham, *Gender* 30-31). With rising costs of production and advertising becoming increasingly important for a newspaper's production, women readers became more valuable to newspapers than men (Bingham, *Gender* 38). As Hackney declares, "Driven by commercial imperatives – women were considered to hold the purse strings of the nation" ("Woman Appeal" 294).[97]

This "woman appeal" however, Hackney continues, "was envisaged in terms of understanding female psychology and *a gendered perspective on life*, in order to better represent and respond to modern women's *widening sphere of interests* as mothers, wives, and workers: private individuals and public citizens" (emphasis added, "Woman Appeal" 294).[98] Sayers found this gendered approach to women's news and women's writing frustrating: in "Are Women Human" she angrily asserts that "What is unreasonable and irritating is to assume that all one's tastes and preferences have to be conditioned by the class [i.e. women] to which one belongs" (107). As a woman writer, she is asked for her 'woman's opinion' on being a writer:

> I am occasionally desired by congenital imbeciles and the editors of magazines to say something about the writing of detective fiction "from the women's point of view." To such demands, one can only say, "Go away and don't be silly. You might as well ask what is the female angle on an equilateral triangle" ("Are Women Human" 113).

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[97] Hackney also argues that "For advertisers, mainstream publishers and many readers, however, 'class papers', as advertising expert H. W. Eley explained, referred not to social class but rather to 'specialist-interest publications' that appealed to 'special classes of people . . . [whose] interests and point of view are known' (1932: 99, 100–1). No class of people were more powerful, in this respect, than women". ("Woman Appeal" 303)

[98] See in Chapter 4 my note about women buying British goods from Empire to be better citizens as well as then becoming part of an imagined community.

Similarly, Bingham notes, Mrs. Peel, editor of the *Daily Mail*'s Women's Pages during World War I, was frustrated that Northcliffe "expected women to be interested solely in knitting jumpers, in caring for their complexions, looking after babies, in cooking, in a 'good murder' and in silly stories about weddings" (*Gender* 28).

Ultimately, however, this reliance on advertising by the press meant that the newspapers themselves had to change and become more interesting to a wider, more female audience (Bingham, *Gender* 34; "Modern Housecraft?" 225). With the demotion of politics and emphasis on illustrations and human-interest stories, however, papers such as Northcliffe's *Mirror* risked being stereotyped as fashion magazines rather than newspapers: seen as 'feminine' and 'lowbrow', terms which were often conflated they were not to be taken seriously (Bingham, *Gender* 36). Inter-war cultural critic Holbrook Jackson despaired about the use of pictures in the popular press which he blamed on women readers and even declared that "When men think pictorially…they unsex themselves" (as qtd in Bingham, *Gender* 36). This gendering of the newspapers highlights the paradox of trying to gain readers, women readers, but also balancing being seen as a newspaper which was not too feminine and therefore lowbrow.

Newspapers hoping to target women readers employed what Hackney calls "new patterns of communication" ("Woman Appeal" 300) which incorporated advertisements, pictures, and information alongside one another. Northcliffe's *Daily Illustrated Mirror*, launched in 1904,[99] was one of the first to use new technology which allowed for "news photographs" in the daily papers: previous printing had been too slow to keep up with this "mass market" (Engel 149).[100] As Hackney posits, though she is

[99] Northcliffe had a failed start to a women's only paper – the *Daily Mirror* – in 1903 (Engel 147). This failed, Bingham notes, because Northcliffe "misread" what his audience wanted, and thus "the mixture of crime and human-interest stories, fashion advice, and domestic articles did not hit the right note for a 'high class' journal for ladies'" (*Gender* 34). Overly expensive and unpopular, Northcliffe quickly reorganised and relaunched the *Daily Illustrated Mirror*, aimed at both men and women, "it became the first daily to rival the leadership levels of the *Mail*" (*Gender* 34).

[100] Engel writes that "Northcliffe had one phenomenal stroke of the luck that attends great generals. Up to now it had proved impossible to get news photographs into daily papers, except by printing at speeds far too slow for the mass

speaking specifically of magazines, these "new patterns of communications also altered reading habits", noting that Q.D. Leavis believed railway bookstalls were designed to "'catch the eye' [and] promoted reading 'with the eye' rather than the mind and resulted in a 'passive', compulsive, uncritical 'reading habit' akin to a 'drug habit'" ("Woman Appeal" 300; quoting Leavis 1932:13, 183, 8).[101] Dorothy L. Sayers would later pick up on this aspect of advertising in *Murder Must Advertise*, where a drug ring is surreptitiously run out of an advertisement agency: Peter Wimsey comments the "public is very odd" in its wish for being told what it wants and seemingly passive in taking in all of the advertisements which are aimed at them (14). Hackney confirms this new type of reading, and the effect of advertisement on women in her own research, stating that "Leavis's literary elitism aside, the compulsive nature of magazine reading she identified was confirmed by the women I interviewed, many of who referred to how they 'took it all in', one even claiming to read every word of advertising (Hackney 2012: 119)" (300).[102] Maggie Andrews and Sallie McNamara posit in the Introduction to their collection, *Women and the Media*, that "[t]he greater involvement of women in the public sphere in the twentieth century perhaps

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market". A solution was found by a former editor of Harmsworth's which made it "possible for the Mirror to use pictures on one four-page spread" (149).

[101] Hackney is quoting Q.D. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public*. It is important to clarify that Leavis sees all fiction as addictive and states that: "the horrors of a brutal industrialism left no time, even if there had been facilities, for the traditional amusements and occupations of the folk, and equally of course no leisure for novel-reading …What saved the lower middle-class public for some time from a drug addiction to fiction was the simple fact of the exorbitant price of novels…The ordinary public could not afford to buy, and circulating libraries were not so organised that they could borrow until Mudie opened his Bloomsbury house in 1842" (151, 152).
As Trodd notes, in 1894 when lending libraries refused to accept the three-volume novel and instead insisted on a cheaper one volume format (33) this changed the reading habits of its public. This new publication ensured that novel were published in a single volume and cheaply which in turn demarcated a type of literature and a type of class which could now afford this (33).
Finding books in a railway station, Q.D. Leavis quotes from an article on "The Sensation Novel" in the *Quarterly* in which the author claimed that "The exigencies of railway travelling do not allow much time for examining the merits of a book before purchasing it" (as qtd in *Fiction and the Reading Public* 160)

[102] Bingham writes that "As with the fashion columns, most women's engagement with the domestic advice was necessarily vicarious and aspirational. With so much space devoted to explaining the benefits of labour-saving devices and electrical appliances, more fundamental issues such as the sexual division of labour, and the lack of money, and poor conditions of many housewives rarely received the attention they deserved" ("Modern Housecraft?" 230).

precipitated an increase in media texts which were produced by women, featured representations of women or were aimed at a female audience" (3). Thus the January 20, 1922 Women's Page of *The Pall Mall Gazette* presents Agatha Christie going on a world tour alongside advertisements and modes of dress. Christie could increase her readership and public appeal by these types of interviews, yet this type of promotion further demoted her work into a middlebrow context: "Authors who accepted the popular press's gold inevitably risked a critical backlash" (Bingham "Cultural Hierarchies" 63). Andrews and McNamara argue that, "[t]he media became in the twentieth century a significant area of women's leisure, its consumption offering spaces and places in which women could gain education and information, grab a little time for themselves, interact with others and feel part of a community" ("Introduction" 3). Part of this community was formed by what these women were reading: fiction, news reports, opinions articles, and interviews with celebrities of the day were all presented together to be absorbed.

It was not only through women's columns and advertisements that Northcliffe hoped to attract the women reader. Northcliffe began serializing fiction in the first issues of the *Daily Mail* (1896) anticipating that wives would request their commuting husbands to bring the paper back home (Bingham, "Cultural Hierarchies" 63; *Gender* 29). When the serial had to be dropped during the paper shortage of the First World War, Northcliffe wanted to ensure it came back as quickly as possible as it was "one of the means by which we gained the great influence we have among women" (as qtd in Bingham, *Gender* 29). By the end of the thirties, one fourth of the fiction serialized was detective fiction (Light 65; Bingham "Cultural Hierarchies" 63) and Light called it the "majority reading" of the commuter classes (65).[103] These commuter classes increasingly included women. The success of the revolution of the press is evident in just a few decades: while Northcliffe's 1896 paper hoped to induce middle-class women

[103] Watson declares, however, that most of the readers of the many books published and of the fiction serialised, were middle-class women: "But the majority of these readers were not commuter or wage earners. They were women – the middle-class wives and mothers and daughters whose task it commonly was to select and bring home a fresh supply of the family's reading matter" (29).

readers to remind their husbands to bring the paper back home to them, in 1922 women's pages such as the example in *The Pall Mall Gazette* were offering advice for what to bring for lunch for women who commuted and worked outside of the home.

Readers were encouraged to interact with serialized fiction, advertisement, and notably, information about and interviews with popular authors. As can be seen from the sample women's page in *The Pall Mall Gazette* above, which included an interview with Agatha Christie, women were reading detective fiction and they were presumed to be interested in the personal lives of these authors and their activities/adventures. Bingham writes:

> Readers [of the popular press such as the *Daily Mail*] were invited to consider the lifestyle dilemmas of the cosmopolitan elites as if they were their own…The women's pages encouraged a fascination with the lives and practices of the wealthy elites that would increasingly spread into the celebrity coverage of other sections of the popular press" ("Modern Housecraft?" 227).

Agatha Christie as a burgeoning detective fiction author participated in this celebrity culture; Faye Hammill in *Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture between the Wars* shows that "the high-profile authors of the twenties and thirties were constructed in relation to new models of fame emerging from Hollywood" (2).

The more willing an author was to engage with this celebrity culture, however, the more likely they were to receive critical backlash and literary demarcations for this public participation in the popular press. Nicola Humble in *The Feminine Middlebrow Novels* argues that "once a novel became widely popular it became suspect, and bestseller status, or adoption of the Book-of-the-Month choice by a major book club was sufficient to demote it beneath serious attention" (12). This is part of what Melba Cuddy-Keane notes was the economic side of the battle for readers, declaring that "[b]eneath the literary discussion of tastes and the question of what characterizes highbrowism lies a deeper ground of investment – the contest for readership, for being read" (20). Hammill importantly asks "how did the

fame and commercial success of women writers in this period impact on their cultural authority and on the reception of their work?" and asserts that "the middlebrow is fundamentally connected with the history of literary celebrity" (*Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture* 3; 13). That is, authors who engaged with the press in a specific way, risked their writing being demarcated.[104]

2.5 Women Writers

Many aspects of women's lives were being discussed in the rapidly expanding newspapers. This offered opportunities for women writers, such as journalists, fiction authors, and women reviewers (discussed below). Kungl posits that by the end of the nineteenth century, "women's writing came to be recognized as more than merely a 'lady's' pastime; it could be as well a moneymaking venture, bringing with it the possibility of economic freedom" (14). While many women writers had achieved a level of economic security through writing in the previous century, with the growth in print culture in the twentieth century, writing was increasingly a viable way of making a living for middle-class women generally, if one could get published. Nicola Beauman, in *A Very Great Profession*, argues of the interwar period that novel writing was now deemed respectable, and middle-class women, with the changes of daily living as mentioned in the Introduction, had more time to write. Yet the proliferation of women authors alongside the high modernist male authors – what Humble calls "convenient literary fictions like 'Modernism', the Auden generation', 'the angry young men'" (2) – meant that the works of women authors were often

[104] Book banning by the censorship board was also common during this period. Yet ultimately the success of banned books which resulted in much publicity, soon became a hallmark of pride for some authors. Watson explains that "Proscription actually became a cachet much sought by authors; it was worth a good many columns of advertising. The suggestion that in some cases condemnation was engineered by mutual agreement has a certain perverse attraction" (34). Bingham also comments on this aspect of book banning in "Cultural Hierarchies", and further notes that highbrow authors were also known for their lack of engagement with popular culture: "Conversely, both the relative cultural marginality and the 'highbrow' reputation of authors such as Joyce, Eliot and Woolf, was not just due to the (perceived) inaccessibility of their writing, but also their lack of interest in engaging with the popular press. Authors who accepted the popular press's gold inevitably risked a critical backlash" (62-63).

demarcated as middlebrow, lowbrow, or genre fiction.[105] For the woman writer hoping to become professional, there was a troubling tension between making a living as a writer and engaging in this celebrity culture as promoted by the press. Describing the writers of the interwar period, Rebecca West (1892-1983), an author, journalist, literary critic, and travel writer whose career spanned from before World War One until her death in 1983, declared that men still occupied the majority of positions in the field of highbrow literature, whereas women were regulated to the "lesser field of glory", specifically middlebrow literature (as qtd in Beauman 6). Whether or not they were constrained within this so-called lesser field, they did take control of this middlebrow space, writing what John Cawelti has deemed "mere entertainment" (6): women were more likely to write romance or detective fiction as popular genres which sold well, were sought out for serialization by the press, and therefore were able to make a living for themselves.

With the gender negotiations of the early twentieth century (Makinen, *Agatha Christie* 4), various employment opportunities through writing became increasingly available, alongside the rapidly popular press. Journalism, writing review articles or advice columns, became further recognized as ways women could enter a writing career. Trodd maintains that it was through journalism that "most women writers of the period developed their writing voice and persona, and on which they relied for their income" (38).[106] There were still societal anxieties however, about women's place as writers, and thus, as Kungl outlines, women journalists were often not employed full-time, as their work "demanded much greater visibility outside the home and hence uncomfortably extended the ways in which women could (or should) write for money" (39). Writing fiction was more private and completed at home/in the home rather than out in

[105] This pattern applied to other professions as well. See Kungl p. 35.
[106] Trodd claims that Virginia Woolf, "formed her voice in her Edwardian Journalism, and it was not until the success of *Orlando* in 1929 that her income from her books exceeded that from her journalism" (38). Mayhall, meanwhile, notes that many journalist after World War One also started to write detective fiction. By 1939, in a catalogue profiling some of detective fiction authors from the interwar period, about twenty-five percent of these writers included had been journalists (151).

public. This 'in the home' representation of 'lady writers' can be seen in how Agatha Christie was presented to her public in the press at the beginning of her writing career. Given her upper-middle class status, Agatha Christie did not need to rely on her income as a professional writer until after her divorce, by which time she was firmly established as a detective fiction author (discussed below and further in Chapter 3). Yet becoming a successful author was a difficult process especially if a woman wanted to rely on her writing for her living. This meant that often women writers of the period such as Rebecca West and Dorothy L. Sayers held down other jobs until they could afford to live off the proceeds from their writing.[107]

The burgeoning genre of detective fiction and its ever-growing popularity offered a way of entering into the profession of writing and making a living from it: Dorothy L. Sayers explained in a letter that she "'began writing detective stories in the hope of making enough money to live on' (Ltrs 4, 242)" (as qtd in Downing, *Writing Performances* 78), while in an interview she expounded that she "'had leanings towards poetry, but it didn't pay' (*Dorothy L. Sayers* 69)" (as qtd in Downing, *Writing Performances* 170). Similarly, Christie claimed about her writing in the interwar years (after the success of *Ackroyd* (1926) and *The Seven Dials Mystery* (1929)) that "the nice part about writing in those days was that I directly related it to money…this stimulated my output enormously" (*An Autobiography* 413).[108] In an article from May 20, 1922, Christie is quoted as stating that "I don't think I shall ever write poetry again. Detective stories pay so much better" ("Stories that Thrill"). Other authors and writers also experimented with detective fiction, and were also apparently motivated by its financial potential. Poet Cecil Day-Lewis, who would become Poet Laureate in 1968, published his first detective novel in 1935,

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[107] Having this time to write, Worsley notes, is a privilege of the middle-classes, and one which Christie herself acknowledged (39).
See also Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (54-55).

[108] It was this success, as Gillian Gill claims, which made Christie ignored by critics: "It turns out, however, to be Christie's very success that has made her uninteresting to critics. A woman writer who fails to go mad, have 'interesting' lovers, bear illegitimate children, commit suicide, or die in poverty is simply no fun" (x).

under the pseudonym Nicolas Blake, apparently in order to pay for a new roof (Stewart, "Defining Detective Fiction" 103). In *Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul*, Barbara Reynolds quotes Sayers as writing that "[a] novelist…is a tradesman who supplies books to the public. Writing books is not a hobby; it is a job, a trade like any other" (225). Agatha Christie felt the same: Worsley comments that examining Agatha Christie's writing in the 1920s, "it's obvious there was strategy behind her growing success" (97), while Christie herself noted that she would "take…crime as a trade" out of her options of pursuing music or poetry ("The Pursuit of Crime" 11). Of the eleven books Christie wrote during the 1920s, five were 'thrillers', one poetry, and one a straight novel: "she was experimenting with genre, finding out what would sell best" (Worsley 97). According to Christie, "[o]ne is a tradesman…in a good honest trade…you must submit to the discipline of form" (qtd in Worsley 97). Reynolds further notes that Sayers, among other business-like qualities, "gave good value for money" (225), while Christie, commenting on her own financial success, proclaimed in a letter that "it's one up to the Low Brows!" (qtd in Worsley, 97).[109]

2.6 Crossing Genres and Literary Demarcations: Detective Fiction and Modernism

Detective fiction had the potential to bring in significant financial remuneration for its authors, and was so popular that authors and writers from various genre background were experimenting with the genre, as can be seen from the example of Cecil Day-Lewis. This chapter will end with details concerning what is known about the types of returns which detective fiction brought Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, and the benefits of interacting with the press in having their work serialized. This will lead into Chapter 3,

[109] Christie called herself 'lowbrow', yet detective fiction was seen by critics to be middlebrow. Christie in her autobiography wrote of her work and that of her husband, Max: "Nothing could be further apart than our work. I am a lowbrow and he a highbrow, yet we complement each other, I think, and have both helped each other. Often he has asked me for my judgement on certain points, and whilst I shall always remain an amateur I do know quite a lot about his special branch of archeology" (523).
This demarcation was significant in the early twentieth century yet is one which critics have more recently been revising. As Worsley asks, "What if middlebrow and modernist could mean the same thing?" She writes that "And so we find the literary critic Alison Light debunking the very idea that 'modernist' has to mean 'highbrow'. Light puts the case that Agatha Christie was in fact an unrecognised modernist herself" (98).

where I discuss the professional choices made by Christie and Sayers in their interactions with the press and publicity. Before this, however, this chapter offers brief discussion concerning why writing in the popular detective fiction genre brought about literary demarcations from contemporary critics in the interwar period, and the recent critical analysis which declares this separation of detective fiction from highbrow literature is 'untenable'.

Part of this argument lies in the ways in which reviewers for the popular press, who helped narrow down suggestions of meaningful reading selections from the myriad of new books published, would engage in commentary across genres, and often were writers and authors of literature as well. This further sets up the cultural context of how detective fiction was an evolving genre in the interwar years which allowed for integrating feminist ideas such as those by Christie and Sayers. Additionally, this discussion shows the reading public's interactions with genre definition and literacy demarcations, where their emotional attachment to the "one day best-seller" of the newspaper also influences their attachment to the novels they could choose to read. This next section ends with examples of the role of female reviewers, such as detection club members Clemence Dane and Dorothy L. Sayers, who show the potential for influencing a community of readers for popular works which might otherwise be devalued. These female critics are important for the female reader in directing her reading choices, which in turn can influence this community of readers to choose books which include feminist discussions and opportunities, such as that found in the fiction of Christie and Sayers. Moreover, as Victoria Stewart identifies, when the reviewers of detective fiction were authors themselves, this makes the "genre formation" of detective fiction "complicated and enriched" ("Defining Detective Fiction" 103).[110]

[110] Stewart also recognizes Elizabeth Bowen as a writer who, alongside Sayers, "wrote in a wider range of genres than is often acknowledged", noting "engagement with crime" in Bowen's work (*Crime Writing* 6). Clemence Dane is another example of one of these women whose works included detective fiction but also offered a wide range of genre with which to influence her readers.

The exponential growth of the publishing market and the number of books to choose from throughout the interwar period meant that readers often relied on reviewers – in the popular press, magazines, and various periodicals – to narrow down their choices of books and to direct their selections.[111] These reviewers established close relationships with their readers and were often experienced authors and experts in their own fields.[112] This intersection between reviewers and authors, who sometimes were the same person, makes rigid demarcations of literature and fiction necessarily difficult, and indeed belies the strict demarcations which an elite modernist canon had created, and which some writers and critics (as noted in the Introduction) were intent on creating in the interwar years. The role of the reviewer had the potential to be a trusted one, and one which could influence readers to choose their books wisely and for certain genre distinctions. The discussion of closing the separation between modernist literature and detective fiction is brought together here, for as many critics have discussed, the crossing of genre writing and types of writing which authors experimented with, makes this type of literary demarcation unwarranted.

The popularity of detective fiction meant that it often, as Christie and Sayers both noted, brought with it the potential for financial success. Yet writing for this financial success did bring with it some constraints for the author as well as literary demarcations.[113] These demarcations, which were assumed to

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[111] As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the book market grew alongside the popular press. Mayhall breaks down the growth of the book market: "Approximately 2,500 book titles had been published each year in the 1850s; by the early 1920s, that number had reached 12,500, peaking in 1939 at 17,000" ("Indecently Preposterous" 147).

[112] In her *Autobiography*, discussing some reviews, Christie writes: "I had had some nice reviews for *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, but the one which pleased me best appeared in *The Pharmaceutical Journal*. It praised 'this detective story for dealing with poisons in a knowledgeable way, and not with the nonsense about untraceable substances that so often happens. Miss Agatha Christie', they said, 'knows her job.'" (283).
See Sanders and Lovallo pp 10-11 for reviews on *Styles*. They include various reviews for her books alongside their own commentary on them.

[113] Bingham writes that if an author (such as Wells, Bennett) would 'contribute' to pages in the press, in turn the press would make them into celebrities. Thus part of the distinction between middle or highbrow authors (such as Joyce, Woolf), though in part due to the 'perceived inaccessibility' to their work, also came from their lack of engagement with the press ("Cultural Hierarchies" 62-63). As Brown and Grover, in their introduction to *Middlebrow Literary Cultures*, write "Numerous and diverse projects demonstrate the ways in which reading

be the separation of such popular fiction as detective fiction from literary modernism, "converged in the 1920s and 1930s," Victoria Stewart argues in "Defining Detective Fiction", "on the issue of discrimination", often based solely on the potential for earnings which popular fiction brought (103). Stewart instead claims that "Discussions about the nature of detective fiction at the time of its emergence as a dominant cultural force show that although contemporary commentators attempted to locate detective fiction and modernism at very different points on the cultural map, this separation often proved untenable" (102). Part of the problem with this separation is the cross-genre and critical writing and reviewing of detective fiction by so-called highbrow authors. As noted, Cecil Day-Lewis wrote detective fiction under the pseudonym of Nicholas Blake claiming that this was for financial reasons. Yet as Stewart argues, "Blake also engages in debate about the nature of the [detective fiction] form in reviews, essays, and in his fiction, in ways which belie the apparent pragmatism of his initial motives" ("Defining Detective Fiction" 103-104).

Authors who were also reviewers commented on and experimented with various types of genre. Graves and Hodge, writing in 1940, are seemingly frustrated by this crossover in genre which makes literary demarcations difficult, complaining of the novelist in the thirties who had become "essayist, dramatist, pamphleteer, prose-poet, historian, all in one" (343). They cite an anecdote from "the head of one of the largest British publishing-houses" who, in 1936, "congratulated his shareholders on the valuable contracts secured that year 'not only with well-known novelists, but with novelists who are also reviewers'" (343). Regarding the detective fiction genre, Watson further asserts that "by 1930 it had become respectable for literary critics and essayists to turn out thrillers on their own account", noting that this led Q.D. Leavis to recognize a 'highbrow cult' surrounding the genre (95).

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communities and cultural classifications have been shaped by publishing history, marketing and specific national contexts" (17). Victoria Stewart similarly notes that Sayers inserts references into her fiction of the ways in which writing popular novels to be published and widely read did place some 'constraints' on the writer, which in turn, "might itself involve intellectual compromises" ("Defining Detective Fiction" 112).

Thus the demarcation of fiction and literature into highbrow or middlebrow becomes unwarranted when the authors themselves wrote in a broad range of genres, wrote articles discussing genre conventions, and additionally reviewed and expanded notions of what these genres could and now can contain. Indeed, as Maria DiBattista convincingly argues in her Introduction to *High and Low Moderns*, while authors of both high and low modernist fiction are treated as coming from separate spheres, their connections, friendships, debates, and sharing of texts and ideas is "telling evidence [which] attests the contrary" (4). Light asserts that such demarcations - or separating of spheres - have been of our own critical making: "the product of literary critical assumptions and judgements, kept alive and well especially by those who are content to work with a map in which what they call the popular and what they deem the high cultural are seen as poles apart" (ix-x). As Stella Deen writes, no "neat demarcation separated modernist from middlebrow practice in the interwar period" (63), while Faye Hammill similarly affirms that there is not an established "theoretical framework for studying the interaction between modernism and middlebrow" (*Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture* 9). Stewart concludes that "Interwar debates about detective fiction were no less vigorous than debates about modernism at the same period" and she argues they were rather "continuous with them" ("Defining Detective Fiction" 101-102).

As Martin Edwards demonstrates in *The Golden Age of Detective Fiction*, book reviewers in the interwar years encompassed a wide range of political, social, and economic classes, and aired their views in the various publications of the interwar period. Detective fiction was reviewed by writers across various genres and classes, including the poets T.S. Eliot, Herbert Read, Edward Shanks and Dylan Thomas (222). Edwards also notes that "Virginia Woolf's husband Leonard, Arthur Ransome (under the pseudonym William Blunt)…the feminist writer Rose Macaulay [and] Charles Williams [friend of Sayers and one of the Inkling] were "critic[s] of crime" (222). Prominent reviewers also included detective fiction authors such as "Torquemada, Berkeley, Margaret Cole, E.R. Punshon, Nicholas Blake [Cecil

Day-Lewis] and Milward Kennedy" (222). Yet "nobody", claims Edwards, "brought more energy and expertise to criticism of detective novels than Sayers" (222).

It is important to situate the role of the female reviewer in relation to her readers especially for understanding the ways in which they could emotionally guide their readers to make book selections. This engagement within the press between reviewers and readers was part of creating a community of readers, influenced both by reviews and then the fiction of these reviewers. Furthermore, until recently, with works such as the collection *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture In Britain, 1918-1939: The Interwar Period*, the influence of the female reviewer on their reading audience had been ignored. For example, writing in the 1970s, Watson lists various "intellectuals whose liking for the construction of detective stories led to their becoming familiar library names" and who contributed to the detective fiction genre, his list is notable both for its inclusions and gendered exclusions. His list of 'familiar library names' includes "G.K. Chesterton, inventor of Father Brown; the economist G.D.H. Cole and his wife, Margaret;[114] Cecil Day Lewis, Poet Laureate-to-be; Dr. Alington, the Dean of Durham; and an Oxford don, J.I. M. Stewart, alias Michael Innes" (Watson 95-96). Glaringly, Watson omits Sayers even though she was an Oxford M.A. and noted reviewer of the genre (which he acknowledges) in the thirties as well. Indeed in his whole chapter, "The Golden Age of Detective Fiction" in *Snobbery with Violence* (1971), he mentions Agatha Christie only once, and Sayers twice, each in relation to criticism levelled at their writing by hardboiled author Raymond Chandler.[115] This omission is part of what I explained in my

[114] It is interesting that Watson includes the Coles, but not Christie in his list of great detective fiction writers; a sign of the demarcation even in detective fiction which critics often gave to Christie. Yet according to Edwards, Sayers appreciated Christie's writings more than the Coles' (based upon her reviews). He cites a review where Sayers wrote of Christie's *Three-Act Tragedy* that "her chief strength lies in this power to compel belief in her characters. In the lack of this power we find the chief weakness of Mr. and Mrs. Cole" (as qtd in Edwards, "Commentary" 14).

[115] Watson's limited discussion on Christie and Sayers gives context to how these women authors were removed from study while male contemporaries were not. Discussing Chandler's notions of detective fiction, Watson writes that Chandler's novels "entailed the replacement of myth and assumption with fact and perception, of pasteboard figures with live characters, of tritely worked out artificial puzzles with human problems that violence might change but never solves" (100-101). While Watson does recognize Sayer's position as a noted reviewer and Oxford M.A.

Introduction which had led to these women detective fiction authors being further removed from critical study.

Thus the importance of discovering and situating the female critic in this interwar period. Positioning the female critic in relation to their important work in shaping genre and reached their reading audience shows how they were able to use interactions with the press to reach a reading public who were eager for advice on what to read.[116] Catherine Clay highlights the prominence of the female critic in this "modern literary marketplace" and notes that various women's periodicals "promoted highbrow, middlebrow, and popular literary and cultural materials, often side by side, and also taught readers what to read, what to see, and how to consume a variety of modern aesthetic forms" ("Culture and the Modern Woman: Introduction" 13, 11). Clay notes that part of the way that these periodicals advertised and reviewed fiction was through engaging in "the promotional strategies of celebrity culture in order to celebrate and consecrate an alternative canon of women's writing that was already in the process of being devalued and marginalised in the development of modernist literary criticism" ("Culture and the Modern Woman" 12). Clay focuses her discussion, as do the other contributors in *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture In Britain, 1918-1939,* on periodicals aimed at women readers. Yet as I already noted, this

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(101), he discredits her distinction as an author by following this information up with Chandler's scathing comments on Sayers, who declared that her writing "'was second-grade literature because it was not about the things that could make first-grade literature. If it started out to be about real people…they must very soon do unreal things in order to form the artificial pattern required by the plot…They became puppets and cardboard lovers and papier-maché villains and detectives of exquisite and impossible gentility'" (as qtd in Watson, 101).

[116] Alison Light heralded in a re-evaluation of women's reading noting that "in most cases the reading habits of the majority of British people, let alone the women among them, are rarely mentioned" (Light 6). Until Light was writing in the 90s, this was a question which was often ignored. Women as an audience for newspapers (or newspaper products as Fowler calls readers), as targets for advertisement, and seen as the means of making a profit, ensured that editors were aware of women's interests, hoping that these women would purchase newspapers. Such study of women and their preferences, or what they were reading, however, was lacking when examining literary history. This exclusion is ironic: female readers helped shape these cultural productions which female authors in turn relied on to make a living. These female reading habits were so influential for their time, yet are now difficult to examine and fully understand. In her article, "Tricks of Aspect and the Varied Gifts of Daylight", Claire Battershill presents the difficulties for understanding these reading practices of women (23) and also focuses on the reading material as advertised in women's periodicals.

discussion is pertinent to my own argument as it allows for the theoretical background acknowledgement for understanding how we can re-evaluate the "*communicational strategies of print media*" (emphasis added, DiCenzo "Feminist Media and Agendas for Change: Introduction", 313), which women used. Thus a brief overview of the way in which women in these periodicals utilized these 'communicational strategies' to 'promote an alternative canon' of writing can inform my discussion of how Sayers and Christie used these 'strategies' within the broader context of the popular press to reach their community of readers.

The relationship between book reviewers and their readers had the potential to be a close one. Claire Battershill argues that "[t]he task of the reviewer in this period of enormous growth in the book industry…was to narrow things down: to distinguish, in Telford's terms, those books that could become a reader's 'real friends' from those she might simply read and discard, or choose not to read at all" (17). "As such", Battershill notes,

> the selection of books and reading material can be treated as an aspect of social and personal life in the pages of Woman's Magazine – books are just as significant as fashion, interior decoration, hostessing, career and family concerns, and travel in defining and determining the ways in which a woman might relate to the world, and the ways in which she might see and characterise herself. (14-15)[117]

Battershill goes on to state that books are "consistently central to constructions of femininity, feminism, and domesticity" (15), further commenting that "Titles such as *Good Housekeeping*, priced at 1s, were more likely to contain book-as-object discussions and, concurrently, substantive critical discussions of books and book reviews" while in contrast, "fashion magazines like Vogue and Harper's Bazaar

[117] See Chapter 4 and the way that books as friends can broaden horizons, both literally and figuratively (Battershill 14).

frequently treated the season's books with the same thoroughness as the season's trendiest holidays or overcoats" (17). Additionally important was discussion in these women's periodicals on exhibiting these books: "The commentary…on bookshelves, how to style them, where to place them, confirms some of the important questions about literary production, book buying, and reading practices in the period, and relates back to the ideas of socialisation in other more explicitly bookish articles, like Telford's on 'books as friends" (Battershill 23). Reading books (or being perceived to read books) then had the potential to broaden the connections which women could make. Reviewers played a critical role in helping the reader determine which books to select, and furthermore, as Stewart notes, while reviewers "referenced generic conventions as a kind of critical shorthand," they "were also keen to point to examples that over-rode these apparent rules, and therefore, to expand readers' horizons" ("Defining Detective Fiction" 103). These women critics and authors were thus engaging with their readers in a key way, offering suggestions of reading to expand their readers' horizons, suggesting they treat these books as friends who could influence their social and cultural lives.

There was a close relationship, then, between the writers of these reviews and their readers: reviewers could write in particular styles to establish personal and guiding relationships with their readers (Deen 62). Victoria Stewart in "Defining Detective Fiction in Interwar Britain" argues that "Part of the task of reviewers, one of the main sources of orientation for readers of detective fiction, was to describe and situate each example in ways which would allow those readers to make *meaningful* decisions about what to read" (emphasis added, 103). Discussing Sayers's reviews in the *Sunday Times*, Martin Edwards comments that "Reviewing attracted her because in those days newspaper and magazine editors allowed plenty of space to consider the form seriously" (*Golden Age* 222).[118] In his Introduction to the collection

[118] Remember Q.D. Leavis's comments on the *Sunday Times* and the *Observer*: each of these papers "gives a large proportion of their contents to book-reviews and publisher's advertisements, [which] is in many cases the only time that even the best-intentioned business man or schoolmaster can spare for his literary education" (*Fiction and the Reading Public* 3).

of Sayers's reviews he further notes that Sayers "established herself as the most incisive reviewer of detective novels at the height of the genre's 'Golden Age'" ("Introduction" 3).

Taking Detective Stories Seriously: The collected crime reviews of Dorothy L. Sayers (2017) brings together for the first time the reviews which Sayers wrote for the *Sunday Times* between 1933-1935 as well as some of her other non-fiction book reviews. This collection was brought together by the Detection Club and compiled with commentary by Martin Edwards, the Club's current president. On her reviewing style, Edwards writes: "Sayers's reviews offer a multitude of pleasures – they are well-written, detailed and thought provoking. They are also witty" (9). From the very beginning, he notes, "Sayers' waspish way with words is evident, as is her desire to blend demanding standards with an innate kindness that is sometimes obscured by the forthright nature of her judgements" (10). Sayers's honesty in her reviewing, and her ability in recognizing writing style and plot structure, allowed her readers to come to respect her judgement: "if she had contented herself with the easy option of praising an apparent newcomer, readers would not have benefitted from learning of her reservations" (11). As Edwards sums up: "This determination to make exacting judgements lifts her critical commentaries out of the ruck, and makes them valuable to readers confronted with too many books and too little time in which to read them all" ("Commentary" 12).

In Sayers's opinion, many detective fiction novels would be worth reading, given their plotting and literary style – as Peter Wimsey declares in *Strong Poison*: "They're the purest literature we have" (165). While in his conversation with other guests it is clear that all the participants have read Harriet Vane's novels, only a few of them have read her murdered lover Philip Boyes's "literary works of what is sometimes called an 'advanced type'" (12). Though few have read them, they claim to know what Boyes's work is like, having read reviews of them in the press: "'James Douglas' article in the Express was good enough for me,' said Captain Bates. 'The paragraphs he quoted were filthy, positively filthy'" (164). Of course Sayers also makes fun of this type of insular reading – relying on the newspaper for the

sole opinion of a book, as evidenced by Peter's mother, the Dowager Duchess commenting after this discussion: "We owe a great debt of gratitude to the press…so kind of them to pick out all the plums for us and save the trouble of reading the books" (164). It is clear, however, that Sayers knew of the influence of a review in shaping readers' selections. As a noted detective novelists in the 1930s, Sayers's commentary and critical judgement allowed readers to make choices of what books to read. Her influence on readers as well as her voice in this decade is important to emphasis, especially given the type of feminist discussion in her novels.

Ten years before Sayers was reviewing detective stories for the *Sunday Times*, another detection club member - Clemence Dane, whose real name was Winifred Ashton (1888-1965) - was also reviewing books for *Good Housekeeping*.[119] Dane wrote three detective novels and these with her friend Helen Simpson, also a detection club member (Edwards *Golden Age* 212-214). Stella Deen describes her as "a prolific writer in multiple genres" with an "active feminist voice", whose writing included novels, plays, essays, and reviews (58).

Deen describes Clemence Dane's reviews, which were published monthly in *Good Housekeeping*:

> Beginning in 1923 and extending over a decade, Dane's monthly book essays connected women's leisure-time reading to their social and cultural empowerment. Reading would increase women's cultural literacy and foster the development of their social networks. And by women's judicious selection of reading matter, they would promote the continued writing and publication of good books. (58)

[119] "Clemence Dane was the pen name for Winifred Ashton (1888–1965), a prolific writer in multiple genres. A versatile novelist, playwright, screenwriter, and essayist, Dane contributed to British literary and cultural life in a career that spanned nearly fifty years, beginning with her bestselling novel, *Regiment of Women* (1917). Dane's play *A Bill of Divorcement* (1921), whose initial run alone totaled more than 400 London performances, established Dane as a talented playwright and active feminist voice. Clemence Dane thus embodied one of the 'interesting people' – the title of a 1925 reply to readers' letters – that her readers strove to become" (Deen 58).

As a middlebrow reviewer, Clemence Dane and other reviewers like her, Deen argues, diverged from the modernist critic in a specific way; rather than insisting on the author's critical detachment and the reader's intellectual effort, Dane "respected the reader's ability to be moved by literature; she did not discount the reader's heart; and she did not deny the somatic pleasures of reading" (63).[120] Clay further sums up Dane's reviews by stating that Dane "rejects two distinct descriptions of the modern reader: the notion of a feminine 'distracted' reader of mass-market forms on the one hand, and the notion of a 'professional' academic reader on the other" ("Culture and the Modern Woman" 13).[121]

Thus to think of the interwar period as having distinct and separate genres and demarcations of literature is a misinterpretation of the interaction and ongoing critical engagement of writing which occurred between authors and reviewers such as Dane and Sayers. Readers' reliance on reviewers like this furthered an emotional attachment to the novels they read based on the reviews which were presented in the paper subscribed to. Authors could use the celebrity culture as promoted by the press to reach a wider reading audience. As I noted in my Introduction, Anderson posits that there is an emotional attachment to the cultural artefacts of the newspaper and the novels which in turn creates an imagined community of readers, who know that many others are performing the same task of reading (35). This relationship between authors, reviewers, and their readers becomes of especial importance when establishing how authors of novels could influence readers through their fiction, and examining the influences which this fiction could contain.

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[120] Deen compares Dane with Eliot, noting similarities and differences in their reviewing (63).

[121] Deen posits that Dane influenced her readers and negotiated the various opinions surrounding the 'brow' demarcations of reading. She did this through an established bond each month and had her reviews take place in a "broader conversation about all things related to books: history, genre, and fellow human beings" (62). Her essays "countered the feared ephemeral and superficial effects of magazine reading" while her "literary-critical approach encouraged readers to view the literary tradition as a line extending behind and stretching out ahead of the present day" As such, Deen concludes, "Dane's regular placement of contemporary books within literary traditions also put her in conversation with academic and amateur literary critics of her day" (62).

2.7 Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers: Professional Writers

Chapter 3 will examine how Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers engaged in communicational strategies with the press to make their living with detective fiction. The rest of this dissertation uses this background to discuss the ways in which they understood and utilized the press and the community of readers to subvert expectations in their fiction to offer feminist discussion of social change for communities. Yet as Chapter 2 has so far discussed, the celebrity status of authors and the targeting of the press offered expanding opportunities for women writers and expanding potential for making a living as a popular author. The rest of this chapter offers details as are so far known about the financial remuneration which Christie and Sayers received from their interactions with the popular press.

Determining the exact amounts of money which Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers earned from serialization and publishing is difficult. Dennis Sanders and Len Lovallo's *The Agatha Christie Companion* offers comprehensive detail and data concerning her life, writing, and earnings alongside a cohesive Bibliography of her works yet is in part incomplete – for example there is no data on the money she earned from her short stories in *The Sketch*. Similarly, Colleen B. Gilbert's *A Bibliography of the Works of Dorothy L. Sayers* (1978) is still considered one of the most complete lists of Sayers's writing output alongside the publishing and price of the books. Yet as Gilbert writes:

> Sayers's neglect in keeping track of her own writings, not of course unique among authors, and the destruction of some publishers' and agents' records make tracing her early works difficult or impossible. The loss or destruction of many journals by 'enemy action' as well as the similarly regrettable shortcomings of the bibliographer has resulted in some failures to find and record some items. I suspect many contributions to newspapers, journals, and parish magazines have yet

to be discovered, and it is unfortunate that some of the first printings of the Wimsey stories cannot be found. (9)[122]

What is clear is that as authors both Christie and Sayers agreed that serialization brought in money, evident from letters and discussion they insert in their fiction.[123] Christie in her *Autobiography*, writing about the late twenties and the thirties, states that "those were the sensible days… I was beginning to be serialised in America… it seemed to me that all I had to do was to be industrious and rake in the money" (414). When Dorothy L. Sayers was trying to publish her first book, *Whose Body?*, she found an agent in 1922 who "simply loves my Lord Peter and is certain of selling him" (as qtd in Reynolds 105). While the publishing process was slow, she received an offer of publication from an American firm and hopes that the story would first be serialized, for "That is where the money is" (as qtd in Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 105-106). In her 1930 *Strong Poison*, Harriet Vane's publisher tells Peter Wimsey that due to Harriet's sudden notorious status while on trial for murder, he is "doing well with serial rights, which are important from the point of view of immediate returns" (Sayers 89).

There are more detailed records of Agatha Christie's earnings from her first detective fiction novels and their first serializations. *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* was published in America in 1920 and then Britain in 1921. In Britain 2,000 of 2500 copies printed were sold yet due to a prohibitive contract

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[122] In-depth research of the Victor Gollancz Archives at the University of Warwick would potentially uncover the information of Sayers's financial returns from serializations etc: https://mrc-catalogue.warwick.ac.uk/records/GLL As far as I know, no such investigation has so far taken place. Further, after emailing with the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College, further investigation of some of Sayers's letters could also offer insight to this question, though again, it seems that no such study as of yet has taken place. I thank the archivist at the Wade Centre for suggesting Gilbert's *Bibliography* to me for further information of Sayers's earnings (Schmidt).

[123] A contemporary of Sayers and Christie, Rebecca West, also made money from her serializations. In her article, "Reading Sideways" Setlz shows the way in which Rebecca West utilized the middlebrow magazine market for publication of her texts as well as making money. The aspect of publishing simultaneously in England and the United States further complicates the data for determining the money made from publications and serializations. My overall aim with the works of Christie and Sayers is to show the benefits of interacting with the public press especially in the British/English context. Further work could be done for determining their interaction with the American press.

which she naively signed she would receive no royalties until after sales surpassed the 2,500 mark. The only money she received from *Styles* was from its serialization in *The Times*: £50 were paid for it of which she received half, only £25 (Sanders and Lovallo 9-11). Christie was not impressed at first with the money but her publisher had stated that serialization was "good for her prestige" (Christie, *An Autobiography* 280). It was a notable exception for Christie's first work to be published in *The Times* and one which shows the extent to which she was admired from the beginning as a detective fiction author. *The Graphic's* January 21, 1922 column, "Some Lighter Literature", states about Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, that "This detective novel has had the unique distinction for a first book of being accepted by the *Times* as a serial for its weekly edition" (86).[124] Though *The Graphic* reviews Christie's book in a column entitled 'Lighter Literature', the publication in *The Weekly Times* shows that Christie's fiction was read by a wide range of people. *The Weekly Times* was considered a more masculine highbrow periodical (Engel 17), and having a serialization in the *Times* was a mark of status for the author. This also shows the range of readers attracted to detective fiction more generally.

Despite this prestige, however, when her next book *The Secret Adversary* was also serialized in *The Times*, she again only received fifty percent of the proceeds, this time £50. *The Murder on the Links* was written next in 1923 and would be serialised in 1926 but there is little information on how much this serialisation made. Christie also wrote short stories for *The Sketch* which appeared weekly beginning in 1923. While the amount of money made from this is unknown, her popularity warranted *The Sketch* producing full page advertisement spreads alerting their readers of her upcoming short stories (see Chapter 3).

[124] The only information the British Newspaper Archive has is that *The Graphic* was published by the Illustrated London News Group. It was active from 1869-1932.

Then, in 1924, Agatha Christie, popular from her 1920 detective fiction novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, received £500 from *The Evening News* for the serialization rights of her new book, *The Man in the Brown Suit*. For context, in *British Society 1914-45*, John Stevenson writes that during the interwar years "weekly-paid salaried and wage-earning employees earning less than £250 per year made up the great majority of the population" while "above them were the 12 percent or so of the tax-payers with incomes over that level" (122).[125] Archie Christie, Agatha's husband, earned £500 a year in his job in the City. With an additional £100 each brought in by Agatha and Archie through savings and inheritance, their total yearly income was enough to afford them rent in a flat in London with a nurse (for their daughter) and housemaid (Morgan 80-81). They were in the upper middle-class of society.[126] For other women writers, earnings were often more varied. Fiona Hackney in "Woman Appeal" details what women journalists would have made, much less than £500 a year:

> Women's increased status in consumer journalism was accompanied by their employment in all aspects of advertising 'woman's point of view' (Bigham 1994; Hackney 2017). Author Elidor M. Briggs, who contributed careers features to *Modern Woman* in 1932, claimed that advertising was "one of the most interesting and suitable kinds of work for women" with salaries of £250–£350 per year and £500 in exceptional circumstances (Aug 1932: 30). (298)

In a note at the bottom of her same article, Hackney gives further context to the wage which working-class women would have had to manage a household: "Working-class women in receipt of less than £5 a

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[125] While Christie made a lump sum of £500 for *The Man in the Brown Suit* in 1924, Stevenson in *British Society* has a table of earnings for various professions. In 1924 a Civil service clerk made £284, a Railway clerk £221, a bank clerk £280, and a civil service shorthand typist £179. Barristers meanwhile made £1124, General Practitioners £756, Clergy £332, and Managers £480.

[126] After Agatha's father Frederick died, writes Lucy Worsley, "Clara would continue to get 300 a year from the wreckage of Frederick's affairs. All Agatha personally had was '100£ a year from her grandfather's will…Given that the average annual income per Briton in 1901 was only 42£, and given that the average salary of a housemaid was 16£, Clara and Agatha Miller were clearly well off" (24).
According to John Stevenson's *British Society 1914-45*, the average salary for men fluctuated around £4 weekly during the interwar years (122).

week, for instance, had incomes of £250 a year and constituted about three quarters of all households (Bowden and Offer 1996: 252)" ("Woman Appeal" 308). The £500 which Christie received for the rights to serialize her newest detective fiction novel identifies both the importance given to popular fiction authors for attracting readers, as well as the potential for earnings which writing in popular fiction could bring.

The £500 which Agatha Christie received from the serialization of *The Man in the Brown Suit* shows the potential which writing popular fiction could make an author and the amount which papers were willing to pay for this type of fiction. This £500 is additionally the same amount which Woolf deemed necessary annually for a woman to have a 'room of her own' for the ability to write: "Intellectual freedom depends upon material things…That is why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one's own" (116-117).[127] Any woman who wanted to devote herself to her craft needed her own private income.[128] As Nicola Beauman writes, "[women] had either to make money by their art, or give it up to support themselves, or live off someone else's money" (83); this is an issue Dorothy L. Sayers struggled with as she was hoping to become a professional writer (see Chapter 3). Detective fiction was a lucrative market which offered a way into the writing profession. Indeed, in *Strong Poison*, it is noted that detective fiction author Harriet Vane was supporting her lover, whose 'highbrow' works did not bring in enough income for him to live on: "No, there never was much money, except what Harriet made. The ridiculous public didn't appreciate Phil Boyes. He couldn't forgive her that, you know" (121). While Boyes

[127] Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" was given as two speeches in 1928 and published in 1929. This timeline is comparable to Christie who started earning money from her writing in 1920 (albeit not enough to support her lifestyle until 1924).

[128] Many of Woolf's essays discuss this notion, arguing that the male literary tradition would continue to hold sway as long as women were marshalled into being financially dependent on men. Melissa Schaub comments on Woolf's point of view around the middlebrow, noting that Woolf's hostility is directed at the middlebrow idea of acquiring culture as a commodity by purchasing the right books and curating the right image (12). Moreover, it is unclear if Woolf would have included detective fiction in the middlebrow category which she was deploring, according to Schaub, she perhaps "would have happily discussed them over tea with her imaginary lowbrow friend" from 'Middlebrow' (13).

expected Harriet to support his art, he did nothing to help her writing: "Didn't it come in useful?" "Of course, but he resented it all the same. She ought to have been ministering to his work, not making money for them both with her own independent trash" (121). As a friend of Harriet's further expounds, "Women geniuses don't get coddled…so they learn not to expect to" (121). They also learn to use other genres of writing to both make a profession, and use the emotional attachments of readers to subvert notions of cultural expectations for women in their fiction.

Becoming a detective fiction author, for the upper middle-class Agatha Christie, moreover, brought with it additional gender negotiations and freedoms. Although she traded her privacy for public notoriety and interviews with the press (which would bring its own hardships), her popularity meant that she could further influence a reading audience. That she was an adventurous woman who believed in opportunities for women is evident. With the £500 from *The Man in the Brown Suit* she bought her first car, which, as her biographer Janet Morgan writes, "meant liberation … acquired with money she had earned herself" (116). Agatha Christie enjoyed the thrill which driving gave her. She was able to buy a car from the proceeds of her writing, and after her divorce, her finally confirmed status as a professional writer would ensure her ability to live independently (see Chapter 3).

Christie's excitement and pleasure in her car is explicitly relayed in her books: "Oh the joy that car was to me! I don't suppose anyone nowadays could believe the difference it made to one's life. To be able to go anywhere you chose; to places beyond the reach of your legs – it widened your whole horizon" (*An Autobiography* 333). In *The Hollow* she writes:

> For Henrietta loved cars. She spoke of cars with the lyrical intensity that other people gave to spring, or the first snowdrop… Henrietta smiled. She shot away down the Mews, savouring the unfailing pleasure she always felt when setting off in the car alone. She much preferred to be alone when driving. In that way she could realise to the full the intimate personal enjoyment that driving a car brought her (*The Hollow* 34; 48)

Christie reveled in the independence which a car gave her, which a profession gave her. Examination of her books – especially early ones – often show an impoverished yet spirited heroine seeking adventure to find money and the ability to have their own independence, for example Tuppence in *The Secret Adversary* and Anne in *The Man in the Brown Suit.* Owning cars and the act of driving by female characters in both Christie's and Sayers's fiction, signals this independence, an independence which Sayers also experienced and relished: she bought a motorcycle from the proceeds of her writing and even when she was married, insisted on keeping her own vehicle to her husband's chagrin (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 166-167).[129] In Sayers's *Gaudy Night* (1935) Harriet Vane compares the freedom of driving herself to Oxford as an established author from when she used to take the train there as a young student (9-10), while some of Christie's various female characters such as Bundle in *The Secret of Chimneys* (1925) and *The Seven Dials Mystery* (1929), and Henrietta Savernake from *The Hollow* (1946), are shown to be adept, fast, confident drivers whose mastery over their cars even frightens some of their male passengers. Their authors surely knew the freedom that being able to drive and afford a car would bring. This was part of the 'intense gender negotiation' referenced by Makinen (*Agatha Christie* 4) which women experienced between the two world wars. Part of these women authors' ability to own a car came about through their professional writing.

Such expressions of heroines driving are important examples of feminist social changes which Christie and Sayers integrated in their fiction. To own a car in the decade following the war was considered a luxury: Christie was only able to buy one from the proceeds of her writing after she became more successful. Though there was an affirmative cultural shift towards women drivers after the First

[129] On controversies surrounding women and motorcycles, see Rosey Whorlow and Sallie McNamara, in "Representations of Women's Motorcycle Riding 1903-1914".

World War (Doan 35),[130] the prohibitive cost meant that many women were excluded from knowing how to drive or owning a car.[131] Agatha Christie's ability to buy a motor car from the £500 she was paid for the serialization of *The Man in the Brown Suit* highlights the income which writing and serialization could bring a successful author; already living with Archie's salary and her inheritance, Christie had the luxury of being able to consider buying a motor car with this additional £500 from her writing. For another woman, this sum would have been enough to live on and support herself. Sayers fictionalizes this in her representation of Harriet Vane who "has worked industriously to support herself, and it is very much to her credit that she has, by her own exertions, made herself independent in a legitimate way, owning nothing to anybody and accepting help from no one" (*Strong Poison* 12). Indeed, her income from detective fiction enables her to own her own motor car by the time she appears in *Gaudy Night* in 1935. Furthermore, in *Busman's Honeymoon*, when Peter asks Harriet how she was able to afford her wedding present for him, and various other expenses, she directly relates it to writing short stories in the papers:

> "How the blazes, with all the other things, did you manage to afford the Donne autograph?"

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[130] Laura Doan in "Primum Mobile" quotes *The Woman's Motor Manuel* (1918) by Gladys de Havilland, who writes: "If there is any one outstanding feature of the conditions produced by the war, it is that the question of motor car driving for women has passed from a debatable subject to the mere orthodox' (de Havilland 1918: vii)" (35). The ability to be able to drive a car, to access one, however, meant that these women were of a certain class and standing. Andrea Trodd writes: "Sylvia Pankhurst…pointed to the contrast between the middle-class women training for work in the munitions factories…and acting as drivers, 'how important, how joyously important, they were, their gait more triumphantly instinct with pleasure than ever it was in the ballroom', and the working-class mothers in the East End bearing the brunt of war privation at home" (20).
Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* provides an example of the social standing of the woman who could afford to learn how to drive a car, and her fictionalized experience of being an ambulance driver during WWI.

[131] Janet Morgan outlines the Christies' financial situation after the war: "[r]ent and the price of food had risen enormously compared with costs before the war but to employ a nurse and cook/housemaid was not considered a luxury. Owning a motor car, however, would have been an immense extravagance" (80-81). Christie herself writes of this period that "it seems to me extraordinary that we should have [had]…both a nurse and a servant, but they were considered essentials of life in those days…the extravagance of a car, for instance, would never have entered our minds. Only the rich had cars" (*An Autobiography* 268).

"That was a special effort. Three five-thousand-word shorts at forty guineas each for the *Thrill Magazine*." (251)

These stories include a "young man who murdered his aunt with a boomerang", an "unpleasant stockbroker who was found in the curate's front parlour with his head bashed in" and a "cook who put prussic acid in the almond icing" (251). While these were printed in an "exceedingly low-class rag", Peter knew of their existence from "press-cutting agencies"; he has been collecting notices of Harriet's work throughout the years: "they lead a shame-faced existence in a locked drawer, and Bunter pretends to know nothing about them" (251-252).

These women authors could reach a reading audience who enjoyed their work through the press. They made a living from their professional popular fiction writing and enjoyed the freedom which such income eventually allowed them. In turn, they inserted this pleasure into their fiction, showing the excitement and freedom which having a profession could bring. Furthermore, as Trodd shows, and as discussed in the Introduction, detective fiction "was addressed to a mixed audience with a strong upmarket segment, conferring an unusual kind of status and authority on those who practised it" (130). The popularity of detective fiction meant that Sayers and Christie could use the genre to support themselves whilst also reaching a large and expanding audience which was tied to an interaction with the popular press, an advantage which Sayers particularly took – perhaps had to take – advantage of. Trodd goes on to state that detective fiction additionally "offered the opportunity to break away from domestic and romantic fiction…it was a flexible form which could be revised to accommodate women's perspectives and interests" (130).

While writing in the detective fiction genre could be a flexible form to 'accommodate women's perspectives and interests', it also was a form which had the potential to increasingly influence its readers. Martin Edwards's research shows that "Women readers borrowed detective novels in large quantities from libraries" (*Golden Age* 236). Watson states that the readers of these many books, periodicals, and

newspaper were women: “the middle-class wives and mothers and daughters whose task it commonly was to select and bring home a fresh supply of the family’s reading matter” (29). Moreover, reading books, as Stella Deen asserts, “would increase women’s cultural literacy and foster the development of their social networks” (58). Yet these readers had to know about the books these authors were publishing. Chapter 3 explores the public and private lives of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, and how they presented themselves as authors to their reading public.

Chapter 3

The Public, Professional, Private and Literary Lives of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers

"How do you propose to get in touch with your would-be-employers?"
"Advertisement", replied Tuppence promptly. (Christie, *The Secret Adversary* 199)

"Provided you get into the papers, the delightful reading public don't mind what it's for" (Sayers, *Strong Poison* 85)

Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers knew how to exploit the celebrity culture of the interwar popular press: examples from their fiction show their realization of the ways in which publicity, and celebrity culture, brought about through their use of the 'cultural artefacts' of the newspapers and novels, had in allowing them to succeed in their writing professions. Highlighting their cognizance of celebrity culture and publicity exemplifies that they were mindful of the power of the newspaper and the novel in influencing communities of readers, readers with whom they hoped to establish an emotional attachment. The private and public lives of Christie and Sayers affected the ways in which they then imagined these various communities within their novels.

In their interactions with the press, Christie and Sayers carefully curated their professional publicity, demonstrating that they could establish emotional connections and authority with their reading audiences. Examining these interactions enables us to more fully understand their awareness surrounding what Anderson calls cultural artefacts, newspapers and novels, and how they make use of them in their own lives to then subvert these artefacts in their fiction. Current re-evaluation of the interwar press by feminist critics allows for a greater understanding of feminist representation within its texts (see Introduction and Chapter 2). Part of this re-evaluation comes from understanding the specific lived experiences of these women authors within their broader social context and the way in which they

interacted with the press and celebrity culture. These lived experiences emphasize how Christie's and Sayers's choices of public representation can be understood from a feminist position.

These women had to negotiate their public appearance in the press while at the same time avoid being exploited by it: both had traumatic instances in their lives, which, if known, or when known, by the press, became an added source of misery to them. The patterns of Christie's and Sayers's presence in the press suggest that – based upon their lived experiences – they had different strategies for promoting their work, yet both used publicity in specific ways which is further reflected in how they began their writing careers. Chapter 2 set up the broad cultural context of the interaction between detective fiction, reading audiences influenced by the popular press, reviews, and popular fiction, and the new celebrity culture which came about in the early twentieth century. It showed how an author who contributed to the popular press was afforded more "cultural visibility" or even celebrity status which in turn did much "to influence the nature or readership of an author's books" (Bingham, "Cultural Hierarchies" 62). This also, as Bingham states, "dictated their cultural esteem, [and]…their wider participation in the commercial world of the mass media" ("Cultural Hierarchies" 62). Faye Hammill posits that 'middlebrow' novels (such as those of detective fiction) are "fundamentally connected with the history of literary celebrity", which in turn, she notes, is "complicated by issues of gender" (*Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture* 13).

Building upon this cultural context then, this chapter discusses the experiences of Christie and Sayers in becoming professional public writers and how they referenced this in their fiction. Becoming a woman writer was complicated by interwar social expectations of the ways in which 'lady writers' interacted with the public profession of writing. Sayers's fictional presentation of Harriet Vane in *Strong Poison* has Harriet publicly condemned for refusing to perform according to her gender: "What nonsense! Of course she did it. You could see it by her face. Hard, that's what I call it, and she never once cried or

anything." (46).[132] Conversely, Christie's performance of herself in the public press in the early 1920s has been deemed 'anti-feminist', as Trodd claims, as Christie's public representations of herself do not, for instance, include a writing desk and instead imply that she wrote around her domestic duties (Trodd 45). As Worsley asserts, however, "female writers have always fitted their work in around the edges of ordinary life" (38-39). There are conflicting public opinions - real and fictional - about an author's performance to their public. Thus, I argue, borrowing and rephrasing Makinen: "[t]he large number of texts [including publicity statements, interviews, and advertisements] that needs discussing, in any comment about Christie's fiction [and public personality], prevents monolithic statements ever being completely accurate, for every claim there is always one text that could be used to argue the opposite" (*Agatha Christie* 65). While Agatha Christie, positioned as a wife and mother within a domestic scene, at first engaged with the celebrity culture surrounding an author, this public persona changed at a key moment in her life. She gave interviews before going on tour and seemingly performed for her public as a wife and mother who also happened to write detective fiction: there are full page magazine spreads of Christie depicted in her home. Then, as her life became more complicated, she needed to present herself in a different (removed) public manner: Worsley states in an interview that "[t]he press had built her up, and now they tore her down" ("Lucy Worsley – Agatha Christie" 11:36-11:40). Dorothy L. Sayers, however, from the first positioned herself as a professional writer, and engaged with the press in a more strident manner. Additionally, her illegitimate child seemingly precluded her from ever performing domestically for her public; she always positioned herself as a writer. She did not present her personal life to public scrutiny, and rather relied on her advertising abilities and self-promotion tactics to endorse her work. Christie and Sayers engaged with the press and celebrity culture – in their own ways and according to their separate life experiences – to make their own work known; what is important is the ways in which

[132] See further discussion of this in Beresford-Sheridan "Bending the Genre" in *Clues*.

they understood the structures behind engaging with their public, and how they exploited these to become professional authors.

As noted in Chapter 2, there were several ways in which an author could interact with the press, which increased serializations and sales of novels, yet this interaction meant that the press treated their private lives as public news. I present this phenomenon in relation to Agatha Christie's disappearance in 1926 and provide a fictional context for this within Dorothy L. Sayers's 1930 *Strong Poison*. There is a real (Christie's) and a fictional (Harriet Vane's) version of what was labeled in both instances as a 'publicity stunt', a ploy to gain attention and increase book sales. The financial remunerations of Christie's increasing sales after her disappearance was a consequence of the media attention and fame, a version of success which she then struggled with for the rest of her life. The following section sets up the rationale for the rest of the chapter, which focuses discussion on the personal and public lives of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers and their curated public press presence and cognizance of the connections between publicity and sales of their fiction. It also explores how their awareness of this relationship further establishes their launch into the professional writing sphere. This creates the link between their attentiveness to these reading communities as encouraged by the press and which they took advantage of and utilized, in turn commenting on and subverting them within their fiction.

3.1 Detective Fiction Authors: "Accessed Voices" and Publicity Stunts (gone wrong?)

Detective fiction and crime reporting in the press had a significant relationship which Mayhall and Stewart have shown and as I acknowledge in Chapter 2. Further, authors of detective fiction were often called to comment on various current happenings discussed in the press, writing articles or essays with speculations of cold cases or current mysteries that appeared in the newspapers (Stewart, *Crime Writing* 125). These detective fiction authors can be seen to have what Roger Fowler refers to in the media as 'accessed voices': perceived as "experts of various kinds", these authors had access to a public arena – the

newspapers – by virtue of their authorial status. Fowler writes that this access is a "reciprocal relationship between such people and the media", that is, "the media conventionally expect and receive the right of access to the statements of these individuals, because the individuals have roles in the public domain; and reciprocally these people receive access to the columns of the papers when they wish to air their views" (22). Detective fiction authors' interactions with notorious murder cases of the day, such as the conviction and hanging of Edith Thompson for the murder of her husband in 1923, brought out discussions of the fallibility of the English courts (Edwards, *The Golden Age of Murder* 37), and are a further example of how detective fiction critiqued its own national, cultural, and social community. These interactions – both in their texts and in the newspapers – show how interrelated all of these authors were with their readers, both of newspapers and novels. Commenting on the readers of both detective fiction and crime reporting in the press, as well as the relationship of these readers to these authors and texts, Victoria Stewart in *Crime Writing in Interwar Britain* writes that "it is misleading to consider Golden Age detective fiction as a self-enclosed genre" (102). She explains that "readers could potentially move from reports of ongoing murder investigations at the front of their newspaper to a crime story, a serialised detective novel or an essay on an actual criminal case, either historical or contemporary, further inside" (102).[133]

Indeed, this link between fact and fiction, specifically between detective fiction, its authors, and readers, furthers Anderson's notion of the ways in which newspapers and novels create imagined communities for readers, as readers await the next instance of the 'story' which appears in either or both of these print mediums, the 'factual' and the fictional. Jonathan Culler, in "Anderson and the Novel", argues that "as we start to think about audiences for novels and newspapers...[and] serialized novels, in

[133] Mayhall's article "'Indecently Preposterous'" builds on Stewart's work. Mayhall's essay "contributes to the project of rethinking golden age detective fiction by examining its overlap and intersection with another genre of interwar crime writing, that of newspaper crime reporting" (144). She further contends that "rather than seeing newspaper crime reporting and detective fiction as separate genres in the interwar years, we should see them as conjoined—and part of a larger cultural field in which fact and fiction intertwined" (144).

which [audiences] are conjoined" there comes a "most striking" and "original" idea behind Anderson's claim of the "'profound fictiveness of the newspaper' (Anderson 33)" (Culler 26). As Culler notes, Anderson posits that the newspaper "depends on the literary convention of novelistic time" which then creates "an imagined world where characters go about their business independently of one another," all the while confident of the others' existences through their presentation in print (Culler 26). Then, when a 'character', whether an event, a place, or a person, "disappear[s] from its pages, 'the novelistic format of the newspaper assures [readers] that somewhere out there [this] character…moves along quietly, awaiting his next appearance in the plot' (Anderson 33)" (Culler 26). Thus when newspapers can be thought of as "one-day bestsellers" (Anderson 35), Culler posits, "[t]hrough them and novels, joined by the formal structure of a way of representing the space-time of a community, 'fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality' (Anderson 35)" (Culler 26).[134] While Culler is uncertain if either newspapers or novels, particularly the latter, ultimately create an imagined *national* community, his theorizing of Anderson's claims regarding how communities of newspaper readers experience this fluidity between fact and fiction usefully links to Fowler's claims regarding the 'accessed voices' of detective fiction authors. This fluidity is seen when Agatha Christie the expert voice (of fiction) shifts into Agatha Christie the subject of a media frenzy after her disappearance (which questions whether this is factual or fictional, discussed below); such shifts further emphasize how these authors had to be aware of their interaction with the structures of these print cultures. For their readers in any case, they are characters waiting to appear in the next installment of the newspaper, whether in a factual (celebrity or exploited) or fictional way.

Further, in order to become known, or engage within these parameters to make their work known, detective fiction authors actively seemingly encouraged this fluidity between fact and fiction as presented

[134] The final phrase goes on to explain how this "creat[es] that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity that is the hallmark of modern nations" (Anderson 35, as qtd in Culler 26).

to their readers through the interactions with the interwar print culture. Dorothy L. Sayers's husband, 'Mac' Fleming, was a Motoring Correspondent to the *News of the World*.[135] At one point Sayers and Mac were sent to France by the *News of the World* to investigate the murder of May Daniels, an English nurse who had disappeared from a waiting room about to cross the channel back to England (Edwards, *Golden Age* 25). Though they were ultimately unsuccessful, Edwards notes the similarities in Sayers's works to the Daniels case in *Unnatural Death* (*Golden Age* 26). Indeed, both Sayers and Christie draw on real-life instances in their fiction which once again suggests that they continually reference their own social world within their novels. Further, in 1936, Sayers and other members of the Detection Club published a series of articles, collected in *The Anatomy of Murder*, which was their speculation and pronouncements on various cold cases. There was a market for commentary by detective fiction authors on real and fictional cases.

Agatha Christie's disappearance, which followed so suddenly on the press frenzy surrounding her narrative 'trick' in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926),[136] was much sensationalized with the whole country involved in searching for her. A detective fiction author had disappeared, other detective fiction authors were called in as 'experts' to both search and comment on the case; it seemed as if indeed, "fiction [had] seep[ed] quietly and continuously into reality" (Anderson 35). On December 12 the British public, including Dorothy L. Sayers, turned up in what was described by the *Evening News* as the "Great Sunday Hunt for Mrs. Christie" (Morgan 144). In her biography of Christie, Janet Morgan outlines the extent of newspapers' involvement in opinion pieces and publicity; she writes that "To the press, the story of Agatha's disappearance was a gift" (136).

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[135] The same newspaper as discussed in Chapter 2 and which Mayhall points out that Peter Wimsey reads in *Clouds of Witness*.

[136] See Sanders and Lovallo for media frenzy around *Ackroyd* (36-37). It is interesting that *Ackroyd* and the narrative experimentation was seen as a trick, whereas other texts - so-called modernist works - were doing similar experiments with time and narrative voice as Ascari points out (171-172). Bernthal acknowledges that "Ackroyd is frequently invoked in discussions of language, semiotics, and narrative" (*Queering* 50).

During the days that Christie was missing, several theories were suggested by the police and the press: she had committed suicide, or worse, she had been murdered by her husband to cover up an affair, or a fight. A frightened Archie Christie came forward to give an interview, alarmed after the newspaper had caught wind of his association with a young woman. He told the *Daily Mail* that Agatha had thought about "disappearing at will", suggesting that this was "for the purpose of her work" (as qtd in Worsley 150). He hinted that because she was so clever, she could have saved up money unbeknownst to him to deliberately stage this publicity (stunt) (Worsley 150). This interview was conflated by various other newspapers and around the world: *The Baltimore Sun*'s headline declared "Police Believe Missing Woman Novelist Is Hiding. Work on Theory She Deliberately Staged Disappearance" (as qtd in Worsley 150).

With the interactions of the news stories and fictional crime stories which were presented alongside one another in the papers, as Stewart notes, it is understandable why excitement would build around the disappearance of one of these celebrity detective fiction authors. The media speculation asks whether her disappearance was factual news or a fictional story which she had created for her readers and for her own publicity. Other authors, of detective fiction and 'thrillers', were presented as authority figures regarding the event. Edgar Wallace's theory in the *Daily Mail* was that Christie was revenging herself on Archie and contributed to the speculation that she had disappeared on purpose. This again was broadcast over the world: the Tuesday, December 14, 1926 article in the *Civil and Military Gazette* from Lahore has a big heading "The Missing Novelist" with Wallace's theory and Archie's statements included ("The Missing Novelist", Figure 2). Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, having investigated other crimes, was given one of Agatha's gloves to try and find a solution through spiritualism (Edwards, *Golden Age* 55). Dorothy L. Sayers also wrote an article on Agatha Christie's disappearance in the Friday, December 10, 1926 issue of the *Daily News* ("The Ideal Sleuth and Mrs. Christie" 8, Figure 3). Under Sayers's name, her credentials are given as "Author of 'Whose Body?' 'Clouds of Witness,' etc.", while her opening for the

article acknowledges these credentials and answers the question as to why she is writing the article: "If one is a 'mystery-monger' by profession, one's friends are apt to ask, on reading any mysterious occurrence in the paper: 'Well now, haven't *you* got a theory about this?'" (original emphasis "The Ideal Sleuth and Mrs. Christie", 8).[137] Sayers does not give an answer as to what actually happened to Christie, but rather speculates on the kinds of detailed questions which *her* fictional detective would ask about the case itself.

The 'accessed voices' of these detective fiction authors gave weight to their opinions in the newspapers. Later, in 1929, after a triple murder was being sensationalised in the news, Agatha Christie wrote an article for the *Sunday Chronicle* (republished by the Detection Club in 2019 in *Six Against the Yard*). In this rare article in the press after her own ordeal, she begs readers to "have one feeling" to be "shared by nearly everybody – the most earnest sympathy and pity for the innocent members of the family, especially the children. It is a case where the innocent suffer most horribly for sins they have never committed" (Christie, "The Tragic Family of Croydon" 298-299). Presumably speaking from experience (of being exploited by media speculation), Christie both acknowledges and reminds her readers to think of the family itself:

> What life has been for them all these three months and what it necessarily must still be is not pleasant to contemplate. They live in a haze of publicity; acquaintances and friends look at them curiously; there are continually autograph hunters, curious idle crowds. Any decent happy private life is made impossible for them.

[137] Sayers's article on Christie's disappearance is not the only commentary on this event published in this paper. On the next page is a column headed "Col. Christie's Disclosures". Wife had talked of disappearing. His Theory…" (*Daily News*, Friday December 1926, 9). There is a £100 reward offered for any information. This article continues on to page 10, which also includes a column about how much the search is costing.

> Add to this any private grief or doubts they may be undergoing it becomes one of our modern forms of torture which, on the whole, has the Inquisition 'beat'. ("The Tragic Family of Croydon" 299).

Remembering her own press scrutiny, Christie likens such notoriety to a form of torture, mostly borne by the innocent. The article prefaces Christie's own words by stating that "Agatha Christie, the well-known writer of detective stories, pleads for a kindly attitude towards those who still must bear much of the burden of the tragedy that might at some future time find a parallel in the family of every one of us" ("The Tragic Family of Croydon" 294). Yet even Christie, in her article entreating for this sympathy, does acknowledge that this type of publicity is "unavoidable" as "The public interest is natural. One would be inhuman did one not feel interested" (299).

Ten years after her disappearance, and five after her article, Agatha Christie seems to fictionally reference this press interaction and public clamour for detective fiction authors to comment on notorious cases. In *Cards on the Table* (1936), Mrs. Adrienne Oliver, herself a detective fiction author, is introduced like so:

> Mrs. Adrianne Oliver was extremely well known as one of the foremost writers of detective and other sensational stories. She wrote chatty (if not particularly grammatical) articles on *The Tendency of the Criminal*; *Famous Crimes Passionnels*; *Murder for Love v. Murder for Gain*. She was also a hot-headed feminist, and when any murder of importance was occupying space in the Press there was sure to be an interview with Mrs. Oliver, and it was mentioned that Mrs. Oliver had said, "Now if a *woman* were the head of Scotland Yard!" She was an earnest believer in woman's intuition. (original emphasis, 14)[138]

[138] Mrs. Oliver was first introduced in short stories, appearing in 1932 in "The Case of the Discontented Soldier" (Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie* 55). See Bernthal *Queering Agatha Christie* for further exploration of the relationship between Christie and Mrs. Oliver.

While some critics, such as Curran, have argued that Mrs. Oliver is a fictional characterization of Christie herself, J.C. Bernthal nuances this in *Queering Agatha Christie* (54). Instead, Bernthal contends that Mrs. Oliver "comes to represent, in embodied form, not a literal mouthpiece but the implied author" (55). He posits that "Christie created a fictional counterpart, not as an alter ego but as a send-up of clichés surrounding her, in gendered terms and professionally" (55). It is also clear that Christie fictionalizes events which she had experienced and which had been written about her. She uses her fiction to reference the society in which she lives, creating fictional representations of what readers can assume about women authors. Yet in doing so, she further contributes to the fluidity between fact and fiction, and thus creates a community for her readers, who participate in this knowledge of Christie's life and fiction which is presented to them and wait for the next installment.

Though there was much speculation and a lot of discussion from police, press, and authors, it is clear that the press capitalized on Christie's disappearance and were excited that it could be a 'publicity stunt':

> The newspapers were carried away. The simple and natural explanation – 'she lost her memory' – left them disappointed. They had to find something more complicated, or all the fuss was unnecessary. A 'stunt', too, fitted in with other preconceptions. Much had been made of Agatha's skill as a writer of the detective fiction, of the trick she had played on her readers in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. She had been presented as a woman of devilish ingenuity and the press had to believe that they had been outwitted. It flattered their vanity to conclude that Agatha should want so to use them. (Morgan 158)

Morgan's claim that the papers thought Christie was using them, shows the further cultural context and influence which the interwar press acknowledged it wielded. Though Christie did not intend for her own life to be so publicly exploited, the influence of the press on its public and the types of advertising which authors employed, invited the conclusion that this was a publicity stunt to reach a wider reading audience.

Indeed, other detective fiction and popular authors seemingly took advantage of this event, such as Conan Doyle, Edgar Wallace, and even Sayers.[139] And this relationship between these authors with the press was ultimately highly beneficial, both for the press which capitalized upon this publicity, as well as for Christie, a consequence of her notoriety and her interaction with her public which she was shy of for the rest of her life (discussed below).

Examination of *British Newspaper Archives* shows how the press exploited Christie in this moment in her life. A large panel advertisement dedicated to serialization of the previously published *The Murder on the Links* (1923), Christie's second full length Hercule Poirot novel, refers to Christie as the 'missing novelist'. The advertisement in the *Portsmouth Evening News* from Saturday, December 11, 1926, (the Great Sunday hunt was December 12) reads: "Great Mystery Story, 'The Murder on the Links', by Agatha Christie, the Missing Novelist, begins tomorrow in Reynold's Illustrated, The Best on Sunday" ("The Murder on the Links" 3). The press may have thought of her disappearance as a publicity stunt, but they were certainly capitalizing on it as well. While Christie does not go into details of her disappearance in her *Autobiography,* she does credit this time with creating her hatred of the press:

> From this time, I suppose, dates my revulsion against the Press, my dislike of journalists and of crowds. It was unfair, no doubt, but I think it was natural under the circumstances. I had felt like a fox, hunted, my earths dug up and yelping hounds following me everywhere. 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. (*An Autobiography* 353-354)

Yet ultimately Christie's disappearance and ensuing publicity meant that the sales of her books and the returns from her serializations helped to launch her into best-seller status. In the summer of 1926

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[139] Edwards comments in *The Golden Age of Murder* that Christie was a "natural diplomat, she made a habit of dodging any hint of controversy" (171). Although Christie and Sayers would both be part of the Detection Club, and work on projects together, Edwards writes that "If [Christie] was annoyed that Sayers had taken such a close interest in her disappearance in 1926, she never showed it" (171).

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd sold 4,000 copies from its first printing (considered a good sale), was well-received by reviewers, and sparked debate over whether Christie had played fair with her readers. Conversely, after her experience in December 1926, thoroughly exhausted and needing to meet her publisher's demands for another book, Christie brought a few Poirot stories together to become *The Big Four* (1927) which, although panned by reviewers sold a startling 8,500 copies (Sanders and Lovallo 40, 42). The success of *Ackroyd* and its ensuing critical reception would probably have increased interest in Christie's next book in any case. Yet there is no doubt that the press publicity of Christie's disappearance further influenced the sales of *The Big Four*, a book which was pieced together from short stories previously published in newspapers (Sanders and Lovallo 41-42). Sanders and Lovallo suggest that the "author's personal life intervened [with sales] in a spectacular way" (40). Lucy Worsley makes a similar claim; detailing the increase in sales of the next few books Christie would write, arguably much weaker than *Ackroyd*, Worsley posits that "The message is clear, it wasn't just quality that sold, but fame" (169). This would create a "terrible tension" for Christie for the rest of her life between her relationship with her public and her work (Worsley 169). Yet as the significant increase of these sales show, there was an increasing readership for Christie's fiction, a community of readers who became more and more interested in Christie's life as well as her work. She acknowledges this in her fiction, exploring the difficulties of publicity with popularity and making a living as a professional author.

This 'terrible tension', between an author, her work, and her engaging with her public, is fictionally mirrored in Dorothy L. Sayers's Harriet Vane stories. McGregor and Lewis, in *Conundrums for the Long Week-end: England, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Lord Peter Wimsey*, comment that Sayers "to give her novels a greater sense of immediacy…often added references to current events to her manuscripts just prior to publication, drawing material from almanacs and newspapers found in the reading room at the British Museum" (3). It is tempting to argue that Christie's disappearance at the close

of 1926 and the notoriety it caused influenced Dorothy L. Sayers's *Strong Poison* in 1930.[140] *Strong Poison* opens with detective fiction author Harriet Vane on trial for the murder of her lover, highbrow writer Philip Boyes. Lord Peter Wimsey is convinced of her innocence and takes advantage of a hung jury to procure evidence for her release. In the novel, the consequence of Harriet Vane's murder trial further increases the sales of her already popular detective fiction novels – which, her publisher tells Peter, "have always sold reasonably well – round about the three or four thousand mark in this country" (89), while Boyes's own 'highbrow' books, never popular, become suddenly highly sought after. Philip's publisher callously comments to Peter that "Mr. Boyes could not have done better for himself than to go and get murdered like this" (87): notoriety has significantly increased his sales. Harriet's publisher, although disgusted by this notoriety, is also taking advantage of the sudden further interest in her work, which has "stimulated things enormously", explaining that her newest book "has sold seven thousand before publication" (89). This success is comparable to Christie's, whose *Ackroyd* sold 4,000 while after her disappearance she consistently sold 7-8,000 in her books' first printings (Sanders and Lovallo, 40, 42; Worsley 169).

As already noted, newspapers too could capitalize on any type of publicity that an author was generating. To pass the time while Harriet is in prison, and to satisfy himself that Harriet did not murder her lover in order to increase her sales, Peter and Harriet concoct a murder mystery story based on an author who commits murders so that sales of his/her books go up and they will then have a legacy to leave to the people that they care about (*Strong Poison* 92-95). This type of motive for crime is not as bizarre as it sounds; Victoria Stewart notes that "Newspapers were not neutral vehicles of information about criminal cases", explaining that "it was not uncommon for newspaper to pay the defense costs in cases

[140] See Martin Edwards's *The Golden Age of Murder* for his commentary on Sayers's awareness of Christie's disappearance. He references her article in the *Daily News* (55) and discusses the commonality with Christie's disappearance and the scene of the car hunt in Sayers's 1927 *Unnatural Death* (55, 56).

which they believed would yield a good story" (*Crime Writing* 102). As Stewart shows, these "publishing practices" are reflected in *Strong Poison*: "Wimsey is told that Harriet's defense costs 'are being borne by her publishers and by a – well, a certain newspaper, which is running her new book as a serial. They expect a scoop as a result of all of this'" (Stewart, *Crime Writing* 102). In real life, Christie's stories were re-serialized in papers who promoted them as by the 'missing novelist'; fictionally, Harriet's trial costs are subsidized by a newspaper wanting 'a scoop'.

Public opinion also is heavily commented on in the novel, with various characters, from strangers in the court room, to journalists, to guests of Wimsey's discussing the ensuing drama. At the trial, Peter's mother the Dowager Duchess, refers to the fact that other detective fiction authors try to solve actual cases: "Edgar Wallace of course, who always seems to be everywhere, and dear Conan Doyle" (45). She wonders if Harriet knows who the perpetrator is as "it is so very curious to write books about crimes and then be accused of a crime one's self" (45) and comments that "I suppose we shall soon know now, not the truth, necessarily, but what the jury have made of it" (45). Over Christmas tea, Peter Wimsey's sister-in-law claims that she does not doubt Harriet murdered Philip as "the wretched woman's sales are going up by leaps and bounds" (165), while another guest, "extremely rich and connected with the City", posits that "the whole thing is a publicity stunt gone wrong. …You never know what these advertising fellows are up to" (165).[141] The exchange between Peter and the guests at tea shows an acute sense of the weight of advertising and publicity for literary popularity and status, a concern for the woman writer hoping to make a living at being a professional author. There is an assumption because Harriet is doing so well by the publicity surrounding her trial – although she could be hanged for her crime – that she must have participated somehow to be so benefitting from it: "Well, it looks like a case of hanging the goose that

[141] Sayers herself worked in an Advertising office, S.H. Benson from 1922-1931. She uses her experience for her plot in *Murder Must Advertise* (1933).

lays the golden eggs this time," said Captain Bates, with a loud laugh. "Unless Wimsey means to pull off one of his conjuring tricks." (165). Meanwhile Miss Titterton hopes Harriet does not hang, but rather be committed to "penal servitude on condition that she turned out a new story every six months. It would be much more useful than picking oakum or sewing mail-bags for the post-office to mislay" (165). "Aren't you being a bit previous?", asks Wimsey. "She's not convicted yet" (166). This exchange, while light in tone, is deadly serious: it shows Sayers's awareness of how a celebrity status – even a negative one – directly contributes to an author's sales. Thus while Christie's disappearance may not have been directly responsible for parts of the plot of *Strong Poison*, Sayers's novel does seem to reflect on what might be seen from the outside as a rather tawdry relationship between personal mishap and financial gain: the financial success brought about by such publicity allows for it to be labeled a 'publicity stunt'.

While Harriet Vane's notoriety is referred to as a 'publicity stunt gone wrong', making use of these cultural productions could turn authors into celebrities which brought more financial stability ("her sales are going up by leaps and bounds"). Although Sayers uses a rather exaggerated example for her readers, any type of celebrity notoriety can influence market productions of an author's best-seller status: there is no difference in how the public reacts to this publicity for Harriet's detective fiction novels or between the 'highbrow' writing of Philip Boyes. This, indeed, further emphasises that public notoriety and popularity and interaction with the press did much in demarcating literary categories such as the middlebrow or highbrow; Bingham claims that the highbrow 'reputation', alongside a 'received inaccessibility' also came about through "lack of interest in engaging with the popular press" ("Cultural Hierarchies" 62-63). Especially beneficial for Harriet however, are the serializations of her books. As her publisher explains to Peter:

> "I am, of course, securing the most advantageous contracts I possible can at the moment, to cover the next three or four books, but I can only really control the advances. The actual receipts will depend on the sales, and that is where I foresee a slump. I am, however, doing well with *serial*

rights, which are *important from the point of view of immediate returns*." (emphasis added, *Strong Poison* 89).

Harriet's trial allows for her publisher to 'do well' with serial rights; this is also reflected in real life, when Christie's *The Murder on the Links* was serialized again during her disappearance, advertised as by the "Missing Novelist" ("The Murder on the Links" 3). Similarly, on December 9, 1926, *The Courier and Advertiser* comments on Christie's disappearance while pointing to serializations of her books *The Secret Adversary* and *The Secret of Chimneys* "which appeared in our own volumes" ("How Agatha Christie Began" 6).

Harriet Vane's fictional awareness of the role of publicity and advertising is arguably a realistic portrayal (without the murder charge) of the choices that popular detective fiction authors of the inter-war years had to make when positioning their own work for publication. Advertisement and serialization were necessary in order to become best sellers and make a living, but these choices then contributed to press scrutiny in an author's private life – what was personal could become commodified – as well as labels of genre and status. Following upon *Strong Poison* and her sensational murder trial, in the subsequent Harriet Vane books, Harriet is desperately aware of the publicity which still pursues her and tries her best to control it as much as she can – just as Christie does after her own disappearance. This effort for control of the publicity further shows the awareness these authors had of the influence of the newspaper for reaching a community of readers, enlarged by corresponding publicity (as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5). In *Have His Carcase* (1932) Harriet angrily justifies to Peter Wimsey her decision to inform the *Morning Star* of her involvement in finding the body on the beach: "You thought I was pretty brazen, I expect, when you found me getting publicity out of the thing. So I was…I can't hide my name – it's what I live by" (171). She is aware of her public status and notoriety as a detective fiction novelist, acquitted murder suspect, and love interest to Lord Peter, and is desperately conscious of how she wants to be and is

portrayed in the press. She tries to take control of her story.[142] The three subsequent stories with Harriet Vane and Peter Wimsey after *Strong Poison* all include Harriet's, and then Peter's struggle (both in *Have His Carcase* and in *Busman's Honeymoon*) to control how she and they will be represented by the press to a reading public. As discussed in Chapter 2, how authors and celebrities offered themselves to the press, or were seen by the press, could influence their status, their name, their livelihood – even bad publicity could in turn make the recipient of it more financially successful, although, as Sayers asks, at what personal or public cost: "it's what I live by" (*Have His Carcase* 171). Consequently, the Harriet Vane novels see this juxtaposition between utilizing the imagined community of readers as gathered by the press, and protecting oneself or other, smaller communities, from the potential of being torn apart by it which could also happen in the newspaper's quest for news (as I demonstrate in Chapter 5). This in turn shows Sayers's awareness of the community of readers who had the ability to be influenced by this publicity: it was incumbent upon one to try and determine if it was positive or negative.

Christie's reference to Mrs. Oliver in *Cards on the Table* in 1936 has her seemingly airing her opinions given any chance, and perhaps Christie is acknowledging the readiness with which many authors were willing to give press interviews to proclaim their opinions. For Mrs. Oliver, however, these are not necessarily *private* revelations, but rather an opportunity for public exposure. By *Hallowe'en Party*

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[142] Peter goes to Harriet's side in *Have His Carcase* to prevent her from being wrongly accused of murder once more. He is informed of the murder and Harriet's involvement from a recurring minor character – reporter Salcombe Hardy of the *Morning Star*.

"Yes – he seemed to know all about it. I was rather hurt. Fancy having to ask the *Morning Star* where the pole-star of one's own heaven has gone to. Hardy seemed to know all about it. How do these things get into the papers?"
"I rang them up myself," replied Harriet. "First-class publicity, you know, and all that."
"So it is," agreed Wimsey, helping himself lavishly to butter. "Rang 'em up did you, with all the gory details?"
"Naturally; that was the first thing I thought of."
"You're a woman of business. But does it not, pardon me, indicate a certain coarsening of the fibres?"
"Obviously," said Harriet. "My fibres at this moment resemble coconut matting." (49)

Later in the story, the reader is made aware of just how much Peter did in protecting Harriet: "Wimsey painfully recalled the terms of the message that had originally reached him from Salcombe Hardy of the *Morning Star*…Then his own furious and terrified irruption into Fleet Street, and the violent bullying of a repentant and sentimental Hardy, till the Morning Star report was hammered into a form that set the tone for the comments of the press" (171).

(1969), Mrs. Oliver's reticence to discuss personal opinions is commented on by Poirot in conversation with another character:

> "Adriane Oliver. A best seller. People wish to interview her, to know what she thinks about such subjects as student unrest, socialism, girls' clothing, should sex be permissive, and many other things that are no concern of hers".
>
> "Yes, yes," said Poirot, "deplorable, I think. They do not learn very much, I have noticed, from Mrs. Oliver. They learn only that she is fond of apples. That has now been known for twenty years at least, I should think, but she still repeats it with a pleasant smile". (*Hallowe'en Party* 112-113)

Though appearing in the press brought publicity, authors tried to control how much of their private lives they shared. Martin Edwards notes that Christie's disappearance in 1926 was "the most high profile of the numerous disasters that befell [Detection] Club members" and profoundly "affect[ed] their writing as well their lives" (*Golden Age* 10). After seeing the results of this controversy, Edwards claims, and despite wanting to "promote their books", "they were determined to keep their personal lives out of the public gaze" (*Golden Age* 10). Edwards's *Golden Age* uncovers the lives of these authors, arguing that in fact, many detective fiction authors successfully guarded their personal lives more easily than is available to celebrities today. As he declares, "Beneath the façade of middle class respectability lay human stories as complex and enthralling as any fiction" (10).

Some of Christie's biographers, most recently Worsley (2022), have observed that her performance to the press and in her *Autobiography* are seemingly the opposite of the clearheaded, shrewd, and brilliant writer and businesswoman which they argue she must have been to write and manage such a successful career as a detective fiction author for so many decades. After Christie's disappearance, her biographer Janet Morgan writes, there were two Agatha Christies: the one in the news and the private one

(162).[143] Bernthal notes that Christie publicly asserted the right to "two personalities", claiming to be "Dame Agatha at work and Lady Mallowan at play" (as qtd in Bernthal, *Queering* 62).

To understand fully the differences between these 'two Christies' and the effect upon Christie of such a media furor surrounding her personal life, it is worth quoting a section from Christie's grandson, Mathew Prichard, in his "Introduction" to *Agatha Christie: The Grand Tour,* where he discusses his grandmother. Even to Prichard, Agatha Christie had two personas, distinguished between the grandmother he knew and the woman author he discovered while looking into her past:

> I am most often asked about Nima…but what was she really like?'…My standard answers were that she was a shy, reserved person, who was very reluctant to talk in public, give press interviews, discuss her work or otherwise engage in activity other than writing books. She was never happier than being with her family or close friends; she was a devout person who believed in God (and in evil) and, to me, an inspirational grandmother far more interested in my own likes and dislikes than in promoting or discussing herself. She was, I have always said, the best listener I ever met. I still believe, based on the evidence of the 25 years or so that I knew her well, that all this is true. (6-7)

According to Prichard, however, this perception of his grandmother is complicated when he reads her letters from her time on the Grand Tour. These letters challenge his previous remembrance of her, and he acknowledges 'another Agatha Christie', of whom he is equally proud:

> But, as I read her account of the Grand Tour, I see glimpses of another Agatha Christie. One with far more confidence in herself publicly than the one I remember. One who sang in public in Coochin Coochin, was very sociable on board ship, and who had the courage to make the decision to go on the tour and leave her daughter for ten months. A person who, even though it

[143] Laura Thompson also comments on this, further explored by J.C. Bernthal (*Queering* 59).

> turned out to be the wrong thing to do, took her place directly beside local dignitaries at the lunch table until being told to go back and sit next to her husband. A young woman of 32 who was actually confident in herself, and in her husband, amid constantly changing circumstances and for the most part in the company of perfect strangers…So I find myself in the presence of a younger Agatha, more confident and assertive than the Nima that I remember – and what do I feel? I feel even more proud of her. (7)

Prichard declares that after the events of December 1926 "a very important part of the confident, carefree wife who accompanied Archie in 1922 was lost forever" (8). Prichard clearly believes that Christie's exploitation by the press led to her reticence in publicity in later years. By this point, however, she had already established herself as a woman detective fiction author, employing a certain type of publicity (discussed below). Her further celebrity status, which came alongside best-seller status, although painful, came as a result of her disappearance and personal anguish.

Yet after this ordeal, Christie focuses her energy on her work and becomes, as she claims, now 'fully professional'. Prichard states that after her second marriage, "all her confidence, energy and genius were concentrated on supporting her new husband and, of course, her work. The days of the vivacious Agatha at public gatherings were not to return; but perhaps in the end we were all the benefactors, for in both quantity and quality her work after 1927 was amazing" (8). For Christie the writer, her divorce and her obligation to her publishers meant that she had to keep writing and publishing. Despite her exhaustion and upcoming divorce, she owed her publishers another novel and wrote *The Blue Train* (1928), an exertion she stated made her 'fully professional':

> That was the moment when I changed from an amateur to a professional. I assumed the burden of a profession, which is to write even when you don't want to, don't much like what you are writing, and aren't writing particularly well. I have always hated *The Mystery of the Blue Train*, but I got it written, and sent off to the publishers. It sold just as well as my last book had done. So

I had to content myself with that – though I cannot say I have ever been proud of it.

(*Autobiography* 358)

Christie needed to become the fully professional author, but at the same time, she became much more cautious and reticent about her press persona. This distinction between the two Christies and the analogous fictional distinction which Sayers makes about Harriet's awareness of how she is portrayed in the news, furthers my argument that these women were aware of and performed for their press attention as well as allowing us to examine how they did this. In turn, they could fictionalize this in their stories as a way of critiquing the social expectations for how women should act and could be portrayed in the press. Further, their fiction shows that press depictions of these public figures were likely incomplete and should be understood in a specific cultural context, one which the readers of their novels would also know. They tried to both utilize and control the press attention which could contribute – or detract – from their professional status as an author. As their careers began and gained momentum, examining specifically the relationship that Christie and Sayers had with the press, as well as their own understanding of why they were engaging with this publicity, can offer understanding for how these women authors controlled their launch into the professional writing sphere.

The rest of the chapter teases out the tension between these authors' desire to promote books on the one hand and to keep personal life out of the public's notice on the other. As I noted in the Introduction, I do not use their auto/biographies to read their fiction, but rather to come to an understanding of the relationship between their personal interaction with promoting their work – their public and private lives – and the conversations surrounding this which was exemplified in their fiction. This reiterates the premise for my argument that they created imagined social communities within their texts to relate to and then expand the imagined social communities in their own cultural context.

3.2 Agatha Christie(?): "Mrs. Archibald Christie"; "mother of a charming little daughter Rosalind"; and "brilliant writer of detective fiction and creator of Hercule Poirot" ("The Maker of 'The Grey Cells of M. Poirot'" 467)

On the day she embarked on the Empire Tour (Jan 20, 1922-Dec 1, 1922) with her first husband Archie, Agatha Christie's interview with *The Pall Mall Gazette* was printed in the Women's Page (see Figure 1). She was becoming increasingly popular with her readers and the public. *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920) and *The Secret Adversary* (1922) were successful stories which led to Bruce Ingram, editor of a popular Sunday newspaper *The Sketch*, commissioning a series of short stories on Poirot, to be published when she returned home. Christie writes of this in her *Autobiography*: "This excited me very much indeed. At last I was becoming a success. To be in *The Sketch* – wonderful!" (282).

The Sketch was one of the first papers to consistently publish the works of Agatha Christie, and from 1923-24 they published 49 of her stories.[144] According to the *British Newspaper Archive*, *The Sketch* was first published in 1893 as a "light-hearted sister paper to *The Illustrated London News* and described itself as 'A Journal of Art and Actuality'" (*The Sketch*). A weekly publication, it was for "the cultivated people who in their leisure moments look for light reading and amusing pictures, imbued with a high artistic value" (*The Sketch*). Other writers were also featured in addition to Christie, such as Storm Jameson and Algernon Blackwood, with reviews about Noel Coward, P.G. Wodehouse, and Dorothy L. Sayers published.[145]

Examination of the *Sketch* shows that this series was advertised in the Feb 28, 1923 issue ("Writer of the Most Brilliant Detective Novel of the Day" 411, Figure 4). There is a full page picture of a

[144] Alison Light states that in 1925 *The Sketch* published pictures Christie at her new home in the suburbs, but on examination of the paper in the *British Newspaper Archives* I could not find the piece she was referencing. Light does not reference the edition nor where she finds this information (75).
[145] The May 30, 1923 issue of *The Sketch* published a short story by Storm Jameson, but first introduced Christie's upcoming series in the above caption (Jameson, "Lady Susan and Life" 433).

smiling Agatha Christie, with descriptive writing beneath, explaining who she is and giving information about the upcoming series. Referred to either as Agatha Christie or Mrs. Christie, the paper details how she had her beginning as a detective novelist, creating a narrative that she is not a professional author who is looking to making money, but rather 'rose to fame' upon winning her bet that she could write a detective novel ("Writer of the Most Brilliant Detective Novel of the Day" 411). The first short story, "The Affair at the Victory Ball" appeared March 7, 1923, under two headings: "Tales with a Sting" and then "The Grey Cells of M. Poirot" ("The Affair at the Victory Ball" 466). The first part of the story appears, and then is accompanied by a full page layout with pictures and texts representing Christie in her home writing ("The Maker of 'The Grey Cells of M. Poirot'" 467, Figure 5). The advertisement for the series of Poirot stories shows various pictures which blend together her professional and private life, offering for the reader a glimpse into the home life of their favourite author.

The narrative of Christie as unintentionally becoming a popular professional author from the beginning is often used as evidence in support of Christie's anti-feminism (as Worsley discusses 95-103). It is also a narrative which she seemingly performed for her public in her later press presence and in her *Autobiography*.

There are various stories which discuss Christie's initial interest in detective fiction. It is clear, however, that she had been reading them since a young age. When Agatha Christie was eight years old, her sister Madge introduced her to the Holmes stories and they both became what Christie called "connoisseurs of the detective story", reading Arsène Lupin, Wilkie Collins and other popular stories of the decade (Sanders and Lovallo 7). Sanders and Lovallo posit that it was in 1908, after reading the popular Gaston Le Roux's *The Mystery of the Yellow Room*, that Agatha decided she wanted to try and write a mystery novel whereupon her sister Madge bet she would not be able to keep the murderer's

identity a secret (7).[146] This is a different story than the one the *Sketch* references, where they claim it was at a dinner party, with a more mature Christie, who responded to a bet to write a mystery story.

Christie wrote *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* during the war, ostensibly as a hobby to occupy her free-time as she worked in a dispensary and looked after her duties at home (Christie, *An Autobiography* 211, 254; Morgan 75). Yet Christie put a lot of effort into this story, thinking about it in her free time and even taking two weeks off at the advice of her mother to go and finish her novel (*Autobiography* 258; Morgan 78; Worsley 73). This special effort rather belies the notion that this detective fiction writing was simply a hobby. After sending *Styles* to a few publishers who refused it, it was sent to The Bodley Head where it was seemingly forgotten about as the war ended and Christie's life moved on. Meanwhile, her husband Archie came home from the war. In her *Autobiography* Christie remembers that she focused cheerfully on her domestic duties and their new daughter and recalls that she was surprised when in 1919 she received a request from publisher John Lane to discuss her book. Christie later reflected that Lane took advantage of her as an inexperienced author "who had not contemplated [writing] as a way of earning money" (Morgan 82; Christie, *Autobiography* 276).

The narrative which Christie spins in her *Autobiography*, as well as the one which she would later perform for the press, would have her reading public believe that she started writing as a hobby and was

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[146] This is a different story than the one which declares Madge bet Christie she couldn't write a detective novel during the war. Probably both accounts are somewhat true – nevertheless it shows that Christie was aware of the detective story, loved them, and was encouraged to write one.
There is also a story in *The Courier and Advertiser*, from Thursday December 9, 1926 during her ten day disappearance. This article entitled "How Agatha Christie Began" states that she was a dinner party when someone declared that he did not like detective stories as one could always guess who committed the murder from the first few pages. "Not at all" was the reply made by Mrs. Christie, and there and then she undertook to write a detective story which would keep the secrets of the crime to the last chapter". Part of the reason this is in the paper, it seems, is for the writer to then conclude: "Strangely enough, in view of the present mysterious disappearance of the writer, this story – the author's initial effort – was entitled 'The Mysterious Affair at Styles', the latter being the name of Mrs. Christie's present Surrey home" (6). The final paragraph of the story simply notes that "Though only thirty-five years of age, Mrs. Christie had written a considerable number of stories, prominent amongst which were 'The Secret Adversary' and 'The Secret of Chimneys' which appeared in our own volumes" (6). Perhaps just a bit more publicity for the paper and a way to connect with what was happening.

only surprised when she became successful. Yet in her *Autobiography* she also emphasises her writing efforts from an early age, while her biographers Morgan and Worsley both extensively comment upon this. Writing as a pastime was common amongst her family members: Christie published poetry in her local paper; her sister Madge published short stories in *Vanity Fair* and then wrote and produced a play in the early 1920s (Morgan 48; Worsley 30). During her youth and into her teenage years, Christie wrote many stories and sent them to editors under different pseudonyms (*Autobiography* 193-194): a full record of their rejections were amongst her personal papers when she died (Morgan 50).[147] Agatha was encouraged to write by her mother, who also suggested that she seek professional help for her fiction, asking neighbour and author Eden Philpott for his advice for plots, writing realistic conversations, and where to publish (Christie, *Autobiography* 195; Morgan 52-53; Worsley 40-41). Janet Morgan comments that "Shy though Agatha was about her writing, she asked [Philpott] what he thought", then noting that "his reaction was splendid" (51). Philpott introduced her to his own literary agent, whom Christie would remember when she wanted to renegotiate her prohibitive contract she had signed when publishing *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (Worsley 99-100). Thus when Christie started *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* during the War, she notes that "Mother had the usual complete faith that her daughters could do anything", quoting her mother as commenting "A detective story? That will be a nice change for you, won't it? You'd better start" (*Autobiography* 257).

Lucy Worsley gives the cultural context for the belief that writing was a "just one of a string of hobbies or accomplishments", commenting that "this notion…was more widespread than you might think" (38). Worsley notes that for Christie, "Writing was a welcome break from socialising" (38). Christie is quoted as stating: "'I had formed a habit of writing stories,'…It 'took the place, shall we say,

[147] Morgan writes out the list of short stories which Agatha tried to write and which all were ultimately rejected: an interesting phenomenon considering Madge's success. Christie would later rework these plots and publish them as mystery stories (49).

of embroidering cushion covers or pictures taken from Dresden china flower-painting. If anyone thinks this is putting creative writing too low in the scale, I cannot agree'" (Worsley 38). As mentioned, Madge published stories in *Vanity Fair* while Agatha's grandmother supported her family with her embroidery: "In each case, what was considered a harmless pastime led to cash" (Worsley 38). As Worsley suggests, "Nothing can be further from the Romantic idea of the artist: a starving, struggling figure in his garret, hurling his genius at his lonely task" (38-39). Christie herself later commented, "'How much more interesting it would be if I could say that I always longed to be a writer', but 'such an idea never came into my head'" (as qtd in Worsley 39).

Yet in fact, Christie was attempting to become a published author before her success with the detective fiction genre and *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920). As Morgan notes of Christie's efforts before *Styles* was accepted, "Magazine editors might reject Agatha's early stories and Hughes Massie be dauntingly dismissive, but she pressed on" (52). She worked on a short story, 'Vision' which was inspired by both May Sinclair as well as the detective story *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* (Morgan 52). She sent another short story (now lost) to Eden Philpott, who wrote her in 1909:

> In fact all is going exceedingly well with your work and should life so fall out for you that it has room for art & you can face the up-hill fight to take your place & win it, you have the gifts sufficient. I never prophecy; but I should judge that if you can write like this now you might go far. However life knocks the art out of a good many people & your environment in the time to come may substitute for the hard road of art a different one… (as qtd in Morgan 52)

His prophecies would become true – and Christie would utilize the popularity of detective fiction to 'go far'. In the 1922 interview with *The Pall Mall Gazette* she declares:

> "Once I wrote poetry. That was in my age of innocence before crime, its fascination and its lure attracted me. When once you adopt crime it's difficult to give it up, I know I can never do so.

"Besides writing poetry, I used to sing. I trained in Paris for two years – but finally decided that I would rather take music for relaxations and crime as a trade." ("The Pursuit of Crime" 11)

Importantly too, Christie acknowledged that she had "good fortune in having the leisure in which to write a whole novel before she was twenty" (Worsley 39) as a woman in the upper middle-class. And though the narrative is not one of an active search for professionalism, her actions and efforts in her writing seemingly discredit this, as does her move from writing romantic stories to experimenting with detective fiction.

Part of understanding this narrative of moving away from establishing herself as a professional writer, despite declaring the contrary in 1922, also comes from Christie's own life situation and class. The daughter of a gentleman and moving in the middle- and upper middle-classes of society, Christie was not ostensibly to be concerned with finding a career for herself: Merja Makinen notes that up until the First World War, the education for these women was focused on their "dependant status as wives and daughters" (*Agatha Christie* 4). Christie comments on this in *An Autobiography*, and as Janet Morgan expounds upon, Christie's aim – like that of many other young women – was to marry:

> [T]he career which middle and upper-middle-class women were exhorted to seek, the destiny promised them by mothers, grandmothers, sisters and aunts, nannies, popular literature and social convention, was marriage. 'No worry,' [Agatha Christie] wrote, 'about what you should be or do – Biology would dictate. You were waiting for The Man and, when The Man came, he would change your entire life.' (Morgan 42)[148]

A man did come into Agatha Christie's life, and she did marry him, on Christmas Eve, 1914. Yet another event also took place, the First World War, which changed Christie's social and marital

[148] Worsley contrasts the lives of Agatha and her sister Madge (30-31), arguing that the war intervened with Agatha's life in a startling way (51).

expectations and divided her from her supposed path and prevented her from following in the same footsteps of both her mother and older sister. Worsley writes that after her engagement, in 1913, Agatha thought that "she would follow her sister into marriage and motherhood… [and] she had no idea that the coming war would both derail her life, and make her into an artist" (51).

Trodd calls Christie "one of the women brought out of the domestic sphere by war-work" (131), and notes that nursing was an "obvious choice for women, and provided the first experience of work for many middle-class young women, including the writers Vera Brittain, Agatha Christie, Rose Macaulay and Freya Stark" (19). Christie began as a hospital nurse at the start of the war and then worked in a dispensary where she gained valuable knowledge which she in turn used in her detective fiction. Christie gives examples of the hard work done by these women in *An Autobiography*: "nursing consists largely of things like bed-pans, urinals, scrubbing of mackintoshes, the clearing up of vomit, and the odour of suppurating wounds" (228). She wryly comments on the romanticized version the older generation had for taking care of their soldiers whose "idea of nursing had, I think, been a good deal of pillow-smoothing, and gently murmuring soothing words over our brave men" (228). When the harsh realities of the war started to be found in the hospitals, "the idealists gave up their tasks with alacrity: they had never thought they would have to do anything like *this*, they said. And hardy young girls were brought to the bedside in their places" (original emphasis, 228).

These young 'girls' had much to learn and a lot to contend with. As Lucy Worsley notes, these young women also "performed" a job critically important in addition to looking after the wounded, which was "to witness the trauma that lay within the wards, to process it, and to give no testimony of it to the town outside" (56-57).[149] In an interview, Worsley expounds upon the benefit of hiding traumatic events

[149] Worsley includes a footnote which references Christine Hallett's *Nurse Writers of the Great War* (2016) (370). Thank you to Carol Acton who also referred me to Hallett's *Containing Trauma*. Acton noted that some of these ideas also come from Enid Bagnold's *Diary without Dates* (1918) which Christie would most likely have read, although there is no evidence of this.

for Christie as a detective fiction author. Christie had "to witness the horror of war, and not to let on, outside the hospital. She had to go home to her mama, and not say, I dealt with powerless, naked, wounded young men today" ("Lucy Worsley – Agatha Christie" 7:19-7:42). With such a writer as Christie, "who was obsessed with the masks that people wear", Worsley observes that this nursing was "excellent training" for "The way we pretend to be one thing, but actually we're covering up something else" ("Lucy Worsley – Agatha Christie" 7:48-8:00). Taken further, it could also be the mask which Christie learned to disguise her professionalism from the beginning: performing for a public audience and advertising herself as a wife and mother during an era where once a woman was married, she was expected to give up her career.

During the war, moreover, there was often a generational disconnect between those actively participating in the war, either fighting, nursing, etc., and those who had to take a more sedentary role due to age or other factors. While Christie was hiding her experience of these traumas – she had to take an amputated leg down to the furnace and burn it – her grandmother, who had no concept of what Christie was actually doing, worried about her walking on the road at night, wondering why the hospital would have a young woman out after dark: "So dangerous, dear, walking home by yourself. Anything might happen…It's not right. Somebody might speak to you" (Christie, *Autobiography* 241). Another elderly friend complained that she had to work on a Sunday. When Christie pointed out that the sick would not be able to get along without food or nursing for twenty-four hours the friend responded: "Oh, dear, I never thought of that. But there ought to be *some* arrangement" (original emphasis, *Autobiography* 233).[150] Middle-class and upper middle-class women, like Christie, were hiding their experience from an older

[150] Even though Christie was not nursing on the front lines, the reality between what she was actually doing and the concern for her well-being in walking alone just goes to show another division between the generations cut off from each other by war. As I noted in my Introduction, while Graves and Hodge discuss the two classes – those who had been to war and those who hadn't – they miss including the women who had dealt with these traumas as well.

generation, but because of this traumatic experience, they were able to move around their villages, the country, and even the world in a new way which had not been experienced before.

Christie was married to Archie when she first published *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), yet wrote it while he was away. Upon his return from the Front they moved to London. It was there that she wrote her second book, the thriller *The Secret Adversary* with Tommy and Tuppence Beresford, published in 1922. Its dedication is "To All those who lead monotonous lives in the hope that they may experience at second hand the delights and dangers of adventure". Elizabeth Prevost notes that Christie wrote this dedication and then set off on the Empire tour, during which she received the press cuttings "which suggested that the book's dedication in particular, as she wrote to her mother, had 'made quite a hit'" (Prevost 173). As Prevost argues, readers in England were excited to read a novel that offered relief from 'monotonous lives' (as further discussed in Chapter 4) and that for Christie personally, "Seeing the public's response to the book must have carried a pointed meaning at this stage of Christie's journey, living firsthand just such a departure from a monotonous life in the company of her marital partner" (173).

Christie's own life presents an adventurous woman who was still eager for new experiences, and who did not conform to social expectations of her day. Though she had married and assumed she would take the same path as her mother and sister, by 1922, when Christie publishes *The Secret Adversary*, the war had interrupted such expectations, both for Christie and for many other women like her, as she demonstrates with Tuppence, in *The Secret Adversary*. In this novel, both Tommy and Tuppence are out of jobs, newly demobbed from their duties during the war.[151] Tuppence is frantic to find a job in London after her excitement of her jobs in the war which she describes to Tommy –

[151] While before the end of the war Archie had been relocated to London and given a job with the war office, many young men coming back after the war had ended were not as fortunate. In her autobiography, Christie reflects back on the young people after the war who were frantic for a job: young men would go door to door trying to sell anything to make a living. She would later use this idea of a traveling salesman for a red herring in the *The A.B.C.*

> "Abridged biography of Miss Prudence Cowley, fifth daughter of Archdeacon Cowley of Little Missendell, Suffolk. Miss Cowley left the delights (and drudgeries) of her home life early in the war and came up to London, where she entered an officers' hospital…At the end of the year left hospital in a blaze of glory. After that, the talented Miss Cowley drove successively a trade delivery van, a motor-lorry and a general. The last was the pleasantest. He was quite a young general! …
>
> "To resume, that was in a way the apex of my career. I next entered a Government office. We had several very enjoyable tea parties. I had intended to become a land girl, a post-woman, and a bus conductress by way of rounding off my career – but the Armistice intervened! I clung to the office with the true limpet touch for many long months, but, alas, I was combed out at last. Since then I've been looking for a job. (195)

She does not want to go back home to live with her father, a relic from a Victorian era:

> "He has that delightful early Victorian view that short skirts and smoking are immoral. You can just imagine what a thorn in the flesh I am to him! He just heaved a sigh of relief when the war took me off. You see, there are seven of us at home. It's awful! All housework and mothers' meetings! I have always been the changeling. I don't want to go back, but – oh, Tommy, what else is there to do?" (196-197)[152]

Murders (1936), pointing out the societal suspicion which was directed upon those who weren't able to hold down a job after the war. She writes that "They had been lieutenants, naval and military, and now they were reduced to this" (*Autobiography* 280-281). This distress inspired the characters of Tommy and Tuppence (*Autobiography* 281).

[152] Graves and Hodge reflect: "The problem of the re-absorption of these men [with shell-shock] into civil life was complicated by their unfitness for any work that needed reliable judgement and steady application. They had been led to believe that the fact of having served honourably at the Front would be a safe coupon for employment; whereas, on the contrary, the more exhausting their service had been, the smaller was the peace-time demand for them. A million men found that their old jobs had either disappeared or were held by someone else – usually a woman, or a man who had escaped conscription" (15).

Tommy has no better luck with finding a job either. Finally "demobbed" he has been searching for a job: "And, for ten long, weary months I've been job hunting! There aren't any jobs! And, if there were, they wouldn't give 'em to me. What good am I? What do I know about business? Nothing" (196). After Tommy and Tuppence try all the depressing 'orthodox' ways of making money, they decide to "try the unorthodox" and "be adventurers" (198). Advertising in the newspaper for any job as long as it is exciting – "'How do you propose to get in touch with your would-be-employers?' 'Advertisement', replied Tuppence promptly" (199) – thrillingly, they are commissioned by the secret service to infiltrate a secret society which threatens the tenuous stability of England trying to recover after the war.

Tuppence in *The Secret Adversary* like her creator, does not want to go home after the exhilaration of movement she experienced during the war. Though Agatha had met and married a man who 'changed her entire life', this was not the conventional marriage experienced by her mother and her sister. Through her marriage, Agatha does not have to go home, but rather moves to London with Archie once he is sent there to work for the Air Ministry. In London she takes various courses, such as book-keeping and shorthand (*Autobiography* 263), becomes pregnant, and has her daughter in 1919. It was after the birth of Rosalind that she wrote *The Secret Adversary*. After all of these experiences, when Christie went to visit an aunt in New York while on the Empire Tour in 1922, she felt "like a bird in a golden cage" as her aunt "never dreamed of allowing me to go out by myself anywhere. This was so extraordinary to me, after moving about freely in London" (305).

It is clear from Agatha Christie's life that she enjoyed adventure, both writing about it and experiencing it; this would serve her well as an author of 'escapist' detective fiction (discussed in Chapter 4). Agatha Christie was living the excitement and adventure which she hoped her book would provide for her readers. Archie had been invited to join the British Empire Exhibition Tour to promote the British Empire Exhibition which was to be held in 1924, and Agatha decided to go as well even though she had to pay her own way and this meant leaving her small daughter behind. She notes in her interview before

she leaves that she is looking for adventure: "Even my little two-year-old daughter does not deter me, for when I am fleeing from the 'Secret Adversary' and before I return to England's shore, yet another story of crime will be to my credit – or shame – in the publisher's list" ("The Pursuit of Crime" 11). Further, she is writing stories while away: "And the tools of the trade are going round the world with me. The typewriter, notebooks, and heaps and heaps of paper" ("The Pursuit of Crime" 11). She was excited about the opportunity to see all the places she thought she would never be able to see. She reflects back "We had never been people who played safe. We had persisted in marrying against all opposition, and now we were determined to see the world and risk what would happen on our return" (*Autobiography* 288). This way of living also meant that Christie had to perhaps find herself an 'unorthodox' way of supporting herself and family, a task which she never shirked from even when her family fell apart: "Yet crime is like drugs. Once a writer of detective stories and though you may stray into the bypaths of poetry or psychology, you inevitably return – the public expect it of you!" ("The Pursuit of Crime" 11).

In her *Autobiography*, Christie details that after their return from the Empire tour, they were once more out of money – a reality which they assumed would be the case. The money earned from the series in *The Sketch* had already been spent. While Archie looked for work, Agatha tried to help him as best she could, staying quietly with him and attending to the domestic duties as they no longer could afford a maid. Writing her autobiography years later Christie reflects that "[n]owadays, I supposed I could have said, 'I'll get a job', but it was not a thing one even thought of saying in 1923" (310). While during the war there had been many opportunities for women – the "WAAFs, WRAFS, and WAACs, or jobs in munitions factories, or in the hospitals" – these "were temporary" (310). After the war, "[t]here were no jobs for women now in offices or ministries. Shops were fully staffed" (310). As a married woman, Christie would have been further precluded from a job, finding herself in a similar situation to her heroine Tuppence from *The Secret Adversary*. While Tuppence turns to adventure (offering vicarious adventure

for the reader),[153] Christie turned to her writing "since I felt that that was the only thing I could do that might bring in a little money" (310). The book she wrote after the tour was *The Man in the Brown Suit*, which ultimately launched her into her professional status as an author, and as Prevost argues, was influenced by the adventure she had experienced while on the Empire tour. From this success, she learned her own worth to her publishers, found herself an agent, Edmund Cork, and ultimately, "unbelievably" she writes, received an offer of £500 from *The Evening News* for the serialization rights (*Autobiography* 317-319; Morgan 111-113). Morgan declares that in Christie's learning to organize her own affairs, "her attitude to her writing became professional" (105).

Yet all of this success, adventure, worldly experience, and ability to write during most difficult circumstances, is seemingly at odds with how she describes this period in her *Autobiography*, as well as the advertisement for her stories in *The Sketch* upon her return home.[154]

When the series begins, the story takes up one full page while beside it is another full page of various pictures of Christie ("The Maker of 'The Grey Cells of M. Poirot'" 467, Figure 5). While the headline proclaims "CREATOR OF THE MOST INTERESTING DETECTIVE SINCE SHERLOCK HOLMES: AGATHA CHRISTIE", the caption underneath begins "Agatha Christie (who is in private life Mrs. Archibald Christie, the mother of a charming little daughter Rosalind) is the brilliant writer of

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[153] Domestic service was an option for working women but was declining in popularity. Trodd notes that while in 1901 domestic service made up 42 percent of the female workforce, this had dropped to 30 percent by 1931 (19). Interestingly, Tuppence becomes a lady's maid in *The Secret Adversary*, but she does this only to spy on the woman she is serving. Another character warns her to leave because the lady is dangerous, but this turns out to be a red herring, as he is worried Tuppence will actually find out what is happening in the flat and what the real relationship is between himself and the lady.

[154] It should be noted that Mary Anna Evans, in "Reading Christie with a Feminist Lens" (2023), recently analyzed three of these short stories as they first appeared in *The Sketch*. From this analysis she concludes that:
"Finally given serious consideration, Christie's fiction has been shown to be consistently focused on issues of critical interest to women, such as matters of independence, maternity, romance, vulnerability, and more. It lends itself to feminist analysis, and that analysis belies the common perception of Christie and her work as emblematic of a conservative suspicion of 'modern women' who fail to depend sufficiently on middle-class English men (Barnard 1980:26)". (102)

detective fiction and creator of Hercule Poirot" ("The Maker of 'The Grey Cells of M. Poirot'" 467). Two of the six photographs in the collage include Rosalind, the other four show Christie in various poses around her house: at the telephone, in her drawing room arranging flowers, at a writing table with pen in hand, and finally "at work with her type-writer" ("The Maker of 'The Grey Cells of M. Poirot'" 467). The mixture of pictures constructs her, not as a professional women in her work environment, but rather emphasises to her audience that she is an upper middle-class mother working in her home, writing stories in her spare time whilst also shown to be creating a home environment, as well as cuddling with her daughter. The serialization of these stories also entailed a glimpse into her private life, advertised alongside her stories themselves. The April 4, 1923 edition includes a full page picture entitled "A Family Study" (Figure 6). Christie and Rosalind are photographed together, Rosalind positioned cozily against her mother, while the caption underneath – after advertising once again the Poirot series in their paper – tells the reader that "Mrs. Christie is the wife of Wing-Commander Archibald Christie, C.M.G, D.S.O, the distinguished airman who did so well in the war" ("A Family Study"). The Christies are portrayed as a happy family, the husband a distinguished war hero, while the wife is presented in her home, writing and taking care of her daughter.

Anthea Trodd contends that in positioning herself in this way in 1923, and in further interviews with the press throughout her life, Christie "insists on an older model of the woman writer", one who writes in between domestic duties or around the schedule of her husband (45). Trodd argues that "By emphasizing her adherence to these work patterns, Christie constructs an image of the woman writer as essentially contained within the domestic rather than the professional world (45). Trodd uses these instances of Christie positioned around her married domestic life with her first husband, and then looks

further into her future when Christie accompanied her second husband Max on his archeological digs.[155] Journalists were eager for pictures of her work room, which "suggest an acceptance of the concept of the woman as professional writers, embodied in her possession of a room devoted to professional capacity" (Trodd 45). Trodd posits that Christie's inability to show such a work room meant that Christie could "*only* write her novels in the interstices of domestic work, or in the vicinity of her archaeologist husband's professional work when she accompanies him on field trips to the Middle East" (emphasis added, 45).

Conversely, Christie gives hints as to a different type of professional writing, one which can be accomplished anywhere – not just at home, but travelling as well, being adventurous, accomplishing writing where *she* wants to. Thus she brings her typewriter on the Empire Tour, and her typewriter on the archeological digs of her second husband, Max. She was not to be confined to a strict definition, at a desk, of what the public (or later critics) think a professional writer should look like. Trodd's argument is narrowly focused, and is missing in part the moment of history when Christie was first advertising herself as a detective fiction writer; as noted, in the Introduction and Chapter 2, the interwar period included debates about women's place in the public sphere, women were often discouraged from continuing their work or professions after marriage, and fiction writing at home was more acceptable than journalism which took place in a public environment. Reducing Christie to a narrative which claims that in order to consider her as a professional writer she had to perform as one (that is, present her public with a specific writing space) both in 1923 and then again later after her exploitation by the press, would seemingly remove Christie from a professional writers sphere. Yet her writing and earnings, as well as further understanding why she might have performed in this way for her reading public (as I noted) refute this contention. In order to actually be professional and make money from her writing, perhaps she had to

[155] Christie wrote about her time on archeological digs with her husband Max, in *Come, Tell Me How You Live*, published in 1946. She published this under her married name, Agatha Christie Mallowan.

perform her writing as amateur, a hobby, or pastime, fitted around domestic life; this performance is at odds with how she actually accomplished her writing – around the world and in various rooms of her own homes which she could afford from her writing. Thus how Christie positioned herself in the press is in keeping with her status as an upper middle-class married woman and mother, and the moment in which she was writing.

Revisiting Christie's presentation to the press through these advertisements and publicity allows for the re-evaluation for feminist representations of how Christie preformed for her public in contrast to her actions and what she wrote in her fiction. Understanding this feminism is also a way of revisiting the feminist narrative of the interwar years; as Alison Light notes this period is hard to reconcile as a "slough of feminine despond" and rather asks "What new kinds of social and personal opportunity, for example, were offered by the changing cultures of sport and entertainment…by new patterns of domestic life…new forms of household appliance, new attitudes to housework?" (9). Alice Wood claims that given the crisis in domestic servants in the interwar years, "housekeeping was recast [in women's magazines] as skilled and professional work" (210). She further argues that, for the interwar woman, "Rather than a place of retreat, the home was imagined as a crucial site of women's engagement with and contribution to public life" (211). Thus in this sense, Christie in her interaction with the public press and her advertisement of self can no longer be so dismissed as unprofessional. She engages with the public press and advertises herself in a way which fully makes sense given the broader social context of the interwar years, the debates around women's roles in the press, her marital status, and even, I argue, the new ways through which she was showcasing the broader boundaries of what being a professional writing woman looked like.

Furthermore, Christie's positioning in the popular press is an engagement with public life. She is presented and commented on in the press alongside other authors. In the March 7, 1923 edition of *The Sketch*, which, as noted above, contained the first story in the Poirot series as well as the pictures of

Christie and Rosalind at home, Christie is later referenced in the paper in a celebrity news column in conjunction with Rebecca West and H.G. Wells among others in a two-page spread entitled "Marigold Again". 'Marigold' is a fictional character with a recurring column. She discusses with other fictional characters ('Peter the Sportsman', her 'Youngest Young Man', 'The Cynic', and the 'Elderly Man'), her supposed interactions with various celebrities. In this instance, after a trip from Cannes and abroad, she mentions seeing Rebecca West and the Wells at an opening night and provides commentary for the readers. 'Marigold' describes how Rebecca West is dressed, "looking handsome and foreign in a red embroidered dress and Russian-fronted hat, and maintaining with ease a deadly Lewis gun fire of epigrammatic criticism of any notability who crossed her range" and notes the reactions of "Mr. and Mrs. H.G. Wells – not very frequent theatre-goers" to the opening night ("Marigold Again" 441). Towards the end of Marigold's commentary and under the heading "A Woman Detective-Story Writer", another character the 'Youngest Young Man' interrupts Marigold to tell her:

> "Please, I met the woman detective-story writer last week, Mrs. Christie – Agatha Christie, who wrote 'The Mysterious Affair at Styles', and invented Hercule Poirot. Wouldn't you expect her to be sombre-looking and darkly mysterious? Well, she is just the reverse. The happiest-looking English blonde with a three-year-old infant whom she adores. She boasts that she typewrites her topping yarns right away on the 'machine' and that she is handy about the house. She can cook, whitewash, and distemper; paper-hanging is another of her accomplishment, and she gratifies her taste for original house decoration by covering her ceilings with patterned papers of a shade darker than the mural adornments; She says her hawthorn-covered ceiling is a tremendous success, She is a musician, too, and a keen golfer". ("Marigold Again" 441)

Here indeed are excellent examples of the types of "activities" and the freedom to do so which Light notes that middle to upper middle-class women enjoyed in this interwar period (9), and which further shows the range of activities, and abilities which Christie has the ability (and privilege) to do. This type of

commentary, which was published in the popular press – in the same newspaper which also published Christie's short stories – shows an acknowledgement of readers who would be both aware of, and excited for, works by Christie, Jameson, West, and Wells, and interest in what they were doing and wearing. Christie is a successful woman, combining an interest in sport, music, and decoration alongside her writing. These are the new life experiences which women could have, as well as be professional. She does not need just one room to perform as a professional writer, but rather has established herself throughout her entire house, and has taken charge of the space. As Christie became more successful, she owned many other homes, redecorating them and turning them into her own spaces.

The social and historical context should be taken into consideration when examining these initial publicity pictures from 1923 which portray Christie as a woman surrounded by her domestic sphere. This does not mean that Christie can be classified as non-professional or as contributing to a conservative construction surrounding the professionalism of woman writers. When Christie was first writing she presented herself to the press in order to gain publicity, and in a way which the public would appreciate. She became part of the celebrity culture which surrounded popular authors; these vignettes and photos, alongside the advertisement for Christie's stories, can clarify the publicity and positioning of popular authors in the press. Christie's series is published by *The Sketch*, and she appears together with it, romantically positioned as a young wife to a war hero and a mother to a charming daughter; women's writing was bound up in publicity culture in turn influenced by gender expectations surrounding professions. The first few issues of the paper which contain her new series also contain pictures showing her as a type of celebrity, one whose upper middle-class lifestyle was also able to be comfortably displayed in the press itself. While the writing table is shown, it is nestled within the domestic drawing room. Christie engages with the press here, giving them the 'human-interest' side and publicity for her

stories.[156] This is her interaction with the press, before she removed herself from its publicity, once she became successful enough to do so. Calling into question Christie's professionalism based upon how she positions herself as a writer to her public downplays the significance of the amount of work, writing, and necessity for professionalism which Christie had to portray, and the nuances between how she portrayed herself before and after her divorce, and as she became more popular.

Christie's professional obligation to her publisher and having to write *The Mystery of the Blue Train* changed her self-conception of herself as a writer. As she admits, "That was the moment when I changed from an amateur to a professional" (*Autobiography* 358). Thus it could be argued that Agatha Christie's first marriage (1914-1928) to Archie Christie did change her entire life, though not in the supposedly conventional way: the break-up of her marriage finally forced her into fully establishing herself as a professional writer, who wrote, in part, for the money which it gave her. In turn, she re-established herself as a career woman for the press; no longer able to give the presentation as a 'domestic' writer, she "began to sit for simpler and more dramatically lit portraits" (Worsley 174).

Janet Morgan shows that the five years following the Empire tour turned Christie from "a little-known contributor to magazines and newspapers, writing imaginative stories for amusement rather than money, to a professional author who earned her living by writing and who was so well known that it was a misery to her" (104). This, of course, did not happen all at once, and Christie's *An Autobiography* in looking back can seem a little dismissive or present conflicting viewpoints of the professionalism which she learns in these years. Perhaps this is the lean towards conservatism which I discussed in the Introduction: imposing remembrances back on the past and not acknowledging the strength and determination to write which must have been present. Yet as Worsley posits, this remembering is "a fairy-

[156] Martin Edwards claims that "Most of them [detection club members] prized their privacy, and not only loathed personal publicity, but kept direct contact with readers to a minimum" (*The Golden Age of Murder* 83).

tale version of events, conforming to the old idea that a woman should only write for money in cases of dire necessity or to help her family" (96). This 'fairy-tale' is instead "belied from evidence from 1920. Before *Styles* had even come out, Agatha was writing to The Bodley Head to tell them she'd already 'nearly finished a second one'" (96). Using this evidence, Worsley proclaims that "[Christie] was eager to get cracking on a career" (96). As critics, we have to be wary of proclaiming what the advertisement for this career should look like.

The narrative which Christie very successfully performed - to such a degree that she was even dismissed by critics such as Symons and Trodd, as being conservative, anti-feminist, too cozy - is one which shows the extent of her awareness of the type of press publicity and advertising which would reach her reading public. Her popularity and engagement with the press brought her an immense following which she could then further reach through her fiction. Part of the type of advertising she performed was because of her marital status. Once her divorce was finalized Worsley notes that she publicly presented herself in a much different manner: "She was recreating herself, visually, as the 'Duchess of Death', a woman who, as journalists like to put it, 'made more money out of murder than Lucrezia Borgia'" (174). Christie's contemporary, Dorothy L. Sayers, without the same marital pressure or public notoriety, had a different press persona. From the beginning of her writing endeavors she asserted the type of writer she wanted to be, pursuing this within her fiction, and to her public.

3.3 Dorothy L. Sayers: Detective Fiction Author, Oxford M.A.

Dorothy L. Sayers and Agatha Christie were born three years apart, and were both part of a middle to upper middle-class British society. Yet their home lives and social milieux were very different: while Christie was discouraged from formal schooling, Sayers's father taught her Latin at age 6; she was sent to a preparatory school where she earned First in all of England in the Cambridge Higher Local Examination, with distinctions in French and German; and was accepted to Oxford on the three year

Gilchrist Scholarship to Somerville College (Reynolds 15, 42, 43). An only child, she was precocious and driven. While Christie's mother took a young Agatha to Egypt for a debutante experience and to help her find a husband (see Chapter 4), Sayers's parents, scholarly and clever, encouraged and supported in her education, where the friends and connections she made at university stayed with her for the rest of her life. Dorothy L. Sayers seemed from the beginning to have a proclivity for writing and performance, as well as understanding the importance of how she was going to brand herself and her work. She concludes at the very end of *Murder Must Advertise*, "Advertise or go under" (256), a motto which she herself seemed to hold. She insisted upon calling herself 'Dorothy L. Sayers', not just Dorothy Sayers: she was outraged when a publisher missed her middle initial on one of her books. As she pointed out, no one talked of E. Bentley, G. Chesterton, or G. Shaw (Edwards, *Golden Age* 21; see letter in Reynolds *Letters* 367-368 to Dr. Chapman). Over the course of her writing career, she gained valuable knowledge of what periodicals to submit to, and which would publish her works. She published her first detective fiction novel in 1923; by 1937 she was able to give advice to an old Somerville College classmate who was trying to break into the literary market; she warned that "'none of the high-brow weeklies pay well' and that building a network of literary connections was slow work" (as qtd in Moulton, 206).

Like Christie, Sayers did not start writing detective fiction. Both Christie and Sayers started writing poetry at a young age and were even published. Both separately acknowledged however, that they moved on to detective fiction writing as poetry 'didn't pay': in an interview Sayers is quoted as stating "I had leanings towards poetry, but it didn't pay" (as qtd in Downing, *Writing Performances* 170), while in a write-up in 1922, Christie is quoted declaring: "I don't think I shall ever write poetry again, Detective stories pay so much better" and the column concludes that "she confessed [this] with a frankness which makes her particularly charming" ("Stories That Thrill"). Their poetry was perhaps of a different kind, however: Christie's was reflective, or pastoral, representing her life at her home, Ashfield, where she

grew up, while Sayers engaged with discussions of philosophy and theology from an early age. A notable difference, however, was that Sayers actively advertised her work, even her poetry (discussed below).

Christie's and Sayers's life experiences, especially their involvement in the First World War, moreover, helped to contribute to how they would pursue their writing inclinations. Sayers was just three years Christie's junior, yet their varied involvement in the First World War seems to widen this age gap and ensure that their lives – notably as professional writers – would be much different. Writing at home, romantically involved, and then a war bride, Christie engaged in active war work, while Sayers, in her second year of university, took a holiday to France and was caught there trying to get home when war broke out.[157] Upon returning to Oxford where she was studying, she found that Somerville was requisitioned for an infirmary and Belgian refugees were housed throughout the various colleges of the University. Though Sayers participated in the war effort at first, aiding with housing and translating, she did not assist much with nursing in England (unlike many women who halted their studies to take up war work). [158] She tried to work for the Red Cross in France, who were looking for volunteers who spoke French, but was disqualified by her age as she was under 23 (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 66-67). She concentrated on her studies and tutored, filling vacancies left by the male students (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 59-62).

Sayers was always driven to write and contributed poems and articles to various publications: her early efforts were high literary endeavours and she had small successes while at Oxford and afterwards

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[157] Ariela Freedman writes that she "do[es] not agree with McGregor and Lewis that 'the Great War touched the life of Dorothy L. Sayers very lightly' (11)" (372). As Freedman notes, Sayers "attended an Oxford transformed by the war, was infatuated with one shell-shocked soldier, Eric Whelpton, and in 1926 married another, Oswald Atherton Fleming, who suffered lasting trauma from being gassed during the war. Sayers lived with the continuing legacy of war trauma until her husband's death in 1950 and had an intimate familiarity with its devastating effects. She must have followed the newspaper accounts of the 1922 *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into "Shell Shock"* with particular interest". (372)
Lucy Worsley writes about Christie that "Agatha was affected [by the war] shockingly soon" (51).

[158] For example, Vera Brittain was a student at Oxford who left to nurse for the duration of the war.

which further confirmed her wish to become a writer. Shortly after she graduated in 1915, and after a year's teaching experience in Hull, Sayers's father arranged to have her apprenticed under Basil Blackwell in Oxford in 1917 where she could use her scholarly and literary talents and be taught the publishing trade. Basil Blackwell had started the series *Oxford Poetry* in 1913; while Sayers was a student she published twelve poems on the beauty of Oxford in an *Oxford Poetry* volume edited by G.D.H. Cole in 1915 and *Op. I* in Blackwell's *Adventurers All* in 1916 (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 68-71). Even at this stage in her life Sayers was thinking deeply about writing techniques with which she was experimenting in her poetry, and the type of readerly experience and depth of understanding essential for a critic of poetry, literature, and writing.[159] It is clear, moreover, that she was both interacting with and part of the intellectual writers and thinkers of her time, such as Aldous Huxley and G.D.H. Cole (Reynolds 68). This is a much different experience than Christie's, who as a young war bride, learning to live with Archie in London, had to find new things to do: "newly married wives are usually lonely…a woman, when she marries, usually transfers herself to an entirely different environment. She has to start life again, to make new contacts and friends, find new occupations" (Christie, *Autobiography* 263). Conversely, Sayers was back in Oxford, a place she knew and loved, and Reynolds writes that after the publication of *Op. I* "[Sayers] knew now more than ever that she wanted to be a writer and that teaching could never be a career for her" (*Her Life and Soul* 75). She wrote to her father "There is no future in teaching, I might really make something of publishing" (as qtd in Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 76). Happily settled back in Oxford in 1917 she loved her job and received a marriage proposal which she turned down.[160] Moulton notes that "working at Blackwell suited her immensely, because it combined a

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[159] Reynolds quotes a letter exchange she had with Sayers in 1956, discussing W.H. Auden's "qualifications for a critic" (70-71). Sayers with "glee" wrote to Reynolds that "There now! I can truthfully answer 'yes' to all four – consequently, the Oxford Professor of Poetry would, believe it or now, implicitly trust my judgement on all literary matters! There's glory for you!" (*Her Life and Soul* 71).

[160] Reynolds notes how different Sayers's life would have been if she had married Leonard Hodgson (78-79). Moulton also posits that the reason The Mutual Admiration Society (MAS) women were so noteworthy is because

commitment to serious literature with a fundamentally popular, and indeed commercial, endeavor… Literature was serious business, but it was also sheer pleasure" (74, 75).

Sayers knew that literature was serious business, and she also knew the power of advertising in promoting her work, as evidenced even before she wrote detective fiction. It was while she was apprenticed with Blackwell that she wrote a volume of poems entitled *Catholic Tales and Christian Songs* which was published in 1918. A more mature work of poetry than her other endeavors, this volume also shows her understanding of advertising and her professional interaction with the press, which was to continue on for the rest of her life. These poems engaged with her Christian faith – "it is intended…to be the expression of reverent belief" – yet she knew that the volume could be controversial as "some people find it hard to allow that faith, if lively, can be reverent" (as qtd in Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 80, 81). She wrote to her parents and relatives that "Some people think it 'wonderful' and some think it 'blasphemous'…Some mugwumps may object to it like anything. You won't mind being the parents and aunt of a notoriety, if that should happen, will you?" (as qtd in Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 80-81). Discovering that a noted Catholic poet was going to publish an unfavourable review in *The New Witness*, Sayers asked a close friend, Muriel Jaeger, to reply to the review, first agreeing with it and then, under another name, opposing it. Sayers would then write in and "there would be 'a scrumptious row', which would make the book 'go like wildfire'" (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 81).[161]

Sayers's calculations were correct especially around the 'scrumptious row' which continued into 1919 (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 81-82): she created her own controversy in the press around her work

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of what they accomplished – as women – when held back from a 'normal' trajectory of work by their gender, they broke new bounds and broadened horizons with the drive and education behind them (6).

[161] Reynolds writes that "Muriel entered into the spirit of the game. Her first pseudonym was H. Hunter ("heresy-hunter"); her next was M. James (a combination of her initial M and her nickname 'Jim'). 'Very wicked of you,' said Dorothy; 'they'll take you for M.R. James'. Several genuine correspondents joined in, among them Wilfred Rowland Childe, a volume of whose poems had preceded Dorothy's *OP I* in Blackwell's series, *Adventurers All*" (81).

and this discussion back and forth of her writing was beneficial to her. It seems that this 'publicity stunt' did not ultimately bring many sales of the book, yet it did bring her into contact with other religious thinkers and "sharpen[ed] her sense of the power of language and publicity" (Moulton 75). This was perhaps Sayers's first 'publicity stunt': in an attempt to garner sales, she wanted *any* discussion of the book and actively curated positive and negative reviews. This type of advertising, as Colin Watson speculates, was indeed pursued by many authors, especially of 'highbrow' literature: "Proscription actually became a cachet much sought by authors; it was worth a good many columns of advertising. The suggestion that in some cases condemnation was engineered by mutual agreement has a certain perverse attraction" (34). In Sayers's case, this 'condemnation' (though her book was not banned) *was* engineered. "Provided you get into the papers" acknowledges Lord Peter Wimsey in *Strong Poison* (1930), upon hearing that the murdered Philip Boyes's books are now popular, "the delightful reading public don't mind what it's for" (85), while other characters are also skeptical that Harriet's murder trial is a 'publicity stunt gone wrong' as "You never know what these advertising fellows are up to" (165).

Wimsey further reiterates to Parker, after diving dangerously and spectacularly into a fountain dressed as a harlequin to impress a suspect, that "It pays to advertise" (*Murder Must Advertise* 65), clearly a belief which Sayers kept in her professional life. As discussed, she wrote an article in 1926 commenting on Christie's disappearance, noting her credentials as a "mystery-monger by profession" ("The Ideal Sleuth and Mrs. Christie" 8, Figure 3). In later years she would use the death of Arthur Conan Doyle (1930) to advertise the newly formed Detection Club; she wrote to another club founder, detective fiction author Anthony Berkeley, that "Old Conan Doyle chose this moment to pop off the books. I just put on a card, 'To the creator of 'Sherlock Holmes' from the members of the Detective [*sic*] Club with reveration [*sic*] and deep regret' I thought it would look well and be a bit of publicity" (as qtd in Edwards, *Golden Age* 90-91).

In the years following the *Catholic Tales* publicity stunt, however, Sayers would struggle to make writing her career. Though Sayers enjoyed her time at Blackwell's, his firm started to move into publishing school books which left little space for Sayers and her literary talents. She began to feel depressed – Blackwell remembered that Sayers "seemed to him like a racehorse harnessed to a cart" – and she turned to editing, free-lance journalism, and tutoring (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 85-86). Twenty-five years old, she fell in love with Eric Whelpton, and followed him to France in 1919: he was a school teacher, she would work in administration.[162] It was in France that she read detective stories voraciously, especially the Sexton Blake series, and Whelpton later credits France as the place where the idea for writing one began. She confided to him her plan to form a syndicate to write detective fiction: she had discussed this with Michael Sadleir and perhaps G.D.H. and Margaret Cole and they thought that they could "create a market". She invited Whelpton to "join with them and make his fortune" (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 93).[163] Finally realizing that Whelpton did not love her, and contracting mumps, she decided to return to London in 1920, where, Reynolds writes, "She had no job, no prospects – just a strong urge to write and a determination to avoid teaching if she could. London beckoned" (*Her Life and Soul* 96).

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[162] Like many other young men and woman after the war, though Sayers and Whelpton were similar in age the war had made their experiences much different. Sayers was educated with years of working experience; Whelpton received a war degree in 1918 and was trying to find work (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 87-88).

[163] Though she had at first been interested in the Sexton Blake series and wanted to join the writing syndicate, her thoughts turned to creating her own detective. McGregor and Lewis analyse this first attempt at writing for the Blake series and find a secondary character, Wimsey, who "refuses to stand quietly aside" in her story of Blake (20-21). Though Sayers ultimately put this story away, and indeed, seemed to forget about it, Wimsey lived on. At first attempting to write him into a play (*The Mousehole*, unfinished), she moved into the premise of her story which would become *Whose Body*? In a letter to her mother she writes: "My detective story begins brightly with a fat lady found dead in her bath with nothing on but her pince-nez. Now, why did she wear pince-nez in her bath? If you can guess, you will be in a position to lay hands upon the murderer, but he's a very cool and cunning fellow" (as qtd in McGregor and Lewis 21-22; Reynolds 101).
In *Murder Must Advertise*, Sayers seemingly acknowledges her appreciation for Sexton Blake. Wimsey takes Joe on as his helper for undercover work in Pym's Publicity Agency, knowing that given Joe's enjoyment in the Blake stories, he would be up for his own detective work: "Conspicuous among them was Ginger Joe, his red head bent over the pages of the latest *Sexton Blake*" (73).

Moving to London to try and become a writer, whilst avoiding teaching as a career, was a bold move for Sayers to make, and which further establishes her desire to become a professional writer. Marriage and permanent teaching jobs were a way in which women could find a reputable place in society, yet Sayers knew she wanted to write: "I'm sure writing is much more my job than office work or teaching" (as qtd in Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 105).[164] Dorothy L. Sayers was well-educated and had been sent to Oxford by her parents; she had graduated in 1915 with first-class honours in French although she would not formally matriculate until 1920 when women were finally allowed to take degrees. Despite this, she struggled in finding a job upon her return to London, especially as she did not like teaching, which was one of the few professions open to women. While she searched for a profession after leaving Oxford in 1915, a male friend from Oxford who had graduated with a second-class degree was given a lecturer position in philosophy; Sayers wrote to her friend telling of his securing this position "in place of a man gone to the Front", and abruptly ended with, "No time for more. I'm cross" (as qtd in Moulton 73).[165] Though Sayers disliked teaching, she was anxious about solely relying on the support of her parents who were by no means wealthy; her father was Oxford educated and rector of a small parish. As Moulton comments, turning away from the options of either marriage or teaching, a woman risked "getting trapped in a kind of antechamber, circling endlessly around the same problems: low pay, few

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[164] Moulton comments that "According to a survey of Somerville alumnae of their generation, they were as likely to become teachers as they were to marry – mutually exclusive options, generally, in an era when teachers were usually barred from marriage. Both options could offer long-term stability and fulfillment. For most of the MAS, though, neither option was ideal" (Moulton 70).

[165] Elsie Lang, in *British Women in the Twentieth Century* (1929) writes that "The teaching profession, hitherto a hardy evergreen, is beginning to wilt. Certainly the life of a mistress in a school is freer and pleasanter than it was, especially with the increased facilities of getting about; but the Burnham scale, although it ensures good salaries, has this disadvantage that as a teacher's salary must be increased every year, many schools, the large private ones in particular, employ young mistresses, and after thirty a woman will find it increasingly difficult to obtain a post, and when she has one that is unsuitable she dare not attempt to change" (256-257).
And for University positions, Andrea Trodd provides context by noting that "There was much tension in the teaching profession over the threat to the status of male teachers implied by the increased entry of women into secondary school teaching. The academic profession remained resistant; in 1931 there were only sixteen women among the 845 professors in the country's universities" (21).

opportunities, unsatisfactory relationships" (81). Sayers found herself struggling through this 'antechamber' for the next few years as she fought to establish herself as a writer. McGregor and Lewis write that "Sex Qualification Removal Act or no, England in the immediate postwar era had little room for women in the public economy. Sayers's choices for employment were severely circumscribed by her advanced education and her sex" (9).[166] Her biographer Barbara Reynolds writes that, unemployed, Sayers was part of this "time of economic depression" where there was "widespread unemployment, and ex-service men selling matches in the street. The loss of life in the war had upset the demographic balance and there were two million 'surplus' women, as they were called. Dorothy was one of them" (*Her Life and Soul* 97).[167]

As noted above, Sayers had returned to England from France in time to be one of the first women to receive her degree from Oxford. On October 14, 1920, after the men received their degrees, the Latin words of matriculation were heard for the first time in the feminine gender: *domina* (for her B.A.) and *magistra* (M.A.) (Moulton 85-86, Reynolds 97-98). The significance of this full acceptance by this academic community – cemented by using the feminine gender in the ceremony – is exemplified in the 1935 novel *Gaudy Night*, where Harriet is finally able to accept Peter's marriage proposal in Latin. His use of this language fully acknowledges their complete equality and belonging to the same social community in the university where – ideally – they are equal: Harriet idealizes university communities as spaces "where all enjoyed equal citizenship" (*Gaudy Night* 26, see further discussion Chapter 5). This type of community acceptance was important for Sayers, and one which influenced her life and writing (discussed below).

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[166] Barbara Reynolds is slightly more positive of Sayers's prospects, especially after Sayers receives her MA from Oxford (97, 98).

[167] See Chapter 6 for further discussion on surplus women and how Sayers proposed her own unique (fictional) commentary on their situation with the introduction of her character Miss Climpson. See also Nicholson's *Singled Out*.

Sayers received her First in French and had already translated and published in *Modern Languages* (1920) some of the "romance of Tristan by the Anglo-Norman poet Thomas" from the medieval French (the complete translation was published in 1929) (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 98). Through the official degree, she now had academic prospects, yet Reynolds asserts that "Her creative urge was far stronger and she preferred the company of writers and artists to that of dons. From now on Bohemian London would be her sphere" (*Her Life and Soul* 99).

Thus in London in 1919, after three different jobs, a marriage proposal, unrequited love, and having published two volumes of poetry, Dorothy L. Sayers still aspired to be a writer. She wrote to her cousin in April 1921 that "My life is dull really just at present – but I can't see how it's to be mended. I don't want a career and careers don't want me…Still, I'm no worse off than lots of other unmarried women, and a lot better off than many, so it doesn't do to grouse too much" (as qtd in Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 102). From 1921 to 1922 she wrote what was to become her first Lord Peter Wimsey novel, *Whose Body?* (1923), working with publishers and editing and censoring her book as they asked (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 101).[168] She also was teaching in temporary positions to make enough money to live. Once *Whose Body?* was finished she started *Clouds of Witness* (1926), even though the publishing process for *Whose Body?* was discouraging. She found an agent for her work in 1922 and writes "[he] simply loves my Lord Peter and is certain of selling him…I do hope something will come of it … I have plenty of ideas for other books if this first one gets taken. After all, *I'm sure writing is much more my job than office work or teaching*" (emphasis added, as qtd Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 105). Finally, in 1922, she received an offer for *Whose Body?* to be serialised.

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[168] Her original draft (apparently) explicitly references that the man in the tub is not circumcised, which could be a clue that it is not the missing Jewish financier, Sir Rueben Levy, in the tub as one of the police members assumes. See Eric Sandburg's discussion in footnote 11 of this censorship, and the case of making too much of it by critics. Sandburg writes: "The point here is the popular assumption of the practice with Judaism, not the reality of a more widespread, class-based pattern of behaviour" (17).

Sayers's prolific letter writing to various correspondents creates a narrative not only of her life but of her writing and her aspirations for it: she is always open about her want to make writing her career, which is seemingly in opposition to the way Christie constructed her mode of professionalism in the beginning which was advertised through the domestic identity she inhabited. Sayers wrote openly to her parents, who in part, were still supporting her life in London. With some publisher interest in Lord Peter by November 1921, Sayers was hopeful and refused to sell the copyright for him, "I am quite sure now there is money in him. I was worried for fear I might have produced a complete white elephant!" (as qtd in Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 103). Acknowledging from the beginning that she might make her profession writing detective fiction, she is not pushed around by her publishers, as Christie admits she originally was when she came to first sign her contract with John Lane (see above). Sayers realizes, however, that she is still reliant on her parents and writes them in December 1921 offering to give up her writing if nothing comes of it:

> Nobody can feel more acutely than I do the unsatisfactoriness of my financial position…If you like I'll make a sporting offer – that if you can manage to help me to 'keep going' until next summer, then, if Lord Peter is still unsold I will chuck the whole thing, confess myself beaten and take a permanent teaching job. (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 103).

Having moved to a flat for a year at 44 Mecklenburg Square (which Harriet Vane was later to occupy in *Gaudy Night*) she also tutored French, translated documents her father sent her, and took temporary teaching positions to make ends meet. In 1921, she then moved to 24 Great James Street which would remain her London address for the rest of her life. She was introduced to an agent – Andrew Dakers – by John Cournos, and publishers wanted to know the plot of her next book before signing for her first. She received an offer for *Whose Body?* from an American firm for two hundred and fifty dollars before royalties, and hoped for the possibility of serialization: her book would be published within the year (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 112; 104-106).

Yet despite the flush of success which Sayers felt from her writing, her personal life was becoming complicated. During the period she was writing her first novel, she was also in a frustrating relationship with John Cournos: while she wanted to marry him, he declared he only believed in free love. Moreover, like Whelpton before him, he disparaged her aspirations towards writing detective stories and was unsympathetic with her writing difficulties. She writes in a letter:

> John was 'nice' enough Friday week in a general way, but I fear he has no sympathy with Lord Peter, being the kind of man who takes his writing seriously and spells Art with a capital A. Norman [Davey], on the other hand, is very helpful. I was delighted with a dictum of Philip Guedella's in the *Daily News*: "The detective story is the normal recreation of noble minds". It makes me feel ever so noble. (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 110)

In addition to being revealing about her personal relationship with Cournos, this excerpt shows that not only did Sayers read the *Daily News*, she was also aware of this type of daily newspaper and interacted closely with it. These types of reviews comforted her in her writing aspirations, giving her a legitimacy despite the denigration of her writing by Cournos.

McGregor and Lewis claim that in writing detective fiction, Sayers and her friends would have thought that she was 'slumming';[169] "To write popular literature was to enter a different kind of world altogether, one her training would identify as a much lower form. Yet she was making daily bread working for an advertising agency by 1922. She needed the ability to communicate with the masses just to survive" (32-33). This claim is complicated: literary value in the interwar period was continually countentious, the hierarchy of writing was itself unstable (as is shown in the Battle of the Brows). Sayers wrote many article and engaged with many authors of detective fiction – her opinions fluctuated and she

[169] "In her own mind, as well as in the estimation of her own social group, Sayers was 'slumming' to attempt popular detective fiction at all" (McGregor and Lewis 32)

called for the elevation of the genre; at the same time, she was in excellent the company of other detective fiction authors whom she admired. Sayers was in discussion with many intellectuals and literary writers of her day, who in their reviews and commentary tried to "indulge in a little 'good writing'", arguing that the detective story must "become once more a novel of manners instead of a pure crossword puzzle" ("Gaudy Night" 76). Claiming that she was 'slumming it', is part of the (mis)understanding that detective fiction was/is as a genre outside of being considered literature and is part of "the product of literary critical assumptions and judgements, kept alive and well especially by those who are content to work with a map in which they what they call the popular and what they deem the high cultural are seen as poles apart" (Light ix-x). Sayers admired many works of detective fiction. She thought that *Trent's Last Case* (1913), written by E.C. Bentley, a noted journalist who also invented the clerihew, was one of the finest detective stories written, while she declared that G.K. Chesterton had "succeeded in making [detective] fiction the vehicle of a reasoned philosophy…he was an acknowledged genius" ("Gaudy Night" 76).

Sayers would have been delighted to be mentioned and hailed as a detective writer by Chesterton himself, therefore, which occurred in his 1929 article celebrating a reprints of *Trent's Last Case* (also discussed in the Introduction). He comments:

> [A]mong those who have expressed their enthusiastic thanks to Mr. Bentley for writing a real detective story that was also a real book, are some of the finest specialists in the department of the crime novel, and also some of the first minds in the domain of general thought and culture…they include those writers, rather especially lady writers, who, without any special show of specialism, have written quite perfectly constructed crime stores that are also entertaining comedies; notably Mrs. Agatha Christie and Miss Dorothy Sayers. ("Our Note Book", Aug 17, 1929, 280)[170]

[170] Chesterton goes on to state that outside the circle of detective fiction writers, *Trent's Last Case* is admired by, from his "personal knowledge", "dozens of famous writers and thinkers, dons and doctors and diplomatists and poets of the most classical turn, who have put this book along with 'The Wallet of Kai Lung' or 'The Diary of Nobody' in the small and secret shelf of the Best Books" ("Our Note Book", Aug 17, 1929, 280)

In his critique of the book, Chesterton claims that it matters not because it is "only meant to kill time" but rather "to kill trash and falsehood". In this, he is joined by Sayers, whom he refers to as "one of those who do write murder stories as if they could write something else" and notes that "Miss Dorothy Sayers…tests her admiration of Mr Bentley's book…and says: "It is the one detective story of the present century which I am certain will go down to posterity as a classic. It is a masterpiece" ("Our Note Book", Aug 17, 1929, 280).

Dorothy L. Sayers interacted with detective fiction criticism of her own time and sought to "bring the genre back to where it began in the hands of Collins and Le Fanu" ("Gaudy Night" 76). She spent time and effort in writing her reviews of detective fiction, holding the writing up to literary standards, for, "Mystery stories are not of such great rarity as to excuse readers for snatching, like famished men, at any ill-concocted mess that offers to satisfy their thwarted appetite for blood. Far from it. There is plenty of choice, and they ought to be sufficiently fastidious to reject rank false concord and bad syntax" (as qtd in Edwards, "Commentary" 17). She is "appalled by the amount of sloppy, slovenly, shiftless writing" (as qtd in Edwards, "Commentary" 17). She would have appreciated the notice which Chesterton gave her in his article, as Sayers admired Chesterton's articles on the importance of detective fiction as well as his Father Brown. G.K. Chesterton wrote "How to Write a Detective Story", published in *G.K.'s Weekly* October 17, 1925; John Cournos saw it and sent it to Sayers – her attention had already been drawn to it (Reynolds 137). Chesterton had already written "A Defence of Detective Stories" in 1902, and (the now renamed) "Errors About Detective Stories" for his "Our Note Book" article for the 1920, August 28 *Illustrated London News*. His "A Defence of Detective Stories" acknowledges in the beginning that "The trouble in this matter is that many people do not realize that there is such a thing as a good detective story; it is to them like speaking of a good devil" (3-4). He makes the claim that detective fiction is the new poetry for the modern era: "A rude, popular literature of the romantic possibilities of the modern city was bound to arise. It has arisen in the popular detective stories, as rough and refreshing as the ballads of

Robin Hood" (4). Whilst in France (1919-1920) Sayers had already experimented in writing a series of essays with Muriel Jaeger (unpublished) which discussed the Sexton Blake stories as a new example of the 'old romance cycles' and romantic figures such as Robin Hood (Moulton 84). Chesterton's "Errors About Detective Stories" discusses the technique of writing good detective fiction, a theme he would expound upon in the 1925 article, "How to Write a Detective Story". Sayers would have been aware of these previous articles and was wanting to read his newest one when Cournos sent it to her. Reading Chesterton's analysis in 1925 would have strengthened her opinion on the significance of the fiction that she was writing: just because it was popular did not mean that it was necessarily 'bad' (either morally or in terms of literary appeal), or was necessarily excluded from being a "tale founded on a truth" (Chesterton, "How to Write a Detective Story").

Sayers later gave an address at Oxford, "Aristotle on Detective Fiction" (1935), presenting her case for comparing the study of detective fiction to that of Greek mythology: Aristotle she posited, only examined Greek mythology because it was the popular literature of his time. During her detective fiction writing career, she continually exerted more effort to create life-like characters: fully realized, she declares, in the same year, 1935, when she wrote *Gaudy Night* ("Gaudy Night"). From 1933-1935 she had reviewed detective fiction for the *Sunday Times*, as discussed in Chapter 2. She strove to uphold the literary quality in the detective story throughout, one which could not sacrifice quality at the expense of plot. Even though she was trying to make writing her profession, she worried about the "risks of writing too much fiction too quickly" (Edwards, "Commentary" 11). Although the public was "too indulgent to hasty and mechanical writing where mysteries were concerned", care should be taken with writing; she states that though "the greatest genius is usually attended by a considerable fertility…as a rule, it is too much to expect a fresh masterpiece every four months" (as qtd in Edwards, "Commentary" 11).

Therefore, as a young woman writing to make a living, and with such examples before her, Sayers seemed to think of detective writing as a potentially viable profession, one which would allow her

to write for her own living while at the same time contributing to expanding the genre form: "A novelist…is a tradesman who supplies books to the public. Writing books is not a hobby; it is a job, a trade like any other" (as qtd in Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 225). Her own character, Harriet Vane, as several critics including Terrance Lewis note, made enough money to live on: indeed, Harriet was able to support her 'highbrow' impecunious partner, Philip Boyes (Lewis, *Dorothy L. Sayers's Wimsey* 70). Perhaps it is only after the twentieth century's anxiety surrounding literary canons and demarcations that critics such as McGregor and Lewis can think that Sayers was 'slumming it'.

Thus this intellectual community of writers was represented in their commentary and articles in the press and was one which was especially important to Sayers. Her presentation of herself and her articles in the press denote a professional woman who argued for the quality of detective fiction as well as the way in which readerly expectations could shape it. She also acknowledges this influence in her fiction, such as in *Strong Poison*, and then in *Gaudy Night* (discussed in Chapter 5). Sayers had strong social communities which she relied on, and these were necessary to her own writing endeavours, as noted by many critics including Edwards, Moulton, and Colón. When she had first arrived at Oxford in 1912, Sayers and her friends began a writing group ironically entitled the Mutual Admiration Society, where they examined, argued, and gave advice on each other's writing and ideas (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 53; Moulton 1).[171] Colón outlines the various communities which Sayers was a part of, noting that she was "well aware of the potential power of strong community", and how these influenced her life and writing:

> At university, she and several of her friends created the Mutual Admiration Society, a writing group where members would come together to share their poetry and invite critique from the

[171] Mo Moulton has dedicated an entire book – *The Mutual Admiration Society: How Dorothy L. Sayers and Her Oxford Circle Remade the World For Women* (2019) – to the women in this group. It is an excellent resource on these women's lives beginning at Oxford and where their education and training took them.

other members. As a detective novelist, she was one of the founding members of the Detection Club, where mystery writers would socialize and support each other in their craft. As a playwright, she reveled in the community that arose around each production, immersing herself in the vibrant creativity of the actors, directory, and production team. And as a Christian apologist, she worked with St. Anne's House in Soho to open a dialogue between Christians and agnostics through lectures, debates, and discussions. Throughout her life, Sayers immersed herself in groups that would not only help to nurture her own individual creativity but also allow her to work with others to achieve more as a group than she could individually. She recognized the potential power of people working well in community and utilized it in her own life and career. (Colón 4-5)

While Sayers was given a background and education which enabled her to surround herself with communities, Christie's relationship with the more 'domestic' model of woman and writer did not seem to allow her the same opportunities, as Elizabeth Prevost notes.[172] Prevost posits that "the [detective fiction] genre propelled the fortunes of a number of middlebrow British women writers", but comments that while "Christie's was a solitary journey of discovery and subjectivity" this is in contrast to the career of Sayers, "who found solidarity and creative energy in women's Oxbridge colleges, social and professional circles, and political networks" (184-185). Yet in their personal lives, the very reverse seems to be the reality: while Agatha Christie claims she was encouraged first by Archie,[173] and then by Max in

[172] Worsley writes that "It's noticeable that Agatha would live mainly among women for near to her first thirty years. At Ashfield, she and Clara lived with two female servants. Auntie-Grannie had come to live there as well, and now she had the intense female friendships of the hospital" (58).

[173] Lucy Worsley seems to think otherwise, and suggests that Christie is compensating for Archie's emotional distance: "Archie was proud of his clever wife, keen on the money she was beginning to earn. But one cannot help suspecting that Agatha's unexpected success unsettled him even further" (90). She later comments on the difference between Max and Archie as husbands who supported Agatha's writing: "Archie had wanted to leave his wife at home while he played golf, whereas Max wanted Agatha to read ancient Greek with him and go on adventures. It helped that she was already an independent, professional woman, and that they respected each other's accomplishments. Agatha found Max's work much more interesting than Archie's in the City" (189).

her own writing, conversely, Sayers did not have same the romantic support of a partner. In her novels, Sayers creates a fictional example of what personal support for writing and literary endeavours in detective fiction could look like, perhaps filling a void in her own life and further supporting my assertion that she created imagined social representations as examples for her readers. Through her four books with Harriet and Peter, Peter is always supportive of Harriet's literary efforts when writing detective fiction. In *Gaudy Night*, he further encourages her to rework her characters to give them further credibility and realism:

> [Harriet] was taken aback, not by what he said, but by his saying it. She had never imagined that he regarded her work very seriously, and she had certainly not expected him to take this ruthless attitude about it. The protective male? He was being about as protective as a can-opener.
>
> "You haven't yet," he went on, "written the book you could write if you tried. Probably you couldn't write it when you were too close to thing. But you could do it now, if you had the—the—"
>
> "The guts?"
>
> "Exactly."
>
> "I don't think I could face it."
>
> "Yes, you could. And you'll get no peace till you do." (231)

This is in sharp contrast to what Sayers believed John Cournos felt about her work – "John was 'nice' enough Friday week in a general way, but I fear he has no sympathy with Lord Peter, being the kind of man who takes his writing seriously and spells Art with a capital A." (Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 110).

Ending her relationship with Cournos, she finds herself in another one with Bill White, with whom she became pregnant in 1923, just before *Whose Body?* was published. This pregnancy precipitated a major crisis for Sayers. In May 1922 she had accepted a job at H.S. Benson's, an advertising firm, and where she would work until 1931 until she could finally fully support herself, her son, and her husband

with her writing. She was well liked and good at her job, by 1923 her salary had been raised to six pounds ten shillings a week with the potential of a bonus. Despite her success at her job however, she worried in late 1923 that if the secret of her pregnancy were to be revealed she could be fired (Edwards, *Golden Age* 14). Taking a two month leave of absence in November 1923 ostensibly to write, she went to a nursing home where she gave birth in January and handed her young son, John Anthony, over to her cousin Ivy to take care of. She used the proceeds of her newly published book for the upkeep of her child. Eight weeks later she went back to work.

Martin Edwards entitles one of his chapters on Dorothy L. Sayers in *The Golden Age of Murder* "A Bitter Sin." In it, he details the shadow which was cast over her life by her desperate performance to hide her illegitimate child, John Anthony, both from her most intimate circle of friends and family and from her public. Given the social conventions of the time, options were limited for unwed pregnant women. As Edwards and Barbara Reynolds discuss, for Sayers in particular, the scandal the child would cause for her elderly parents, in addition to the threat of losing her job, meant that she felt she had to keep her child a secret. Her situation had the potential to be a scandal as notorious as Christie's disappearance in 1926. Not one to shy away from advertising and press publicity surrounding her writing, she guarded her private life carefully – she was not pictured in a cozy home with a loving husband and child as Christie was. Her publicity and press attention would come from an extreme sense of professionalism and the writing which she presented to her audience. She knew that "provided you get into the papers, the delightful reading public don't mind what it's for" so she aimed to control what she was in the papers for. In later years Sayers would also protect her image, never telling friends of her child's existence for fear that it would be published: additionally, her child seemingly closed the door on any option to model herself as a 'domestic' woman as Christie originally did. Sayers's fear was not unwarranted; she had seen what the press could do to other notable figures. As readers in the twenty-first century we cannot hold ourselves above this treatment of Sayers, for, as Crystal Downing rightly points out in *Writing*

Performances, the focus of biographers and critics on Sayers had tended to narrow in on this moment in her life – "she has been reduced to her sexual indiscretion" (9) – rather than thinking broadly about her enormous output and contributions to literary history, not only to detective fiction, but to the theatre, feminism, and theology. My contention is that the worry over this type of publicity and the careful guarding of her private life help to shape a sense of how aware Sayers was of the power of the press, publicity, and its influence for readers, as well as noting the different types of performances open to both Sayers and Christie as they advertised themselves as writers to their readers.

Andrea Trodd contrasts Christie and Sayers in this regard, claiming that in Christie's presentation of herself in her autobiography she "cultivated the stance of the woman amateur who wrote books in the interstices of domestic life" which "distinguished herself from innovative novelists such as Sinclair and Elizabeth Bowen" while "her closest rival, Dorothy Sayers, identified herself strongly with professionalism, and with raising the status of the genre" (13). Yet to make this simple contrast misses the aspects of their personal lives and experiences which influenced how these women chose to present their novels and writing as their professions, as well as perhaps answer why Christie wrote an autobiography while Sayers did not. Christie's personal life had already been exploited in the press. Her *Autobiography* can perhaps be seen as a way of taking back a type of agency over her life story, or "writing back" (Smith and Watson 235), and offering her life and writing a whole narrative to argue against the allegations made against her at the time of her disappearance.[174] Conversely, Sayers's pregnancy stayed secret and she was fearful of it becoming known: she did not need to write an autobiography to achieve agency over her own story; rather, in order to keep the public presence she had curated, she needed to conceal it. While Makinen noted that "it is now less possible for critics to argue that Christie's novels show a 'dislike of

[174] "People tell stories of their lives through the cultural scripts available to them, and they are governed by cultural strictures about self-preservation in public. Given constraints, how do people change the narratives or write back to the cultural stories that have scripted them as particular kinds of subjects? How is this 'writing back,' this changing of the terms of one's representations, a strategy for gaining agency?" (Smith and Watson 235)

career women', because of one reference in the *Autobiography* written in her seventies" (*Agatha Christie* 1), I further contend it is less possible to argue that her publicity and press presence shows this dislike, even though the narrative in her autobiography can be seen to complicate this. Rather, we need to examine the broader context, and examine the strategies she and Sayers used to navigate this. There are now known so many instances of Christie's discussion of herself as a writer, that to make a claim about her conservatism, or lack of professionalism from a phrase in her *Autobiography* written in her 70s is untenable. Juxtaposing the choices of Sayers and Christie further shows the ways in which a woman author seeking publicity in order to make writing a profession, had to navigate controlling their press presence. Additionally, examining Sayers and Christie together highlights their social awareness of the readers of the newspapers, who were both anxious for news of these celebrity authors, but also aware of the ways in which the reading public could quickly change opinion about them. This awareness is key for understanding the types of communities which Christie and Sayers build in their fiction, for subversion and representation of different ways in which a social community can be brought together by the press.

Christie entered into a type of publicity in the early 1920s which was part of a burgeoning celebrity culture: Bernthal claims that "The cultivated image of a homely woman writer in a domestic sphere was instrumental in selling her books" (*Queering* 29), an image which Sayers was precluded from with the birth of her child. Christie additionally at first had the financial ability (or needed to for her marriage) to present herself as wife, mother, then author. This is contrasted with Sayers who from the beginning pursued a type of professional publicity in order to make a living, and then, precluded from the domestic model of woman writer, continued in her type of publicity to additionally support her secret child. Once Christie had her own personal – and very public – catastrophe, she too shied from a particular type of press attention. After this event, however, and by the 1930s, her books were so popular that she could afford to do so, yet always struggling with the potential that she was so successful from this very negative press attention which she had received. Sayers meanwhile, had to obtain that success, and work

and write to support not only herself, but her son. Moreover, the illegitimacy of her child, especially in the interwar period, meant that the moral feelings of her public could be outraged: she was not willing to trust that a 'publicity stunt' of this kind would bring in the type of book sales she needed to support herself and her child, as well as her fear of what such knowledge would do to her parents. Letters during these few years show an anguish and despair; she is driven to keep working worried about what would happen to her son John Anthony if she died (Reynolds 135). Christie too knew she needed to keep writing after her divorce to support her child.[175] For both of these women writers, domesticity was not the basis of economic stability for them; they found this in their writing careers.

The years following the birth of John Anthony in 1924 would be significant for Sayers, both personally and in her writing. She worked fiercely to support her son. She wrote *Clouds of Witness* (which would not be published until 1926). During this time she met her husband, Mac, who suffered from shell shock and was a reporter on crime and motor-racing for the *News of the World*. As he was divorced they were married privately in the registrar's office April 13, 1926 after being sent off by their Fleet St. friends:

> Dear Mother,
>
> Meant to send you a card last night, but nobody had any stamps and we had all overeaten and over-drunk ourselves. I understand that, the news having seeped out, the whole of Fleet Street, incapably drunk, decorated the bar of the Falstaff last night, and for all I know they are still there. We were turned off, as the hangman says, in the salubrious purlieus of the registrar's office of the Clerkenwell Road. (as qtd in Reynolds, *Her Life and Soul* 157)

[175] Storm Jameson, in her *The Mirror in Darkness* trilogy, has the heroine in the first book, *Company Parade* (1934), struggling to find work in London. Her young son is boarded out in the country and she wants desperately to earn enough to make a home so that they can all live together. She too is not helped by her war exhausted husband. Clearly this is a theme – in fiction and in life – for the women of this time.

This letter indicates that Sayers and her new husband lived in a different social class that that of Christie and her husband, interacting with the Fleet Street crowds and professional colleagues. Sayers turns down an offer from her father to announce the news in the *Times* as it would "bring a horde of the very people we particularly wish to avoid – Mac's Fleet Street acquaintances and family friends and all the imbeciles who were ever at school and college with me. Sorry and all that!" (Reynolds 157-158). She does not want her marriage advertised in this way. Mac and Sayers were well suited and set up as a modern couple. Mac would cook and he would put advance notices of her books in the press (Reynolds 163). Reynolds writes of the next few years that Sayers's life held extreme purpose:

> She had to keep on at her job at Benson's; and she had to write novels and short stories which would sell. John Anthony's upkeep would become more and more expensive. She was determined to give him as good an education as she could afford…In the meantime there was work to be done. And work she did! The early years of her marriage are extremely prolific, despite the increasing demands made on her energy during the day at Benson's. Between 1923 and 1928 she published four novels, twelve short stories, and edited the first volume of *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror*. (*Her Life and Soul* 167)[176]

After she wrote *Gaudy Night* in 1935, Sayers slowly started to move away from detective fiction. She collaborated on a play about Peter and Harriet's marriage with her friend, Muriel St. Clare Byrne, *Busman's Honeymoon*, which she then turned into a novel, aptly subtitled "a love story with detective interruptions". Through the plot in *Gaudy Night*, which "should exhibit intellectual integrity as the one great permanent value in an emotionally unstable world" she was, she says, "saying the thing that, in a confused way, I had been wanting to say all my life" ("Gaudy Night" 82). She found, however, that her

[176] Sayers would "earn enough to send him to a preparatory school when he was eleven, then to Malvern College at thirteen (he helped by winning a scholarship) and later to Oxford, where he entered Lord Peter Wimsey's College, Balliol, again winning a scholarship, and took a first class degree" (Reynolds 167).

aim through her writing in the detective fiction genre, was "obscured by the conviction, still lingering in many people's minds, that a detective plot cannot bear any relation to a universal theme" (87-88). She turned to other forms of writing, such as articles, plays, and more scholarly works, yet still with the same professional awareness and public ability to present her integrity as a writer to her public. The same 'universal purpose' – "intellectual integrity" – which she brought to her detective fiction, she brought to her other writings. Yet as she despaired in "Gaudy Night", "But, *mutatis mutandis*, novel and play [*The Zeal of Thy House*] deal with the same problem and offer the same solution, and it is only the 'detective' label on the one and the 'religious' label on the other that has put them into different critical pigeon-holes" ("Gaudy Night" 88).

3.4 Conclusion

These authors tried to control and present themselves in a certain way to the press, aware of how their personal, professional, and writing lives all interacted with one another, navigating choices of publicity within a society which had prescribed narratives for women. As already noted, Christie publicly claimed the right to "two personalities": "Dame Agatha at work and Lady Mallowan at play" (as qtd in Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie* 62). Sayers felt the same. On September 15, 1935, Sayers wrote a letter to her cousin Ivy Shrimpton, who looked after Sayers's son, cautioning him against mentioning who his mother was at school:

> Better warn J.A. to leave 'Dorothy L. Sayers' out of it. 'Mrs. Fleming' is unknown, but 'Sayers' will be the signal for autograph-hunting and nuisance. Explain to him that *professional writers want their business and private affairs kept separate* – which is true enough, God knows! I spend my time in Witham chocking off the bores who want to call on Mrs Fleming for the sake of seeing Miss Sayers, confound them! (emphasis added, *Letters* 356)

This chapter presents examples of how these women were writing and engaging with the popular press and publicity within this time period. The complexities of each author's interactions with the public press could indeed be studied year by year, as they learned or were forced to shift elements of this relationship based on their personal and professional needs and desires.[177] Agatha Christie's public persona as a professional author is conflicted due to the narrative she creates about herself in her *Autobiography* and later press presence after she was exploited during her disappearance. Examination of early interviews show a confidant young middle-class woman who was eager to discuss making 'detective fiction her trade'. Dorothy L. Sayers, in her desire to become a professional writer, from the first curated a specific public persona, and relied on her professional outcome and advertising abilities to promote her work. What is clear, however, is that both Christie and Sayers used the press in specific ways and these ways reflect how they began their writing careers. They engaged with the press and celebrity culture – in their own ways and according to their separate life experiences – to make their own work known. Furthermore, it is apparent that these women were aware of and utilized both the celebrity culture and the voracious reading habits of an increasing reading public which was given to them by the popular press. This awareness then, is used in their fiction, to create communities – social and imagined – which will be examined in the following chapters.

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[177] This research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic and as such was necessarily limited to what could be discovered online. This presents a challenge: as Bingham has asserted, in "The Digitization of Newspaper Archives: Opportunities and Challenges for Historians", that while digitization of various periodicals and newspapers has been helpful for scholars, the danger is that in using key words for searching and looking at specific pages rather than the whole, researchers can make claims whilst perhaps missing the broader context of the newspaper. As I note in the beginning of this chapter, my study in this chapter is not to present an entire overview of these women authors and their interaction with the press but rather to present some of the key ways in which these women positioned themselves as professional authors alongside the influence of the interwar social context upon their work as detective fiction authors. Further work could be done perhaps in examining how they interacted with various paper with each passing year. A difference between periodicals, magazines, and the weekly and daily press could also be examined. What other authors were they interacting with? From my brief analysis G.K. Chesterton, Storm Jameson, Rebecca West, E.C. Bentley, and various members of the detection club are noted. These are other questions to consider.

Chapter 4

Detecting Agatha Christie's Imagined Communities at Home and Abroad

> *A new book by Mrs. Agatha Christie, who wrote a detective story for a bet and sold it last year, appears this week, and Mrs. Christie starts the very next day for a tour round the world; but she will not admit that she is running away from the criticisms* ("Talk of the Town", Sunday 15 January 1922, 8).

Perhaps the author of "Talk of the Town" was prophetic, for in Agatha Christie's life and in her fiction, she would use travel many times as an escape, both from publicity and from situations at home. This escape was fairly common (for those who could afford it) in the interwar years. Lucy Worsley writes that Christie's "decision fits into a pattern" of the time: "Other British women were running away from their problems and finding new selves in ancient Asia: famous and less famous names like Gertrude Bell, Freya Stark and Katherine Woolley. Bell's lover died at Gallipoli, Stark wanted to escape a marriage, Woolley's [first] husband had committed suicide" (176). Just five years after this review appeared in the press, and following Agatha Christie's separation from her first husband Archie Christie and her subsequent infamous disappearance in December 1926, Christie did run away (again) from England, first escaping to the Canary Islands in 1927 with her daughter Rosalind and her companion/secretary Charlotte (Carlo) Fisher (Worsley 166; Christie, *An Autobiography* 353), and then to "the East" in 1928. In Christie's *An Autobiography* she writes: "I knew that the only hope of starting 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… If I could be alone with [Rosalind] and my friend Carlo, things would heal again…But life in England was unbearable" (353).

Many of Christie's characters in her travel plots from the 1930s often express the same sentiments of an overwhelming desire to escape life at home, search for adventure, and find peace abroad.

What Christie and her characters would ultimately find, however, is that due to their national connections and the places that they were travelling to, there was no real 'escape' from cultural artefacts, ideologies, and often perilous connections or characters which tied them to England, or back to home. The same newspapers and connections which had helped Christie establish writing as her profession also became a source of constant anxiety for her; so much so that she felt she had to escape abroad – "run away from critics" – even though there she was still connected to the events back home. These cultural ties are also found in her fiction. Newspapers in her novels and in her life link news and people together throughout the British Empire and beyond. On a broad scale, news, tourism, novels, and other cultural artefacts serve to create an imagined national community that is mirrored in the smaller social embodied communities which Christie addresses in her work and which her characters inhabit.

This chapter examines the imagined social communities created by characters in Christie's novels and the effects on them of belonging to these communities; in particular it claims that their attachment to the cultural artefact of the newspaper is crucial in forming this social community. It further discusses the notion of detective fiction as escapist fiction and queries whether this type of fiction provides a potential for escape from the specific social and cultural context of the interwar years both for Agatha Christie – celebrated English detective fiction novelist – and her readers who all are participatory in a specific imagined social community connected through their identifications with the cultural artefacts of newspaper and novel.

As discussed in the Introduction, when establishing this 'social milieu', or community, I employ and build upon Benedict Anderson's theory of community as presented in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. The novel and the newspaper provide the means for "'re-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is nation" (original emphasis, Anderson 25). While my Introduction explores how Anderson's theory can be used to further establish social communities, imagined through connections of race, gender, religion etc., this chapter first presents how Christie's

characters imagine themselves in a specific setting (first abroad) in relation to others of the same national community and/or class. It then shows how these imagined communities become fictionally real, embodied social communities, once characters interact with each other based upon these imaginings and connections through their emotional attachment to such cultural artefacts as the newspaper and the novel. These social communities, connected through various imaginings, are then subverted by Christie to show the dangers of types of limited imaginings, whether they are social, class bound, or even national. In Chapters 2 and 3, I argue that Christie and Sayers used newspapers to reach a reading public to become professional independent women, and then expanded their community of readers through their use of a carefully curated press presence (hiding or recovering from personal traumas). In this chapter, building upon Benedict Anderson's community theory, I examine how Christie's use of the cultural artefact of the newspaper within her novels similarly work to bring an imagined community of characters together. Once these characters are brought together abroad, becoming a model of an English social community in a foreign setting, Christie then shows the dangers of these limited imaginings through a murder which must be solved.

This chapter is divided into two main parts: first, a critical and cultural context for establishing these communities abroad and second, textual analysis to establish these communities (or, how texts represent communities). Part of the critical context is acknowledging the places that Christie's 1930s travel novels inhabit, as many of Christie's plots are set in foreign places or exotic locations, with characters using various forms of travel to reach them.[178] Christie conducts an inquiry into the social structures apparent in her plots either home or abroad: the actions of the characters are under scrutiny,

[178] Agatha Christie's detective fiction is often equated with a storybook England, a kind of cozy appeal and nostalgia of the big manor house and upper-middle class insular society (albeit expanding as time went on). This assumption of her plots affirms the notion that her stories are conservative. This nostalgia, is in part, as Light argues, from the representation of Christie's fiction in television which showcased a version of England as this cozy land. Television and film representation have since changed, highlighting the darker side of Christie, as discussed in Evans's and Bernthal's *The Bloomsbury Companion to Agatha Christie*.

even though their setting may vary. As Alison Light humorously comments in *Forever England*, "Hercule Poirot may rely on armchair methods, but he certainly gads about, visiting Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Turkey" (89).

Yet even though these are foreign places away from England, the imperial conquest, as Edward Said states in *Orientalism*, merges them into British-held territory:

> [W]hat the English mind surveyed was an imperial domain which by the 1880s had become an unbroken patch of British-held territory, from the Mediterranean to India. To write about Egypt, Syria, or Turkey, as much as travelling in them, was a matter of touring the realm of political will, political management, political definition. (169)

Thus, though I specifically argue that these foreign settings further established the types of imagined communities of characters bound by cultural artefacts from England, the settings themselves as 'the realm of political will' initially needs to be situated. As Christie's travel novels are set in a colonized and imperialist setting, it is crucial to acknowledge important post-colonial criticism which scholars have noted about Christie's texts as well as the relationship of (English) detective fiction to Empire. Therefore, before I can situate the argument of how Christie's fiction established types of social communities for her readers built upon certain imaginings, this chapter presents a brief critical background to English detective fiction's participation with Imperialism. It provides recent scholarly examples of post-colonial criticism of Agatha Christie's travel novels, especially important given her participation in this English mindset which surveys an imperial territory.

Following this critical context, this chapter then argues that in Christie's fiction communities are first imagined by characters in their understanding of cultural artefacts which would be available abroad. Even abroad, characters are gathered through their use of cultural artefacts as described by Anderson in being always connected to England – their life there and reliance on access to newspapers, etc. – or to the

British Empire (and the political ideology which this entails).[179] Once these characters come together, finding other characters who think and act in a similar way, they become social communities in various settings. Though the foreign setting at first seems to be the cause of danger in the story, it is rather shown to be mirroring the anxiety which produces the plot, as characters impose their own anxieties onto the new setting. Locating these social communities in foreign settings allows Christie to show that once these characters come together in a social community, with specific ideologies, it is in fact the communities which are dangerous, not the settings themselves. She is then able to strip away social assumptions to expose new ways of bringing together a social community based on new imaginings. This chapter further analyses how the cultural artefacts of the newspaper and novel which create this imagined community are apparent in Christie's life and represented in her detective fiction texts, both home and abroad. Even though characters leave England they are still tied to a notion of Britishness throughout their travels by assumptions of accessibility to cultural artefacts such as the newspaper: there is no real cultural escape even though they may be in a different place.

4.1 Agatha Christie's Private and Fictional Escape

Going abroad was a way of dealing with problems, to leave behind issues which one was facing. As noted in the beginning of the chapter, when Christie left England with her daughter Rosalind, her decision fitted in a pattern of the time (Worsley 176).[180] Further, Christie's decision to escape abroad – to the Canary Islands with Rosalind and Carlo in 1927, and then to travel alone in 1928 – was one which was probably influenced by her own previous personal experiences: when Christie had been a little girl and her family's finances were running low, her parents had let their home and gone abroad to France for a year in search

[179] I use England as the term rather than the United Kingdom or Britain as most of Christie's characters are usually from England. While there are some from places in the United Kingdom, for the most part they are from England itself.

[180] See Sanders and Lovallo for confusion of dates regarding this travel (55). See Appendix B for the timeline of Christie's experiences and publishing context.

of cheaper ways of maintaining their lifestyle. Similarly, when Christie's father died, her mother Clara went again to France for three weeks to deal with her grief. Later, a teenage Agatha accompanied Clara to Egypt for three months, escaping the winter cold of England for the sake of her mother's health and for Agatha to be given a debutant experience in a much more economical way than her sister Madge had experienced in New York.[181]

Going abroad, however, did not mean abandoning one's social set; one could find other English people to socialize with. As Janet Morgan details in her biography of Christie, Clara's decision to go to Egypt "was not a bizarre choice" (40); many of the countries in the Near and Middle East were controlled by the British or French and were familiar for the Victorians and Edwardians. Cairo was a favourite place to spend the winter. With respectable hotels and British regiments based in the area, "there was people to watch and a dance at one or other of the hotels nearly every night of the week" (Morgan 40).[182] Thus although removed from England, an upper-middle-class English society was available for a young woman and her mother to experience. This experience is somewhat mirrored in Christie's *Autobiography* and fiction, although Christie does subvert it and shows a danger in this type of close connection (see *They Came to Baghdad* discussion below).

Being able to afford this type of escape, Christie portrays this experience for her readers. As a detective fiction writer, she participated in a genre which has been often labeled as escapist fiction. Her

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[181] Though, as Lucy Worsley notes, this three month excursion probably cost about £500, a lot of money when both Clara and Agatha together only made £400 a year. Worsley writes that "Clara must have been digging into capital for this trip, which shows how much it mattered for Agatha to meet the right sort of man" (36). It also shows how much they would have spent on Madge's coming out, which also casts some light on why Agatha's father lost his money in the first place.

[182] Worsley compares Agatha's first experience in Egypt with that of Lucy's in E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View*: she doesn't meet anyone she couldn't have met in England (37). Christie wrote a novel, *Snow Upon the Desert*, based on this experience in Egypt (which was rejected by publishers for its ridiculous plot (Worsley 40)). Worsley writes that "her novel was an extended satire about the Britishers abroad to whom Cairo seemed like Cheltenham" (38). The real reason or 'pleasure' which comes from reading this novel now, however, Worsley claims, is "imagining the young Agatha putting herself into her heroine, lolling in bed, looking forward to a day with her current young man" (39).

readers, Alison Light claims, "longed to be in the class of luxury cruisers, rather than empire builders or missionaries" (86);[183] a broadening middle-class wanted to enjoy the travel pleasures which were once only for the rich or the literary intelligentsia. Light also identifies that "it was the domesticated and managed aspect of tourism which appealed to people; the idea of going in a group. From being a place known only as part of the Empire, 'abroad' is amorphously exotic whilst at the same time being reassuringly familiarised" (90). As Christie acknowledges in the opening of *The Secret of Chimneys* (1925): "Interesting, though. After all, that was what one came abroad for—to see all these peculiar things one read about in books" (191).

'Abroad' became familiar, in part, through reading novels which were set abroad, alongside reading the news reports of what was happening there. The popular press discussed what people were wearing, what to pack, etc. When Christie wanted to escape again after her divorce, she is eager to visit Ur, which had become popular from the findings by archeologist Leonard Woolley which Christie herself was excited to read about: "I had just been reading in *The Illustrated London News* about Leonard Woolley's marvellous finds at Ur. I had always been faintly attracted to archaeology, though knowing nothing about it" (*Autobiography* 361). Thus 'abroad' became more familiar with more readers – through novels and newspapers – and ultimately more accessible.

While in the Canary Islands, Christie was both physically escaping her own situation whilst also writing escapist fiction for others who perhaps could not afford to do so. As Ian Stuart comments, "[p]eople were hungry for escapism, and for many of them the mystery novel was the equivalent of a Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers or Shirley Temple film" (24).[184] While Christie could physically travel and had the

[183] Christopher Prior argues that Christie saw this tendency towards tourism rather than wanting to be empire builders as contributing to the overall decline of the British Empire. His argument is prefaced on the assumption that Christie supported the British Empire, which has been argued for and then against and nuanced by several critics, including Merja Makinen and then Lucy Worsley who both wrote books under the same title – *Agatha Christie*.
[184] Ian Stuart is himself a detective fiction author. He comments specifically on Sayers's fiction but then also on her cultural period and her contemporaries at the time of her writing. Some of his conclusions seem more based on

ability to escape personal problems, her fiction offered brief escape for her many readers who were perhaps confined to England.[185] Her travel plots, moreover, added an exotic element: Martin Edwards claims that "detective novels featuring foreign travel held the appeal of a magic carpet" (*The Golden Age of Murder* 224).[186]

For those who could not afford to leave England, these novels additionally offered to readers participation in the imagined community abroad as portrayed by Christie. Books as an escape, as a 'magic carpet', were wanted by readers; Claire Battershill provides an example of this in her chapter in *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918-1939* with a quotation from Winnifred S. Telford's 1928 essay, "Are Your Books Real Friends?" in the monthly periodical *Woman's Magazine* (Feb 1928: 402). Telford writes:

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assumptions, rather than factual arguments. For instance, he concludes the above statement stating that the "mystery novel was the equivalent of a Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers or Shirley Temple film, especially if it contained a romantic, aristocratic hero. After all, the majority of the readers of detective stories, as distinct from thrillers, were women" (24-25). While I argued in Chapter 2 that detective fiction was a burgeoning market for attracting women, it has also been shown that men were readers of this type of detective fiction too (see Trodd, Edwards, and Christie's "Detective Writers in England").

[185] Such as Sayers herself who, tied to England by her sick husband and having to provide from her son, could not travel as Christie did, but rather has Harriet Vane travelling to escape intolerable situations. After Harriet's attempted flight to Wilvercombe in *Have His Carcase* only further propelled her into press attention through her discovery of a body, like Agatha Christie, she tries to escape England and the pressures of her life. She needs to learn how to cope with her relationship with Peter and having to feel so unbearably grateful for his saving her life, a life which she must come to realize was worth saving. In the interim between *Have His Carcase* (1932) and *Gaudy Night* (1935) Harriet travels to Europe. The success of this trip and the many experiences which furnish Harriet new ideas for stories are outlined in *Gaudy Night* (47-48). Perhaps Sayers was also writing herself a vicarious escape from her own life situation which was fast becoming increasingly more difficult with finances and managing her ailing husband who never recovered from his war service. This was probably a common occurrence for women of this time. While Sayers openly deals with the difficulties of managing and supporting – mentally, physically, and financially – a husband who is so badly affected from the war in *The Unpleasantness of the Bellona Club* (1928), in *Gaudy Night*, as World War Two was looming, she turns the escape into a much more personal reason: Harriet trying to determine her own self-worth and her relationship with Peter Wimsey. Probably by 1935 this was the same type of personal situation which Sayers herself was struggling with yet did not want to blame it all on the previous war though its effects were still lingering.

[186] Stewart King writes that "R. A. York argues that novels like *The Mystery of the Blue Train* (1928) and *Murder on the Orient Express* "provide little evidence of interest in the places through which the characters pass" (135). Instead, he maintains, "these books are about luxury" (135), a point supported by Martin Edwards (150)" (King 11).

> My books have taken me to many places I shall never visit for myself. There are book friends who will spread a magic carpet and transport you across an African desert, or leave you spell bound lost in the wondrous majesty of Niagara. You may be transported from city streets to flower-gardens, among the hills, and so vividly do these friends bring what they describe before your vision, that the scent of the flowers and the music of hill-side springs are for the moment almost real to you. (Battershill 14)

Likewise in Christie's books, as Edwards writes, "[t]rains and boats and planes carried Christie's characters around through the Thirties. Readers with no chance of experiencing first-class international travel for themselves relished the picture of life on a luxurious cruise presented in *Death on the Nile*…the book became a genre classic" (*Golden Age* 226). Furthermore, travel was made familiar in the novels by writers presenting assumptions that abroad there would be the same English society and customs which could be found at home: those same cultural artefacts which connected such a large Empire.

Familiarity with the British Empire and its link back to England were seen as necessary for establishing a new society after the War; indeed, Andrea Trodd claims that "the idea of a semi-detached national identity is central to women's writing of this period" (25). Moreover, Alice Wood, in her article "Housekeeping, Citizenship, and Nationhood in *Good Housekeeping* and *Modern Home*", argues that *Good Housekeeping* (the same magazine that Detective Club member Clemence Dane wrote for), in its topics and articles, as well as its declarations of the importance of understanding of international affairs, contradicts Alison Light's view of England as becoming more inward looking after the war, moving from a masculine ideal of 'national destiny' to a more insular, feminine domestic society (Wood 212). Wood rather posits that *Good Housekeeping* reflects an extension of domestic 'feminine' nationalism, bent on

supporting England through Empire and British-made goods.[187] The informed housekeeper could influence the affairs of the nation: "Far from a dim and dazed housewife, the interwar consumer was constructed as a savvy shopper whose actions in the marketplace affected not only her family but the nation" (218).[188] Perhaps this shopping was made more appealing by slipping in the newest detective fiction book which presented for the reader a description of the places which the housekeeper – or any other working woman – was patriotically supporting.[189]

Thus readers in England could escape to various foreign places in these detective fiction books which were peopled with Western travellers. Yet detective fiction, while being escapist fiction, paradoxically also offers a space to interrogate social customs, cultural artefacts, and the importance of grappling with difficult issues as well as the human response to them. As Heta Pyrhönen writes, "The drama of solving a crime always takes places within a social milieu. It is this milieu, disrupted both by crime and by its investigations, which comes under scrutiny, disclosing various 'truths' about human conduct and nature" (*Murder from an Academic Angle* 3). Agatha Christie's detective fiction disturbs the social milieu it references. These Western travellers brought their own domestic problems and grievances to an outside (international/non-western) environment. This then presents an imagined community as represented in Christie's novels. Although many of these stories take place across physical borders and

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[187] Light's argument is that she "maintain[s] that the 1920s and '30s saw a move away from the formerly heroic and officially masculine public rhetorics of national destiny and from a dynamic and missionary view of the Victorian and Edwardian middle class in 'Great Britain' to an Englishness at once less imperial and more inward-looking, more domestic and more private – and, in terms of pre-war standards, more 'feminine'" (*Forever England* 8-9).

[188] Trodd also writes that there was an "intensive focus on the national duties of motherhood, and on the failings of individual mothers, [which] is the context for representations of mothers in fiction and autobiographical writing in this period [between the wars]" (11).

[189] See Nicola Beauman, *A Very Great Profession*, for details on the various lending libraries and the way which women completed their weekly shopping with a stop off at these libraries to get their weekly reading alongside their weekly groceries (10-13). Andrea Trodd also notes that "attempts [by Boots] to encourage female customers to regard changing a library book as part of the general shopping day proved very successful. By 1930 Boots had 250,000 subscribers who could change their book at any one of the 340 branches, and had become the largest of the subscription libraries" (35). See also Watson, *Snobbery With Violence* (and my discussion in Chapter 2).

land boundaries, the characters in them for the most part exist within the traditions and customs of the western world, more usually Great Britain and sometimes America.[190] Not only do they bring these ideologies with them as they travel, but they rely on the news and 'artefacts' of where they have come from to be accessible abroad: England expands beyond its land borders into the Empire, through the people who are written about there – both by the newspapers of the day, and Christie's own novels.

Indeed, Christie's travel plots rely on the fact that in going abroad the Western character was certain to know that there were still Western ideas of society – brought through the newspaper, novels, British rule (and sometimes French) – which were expected to be available as part of an empire outpost. Yet these assumptions are often just further ways for Christie to subvert readerly expectations, provide red herrings, and additionally, commentary on why these assumptions would be there in the first place. In *Destination Unknown*, a seemingly stereotypical British spinster traveller complains about Morocco that "It really seems dreadful nowadays the way one meets hardly any of one's fellow-countrymen", and instead can only meet "the French" (71). Hilary Craven, the protagonist, "smil[es] faintly" at this statement: "The fact that Morocco was French colonial possession did not seem to count much with Miss Hetherington. Hotels anywhere abroad she regarded as the prerogative of the English travelling public" (Christie 71). The local inhabitants of Morocco are not even mentioned. These stereotypical assumptions are complicated, however, by the presentation of Miss Hetherington: she is a stock English narrow-minded spinster traveller who in fact turns out to be a spy. Does Miss Hetherington actually think the things she has said, or is she just further participating in a stereotype of what people would think for her cover? As Merja Makinen writes, "one of Christie's narrative tropes is her manipulation of cultural

[190] Interestingly, Benedict Anderson's theory on imagined political communities was, he writes, "partly aimed at British and American imperialism" (227). There is a connection between this kind of imperialism even seen by Christie in her writing. Though there are differences in personalities between American and English travellers, as a whole, imperialistically speaking, similar assumptions towards the people and places they are visiting are made by characters of both nationalities in Christie's books.

stereotypes: the major uttering imperialist views, the old maid distrustful of young people…The texts deploy these stereotypes against the reader and the text's investigator, invoking erroneous prejudices that 'blind' them to the more complex masked depths" ("Agatha Christie (1890-1976)" 416).[191]

These are masked depths that, as discussed in Chapter 3, Christie had much experience within her war work (hiding traumas), and further, through her wide experiences travelling. Stereotypes such as she employs with the character of Miss Hetherington can be seen to be based on Christie's own experiences. For example, whilst travelling by car across the desert towards Baghdad, she recounts in her *Autobiography* how a forceful middle-aged woman, whom she calls Mrs. C, demands the best seat in the car (although it was previously reserved by someone else), and "gave the impression that she was the first European woman ever to set foot in the city of Baghdad, before whose whims all else [indigenous peoples, those of other countries, those of lower classes] must fall down" (371). Christie would give this trait to various characters in her novels: Lady Westholme in *Appointment with Death* (1938), continuously and loudly demands the best travel arrangements (from the various travel agencies and guides) and refuses to fully pay for them: "'The price', said Lady Westholme firmly, 'is inclusive and I shall certainly refuse to sanction any addition to it'" (52). Travellers in Christie's novels rely on access to newspapers, telegrams, and trains, cars, boats, and then planes. English tourists who are self-importantly aware of their own social status rely on others' recognition of this and assume that that all others will

[191] Makinen outlines some of these instances where the investigator makes these assumptions. She writes that "Luke Fitzwilliam plays much the same role [as Hastings] in *Murder is Easy* (1939), finally realizing at the close that his unthinking sexism has made him look in the wrong direction for the killer, "Not a man – she never mentioned a man – you assumed it was a man" (215). Rather than invoke these stock characters, Christie examines how her characters masquerade within the conventional expectations, thereby reconfiguring the instability and slipperiness of social identities ("Agatha Christie" 416).
Furthermore, it is interesting to note that it is the women in the story who are able to see Miss Waynflete (the murderer) for who she really is. Miss Fullerton recognizes Miss Waynflete's madness and is killed by her before she can get to the police. Bridget sees it but considers herself a match for the older spinster, almost bringing about her own death. Another woman of the village warns Luke commenting: "Honoria Waynflete is, I am sure, a very wicked woman! Oh, I see you don't believe me!" (*Easy to Kill* 166).

gladly give up the best seat on the plane, train, or automobile. While often surprise ensues if this happens to not be the case, these characters are more usually shown to be red herrings for the stories – such as Miss Hetherington the spy – or end up murdered (such as Mrs. Otterbourne and even Linnet in *Death on the Nile*), or, indeed, the murderer (Lady Westholme).

This is not to suppose that Christie herself supports these assumptions or condones them. The reliance on this type of community making in a foreign land, such as recognition of social status, news reports, and these various links back to England, enables Christie's characters to presume upon their own Britishness no matter where the story takes place. Yet the far-reaching influence of their own customs may allow travel but ultimately shows the imposition of a colonial mindset upon other locations. And this is a mindset which brings with it murder. Upon leaving England, the new landscape and people become part of Christie's murder scene and thus suspect – as at first glance Poirot seemingly agrees with: "*Quel pays sauvage*!" (original emphasis, Christie, *Death on the Nile* 272 (discussed below)) – yet ultimately the culprit is found within the enclosed community of the travellers. Human relations in Christie's stories are built through their shared ideologies which create enclosed communities of specifically British/Western peoples in foreign locations. Phyllis Lassner posits that "[a]s in all of Christie's Oriental mysteries, the European, English, and American visitors are the narrative's defining presence" (35). The assumption of Christie's characters, and of her readers, regarding continuing access to British newspapers, novels, and to foreign lands as tourists, as well as their shared connections and recognition of these connections, create an imagined ideological Western enclosed community abroad. Thus, no matter the foreign place these characters go, they are always connected with each other through their participation with a specific English/British cultural milieu. As Lassner further concludes. "However exotically romantic the Middle East is imagined, from Egypt to Syria, it is the presence of the Westerner that makes that Other place significant. In effect, only Westerners make the Orient worthy of lending an

exotic atmosphere to an Occidental melodrama" (35). This creates the ground for the plot for the detective fiction novel, which further connects Christie's characters to the world outside the novel.

4.2 Detective Fiction and the Imperial Project

When Agatha Christie's fiction brings the English detective into the empire or abroad in the early 1930s, this constitutes a shift from what Caroline Reitz in *Imperial Detection* (2004) calls "one of the innovations of Dickens and Collins" of the mid- to late Victorian era, where they are "credited with…the introduction of Empire into the [detective] genre" (45). Christie now brings the English detective fiction genre and British imaginings of a kind of national community, tied through their emotional attachments to newspapers and novels, into the empire. Notably, though, Christie does not bring the detective and investigation into all of the various indigenous communities of the empire, but rather investigates the social communities composed of British/Western travellers abroad, whose relationships impose a murder investigation upon the imperial landscape. This ensures, as Knight affirms, that "crimes that were realised as personal and domestic were also projected directly or indirectly as social and political" ("Crimes Domestic and Crimes Colonial" 25). Murder, in Christie's books, only occurs in a specific social community which necessarily excludes the peoples from the places these touristic characters are visiting. As Susan Rowland declares in "The Classical Model of the Golden Age": "Like the entirely guiltless Egyptians in *Death on the Nile* (1937), foreigners are not the main targets for guilt in golden age detective fiction. More usual is the detection of otherness within English society in the form of deviance and criminality" (126). The setting becomes part of the plot, or a 'red herring', whilst the murder itself uncovers dangerous social expectations and relations which must be re-imagined if the expatriate community is to be made whole again. Foreign/tourist/Western characters are brought together in various ways: through murder; through being the same group/type of person within a political community in a new place (i.e. having a national identity, though not the focus of my argument); and, importantly, they

are also connected by their understanding and consuming of what is happening back in England (or America), through their interaction with what Benedict Anderson calls cultural artefacts, especially that of the newspaper and the novel.

This chapter analyzes and emphasizes the types of social communities which can be found first abroad and then back home, tied through characters' emotional connections with newspapers and novels. Yet as my argument is concerned with texts which are set in a colonized situation, though the characters themselves are part of the imperialist nation, critical context of the history of English detective fiction with the Imperial project is necessary. Changes in English detective fiction kept pace with changes within the British colonial space, as many critics have shown. As Stephen Knight argues in his chapter, "Crimes Domestic and Crimes Colonial", "Crime Fiction is an early, often the first, voice to respond to new social and cultural encounters generated by the colonial situation" (25). Christie brings the English detective genre and its social milieu and national imaginings into the empire. This is not surprising: Nels Pearson and Marc Singer, in their Introduction to their edited collection, *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World* (2009), state that "No contemporary critical account can overlook the formative roles that race, nation, and empire have played in the development of detective fiction…Evidence of colonialism and empire has…been legible in the detective genre since its beginnings" ("Open Cases: Detection, (Post)Modernity, and the State" 3). They cite both Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee and Caroline Reitz who have each argued that "nineteenth-century English crime fiction developed in conjunction with the formation of imperial authority, especially in India, drawing upon narratives of colonial governance to formulate its own portrayals of domestic policing" (Pearson and Singer 3). As Reitz argues, detective fiction and the British imperial project are linked, indeed were dependent upon one another. She examines the rise of both imperialism and detective fiction, asking at the beginning of *Imperial Detection*, "How did English acceptance of the police provide a vehicle for the acceptance of the then equally suspect imperial project?" (xix). Reitz traces the history of such works as Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868)

in epitomizing detective fiction, but also "focuses" on how "the confusing omnipresence of an imperial narrative" in "the peaceful order of England" such as exemplified in *The Moonstone* "is confounded by Empire" (xix). As she explains about the novel:

> [T]he novel's main narrator, Gabriel Betteredge, complains, 'here was our quiet English house suddenly invaded by a devilish Indian Diamond' (36). The diamond leaves the house, but never the novel; a detective figure tracking it to the wilds of India literally has the last word. Similarly, Doyle's *The Sign of the Four* [the second Sherlock Holmes novel, 1890] cannot tell a story of English crime without placing an account of the Indian Mutiny at its center. (xix-xx)

Likewise, Yumna Siddiqi, in *Anxieties of Empire and the Fiction of Intrigue* (2008), observes that "British imperial fiction and detective fiction are, on the face of it, distinct genres of writing" (17). Yet Siddiqi examines the Sherlock Holmes stories to conclude that "[d]etective stories by Arthur Conan Doyle typify the ways in which fiction of intrigue expresses, frames, and responds to such anxieties [of empire]" (18).

These anxieties of empire continue on into the twentieth century, as Jane Garrity argues in *Stepdaughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary* (2003). Robin Hackett and Gay Wachman, in their Introduction to the edited collection, *At Home and Abroad in the Empire: British Women Write the 1930s* (2009), state that Garrity "erodes remaining critical reluctance to consider questions of empire in studies of modernism by addressing the 'misperception that British imperial dominance had ended by 1914' (2003, 225)" ("Introduction. Making the Private Public: Women Writers, Modernism, Empire, and War" 19). As Garrity had explained, "territorial expansion did not come to a halt with the Edwardian era: indeed, at its zenith in the 1920s, the British empire held territorial possessions…on all five continents, covering about one-quarter of the globe and compromising a population of some 400 million individuals" (Garrity 14). Meanwhile, Siddiqi claims that "Doyle's successors Dorothy Sayers, Margery Allingham, Ngaio Marsh, and Agatha Christie, who occupied center

stage during the so-called 'golden age' of detective fiction…focused on London and the English country-side, even though they wrote at a time when the British Empire was at its pinnacle" (19).[192] Yet as this chapter argues, the 'focus', especially of Christie's novels, was beyond England too. Christie's detective stories, then, are set both in the metropole and in the empire, and raise claims about the role and importance of the imperial imaginary in her works.[193]

Writing in a specific time period and social milieu of course does not excuse Christie from the aspects of her colonial assumptions. Mevlüde Zengïn employs a post-colonial reading of texts such as *Death on the Nile* and *Appointment with Death* and concludes with dismay that, with the popularity of her fiction, Christie is complicit in spreading the idea of the Oriental Other as defined by Edward Said and other theorists ("Western Image of The Orient and Oriental In Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*: A Postcolonial Reading").[194] Additionally, Christopher Prior argues that Christie comments on a declining

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[192] Siddiqi goes on to state that "Their stories, too, might be read against the grain to explore the ways in which Empire shapes part of the 'unsaid' of detective fiction – but that is beyond the scope of my study" (19).

[193] More recently scholars have been commenting on this relationship of empire and Christie. As Stewart King notes in his 2018 article, "*E Pluribus Unum*: A Transnational Reading of Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*", "over the past decade, scholars have begun to focus on Christie's transnationalism, particularly in the 1930s novels set outside Britain—*Murder on the Orient Express*, *Murder in Mesopotamia* (1936), *Death on the Nile* (1937), and *Appointment with Death* (1938)" (10). He mentions Phyllis Lassner, Sami Atassi, and Mevlüde Zengin as critics who have undertaken this transnational reading of Christie (10-11). Similarly, M. Isabel Santaularia i Capdevila, in her 2022 article on contemporary crime writer Lisa See's *Dragon Bones*, helpfully outlines the issues of the imperial project with detective fiction, and the relationship between them. She cites *The Foreign in International Crime Fiction: Transcultural Representations* (2014) which "define[s] detective fiction as 'a transcultural contact zone,' that is, a space that 'lends itself to exposing, denouncing, addressing and . . . constructing Otherness' (1)" (96). Santaularia i Capdevila also refers to critics Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee (2003), Caroline Reitz (2004), and Stephen Knight (2006), noting that they "have demonstrated [that] the genre was born at the height of the British Empire and…it played an important part in mapping foreign lands and translating the Other for an audience that saw itself as being at the center of culture, progress, and civilization" (96). Christie participates in this 'translation of the Other', in her detective fiction, read by a myriad of people all over the world.

[194] It must be noted that in "Western Image of The Orient and Oriental In Agatha Christie's Death on the Nile: A Postcolonial Reading", Zengïn mistakenly conflates together two characters, Rosalie Otterbourne and her mother, Mrs. Otterbourne. Mrs. Otterbourne is a writer of romantic sensationalist fiction, and is also an alcoholic. Her daughter, Rosalie, loves her mother for who she was, and desperately tries to take care of her while also being significantly embarrassed by her. Yet Zengïn brings these two characters together: "Rosalie Otterbourne, the drunken writer of pornographic novels, defines Egypt as a place having a bad effect on her: "There's something about this country that makes me feel wicked. It brings to the surface all the things that are boiling inside one. Everything's so unfair – so unjust" (p. 49)" (849). Rosalie does say this – but she is the daughter, not the 'drunken

empire, not because it was wrongly undertaken in the first place, but rather because there are not enough stalwart young people to take the place of the older imperialist generation who originally contributed to the building of empire. He contends that "Christie remained trapped by her own past, honouring an archetypal outward-bound, go-getting male empire builder as the model modern-day Britons would have to emulate were Britain to return to success" (209).

To fully claim, however, as Prior does, that "[b]efore the Second World War, Christie's work was explicitly racist" (200) is, in part, missing some of her narrative voice which must be separated from that of her characters (as I will show below in juxtaposing her *Autobiography* with *Murder in Mesopotamia*). Christie does participate in a specific imperial social community with her readers, yet she is also able to critique this in her own writing. Reitz claims about the detective fiction genre that "[b]y situating the figure of the detective in this vast, interconnected world, rather than as the homegrown gatekeeper of a narrowly envisioned metropolitan center, we restore to detective fiction the critique of authority out of which it first came" (81). Moreover, Phyllis Lassner offeres a more nuanced approach to Christie's colonial novels, refuting Alison Light's claim that the setting did not matter at all. Instead, Lassner

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writer of pornographic novels'. Rosalie admits the sentiment to Poirot and clarifies that she is afraid of her own wicked tendencies of coming to hate her mother for who she is now. When Zengïn mistakenly attributes this saying of bringing to the surface these wicked tendencies to Mrs. Otterbourne, Zengïn then concludes that:
For Mrs. Otterbourne it is the Oriental world that arises in one the negative perhaps dangerous feelings. This is the stereotyped image of the East as degenerate. For this reason she makes a connection between the murder of Linnet Doyle's maid Louise Bourget and the suspect, Fleetwood:

> "The crime passionnel!" she exclaimed. "The primitive instinct-to kill! So closely allied to the sex instinct. That girl, Jacqueline, half Latin, hot-blooded, obeying the deepest instincts of her being, stealing forth, revolver in hand-" […]
> "Her husband, then," said Mrs. Otterboume, rallying from the blow. "The blood lust and the sex instinct-a sexual crime. There are many well-known instances." (as qtd in Zengïn, 849)

Mrs. Otterbourne, as a sensationalist romantic fiction writer attributes this sexual passion to the *French* maid and then to the *Spanish* Jackie. Mrs. Otterbourne in the novel makes no mention of the 'Orient' itself as 'degenerate', Zengïn's claim is based on interpreting Rosalie's fear to her mother. And finally murdered, Mrs. Otterbourne's death sets her daughter free, an action which we readers secretly celebrate. I discuss the implications of Rosalie's fear towards 'wicked tendencies' in the *Death on the Nile* section.

argues, the setting does matter, but more as a way of showing Christie's personal beliefs, not through the detective or travellers, but rather in how she questions use of narrative:

> Despite Christie's assurance that in her scheme of things, the murderer will always be captured, she also raises the question of whether such narrative promises can serve as a model for identifying threatening power and stopping real villainy when our own vision is so clouded with conventional or stereotypical categories of identity…her 1930s colonial mysteries can be assessed as brilliantly managing a set of serious political questions as literary and political satire.[195] Combining the two, she satirizes the staying power of British manners and morals in places and plots that resist their efficacy. (47)[196]

These varied critical analyses of the role and work of the imperial imaginary in the detective fiction genre suggest that readers need to be alive to the nuances of the representation of colonial peoples and spaces in Christie's fiction.

4.3 *An Autobiography*, *Appointment with Death,* and *Murder in Mesopotamia*

Christie herself found that what Lassner calls this 'staying power of British manners and morals' in various places both shocking and boring – to simply find more English society is not why one should go abroad. Leaving home can bring into focus the problems of self or society which can be buried in the

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[195] Roberta Mullini, in her article "'How much I have loved that part of the world': Agatha Christie and the Orient", comments, "It is not a case [*sic*], then, that her publisher had recently collected the three novels *Murder in Mesopotamia*, *Death on the Nile*, and *Appointment with Death* – where Poirot is the protagonist – in a single volume entitled *Poirot in the Orient* (25) (2001)" (26).

[196] Interestingly, in Christie's first 'colonial' novel, *The Man in the Brown Suit*, the ultimate villain, Sir Eustace Pedler, is never caught. Moreover, Anne, the protagonist of the novel, rather likes him. Merja Makinen argues that "Anne is resistant to simplistic categorisation and voices her ambivalence in her admiration. Life is more complex than bourgeois, patriarchal notions of law and order would have us believe" (*Agatha Christie* 71). And importantly, Colonel Race, who is a character who shows up a few times in Christie's fiction, and exemplified as being a stalwart defender of Empire, had been chasing the villain but ultimately never catches him. Race is trying to track down Pedler, who makes his money on provoking others in the empire to rebellion, and supplying the ammunition to fight against the British rule.

routine and customs of home. It can offer an escape from a situation, but also make one aware of situations. In *Appointment with Death* (1938), when Poirot is investigating the murder of a particularly malevolent mother (a controlling matriarch is one of the themes which Christie often grapples with), Carol Boynton, stepdaughter of the tyranical Mrs. Boynton, tries to explain to a "sympathetic" Poirot why she and her brother once contemplated murder:

> "It's impossible for you to understand the state we were in!" She sat up, pushing back the hair from her face. "It would sound fantastic. It wasn't so bad in America – but traveling brought it home to us so…Our being different from – other people! We – we got desperate about it. And there was Jinny. … That evening in Jerusalem things kind of boiled up! Ray was beside himself. He and I got all strung up and it seemed – Oh, indeed, it did seem right to plan as we did!" (108-109)

The Boyntons knew that their familial situation was odd. The full force of the abuse they suffered was only brought home to them when they interacted with a broader international community. As fellow traveller, Sarah King, tells Carol in the beginning of the novel, "Talking with an outsider is always a good thing…Inside a family one is apt to get too intense" (37). Trapped by their step-mother, three siblings have been mentally abused almost their entire life, along with their half-sister, Mrs. Boynton's own daughter. Feeling her power waning, Mrs. Boynton has taken her family abroad, to torture them by juxtaposing their family situation with that of others. Yet in an effort to extend her own powers, Mrs. Boynton is murdered by a victim of her malevolence. The Boynton family are freed from her, but their relief enhances their potential for being murderers. Poirot is brought in and solves the case, freeing the Boynton family from all charges. For the Boynton siblings, travel highlighted their own familial failings and the anxieties they had from home. They brought these with them and imposed them on a new place,

and then imposed their dysfunction on the new setting.[197] Yet travel also helped to show them the traps which they were held in, and they resolved to take steps to escape, before their mother was murdered. Likewise, in 1928, Christie hoped that travel by herself would help to show her the kind of person she was, now that her marriage had fallen apart (*Autobiography* 362).

As discussed in Chapter 3, Christie was adventurous. Her own experiences abroad are mirrored in her detective fiction; fiction which acknowledges and then often critiques characters' (or English travellers') assumption of this imagined community abroad connected by customs from home, such as noted above when Mrs. C demanded the best seat in the travel car. She writes about her travel experiences in her *Autobiography* and gives the context for why she was determined to travel: she had travelled with Archie, then with her daughter and Carlo; she was now determined to travel by herself. Fate, as she calls in in her *An Autobiography*, changes her plans to visit the West Indies and she instead takes tickets on the Orient Express on the advice of an acquaintance, Commander Howe (361): "All my life I had wanted to go on the Orient Express. When I had travelled to France or Spain or Italy, the Orient Express had often been standing at Calais, and I had longed to climb up into it. *Simplon-Orient Express – Milan, Belgrade, Stamboul…*" (original emphasis 361).[198] Yet as Lucy Worsley states "we need to examine the romance Agatha spins around her first trip to what Britons called the 'Middle East'" (176).

As noted in the beginning of the chapter, travel was an escape which Christie sorely needed, from the types of celebrity culture and exploitation which came with her profession as a popular detective fiction author, itself a genre which offered escape for her readers. While her *Autobiography* does not

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[197] Jesper Gulddal claims that there is a second ending other than the one which Christie offers in her story. His new reading of the narrative text is that the Boynton children killed their own mother in order that they could live. In their marriages, Gulddal argues that they are participating in the sacrificial quality of a pagan religion for the sake of 'bearing fruit', i.e. marriage and children.

[198] Lucy Worsley gives context for this trip: "Iraq sounds a long way to go for a holiday, but it was increasingly popular as a travel destination. Having crossed the Channel by sea, British tourists would take the train from Paris, firstly to Istanbul and then on to Damascus. The decades between the wars saw the heyday of the service run by the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits, and there were four trains a week" (175).

specifically comment on this dark period in her life, as a whole is can be seen as a way of doing what Smith and Watson, in their interrogation of autobiography, call 'writing back': they ask "how is this 'writing back', this changing of the terms of one's representation, a strategy for *gaining agency*?" (original emphasis, 235). Christie tells her own story to gain agency for her actions and this section on travel is exceptionally well documented. She turns it into a romantic travel narrative, "tell[ing] the tale as a spontaneous act of reinvention" (Worsley 174). Christie claims that through travelling she will see how she likes "having no one to consider but herself" (*Autobiography* 362).

Yet in having no one to consider but herself, and wanting to travel to escape and find herself, Christie is necessarily still part of a specific cultural and social milieu, apparent even in her *Autobiography* and which, in turn, her characters never fully escape: they are tied to their imagined communities even abroad. Her *Autobiography* and her fiction show her acknowledgment and then representation of this imagined community. Christie describes this trip and Worsley calls it "one of the most exciting, glamourous passages" in her autobiography (174). Yet the very privileges and experiences which Christie has also ensures that as readers we need to ask "What is the position of the *historical person writing the autobiography* within her cultural world?" (original emphasis, Smith and Watson 238). Christie is an English upper-middle-class woman who realizes that she will be safe travelling alone, and having the money and connections to go where she pleases. While Carlo was doubtful about Christie travelling by herself (*Autobiography* 361), as Christie unconsciously identifies, as an English upper-middle-class woman travelling she is not alone, nor in any danger except of too much attention brought on by other travellers, solicitous on her behalf (often to her chagrin).

Before Christie sets off, she is warned to be careful of getting caught up in the British community at Alwiyah, just outside of Baghdad: "Commander Howe wrote down for me places I must go and see in Baghdad. 'Don't get trapped into too much Alwiyah and Mem-sahibs and all that. You must go to Mosul

– Basra you must visit – and you certainly ought to go to Ur'" (*Autobiography* 361).[199] Commander Howe was warning her of an expatriate community (which was placed) in Baghdad, yet not participating with it. She benefits from his experience in Baghdad, albeit as an army commander (which she does not comment on). Additionally, she was excited by the idea of visiting Ur, having read about Leonard Woolley's archeological finds in *The Illustrated London News* (*Autobiography* 361). She wants to see for herself what was presented in the paper: news from the Empire is brought back to England – both by person and by print – and she wants to travel to these places because of this.

Once on the train, Christie finds herself caught by one of "the first dangers of travel…a middle-aged woman, a well-dressed, experienced traveller, with a good many suitcases and hat-boxes…entered into conversation with me" (363). Upon hearing that Christie was alone and going to Baghdad, Mrs. C – the same woman above who took the best seat in the travel car – becomes all animation and invites her to stay in Alwiyah, as the hotels in Baghdad are "*quite* impossible" (original emphasis 363). Mrs. C's sentiments are seemingly echoed later, in Christie's 1936 *Murder in Mesopotamia*. The narrator, Nurse Leatheran – Lassner calls her a "classic unreliable narrator" (34), whose "bigoted comments [are] a tad too obvious" (35) – writes to a colleague that "The *dirt* and the *mess* in Baghdad you wouldn't believe – and not romantic at all like you'd think from the Arabian Nights! Of course, it's pretty on the river, but the town itself is just awful" (original emphasis, 355).[200] Nurse Leatheran sees the places she read about

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[199] Worsley writes: "The next leg towards Ur, Damascus to Baghdad, was undertaken in a bouncing six-wheeled desert minibus. Run by former members of the British Army's transport corps, this motor link followed a gash in the desert cut to guide planes to Baghdad after the British wanted to keep control of this area; Churchill's decision to change over the Royal Navy's ships from coal to oil required it. But lacking the resources to send in a traditional army, Britain relied instead on the threat of aerial bombing. Iraq may have become a place for tourism, but it was also still a place for the exercise of imperial power" (175).

[200] Mullini makes a compelling argument about the discourse of Nurse Amy Leatheran. Mullini writes that as the narrator "Amy is always presented as strongly biased on the British side" (28). Though Amy's preconceived notions of the East are "imperialistic and 'Orientalist", Mullini also points out that Leatheran's prejudices also extend to Poirot, which, she argues, "thus show[s] the comic side of her insular and anglocentric point of view…Any time Amy's comments upon Iraq reality are too strongly negative, therefore, Christie introduces another character who modifies these views in the reader's eyes" (28). Concluding her point about *Murder in Mesopotamia,* Mullini writes:

in books (as Telford had discussed above, see Battershill 14), but she is not impressed, as the reality did not live up to her expectations. While Nurse Leatheran enjoyed life on the river, Christie is bored by it: she is caught in the social life of the English colony which she had been warned about. Mrs. C organizes tennis and visiting just as if Christie had never left the English countryside. Christie writes "[a]nd there I was – in what I sometimes thought of as Mem-Sahib Land" (*Autobiography* 373). She is seemingly aware of the other people's perceptions or lack of them to their surroundings, and equally aware of the larger issues of this worldview. Feeling stifled, she resolves to get away: "The people of Alwiyah offered me charming hospitality…[but] I felt that I might just as well be in England… my idea of travelling had been to get away from England and see other countries. I decided something must be done" (374). Despite being in Baghdad, the English community had organized life there, outside of England's land borders, to reflect the same style of life that they would have had back home – "Geographically I might be in Baghdad, spiritually I was in England still" (374): they made a Baghdad that conformed to their own customs whilst stationed there. Understanding this historical social perception as exemplified in her *Autobiography* helps to situate the social conventions which are represented in her fiction.

Yet although Christie was quite adventurous, and did go travelling by herself, she does not refer to the status which she must have had as a traveller. As an upper-middle-class Western woman, Christie is afforded many distinctions and benefits from travelling in a part of the world occupied by other British people. She received advice about where to go for her trip from someone who was stationed there. Once abroad, the British men in these other places outside of England were there to assist her: "One of the surprising things about Baghdad, and about Iraq generally, was that there was always someone to escort

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"I wouldn't say that Christie arrives here at a deep intercultural understanding, at a complete acceptance of the diversity of the cultural and religious Other…Nevertheless there are some hints that the feeling she passes to her novel tends to overcome the romantic idea of the Orient and to change it into a more realistic and modern picture where there are pipelines, where Iraq has its own police, even if the British authority is still very strong" (29).

you to places…As soon as you wished to travel, somebody produced a friend, a cousin, a husband or an uncle who would manage to make time and escort you there" (*Autobiography* 379-380).

Moreover, Christie was well enough known by the time that she was travelling for people to want to host her. Though she does not mention it in her *Autobiography*, the fact that she was 'Agatha Christie detective fiction novelist' must have afforded her some social position while staying at Alwiyah. When she goes to visit Ur, the site of the archeological dig, she reflects back that she was greatly honoured and welcomed, precisely because of her prestige as the author of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*: "Katherine Woolley, Leonard Woolley's wife… was so enthusiastic about [*Roger Ackroyd*] that I was given the V.I.P. treatment" (376). Here is a lived example of how reading, as Stella Deen writes, "would increase women's cultural literacy and foster the development of their social networks" (58). Though Deen is building upon Clemence Dane's thesis that "'interesting people are within everyone's reach so long as books continue to be printed' (88)" (68), Agatha Christie's connections – she would also meet her future husband Max Mallowan at this dig – and reception at Ur were because she was a writer whom Katherine Woolley read and admired. Just as Christie had known about the findings at Ur through the *Illustrated London News* back in England, the Woolleys, in Iraq, were excited by her coming to stay with them through their understanding of her as Agatha Christie author of *Roger Ackroyd*. And just like Christie, Katherine Woolley was also a woman of this period who was running away from problems, as I noted above (Worsley 176). Christie would famously base her character and murder victim, Louise, in *Murder in Mesopotamia* on the complex historical persona of Katherine Woolley; it seems there is no escape from social or cultural connections either fiction or in life. Christie and the Woolleys are associated with England beyond its borders. Just as England extended its own borders through political conquest, likewise, its people were connected, not only nationally, but culturally. News from England and its empire travelled and interacted with one another through newspapers and novels.

Christie may not have been surprised that her work was known. As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, just before Christie set off on her Empire Tour with her first husband in 1922, she gave an interview which was published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. In the interview itself Christie wonders if the people she will meet on the Empire tour will like her work: "I am not sure that the people in the Overseas Dominions are going to like me; they may find my love of crime objectionable, for I believe they have less tolerance than London and Londoners. It cannot be helped!" ("The Pursuit of Crime"). Her assumption is that readers will know her work outside of England, from newspapers and serializations, and that what is happening in England will be reported on in the Dominions of the Empire. This was the case: Alice Wood describes how magazines would be posted abroad and the appreciative response of readers. She notes that the magazine *Good Housekeeping* provided free shipping for any subscribers, either in England or abroad (217-218). She cites a reader from Northern Rhodesia who wrote "'I am sure that many other women situated as I am, somewhere out in the "blue" in various parts of the world, are also grateful for the help your magazine gives them' (Sep 1924: 189)" (218).

Christie knew about Ur and went to visit it from her knowledge of the findings she read in England in the *Illustrated London News*. At Ur, she met the Woolleys, who so enjoyed *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, that she was welcomed in a foreign place, albeit inhabited by English people. Similarly, these connections between British/English/ Western peoples are found in her books. Lines of communication through newspapers, knowledge through press reports, and connections of certain social sets which Christie experienced in her travels are reflected: there is an understanding that there is a common knowledge about Western people and society, which is to be found in any place of travel. Many of her books deal with the knowledge that readers would have about various members of society (as noted, she herself at the beginning of her career used the press's publicity), and news from England was sure to reach even the furthest outposts of the Empire. Additionally, Christie's characters abroad rely on news reaching England from mentions in newspapers there: "Nigel would read presumably in the paper

that a Mrs. Hilary Craven had died of an overdose of sleeping-tablets in Casablanca. It would probably be quite a small paragraph" (*Destination Unknown* 32). Thus in her fiction Christie illustrates how instrumental both the public press and fiction were in creating communities and tying together readers no matter where in the world they were situated.

4.4 *Death on the Nile* and Abroad

Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile* (1937) is particularly important for showing how interaction with the British popular press brings together a community even outside of England.[201] The various characters all ultimately end up on a Nile cruise together, and are aware, before they embark, of who each other is through the society news in the press. The novel's use of the newspaper and knowledge of news and social standing show how they are all connected. This demonstrates that Christie was aware of the importance of cultural artefacts such as the newspaper and novel in creating communities, and additionally, that she used these features in her novels to highlight the connections which come from people interacting with the news culture from a certain space and place.

Death on the Nile is divided into two sections, "England" and "Egypt". The shorter opening section "England" serves to gather the characters together on the boat in the Nile, mostly by their participation in and reading of society columns which discuss certain people, notably the beautiful and wealthy American, Linnet Ridgeway. Light writes that "Christie's crimes are always 'closed' even when at first they seem public and open. Murder socialises and familiarises…murder creates a 'circle', a shared intimacy like that of home" (91). The imagined community of readers of society news has made a certain social community, connected through knowledge which is brought out of England into new surroundings.

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[201] *Death on the Nile* was one of Christie's favourite books set in a foreign location and became one of her readers' favorites as well: Robert Merrill, in "Christie's Narrative Games", states that "*Death on the Nile* has many weaknesses, but it is perhaps Christie's finest example of a novel that combines the essential features of drama with that of a narrative puzzle" (91).

The first newspaper piece introducing Linnet Ridgeway is seemingly conscious of the community of its readers within the novel, commenting "Miss Ridgeway, *as everyone knows*" (emphasis added 4). The novel further references a community of readers *outside* the novel, aware of what these society pieces look and sound like. In using the form of an English society piece – apparent in the titles and the people the column itself names – such a piece assumes a readership within the novel who would be interested to know what these people are doing. Christie additionally makes it clear that she knows what type of news item her own readers (outside the novel) would be familiar with. And though some of the characters in the "England" section are away from England, they are linked through their reading of the newspaper and of its reporting of Linnet; Tim Allen and his mother are in Majorca, while Mrs. Otterbourne and her daughter Rosalie are in Jerusalem. Rosalie reads in the newspaper below a picture of Linnet: "*Mrs. Simon Doyle, who before her marriage was the well-known society beauty, Miss Linnet Ridgeway. Mr. and Mrs. Doyle are spending their holiday in Egypt*" (original emphasis, *Death on the Nile* 32). This notice seems to echo pieces that were written about Christie herself: "Christie…of course, she married the distinguished R.A.F. officer, Wing-Commander Christie" ("Marigold Again" 441). Additionally, this insertion of the newspaper brings together a specific community of characters within the novel who know who Linnet is in their own consumption of such newspapers.[202] As noted in Chapter 3, Culler emphasises the importance of Anderson's claim regarding the "profound fictiveness of the newspaper" (Anderson 33, Culler 26). This fictiveness means that the newspaper relies on the "literary convention of novelistic time": the newspaper creates 'characters' to be presented to readers, who then wait upon the character's

[202] Linnet, along with Sayers's Peter Wimsey, and to some extent Harriet (see Chapters 5 and 6) is another example of what Roger Fowler would call 'Accessed voices' (as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3): "Access is a reciprocal relationship between such people and the media; the media conventionally expect and receive the right of access to the statements of these individuals, because the individuals have roles in the public domain; and reciprocally these people receive access to the columns of the papers when they wish to air their views. … The political effect of this division between the accessed and the unaccessed hardly needs stating: an imbalance between the representation of the already privileged, on the one hand, and the already unprivileged, on the other, with the views of the official, the powerful and the rich being constantly invoked to legitimate the status quo" (Fowler 22).

next appearance (Culler 26). Linnet is surveilled by the newspaper: its readers are waiting on her next appearance to provide the next installment of her 'story'. This surveillance implies a community of people who read this particular newspaper, who are aware of the social status of Linnet Ridgeway and presumably care enough about her to read about her, as well as being linked together by a communal knowledge which they have already received from previous reports of Linnet. It further shows that the reporters in other places outside of England are discussing Linnet no matter where she goes, to be consumed by English/Western readers, no matter where they are. Thus there is a connection of news/information which travels, not only from one place to England and back, but to several locations in the world, with English/Western readers participating in that news. Christie's use of the society news here, then, means that she is portraying a distinct community of readers within her novel, and her novel itself is referencing the world outside. That is, the readers of her novel know of the type of community of readers within the novel, linked by their engagement with the society news. This then sets up Christie's mystery plot in bringing these characters together, from an imagined community of readers to a social embodied community on the same boat, to represent for her own readers, the types of social communications and expectations which can bring people together.

These isolated characters in Christie's novel at first were an imagined community, connected severally in their consumption of news about Linnet. Though they might have imagined others reading the same news, Christie explicitly shows for her readers the various characters all consuming, separately, the same information. Once on the same boat, they become an embodied community of Western tourists abroad, who have found and connected with one another. Christie then shows how any of the suspects gathered together could indeed be the murderer, presenting them, as Light notes, "often literally, in the same boat" (91). Light contends that "Christie uses abroad as an effective means of concentrating her plots and isolating her characters so that their local anxieties and indigenous behaviours are thrown into relief" (91). The characters in *Death on the Nile* have used going abroad as an escape, just as Christie had

been used to do. The boat serves its purpose in gathering everyone together to sort out the problems they presume they are escaping from, which are then brought against the backdrop of the Nile. They are tied together through their understanding of who the murdered victim is, because of their participation in the culture which had celebrated the beautiful and wealthy Linnet.

The travellers in the novel, moreover, expect access to and knowledge of what is presented in the British press:

> Mrs. Otterbourne went on in her high complaining voice:
>
> "Quite a lot of notabilities here now, aren't there? I expect we shall see a paragraph about it in the papers soon. Social beauties, famous novelists—"
>
> She paused with a slight mock-modest laugh. (46)

Mrs. Otterbourne was not mistaken; papers were interested in what famous novelists were doing. A newspaper article, "Stories that Thrill", from May 20, 1922 in *The Herald*, writes about Christie while she was on the Empire Tour with Archie. The article comments on Christie as a detective fiction author and is conversational in tone: "Coming direct from South Africa to Australia, Mrs. Christie notices a great difference between the vegetation of the two countries…When she gets back to her London flat and her two-year old daughter Rosaline [*sic*], Mrs. Agatha Christie may write on what she has observed in her travels" ("Stories that Thrill"). Christie as a mystery writer is news: as the 1922 article declares "a woman writer of detective stories is still somewhat of a pioneer" ("Stories that Thrill"). Unfortunately for Mrs. Otterbourne, however, society newspapers are no longer interested in her as a romance (pornographic) author (her profession); the only thing they would be likely to make mention of is her alcoholism (her private life), a fact which her daughter Rosalie desperately conceals. Yet Mrs. Otterbourne, though she cannot now get her name into the papers, is tragically aware of the others around her who are being remarked on in the society section; the relation between all the people travelling on the boat down the Nile is commented on through their understanding and reading of the same type of newspaper.

While *Death on the Nile* clearly presents two distinct settings, England and Egypt, once on the boat in Egypt where the murder must be solved, no other influences are allowed in, thus creating a perfectly closed group of Western peoples – the tourists who are presented as the main characters – for examination in a foreign location. It transports a certain group of people to a different location. It then aptly shows how connected they are both through the people and cultural knowledge which is shared by these main characters. This is done, in part, through the newspaper. Although the plot insists on showing how the characters are connected through their potential for being the murderer, the connections of the newspaper are also there as it is available and, importantly, read by those travelling abroad.

These connections are made more apparent by the fact that the characters are linked through their status as tourists or travellers in a different place. The novel first presents the characters as creating their own imagined community even outside their land borders to become an actual embodied community of people brought together by sharing certain cultural connections. This is highlighted through this community's portrayal as contrasted against the backdrop of a foreign location and foreign others, brought together in the vehicle of travel, and bound by their social, national, and class connections. Part Two, "Egypt", immediately sets the scene with the travellers in a foreign location. The detective, Hercule Poirot, although Belgian, is sometimes aligned with other tourists. He is arrayed in white with a panama hat and is carrying a "highly ornamental fly whisk" (38). He comments on how the scene before him 'enchants him' – "The black rocks of the Elephantine, and the sun, and the little boats on the river" (38) – yet it is also made clear that he is staying at a hotel, one there for tourists. Once Poirot and his companion Rosalie Otterbourne leave the grounds of the hotel, "They came out from the shade of the gardens onto a dusty stretch of rad bordered by the river" (39), they are immediately confronted by various villagers and others of the area, hopeful to sell to these tourists. Poirot and Rosalie "stalked through them like a sleep walker" with Rosalie remarking that "It's best to pretend to be deaf and blind" (40). Their dismissal of

these villagers is contrasted with their intense interest, in the very next scene, as they watch the steamer ship and the new batch of tourists to the area who are disembarking.[203]

Poirot, Rosalie, and then Tim Allerton who joins them, are shown to have the 'lofty' poise of the tourist who was in the new environment first; they look at and think of the newest batch of tourists as people to provide amusement and watch. This interest differs from their lack of notice of the other indigenous people around them who do not belong with the tourist group: their social community abroad solidifies a social identity through 'othering'. Poirot and Rosalie, and then Tim, are only connected because they belong as tourists who are staying at the same hotel: they are also connected through their language, and in their dismissal of the actual people whose country they are visiting. Even abroad, they can reinforce their social and cultural identity with others who share this connection. They go down to the steamer ship to look for the new connections that they can make, with similar people. They are looking for their next type of amusement, with people that they may know (of). Eventually they see Linnet Ridgeway – now Doyle – as she walks down the gangplank.

As Linnet enters the scene, she is aware that she will be looked at and recognized. Christie deliberately introduces her in this way: "Linnet Doyle was looking as perfectly turned out as if she were stepping onto the centre of the stage of a revue. She had something too of the assurance of a famous actress. She was used to being looked at, to being admired, to being the center of the stage wherever she went" (41). Yet even though she is "aware of the keen glances bent upon her", she also dismisses them, as "such tributes were part of her life" (41). Therefore Linnet Doyle, as someone who is consistently 'looked at' and commented on, also ensures that she plays this part for the newspapers who will be reporting on

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[203] Mullini points out the differences between this scene and one similar in *They Came to Baghdad* wherein she posits that in *Death on the Nile* "the strongly westernised point of view is evident, and there is nothing to hedge it anyhow" but reminds us that Christie "did not like her detective, and that, as a consequence, she might have endued him with [a] spiteful remark" (31) whereas in *Baghdad*, "the people in the passage are examined in a more friendly way than in [*Death*], their goods are not despised, and their way of talking together is somehow explained" (31). See too my point below about the 'cheap western goods' which are compared to those as sold by the people of Baghdad.

her. As mentioned above, newspapers had already announced to interested readers that she was in Egypt – "*Mrs. Simon Doyle, who before her marriage was the well-known society beauty, Miss Linnet Ridgeway. Mr. and Mrs. Doyle are spending their holiday in Egypt*" (original emphasis, *Death on the Nile* 32). Thus when she leaves the boat, "She came ashore playing a role, even though she played it unconsciously. The rich beautiful society bride on her honeymoon" (41). Linnet is correct in assuming that even abroad and on her honeymoon, she will be watched and recognized, thus she performs for her audience, performing for newspapers and their readers the role that they had written for her. Tim notices Linnet first: "Hullo!" exclaimed Tim, his voice suddenly excited. "I'm damned if that isn't Linnet Ridgeway", and his recognition "stirred Rosalie's interest" so that "her sulkiness quite dropped from her as she asked: "Where? That one in white?" (41). Rosalie knows Linnet's husband – "Doyle…Simon Doyle" and thus Linnet's new married name as "[i]t was all in the newspapers" (41). Linnet the character has made character appearances in the newspaper, now, her readers are recognizing her in person, exemplifying how the newspaper, as Anderson declares, allows "fiction [to] seep quietly and continuously into reality" (Anderson 35). The (western) tourists, Tim and Rosalie, become aligned with one another in Egypt, forming a small community when they see and then comment on Linnet, based upon their knowledge of her from their consumption of social news. Yet while this connects Tim and Rosalie, interestingly, Poirot is left out of this excitement – "the information left Poirot unmoved" (41).[204] He does not participate in the same social rules/cultural artefacts as Tim and Rosalie.

This is often the case for Poirot in the novels which he occupies, either in England or abroad. As a Belgian foreigner in England, Poirot is just 'other' enough to be looked down upon by characters in

[204] Interestingly, Poirot does recognize another character, who has changed his name and is pretending to live a bohemian life as a communist. Mr. Ferguson is actually the '"young Lord Dawlish" who "became a communist when he was at Oxford" (231). Poirot remember his face from a picture in a newspaper. This does not allow Poirot a social standing, but rather helps him in his investigation. It also is a marker of the snobbery of Poirot – he knows the faces of the English nobility but not that of the wealthy American society bride.

Christie's novels, yet still understands and critiques the British social systems. When travelling and moving from place to place, the characters in Christie's novels band together with others whom they recognize as the same: "His eyes rested for a moment on Hercule Poirot, but they passed indifferently. Poirot, reading the English mind correctly, knew that he had said to himself: 'Only some damned foreigner'" (Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express* 6). Yet the reader knows that Poirot is not as 'foreign' to these social communities as he may seem to the characters. These sentiments are found throughout the various stories, the characters not realizing the paradoxical quality of these thoughts given the places they are occurring: they are actually the foreigners. Indeed, depending on the place, Poirot and the British tourist would be more closely aligned as foreigners in the touristic setting. Yet Christie's characters also tend to gather together against whatever indigenous population or different tourist nationality they might come in contact with, creating their own imagined communities with people who participate with the same cultural artefacts. Indeed, Tim Allerton is annoyed that his mother has asked Poirot to sit at their table with them, as "He's an unmitigated little bounder!...what do we want to get mixed up with an outsider for? Cooped up like this on a small boat, that sort of thing is always a bore. He'll be with us morning, noon, and night" (85). Mrs. Allerton is "puzzled" by his attitude: "Tim was usually so easy-going and good-tempered. This outburst was quite unlike him. It wasn't as though he had the ordinary Britisher's dislike – and mistrust – of foreigners. Tim was very cosmopolitan" (85). While Tim's mistrust of Poirot ultimately is explained by the fact that Tim is a thief and worries that a detective might discover this, Christie creates a sense of mistrust within the English characters against anyone else who is different (even another westerner, such as Poirot, whose foppish manner is explained by being 'Belgian', or mistaken as 'French').

As the writer, Christie tries to point out the dangers of such assumptions, apparent in the ways which Poirot uncovers the truth to the various scenarios he investigates. This shows his outsider/insider participation in British culture: as a private detective working in England and abroad for English people,

he upholds British law and justice, yet he is often displaced from the community imagined by those who would have read the society newspaper. Thus Christie makes it clear that assumptions about lack of belonging which characters assume comes from lack of certain (social) knowledge, is not ultimately a danger. Indeed, as the detective who solves the crime, this outsider knowledge ultimately is more important to the social community than the types of knowledge based upon cultural connections upon which they had originally imagined themselves.

Poirot, Rosalie, and Tim watch more characters embark and everyone makes their way back to the hotel. The group which is gathered together at first seems separate, yet by the end of the novel, it is clear that most/many of them were there to surround Linnet: they knew of her whereabouts from their consumption of newspapers. These characters are then taken out of the 'safety' of the hotel, to take a Nile trip together. There is apparent tension amongst this group, but the reader interprets these in the context of the relationship between Linnet, Simon, and Jackie. The real tensions and the reality that many of these characters are trying to escape problems back home are not exposed until later, when we learn why the several various characters are escaping on this Nile cruise. These characters form a social community around communal knowledge of Linnet, a formation which produces anxiety throughout the whole trip. This is then heightened by the atmosphere by presenting the foreign place as setting the scene to tear away all types of social regard.

To further escape publicity or to keep close to Linnet, the characters in *Death on the Nile* all board a Nile cruise together. Once on board the *S.S. Karnak*, the boat makes stops along the way to visit various monuments such as Ramses II's temple at Abu Simbel.[205] The tensions of the characters transfer to the landscape. Edward Said claims that "[e]very European traveller or resident in the Orient has had to

[205] The journey described in the book is likely the same one which she and her husband Max had taken (Sanders and Lovello 152-153).

protect himself from its unsettling influences. … All of them wore away the European discreteness and rationality of time, space, and personal identity. In the Orient one suddenly confronted unimaginable antiquity, inhuman beauty, boundless distance" (166-167). Christie makes use of this 'unsettling influence'. The local landscapes are brought into the plot of the murder, and the Nile or other places become almost as another threatening character. Here, Christie positions the various characters' responses to the structures: there is a feeling of heightened expectancy – Mrs. Allerton describes Linnet as 'fey' – justified when Linnet escapes an attempted murder (*Nile* 101, 105).[206] The imposing setting is contrasted to the mixed emotions of the tourists' reaction to them: Simon Doyle tells his new wife that "They're a damned sight too impressive, there's something uncanny about them. Come out into the sunlight" (*Nile* 104). Ultimately, however, murder cannot happen in the temple – though they are an enclosed group of tourists, outside the temple are the usual representations of the local population – the murder must take place on the enclosed boat. The murder is a result of the bringing together of the imagined community, connected by participation in the understanding of the social position, and wealth, of Linnet. The new community of characters which revolves around her is where the murder must take place, for Christie shows the dangers of the limited imaginings of awe and avarice at the standing of Linnet.

Yet the characters cannot separate their feelings surrounding Linnet and their jealousy or unhappiness from the feelings which they place on their new setting: "There was a savage aspect about the sheet of water in front of them, the masses of rock without vegetation that came down to the water's edge … The whole scene had a melancholy, almost sinister charm" (81). Gazing upon this scenery, Rosalie is confused at her emotions as the boat embarks on its journey. Although she is happy to be left alone at last with the nature around her – "Away from *people*," said Rosalie Otterbourne" – she worries to

[206] "Will you explain to me, Madame, the meaning of the word 'fey'?" Mrs. Allerton looked slightly surprised. She and Poirot were toiling slowly up to the rock overlooking the Second Cataract… "'Fey'?" Mrs. Allerton put her head on one side as she considered her reply. "Well, it's a Scotch word, really. It means the kind of exalted happiness that comes before disaster. You know – it's too good to be true." (*Death on the Nile* 106-107)

herself and to Poirot that it brings about a wickedness in herself: "Then she said: "There's something about this country that makes me feel—wicked. It brings to the surface all the things that are boiling inside one. Everything's so unfair—so unjust" (original emphasis, *Nile* 81). Once in the new scene, "away from *people*", Rosalie can let go of the mask which she has always had to wear (like Christie). She is ironically comfortable amongst the people – notably her mother – who are causing her anxiety in the first place, as Poirot points out, "those of our own number" (81). Importantly, this new landscape offers her escape from the publicity which she fears for her mother and thus allows her to be open about what she is feeling. Yet instead of facing and acknowledging her own fears, Rosalie rather uses the scene and nature as an excuse to bring to surface her 'wicked' tendencies. She confides in Poirot the anxieties and anger which she has held onto for so long: being tied to her overbearing alcoholic mother whom she can no longer love, and keeping her safe from publicity. The backdrop of the Nile and moving around as a tourist seemed to be a way of escaping problems, of importing them to other places, but Rosalie finds that the potential for publicity is always there, as suggested by the presence of news report. It is only once she is on board ship, in this closed environment, that she almost lets down her guard. Indeed, Poirot suggests to Rosalie to drop her problems into the Nile and let the water carry them away:

> Poirot made a gesture with his hands.
>
> "Why not say it – to me? I am one of those who hear many things. If, as you say, you boil inside – like the jam – *eh bein*, let the scum come to the surface, and then one can take it off with a spoon, so."
>
> He made the gesture of dropping something into the Nile.
>
> "There, it has gone." (original emphasis, *Nile* 81)

Rosalie is running away from England and the connections – or notoriety – which could destroy her mother there. At a later point in the story, she is caught up as a murder suspect when she does physically drop her troubles in the water – the bottles of liquor she finds in her mother's room (*Nile* 183-185). The

Nile has become the dumping ground for her problems, the catalyst for letting emotional and physical troubles out.

This backdrop then creates the atmosphere for the murder of Linnet. It is not until they are away from the tourist civilization and surrounded by the nature of the Nile that Linnet becomes fully afraid. She cries out: "Monsieur Poirot, I'm afraid—I'm afraid of everything. I've never felt like this before. All these wild rocks and the awful grimness and starkness" (83). The setting is what terrifies her; she is not afraid of her seemingly comfortable British husband, Simon, misinterpreting his hatred for her to her fear of the wildness of the scene. Linnet reveals to Poirot that she and Simon had travelled to Egypt on their honeymoon to escape Jackie, Simon's ex-fiancée and her own old friend. Yet what Linnet does not realize is that she herself is the cause of her own fear, since it is she who took away Jackie's fiancé Simon. Poirot explains the situation to her:

> I suggest that the initiative rested with you – not with Monsieur Doyle. You are beautiful, Madame; you are rich; you are clever, intelligent – and you have charm. You could have exercised that charm or you could have restrained it. You had everything, Madame, that life can offer. Your friend's was bound up in one person. You knew that, but, though you hesitated, you did not hold your hand. You stretched it out and, like the rich man in the Bible, you took the poor man's one ewe lamb. (57)[207]

[207] The reader is not put in sympathy with Linnet – she has stolen Jackie's fiancé to make him her own husband. This is the main red herring of the book, yet also helps to create the character of Linnet. This feeling of unease, that Linnet has done something not 'quite nice', contributes to the plot of the book. Could this also contribute to how America or England were seen? As the wealthier nations, they too stretch out their hands and take the 'one ewe' in a search for more wealth, more comfort.
See too, Lassner's essay on the anxiety of American wealth and new imperialism. Lassner writes that "As Christie debunks expectations associated more with Salome Otterbourne's romances, she expands those of her readers by relating the mystery of Linnet's murder to mysteries of the ancient Near East and to modern global politics…the murder in *Death on the Nile* concerns the power of American money to produce and exacerbate global injustice" (43).

Yet it is only once they are on the Nile cruise that Linnet becomes fully afraid for the consequences of what she had done. The 'Orient' stands in for that which has worn away Linnet's "European discreteness and rationality of time, space, and personal identity" (Said 166). Against the backdrop of the wild Orient she suddenly has to confront herself, and she is afraid. Running away to a new place has not dispelled her anxiety or guilt over what she has done, nor, indeed, the danger of what she has done. Poirot says to her that "No, to you this persecution is *intolerable*—and why? It can be for one reason only—that you feel a sense of guilt" (emphasis added, 56). Thus Linnet's confusion of her personal fear with her fear of the landscape, instead of recognizing her own folly in the type of husband she married, creates both a red herring in the story as well as warns readers of imposing one's own feelings on new lands. Christie shows her readers the dangers of being an insular traveller, of discounting other peoples and culture in favour of one's own set, clearly portraying that the characters' fears are wrongly attributed to the environment, rather than to their own personal and social failings. She subverts the expectations of this community which has been brought together against the back drop of a new setting, to show, not the dangers of the Nile, but the dangers of these social expectations, greed, and selfishness which are within the characters themselves.

Ultimately, it is only Poirot who is able to acknowledge that his unease on the boat comes from his anxiety surrounding the relationship between Jackie, Linnet, and Simon. He does not attribute it to the setting of the Nile as do the other characters. Interestingly, as mentioned above, he is one of the only ones at the beginning of the story who is unaware of who Linnet or Simon are from the newspapers; he is on the Nile for leisure and does not want to be drawn into the difficulties of the relationship, although he ultimately is. He tells his friend Colonel Race (a recurring secondary character in Christie's works who is introduced in *The Man in the Brown Suit*) that he is frightened of what might happen now that they are all on the same boat: "'I am afraid,' my friend, he said. 'I am afraid. … Today, I advised this lady, Madame Doyle, to go with her husband to Khartum, not to return on this boat. But they would not agree. I pray to

Heaven that we may arrive at Shellâl without catastrophe'" (113). Though Christie places his unease in the *setting* of the Nile, she makes it clear that the relationship of Simon, Linnet, and Jackie is the cause of Poirot's fear; others have been afraid of the "wild rocks and the awful grimness and starkness". While other characters acknowledge the awkwardness of the situation, they are too overwhelmed by their surroundings to properly identify their fear towards the relationship between themselves and Linnet.

It is only at the end of *Death on the Nile*, once he has resolved his case, that Poirot seemingly focuses his anxiety surrounding what he has just resolved onto the landscape: "It was early dawn when they came into Shellâl. The rocks came down grimly to the water's edge. Poirot murmured, '*Quels pays savage!*'" (original emphasis 272). Now that Poirot has dealt with the animosities of the people around him, he takes the time to contemplate the landscape; he realizes that the setting mirrored/reflected what was happening on the boat rather than being the cause of it. The boat has finished its tourist journey and now has to unload three bodies and two murderers. Poirot's comment can have a double meaning: perhaps '*Quels pays savage!*' is directed at the landscape. Yet his sigh can also be directed at the western countries whose tourists now necessitate unloading these (now) five bodies off of the ship (the final two are those of the murderers escaping trial and hanging). They had imposed their own social dysfunctions upon a new land. As Jackie reveals to Poirot at the end, Linnet's death was a combined result of Simon's desire for her money, "he's always wanted money so dreadfully…he did like the thought of her money" (268, 269), which was facilitated by Linnet's selfishness in taking Simon from Jackie when she knew that Simon was Jackie's life: "She went all out to get Simon away from me. That's the absolute truth! I don't think she even hesitated for more than about a minute. I was her friend, but she didn't care. She just went baldheaded for Simon" (269). Thus Linnet dies, a result of both her and Simon's greed: "He said his idea of having money was to have it to himself—not to have a rich wife holding the purse strings" (269). Jackie helps Simon plot Linnet's death, as she desires him. These three people's selfishness and greed creates an overwhelming atmosphere of anxiety which the characters (mis)direct at the Nile setting. As a

result of this, five people end up dead. Poirot often reflects to himself in French removed from the conversation or setting which he is in. Thus his own remark to himself – "*Quel pays sauvage*!" – can be interpreted by the scene before him: five bodies being carried off of a ship in the Nile, a result of the actions of the tourists on it, not Egypt, the setting. While the exotic setting might seem at first dangerous, the dangers actually lie closer to home, connected in an insular way by the far-reaching powers of the British society, and held together by the cultural artefacts such as newspapers or novels which ultimately connect the various parts of the world, despite political borders.

In the beginning of *Death on the Nile*, Linnet is discussed by members of the town where she is renovating a country house she had bought. A London society paper declares that "[t]he lovely Linnet is the sensation *of the moment*" (emphasis added, 5). The men in the town know who she is, and where her money is from; they refer to her celebrity status as "Quite like the Pictures" (4). The story highlights how this sensation is noted throughout the world (as examined above) with various characters discussing their knowledge of Linnet, linked through their understanding of who she is, and where she is, through news reports. Ultimately, this fame and beauty brings only death, and with her death, her moment passes. A final news report closes her story, lays to rest this reoccurring 'character' who has appeared in the papers, while also linking 'abroad' – and the events of the Nile cruise – once more with the rest of the world:

> Lastly the body of Linnet Doyle was brought ashore, and all over the world wires began to hum, telling the public that Linnet Doyle, who had been Linnet Ridgeway, the famous, the beautiful, the wealthy Linnet Doyle was dead…
>
> Sir George Wode read about it in his London club, and Sterndale Rockford in New York, and Joanna Southwood in Switzerland, and it was discussed in the bar of the Three Crowns in Malton-under-Wode. (276)

Christie notes that wires hum 'all over the world', and then proceeds to pinpoint where this information is acknowledged: London, New York, Switzerland, and finally, in the small community of Malton-under-

Wode, where Linnet had bought and rebuilt a manor house; it is read both globally and locally. “But after a while”, the story concludes, “they stopped talking about her and discussed instead who was going to win the Grand National. For, as Mr. Ferguson was saying at that minute in Luxor, it is not the past that matters but the future” (276).

The community in the novel is linked through their understanding of the news reports. Yet once the sensation of the moment has passed, this community ultimately moves on, for it is the ‘future that matters’. Christie ensures that her readers know there is will be a future which can be re-evaluated after the events of the novel. Though the cruise on the Nile ultimately ends with five bodies, in terms of the domestic plot it also ends with some new couples: there has been a kind of restoration and life will continue on. Though detective fiction critiques society at large, it offers an antidote. In Christie’s novels, the reader can decide how far reaching that antidote might be.

These novels, such as *Death on the Nile* (1937) and *Appointment with Death* (1938), set in ‘exotic’ settings magnify the problems of the tourists who come to them, yet the characters impose certain cultural ideas upon the landscape: Rosalie literally dumps her problems into the Nile; other characters assume they can have touristic access to various monuments. By the time that Agatha Christie wrote *They Came to Baghdad* (1951), she has arguably become more overt in her opinion about the imposition of the ideas of others on a land and its people. She juxtaposes the East and the West, likening the West to the frantic and cheap, while the East has peace on its side: British Secret Agent Carmichael thinks to himself that “For a moment he longed intensely to be a man of Eastern and not Western blood” (34). Of Baghdad itself, Christie writes: “Here the produce of the West and the East were equally for sale…All the cheap merchandise of civilisation together with the native products” (35).

They Came to Baghdad highlights how Christie’s thoughts towards travel and escape evolved. Further, it shows how just staying or interacting with the colonial British Western communities in these

other places is the cause of danger, not the place itself. In *They Came to Baghdad* the hazards which beset the heroine Victoria are not from being in Baghdad – she is taken care of by the management of the hotel which she stays at – but rather by the web of people using Baghdad for their various schemes.[208] The main plot of the book centers on world domination by people who seem to have renounced their own countries, wanting to be rid of all national identities, for their own greater power over the world. The dangers the heroine Victoria endures do not come from Baghdad, and the spies who murder the British Secret Agent Carmichael are not the inhabitants of Baghdad, but rather people within the British agency, the British government: "There were enemies to fear *within* the system" (emphasis added, 37). A murder attempt is made on Carmichael within the very foyer of the British Consulate by a "stoutish Englishman with a grey moustache – the commercial traveller type –" (39-40).

When Victoria is on her way to Baghdad, she revels in "all the romance of the glorious East" (46); just like Nurse Leatheran in *Murder in Mesopotamia*, she has an idea of the East from such stories as *Arabian Nights*. Yet Victoria's apparent enjoyment of the actual city of Baghdad is a sharp contrast to Nurse Leatheran's earlier comments: "[t]he *dirt* and the *mess* in Baghdad you wouldn't believe" (original emphasis, 355). Roberta Mullini writes in her article "How Much I have loved that part of the world" that "cultural otherness seems to be better understood in [*They Came to Baghdad*] than in the others" (31). Moreover, when Victoria arrives, she finds herself embroiled in a plot which is besetting Baghdad, created by expatriates from various countries. At the end of the book, once she has been rescued, she mumbles to her rescuers, "better to serve in Heaven than reign in Hell" (185), arguably we can read this as a commentary on Empire.

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[208] Much like many of Christie's other heroines. Victoria is also a keen judge of character, and is another female character who is not only able to take care of herself, but also – humorously – knows how to stay safe in any situation: "But she would have to be very careful not to make any real slip. Luckily, thought Victoria, men were always so superior about women that any slip she did make would be treated less as a suspicious circumstance than as a proof of how ridiculously addlepated all women were!" (145).

Mullini concludes her article on Christie and the Orient by acknowledging that she does not "pretend to build up a picture of Dame Agatha Christie (she was named a Dame in 1971) as a heroine of international fighting (writing) against colonial and imperialist power" (32). Rather, even though Christie "felt the powerful legacy of Victorian British culture all her life", Mullini states that "it is not totally true that her work was unaffected by history and by what was going on around her" (32). Though Christie's characters of Poirot and Miss Marple stay consistent in their own worldview, as the author, Christie is "able to adapt her views to the changing world" (32). Mullini argues that "Agatha Christie [is] adjusting her writing to time, updating her points of view about the Orient, [and] composing a novel out of her direct experience", especially through her creation of such characters like Victoria Jones in *They Came to Baghdad* (32). This ability of Christie's to portray and 'update' her characters and writing comes from her direct interaction from the people and spaces of these foreign places, not with the expatriate English people there. Christie loved to explore and come to know these histories, for, as Mullini acknowledges, Christie declared "[h]ow much I have loved that part of the world. I love it still and always shall" (Christie 1993:548)" (32).[209]

No matter where Christie's characters go, however, there is no real escape from the customs or personal feeling which might hold them back. Christie herself probably fully realized this as she details in *Destination Unknown*: "And now she knew…*that there was no escape*…It was from Hilary Craven that she was trying to escape, and Hilary Craven was Hilary Craven in Morocco just as much as she had been Hilary Craven in London" (original emphasis, 29). Escape is not possible, no matter which other lands one travels to, which borders one crosses and which new areas one visits. People will always bring with them their own ideas and customs, often imposing them on the new area, paradoxically wishing for the

[209] Mevlüde Zengin's more recent articles (2016) decry the Orientalist attitude which she argues Christie further perpetrates in her novels.

same ideas and customs from which they have fled upon the new place. Travel in the confined space of various vehicles can bring characters together just as the manor house or small village. The cultural connections which bring together an imagined community abroad are also found back home: in newspapers and novels. It is how one interacts with these cultural artefacts, that the real social communities are rebuilt. And Christie discusses these in familiar settings, back in England.

4.5 Agatha Christie's England: *A Murder is Announced* and *Ordeal By Innocence*

Up to this point, this chapter has explored Christie's use of newspapers as cultural artefacts in international settings to demonstrate how imagined British communities are exported abroad. National settings too, of course, provide examples of how social communities come together, even though in England, there is an imagination at work in providing the context for how these characters see themselves as connected together. While abroad, characters gather in small communities against the backdrop of a foreign location; in England, characters come together in smaller settings such as a village or even a house, providing a narrower space for a more magnified examination. Abroad, a character's national identity helps to establish an imagined community by shared national understanding of events and news from England. Conversely, in England, characters create imagined communities in a more social context and these can be identified through which newspaper they take in, or which political ideology they support. Examining the establishment of these imagined communities back in England in a local context such as a village then, provides the theoretical means for my discussion of how social imagined communities come together and are embodied in Christie's fiction.

Agatha Christie's 1950 *A Murder is Announced* shows a village's specific interaction with a local newspaper and illustrates how cultural artefacts can bring characters and readers within an imagined community together.[210] *A Murder is Announced* opens:

> Between 7:30 and 8:30 every morning except Sundays, Jonnie Butt made the round of the village of Chipping Cleghorn on his bicycle…alighting at each house or cottage to shove through the letter-box such morning papers as had been ordered by the occupants of the house in question, from Mr. Totman, stationer, of the High Street…
>
> At all these houses, and indeed at practically every house in Chipping Cleghorn, he delivered every Friday a copy of the *North Benham News and Chipping Cleghorn Gazette*, known locally simply as '*the Gazette*'.
>
> Thus, on Friday mornings, after a hurried glance at the headlines in the daily paper…most of the inhabitants of Chipping Cleghorn eagerly opened the *Gazette* and plunged into the local news. After a cursory glance at Correspondence (in which the passionate hates and feuds of rural life found full play) nine out of ten subscribers then turned to the PERSONAL column. (9)

Most people in Chipping Cleghorn imagine themselves as part of a community, reading and knowing the same news as the others. This is exemplified in their knowledge that Jonnie Butt delivers the same paper to most every house.

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[210] Yiannitsaros's article, "Displaced Persons: *A Murder is Announced* and the Condition of Postwar England" also utilizes Benedict Anderson's theory of community. As I noted in my Introduction however, Yiannitsaros examines *A Murder is Announced* within Anderson's discussion of building a national community. He states that "Christie's vignettes depicting the breakfast-time reading of the *Gazette* in *A Murder Is Announced*, is therefore a prime example of what Anderson terms the "confidence in […] steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity" that can foster such powerful feelings of affinity in members of the same nation (26) (134). Further, he declares, "Christie's novel does not just unthinkingly reproduce these formative mechanics of nation-building…Rather…[it] critiques the mechanisms through which national identity is acquired and venerated (134-135). As he also concludes, "In the communities that Agatha Christie imagines, however, one's fellow countryman can be as treacherous as any dangerous 'foreigner'" (125).

Startlingly, the personal column, on this particular Friday, invites all of the villagers to a specific event: "*A murder is announced and will take place on Friday, October 29th* (that's to-day) *at Little Paddocks at 6:30 p.m. Friends please accept this, the only invitation*" (12). The announcement assumes all the villagers as 'friends' as "at practically every house in Chipping Cleghorn" the Gazette is delivered. As the narrator describes the characters who are reading this invitation, it becomes clear however, that these characters do not fully exemplify the type of imagined community which their taking of the Gazette had first implied. Though they are eager for the local news, they themselves are foreign to the village, having moved there after lives abroad or in other parts of England. Their settling in the village and taking the Gazette only masks their actual 'outsider' status to the life in the village. The real community is not as similar as was originally imagined: "most of the inhabitants of Chipping Cleghorn eagerly opened the *Gazette* and plunged into the local news" (9).

Mrs. Swettenham and her son Edmund are resolved to go. The text also suggests that they are in this English village after a life spent in India ("You had an *ayah*, dear" (original emphasis, 11). Another couple, also with ties to India, similarly respond to the murder advertisement and decide to attend. Colonel Easterbrook, "snorting with impatience over an article in *The Times*" about India, which he terms "such piffle", is flattered into attending by his much younger wife Laura, who is asserting her belonging to the village by reading the *Gazette*: "Archie…listen to *this*" (original emphasis 13-14). Thinking that the advertisement must be about a murder game, Laura plays upon the arrogance of her husband, and suggests that his knowledge of the police work he did in India would be helpful for the game, upon which "Colonel Easterbrook smiled indulgently and gave his moustache a complacent twirl. "Yes, Laura," he said. "I dare say I could give them a hint or two" (14).

Various members, supposedly of the village, arrive at the home of Miss Letty Blacklock ready for a game and are surprised by the murder of an apparent stranger. Though the opening of the novel had imagined the readers of the *Gazette* as members of the village of Chipping Cleghorn, in reality the

characters who gather together at Letty's home come from a myriad of places and backgrounds; this an example of how these imagined communities are not, in fact, 'real'. Characters are suspected of being secret Nazis or Bolsheviks hiding in England, while others have returned to England after varied lives abroad, such as in India. The young man murdered was a Swiss immigrant trying to return home; he was murdered because he might recognize that the English woman whom he met abroad was not who she pretended to be. These characters are first brought together by the insertion of the invitation in the newspaper, and then into a murder investigation.

The ultimate exposure of who these characters are highlights the dangers of composed imaginings of simply reading the same paper. By reading the newspaper of a certain [national] place, Anderson states that "each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands…of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion" (35). The characters in *A Murder is Announced* hoped to masquerade as villagers and show their belonging by "replicat[ing] simultaneously" the "ceremony" of reading the village paper (Anderson 35). Yet instead of becoming part of a community through the common reading of the *Gazette*, the villagers learn that they do not, in fact, know who belongs to their community and the true nature of the community they believe they know: the act of reading the newspaper allowed for a fictional expression of their idea of community which was not based upon reality. Detective fiction is ideal for exposing this type of fictional community based upon these imaginings as murder is an expression of this state of uncertainty; a young man is murdered out of fear that he will reveal who someone really is. This uncertainty produces the anxiety of the story that no one is as they seem. As Miss Marple comments, "[f]ifteen years ago one knew who everybody was…But it's not like that any more" (114). This is because after the Second World War, and after lives abroad as part of an empire – "People from India and Hong Kong and China, and people who used to live in France and Italy in cheap little places and odd islands" (115) – people are returning and moving in new ways. As such, Miss Marple declares, "every

village and small country place is full of people who've just come and settled there without any ties to bring them…But nobody knows any more who any one is…You can come from the South of France, or have spent your life in the East. People take you at your own valuation" (original emphasis, 115). While in *Death on the Nile*, characters are drawn together against or in contrast to a *foreign* setting, in *A Murder is Announced*, characters assume they belong together because of the *familiar* setting. In both of these cases, the imagined way that these communities are composed and embodied is ultimately exposed as they are based upon false perceptions of limited imaginings, assuming belonging based on information spread by the cultural artefact of the newspaper.

Christie establishes the red herring through fear of the unknown, the immigrant, this time in the rural pastoral setting of England itself. It behooves the reader to be aware of this though, as ultimately the murderer is not the unknown foreigner, masquerading in the small English village, but the elderly English woman, masquerading as her dead sister to inherit her fortune. She is able to successfully masquerade because she fully exemplifies the type of person who would belong to the community as imagined by the other villagers. Though the novel was written in 1950, and its characters are clearly still recovering from a world war and various life experiences, Christie makes use of the cultural artefacts of the newspaper to gather her characters together; the invitation to the murder embodies the imagined community by inviting everyone to one place at one time for a specific purpose, becoming a local example of the way in which characters can be connected across the world through their participation with cultural artefacts, as she did in *Death on the Nile* (1937).

Christie ends *A Murder is Announced* in the same style as it opened, listing off the several newspapers read by characters in the story and which are organized by Mr. Totman. There is a difference however: rather than detail the names of the myriad of papers which are delivered to various members of the village as she did in the opening, Christie narrows her new list down to two people whose lives have been (happily in the end) affected by the murder. Philippa and Edmund tell Mr. Totman the names of the

papers which they are interested in - the imagined community of readers they want to be part of - which are broader than the inhabitants of Chipping Cleghorn:

> "*The Times*, sir, I think it was?" Mr. Totman paused with pencil uplifted.
>
> "*The Daily Worker*", said Edmund firmly. "And the *Daily Telegraph*," said Philippa. "And the *New Statesman*," said Edmund. "*The Radio Times*," said Philippa.
>
> "*The Spectator*," said Edmund. "*The Gardener's Chronicle*," said Philippa.
>
> They both paused to take a breath.
>
> "Thank you, sir," said Mr. Totman. "And the *Gazette*, I suppose?"
>
> "No," said Edmund.
>
> "No," said Philippa.
>
> "Excuse me, you *do* want the *Gazette*?"
>
> "No."
>
> "No."
>
> "You mean" – Mr. Totman liked to get things perfectly clear – "You *don't* want the *Gazette*!"
>
> "No, we don't"
>
> "Certainly not."
>
> "You don't want the *North Benham News and the Chipping Cleghorn Gazette*?"
>
> "No."
>
> "You don't want me to send it along to you every week?"
>
> "*No*." Edmund added: Is that quite clear now?" (original emphasis, 255-256).

Edmund and Philippa do not want the *Gazette*; they want to be removed from the imagined community of readers as exemplified by the villagers, especially after the events of the novel, and they are not interested in the private events of the village in which they will live. When Mr. Totman tries to tell his wife "They don't want the *Gazette*. They said so", she rebukes him: "Nonsense," said Mrs. Totman. "You don't hear

properly. Of course they want the *Gazette*! Everybody has the *Gazette*. How else would they know what's going on round here?" (256).

Living in a specific community one is duty bound to be interested in "what is going on round here". And it is incumbent on the member of a society – imperially, nationally, or locally – to understand not only the present, but also what has happened in the past in order to make sense of that present, so that, as Christie concludes in *Death on the Nile*, the future can matter.

Thus one of Christie's main themes is finding the truth about a situation (or society), even if it is many years after the event. This is exemplified in her *Murder in Retrospect/ Five Little Pigs* (1941), *Sleeping Murder* (written during WWII but published in 1976), and *Ordeal by Innocence* (1958). The innocent must not be made to suffer for the guilt of one (or many) people, as she passionately pleaded for in 1929 in her article about the family at Croydon ("The Tragic Family of Croydon", see Chapter 3). Information or knowledge of community or family has its uses, just as a way of relating this information also does. Paradoxically, though, part of this is also knowledge of events spread by the press.

Yet British news is not completely far-reaching: there are limitations in this print culture as a vehicle for building community and thus the types of community building which the newspaper creates are not to be confused with reality. Interestingly, Christie explores what happens when one is completely cut off from information of one's world or events. She makes it clear that one must engage to some extent in society and can contribute to that society when one does so. In *Death on the Nile* (1937) the characters are connected in their awareness of who (they think) Linnet is through their reading of various newspapers – even though spread all over the world – and then gathered together on the boat. In *A Murder is Announced* (1950) the paper actually serves as the conduit for gathering a list of suspects together for the first murder as the person who inserted the announcement understood how the readers would react to it. Yet the murder which happens shows the dangers in this type of community making. Conversely, in *Ordeal by Innocence* (1958), the confined spread of the newspaper fails to alert a potential

witness to a murder in time to save a suspect from being found guilty (although he later found to be an accessory to the murder).

In *Ordeal by Innocence* Dr. Arthur Calgary has returned from an expedition to Antarctica – where he had been cut off from news of the world and of England – and is horrified to learn, when he reads an old newspaper, that he is a crucial witness for an alibi in an old murder investigation. When he arrives at the family's house to present his apologies, the family is naturally upset and bewildered as to why he has taken so long to give his testimony: "Why didn't you come forward at the time?" "Yes." Hester's voice sounded breathless. "Why did you skulk away from it all? There were appeals in the paper – advertisements. How could you be so selfish, so wicked—" (23-24). The family assumes that Calgary has seen the appeals in the papers and ignored them, 'so selfish, so wicked'. Their perception of the reach of the newspapers is misguided. As Dr. Calgary explains, he had no access to the news due to an accident, "I was kept in hospital, in absolute quiet, with no newspapers", and then he went to one of the remaining places in the world where the news had no way of reaching him: "by the time the case came to trial and was fully reported, I was on my way to the Antarctic" (26). Just like Poirot, in this case, Calgary is an outsider to the information pushed by the press. Yet as the outsider, Calgary can ultimately solve the murder, to help the innocent members of the family.

As the title of the book suggests, it is the innocent who suffer from lack of knowledge and failure to find the true murderer. Dr. Calgary feels it his duty to stay on and offer support for the family, at first uncertain as to why his news was so unwelcome:

> "Very well, then," said Arthur Calgary impatiently. "Call it fanciful if you like. But my feelings, my conscience, are still involved. My only wish was to make amend for something it had been outside my power to prevent. I have not made amends. In some curious way I have made things worse for people who have already suffered. But I still don't understand clearly *why*."

> "No," said Marshall slowly, "no, you would not see why. For the past eighteen months or so you've been out of touch with civilisation. You did not read the daily papers, the account of the criminal proceedings and the background account of this family that was given in the newspapers. Possibly you would not have read them anyway, but you could not have escaped, I think, *hearing* about them. The facts are very simple, Dr. Calgary. They are not confidential. They were made public at the time". (original emphasis, 48)

Even if one does not read specific papers, bound together in a certain society, one would hear or understand what was happening. Even though English, Calgary has been completely removed from this (by being in another place) and thus his information is presented too late to save Jackie from the prison system, and, importantly, discover the true identity of the murderer for the benefit of the family unit itself.

What Christie shows, however, is that although Calgary at first disturbs the peace of the family he brings his news to, ultimately he is able to solve the case as he comes to it with a completely unbiased appraisal. Just as Poirot the foreigner or Miss Marple the spinster are the 'outsiders', Dr. Calgary, in being the outsider from the news of the event, ultimately is able to bring peace back to the family. For Christie, the truth must always eventually be found, even if it takes several years. There is no escaping the hardships which come from searching for the truth – even if it means attempting to escape hounding journalists for a time – but ultimately one must face the problem, be it personal or societal, full on.

Thus although detective fiction is called escapist fiction, it does offer an interrogation of social customs, and national ideas, as well as the ways in which certain cultural artefacts bring these together. It allows the reader to both have a momentary escape but also realization of the importance of interrogating how their own community is imagined. Moreover, while detective fiction such as Christie's has links to (indeed, as Rietz and others have argued), coincides with and is related to, expansions of the British Empire, it also critiques such expansions. It additionally offers, as I argue, commentary on how this social community is known both home and abroad, joined together by the social understanding of the cultural

artefacts such as the newspaper and the novel. Christie draws attention to how these communities are imagined through these cultural artefacts, and warns her readers of making assumptions about their imagined communities they see reinforced by the others around them. As she states in her article about the Croydon family, "[w]e read the papers and we strive to visualize each separate participant in the case" ("The Tragic Family of Croydon" 295). Importantly, she reiterates, the cultural connections, setting, and way of imagining the community that each individual person is part of also must be taken into consideration. This is so that "the truth…will come to light soon and… innocent people [will] be able to take up their lives again free from doubts" ("The Tragic Family of Croydon" 299-300).

Chapter 5

Discovering Belonging in the Public, Private, Professional, and Academic Communities in Dorothy L. Sayers's *Gaudy Night*

"Women, of course, were always news" (Sayers, *Gaudy Night* 57).

The mystery plot of Dorothy L. Sayers's penultimate detective fiction novel, *Gaudy Night* (1935) begins slowly. Heroine Harriet Vane goes back to a Gaudy dinner at Oxford for the first time since she graduated and meets her old College friends and professors.[211] While there, she finds a poison-pen letter in her gown accusing her of being a "dirty murderess" (46). At first she assumes that the letter is targeting her, and thinks someone is, yet again, attacking her for events in her past (as depicted in *Strong Poison* and *Have His Carcase*). She is blinded to the possibility that it could originate from within the peaceful, unspoiled, and collegial academic community as Harriet imagines it, such as the one at Shrewsbury College. When she returns to London she reads a newspaper article on an incident at the College, a so-called 'undergraduette rag', where a bonfire of student gowns is burnt in the quad. Harriet is angry at the wording of the newspaper and its exploitation of university women for a story. Only informed of the College through the newspaper, she is as yet unaware of the other – more salacious – happenings at Shrewsbury until her former Dean writes a letter asking Harriet to come up to Oxford again: someone within the College community is attacking it from the inside, writing poison-pen letters using print from newspapers, writing obscene inscriptions on walls, and destroying rooms. The latest outrage has targeted Miss Lydgate, Harriet's former tutor, destroying the proofs of her nearly completed book. The attacks have been intensifying and seem to implicate a new resident Fellow, Miss de Vine.

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[211] Esme Miskimmin writes that *Gaudy Night* is a "novel in which the detective story again takes something of a 'back seat' to other narratives, in 450 pages there are a handful of anonymous notes and spiteful practical jokes and a somewhat muted attempt at murder. The real investigation may be Sayer's own into the obligation of creative or intellectual minds" ("Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957)" 446).

Harriet attempts to expose the culprit, acutely aware that she has to protect the college - a woman's college in a male-dominated university - from the scandal which could erupt in the press if the events become known. Before she returns to Shrewsbury, she worries about the 'alarming implication' of these letters for the College and "University women…everywhere" (59), and imagines "whole sets of epithets, ready-minted for circulation" which could be printed by the press about University women: "'Soured virginity' – 'unnatural life' – 'semi-demented spinsters' – 'starved appetites and suppressed impulses' – 'unwholesome atmosphere' – " (60). Back in Oxford, Harriet examines the letters which are "a pitiful little heap of dirty imaginations" (64). Mainly addressed to the women in the Senior Common Room, they "inform[ed] them, with various disagreeable epithets, that their sins would find them out, that they were not fit for decent society and that unless they left men alone, various unpleasant things would occur to them" (64), seemingly confirming the 'ready minted epithets' which Harriet imagined. Alongside this mystery plot, Harriet also has to determine her own feelings towards her work, her place at Oxford, and her relationship with her past and with Peter Wimsey. Sayers writes about the solution to her mystery and romance plot of *Gaudy Night* that "[t]he new and exciting thing was to bring the love-problem into line with the detective-problem, so that the same key should unlock both at once" ("Gaudy Night" 85).

Therefore, at a key moment, Harriet awaits Peter Wimsey, from whom she has requested help in solving the mystery. The attacks have finally succeeded in making all the members of the College suspicious of each other, and have torn apart the once tranquil community of women scholars. The women of Shrewsbury College, including Harriet, constitute a real social embodied community while additionally participating in a broader imagined community of women who have fought and continue to fight for the right to an education. The targeted actions and accusations of the so-called 'poltergeist' have created suspicion around what the imaginings of this community are and what the ideologies are which

bind it together.[212] Further, it has made the women in the College fearful that these occurrences will be made public by the press and damage the reputation of women in universities everywhere. Once Harriet hears Peter's knock on the door, she contemplates the potential implications that his arrival has for herself personally and for the community of Shrewsbury:

> When she said 'Come in!' the commonplace formula seemed to take on a startling significance. For good or evil, she had called in something explosive from the outside world to break up the ordered tranquillity of the place; she had sold the breach to an alien force; she had sided with London against Oxford and with the world against the cloister. (212)

For Harriet, the emotional and intellectual attachments she feels to Shrewsbury College causes her to worry that she is betraying this academic community by bringing in someone (whom she thinks) is a worldly and celebrity outsider, Peter Wimsey.

Throughout *Gaudy Night* Harriet has difficulty in knowing which embodied social community she actually belongs to: the professional celebrity culture world of London, or the quiet, scholarly, supposedly peaceful one of Oxford. She is inhibited by her own imaginings of what she thinks these communities are. This feeling of belonging, or not belonging, is further complicated by Harriet's gender, both in the Oxford (academic) community as well as the London (professional) and celebrity community. As a woman in Oxford, she belongs to a broader community of scholarly women who both know and imagine how and why they can belong there. Yet these women of the early twentieth century, exemplified by the Shrewsbury women, were often on the peripheries of the mostly male academic community, or the

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[212] The term 'poltergeist' commonly refers to "a noisy usually mischievous ghost held to be responsible for unexplained noises (such as rappings)" (*Miriam-Webster Dictionary*). The term is first used in *Gaudy Night* by the Dean, Miss Martin, in her letter to Harriet. She explains: "The fact is, we are being victimised by a cross between a Poltergeist and a Poison-Pen, and you can imagine how disgusting it is for everybody. It seems that the letters started coming some time ago, but at first nobody took much notice…But wanton destruction of property is a different matter, and the last outbreak has been so abominable that something really must be done about it" (58).

other male colleges portrayed in the novel.[213] *Gaudy Night* was published in 1935; in 1920 women who had studied at Oxford were finally officially granted the degrees which they had previously earned (in a ceremony Sayers was part of).[214] Further, Harriet is a woman writer in London who has made her living as a detective fiction writer and is moreover notorious from the case in *Strong Poison* as well as her continued relationship with Peter Wimsey. Thus her beleaguered feelings as she awaits to admit Peter into her confidence and into the women's college at Oxford. The novel shows that Harriet imagines two types of communities, represented by Oxford and London, and worries about betraying herself or the female academic community by siding with one or the other: "Harriet realised for a moment how queer the whole situation was. Once again, she felt Wimsey as a dangerous alien and herself on the side of the women who, with so strange a generosity, were welcoming the inquisitor among them" (252).

This chapter examines how Sayers uses the character of Harriet Vane to explore the ways in which the fictional embodied social communities in *Gaudy Night* are imagined and portrayed. It argues that through Harriet's relationship with these communities, Sayers explores the implications, especially for women who may hold tenuous positions in certain social communities (such as Shrewsbury), of what occurs if the imaginings for 'equal citizenship' within these communities are threatened. In employing the same solution for her detective and romance plots, Sayers creates an imagined social community that can provide 'free and equal citizenship' for its members.

Gaudy Night provides various examples of types of embodied social communities based upon certain imaginings which are connected through characters' ties to each represented community both in a personal and communal way: such as Harriet's to the women's college, Shrewsbury College; Peter and

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[213] Writing in *The Mutual Admiration Society*, about Dorothy L. Sayers and her friends at Oxford, Moulton states that "Even as they sat debating poetry and politics in Somerville College, they were second-class citizens at Oxford University, where they were permitted to take classes and sit for examinations but could not receive degrees. That would change in 1920, five years after most of the group had finished their studies" (3). Harriet takes on this feeling of exclusion, which is also apparent in the tenuous position of the women at the university throughout *Gaudy Night*.
[214] Moulton gives a beautiful presentation of this degree ceremony in *The Mutual Admiration Society* (85-86).

Harriet's to Oxford University; and the women's college to Oxford and the broader public world. These communities point to broader imagined communities – imagined within and outside the novel – of women in academia, and women having a space in a professional or academic environment without needing to continually justify their place there. This chapter builds upon Chapter 4, which examined how Agatha Christie presented a version of Anderson's imagined communities through groups of English tourists aboard which became embodied communities once these tourists were gathered together based on their (limited) imaginings. They were connected by their attachment to the cultural artefacts of the newspaper, and assumptions that these connections would be available wherever they would travel. Christie then highlighted the dangers of these limited imaginings by using murder to tear apart social assumptions. This chapter now extends Anderson's theory of imagined national communities to imagined social communities. In establishing and examining these fictionally embodied social communities, this chapter utilizes Philipps's claim, as discussed in the Introduction, that Anderson's theory can be used for "social analysis"; communities can be conceived of as imagined by a "wide array of social forms" such as "Religion, place, gender, politics, civilization and science" (600). The characters in *Gaudy Night* represent various social communities built upon their imaginings of belonging based on gender as well as place. In their imagining of belonging at Oxford, they participate in an imagined belonging in a broader academic community throughout the world, not bound by a specific place, institution, or even country, who believe and acknowledge the right and thus fight for women to have a place in academia.[215]

These imaginings are further complicated by the awareness of the importance of the cultural artefacts of the newspapers for creating communities, or, in this case, their potential to destroy communities built upon other imaginings such as gender or place. For the female characters in *Gaudy*

[215] This is made clear by the discussion of the social community of women at Shrewsbury College, mentioning novels, books, and connections of women all over the world who are fighting for a similar right. Miss Barton's book, *The Position of Women in the Modern State*, is ripped apart in the library by the poltergeist.

Night there is an additional fear of what the press or newspapers could discuss about them, a realization of the dangers of these cultural artefacts for the imagined community of women in academia, or for women generally, as papers could discuss "all problems involving women" (Graves and Hodge 41). Therefore, while in Chapter 4, characters in Christie's *Death on the Nile* were brought together by their knowledge of Linnet from the society news, in Sayers's *Gaudy Night* the women at Shrewsbury College are afraid of the consequences for their own embodied social community – and by extension for the broader imagined community of women in academia – if exploitive stories of the happenings of Shrewsbury College appear in the press. Depending on characters' roles within their community, they have the potential for a public presentation, in the press, of this relationship. Female students or dons may be made an example of, while Harriet's private life is of interest to the press given her trial, her relationship with the notorious Lord Peter, as well as her connection to the College. The connections between these women and the community in which they live and which they imagine are thus fearful of the ways in which Benedict Anderson argued that a connection to the cultural artefact of the newspaper brought an imagined community together. Anderson argues that an individual becomes part of an imagined community through their awareness of millions of others performing the same actions, such as reading the papers, or these "one day best-sellers" which in turn is represented in the world around them (35), these women of Shrewsbury College constitute their own small community built upon certain imaginings and understand that any negative discussion of it in the press will further confirm the ideas of the larger imagined community against women belonging in academia. Thus the community in Shrewsbury is aware of the danger which exposure from the surveillance of the press to the larger imagined national community, who in turn are connected by reading the newspapers, could bring to their own community. The women of Shrewsbury College are desperate to keep any mention of the 'poltergeist' out of the press, as the letters – which are "obscene…abusive…and threatening everything from public exposure to the gallows" (60-61) – seemingly only reinforce the idea that university for women becomes a place of "frustration and

perversion and madness" (60). They are desperate to preserve their own community at Oxford as well as the imagined community of individuals who believe in the right to education.

Thus the detective narrative is presented alongside Sayers's exploration of women's rightful space in academia as well as the anxieties which surround that space. In addition to writing a love narrative for Peter and Harriet, Sayers also wanted to use fiction to examine issues surrounding women in places they were often excluded from as women, such as university, or the professional sphere, and importantly, the necessity of providing a place to any person – man or woman – who wanted a space, as student or professor, at the university.[216] The threatened public exposure of the private attacks within the College walls creates a double-news story through which Sayers inserts her feminist discussion of the rightful place for women in academia as well as how women can imagine a community tied together by knowing they belong at university. The social community of the women at Shrewsbury College is represented in their common understanding of their right to space at Oxford, but also acknowledgement of their tenuous position there. *Gaudy Night* continually recognises that the popular press was always ready to print exploitive news about "Undergraduettes" or the dangers of university life for women: "'unnatural life' – 'semi-demented spinsters' – 'starved appetites and suppressed impulses' – 'unwholesome atmosphere' – [Harriet] could think of whole sets of epithets [about women in academia], ready-minted for circulation" (*Gaudy Night* 57, 60).

This fictional representation of anxieties related to women in academia, or at Oxford in particular, was also represented in the so-called Oxford novels of the period;[217] Anna Bogen lists at least eleven other

[216] As she declares in many various articles and essays. See "Gaudy Night"; "Are Women Human"; and "The Human-Not-So-Human".

[217] Andrea Trodd claims that while the most famous expression of Oxford life is from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1928), overall, a "sense of exclusion…haunts the novels of university life" (22). Trodd notes that authors including Sayers, Rosamund Lehmann, and Rose Macaulay (who are also referenced by Bogen), "celebrate the powerful glamour of Oxbridge life, but situate it outside the women characters in the 'real' male Oxbridge, the world of tradition and ceremony from which they are excluded" (22).

such novels published in the decade before *Gaudy Night* (1935) and three others published in the same year (262).[218] These novels belong to a popular genre "characterized by an idealized, romantic atmosphere and an obsession with detail that fetishized the features of college life" (Bogen 262). [219]

With its relationship to these Oxford novels, *Gaudy Night* positions an embodied and social imagined community within the text while it additionally references the world outside for its readers (Anderson 30). As a novel it is one of the cultural artefacts which, as Anderson writes, works to create for its readers an attachment to a broader imagined community, one that includes roles for women. Just as Christie's readers would understand the types of society news printed about Linnet in *Death on the Nile*, so Sayers's readers would understand the *Gaudy Night* plot potential for exploitive news. Sayers's presentation of the female academic community highlights the anxieties of women scholars and

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Yet in "Are Women Human?" Sayers writes, "But there is a sillier side to the university education of women. I have noticed lately, and with regret, a tendency on the part of the women's colleges to 'copy the men' on the side of their failings and absurdities" (108). She goes on to state that "Because the constitutions of the men's colleges is autocratic, old-fashioned and in many respects inefficient, the women are rather inclined to try and cramp their own collegiate constitutions – which were mapped out on freer democratic lines – into the mediaeval mould of the men's – and that is unsound. It contributes nothing the university and it loses what might have been a very good thing" (108). Women should not enter into the exclusion of the male-centered university life, but rather create their own within the university setting.

Further, women students should not simply copy the men students in their pranks, this too is detrimental to college life. As Sayers notes in "Are Woman Human?", "The women students, too, have a foolish trick of imitating and outdoing the absurdities of male undergraduates. To climb in drunk after hours and get gated is silly and harmless if done out of pure high spirits; if it is done 'because the men do it', it is worse than silly, because it is not spontaneous and not even amusing" (108). In *Gaudy Night*, Harriet asks a young female student why she must behave as foolishly as the men, indeed there is more at stake for the woman student: "it isn't fair to College. It's not fair to other Oxford women. Be a fool if you like—I've been a fool in my time and so have most people—but for Heaven's sake do it somewhere where you won't let other people down. (120).

[218] Sayers in "Gaudy Night" writes about choosing her setting at Oxford, why it worked perfectly for the type of novel that she wanted to write, and further acknowledges the other books about Oxford "written…usually by dissatisfied young persons recently down from Oxford, and concerned only to deride her external futilities and absurdities without understanding of or sympathy for her inner values" (82).

[219] Part of these revelations and this effort to display what life was really like at university, while at the same time critiquing it does help to contribute to, as Bogen argues, what Q.D. Leavis called the 'peepshow' quality in her review of Sayers's *Gaudy Night*. The first female students at university in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century were seen as sexless, but by the 20s and 30s, "changing coding of the female student…increasingly focused on her attractive or even tempting appearance, particularly in the popular and regional press" (Bogen 263-264). This, as Bogen notes, could "all too easily slip into an implication of sexual aggressiveness, often constructed in the press as dangerous to male students" (Bogen 264).

additionally expands what representation of these communities outside the novel can look like. In this, she offers her own philosophical justifications in creating such imagined communities, both within her texts and outside them.

Anderson's conception of an imagined community may be supplemented by McGregor's and Lewis's claims in *Conundrums for the Long Weekend* where they state that each of Sayers's detective novels presents a different type of community – aristocratic, bohemian, small town, or academic – and examine how it was impacted by the war and modernity (5). In doing so they posit that Sayers "provides the reader entry into each microcosm, sympathetically displaying the degrees of common cohesiveness and the impact of the modern" (5-6). They then ask "How do these communities function? What threatens their survival?" Answering these questions, they claim, is "to approach understanding a Sayers novel" (6).[220]

The idea of community and an individual's actions in a community were important to Sayers throughout her life and in her writing. Mo Moulton in *The Mutual Admiration Society* (2019) and Christine Colón in *Choosing Community* (2019) both separately examine the significance of community in Sayers's own life (as discussed in Chapter 3). Moulton's book shows the strength of the ties between Sayers and her fellow members of the Mutual Admiration Society (the MAS) and the influences of these friendships for the rest of their lives. Colón surveys the importance of community in Sayers's life and how she discussed this throughout her writing career. For Sayers, Colón posits, "community is an 'intricate ritual' in which individuals must work diligently to perform their parts, trusting that these parts

[220] McGregor and Lewis explore this question through the lens of modernism and English society's reaction to it as exemplified through Peter Wimsey's career: "The Great War saw the clash of these cultural identities. Britain and her allies emerged victorious, but at the cost of their own cultural disintegration. Postwar England embraced Germany's modern world. Peter Wimsey's career, we argue, traces the painful process of that modernization" (McGregor and Lewis vii-viii)

will ultimately combine well with the others so that the ritual will be 'faultlessly performed'" (2).[221] Colón begins her own exploration of the role of community in Sayers's oeuvre with her detective fiction, arguing that "Sayers's growth as a writer of detective fiction is integrally connected to her developing ideas regarding community and, more particularly, the role of individual action within it" (3). Thus Anderson's notion of an individual who imagines themselves as part of a community by seeing similar actions performed around them (reading the same newspaper) becomes transformed with Sayers, who looks for various ways in which individuals can perform actions which in turn "maintain[s] a kind of state in which every man and woman should enjoy freedom and equality while yet sharing in an orderly communal life which should ensure the control of a means of livelihood for all" (Sayers, *Begin Here* 33).

An individual's action within the community is fraught with difficulties, however, if this individual is a woman, since, as a woman, she will not be judged by her individual actions, but what her actions will represent for women as a whole. Harriet struggles throughout *Gaudy Night* to find her own role within the community of Shrewsbury College in conjunction with her role as a professional woman writer and celebrity in London. Because of her celebrity status in London, and the type of news article which the press could print about her, Harriet is also aware of the ways in which the press can take singular instances to discuss larger themes, such as women writers, women academics. This is because, as Sayers points out in "Are Woman Human" and "The Human-not-so-Human", as well as in *Gaudy Night*, a woman will be referred to as part of a group, not as her own entity. Sayers asserts that "[w]hat is repugnant to every human being is to be reckoned always a member of a class and not as an individual person" ("Are Women Human?" 107). As already discussed, during the interwar years, articles in the popular press and periodicals were encouraged to comment on "all problems concerning women" (Graves

[221] Colón builds upon the change-ringing scene in Sayers's *The Nine Tailors* to show the significance and harmony which can come when all members play their part in the 'intricate ritual' of bell-ringing. She uses this as a starting point to discuss the actions of members of a community who all have their part to play in the 'intricate ritual' of being a part of a community (1-2).

and Hodge 41); indeed, the papers almost create a form of surveillance of women and especially women who can represent 'classes' of women and the ways in which they moved within society. As the narrator/Harriet in *Gaudy Night* affirms, after Harriet reads "a paragraph in one of the more foolish London dailies about an 'Undergraduettes' Rag'", "Women, of course, were always news" (57).

Women, as a group, or 'class' as Sayers calls them, are going to be commented on, and, as Roger Fowler in *Language in the News* declares, be "traded in discourse" (Fowler 94). According to Fowler, this is because "[t]he world presented by the popular Press, like the world we feel we live in, is a *culturally organized set of categories*, rather than a collection of unique individuals" (emphasis added, 92). This is done so that collectively we can "manage the world, make sense of it, by categorizing phenomena, including people" (92). These labels "tell us a good deal about the structure of the ideological world represented by a newspaper or by a certain type of newspaper" (93). Yet as Fowler argues, "categorization is a discursive basis for practices of discrimination" (93): that is, a singular person may be discriminated against based on the 'group' to which they are seen to belong. He gives examples of these 'groups' such as "'young married women', 'immigrants', 'teachers', 'capitalists' and 'royalty'" and asserts that they are "imaginary, socially constructed concepts", further noting that 'group' is "an instrument for handling discrimination, for sorting unequally, and it acquires much of its apparent solidity by being traded in discourse" (94). From this, for the purposes of my examination of *Gaudy Night*, we can extrapolate that Harriet realizes that a woman who is put in a group such as 'women academics', is "perceived not as her own person with her own experience and qualifications, but as the carrier of attributes which…has [been] stereotypically assigned to the 'group' which she supposedly belongs" (Fowler 94).

Sayers describes the same type of discrimination and relates it to her own struggles as a woman detective fiction author and a woman who was a scholar and student at Oxford. On the subject of the inequalities of how men and women are discussed, in "The Human-not-quite- human" Sayers writes that

"*Vir* is male and *Femina* is female: but *Homo* is male and female". Yet even though "this is the equality claimed" it is a "fact which is persistently evaded and denied" (116). Sayers instead finds that "Man is always dealt with as both *Homo* and *Vir,* but Woman only as *Femina*" (116). Women are excluded from the 'human being' discussion, and only spoken of as women; she argues in "Are Women Human" that "a woman is just as much an ordinary human being as a man, with the same individual preferences, and with just as much right to the tastes and preferences of an individual" (107). Speaking on an individual woman's right to an education, Sayers further clarifies:

> When the pioneers of university training for women demanded that women should be admitted to the universities, the cry went up at once: "Why should women want to know about Aristotle?" The answer is NOT that *all* women would be better for knowing about Aristotle – still less, as Lord Tennyson seemed to think, that they would be more companionable wives if they did know about Aristotle – but simply: "What women wants as a class is irrelevant. *I* want to know about Aristotle. It is true that most women care nothing about him, and a great many male undergraduates turn pale and faint at the thought of him – but I, eccentric individual that I am, do want to know about Aristotle, and I submit that there is nothing in my shape or bodily functions which need prevent my knowing about him". (original emphases, "Are Woman Human" 108)

Conversations regarding women in education persist in arguing for *all* women, not asking what women want as individuals. Or, to put it in Sayers's terms, questions regarding education for women ask whether all women want to learn Aristotle, or perhaps *none* should, instead of asking what an individual – woman or man – would want. This proclivity of assigning group mentality to conversations concerning education or other opportunities then brings the discussion back to *Gaudy Night* and the dangers of having the insinuations of the poltergeist – based upon female madness, thwarted or dangerous sexuality, and even murder – being made public. As Harriet realizes, "Here was a pretty thing! Just the kind of thing to do the worst possible damage to University women – not only in Oxford, but everywhere" (59). This fear of the

press, however, also contributes to the difficulties Harriet faces in imagining herself as part of a community. Harriet realizes the dangers that she – as celebrity author Harriet Vane and perceived romantic partner to Peter Wimsey – could bring to the academic community by simply being there: "It was a matter of mild public interest at Shrewsbury College that Miss Harriet Vane, the well-known detective novelist, was spending a couple of weeks in College" (*Gaudy Night* 97).

Having one individual woman represent all women thus creates a danger to Shrewsbury College if the attacks were to become known. Yet as a College, as a social community based upon certain imaginings, it is made up of individuals. All of these bring to this one community their own personal experiences and relationship with both the academic community, past and present, as well as the reading public community who would know of the College, or individuals at the College, through news reports in the public press. It is made up of all women (except for Padgett, who is at the gates), and the women dons and students imagine that all the women, including domestic staff, support the imaginings which creates this social community there: women having a right to education. As a social community, built upon gender and upon a certain imagining – the women believe that everyone there supports the right for women to have education, to be in that space as woman with other women – the imaginings of the community are attacked through the poltergeist, who makes it clear that, in her mind, women should not be at university, as is shown when Miss Barton's book, *The Position of Women in the Modern State*, is destroyed as it argues for the right of women to education. It is no accident, the women agree, that this book discusses the ways in which Hitler's Germany have removed women from the public sphere and back into the home. Miss Barton's book denounces this and is thus destroyed (64). Peter later comments on this in determining the psychology behind the attacks, emphasizing the significance of "the burning of Miss Barton's book in which she attacks the Nazi doctrine that woman's place in the State should be confined to the 'womanly' occupations of *Kinder, Kirche, Kuche*" (325-326). Thus the very beliefs which had gone to form this imagined social community begin to be shaken. The women are afraid that one of

their own members is tearing apart the College. What was once "a close community" is being harmed through "an atmosphere of mutual distrust" (72).

The focus of the plot on alumna Harriet Vane further ensures that there is an interaction between Harriet as a professional celebrity woman and Harriet as a loyal member of the women's College. Harriet feels that she belongs, or does not belong, to two communities, exemplified by the physical places of London and Oxford. As a professional detective fiction writer she is finally called in to help with the problem. Yet her very presence there could also bring notoriety to the College, while Harriet's awareness of her notoriety has her doubting her right to be present in the College at the beginning of the novel:

> It was all so long ago; so closely encompassed and complete; so cut off as by swords from the bitter years that lay between. Could one face it now? What would those women say to her, to Harriet Vane, who had taken her First in English and gone to London to write mystery fiction, to live with a man who was not married to her, and to be tried for his murder amid a roar of notoriety? That was not the kind of career that Shrewsbury expected of its old students. (8)

Harriet's notoriety stems from her history as a woman who has been tried, and acquitted, of murdering her lover, Philip Boyes, in *Strong Poison* and then her relationship with the detective Peter Wimsey. As Harriet realizes, she and Peter are and will always be news – "After all, we're both News - and it's no good offending News, is it?" (Sayers, *Busman's Honeymoon* 229) – a fact which Harriet must come to terms with throughout the four novels she occupies. While in *Strong Poison* Harriet's arrest and the ensuing publicity increased the sales of her books, she also has been bruised, understandably, by this public scrutiny of her life. Although this notoriety was unintentional - "The particular trouble I got let in for was as much sheer accident as falling off a roof" (*Gaudy Night* 29) - she had "dragged her reputation in the dust and made money" and now lives on and must live with "the uncertain rewards of fame" (*Gaudy Night* 8).

Therefore, as noted in Chapter 3, Harriet tries to take control of how the press would present her to the public. After the events of *Have His Carcase*, she leaves England to escape notoriety and to break ties with Peter: "Before her departure, she had asked Wimsey not to write. He had taken the prohibition with unexpected meekness" (*Gaudy Night* 48). This interdiction on writing breaks their personal relationship, yet she still keeps abreast of what is happening in England even while abroad, and is informed of Wimsey through the papers: "She had occasionally seen his name in the English papers" (*Gaudy Night* 48). Harriet is still part of a cultural community: just like Christie and her characters such as in *Death on the Nile*, Harriet still keeps up her connections with English news. Believing that this trip has ensured a clean break between herself and her past (and Peter), Harriet then comes home to London. Once home however, she is seen at an event and "[t]hree days later, while reading in the morning paper that among the guests at a literary luncheon-party had been seen 'Miss Harriet Vane, the well-known detective authoress,' she was interrupted by the telephone…'Is that you Harriet? I saw you were back'" (*Gaudy Night* 48). Peter is ringing her up, informed by the papers where she is. Harriet now knows that "as far as this situation was concerned, her flight had been useless. She was back in the old net of indecision and distress" (*Gaudy Night* 50). Just as Hilary Craven realizes, in Agatha Christie's *Destination Unknown*, that escape is not possible, so Harriet finally determines to face her own fears in *Gaudy Night* and returns to Oxford where she learns how to re-establish her sense of dignity:

> She had never gone back; at first, because she had loved the place too well, and a clean break seemed better than a slow wrenching-away; and also because, when her parents had died and left her penniless, the struggle to earn a livelihood had absorbed all her time and thought. And afterwards, the stark shadow of the gallows had fallen between her and the sun-drenched quadrangle of grey and green. But now--? (8)

Harriet thus returns to Shrewsbury and attends the Gaudy despite her initial reluctance, an event which begins her reconnection with this community of women scholars from which she had made a clear

break: “Harriet had broken all her old ties and half the commandments, dragged her reputation in the dust and made money, had the rich and amusing Lord Peter Wimsey at her feet, to marry him if she chose, and was full of energy and bitterness and the uncertain rewards of fame” (8). Harriet’s movement between London and Oxford shows how Harriet believes these communities to be distinct from one another: she is surprised by the interest in each community about the other.

Gaudy Night emphasises that Harriet’s very return to Shrewsbury is as a professional and successful writer and celebrity, symbolised by the fact that she is able to drive herself to Oxford. She is “glad that in these days she could afford her own little car” as it heralds her new status as “a well-to-do woman with a position in the world …She was eager to distinguish herself as sharply as possible from that former undergraduate” (9). As posited in Chapter 2, this ability symbolizes Harriet’s success and is a physical reminder of what she has accomplished professionally. While Harriet remembers first taking the train to Oxford – an action which itself is an expression of new types of mobility for women in the early twentieth century – her return in her own car signals Harriet as a successful career woman. Wendy Parkins, in “Moving Dangerously”, writes that “the mobility gained from walking, cycling, or taking a bus in the city was qualitatively different from that which became available with the car, which increasingly signified independence, pleasure, and modernity for women” (81). Harriet travels to and fro between Oxford and London throughout the plot of *Gaudy Night*, back and forth from her life as a novelist – and successful albeit notorious woman – to a life of academia and contemplation. Harriet’s ability to travel in this way is an instance of the types of freedom which Sayers shows come from a profession: that she can move between two such opportunities now open for women marks the expanding borders of gender negotiations of her time. Parkins notes that previous discussion of mobility for women from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century seemed at times to solely emphasise “shopping expeditions and city outings” (77). Whereas Parkins focuses part of her discussion around women’s mobility and ability to move from town to country in order to query women’s place in modernity (such as

in the novels of Elizabeth Bowen and Stella Gibson (77)), Harriet's own movement in her "own little car" transcends even this discussion: her mobility from career location to academic location allows her to leave behind the suggestion that women do not belong in either place. Further, Harriet's return to Oxford allows her to rediscover that she can inhabit both communities – professional and academic – when she had originally believed that her participation in the professional community of London had cut her off from the academic community of Oxford. The very movement back and forth in the plot of *Gaudy Night* as she works through her own personal struggles exemplifies her right and earned position for her place in both spaces, both communities.

Thus one of the great moments near the beginning of the book is when Harriet realizes that whatever she has done (or thinks that she has done) or the public thinks she has done, no one can take away her achievement of being an Oxford M.A.:

> She laughed suddenly, and for the first time felt confident.
>
> "They can't take this away, at any rate. Whatever I may have done since, this remains. Scholar; Master of Arts; Domina; Senior Member of this University (*statutum est quod Juniores Senioribus debitam et congruam reverentiam tum in privato tum in publioco exhibeant*); a place achieved, inalienable, worthy of reverence." (12)[222]

Part of Harriet's difficulty in imagining herself belonging at Shrewsbury – in addition to her public notoriety – is built upon her writing detective stories for a living. As a detective fiction author who earns her living through her writing and thus a professional woman who also must navigate her public persona in the popular press, Harriet, therefore, represents two types of communities: the academic/cloistered one of Oxford, as well as the professional/public world as exemplified by her life in London. Harriet's

[222] In her article, "Translations of Latin in Dorothy Sayers' Gaudy Night", Ellen gives the English translation to "*statutum est quod Juniores Senioribus debitam et congruam reverentiam tum in privato tum in publioco exhibeant*" as "It is established that Junior Members should display, both in private and in public, the respect which is owed and appropriate to Senior Members" (Ellen).

movement back and forth between London and Oxford represents the tensions which Harriet feels exists between each and determines her individual action within this community: between popularizing her work in the popular press so that she can build her own success and readers, and between the dangers which the press represents to what she identifies as the 'cloistered' community of academia. Yet upon her return, Harriet discovers that she is welcome at Oxford – "Miss Lydgate showed no signs of being ashamed of Miss Vane. On the contrary, she greeted her warmly, begged her to come and see her on Sunday morning, spoke appreciatively of her work" (17) – and indeed is "commended…for keeping up a scholarly standard of English, even in mystery fiction" (17). Harriet realises that even in the midst of "her indecisions" she "had stuck to her work" (32). As she reflects, this is proof of her own integrity: "She had written what she felt herself called upon to write; and though she was beginning to feel that she might perhaps do things better, she had no doubt that the thing itself was the right thing for her" (32).

As noted in Chapter 3, McGregor and Lewis claimed that Sayers would have thought she was "'slumming' to attempt popular detective fiction at all" (32). Yet *Gaudy Night* is Sayers's justification of the intelligence and upholding of standards for literary integrity which can be shown in detective fiction. Even if it *is* labelled popular fiction, she makes her living from detective fiction at the same time including the importance of an author's integrity in striving towards 'good writing': "the technique of detective fiction did improve out of all knowledge in the hands of a number of brilliant writers, and we all became a great deal more careful about our facts. Some of us, from time to time, even indulged in a little 'good writing' here and there, and were encouraged by finding it well received" ("Gaudy Night" 76). "Miss Dorothy Sayers…is one of those who do write murder stories as if they could write something else" (Chesterton, "Our Note Book", Aug 17, 1929). In *Gaudy Night*, Harriet's former tutor acknowledges the benefits of Harriet's university training for her fiction writing, even if Harriet is somewhat doubtful about her own abilities:

"After all, my books are only meant for fun; it's not like a work of scholarship."

> "You always had a scholarly mind, though," said Miss Lydgate, "and I expect you find your training a help in some ways, don't you? I used to think you might take up an academic career."
>
> "Are you disappointed that I didn't?"
>
> "No, indeed. I think it's so nice that our students go out and do such varied and interesting things, *provided they do them well*. And I must say, most of our students do do exceedingly good work along their own lines." (emphasis added, 34-35)

Nevertheless, Sayers makes it poignantly clear that the struggle to earn a living has encompassed all of Harriet's time and energy, and the fear of demarcations, the necessity of becoming professional and engaging in a celebrity culture, often make the woman writer worried about re-establishing her position back in the imagined academic community exemplified in Harriet's uneasy return to Shrewsbury. This is especially unfair – as the book declares – for women of that time period were often not given the choice to stay at Oxford or make their living as an academic (as Miss de Vine experiences) and as Sayers experienced in her own life (despite her education and training, as discussed in Chapter 3). Harriet's "uncertain rewards of fame" and notoriety disconcert her and make her uneasy about taking her earned place at Oxford, and make it almost impossible for Harriet to step back to a place – back to an enclosed community – where she had been happy. Sayers reaches her reading public and wants them to sympathize with the struggles of becoming a professional woman, while perhaps Sayers herself is highlighting the anxiety which surrounds even trying to have a profession as a woman.

Although Harriet was initially concerned with returning to Oxford and re-establishing her place, once there she finds herself at peace:

> As Harriet followed Miss Lydgate across the lawn she was visited by an enormous nostalgia. *If only one could come back to this quiet place*, where only intellectual achievement counted; if one could work here steadily and obscurely at some close-knit piece of reasoning, undistracted and uncorrupted by agents, contracts, publishers, blurb-writers, interviewers, fan-mail, autograph

> hunters, notoriety-hunters, and competitors; abolishing personal contacts, personal spites, personal jealousies; getting one's teeth into something dull and durable; maturing into solidity like the Shrewsbury beeches – then, one might be able to forget the wreck and chaos of the past, or see it, at any rate, in a truer proportion. (emphasis added, Sayers, *Gaudy Night* 19)

She finds the academic discussions and ideas of women working towards an intellectual goal rewarding. Sitting with the other alumna at the Gaudy Dinner, Harriet listens to and reflects upon a speech which emphasises the importance of university life. It additionally emphasises the feeling of belonging to an imagined community which celebrates this, not only at Oxford but in universities around the world:

> The Warden rapped upon the table. A welcome silence fell upon the Hall. A speaker was rising to propose the toast of the University.
>
> She spoke gravely, unrolling the great scroll of history, pleading for the Humanities, proclaiming the Pax Academia to a world terrified with unrest. "Oxford has been called the home of lost causes: if the love of learning for its own sake is a lost cause everywhere else in the world, let us see to it that here at least, it finds its abiding home" (26).

Harriet reflects on her words, and then imagines the community which is shaped by this "love of learning":

> Magnificent, thought Harriet, but it is not war. And then, in her imagination weaving in and out of the spoken words, she saw it as a Holy War, and that whole widely heterogeneous, that even slightly absurd collection of chattering women *fused in a corporate unity with one another and with every man and woman to whom integrity of mind meant more than material gain* – defenders in the central keep of Man-soul, their personal difficulties forgotten in face of a common foe. To be true to one's calling, whatever follies one might commit in one's emotional life, that was the way to spiritual peace. How could one feel fettered, being the freeman of so great a city, or humiliated, where all enjoyed equal citizenship? (emphasis added 26)

Harriet places all of these women at the Gaudy with men and women around the world in a "corporate unity" who can enjoy "equal citizenship" based on love of learning rather than gender. And this love of learning is what holds them together, even though studying separate subjects: "The eminent professor who rose to reply spoke of diversity of gifts *but the same spirit*. The note, once struck, vibrated on the lips of every speaker and the ear of every hearer" (emphasis added 26). The women at the Gaudy imagine themselves in this greater imagined community. The passage then moves from the universal imagined community of women and men in academics, to focus on the social community at Shrewsbury, who in the bestowing of degrees, in learning, participate in this broader imagined community:

> Nor was the Warden's review of the Academic year out of key with it: appointments, degrees, fellowships – all these were the domestic details of the discipline without which the community could not function. In the glamour of the one Gaudy night, one could realise that one was a citizen of no mean city. It might be an old and an old-fashioned city, with inconvenient buildings and narrow streets where the passers-by squabbled foolishly about the right of way; but her foundations were set upon the holy hills and her spires touched the heaven (26)

Thus the opening of the novel and Harriet's participation at the Gaudy firmly establish a social community of women academics who know and believe that they participate in a broader imagined community, held together by their imagining of "love of learning", citizens with a "diversity of gifts" yet having the "same spirit".

Uplifted by the speeches and some of her various conversations, Harriet at first imagines that there is no intrusion of the outside world to disturb the peace of the academic community. She associates London with the struggle to earn a living, where the exhaustion associated with this struggle breaks down emotional and personal integrity. Yet Harriet's belief that these two worlds to do not interact, that one would be safe from London at Oxford, is quickly overturned. Women in both London and Oxford experience the same struggle to earn a living, the same struggle for survival, and the same anxieties about

justifying one's place in a professional or academic world. Further, they also have the same curiosities about 'celebrities'. Thus Harriet finds that even at Oxford she is still questioned about her life and her relationship with Peter: "Seeing", said Harriet, in angry and desperate tones, "seeing that he got me out of prison and probably saved me from being hanged, I am naturally bound to find him delightful" (*Gaudy Night* 25). She must discuss Peter several times with the various guests at the Gaudy, who are interested in their personal relationship: "One would have thought that Oxford at least would offer a respite from Peter Wimsey and the marriage question" (*Gaudy Night* 38). She is angry at the assumption that because Peter rescued her from the gallows, she is "naturally bound to find him delightful" (25). She had thought that at Oxford, with other ideas to discuss, her own problems would not be mentioned. Yet, as Harriet reflects, "although she herself was a notoriety, if not precisely a celebrity, it was an annoying fact that Peter was a still more spectacular celebrity, and that, of the two, people would rather know about him than her" (*Gaudy Night* 38). This is true in Oxford as well as London. Her presence is going to make news: though this has helped her become a professional author, it is an uncomfortable personal realization when trying to return to Oxford.

Harriet's inability to avoid others knowing about her own life makes her (understandably) somewhat self-absorbed (or morbid) and take upon herself any slight, real or imagined, which she thinks that others will think of her. This type of thinking ensures that she imposes upon herself the malice of the poison-pen letter campaign which she stumbles upon at Oxford: she personally takes on the attacks which are aimed at professional and academic women more generally. Having received these in the past, and continuing to receive them in her own public life in London (55, 56), at the Gaudy she mistakenly assumes the targeted notes are meant for her:

> There was a message pasted across it, made up of letters cut apparently from the headlines of a newspaper.
>
> YOU DIRTY MURDERESS. AREN'T YOU

> Hell! said Harriet. Oxford, thou too? (46)[223]

The crux of the mystery is that Harriet assumes this is for her, that she in some way deserves this note. She is unable to move past her own life and forgive herself; she feels that in becoming a successful mystery writer (and also having been on trial for murder in London), she cannot belong again to the Shrewsbury community. This is what ultimately stops her from solving the mystery as a whole; she cannot separate what she feels she has done to look objectively at the Oxford community without her own imposed 'taint' upon it. Having left London to return to Oxford for the Gaudy dinner, she is repulsed at finding something "ugly and sadistic", as it was "not at all the kind of thing that one would expect to find in a college quadrangle" (32).

Harriet's first return to Shrewsbury signals to her that the two communities are not as distinct as she had originally believed. She returns to London after the Gaudy and again loses personal connection with Oxford, yet is still kept informed of some happenings through the press:

> She heard no news of Shrewsbury College in the interval, except that one day in the Michaelmas Term there was a paragraph in one of the more foolish London dailies about an 'Undergraduettes' Rag,' informing the world that somebody had made a bonfire of gowns in Shrewsbury Quad and that the 'Lady Head' was said to be taking disciplinary measures. Women, of course, were always news. (57)

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[223] In continuing to see Harriet, the public assumes that Peter, with his association with the police, somehow made it possible for the murder charge against Harriet to be dropped. Peter sees one of these letters:
"God, what muck!" said he, bitterly. "So that's what I'm letting you in for. I might have known. I could hardly hope that it wasn't so. But you said nothing, so I allowed myself to be selfish" (55). After conversation, where Peter offers to go away and leave Harriet alone so she won't be accused of this, Harriet replies: "Peter, I'm afraid I'm not very consistent. I came here to-night with the firm intention of telling you to chuck it. But I'd rather fight my own battles. I – I - ," she looked up and went on rather quaveringly, "I'm *damned* if I'll have you wiped out by plug-uglies or anonymous-letter writers" (56).
They are not going to be pulled apart through other people's accusations.

Harriet is annoyed at the exploitation of women in academia and "wrote a tart letter to the paper, pointing out that either 'undergraduate' or 'woman student' would be seemlier English than 'undergraduette,' and that the correct method of describing Dr. Baring was 'the Warden'" (57). Yet the public is uninterested in this information – "The only result of this was to provoke a correspondence headed 'lady Undergrads' and a reference to 'sweet girl-graduate'" (57) – as they would rather know about women in academia for the news that they could provide. The academic community comes into Harriet's professional life only through the public announcement of possible disgrace. Harriet is thus connected to the community at Oxford through the papers which are wanting to print anything about women, even to the detriment of that imagined community of women scholars everywhere. As Bogen argues, "Sayers depends on her readers' awareness of potential scandal" (265). Of Harriet's sigh that "women, of course, were always news", Bogen comments: "The flattering inclusion of the reader in 'of course' may suggest a shared scorn for press antics, but it also relies on an *implicit connection* between women students and sensationalist news" (emphasis added, 265). Harriet and the novel's reader know that women will be news, that the papers helped to control perceptions of women in society. While the reader, like Harriet, might be weary of this idea, the reader is also implicated in this. We want to know what happens next in the story, and we are also interested in the information which Harriet can provide as a member of the College. However, in our participation with this information in the novel, we are further made aware by the novel that readerly consumption of such news leads to it being further presented in the press.

Only after she has read this news story is Harriet then called in by the Shrewsbury (Oxford) community to solve the problems which have been occurring. When she left the Gaudy she had promised to come back if they were to "find a mangled corpse in the buttery", but reflected that "[t]he glory of a college was that nothing drastic ever happened in it…Bless their heart, how refreshing and soothing and *good* they all were, walking beneath their ancient beeches and meditating on *ὂν καὶ μὴ ὂν* and the finance

of Queen Elizabeth" (original emphasis, 46).[224] Hence her shock upon receiving the letter from the Dean, asking her to come investigate the poison-pen letters that they have all been receiving:

> One can scarcely call in the police – if you'd seen some of the letters you'd realise that the less publicity the better, and you know how things get about. I dare say you noticed there was a wretched newspaper paragraph about the bonfire in the quad last November. We never discovered who did that, by the way; we thought, naturally, it was a stupid practical joke; but we are now beginning to wonder whether it wasn't all part of the same campaign. (58-59)

The Dean knows that Harriet probably has seen the bonfire event in the paper, and must be aware of this first instance of scandal. Also, the paper has only written about the least scandalous happening at the College; the Dean is desperately writing to Harriet so that she can help to prevent further incidents and, especially, prevent news of these finding their way into the press. As Marty Roth writes of detective fiction, "[s]candal is also what the community most fears; it is afraid that word of this even might leak out into the world of history, and it treats that eventuality as if it carried an explosive charge…The crime must be kept inside and under wraps" (135). These poison-pen letters are shockingly out of place – Harriet had thought so when she first encountered one at the Gaudy – because they take place in an institution which values honesty and integrity, not scandal. Yet public perception surrounding women in academia expects such scandalous things to happen, that women in academia become what the letters accuse them of. The College then is frightened of the publicity if these out-of-place events were made public, which would affirm to the public that these happenings inevitably occur if women are allowed in these spaces, and is desperate to avoid scandal. This avoidance, found in many detective stories, Roth

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[224] In "Translations of Latin in Dorothy Sayers' Gaudy Night", Ellen also includes some Greek translations. She writes: "*ὂν καὶ μὴ ὂν* means, literally, *"isness* and *not isness"* or "being and not being." For those who remember grammar, *ὂν* is the gerund (noun form) of the verb "is."
ὂν καὶ μὴ ὂν is from Marlowe's *Faustus,* Act I, scene I, line 12, when Faust is "bidding farewell" to the Greek philosopher Aristotle (who discusses "being and not being," riffing on Parmenides' philosophical poem *On Nature.*) Even in *Faustus,* the phrase gets mangled in some editions, since so few printers know Greek" (Ellen).

posits, then "reinforces two conventional [plot] constraints: that the detective be an amateur and the criminal an insider. Fear of scandal dictates that a private detective be sent for to solve the crime quietly" (135), hence the motivation for inviting Harriet. Although a professional woman from London, and one whom some of the dons view with suspicion, she also is a member of the College community. As the librarian, Miss Allison states:

> "I do feel most strongly that the presence of paid detectives in this college would be most unpleasant, however discreet they might be. I have served the College for a considerable number of years and I have its interests very much at heart. You know how undesirable it is that any outsider should be brought into a matter of this kind...
>
> But if it came to the point, I would put more faith in your tact than in that of an outside professional detective. And you start with a knowledge of the workings of the collegiate system, which is a great advantage." (77-78)

Thus the Warden of Shrewsbury College, when engaging Harriet to stay and help with their poltergeist, leaves her with this warning: "I cannot too strongly emphasise how exceedingly important it is to avoid publicity. Nothing is more prejudicial to the College in particular and to University women in general than spiteful and ill-informed gossip in the press" (96). The Warden is aware of how the scandal in the press will affect the imagined community of women scholars – bound not through their consumption of cultural artefacts such as the newspaper, but rather by their gender and ideological beliefs that they belong there. They are frightened of the power of the newspaper in creating communities of people acting against their own imagined community of women academics, and education for women. Shrewsbury College is an embodied social community with ties to a great imagined community, tied together by other ideological artefacts against the cultural artefact of the press, and of notorious publicity. The national institution of public press must be guarded against for the preservation and continuation of the community of women scholars.

Precisely because they are women academics – 'lady head, 'undergraduettes', 'sweet girl graduate' – anything that happens in the College will be news, and will be questioned, even their very presence there. Upon receiving the Dean's letter, then, Harriet is well aware of the many potential repercussions: "Here was a pretty thing! Just the kind of thing to do the worst possible damage to University women – not only in Oxford but everywhere" (59). Women, scholarly women, as a whole are being attacked, as Peter Wimsey realizes: "The object of the campaign begins to show itself more clearly. The grievance felt by X, starting from a single person, has extended itself to the entire College" (326). The very nature of the violence against the closed community makes it impossible to call in outside help. As Sayers had written in a 1920 pamphlet from the British federation of University Women: "Women have claimed and won the right to responsibilities of citizenship, but their public work will be judged by no lenient standard" (as qtd in Moulton 70). The women at Shrewsbury are always anxious about this. Peter Wimsey, in answer to a question about women's education, queries: "Is it still a question? It ought not to be" (249). Sayers is giving Peter the voice she hopes others will emulate: she gives her readers a chance to speak like Peter. The women in the College, however, know that this will continue to be a question debated and asked: "'I assure you,' said the Warden, 'that even in Oxford we still encounter a certain number of people who maintain their right to disapprove'" (249). Peter rather asserts that "I hope you are not going to ask me whether I approve of women's doing this and that…You should not imply that I have any right either to approve or disapprove" (249). The reading community should not question the rights for women which are a norm for men.

The readers of *Gaudy Night* further realise that there will be no leniency from the press, or public, should women fail at University, or should the poison-pen campaign leak to the press. The anxiety in the novel is reflecting actual events. In 1935 there had been a scandal at one of the women's colleges, where a student was sent down for practical joking (an occurrence not uncommon on male campuses). The press had capitalized on this however, as notorious for happening in a women's college, and for months

headlines appeared commenting on the issue. Bogen writes that "[f]or the writer of women's university fiction, therefore, the groundswell of public interest had been stoked by widespread press coverage, setting up the expectation of sensationalist exposure" (264). Thus the overwhelming importance and anxiety in *Gaudy Night* to keep the salacious nature of the poison-pen letters out of the press. As already noted, Harriet realizes what the headlines could be: "'Soured virginity' – 'unnatural life' – 'semi-demented spinsters' – 'starved appetites and suppressed impulses' – 'unwholesome atmosphere' – she could think of whole sets of epithets, ready-minted for circulation" (60). Describing the reason behind her plot for *Gaudy Night*, Sayers wrote:

> There was one crime which could readily be dealt with by academic authorities, and which they would be particularly anxious to screen from publicity, and that was the crime of disseminating obscene libels, and committing malicious damage. *It was the kind of crime which the world in general would be ready enough to connect with a community of celibate women*, and which, for that very reason, would automatically place all the members of the college staff under suspicion both of each other and of the reader. (emphasis added, "Gaudy Night" 83).[225]

It has already been noted how the inversion of the community of women comes from not wanting to participate in the cultural artefact of the newspaper; they are frightened by the surveillance of the press for any news regarding women. Conversely, the poltergeist's aim is to try and take down the imagined community of women scholars by attacking the embodied social community at Shrewsbury. The poison-

[225] Single women – the surplus women – after the Great War, were cause of much concern and the issues surrounding these single women are further discussed in Chapter 6. Celibacy was thought to provoke madness, and Marie Stopes' *Married Love* (1918) "warned of prolonged celibacy as neuralgia, neurosis, fibroid growths, lack of inspiration or of identification with cosmic forces" (Trodd 24). Trodd notes other writers of this period which similarly cautioned of the same dangers of celibacy, commenting that "Russell's *Hypatia* for instance, suggest[ed] that the neurosis inevitably produced by celibacy might often evolve into insanity" (24). The world inside *Gaudy Night* is well aware of the world outside the novel. Part of the tension for the mystery is in understanding the type of headline that this hint of scandal at Shrewsbury College would make. The reader is drawn into the world by Harriet, and is made to sympathizing with Harriet in her efforts to not let this story escape for the sake of "University women in general" (*Gaudy Night* 96).

pen letters sent by the poltergeist are full of shocking accusations, yet are accusations which "the world in general would be ready enough to connect with a community of celibate women", and significantly, are cut out of newspaper clippings. The poltergeist is literally using other news stories to perpetrate a new one in the hope that it will be reprinted in the press.

The poltergeist is finally revealed to be one of the female staff, Annie Wilson, who is angry at the new Fellow at Shrewsbury, Miss de Vine, and indeed, at all professional and academic women. She does not think that women should be educated to take jobs away from men. Her 'malevolence' is felt by the College – the Dean wonders to Harriet: "What is the object of all this persecution? It doesn't look like a personal grudge against anybody in particular. It's a kind of blind malevolence, directed against everybody in College. What's at the back of it?" (73). Though there is a personal grudge – Annie hates Miss de Vine – there is also a hatred of educated ('unwomanly') women "who take men's jobs". Early on in the plot, a clue is given as to who the perpetrator could be. Harriet is in the new library where she falls into conversation with Annie. Annie observes about the new library that "It's a very handsome room, isn't it, madam? But it seems a great shame to keep up this big place just for women to study books in. I can't see what girls want with books. Books won't teach them to be good wives" (93). Harriet is surprised, and wonders why, with opinions such as these, Annie decided to work in the College: "What dreadful opinions!" said Harriet. "Whatever made you take a job in a women's college, Annie?" (93). Though Harriet is now made aware of there being a person in College who disagrees with the imaginings of this social community, Annie is able to play upon these women's fears of their right to belonging, to mask her own anger and hate at these women:

> The scout's face clouded. "Well, madam, I've had my misfortunes. I was glad to take what I could get…But I always think of what it says in the Bible, about 'much learning hath made thee mad.' It isn't a right thing" (93).

Annie believes that women should not be educated, that women should not do "a boy's job" as "It isn't fair. The boys have a hard enough work to get jobs of their own" (172). Yet Annie's emphasis on "much learning hath made thee mad" echoes the epitaphs that Harriet is reminded of, and the worries of the women themselves. Thus Annie is able to hide in plain sight as she plays upon the emotions and fears of the women she is tormenting.

Peter finally reveals that Annie's husband committed suicide and Annie holds the new Fellow, Miss de Vine, responsible. She attacks the women of the College, and then Harriet, and finally Peter, because this community takes jobs away from the 'real' men, men who do not support women in education like Peter. As Peter explains: "The grievance felt by X, starting from a single person, has extended itself to the entire College, and the intention is to provoke a public scandal, which may bring the whole body into disrepute" (326). Annie bursts out at the women: "I wish I could burn down this place and all the places like it – where you teach women to take men's jobs and rob them first and kill them afterwards" (336); a woman's job "is to look after a husband and children" (336). As Carolyn G. Heilbrun writes, Sayers's "concept of doing one's own work and not someone else's was *a powerful idea for women*, who had always been persuaded to make someone else their job" (emphasis added 1-2). As noted in the Introduction and Chapter 2, the anxiety of women taking a man's work was also discussed in the interwar papers: Annie not only threatens the women's space at Oxford but also accuses them of taking work from the 'deserving' men. She enters further into the various discussions of the interwar years – what jobs should women be allowed to hold, were they taking jobs from deserving men, and should they be allowed a university education. Annie builds upon these women's anxieties, both of their occupying this space and their misunderstanding of the reasons behind the attacks – "You're only frightened of your skins and your miserable reputations. I scared you all, didn't I? God! how I laughed to see you all look at one another! You didn't even trust each other…But I made you shake in your shoes, anyhow" (337).

Importantly, Annie has enough understanding of the type of community she works in, as well as the type of broader national community she participates in, to be able to use the fear of the press and notoriety to stir up trouble for the College: "I'd like to see you bring me into court. I'd laugh in your faces" (336). She knew of the types of "epitaphs, ready-minted for circulation" (60) which would be used in the press if word of the poltergeist became public. Therefore it is significant that Annie reuses newspapers – which would have had articles concerning these issues within their pages – to then print her own stories. This not only hides her identity, but also creates a twofold news structure: she creates and writes her own headlines and articles (or narrative), while at the same time publically informing the closed community at Shrewsbury College of the deeds of one of their members. Additionally, she is writing about and enacting a breaking news story which the press would most certainly want to capitalize on. Annie leads the whole College community on a tantalizing and dangerous chase in an effort to track down the perpetrator of the anonymous letters, but for Annie, it is an effort to expose to the College who she thinks is a guilty person, a murderer, and then to society or the broader national community of newspaper readers, the dangers of this community of women academics. The struggle of the community at Shrewsbury –who believe in their right to be there – then becomes to find the 'writer/journalist' narrating the supposed guilt of Miss de Vine through the poison-pen letters, and additionally ensuring that these 'articles' or events are not leaked to the public newspapers. This would be a story which the readers of the newspaper would heartily want and would then spread, to the detriment of women in the College and the imagined community of women who believe in education for women, as it would enter into further press debates about "all problems concerning women" (Graves and Hodge 41).

As acknowledged throughout this thesis, the newspaper which one read could be seen as a class signifier, and indeed, as noted in Chapter 2, both Christie and Sayers use this in their mystery plots. Peter Wimsey reads the *News of the World*, as Mayhall argues, because he has the "ability to read across a variety of forms to apprehend the modern world" (159), while Christie's characters in *A Murder is*

Announced identify which news stories, and thus which community, they want to be part of. In *Gaudy Night*, part of the effort to find the perpetrator involves also trying to find the old newspapers used: as the Dean demands "[a]nd *what*…becomes of the mutilated newspapers?" (original emphasis 73). These papers could provide a potential clue to the poltergeist. A fire of these mutilated papers is found in the study of Miss de Vine, but as the community has knowledge of the type of papers she would read, this then becomes part of a complex clue, or red herring. Padgett, the Porter who found the fire, knows these mutilated papers are unlikely to be Miss de Vine's:

> "I'll keep this Padgett, thank you. Does Miss de Vine usually read the *Daily Trumpet*?"
>
> "I shouldn't think so, miss. It would be more likely the *Times* or *Telegraph*. But you could easy find out."
>
> "Of course, anybody might have dropped this in the fireplace. It proves nothing. But I'm very glad to have seen it." (160)

Even within the College public newspaper references help to establish a readership and potential community of readers who would do this sort of thing. Did Miss de Vine purposely buy newspapers she would not normally read to use for nefarious purposes? Or was the true perpetrator unaware of Miss de Vine's reading habits and thus gave herself away by being outside of the academic community which would have known this?

The privacy of the events at the College means that only when Harriet is called in by the Dean for help is she finally able to realize that the note she had found originally was not for her, but for someone in the College:

> The Dean would be horrified to know that Harriet was the last person who should, in charity, have been approached in the matter; and that, even in Oxford itself, in Shrewsbury College itself--

> In Shrewsbury College itself: and at the Gaudy. That was the point. The letter she had found in her sleeve had been put there in Shrewsbury College *and at the Gaudy*. Not only that; there had been the drawing she had picked up in the quad. Was either, or were both of these, part only of her own miserable quarrel with the world? Or were they rather to be connected with the subsequent outbreak in the college itself? It seemed unlikely that Shrewsbury should have to harbour two dirty-minded lunatics in such quick succession. But if the two lunatics were one and the same lunatic, then the implication was an alarming one, and she herself must, at all costs, interfere at least so far as to tell what she knew. There did come moments when all personal feelings had to be set aside in the interest of public service; and this looked like being one of them. (original emphasis 60)

Harriet's emotional attachment to the College and protecting its place provides her with the impetus to go back and face her own self-inflicted fears of belonging at Oxford. For the sake of the College she will go back. While Harriet had thought that her public life was thrusting itself into her Oxford life, in actual fact, she finds that life in Oxford is not as peaceful as she had once imagined, threatened by its fragile social position. She drives back to Oxford again, but this time, it is a much different experience than when she originally returned in her car, the symbol of her success:

> Harriet drove out to Oxford through a vile downpour of sleet that forced its way between the joints of the all-weather curtains and kept the windscreen-wiper hard at work. Nothing could have been less like her journey of the previous June; but the greatest change of all was in her own feelings. Then, she had been reluctant and uneasy; a prodigal daughter without the romantic appeal of husks and very uncertain of the fatted calf. Now, it was the College that had blotted its copy-book and had called her in as one calls in a specialist, with little regard to private morals, but a despairing faith in professional skill. (63)

Harriet must come to terms with how she sees herself fitting into these two communities: Oxford is calling her from London because of her professional success, and because of her belonging at Oxford – she will not betray either one. Indeed at Oxford, Harriet feels herself as belonging to the community:

> She worked away happily till half-past ten; the racket in the passage calmed down; words flowed smoothly. From time to time, she looked up from her paper, hesitating for a word, and saw through the window the lights of Burleigh and Queen Elizabeth burning back across the quad, counterparts of her own. Many of them, no doubt, illumed cheerful parties, like the one in the Annexe; others lent their aid to people who, like herself, were engaged in the elusive pursuit of knowledge, covering paper with ink and hesitating now and again over a word. She felt herself to be a living part of a community engaged in a common purpose. (144-145)

Ultimately, however, despite feeling part of this community, Harriet is unable to solve the problem on her own. This is not because she is unintelligent, but rather, as Sayers makes clear, because she is hampered by her own experiences and insecurities as a public and academic and professional *woman*: she was publically tried for a sexual indiscretion in *Strong Poison*, and is publically anxious about women's place at Oxford. Being a woman and being part of the community of women in an overwhelmingly male space – which produces several anxieties such as their right to be there, and be a women-centered community – gives her the emotional attachment (which Anderson states is essential in belonging to an imagined community) to the College which allows her to be willing to risk her life to defend it. Yet it is also this emotional attachment to this women's College and as a woman, scared by the consequences to the College and women everywhere from these attacks, which prevents her from fully seeing the truth. Her whole life has been exposed to the public as *woman*: as a disgruntled murderous thwarted lover (*Strong Poison*), as a woman author in a murder mystery (*Have His Carcase*), as a 'sweet girl graduate' (*Gaudy Night*); thus, she becomes afraid of what being a woman means in personal and public and academic life. She is unable to see how she fits into these embodied communities built upon

certain imaginings, brought together yet complicated by gender, and which are further complicated through the role of the newspaper in surveilling and reporting on 'all problems concerning women'.

Sayers elsewhere poignantly indicates how strange the world is for women who are exposed to public scrutiny as individuals but always in relation to 'woman' as a group. In "The Human-Not-Quite-Human", she decides:

> Probably no man has ever troubled to imagine how strange his life would appear to himself if it were unrelentingly assessed in terms of his maleness; if everything he wore, said, or did had to be justified by reference to female approval; if he were compelled to regard himself, day in and day out, not as a member of society, but merely (*salva reverential*) as a virile member of society (117).

Sayers goes on to give several examples in everyday life where the man could be assessed in terms of his 'maleness': the "newspaper would assist him with a 'Men's Corner,'" which would detail that with an "expenditure of a good deal of money and a couple hours a day" he could "capture a mate" upon which, "his name would be taken from him, and society would present him with a special title to proclaim his achievement" (118). After all this, as she tartly posits:

> If, after a few centuries of this kind of treatment, the male was a little self-conscious, a little on the defensive, and a little bewildered about what was required of him, I should not blame him. If he traded a little upon his sex, I could forgive him. If he presented the world with a major social problem, I should scarcely be surprised. It would be more surprising if he retained any rag of sanity and self-respect. (119)

The women of the College are frightened of public exposure because they have to be defensive of their place there. Harriet is continually defensive about her writing of detective fiction after being tried for murder, and defensive about her public exposure of her sexual and therefore social indiscretion (in living with Philip) and her puzzling through her relationship with Peter. Thus her protective awareness of what

this scandal could do for the imagined community of academic women as a whole, and for the embodied community at Shrewsbury College more personally, cannot allow her emotional distance from the crime.

Uneasy at the happenings at Oxford, Harriet does not know who to call for help: fear of publicity means that the police are out of the question. Given the mostly celibate community and the nature of the crimes, Harriet worries that the perpetrator is a woman whose sexual repressions have altered her mind. She examines a list of people whom she can call upon, including Miss Climpson of Peter Wimsey's 'Cattery' (discussed in Chapter 6):

> It struck her then as a fantastic idea that she should fly for help to another brood of spinsters; even if she succeeded in getting hold of Miss Climpson, how was she to explain matters to that desiccated and elderly virgin?…In this, Harriet did the lady less than justice; Miss Climpson had seen many strange things in sixty-odd years of boarding-house life, and was as free from repressions and complexes as any human being could very well be. But in fact, the atmosphere of Shrewsbury was getting on Harriet's nerves….
>
> There were plenty of people in London – both men and women – to whom the discussion of sexual abnormalities was a commonplace; but most of them were very little to be trusted…
>
> "The fact is," said Harriet to the telephone, "I don't know whether I want a doctor or a detective. But I've got to have somebody." (199)

There are many facets running through Harriet's dilemma of who to call upon for help. She wonders about calling in Peter Wimsey but initially concludes: "he was the last person. And he, at any rate, had no niche in the grey stones of Oxford. He stood for London, for the swift, rattling, chattering, excitable and devilishly upsetting world of strain and uproar" (173).

Harriet imagines the communities of Oxford and London as completely separate. Even when she goes to Oxford, she worries about bringing this aspect of London or the professional world with her. Moreover she is a professional woman who has been publically exploited for a sexual indiscretion in

living with a man, while she worries that the poltergeist justifies one of these readily minted epitaphs of 'soured virginity'. She is welcome in the woman's section of Oxford, but fears betraying its community, both as a professional and a previously sexually active woman. She is frightened of the so-called thwarted desires of both herself and her female colleagues. Later, whilst discussing the case with Peter, she exclaims:

> "But the reason why I want to – to get clear of people and feelings and go back to the intellectual side is that that is the only side of life I haven't betrayed and made a mess of."
>
> "I know that," he said, more gently. "And it's upsetting to think that it may betray you in its turn. But why should you think that? *Even if much learning makes one person mad it need not make everybody mad*. All these women are beginning to look abnormal to you because you don't know which one to suspect, but actually you don't suspect more than one."
>
> "No; but I'm beginning to feel that *almost any one of them might be capable of it*."
>
> "That, I fancy, is where your fears are distorting your judgement. If every frustrated person is heading straight for the asylum I know at least one danger to Society who ought to be shut up." (emphasis added, 225)

Peter reminds Harriet that he is frustrated in his own desires, for her. He reminds her that the group mentality of discussions about women in the press is clouding her judgements of what is happening at Shrewsbury. Annie could convince Harriet that it was one of the women in the Senior Common Room who was behind these attacks – "But I always think of what it says in the Bible, about 'much learning hath made thee mad.' It isn't a right thing" (93) – by implying that learning would make all the women at Shrewsbury 'mad'. Peter is able to separate this for Harriet: "learning…need not make *everybody* mad" (emphasis added, 225). Indeed, in this story, learning has not made anyone mad: rather it was the wrongly directed desire for and at her husband which makes Annie 'mad'. Peter, as a man, and not pressured to represent a group, is able to separate the anxieties of the women to see what was behind the attacks.

Furthermore, as a man, the implications of this for the Oxford community are far less dire than what the women of Oxford fear the press, with "whole sets of epithets, ready-minted for circulation" (60), would write about their perceived repressions, and group all women scholars together – "'Soured virginity' – 'unnatural life' – 'semi-demented spinsters' – 'starved appetites and suppressed impulses' – 'unwholesome atmosphere'" (60). Because of his own security in his place in society as a man, and of his confidence at belonging both in Oxford and in London, Peter can recognize that it is Annie's wrongly directed desire towards her husband which causes the fear at the College.[226] Peter is frightened of Annie and frightened of what will happen when he exposes her – he could lose Harriet but he knows that to expose the poltergeist is the right thing to do for the women's Oxford community. Sayers makes it clear that just because one person may or may not benefit from education, or go mad from too much learning, does not mean that all women can be brought together in this implication, yet women become grouped together to be more easily discussed.

Ironically, it is while at Oxford amongst this group of women, of whom Harriet herself is beginning to wonder if they deserve the above epitaphs, that she is able to see Peter as a man, not as the man to whom she must feel beholden: "He's an interesting man, isn't he?" "To the biologist?" Miss Edwards laughed. "I didn't mean that…To many women, I should imagine" (281). Peter's confidence in the bringing together of what Harriet had seen as two distinct communities – London and Oxford – allows Harriet to recognize her place in both of them, and thus, her place as Peter's equal: "Oddly enough, it had never yet occurred to her to wonder what other women made of Peter, or he of them. This must argue either very great confidence or very great indifference on her own part; for, when one came to think of it, eligibility was his middle name" (282).

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[226] For discussion on 'desire' in *Gaudy Night*, see Jasmine Y. Hall's article, "A Suitable Job for a Woman: Sexuality, Motherhood, and Professionalism in *Gaudy Night*".

Of the relationship between Peter and Harriet, Barbara Reynolds writes:

> The sexual current which runs through *Gaudy Night* like an electrical charge is the more powerful for not being overt and explicit. Harriet spends much of her energy resisting it, running away from Peter, from herself and from her full potential as a writer…When she sends for him it is as a detective, not a lover. Unable to solve the Shrewsbury mystery, she turns to him for help. He enters the all-female community – a sole male whose attractiveness is as potentially explosive, Harriet later realises, as dynamite in a munitions factory. (*Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul* 257).

Marty Roth claims that "[a] conventional method of detectives and spies consists of exploding stable situations" (243). Miss Edwards, a don at the college, observes about bringing Peter in that "[i]f people will bring dynamite into a powder factory, they must expect explosions" (283).

This explosive power of Peter comes from his confidence of belonging in both worlds, both communities: professional and academic, London and Oxford. As an Oxford man, he has no qualms about entering into Shrewsbury College and taking his place there among the women scholars. As noted at the beginning of the chapter, when Harriet waits for Peter to come and help her in the situation, she worries that she is betraying the Oxford community to that of London: "For good or evil, she had called in something explosive from the outside world to break up the ordered tranquillity of the place; she had sold the breach to an alien force; she had sided with London against Oxford and with the world against the cloister" (*Gaudy Night* 212). While the women's community at Oxford has been shown in the course of the investigation to be unstable – from an individual who did not agree with the imagined beliefs which was holding this community at Shrewsbury together – it at least has presented a stable front to the outside world. In her own head, she worries she is betraying both women and Oxford. As the reader, however, and through the insider knowledge from Harriet, we know that it is not a stable situation. Harriet's fears are then relieved by Peter, in his ability to belong to and bring together both communities: "But when he

entered, she knew that the image had been a false one. He came into the quiet room as though he belonged there, and had never belonged to any other place" (212).

Peter is able to explode the situation by belonging to it both physically, as a member of Balliol College, and imaginatively, as he agrees that women have the right to an education and a place at Oxford. He is a man in a woman's college but he is also an Oxford man, having received his First in History. He also reassures for the reader that this right for women at Oxford is agreed upon by both women and men alike (despite what may be published in the press). Peter's principle, which is echoed by all the members of the Senior Common Room and by Harriet herself, is to "[e]stablish the facts, no matter what comes of it" (256), even if the facts could end up breaking down all hope of personal happiness: "Incidentally, I established for a certainty…that there was not a woman in this Common Room, married or single, who would be ready to place personal loyalties above professional honour. That was a point which it seemed necessary to make clear – not so much to me, as to yourselves" (331). Thus Peter aligns himself with the women in the College and into the further imagined community of people who believe in the rights for women to be educated, not through his sex, but through their ideological beliefs in the importance of determining the truth, the importance of an individual's right to having the job they are suited for, having the right to 'learn about Aristotle' if they so wish. They are not separated by arbitrary division of gender. The women have been and are fearful that their very gender will be used against them if they opt for family loyalty, or professional loyalty: "You've got us in a cleft stick", said the Dean. If we say it [to discount professional honour for the sake of family], you can point out that womanliness unfits us for learning; and if we don't, you can point out that learning makes us unwomanly" (260). To this Peter replies: "Since I can make myself offensive either way…you have nothing to gain by not telling the truth" (260). It is at this College and at this moment that they are allowed to tell the truth not based on their womanly or unwomanliness. Peter often is given the ability throughout the novels of speaking out in defense of the equality of the sexes. As I discuss in Chapter 6, he is not the one arguing about women's

place in the public sphere. He rather defends it, perhaps as an example of what other men outside the novel could do as well.

Therefore, it is the understanding of the women in the College of the importance of protecting the academic community against these types of attacks – Sayers makes clear that these are against all women – which enables these women to come together to solve their problem while Harriet relies on the community of academic women to grapple with her own personal problem of how to solve her relationship with Peter Wimsey.[227] Sayers writes of *Gaudy Night* that it is a book "tightly constructed", for the "plot and the theme being actually one thing, namely, that the same intellectual honesty that is essential to scholarship is essential also to the conduct of life" ("Gaudy Night" 87). Peter Wimsey comes in to help Harriet with the case, not because she is not an able detective, but because she is struggling with the personal and societal implications of what this will do to the College and herself. Peter acknowledges this to Harriet: "I don't think," said Peter, "you approached the problem – forgive me for saying so – with an unprejudiced mind and undivided attention. Something got between you and the facts" (*Gaudy Night* 330). Harriet's fear of herself and of betraying the women of the College clouds her judgement. As already noted, and to rephrase the claims that Sayers makes in "The Human-not-so-human", it is no wonder after all the discussions of women's place, the woman is a "little self-conscious, a little on the defensive, and a little bewildered", is it any wonder, she notes, that she retains "any rag of sanity and self-respect" (119). Yet this very reason, which has made it so difficult for Harriet and the women of the College to discover the truth, is also the reason why the female Oxford community has been so united

[227] Mo Moulton likens Sayers's reliance on her Oxford friends and writing the collaborative play *Busman's Honeymoon* to Harriet's reliance on her academic community: "Harriet relies on her college community to provide the support and context she needs to find her way to a workable relationship with Peter. In much the same way, writing *Busman's Honeymoon* in collaboration with Muriel and Bar allowed DLS to break through the emotional barriers that had increasingly seemed to stultify her work" (200).

against publicity. Peter commends the women for their united front against the intruder, presenting themselves as an able community:

> "Will you let me say, here and now, that the one thing which frustrated the whole attack from first to last was the remarkable solidarity and public spirit displayed by your college as a body. I think that was the last obstacle that X expected to encounter in a *community of women*. Nothing but the very great loyalty of the Senior Common Room to the College and the respect of the students for the Senior Common Room stood between you and a most unpleasant publicity. It is the merest presumption in me to tell you what you already know far better than I do; but I say it, not only for my own satisfaction, but because this particular kind of loyalty forms at once the psychosocial excuse for the attack and the only possible defense against it." (emphasis added, *Gaudy Night* 326)

'X' had expected to find a divided community precisely because they were women, and what Annie deemed to be 'unwomanly' women, and she therefore attempted to break it up based on her own assumptions of what it was to be a woman scholar, unaware of strong connections – emotional and academic – which bind together the women in the academic community. The women of Shrewsbury indeed, present quite the opposite to what Annie had imagined about this community of women scholars within the plot of the novel but also gesturing more broadly to the readers of Sayers's far-reaching detective novel: "You brazen devils – you all stand together" (337). They all stood together even though "you didn't even trust each other" (337). Annie cannot understand the ideological ties which bind this community together; even when within their own social community they did not trust one another, they stood together for the sake of 'women in university everywhere'.

Moreover, and importantly for Sayers's assertion of the rights for women to belong to universities, it is not only the women of the College who present a united front, but the academic community in general:

> "[A]n effort is made to create a stink in the University by sending letters to the Vice-Chancellor. However, the University proved to be as solid as the College: having let the women in, it was not prepared to let them down. This was no doubt exasperating to the feelings of X. Dr. Threep acted as intermediary between the Vice-Chancellor and yourselves, and the matter was presumably dealt with." (330)

Sayers highlights the abilities of the women in College to deal with any sense of scandal, any type of problem and the necessity for the men to respect this. Such intellectual communities, convinced of their own rights, can create impenetrable and united fronts against those who would like to destroy them: "having let the women in, [the University] was not prepared to let them down" (330). This echoes the speech at the beginning of the book, where Harriet imagines women and men as "that whole widely heterogeneous, that even slightly absurd collection of chattering women fused in a corporate unity with one another and with every man and woman to whom integrity of mind meant more than material gain…where all enjoyed equal citizenship" (26).

The ultimate exposure of Annie Wilson as the poltergeist removes the suspicion from the members of the Senior Common Room. It is notable that the threat comes outside the community of academic women so that Sayers does not allow the situation to be attributed to education negatively affecting women, Annie rather represents those who are angry that women might be taking men's jobs. Critics sometimes find that the tension Sayers had created in Harriet's struggle to determine the perpetrator through fear of exposing the women's College to condemnation and having Annie Wilson as the culprit means that "the result is an ending that is unconvincing at best" (Bogen 269). Bogen argues that "[a]fter four hundred pages of what Lord Peter calls 'peopling the cloister with bogies", protestations at the eleventh hour that everyone is 'normal' seem hollow (Sayers [1935] 1970, 283)" (269). Yet Bogen's argument focuses on *Gaudy Night*'s relationship between detective fiction and the middlebrow Oxford novel. She goes on to conclude that "Sayers's awareness of her potential audiences, [for detective

fiction and Oxford novels]…eager for exposés of the women's college, means that, however convincing the ending might be to individual readers, it is undeniable that the bulk of the text is preoccupied one way or another with a topical, tabloid view of the women's college" (269), thus confirming Q.D. Leavis's notion of the peepshow quality of the text.

A preoccupation with this potential for the tabloid view of a women's college, however, is key to understanding Sayers's ability to present these communities and the strength of the imaginings which holds them together. The potential for being torn apart by the press, the tabloid headlines, and the 'group' discrimination against women academics allows them to more fully unite and to display their professionalism in the face of this exploitation of their community for news. The female community of Shrewsbury College and Sayers's awareness of the emotional attachments which binds these women together within the College, unites the characters in the book, and then its readers, against such attacks on women in the professional and academic space as exemplified in the novel. Presenting the potential story for a tabloid story, and then ultimately discrediting it by the way in which these women unite on the strength of their imaginings, creates a world in the novel which can be represented in the world outside, where women can enjoy "equal citizenship".

Therefore Harriet and Peter's ultimate coupling, which occurs at the end of the novel, is able to happen not only because of Harriet's final awareness of her belonging both in the professional and academic communities of London and Oxford, but also because her lived experiences have enhanced the imagined community of women as a whole, in her efforts for equality. Peter's proposal to Harriet in Latin – the language of this academic community of which Harriet is fully a part of – recognizes this.[228] The

[228] Latin, once the language of the Roman Empires, then became the language of the Church. Anderson writes about Latin that "the determinative fact about Latin – aside from its sacrality – was that it was a language of bilinguals" (38). Latin was used as a universal language which could transcend national dialects: Anderson writes that "Christendom… [was] imagined largely through the medium of a sacred language [Latin] and written script" (12-13). Aspects of the history of Europe separates Latin then between Church Latin (still used today by the Roman Catholic Church) and Ciceronian Latin, there was a "change in Latin itself" (Anderson 39). Therefore in *Gaudy*

ability of Peter and Harriet to come to their personal understanding was through their participation as scholars at Oxford. Sayers had already used Latin for a proposal at the beginning of *Gaudy Night*: "One First of April, the question had arrived from Paris in a single Latin sentence, starting off dispiritedly, 'Num…?' – a particle which notoriously expects the answer No'. Harriet, rummaging the Grammar book for 'polite negatives', replied, still more briefly, 'Benigne'" (63). After the events of *Gaudy Night*, both Harriet and Peter realize that there has been a shift in their relationship. They recognize their equality, their belonging to these communities. Peter knows that when he proposes to Harriet in Oxford, because of her re-established footing in this place, this will be the final answer. Struggling to find the right words, Peter proposes to Harriet for the last time, again in Latin, yet significantly, in a way which shows he expects her reply in the affirmative (Ellen). After having used *Gaudy Night*, set in Oxford where both Peter and Harriet are Masters of Arts, to discuss the anxieties of women in academia, Sayers then has Peter and Harriet able to understand each other perfectly, connected and without previous shackles from their history, in an equal academic setting, as "equal citizens", and using the language which distinguishes that setting from others:

> She stood still; and he stopped perforce and turned towards her. She laid both hand upon the fronts of his gown, looking into his face while she searched for the word that should carry her over the last difficult breach.
>
> It was he who found it for her. With a gesture of submission he bared his head and stood gravely, the square cap dangling in his hand.
>
> *Placetne, magistra?*

Night Harriet and Peter's use of Latin brings them together as part of a community which uses a language – it makes them bilingual - which its members can use to recognize each other. Oxford uses Ciceronian Latin as a universal language which holds its members together, regardless of what they study, and so that the graduation ceremony places them all in the same community.

Placet. (440)[229]

As Ellen writes of this use of the Latin:

> The -ne at the end of Peter's question is the sweet part, and the most significant part, and the part that just cannot be translated. Remember that odd Latin word *num* used to prefix questions when you expect a 'no' answer? *-ne* is its opposite number, a question which confidently expects the answer will be 'yes.' That tiny shift from *num* to *-ne* sums up a five-year courtship in five letters.

Re-establishing Harriet's position within the imagined communities as represented by Oxford and Shrewsbury College gives Harriet the confidence which allows Peter to propose marriage, fully expecting her to say 'yes'. She can be confident of her 'equal citizenship' in both of these communities which allows her to have the free and equal choice to belong to one or both of these communities. Harriet chooses the professional over the academic community as a detective fiction author and public figure who is now also connected to the notorious Peter Wimsey.

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[229] The Latin can be translated as 'Does it please thee, Mistress', - magistra being the feminine version of 'magister', scholar and teacher, or master and mistress. Fifteen years before Sayers wrote *Gaudy Night*, in a ceremony which Sayers was herself part of, the Oxford graduation ceremony had been pronounced in the feminine gender *domina, magistra*.
Ellen writes of the Latin: "*Gaudy Night* concludes with a suitably touching Latin proposal whose translation is what induced me to write this page. It looks so simple, those deceptively plain, impersonal verb forms:
"*Placetne, magistra?*" "Does it please [thee], Mistress?"
"*Placet.*" "It pleases."
But of course, it is not simple, and this is what simple Latin is for.
Whereas we use impersonal verb forms like "It's raining" or "it's hot" for boring things like the weather (while Germans, more correctly, say "it's hot to me,") Latin has a maddening habit of expressing opinions and even feelings with impersonal verbs like *placet*, "it pleases," a verb which is *always* impersonal in form while talking about personal feelings. Peter and Harriet, who have been carrying on an extended conversation about the reconciliation of heart and mind through this entire book, find a Latin word to do the job for them.
Magistra is "Mistress" in the sense of *Master of Arts*, respecting Harriet as a scholar and writer; it is also an honorific for "Lady," subtly emphasizing her choice and agency in the matter."

Chapter 6

'*Chercher les Femmes*': Dorothy L. Sayers's Miss Climpson and Harriet Vane

As we have seen in earlier chapters, investigating the public and private lives of Dorothy L. Sayers and Agatha Christie together, and then in conjunction with their fiction, enables new avenues for understanding how these writers established social embodied communities for readers in which women have 'equal citizenship'. In turn, determining these social communities further establishes the importance of considering the social and cultural backgrounds of these authors' lives, publicity, and fictional writing. The previous chapters discuss this cultural background, the public lives of these women authors, and examine how they established social communities in their fiction using the cultural artefacts of the newspaper and the novel.

This chapter builds upon and concludes my argument for the use of cultural artefacts in establishing social communities which are built upon certain gender ideologies.[230] It furthers my discussion of Anderson's claims regarding the novel as a cultural artefact in which, as he argues, the movement of a novel's "solitary hero" through "a sociological landscape … fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside" (30), a fusion characteristic of realism. This chapter examines Sayers's Miss Climpson and Harriet Vane, characters who also "fus[e] the world inside the novel with the world outside" yet also question this world; Sayers does this by appealing to gender, societal, and generic conventions which are familiar to readers, only to invert or subvert them in her fictional world and also to imply that such inversions and subversions are required in the social world of readers themselves. Specifically, Sayers achieves this through questioning societal categories imposed upon women, such as 'spinster' or superfluous (what is their function in community and society), professional and educated

[230] A version of this chapter appears in the Lucy Andrews and Samuel Saunders edited collection, *Study in Sidekicks: The Detective's Assistant in Crime Fiction*, pp 121-146. See Bibliography for full reference. I also reference their Introduction in this chapter (see below).

women, detective sidekicks, and other labels attributed to women in the interwar society, and showing how these women – despite these labels – can contribute to a more equal community. Both Sayers and Christie created female characters whose fluctuating roles and subversion of the genre's expectations of these roles expand the conventions of the detective fiction genre and additionally creates strong women characters whom readers can imagine in their own communities or in their own lives. Sayers's additional portrayal of the dignity and respect offered to these characters in their professional and private spheres challenges both detective fiction genre characters' conventions as well as the prevailing social constructions and perceptions of women in her society. In this, she offers an idea of a social community with the necessity of various roles for "individual actions" (as Colón states) in making up this community which in turn presents a way of seeing all members enjoy (as Harriet hopes for) "equal citizenship" (*Gaudy Night* 26). This is so that each individual, to paraphrase Colón, can work at "diligently perform[ing] their parts, trusting that these parts will ultimately combine well with the others so that the ritual [of community] will be 'faultlessly performed'" (2).

As argued in Chapter 5, however, this role is complicated when the character in the detective fiction novel is a woman. This chapter thus turns to women character genre conventions to examine the ways in which the progression of Sayers's presentation of female characters in her fiction both references conventions and then subverts them. Using detective fiction genre character tropes while at the same time expanding them, Sayers both re-evaluates the role of individual action for women and how they can have equal citizenship as part of a community as well as challenging and expanding the detective genre expectations. She does this in her portrayal of her 'spinster' detective Miss Climpson – who is Sayers's mouthpiece on the plight of society's so called useless or 'superfluous' women – and then Harriet Vane. While this chapter focuses on Sayers's characters, in relevant places it includes reference to Agatha Christie's contribution to a similar subversion of female character expectations through characters such as Tuppence Beresford (in her relationship with Tommy) and Miss Marple. In expanding conventions of the

detective fiction genre, these authors established communities in the novels through these characters and thus envisioned for readers a new way of interacting with the anxieties (especially concerning women) of the interwar years. This chapter also looks back to detective fiction genre conventions in the position of characters alongside the main, often male, detectives of the interwar years to examine how the male detective can be a detective for community, and how the subversion or expansion of genre roles of these female characters expands the detective fiction genre and creates a community comprised of individuals who can enact change in their own community.

After the mystery of the poltergeist is solved in *Gaudy Night* and Sayers works out her arguments for establishing a female community in academia, as argued in Chapter 5, Harriet and Peter also are able to resolve their personal relationship. This created a "book very tightly constructed", as Sayers stated, with "the plot and the theme being actually one thing, namely, that the same intellectual honesty that is essential to scholarship is essential also to the conduct of life" ("Gaudy Night" 87). Yet despite these distinct feminist representations, Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey novels, written between the two World Wars, are often seen as conservative by various, notably feminist, critics who lament the ultimate coupling of Wimsey and Sayers's supposedly-feminist heroine, Harriet Vane (as discussed in the Introduction). Jasmine Y. Hall, at the end of her excellent article on Sayers's *Gaudy Night* and after analysing the many boundaries Sayers breaks within her fiction, finally can only conclude: "The professional woman is still securely placed in the realm of the heart – approaching that ideal 'ravishing' only through her admiration of the professional man's skill. To be a meek accompanist, it seems, is a suitable job for a woman" (176).[231]

[231] I think Jasmine Hall misses in part the ideology which Sayers would have had and which is apparent in her writing – arguing not for characters, or men and women, to be the same, but rather different but equal. So Harriet is not a meek accompanist, but rather a professional woman, a writer, who does not need to be a detective, because she is – masterfully – who she is as a woman and writer.

Part of the difficulty which critics had in recognizing the ways in which Harriet can exemplify a feminist perspective comes from trying to fit Harriet as *detective* into the detective fiction genre. This is because Sayers herself admitted in her Introduction to *The Omnibus of Crime* in 1929 that "[t]ere have also been a few women detectives,[232] but on the whole, they have not been very successful" (15). After explaining the social stumbling blocks which inhibit these fictional women detectives from achieving success, she concludes that "the really brilliant woman detective has yet to be created" ("Introduction" 16). A year after this Introduction, Sayers created the character of Harriet Vane, in *Strong Poison* (1930), a character who directly contradicted the rescue marriage plot, refusing to socially 'perform' in the conventional manner and marry her hero at the end of *Strong Poison*. This is seemingly in direct contrast to the women in detective fiction for whom "marriage…looms too large in their view of life...[as] they are all young and beautiful" ("Introduction" to *Omnibus*, 15); Harriet is described as "perhaps not strictly good-looking, and all the more interesting because of that" (*Strong Poison* 45). Yet because Harriet does ultimately marry Peter in *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937), Kathleen Gregory Klein, after directly repeating Sayers's quotation above, sadly concludes that "society [still] hands [these heroines] their proper scripts. Women's professional lives are stopgaps until or in place of marriage… Sayers's Lord Peter Whimsy saves and then wins Harriet Vane by his detecting ability" (*The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre* 120). Many of these critics argue that Harriet's feminism is flawed because, they claim, she is ultimately a flawed detective: Harriet never becomes the fully independent female sleuth but rather leaves the final solving of the mysteries to Lord Peter Wimsey. As Carla Kungl summarizes her question for beginning *Creating the Fictional Female Detective*:

[232] In a footnote Sayers references these woman detectives: "e.g. Anna Katherine Green: *The Golden Slipper*; Baroness Orczy: *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard*; G.R. Sims: Dorcas Dene; Valentine: *The Adjusters*; Richard Marsh: *Judith Lee*; Arthur B. Reeves: *Constance Dunlop*; etc." ("Introduction" 15)

> Harriet Vane was unlike any other female detective character I had encountered – interesting, intelligent, and well developed – and the obvious similarities between her and Sayers were intriguing. Yet she seemed curiously inept. Why was she never the 'true' detective, responsible for solving crimes, but always in the position of helping Lord Peter Wimsey? Why create such an unconventional role model (introduced in 1929 [*sic*] as she is on trial for the murder of her ex-lover) and then place her firmly in the traditional plot of the female romance novel: social complicity, then social aberration, then salvation through marriage, subjugation, and 'happily ever after'? What happened to Harriet Vane? (5)

As Kungl suggests, critics have been confused by the apparent 'about face' which the character of Harriet Vane takes in the four books she occupies. Yet what happened was not that Harriet Vane abruptly changed her principles and feminist characteristics, but rather that critics, including Kungl, changed their understanding of what Sayers was accomplishing in her character. She was not writing the "really brilliant woman detective". Instead, Sayers repeatedly works the conversation of equality between men and women into her writing, particularly asking for women to have the right to work and 'have occupation' without worrying about their marital state (Sayers, "Are Women Human?" 110). It takes her several novels to fully discuss the 'woman' question, to which she finally offers a conclusion in *Gaudy Night* (1935) and *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937). Laurel Young states that Sayers "incorporate[s] into her fiction her interest in the debate over the changing place of women in society" (39), and that *Gaudy Night* is the "text in which a female protagonist's negotiation of gender is of equal importance and often bound up with the mystery" (42). More specifically, Diana Wallace argues that the novels that focus on the "six-year courtship" between Lord Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane "can be read as a meditation on marriage and its possibilities for the educated woman, and as a plea for women to be able to continue the work they do best after marriage" (68). Harriet Vane is naturally one of the key characters whom Sayers uses to discuss women's place in society and she is found in four of the Wimsey novels: *Strong Poison* (1930),

Have His Carcase (1932), *Gaudy Night* (1935), and *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937), as well as appearing in a collection of three short stories which present Harriet and Peter as happily married and parents to three young boys.[233]

This chapter argues, however, that Sayers does not begin her discussion surrounding women's rights or place in society with Harriet. Instead she starts through her 'spinster' character, Miss Alexandra Katherine Climpson, in *Unnatural Death* (1927), who, in her professional position, blurs the boundaries between the role of detective and detective sidekick. This is an important nuance, for the sidekick, as Lucy Andrew and Samuel Saunders note, is a "crucial" character in the detective fiction genre, further arguing that the sidekick has "far greater significance, responsibility and narrative complicity within the genre than has hitherto been recognised" ("Introduction: Step Forward, Sidekicks" 2). Andrew and Saunders, in their edited collection *The Detective's Companion in Crime Fiction: A Study in Sidekicks*, "aim to redress the prevailing attitude that the sidekick is simply the detective's biographer, assistant and 'stupid friend', by demonstrating how the sidekick is a necessary, often enriching and, crucially, universal presence in the genre" (2-3). Miss Climpson thus presents a new way to challenge declarations of a flawed feminism in Sayers's texts through Miss Climpson's refusal to conform to detective genre character conventions: the sidekick as the 'stupid friend' or assistant. In Sayers's portrayals of Miss Climpson and Harriet, she challenges genre expectations and additionally creates a male detective, Peter Wimsey, who, as Colón argues, establishes himself as a detective for community (discussed below). We see a community of individuals who take action, destabilising genre conventions of the world inside the novel. Through this, they change expectations of the world outside the novel, especially for women, and notably, women who society has deemed 'superfluous'.

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[233] *Striding Folly* compiles the last known three Peter and Harriet short stories. A note at the beginning of the book states that "Two of the three final Lord Peter Wimsey stories, *Striding Folly* and *The Haunted Policeman* were previously published in *Detection Medley*, edited by John Rhode (Hutchinson & Co. Ltd.), in 1939. *Talboys*, written in 1942, has not been published before". The three stories were published together under *Striding Folly* in 1972.

Another aspect of the difficulty in determining the feminism in Sayers is that there is one main female character for critics to focus on, Harriet Vane (despite the many other side characters, such as Miss Climpson). While this chapter focuses on the characters of Miss Climpson and Harriet Vane, it is helpful to consider them in relation to the many female characters of Agatha Christie. This shows the ways in which women detective fiction authors further expanded the genre conventions for their readers. Christie offers a myriad of female characters and their varied careers and experiences show that Christie does not relegate women to these roles of 'meek accompanist' as Merja Makinen contends in *Agatha Christie* (12-14; 66-68).[234] This is especially clear through Christie's portrayal of her first romantic detective duo, Tommy and Tuppence Beresford in *The Secret Adversary* (1922), where Christie marries the genres of detective fiction and romance to the benefit of both. Susan Rowland asserts that "Christie is notable for allowing a young woman to be the dominant detective partner in *The Sittaford Mystery* (1931), and in her married sleuths, Tommy and Tuppence Beresford, the woman repeatedly refuses to be sidelined" ("The Classical Model of the Golden Age" 122). Many of Christie's other female characters of the twenties and thirties would go on to be "constructed as equal partners rather than a feminine secondary role" (Makinen, *Agatha Christie* 78).[235] Indeed, Makinen argues that critics can too often miss Christie's "innovations from 1920 onwards in relation to detective genre or the challenges to femininities" when they "concentrate on Christie as a puzzle-plot writer, or only on Poirot and Miss Marple as

[234] Merja Makinen's introduction to *Agatha Christie* is an excellent resource for going through the Christie scholarship in its relation to gender. Makinen notes that in the 90s and beyond these anti-feminist assumptions start to be questioned, albeit "always in dialogue with her conservatism" (15). She goes on to state that "Feminist readings were so large a part of the decade's literary analysis that they necessarily became a significant part of Christie scholarship and the nineties feminist pieces tend to question the earlier dismissals of Kaplan and Craig and Cadogan" (15).

[235] Makinen writes: "Thrillers such as *The Man in the Brown Suit* (1924), *The Seven Dials Mystery* (1929), *They Came to Baghdad* (1951) and *Destination Unknown* (1954) sport lone [female] protagonists, whereas detective stories such as *The Sittaford Mystery* (1931), *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* (1934), *Murder is Easy* (1939) and *The Pale Horse* (1961) contain the feminine half of a duo that redefines the concept of the female sidekick, since they exhibit the brains and the courage" (*Agatha Christie* 67).

detectives" (66).[236] Although Makinen acknowledges the "gendered focus of [Sayers's] Vane trilogy, and *Gaudy Nights* [*sic*] in particular", she declares that "the claim for shifting Golden Age genre traits and for innovation needs to be given not to Sayers, but to Christie, writing some ten years earlier" (66). Makinen successfully demonstrates her point for the many modern-girl characters throughout the Christie oeuvre which display this refusal, indeed, are expected to be the "feminine half of a duo that redefines the concept of the female sidekick, since they exhibit the brains and the courage" (*Agatha Christie* 67). Thus this chapter acknowledges Christie's innovation while focusing on Sayers and her female sidekicks and their appearances throughout her novels, examining characters being and becoming detectives for community.

In her presentation of Harriet Vane and Peter Wimsey, Sayers works through an ideological discussion dispelling any doubts as to why she does not regulate or believe in women being 'meek accomplices' but instead that women had a role and right in the sphere they wished to inhabit. As shown in Chapter 5, Sayers firmly believed in each person being treated as an individual, not as a 'class' which could be used as a way of, as Fowler stated, 'handling discrimination' (93), a way of discussing women often used by the press. Thus through her portrayal of a number of strong female characters, she consistently presents examples of women's roles, benefits, and rights in British interwar society into her writing, denouncing the labels used to categorize women, such as: 'spinster', superfluous, fallen woman, woman scholar, etc., who also take on the role of detective sidekick. Sayers asks the reader to question her female characters' positions and accomplishments; even though her main detective is a man, this does not then entail that her female characters, whilst acting as detective, or working with Peter, are necessarily the meek accomplice or less-than Peter.

[236] With novels such as *The Sittaford Mystery* (1931), *Why Didn't They Ask Evans* (1934), *Murder is Easy* (1939), and then *The Pale Horse* (1961)

In the terms of the detective fiction genre, Sayers does not limit her characters to occupying conventional generic character types, especially for her women characters. Sayers rather presents these characters as more than female sidekick or detective; indeed, they cannot be simply categorized as either. Instead, these female characters move beyond such specific generic labels, and inhabit many facets of the roles of detective and sidekick simultaneously, as I will show with Miss Climpson. Sayers thus asks the reader to broadly question how female characters, who sometimes become female detectives, detect, how their work is respected, and how others in the novels perceive and treat them. Instead of "reaffirm[ing] the old rules for women's behaviour" and controlling "the reading public's perceptions of women" (Klein 121),[237] she offers new ways for her readers to reimagine their perceptions of women in society while at the same time expanding detective genre character conventions. Sayers ultimately marries the discussion of the roles of 'sidekick' and 'detective' with that of women's place in society, providing space for the genre conventions of the sidekick and detective positions to vary and develop alongside the places where women could enter workplace and professional spaces. Furthermore, through the romance plot of Harriet and Peter, Sayers further subverts romance expectations in delaying their marriage until their final novel together (discussed below).[238] In doing so, Sayers is a woman who uses her writing to do what Kathleen

[237] Klein's conclusion comes at the end of her chapter in *The Woman Detective*, "British and American Sleuths between the Wars. She notes that while the male detective of the interwar period is rarely forced to choose between marriage and his detective career, women protagonists are "rarely allowed to decide for themselves" (120). She goes on to state that "The gold age of detective fiction which codified so much of the genre's structures reaffirmed the old rules of women's behaviour and kept its priorities firmly in place. Authors were willing to sacrifice the genre's usual form to the exigencies of controlling the reading public's perceptions of women. Even ordinarily imperceptive readers could not have failed to recognize how few golden opportunities women detectives – and similar, independent, professional women – really had" (120-121).

[238] Of the love interest Sayers wrote that "One fettering convention, from which detective fiction is only very slowly freeing itself, is that of the 'love interest'. Publishers and editors still labour under the delusion that all stories must have a nice young man and woman who have to be united in the last chapter. As a result, some of the finest detective-stories are marred by a conventional love-story, irrelevant to the action and perfunctorily worked in" (Introduction to *The Omnibus of Crime* 38). Harriet is shown to struggle with trying to write love scenes in her detective fiction.

Gregory Klein suggests popular fiction authors do, "work through existing systems to effect change and to expand women's opportunities" (*The Woman Detective* 200).

6.1 Alexandra Katherine Climpson[239]

By the time Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey in *Whose Body?* appeared in 1923, several tropes of the detective genre had been introduced and had already solidified. Dr John Watson, the famous companion to Sherlock Holmes, substantially helped to construct the extant narrative dichotomy between detective and sidekick that authors of detective fiction have emulated ever since the first Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887). In Sayers's novels a continuation of this tradition can seemingly be identified; Wimsey is portrayed as the detective while his manservant, Mervyn Bunter, ostensibly represents the sidekick who performs tasks often ascribed to the role, including "observ[ing], serving as helpers and, more importantly, bear[ing] witness to the detective's brilliance" (Bredesen xi). Bunter certainly assists Wimsey in his cases by collecting evidence with a camera and by generally taking care of Wimsey, especially as Bunter understands Wimsey's occasional lapses into shock from his wartime trauma. Bunter also rescues Wimsey on occasion (as in *Clouds of Witness* (1926)). However, Bunter's sidekick role is not quite 'stock and trade'. He never narrates the story – in fact, Sayers never utilizes a completely standard sidekick/narrator character in her stories, despite P.G. Wodehouse's declaration that "[a] Watson of some sort to tell the story is unavoidable" (xv-xvi).[240] It is as a manservant that Bunter can in some respects be Wimsey's 'Holmesian' sidekick, but he is also a servant and thus can often be removed: in some novels he is mostly unseen or in the background of the stories. Sayers acknowledges the Holmesian sidekick

[239] Miss Climpson is introduced as Miss Alexandra Kath*e*rine Climpson in *Unnatural Death* (31). In *Strong Poison*, however, her name is written as Miss Kath*a*rine Climpson (67).

[240] In Sayers's Introduction to *The Omnibus of Crime*, she notes that "Some writers, like Mrs. Agatha Christie, still cling to the Watson formula" (33). To this statement, however, she adds a footnote which states that "An exceptional handing of the Watson theme is found in Agatha Christie's *Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, which is a *tour de force*" (33), going on to add more commentary defending Christie against the critics who thoughts she was not playing fair with her readers (33).

arrangement within the relationship of Wimsey and Bunter, but their relationship is sufficiently quixotic to discredit a simple comparison. Bunter even has his own detecting strategies and uses, being Wimsey's camera man and using his own social status to detect for Wimsey, such as in both *Whose Body?* and *Strong Poison* when he interviews and ingratiates himself with the household of the domestic staff to find key evidence. Thus in Sayers's refusal to use Bunter as the 'Watson' of the stories, she is able to develop other kinds of sidekick-relationships for Wimsey at the same time. She has various characters who participate in a sidekick role when needed, asked, or placed there, yet who do not permanently or always stay as sidekicks. In having these fluctuating character roles, she recreates and plays with the idea of the function of the sidekick.

Additionally, as Sayers uses the detective genre to discuss women's roles in society, to "work out her own humanistic scheme for equality among the sexes within her novels" (Trembley 86), it is fitting that she does so through offering complex representations of specifically female characters that exist in relation to her established detective. Thus, the female sidekick/detective is where she actually focuses the bulk of her attention, and she uses these figures to consistently question standard generic labels of detective (or independent investigator) and sidekick. Miss Climpson is introduced as an older working woman operating as a subordinate to Wimsey, and in this she consistently blurs the line between 'detective' and 'sidekick' in various ways: in her role as lead investigator of Wimsey's 'Cattery' and as female sidekick to Wimsey for his private cases. Her professional status also highlights how Miss Climpson is created to explore the position of working women in society, and Sayers thus uses Climpson's character to extensively discuss the right of women to place, space and to work a job at which they are effective, and importantly, a job that they want and enjoy.[241]

[241] See 'Are Women Human' and 'The Human-Not-Quite-Human' for further evidence of Sayers's views on the relationship between women and men and women's place in the workplace.

6.1.1 The Spinster Detective

Miss Climpson is notably a 'spinster', a specific label attributed towards women who were seen to be past social 'usefulness' notably in that they were not married (discussed below).[242] This acknowledged 'status' throughout the books is one which points to various important interpretations of her character's position in establishing a feminist commentary. As 'spinster', she was part of the group of 'superfluous women' who were regarded with varying degrees of pity and contempt in the interwar period (discussed below) and who were perceived to be outside the conventions of social expectations for women to marry and bear children, and thus were not seen as contributing to society. She also participates in a strong detective fiction genre trope, the spinster female detective. Thus her very inclusion is Sayers's way of acknowledging genre conventions as well as the cultural and social world she portrays in the novels. Importantly, Sayers subverts both of these in the character of Miss Climpson.

As a 'spinster' detective, an older single woman, Miss Climpson is immediately not in danger of being included in the stories simply as a love-interest for Wimsey. Instead, she is a woman with a strong working relationship with him, and by casting her in this light, Sayers highlights both the effectiveness and the necessity of including female detecting skills in the detective fiction canon.[243] Miss Climpson continues a much longer tradition of spinster-detectives, particularly exemplified by Andrew Forrester Jr's Miss Gladden (1864) and later solidified in Agatha Christie's Miss Jane Marple, who first appeared

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[242] This label or category was part of an ongoing discussion surrounding single women, and was not specific to the interwar years. The Victorian era questioned 'redundant' women while in the interwar years they were often labeled as 'superfluous'. See Virginia Nicholson's *Singled Out* (2007). My thanks to Kate Lawson for affirming the history of this conversation which was also prevalent in the Victorian era: see Michael Anderson, "The Social Position of Spinsters in Mid-Victorian Britain" (1984); W.R. Greg "Why are Women Redundant" in the *National Review* (April 1862) and Frances Power Cobbe, "What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?" in *Fraser's Magazine* (Nov 1862).

[243] Kungl writes that "Women detective fiction writers' emphasis on traditional 'womanly' qualities provided one way of making the idea of professional women more acceptable. The one great fear of British society, especially after the War, was that women would take away jobs that belonged to men. Making detectives deliberately feminine and allowing them success in situations for which they, as opposed to men, were specially fitted, such as crime in the domestic sphere, helped to mitigate this fear. Women writers who created female detectives were not necessarily (or always) arguing that they could replace male detectives, but they did offer scenarios for how women could succeed in a 'man's world'" (13).

in short stories and then was formally introduced in the novel *Murder at the Vicarage* in 1930.[244] In *Sherlock's Sisters: The British Female Detective, 1864-1913*, Joseph Kestner traces the origins of the female detective back to the 1800s specifically focusing on detective stories with female protagonists such as W.S. Hayward's *Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864) featuring Mrs. Paschal and Andrew Forrester Jr's *The Female Detective* (1864) with Miss Gladden. In *The Female Detective*, Miss Gladden herself correctly states that "the woman detective has far greater opportunities than a man of intimate watching, and of keeping her eyes upon the matters near which a man could not conveniently play the eavesdropper" (2). And Sayers seemingly expounds upon this idea, humorously observing in *Strong Poison*: "The male detective…is favourably placed for 'shadowing.' He can loaf without attracting attention. The female detective must not loaf. On the other hand, she can stare into shop-windows for ever" (226). Miss Climpson detects by utilizing key tropes of the elderly woman spinster-sleuth, such as not being taken seriously as a threat, participating in local gossip and hearsay, and simply being able to go where a man cannot without being observed. Her detecting skills are what are important to the story; she is not a potential love interest for the main male detective and thus does not present either a sexual distraction or an emotional hindrance to him in solving his cases. A number of critics including Kathleen Gregory Klein (*The Woman Detective* 67-68, 141-143) discuss the benefits of the spinster detective, one of which is her lack of sexual attraction, while Birgitta Berglund specifically declares that spinster detectives are the best solution to the difficulty of a successful female detective who will not be conflicted by sexual emotional feelings, nor by the social expectations of settling down, marrying, and raising a family (144). Moreover, by having Miss Climpson as a professionally paid and unsexual 'spinster' female detective/sidekick, Lord Peter does not violate, complicate, or infringe upon his professional relationship with her. As Berglund explains, the spinster detective does not "need any excuses for her involvement in

[244] Although she first appeared, according to Sanders and Lovallo, in short stories in *The Sketch* in 1928 (52)

criminal cases, and can occur in one book after another without requiring any greater suspension of disbelief than is usual for the average male amateur sleuth" (144). Christie moreover solves this problem with her other key female detective by making Tuppence and Tommy wife and husband and, importantly, equal *Partners in Crime*.

This tradition of the spinster-detective is one which Sayers specifically makes use of, both to instigate discussion on social change and status of women, but also to play with the detective fiction genre's labels of what it means to be a detective and/or sidekick. Chapter 3 of *Unnatural Death*, is entitled "A Use for Spinsters" (which right away implies that the category 'spinster' is applied to those seen as 'useless'), and opens the chapter with an epigraph taken from Gilbert Frankau (a famous interwar middlebrow author), who states: "There are two million more females than males in England and Wales: And this is an awe-inspiring circumstance" (Sayers 23). This chapter is immediately designed to raise questions for the reader concerning, as Wimsey himself later remarks, supposedly 'superfluous women' who do not end up married. Sayers having this chapter title, "A Use for Spinsters", is itself significant, as the label of 'spinster' had a number of unfortunate contemporary connotations: she is immediately signalling she is challenging these connotations.

Jane Lewis begins her book, *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (1984), by stating: "For all women marriage conferred a higher status than spinsterhood, which connoted failure" (3). Though Lewis argues that this was more particularly the case prior to World War I, even afterwards marriage was viewed as the more "successful" option for women, and the alternative was usually a life of poverty and loneliness unless the woman had an independent income since the wages for women workers were below "subsistence level" (Lewis 3). Indeed, in Agatha Christie's *The Secret Adversary* (1922), when Tommy and Tuppence are discussing trying to make a living, Tuppence "bursts out":

> "Money, money, money! I think about money morning, noon, and night! I dare say it's mercenary of me, but there it is!"
>
> "I've thought of every imaginable way of getting it too," continued Tuppence. "There are only three! To be left it, to marry it, or to make it. First is ruled out, I haven't got any rich elderly relatives. Any relatives I have are in homes for decayed gentlewomen! …
>
> "Of course," resumed Tuppence, "*marriage is my best chance*. I made up my mind to marry money when I was quite young. Any thinking girl would! I'm not sentimental, you know". (emphasis added, 197)

As already discussed in Chapter 3, Tommy and Tuppence eventually decide to become joint adventurers which ends in their marriage where they run a joint detective agency in *Partners in Crime*. Tuppence did not marry into money but marries a partner with whom she could work: they make a living together both being equally supportive to one another as Christie makes clear in the stories. Tuppence's other female relatives are in homes for 'decayed gentlewomen!'. And this was the life which many 'spinster' women would have to look forward to as they grew older. Maroula Joannou gives context to the derogatory connotations of the term 'spinster' when she states that approximately one-third of women between the two World Wars who had not married by age 29 did not marry in their 'reproductive years'. She goes on to posit:

> The meaning of spinsterhood became a site of contestation between those who wished to objectify the spinster and others who saw her as a person with needs, desires, and potential of her own… the terms 'superfluous woman' and 'spinster' became interchangeable and 'spinster' [began] to be widely used as a pejorative term (*"Ladies, Please Don't Smash These Windows"* 77-78).

These women were additionally discussed in the press. Yet as Adrian Bingham, in *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, writes:

> A self-declared 'one of the million' 'surplus' women argued that the restricted opportunities to marry should not be a matter for regret: "We have a glorious freedom of our own". Meanwhile a female doctor criticized the terms in which the question was discussed: "I also greatly regret that the word 'surplus' should be applied to them, however many there may be. No woman is 'surplus' just because there is not a husband for her, marriage is not the only thing in life open to a woman". (54)

Later, in *Gaudy Night*, Sayers is perhaps much more overt about society's insistence of emphasizing the 'usefulness' to 'uselessness' of married and unmarried women, having Miss Hillyard – the history don – passionately declare: "The fact is…that everybody in this place has an inferiority complex about married women and children" (175). Though the women in Shrewsbury College know they are doing important work, Miss Hillyard bluntly states the uneasy relationship these women have with university life and accuses her peers that "[f]or all your talk about careers and independence, you all believe in your hearts that we ought to abase ourselves before any woman who has fulfilled her animal functions" (175). Of course these women do not 'abase' themselves, and *Gaudy Night* is part of Sayers's discussion of how women after marriage can and should still have the opportunity for a fulfilled professional life, but Miss Hillyard's rant does reveal the anxieties of the period. She goes on to point out that (seemingly) even the women of Shrewsbury believe married women lead a "more useful" life:

> "Look at the fuss that's made over Shrewsbury grandchildren'! Look how delighted you are when old students get married! As if you were saying, 'Aha! education doesn't unfit us for *real* life after all!' And when a really brilliant scholar throws away all her prospects to marry a curate, you say perfunctorily, 'What a pity! But of course her own life must come first'." (emphasis added, 175).

Eight years before Miss Hillyard's outburst, Sayers's chapter title and epigraph in *Unnatural Death* references the reader's perception of 'spinsters' which Sayers then overturns in her introduction of Miss

Climpson. Sayers interacts with the conversations happening outside the world of the novels to specifically present a new landscape which, though it fuses the world of the novel to that of outside, can also offer changes.

As already shown in other chapters, Wimsey and Harriet, as well as Sayers herself, were keenly aware of conversations in the press; as explored in Chapter 5, Wimsey asserts that there should not even be a question concerning women in education. Thus he is also shown as mindful of these connotations surrounding the 'spinster': in offering Miss Climpson detecting jobs he demonstrates his awareness of how a spinster-detective has certain advantages despite her perceived outcast position in society. Indeed, Miss Climpson's detective work is enhanced by her spinster status. She is cognizant of the social expectations and opinions of the spinster and, much in the same way as Andrew Forrester Jr's and W.S. Haywards's female detectives Gladden and Paschal (as noted above), Miss Climpson actively uses this to her advantage:

> At length a really brilliant notion occurred to her. She was (she did not attempt to hide it from herself) precisely the type and build of person one associates with the collection of subscriptions…What more natural than that she should try a little house-to-house visiting in a wealthy quarter? (*Unnatural Death* 173).

Her unobtrusive presence also allows others to speak openly around her, something they likely would not do in the presence of either Lord Peter or the police, which is precisely why Wimsey offers her investigating work. As Wimsey explains to Detective Inspector Parker:

> Just think. People want questions asked. Whom do they send? … I send a lady with a long, woolly jumper on knitting-needles and jingly things round her neck. Of course she asks questions--everyone expects it. Nobody is surprised. Nobody is alarmed. (*Unnatural Death* 30)

Miss Climpson is all too aware of social stereotypes and expectations and effectively uses this gender bias to her advantage. She is able to blend in with her surroundings of tea and social chatter and thus pick up on pieces of information that are pertinent to her investigation.

Thus the spinster detective is an effective detective, and also important for making the social commentary which Sayers integrates into her fiction as to the need for expanded roles for women in professions. When Lord Peter describes his new enterprise, initially providing Miss Climpson with detecting work and setting up the 'Cattery' detecting agency staffed entirely by women, he is conscious of the social discrimination faced by these so-called 'superfluous' spinster figures. He comments several times at the unjustness of a society that merely "makes fun of them" instead of trying to offer them dignity and respect (*Unnatural Death* 26), and sees through the stereotypes to openly recognise the merits of women who are, in fact, well-suited to detection:

> "Miss Climpson", said Lord Peter, "is a manifestation of the wasteful way in which this country is run…Thousands of old maids, simply bursting with useful energy, *forced by our stupid social system* into hydros and hotels and communities and hostels and posts as companions, where their magnificent gossip-powers and units of inquisitiveness are allowed to dissipate themselves or *even become harmful to the community*, while the ratepayers' money is spent on getting work for which these women are providentially fitted, inefficiently carried out by ill-equipped policemen like you…And then bright young men write nasty little patronising books called 'Elderly Women,' and 'On the Edge of the Explosion' –and drunkards make songs upon 'em, poor things".
>
> "Quite, quite," said Parker. "You mean that Miss Climpson is a kind of inquiry agent for you".
>
> "She is my ears and tongue," said Lord Peter, dramatically, "and especially my nose. She asks questions which a young man could not put without a blush. She is the angel that rushes in where

> fools get a clump on the head. She can smell a rat in the dark. In fact, she is the cat's whiskers" (emphasis added, *Unnatural Death* 30).

Laurel Young references Catherine Kenney, who states that Lord Peter creating this agency is "not just an act of charity toward [the women] but a service to society". Young continues that "[t]heir energy and intelligence suit them well for private inquiry work" (43).

This inquiry work is directed by Miss Climpson as the leader of an organisation started by Wimsey and eventually referred to as his 'Cattery'. More fully described in *Strong Poison*, the Cattery gives work to all sorts of women known by society as 'superfluous' – for example those married and deserted, those widowed, or spinsters (*Strong Poison* 67). Although again Sayers writes within the framework of the spinster sleuth (and indeed, conventional gender ideology), she also challenges this, as Miss Climpson is given much more authority than other notable spinster sleuths in the detective fiction genre through her professional relationship with Wimsey. Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, perhaps the most famous of these female spinster sleuths, at first has no clear authority or recognition of her abilities; indeed, in *Murder at the Vicarage* when she is introduced, Marple's detecting abilities only give her the epithet as the "worst cat in the village" who "always knows every single thing that happens – and draws the worst inferences from it" (178). Miss Marple is thus not given the same authority as Miss Climpson, and she does not work directly under the protection of a recognized male detective (though she was shown to be respected in other stories, for example by the retired Sir Henry Clithering in *The Thirteen Problems* (1932)). Contrastingly, when introduced in *Unnatural Death*, it is clear that Miss Climpson has been investigating other cases for Wimsey which she leaves aside to participate in the case presented in the novel while in *Strong Poison* the reader learns that "Miss Climpson's office boasted a private telephone-line to Scotland Yard" (68). She runs an office of women employed in detective work, on the lookout for men who tried to take advantage of women in compromised situations.

6.1.2 Detective or Sidekick?

Miss Climpson's presentation thus far, however, rather than being presented as an effective sidekick to Lord Peter Wimsey, instead has her as an effective spinster detective, participating in the spinster-sleuth tradition. This presentation allows Sayers to work within her plots and through her characters social critique of the plights of these women. Yet what separates Miss Climpson from other spinster detectives is her professional fluctuation between being detective and sidekick while employed by Lord Peter. She is specifically and privately hired (and thus paid) by Lord Peter Wimsey to both be a sidekick and assist him in his cases which he is investigating and additionally to run his 'Cattery' as an independent investigator/detective. It is the distinction of these two separate roles, both of which she is uniquely suited for, where Sayers shows the importance of including Miss Climpson, a spinster, into the professional sphere. This oscillation between what can be seen as an independent detective and sidekick also sets her apart from other spinster sleuths. While Miss Gladden emphasizes that it does not matter to her status as a detective "whether I work willingly or unwilling, for myself or for others" (Forrester 1), Miss Climpson is portrayed throughout the series as working for Wimsey. With his own personal cases, Wimsey makes it clear that he is not a client asking Miss Climpson for help (such as often with Misses Gladden and Marple), but rather he specifically sends her on "inquiries" (Sayers, *Unnatural Death* 28) for the cases that he is investigating. For this, as Wimsey declares to Detective Inspector Parker, is "where [Miss Climpson's] remarkable tact and shrewdness are going to be so *helpful to us*" (emphasis added, Sayers, *Unnatural Death* 28). Indeed, Inspector Parker quickly realizes this:

> Pulling his wits into order, Mr. Parker accordingly obliged with a digest of the doctor's story. Miss Climpson listened with great attention, making notes of the dates and details. Parker observed that she showed great acumen in seizing on the salient points; she asked a number of very shrewd questions, and her grey eyes were intelligent. When he had finished, she repeated the

> story, and he was able to congratulate her on a clear head and retentive memory. (*Unnatural Death* 28)

In a humourous twist, and playing upon other genre conventions such as those in the romance genre, when Lord Peter Wimsey brings his friend Detective Inspector Parker to meet Miss Climpson, the reader could, like Parker, assume that Wimsey is referring to a mistress that he has installed in an apartment for his and her convenience:

> "– rather an experiment," Wimsey was saying a trifle shyly; … "the arrangement's only been going a few months…but it really seems to be working out quite satisfactorily. Of course, it makes things much easier for me." (*Unnatural Death* 25)

To Parker's (and perhaps the reader's) great surprise, a woman is introduced who bears no resemblance to a fashionable mistress. Indeed, Miss Climpson moves rapidly in this section from being thought of as a fashionable mistress, to demonstrating her abilities as a detective, to being called upon as Wimsey's sidekick. The fashionable mistress suggestion offers a hint of levity to the story while at the same time inviting readers to rethink their own assumptions about Wimsey's 'experiment'; the importance of Miss Climpson's detective investigator and sidekick role to society is given prominence when she is first introduced, contrasted to the implied opening which suggested that she occupies the (traditional and useful?) role of mistress.

Miss Climpson immediately starts going into her cases which she has been investigating and explains to Wimsey:

> "I have gone *very* carefully into all these cases", she began, taking up a thick wad of type-script. … Dear me! such *sad* stories some of these poor women had to tell me! But I have <u>investigated most fully</u> … and I feel sure that in the majority of these cases your assistance will be *well bestowed*. If you would like to go through—"

> "Not at the moment, Miss Climpson," interrupted Lord Peter, hurriedly. … "Just now, Miss Climpson, we want your help on something quite different."
>
> Miss Climpson produced a business-like notebook and sat at attention.
>
> "The inquiry divides itself into two parts", said Lord Peter. (original emphasis Sayers, added emphasis mine *Unnatural Death* 27)

Thus in this moment Miss Climpson moves from being the lead investigator of cases for the 'Cattery' to being called upon by Wimsey as his sidekick, making inquiries that will benefit both him and Parker in their own case. Miss Climpson leaves aside her own work to be Lord Peter Wimsey's sidekick whenever he asks for her.

Sayers highlights Miss Climpson's abilities, who does prove herself to be the 'cat's whiskers'. Whilst undercover for Lord Peter in *Unnatural Death*, she installs herself in the village to try and determine if Mary Whittaker's infirm aunt was killed by Mary herself. In Chapter 16, 'A Cast-Iron Alibi', Lord Peter sends instructions to Miss Climpson to find information to break the alibi of the main suspect: Mary Whittaker. Miss Climpson tries to find information from Mary's close friend Vera Findlater and Sayers writes: "Miss Climpson, most faithful of sleuths, and *carrying Lord Peter's letter of instruction in the pocket of her skirt like a talisman*, had asked the youngest Miss Findlater to tea" (emphasis added, *Unnatural Death* 121). And then, while Vera is giving her heartfelt confidences to Miss Climpson, Sayers notes: "Miss Climpson did not smile. She was accustomed to the role of confidante" (*Unnatural Death* 124).

This detection that Miss Climpson performs under the direction of Wimsey is subsequently contrasted to that completed by Lord Peter and Detective Inspector Parker. By doing so, Sayers shows that the case is solved, ultimately, by the detecting skills of all three, each thriving in their own particular

form of detection.[245] What Miss Climpson offers the trio is precisely what Wimsey described in the beginning; she is able to go places and see and hear things that he and Parker could never hope to.[246] Her role as a sidekick in this case is thus emphasised: she moves away from her investigative work at the beginning and comes to make inquiries for Wimsey in the case of *Unnatural Death*. She is called upon by Lord Peter Wimsey to assist him and while her detective work is insightful, she ultimately always refers back to him as the lead detective when working for him on his private cases.

Throughout the stories, Wimsey and Miss Climpson continue to have a working and professional relationship, with Wimsey coming to depend on Miss Climpson as his sidekick. Indeed, Miss Climpson recognizes her sidekick position when she tells Wimsey in *Strong Poison*: "Only let me know, at *any* minute of the night or day, and I will do my *very* best to help you" (original emphasis, 74). And when Wimsey is depressed over lack of evidence and movement in the case, he openly relies on Miss Climpson to find it for him:

> "I have a job", he said to her, more abruptly than was his wont, "which I should like you to undertake yourself. I can't trust anybody else".
>
> "How *kind* of you to put it like that", said Miss Climpson. (original emphasis, Sayers, *Strong Poison* 209)

While investigating for Wimsey, Miss Climpson sends him updates. This additionally strengthens her position of sidekick, for in her letters Miss Climpson also contributes to the narration of the story. In terms of genre forms and conventions, Sayers also experiments with the tradition of sidekicks narrating

[245] Parker's detection is very visceral and full of movement, he goes from door to door completing the classic police legwork. See Eric Sandburg, "The Body in the Bath".
[246] See Susan Rowland where she notes that the detective work in *Strong Poison* is mainly done by the women of the Cattery: their detective action leaves Peter in the "frustrated and passive feminine position" (emphasis added, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 30).

the stories and supplying readers with information which is not available through conversation and clues relayed by the main detectives. Climpson writes with copious use of italics and exclamation points:[247]

> My dear Lord Peter, You will be happy to hear, after my *two previous* bad shots (!), that I have found the *right* place at last…My landlady seems a very nice woman, though a *terrible gossip*!–which is *all to the good*!! (original emphasis, *Unnatural Death* 31)

While the letters do take some wading through, and are long and rambling, Miss Climpson provides the reader with various events and her detecting forays which she takes upon direct request of Lord Peter. In this Sayers seemingly points to the trope of the sidekick who narrates the stories; Sayers writes: "Miss Kitty Climpson … was living in what she herself liked to call a 'whirl of activity'. A letter, written the second day after her arrival in Windle, furnishes *us* with a wealth of particulars" (emphasis added, *Strong Poison* 217). Miss Climpson then eagerly relates to Wimsey (and thus the reader): "My dear Lord Peter – I feel sure you will be anxious to hear, at the *earliest possible* moment, *how* things are *going*, and though I have only been here *one* day, I really think I have not done so *badly* all things considered!" (original emphasis, *Strong Poison* 218). Thus Miss Climpson subverts genre expectations while at the same time narrating the story for Sayers's reader. In her professional position and accomplishments, she changes perceptions of these 'superfluous women' in her society.

Upon her introduction in *Unnatural Death*, Miss Climpson remains the sole official professional female sidekick to Lord Peter Wimsey who reappears throughout the series. While Wimsey occasionally consults other female aids in some of the other novels (such as that of the artist and bohemian Marjorie Phelps in *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* (1928) and then again briefly in *Strong Poison* (1930)),

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[247] Reynolds comments in *Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul* that Sayers copied the writing style of her elderly aunts, especially that of her Aunt Gertrude. She tells her parents that she hopes they won't notice, or be offended (200). She "had compassion" for them, and women like them, who "brought up without education or training, thrown at my grandfather's death into a world that had no use for them" (200-201). These aunts had sad and difficult lives, and Reynolds writes that "It was with the fate of such women in mind that Dorothy L. Sayers the novelist created employment for Miss Climpson and her 'cattery' in *Unnatural Death*" (201).

Miss Climpson is his only professional, female, paid sidekick who actively searches for clues and solutions to the problems he presents to her. Indeed, Miss Climpson's detecting abilities are key to solving the overall case in *Strong Poison*.

Importantly, much of the female detection in *Strong Poison* is completed by Miss Climpson and the other members of her 'Cattery'. Moreover, Miss Climpson's presence on the jury which ultimately cannot reach an agreement as to Harriet's guilt is notable, as Virginia B. Morris declares, for Sayers's "pointed inclusion of women on the jury which fails to convict Harriet" (486).[248] Morris asserts that "[t]he fact that the chief spokesman for Harriet's acquittal is a woman is particularly powerful because the legal profession had been among the last bastions of male exclusivity, and no women sat on juries until 1919, the year the first woman lawyer was admitted to the Bar" (486). As Stewart further reiterates, Miss Climpson is one of three women on the jury, and in "stand[ing] firm in her resistance to a guilty verdict" she further is joined by another "female juror who draws on her experience as an observer at other trials" (*Crime Writing* 5-6). Wimsey explains to the defence lawyer that "the [other] woman was rather unexpected…she was influenced, rather oddly, by the fact that she had attended one or two arsenic trials, and had not been satisfied by the verdict in some other cases—notably the Seddon trial. She has no opinion of men in general" (*Strong Poison* 54). Thus Wimsey's very ability to re-examine the case and even prove Harriet's innocence comes from the inclusion of women on the jury who, only eleven years earlier, would not have been present. Morris compares Harriet's trial with that of Florence Maybrick, "one of the clearest miscarriages of justice in English legal history" (487). As Morris notes of both of

[248] Virginia B. Morris, in "Arsenic and Blue Lace: Sayers' Criminal Women", compares the trial in *Strong Poison* to two actual poisoning cases which the text itself recognizes. While in one of the real life trials, the woman is acquitted through lack of evidence, Harriet, "like [Madeline] Smith…continued to be remembered – sometimes by herself and often by others – as the woman who was tried for killing her lover" (487). Even more poignantly, as Morris points out, Harriet's trial also references another woman's, who was ultimately convicted and hanged by a jury of only men: "Even more provocative are Sayers' intimations about the connections between Harriet's plight and Florence Maybrick's conviction for poisoning her husband, one of the clearest miscarriages of justice in English legal history" (487).

these trials – real and fictional – "the judge's extensive summary and clearly prejudicial attitude focuses on the moral consequences of illicit sexual behavior and on the ways it undermines a woman's character" which, Morris asserts, is "[c]learly…a notion that Sayers rejects" (487). The judges in both of these trials "twist the defense's argument by proposing that the sexual indecorum of the accused was the reason the crime has occurred" (Morris 487). Yet there is a key difference between the real trial of Florence Maybrick and Harriet's fictional one, the sex of the members of the jury. Morris declares that "whereas Justice Stephen carried the all male jury with him when they convicted Maybrick, Sayers emphasizes Miss Climpson's critical role in resisting Judge Crossley's direction" (487). Harriet's innocence is established specifically by the inclusion of women in public places where they can bring their own intelligence and expertise – even that of observation – to acquit an innocent member of society who was judged more harshly by the professional men. The only other juror who believed Harriet was an artist "about three-quarters of a man", disliked by the other men on the jury who were impatient to be done, one because he "had an important deal to put through next day" (56).

Christine Colón in *Choosing Community* (2019) writes of *Strong Poison* that Sayers "masterfully shift[s] the focus from the individual detective to the community that surrounds him, a community that supports his job by doing their own work extremely well" (26-27). In doing so, as Colón declares, Sayers "implicitly broadens" her "vision" of community, "by demonstrating that Inspector Parker, Miss Climpson, and Miss Murchison [another member of 'The Cattery'] are not simply waiting around until they can be useful to Peter"; instead, they are "actively pursuing their own vocations and doing their own work to make their community better" (27). By the time of *Strong Poison*, Miss Climpson has a whole army of female detectives below her with her own line to Scotland Yard. These women detect precisely through their ability to blend in and be overlooked while at the same time offer an example of the necessary and important place which they occupy in public life while protecting the private. Then, in *Gaudy Night*, their status is such that there are only references to the detecting work that they do, the

'behind the scenes' which gives Peter the information he needs to solve his case (see below). Miss Climpson has firmly established herself as a vital member of the Sayers oeuvre, and her presence then ensures not only that Peter solves his case, but also that women in the broader world of Sayers's novels are protected. Her detective abilities in *Gaudy Night* in turn ensures that the social community of Shrewsbury could expel the poltergeist from its midst, and further protects the broader imagined community of women scholars everywhere, an imagined community Miss Climpson is most certainly one of. Had she been born in the same generation as Harriet, she might have gone to university or into a profession herself:

> "A dear old friend of mine used to say that I should have made a very good lawyer," said Miss Climpson, complacently, "but of course, when I was young, girls didn't have the education or the *opportunities* they get nowadays, Mr. Parker. I should have liked a good education, but my dear father didn't believe in it for women." (original emphasis, *Unnatural Death* 28)

Strong Poison also introduces the other particularly noteworthy female character who holds a temporary sidekick position, Harriet Vane. Miss Climpson's intervention on the original jury at Harriet's trial directly saves her from the gallows, and Miss Climpson thus opens up the potential for Harriet's relationship with Wimsey to develop as the series goes on. After the introduction of Harriet, Miss Climpson fades from the stories, although she is mentioned briefly, which also shows she is still engaged in work with the Cattery as noted. In *Gaudy Night* Harriet even contemplates asking for her help: "For she had remembered that there was a Miss Katherine Climpson, who ran what was ostensibly a Typing Bureau but was in fact a *useful* organisation of women engaged in handling odd little investigations" (emphasis added, 71). However, for the purposes of the story, and for Harriet and Peter to work out their own personal relationship, as well as Harriet's status as potential sidekick to Peter, Harriet learns Miss Climpson is not available: "Why she should be surprised to learn that Miss Climpson was absent from

Town 'engaged on a case' she could not have said. It seemed vaguely monstrous that this should be so; but it was so" (198).

Even when Miss Climpson is not portrayed within the stories themselves, she is still shown to be living her professional life as a female investigator, head of the Cattery, sometimes sidekick to Peter Wimsey, yet always someone who is making the lives of her interwar community better. Miss Climpson recognizes the place in society which others have imposed on her and uses this to her own advantage. Although she is positioned as a sidekick, her intelligence is always highlighted, as is her ability to understand the social structures which put her there and the ways she learns to challenge these. While Miss Climpson's roles as detective and sidekick remain strictly professional – in *Gaudy Night* Peter refers to her as "a colleague of mine" (255)[249] – they thus open the space for Harriet Vane's character and the social conversation she embodies to become aligned with and eventually come to supersede the detective plot.

6.2 Harriet Vane

While Miss Climpson's spinster status ensures that her relationship with Lord Peter remains professional, Harriet Vane's role as a potential love interest for Wimsey complicates the construction of both her role as a sidekick and the detective/sidekick relationship more broadly. Sexually available and attractive female detectives were perceived as rare in the Golden Age of detective fiction and, as Julian Symons argues, after they had solved their case these 'lady' detectives "presumably settle down again to

[249] Peter is retelling the story of the case he solves in *Unnatural Death*. When recounting the murderer whom he uncovers, he notes how dangerous she is by explaining that she had attacked "A lawyer, a colleague of mine, and myself" (*Gaudy Night* 255). While he does not specifically name Miss Climpson, his recounting of the events in *Unnatural Death* makes it clear that he is speaking of Miss Climpson, who is attacked at the end of the book: "Miss Climpson gasped with amazement, and bent over the smaller type. 'How extraordinary!' she said, looking up quickly.
Not quickly enough. The heavy brass lamp missed her head indeed, but fell numbingly on her shoulder. She sprang to her feet with a loud shriek, just as Mary Whittaker's strong white hands closed upon her throat" (*Unnatural Death* 177).

domesticity" (*Bloody Murder* 87). Indeed, the concept of 'attractive' female characters in detective fiction was so controversial that a rule was invoked by the Detection Club stating that the unity of the detective story was 'damaged' by an insertion of a love interest (Symons, *Bloody Murder* 108). Symons also quotes Sayers, who herself said that characters in detective novels lived "'more or less on the *Punch* level of emotion' and, if they were to be considered more seriously, their emotions would 'make hay of the detective interest'" (Symons 108).[250] So why, therefore, was Harriet Vane introduced as a love interest for Lord Peter Wimsey when it seemed that Sayers both disagreed with the concept of providing a love interest or storyline in detective fiction, and had already inserted sufficient commentary on the role of women in her society through the character of Miss Climpson?

The answer comes through looking at the development of the characters Harriet Vane and Lord Peter Wimsey in the four main novels in which they appear: how they navigate their relationships with each other and with the mysteries that they are involved in. Specifically, what role do they see themselves in, place themselves in, or place each other in, within the mystery: detective, sidekick, or partners? Additionally, the inclusion of Harriet Vane as love interest gives Sayers the opportunity to broaden her discussions of the role of women in society and the detective fiction genre further than she could with Miss Climpson's professional oscillation between detective and sidekick. Not only does Harriet complicate the conventions of sidekick, but she also subverts romantic expectations for the 'marriage plot'. With the added love interest between Harriet Vane and Peter Wimsey, Sayers allows herself to write characters who, moving away from the 'Punch level of emotion', can rather be:

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[250] Sayers's full quotation is: "Just at present, therefore, the fashion in detective fiction is to have characters credible and lively; not conventional, but, on the other hand, not too profoundly studied—people who live more or less on the Punch level of emotion. A little more psychological complexity is allowed than formerly; the villain may not be a villain from every point of view; the heroine, if there is one, is not necessarily pure; the falsely accused innocent need not be a sympathetic character. The automata—the embodied vices and virtues—the weeping fair-haired girl—the stupid but manly young man with the biceps—even the colossally evil scientist with the hypnotic eyes—are all disappearing from the intellectual branch of the art, to be replaced by figures having more in common with humanity" ("Introduction" *The Omnibus of Crime* 40-41).

> [*G*]*ood*. This, I suppose, must be taken relatively, to mean that they should, even the meanest and wickedest of them, be not merely monsters and caricatures, like the personages in a low farce, but endowed with some sort of human dignity, so that we are able to take them seriously…*appropriate*…and *like the reality*… as we say today, 'realistic' – i.e. with some moderate approximation in speech and behaviour to such men and women as we see about us. (original emphasis, "Aristotle on Detective Fiction" 177-178)[251]

Or in other words, characters who can fuse the landscape of the novel with the reality of the world outside (Anderson 30). Over the course of the four novels that Peter and Harriet are in together, Sayers directs the focus of her stories more towards creating characters who are well-written, given human characteristics, appropriate, and realistic while moving away from mere "caricatures" (sometimes found in 'classic' detective stories). Indeed, as I already noted, she subtitles her final novel, *Busman's Honeymoon*, as 'A Love Story with Detective Interruptions' (1937).

While the relationship between Harriet and Peter moves towards an emphasis on character development, it also must be stated that Sayers was specifically interested in the idea of women detectives and women characters in the detective genre. In her Introduction to *The Omnibus of Crime* (also published as *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror*), Sayers commented directly on women detectives (as noted above):

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[251] As Sayers notes, Aristotle claims about creating *appropriate* characters, that "a female, he says, must not be represented as clever" (177). Sayers states that "this is a delicate point", and asks, "would he, or would he not, have approved of Miss Gladys Mitchell's diabolically clever Mrs. Bradley?". As she instead declares, "We may take it, however, that the cleverness should only be such as it is appropriate to the sex and circumstances of the character – it would be inappropriate to the maiden sister of a country parson should carry out or detect murder by means of an intricate and lever method knowable only to advanced chemical experts; and so with the other characters" (177). The literary definition of 'realism' could work here as well. To use the word, however, opens up the discussion to how the 'middlebrow' and 'realism' were often seen as connected (see Brown and Grover: "When modernism gained the critical ascendancy, romantic prejudices against the professional writer intensified. It is possible that this was not mere social snobbery but closely connected with fears that representing the act of writing would tip the narrative uncomfortably in the realms of realist representation and desacralize the text under construction" ("Middlebrow Literary Cultures" 16)).

> In order to justify their choice of sex, they are obliged to be so irritatingly intuitive as to destroy that quiet enjoyment of the logical which we look for in our detective reading. Or else they are active and courageous, and insist on walking in physical danger and hampering the men engaged on the job. Marriage, also, looms too large in the view of life; which is not surprising, for they are all young and beautiful. Why these charming creatures should be able to tackle abstruse problems at the age of twenty-one or thereabouts, while the male detectives are usually content to wait till their thirties or forties before setting up as experts, it is hard to say. Where do they pick up their worldly knowledge? Not from personal experience, for they are always immaculate as the driven snow. Presumably it is all intuition. ("Introduction" 15-16)

Miss Climpson, alongside Miss Marple, as a spinster and therefore in no danger of being this young and 'charming creature', is an effective argument against this specific type of female detective of whom Sayers despairs.[252] However, as effective as Miss Climpson is for the discussion of women's place in society, her role is still a secondary one (Young 43). Thus although Miss Climpson is an effective sidekick and detective who highlights how women are both necessary in the workplace and that they have a right to do the job which they are best suited and which they want to do, her narrative consistently remains submerged in the wider detective plot.

Therefore, it is with Harriet Vane that Sayers ultimately concentrates her conversation on women in society most firmly. For the purposes of this chapter, Harriet's roles can be broken down into four basic categories or genre tropes corresponding with each of her four stories – love-interest, sidekick, detective and then equal partner – although it must be clarified that these roles are fluid and transition between each different story. It also must be said that it is important to remember that Sayers was not writing Harriet to

[252] Dorothy L Sayers wrote to Christie on the publication of *Murder at the Vicarage* acknowledging the claim that spinster detectives had on the genre: "Dear old tabbies are the only possible kind of female detective, and Miss M. is lovely" (as qtd in Berglund, 144)

create a fully female detective, but rather using Harriet to work out her notions regarding women in society and offering a new representation for women to imagine.

Harriet comes into the Peter Wimsey series for several reasons; in her essay "Gaudy Night" Sayers explains that Harriet was introduced in *Strong Poison* as an attempt to "marry Peter off":

> Let me confess that when I undertook *Strong Poison* it was with the infanticidal intention of doing away with Peter; that is, of marrying him off and getting rid of him – for a lingering instinct of self-preservation, and the deterrent object-lesson of Mr. Holmes's rather scrambling return from the Reichenback Falls, prevented me from actually killing and burying the nuisance. (78)

However, Harriet became such a strong character herself that Sayers found she could not simply have her marry Peter at the end of the novel without a total loss of self-respect:

> I could not marry Peter off to the young woman he had (in the conventional Perseus manner) rescued from death and infamy, because I could find to form of words in which she could accept him without loss of self-respect. I had landed my two chief puppets in a situation where, according to all the *conventional rules of detective fiction*, they should have had nothing to do but fall into one another's arms; but they would not do it, and that for a very good reason. When I looked at the situation I saw that it was in every respect false and degrading; and the puppets had somehow got just so much flesh and blood in them that I could not force them to accept it without shocking myself. (emphasis added, "Gaudy Night" 79)

It takes Sayers two more novels to find a solution to this problem, ultimately concluded in *Gaudy Night*, where the novel's events finally allow Harriet to see herself as fully equal to Peter and no longer beholden to him for rescuing her from the gallows in *Strong Poison*. Harriet can, and does, finally accept Wimsey's proposal. Through this narrative, Sayers uses Harriet, who "dominates the novels in which she appears" (Young 43), to define the changing role of women in society, in a marriage, and in the workplace more comprehensively than she does with Miss Climpson. Thus, while the treatment of Miss Climpson and the

social conventions she breaks are only secondary to her plots, in Harriet Vane, Sayers creates a more complex conversation that dominates and finally supersedes the mystery. Carla Kungl argues:

> Harriet's "capitulation" to marriage (and Sayers' to the marriage plot) was of lesser importance than the much more forceful act of construction: the realization that through Harriet Vane (a female detective fiction writer) Sayers (a female detective fiction writer) was working through a processional knot. She was actively working to move her fiction from the puzzle-oriented plot that had come to prevail in the British strain of the detective fiction genre and return it to a more character-based, well-developed novel of manners, one which took into account cultural and social issues of her day. By casting Harriet in a situation similar to her own and showing her facing the same problems, as both writer and as a woman, Sayers herself was exploring and developing her own goals as a writer, working to construct for herself a professional authority in the detective fiction genre. (6-7)

Further, Sayers was using Harriet to show her readers the position of women in her own world: simply because Harriet was married, did not mean that she would stop writing. She would continue to use her own name professionally (*Busman's Honeymoon* 229), and indeed, Peter supports her in her wiring profession.

6.2.1 Love Interest: *Strong Poison* (1930)

Harriet Vane is introduced in *Strong Poison*, and she is on trial for the murder of her lover. She is no 'immaculate' heroine; Harriet quite obviously possesses some worldly knowledge. It is made also clear from the beginning of the story that Peter is invested in this case in a personal and emotional way. Sayers introduces the love interest of the whole case towards the very beginning. The meeting between Harriet and Peter is written so that the reader understands the depth of Peter's feelings for Harriet, despite the often foppish façade which he displays: "because you'll understand that I'm not really such an ass as

I'm looking at present" (35). Waiting to meet Harriet in the prison, "Wimsey sat down and waited, a prey to curious sensations" (34). During their interview together, Harriet smiles at Peter and "his heart turned to water" (35). After Peter leaves the prison, where he has already proposed to Harriet – "Why? Oh, well—I thought you'd be rather an attractive person to marry. That's all. I mean, I sort of took a fancy to you. I can't tell you why. There's no rule about it, you know" (37) – he ruminates on how 'jolly' their life will be together:

> [P]oor kid, I would damn well work to make it up to her – she's got a sense of humour too – brains – one wouldn't be dull – one would wake up and there'd be a whole day for jolly things to happen in – and then one would come home and go to bed – that would be jolly, too – and while she was writing, I could go and mess round, so we shouldn't either of us be dull – . (39)

Peter imagines their relationship together in parallel with the professional work which both of them do. Right from the beginning Peter sees Harriet as a professional working woman and makes it clear that, in his mind at least, once they can be together Harriet will continue on with her work. He works to solve the murder of Harriet's dead lover – alongside Miss Climpson, the Cattery, and then Parker – with the increased pressure that if he fails, the woman he loves will most likely be hanged for a crime he feels certain she did not commit.

Harriet offers insight into the death of her lover, but more poignantly, it is her imprisonment that reveals how society condemns professional women who deviate from socially-constructed gender norms. The assumption that Harriet is guilty of the murder of her lover is based upon her nonconformity to her gendered role:[253] she first lived with Philip outside marriage, and then refused his offer of marriage once he offered it. As she later tells Peter, she believed Philip when he "represented himself as being conscientiously opposed to any formal marriage" (13). To then have marriage offered to her as a "bad-

[253] See my article in *Clues!*

conduct prize" (61) after a trial run of living together, especially after she had broken her own principles to live with him, made her feel as if she had betrayed herself (thus her desperate search in *Gaudy Night* and her fear of the intellectual life betraying her in turn) and Philip had made them both "ridiculous" (61). The judge and jury are startled at her refusal of this marriage proposal --

> [T]he prisoner herself states that this honourable, though belated, proposal was unwelcome to her…She says—and you must try to put yourselves in her place and understand her point of view if you can—that she was angry with Boyes because, after persuading her against her will to adopt his principles of conduct, he then renounced those principles and so, as she says, 'made a fool of her'. (16)

The spectators at her trial then declare her guilty based on evidence of her comportment: "What nonsense! Of course she did it. You could see it by her face. Hard, that's what I call it, and she never once cried or anything" (46). In *Strong Poison*, Harriet as a detective or Harriet as a sidekick is not the discussion; rather, she is shown to be a successful and professional woman, whose very success caused her lover to be jealous of her. Additionally, the research she was doing for her next book as a detective fiction author creates much of the evidence for the initial case against her: her lover had been poisoned by arsenic and she had bought arsenic under several assumed names to see how it could be done for the plot of her next novel (17-19). She is doubly condemned socially and professionally: first through refusing to conform to gender social expectations and secondly, for being so adept at her job as a professional detective fiction author that her very skill – which also shows that the structures in place so that people cannot buy poison like this are ineffective – is used against her in her trial.

While Harriet's first appearance in *Strong Poison* deliberately positions her as little more than a potential love-interest for Lord Peter, she does offer Sayers the opportunity to present the discrepancies between how women and men are perceived as a society: Harriet asks Peter two questions upon their first meeting, regarding his feelings about her work and about her sexual status: "But you wouldn't want a

wife who wrote books would you?...But, by the way, you're bearing in mind, aren't you, that I've had a lover?" (62, 63). These questions give Peter the chance to respond and moreover, to give Sayers's opinion on how the ways in which a woman's experience not only is necessary to her, but also, indeed, helps establish a fulfilled relationship. Thus Peter answers about Harriet's work: "But I should; it would be great fun. So much more interesting than the ordinary kind that is only keen on clothes and people. Though of course, clothes and people are all right too, in moderation" (62). Upon Harriet's protest that she has had a lover, he responds: "Oh, yes. So have I, if it comes to that. In fact, several. It's that sort of thing that might happen to anybody. I can produce quite good testimonials. I'm told that I make love rather nicely – only I'm at a disadvantage at the moment" (63). Peter's responses immediately show society's discrepancies in how they judge a person based upon their gender, in terms of work as well as sexual comportment.

Harriet's character is also set up to be an influence on Lord Peter. In Sayers's reworking of Peter, she "humanized Peter for [Harriet's] benefit" ("Gaudy Night"), Harriet's roles and relationship with him also undergo significant changes which are developed in *Have His Carcase, Gaudy Night,* and *Busman's Honeymoon.* Though she is introduced as a love-interest in *Strong Poison,* she does not conform to the conventional marriage plot of marrying her rescuer.[254] Indeed, she is not able to marry Peter for fear of having to be grateful to him for saving her life. It is not until *Gaudy Night,* where he does not deny her right of risking it, that she can see how Peter would think of marriage as an equal partnership (discussed below). In the stories following *Strong Poison,* and in her relationship with Peter, Harriet becomes first sidekick, then acts as detective but ultimately is an equal partner to Peter. In this movement and changing

[254] In Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage,* Miriam thinks upon the myth of Andromeda and likens it to the modern woman being recused from being single by marriage. The beautiful woman is cursed for she will be looked at and "Because Perseus looked and rescued her, she would have to be grateful to him all her life and smile and be Mrs. Perseus" (459) – a fate worse than being eaten by the monster of the sea. This is the "conventional Perseus manner" which Sayers references in "Gaudy Night" (79).

of roles, Sayers experiments with detective fiction in having a character inhabit many of the genre's roles while at the same time using the characters to discuss the necessity for equality between the sexes. Harriet is professionally an author of detective fiction, but in the various experiences of the stories, she once again blurs the distinction between sidekick and detective. While Miss Climpson is called upon (and paid) by Lord Peter to help him solve his cases, how Harriet enters into the mysteries, and how she sees herself in relation to the mystery itself, helps to codify her first as sidekick and then detective, then equal partner and professional woman. In *Have His Carcase* Harriet fulfils a sidekick role before she moves into that of detective/partner in *Gaudy Night* and *Busman's Honeymoon*.

6.2.2 Sidekick: *Have His Carcase* (1932)

Have His Carcase opens humorously while referencing Harriet Vane's recent escape from the gallows and Peter's offer of marriage: "The best remedy for a bruised heart is not, as so many people seem to think, repose upon a manly bosom. Much more efficacious are honest work, physical activity, and the sudden acquisition of wealth" (9). Harriet's wealth has come from her notoriety which in turn allows her to leave the 'manly bosom' and work on a new novel: "Work she had in abundance. To be tried for murder is a fairly good advertisement for a writer of detective fiction. Harriet Vane thrillers were booming" (9). On a walking tour in England, she stumbles on a corpse on the beach, and once more finds herself entangled in a murder case. Harriet's insecurities and her fear of being exploited by the press are represented by her inability to be a full detective or determine her relationship with Peter. Because of her 'bruised heart' from the events of *Strong Poison*, yet also because of her own personal integrity in recognizing Peter's detection abilities which did save her life, she cannot come to terms with her public position as detective, sidekick, and her relationship with Peter. *Have His Carcase* also references Harriet's writing abilities. While in *Strong Poison* her research as a writer was used against her in court (when she bought arsenic under assumed names as research for her next novel), in *Have His Carcase*, her

professional writing skills are used to augment her detective abilities, and shows how her own career strengthens her in her own personal life.

Divided into thirty-four chapters, each chapter of *Have His Carcase* discusses a point of evidence of the case. The opening chapters initially display Harriet's ability to be a detective, when she conscientiously examines a corpse she finds on a beach and takes notes on it for the police before the body is taken away by the tide. How she sees herself in gathering this information, however, is always in relationship to how the two detectives she knows would gather evidence. After a brief moment of understandable weakness is quickly overcome, she contemplates how best to react to the situation:

> "The great thing," Harriet found herself saying, after a pause, "the great thing is to keep cool. Keep your head, my girl. What would Lord Peter Wimsey do in such a case? Or, of course, Robert Templeton?" (16).

Robert Templeton is the hero of Harriet's own detective stories. Even though Harriet created Templeton, she puts herself in a position of sidekick to him, thus she is seemingly taking advice from herself. In this situation Harriet puts herself 'in counsel' with her own fictional detective character: "She conjured up this phantom [of Robert Templeton] before her in the suit of rather loud plus-fours with which she was accustomed to invest him, and took counsel with him in spirit" (16). Pushing the image of Peter Wimsey (almost the exact physical opposite of her own creation, who was "a gentleman of extraordinary scientific skill, combined with almost fabulous muscular development" with "arms like an orang-outang and an ugly but attractive face" (16)) firmly from her mind, she constructs how Templeton would examine the body and then proceeds to do the same. In doing so, her actions resemble those of a sidekick because, instead of simply 'being detective', she 'takes counsel' with her own fictional detective. She separates the research and the professionalism which she has accomplished as a writer, and uses that information to guide herself when she could quickly be overwhelmed in an extremely stressful situation. Separating

herself from being a main detective and taking on a sidekick role to her own detective allows her to examine the dead body in an organized manner.

Then, when Harriet gives her statement to the police, the Inspector is surprised that a 'young lady' is so composed about murder and comments on her poise:

> "It's a miracle to me, the way you handled it. Why, most young ladies would have run away".
>
> "Well you see", explained Harriet, "I know what ought to be done. I write detective stories, you know". (38)

Thus it is clear that how Harriet reacted to examining the body is influenced by her occupation as an author. In *Strong Poison,* Harriet and Peter make up detective stories to amuse themselves while Harriet is locked in prison (92-95), but it is in *Have His Carcase* that Sayers specifically shows how Harriet's professional work as an author – not just her life experiences – assists her in detection: she starts her detective work by positioning herself as a sidekick to her own fictional detective.

How Harriet positions herself as a sidekick to her own fictional detective is perhaps a much nuanced point and one which could be argued against: after all, she does accomplish her task and steady herself while doing all of the detecting work and taking notes while examining the body in the first place. Where her true sidekick role comes into clear focus is once Lord Peter enters to essentially take over the case himself. Initially it may appear as if Harriet and Peter are equal detectives in *Have His Carcase*, yet Sayers positions Harriet in a subordinate, even a sidekick role, to Lord Peter. She does this in several ways, and in doing so, uses the opportunity to further bend the definition of sidekick while also discussing the balance of equality in the relationship between Peter and Harriet. This is because in *Have His Carcase,* Harriet is once more considered a suspect. Peter must come to detect in order to save Harriet once again, and again, her enforced gratitude to him does not allow them to resolve their personal relationship.

Harriet's respected position with the police in *Have His Carcase* is dependent upon Lord Peter's name; they base her innocence in this case on the evidence of her innocence established by Lord Peter in *Strong Poison* (*Have His Carcase* 39), and additionally ask him for information on her personally (171, 330). Thus Harriet becomes necessarily 'protected' once again by Lord Peter and her feeling of forced gratitude is one which haunts her through the stories and makes it difficult to recognize her own worth to Peter. *Have His Carcase* discusses the difficulty of being forced into the 'protected' role, and how hard it is to come out of it; Harriet's fear of being romantically linked with Peter in the course of his investigation also then makes her wary of undertaking too much detection herself. Invited to re-examine the murder weapon, Harriet declines: "'Not me!' said Harriet. 'I've got to see [the reporters] and tell them all about my new book. A razor is only a razor, but good advance publicity means sales'" (56). Harriet is not fully under suspicion of the police because of her connection with Lord Peter, yet in his protection of her, he undermines any chance of romantically being with her. In their conversation about likely suspects Harriet adds her name to the list, to which Peter strongly reacts. She is indignant, and forces him to admit why he had to come to help solve the murder:

> "Then why did you come?"
>
> "So that you might not have to send for me"
>
> "*Oh!*"
>
> There was a strained pause, while Wimsey painfully recalled the terms of the message that had originally reached him …
>
> And finally, the certainty that the best way out of a bad situation was to brazen it out – Harriet's word – even if it meant making a public exhibition of his feelings, and the annihilation of all the delicate structure of confidence which he had been so cautiously toiling to build up between this scathed and embittered woman and himself. (original emphasis, 171-172).

This necessitated protection, while keeping Harriet from being hounded by the police, also places her into a sidekick role, and ultimately, delays the satisfying romantic conclusion to their relationship. Because Harriet is constrained to the sidekick role in the detective fiction genre, as a character, Harriet cannot see herself as equal to Peter. And Harriet, in a sense, has had to put herself into this role in her own portrayal of the matter to the public, in her carefully constructed way of announcing the discovery of the body to the press. Harriet thus has had to create her own publicity, and controls the way that the press will discuss the case after her narrow escape from the gallows in *Strong Poison*, but the very fact that she did have this escape means that once again she must fall under the protection of Peter. As the detective who comes to solve the case and to ensure Harriet is not once again arrested for murder, Peter takes on the detective role and puts Harriet into his sidekick role which also unfortunately means that Harriet cannot see herself as equal to Peter. In *Have His Carcase*, Sayers likens Harriet and Peter to the famous detective sidekick pair, Holmes and Watson, as Harriet struggles to see herself as equal to Peter, not as his Watson.[255]

When Peter first comes to Wilvercombe, the scene of the murder, Harriet is seen as the main detective (though she sees herself as under the guidance of her fictional character Robert Templeton) and Peter acknowledges this when he first greets her: "Good morning, Sherlock" (48). He asks Harriet to give him the details of the murder and even wonders why she did not call on him to come solve the case: "bearing in mind that I'm a corpse-fan, don't you think you might, as man to man, have let me in on the ground-floor?" (49-50). At the police station, examining the photos Harriet had taken of the body before it was washed away in the tide, Peter once again calls her "Sherlock" (55). However, the movement of Harriet into a full sidekick role to Peter comes immediately once Peter has received all the facts of the

[255] Sayers writes in her article "Gaudy Night" that she had given Harriet such an inferiority complex that Sayers was never going to be able to bring Harriet and Peter together: "Her inferiority complex was making her steadily more brutal to him and his newly developed psychology was making him steadily more sensitive to her inhibitions. Clearly, they could not go on like this; and time was passing with alarming rapidity, at this rate they would be grey-headed before they were reconciled" (81).

case, and has examined what there is of the physical evidence. Discussing the evidence and bantering with Harriet, Peter laughingly refers to her as Watson, "[t]hese are deep waters, Watson" (59). Harriet's reaction to this name is not presented, the sergeant interjects, and Wimsey declares his next step in searching for evidence. However, when Wimsey announces his intention of going to town, Sayers writes that "Harriet, who had been preparing to say that she had work to do and could not waste time rubber-necking round Wilvercombe with Lord Peter, experienced an unreasonable feeling of having been cheated" (60). It is unclear, however, if she feels cheated out of his company, feels cheated out of helping to gather evidence in the case, or, indeed, cheated out of being the Sherlock. Perhaps it is all of these.

Throughout the rest of the story Harriet is mostly referred to as Watson by Peter, and Harriet even takes on this role in a playful encounter as Peter examines the evidence of a horseshoe. After Peter has given a list of information, deduced from the horseshoe, Harriet exclaims: "Holmes, this is wonderful! How do you do it?" to which Peter replies: "Perfectly simple, my dear Watson" (207). Harriet's role becomes clearly that of sidekick, as she works on the cipher or other tasks that Wimsey has given to her. Though there are a few instances where Harriet goes out to do detecting work on her own, such as when she 'vamps' the main suspect, Henry Wheldon, in 'The Evidence of the Snake', she relies on Peter to take the information she gives him and make use of it towards the ultimate solving of the case.

Yet importantly, Harriet, though put into the sidekick role in *Have His Carcase*, is also given a position of authority as an author. Disdaining a potential solution which Peter and the police have come up with, Harriet avers that "[y]ou men…[have] lost sight of what you're really dealing with. It's like – like a bad plot, built up round an idea that won't work" (328). At the inquest the detached narrator writes: "The next witness was Harriet Vane, who gave a detailed account of the finding of the body. … Harriet was a good witness on these points, her training as a mystery-writer having taught her to assemble details of this kind coherently" (269). Harriet's status as an author is commented on several times, and her knowledge and insights into the case often are drawn from her experience as a writer: "Harriet let her

mind range over the field of detective fiction, with which she was moderately acquainted" (361). Peter acknowledges her worth in solving the case as a writer as well: "Harriet! It's your business to work out problems of this sort—how do you propose to tackle this one?" (427). Her insights into the case stem from her professional ability as an author and this is always made clear; ultimately, however, she does not solve the case, unable to bring together the evidence in line with a solution – "'Of course!' she said…'I never thought about it in connection with the murder'" (439, 440). She is placed into the sidekick role in *Have His Carcase* both through having to be protected by Peter and in how Peter sees his role in the case. Harriet positioned as sidekick ultimately means that Harriet is forced again to subordinate herself to Peter and cannot becomes romantically involved with him. Yet is it her experience as sidekick, coupled with her professional life as an author, which enables her to take on the case in *Gaudy Night*. And it is Peter's response to her dealings with this case which ultimately allows them to acknowledge each other as equals.

6.2.3 "Admission of Equality": *Gaudy Night* (1935) and *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937)

As discussed in Chapter 5, *Gaudy Night* was the book Sayers declared she had been trying to write her whole life:

> I discovered that in Oxford I had the solution to all my three problems at once. On the intellectual platform, alone of all others, Harriet could stand free and equal with Peter, since in that sphere she had never been false to her own standards. By choosing a plot that should exhibit intellectual integrity as the one great permanent value in an emotionally unstable world I should be saying the thing that, in a confused way, I had been wanting to say all my life. Finally, I should have found a universal theme which could be made integral both the detective plot and to the 'love-interest' which I had, somehow or other, to unite with it. (82)

Having made Harriet a 'human-being' from the start, Sayers recognises that Peter had started out as her 'puppet' for whom she had "envisaged…a prolonged and triumphal career, going on through book after

book amid the plaudits of adoring multitudes" (78). As a writer however, she "had not properly realized – and *this shows how far I was from understanding what it was that I was trying to do with the detective novel* – that any character that remains static except for a repertory of tricks and attitudes is bound to become a monstrous weariness to his maker in the course of eight or nine volumes" (emphasis added, "Gaudy Night" 78). Thus she wrote Harriet to 'marry him off', but instead found herself confronted with the fully realised character of Harriet, whom she could not, in all intellectual honesty, bind to Peter. As acknowledged above in connection with *Strong Poison*, Harriet cannot accept Peter in "the conventional Perseus manner…without loss of self-respect" ("Gaudy Night" 79). Harriet refuses to have to be a grateful Andromeda her whole life to Peter – "How right you are," said Harriet…"I know. Gratitude is simply damnable" (*Gaudy Night* 121) – and thus both Peter and Harriet have to figure out the 'counterpoint' for their relationship to see if they can make it work to be together: "Anybody can have the harmony, if they will leave us the counterpoint" (*Gaudy Night* 292).

Sayers solves this difficulty in *Gaudy Night*, subverting genre conventions of characters' traits, moving Harriet from love-interest, to sidekick, to detective, to finally equal partner with Peter (as I noted earlier), and highlighting Harriet's academic and personal worth from all of her experiences and professional work. Sayers declares in her article of the same name that *Gaudy Night* is new and exciting as she "bring[s] the love-problem into line with the detective-problem, so that the same key should unlock both at once" (85). As such, she asserts that *Gaudy Night* is a book "very tightly constructed, the plot and the theme being actually one thing, namely, that the same intellectual honesty that is essential to scholarship is essential also to the conduct of life" ("Gaudy Night" 87, as discussed in Chapter 4).

After Harriet re-established her connection with Shrewsbury College in *Gaudy Night*, she is asked by the Dean of her old Oxford College, Miss Martin, to investigate cases of vandalism and poison-pen letters. They want Harriet's advice: "Not that one expects a detective novelist to be a practical policeman; but I know that you have taken part in one real investigation, and I feel sure you know a lot more than we

do about tracking down malefactors" (58). Harriet "smiles wryly" over the Dean's letter, which innocently references Harriet's detecting abilities from "the benefit of [her] experience" and gives little thought as to whether this is an insensitive thing to say: "it had undoubtedly never occurred to her that to ask the notorious Miss Vane for advice about how to deal with that kind of thing was to talk of rope in the house of the hanged" (59). Thus, the "worldly knowledge" that Sayers lamented as lacking in the "young and inexperienced woman detective", is ascribed to Harriet (with a vengeance) as she is certainly not "immaculate as the driven snow". Rather, Harriet possesses knowledge and experience, not only from being a successful author with a degree from Oxford, but also from having a lover, from being acquitted from the gallows, and from participating – albeit as sidekick to Lord Peter – in solving a case of her own. Though the Dean's letter lacked tact, the Dean was able to see that Harriet possessed the abilities and experience – notwithstanding her reputation – that made her the most fitting candidate to do the required detecting work. And importantly, the Dean does not expect Harriet to be a 'practical policeman', but rather refers to Harriet's *own* experiences which the Dean is sure will be a help for solving the case: "Now, it was the College that had blotted its copy-book and had called her in as one calls in a specialist, with little regard to private morals, but a despairing faith in professional skill" (63). This professional skill comes from Harriet's active participation in the academic community, her "scholarly mind" which she uses in writing her books, and her own life experiences.

After Harriet learns that Miss Climpson is engaged elsewhere on a case, Harriet then becomes a fully-fledged detective in *Gaudy Night*. The women of the college recognize this: the Dean 'inquires' "What does Sherlock Holmes do now?" as Harriet is surveying the damage inflicted by the poltergeist (234). Harriet is able to successfully take care of herself, and she thus moves away from the protected sidekick figure that she manifested in *Have His Carcase*. She is also the direct contrast to typical female detectives who, Sayers laments, "insist on walking in[to] physical danger and hampering the men engaged

on the job" ("Introduction" 15). Indeed, Harriet saves herself from possible harm, recalling Peter's disgust at distressed heroines in thrillers:

> She remembered Peter's saying to her one day: "The heroines of thrillers deserve all they get. When a mysterious voice rings them up and says it is Scotland Yard, they never think of ringing back to verify the call. Hence the prevalence of kidnapping." (277)

Harriet is not the distressed heroine; this had been made clear since the beginning in *Strong Poison* when she does not fall into Peter's arms. She thwarts the first attack by confirming the phone call, and then learns how to physically defend herself against later ones, sparring with Peter to withstand potential attacks (286). This ends up saving her life after she is attacked by the poison-pen author who, at the end of the novel, becomes almost driven to a frenzy in her quest for revenge.

What seems to be most important for Harriet's progression to 'detective' however, is the confidence Lord Peter places in her abilities and his refusal to behave as a 'protective male', both in her abilities as a detective and in her abilities as a writer: "The protective male? He was being about as protective as a can-opener" (231). This is growth in the character of Peter, as well as Harriet, as Peter learns to give Harriet space and not fly to her side once he learns she is in potential danger. Harriet herself acknowledges this new aspect of Peter's character as she contemplates how to solve the vandalism in *Gaudy Night*:

> More generously still, he had not only refrained from offers of help and advice which she might have resented; he had deliberately acknowledged that she had the right to run her own risks. "Do be careful of yourself"; "I hate to think of your being exposed to unpleasantness"; "If only I could be there to protect you"; any such phrase would express the normal male reaction. Not one man in ten thousand would say to the woman he loved, or to any woman: "Disagreeableness and danger will not turn you back, and God forbid they should." That was an *admission of equality*, and she had not expected it of him. (emphasis added 166)

Peter respects Harriet enough to understand that she can make her own decisions regarding her safety, at which point Harriet responds by asking for his help in learning how to beat off an attacker. Though Peter knows that Harriet would be safe from attack if she were to pretend to be his lover or girlfriend, neither of them are willing to perpetrate a falsehood for the sake of safety. Rather, Peter buys Harriet a collar to protect her neck against strangling.[256] As he gives it to her, Peter remarks:

> "That collar," he added, wrapping it up again and laying on her knee, "deserves to be put in a glass case."
>
> "Why?"
>
> "It's the only think you've ever let me give you."
>
> "Except me life—except my life—except my life."
>
> "Damn!" said Peter, and stared out angrily over the wind-screen. "It must have been a pretty bitter gift, if you can't let either of us forget it." (289-290)

Harriet cannot live being burdened by gratitude. Only after she has been attacked and after she and Peter have both stood up for what they believe despite personal consequences, can she recognize that in Peter not fussing about her risking her life, he has absolved her from her gratitude:

> "Peter—it's not fair to let you talk like this. It's I who ought to apologise. If I owe you nothing else, I owe you my self-respect. And I owe you my life---"
>
> Ah!" said he, smiling. "But I have given you that back by letting you risk it. That was the last kick that sent my vanity out of doors." (344)

Unlike Andromeda, Harriet at last does her own rescuing, finding her own self-respect in risking her life in a community which needs her and welcomes her (as discussed in Chapter 5). Once she determines her

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[256] For further discussion surrounding the implications of this gift, see Jasmine Hall "A Suitable Job for a Woman: Sexuality, Motherhood, and Professionalism in *Gaudy Night*"'. Rohan Maitzen also addresses this in her blog post, "This Week in My Classes: Am I Making Excuses for Gaudy Night?" along with other difficulties – such as its 'elitism' – present day readers have with *Gaudy Night*.

self-worth in this community, she finds it in every community and in her relationship with Peter. As Peter acknowledges, his own vanity was such in *Strong Poison* that he felt, because he rescued Harriet, that she owed him her life. It is only in *Gaudy Night* that he realizes his mistake:

> "I set out in a lordly manner to offer you heaven and earth. I find that all I have to give you is Oxford—*which was yours already*. Look! Go round about her and tell the towers thereof. It has been my humble privilege to clean and polish your property and present her for your inspection upon a silver salver. Enter into your heritage and do not, as is said in another connection, be afraid with any amazement." (emphasis added, 344)

In *Gaudy Night* Peter has dispelled the poltergeist from the academic community and thus Harriet's fears about a starved intellect creating madness. Peter offers to release her from her gratitude to him, and to leave her in Oxford – "which was [hers] already" – to let her live there peacefully without him. Only once both Harriet and Peter recognize that Harriet owes Peter nothing can they come into a relationship with one another.

Not only does Peter offer this 'admission of equality', he moreover is too sensitive to physically force his point with Harriet and 'carry her off'. In this, Sayers seems to be critiquing or discussing the more popular type of romance literature, such as that popularized by Ethel M. Dell (published between 1911-1939) who influenced writers such as E. M. Hull, who wrote *The Sheik* (1919). Elsie M. Lang, in *British Women in the Twentieth Century* (1929) writes of this type of romance fiction that:

> Ethel M. Dell next appeared upon the scene with her strong silent heroes, who think nothing of carrying a presumably fairly heavy heroine over the mountains for hours at a stretch. They in their turn had to give way to the Sheik, who has had a very long run in fiction. It is strange that in these days when women have won equality with their own menfolk they should appreciate so heartily in fiction the brutal dominance of the alien male. I cannot help the lurking suspicion that

women miss that domination by physical force which they enjoyed in the time of the cave man. (235)[257]

In Agatha Christie's *The Secret of Chimneys* (1925), Bundle tells her father to emulate the Sheik if he wants to win the heart of Virginia Revel:

> "You modern young people seem to have such unpleasant ideas about love-making," said Lord Caterham plaintively.
>
> "It all comes from reading *The Sheik*," said Bundle. "Desert love. Throw her about, etc."
>
> "What is *The Sheik*?" asked Lord Caterham simply. "Is it a poem?"
>
> Bundle looked at him with commiserating pity. Then she rose and kissed the top of his head.
>
> "Dear old Daddy," she remarked, and sprang lightly out of the window. (343)[258]

Also in 1925, an advertisement for both *The Sheik* and a Sayers short story appears in the newspaper:

> Some excellent fiction in this number includes a complete story by Dorothy Sayers, in which an entirely new type of detective appears for the first time. His name is Lord Peter Wimsey, and he solves "The Fascinating Problem of Uncle Meleager's will." Owen Oliver, Holworthy Hall, Andern Beaman and Hedley Barker all contribute complete stories, and there is a further long installment of E.M. Hull's great desert romance, "The Sons of the Sheik". ("The July 'Pearsons Magazine", *The Wiltshire Times*, Saturday, July 11, 1925, 8)

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[257] Q.D. Leavis is surprised in "The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers" that Sayers is regarded, along with Naomi Mitchison and Rosamond Lehmann as a "new kind of best-seller, the educated popular novelist", and not as a successor to Corelli, Ouida, and Ethel M. Dell (334, 335). See reference to this in Chapter 2 this thesis.

[258] It is important to note that this reference to *The Sheik* seems to be missing from some editions of *The Secret of Chimneys*. In the 1967 New Dell Edition, the passage is written as:

"'You modern young people seem to have such unpleasant ideas about love-making,' said Lord Caterham plaintively.

Bundle looked at him with commiserating pity. Then she rose and kissed the top of his head. 'Dear old Daddy,' she remarked, and sprang lightly out of the window." (159)

The readers of both Christie's and Sayers's fiction were assumed to be also reading *The Sheik*. Thus Sayers's overthrowing of the traditional marriage plot – or that of Andromeda and Perseus – becomes a catalyst for what she believes romantic love to be, and most certainly, she was changing "the reading public's perceptions of women" (Klein 121). After Peter has exposed Annie as the perpetrator of the attacks in the College, in an emotional scene Harriet and Miss de Vine discuss Harriet's relationship with Peter. Miss de Vine asks:

> "Isn't it time you faced the facts about that man?"
>
> "I have been facing one fact for some time," said Harriet, staring out with unseeing eyes into the quad, "and that is, that if I once gave way to Peter, I should go up like straw."
>
> "That," said Miss de Vince, drily, "is moderately obvious. How often has he used that weapon against you?"
>
> "Never," said Harriet, remembering the moments when he might have used it. "Never."
>
> "Then what are you afraid of? Yourself?...He has done what you asked him without caring what it cost him and without shirking the issue. He hasn't tried to disguise the facts of bias your judgement. You admit that, at any rate."
>
> "I suppose he realised how I should feel about it?"
>
> "Realised it?" said Miss de Vine, with a touch of irritation. "My dear girl, give him credit for the brains he's got. They are very good ones. He is painfully sensitive and far more intelligent than is good for him…Forgive me. I don't suppose you've had a very easy time with yourself. But it can't have been easy for him, either—looking on at it, and quite powerless to interfere."
>
> "Yes. I almost wish he had interfered, instead of being so horribly intelligent. It would be quite a relief to be ridden rough-shod for a change."
>
> "He will never do that. That's his weakness. He'll never make up your mind for you. You'll have to make your own decisions. You needn't be afraid of losing your independence; he will always

> force it back on you. If you ever find any kind of repose with him, it can only be the repose of a very delicate balance." (339-340)

Peter has too much respect for Harriet to attempt the type of popular love-making which was in serialisations such as *The Sheik*. Sayers wants her readers to acknowledge the importance of integrity and respect of the other person: a mutual bond in a relationship where they both respect the other's intelligence and work. Just as in *Strong Poison*, Harriet cannot submit to being Andromache to Peter, so too in *Gaudy Night* the discussion is about love with honour, love with intellect. Sayers writes that "[f]ormerly, she could not marry him to live on gratitude; now, he had advanced to a point where he could not possible want her to do anything of the kind" ("Gaudy Night" 81)

While Harriet's full detective abilities in part seem to stem from her treatment by Peter and his own character growth in refraining from coming to protect her as he did in *Have His Carcase* (where she was then placed in the sidekick role), this is further evidence of how Sayers worked into her fiction a discussion of equality, as well as playing with the sidekick role of the detective fiction genre. Harriet became a sidekick in *Have His Carcase* mostly because she had to take that role through being protected once again by Lord Peter. In *Gaudy Night*, she briefly becomes a detective, sees herself as equal to Peter, and successfully navigates her personal life, because she can finally understand her own dignity and see that Peter recognises this. Yet her job is not that of detective, this is made clear. Rather Harriet comes to realization that her job is to be an author, and to work within her writing loyalty to her own beliefs, despite personal feelings: "What would that matter, if it made a good book?" (231). Reflecting on her loyalty to her own job, Harriet thinks:

> "We can only know what things are of an overmastering importance when they have overmastered us". Was there anything at all that had stood firm in the midst of her indecisions? Well yes; she had stuck to her work – and that in the face of what might have seemed overwhelming reasons for abandoning it and doing something different. Indeed, though she had

> shown cause that evening for this particular loyalty, she had never felt it necessary to show cause to herself. She had written what she felt herself called upon to write; and though she was beginning to feel that she might perhaps do things better, she had no doubt that the thing itself was the right thing for her. It had overmastered her without knowledge or notice, and that was the proof of its mastery. (32)

Though Harriet ultimately asks Peter for help in solving the vandalism at Oxford, this does not diminish her equality with him. Indeed, a lot of the detective work that Peter brings to the solving of the poltergeist he receives through employing his professional sidekick, Miss Climpson: "I returned to London and dispatched sundry members of Miss Climpson's Bureau" (*Gaudy Night* 285). Harriet's intelligence and skills are highlighted through her own unique talents of being a detective fiction author and scholar. Harriet presents Peter with her notes and he admires her organization, reaffirming what he had declared in *Have His Carcase* when he comments that as an author of detective fiction she should be able to come up with a solution: "I'll say one thing for the writing of detective fiction: you know how to put your story together; how to arrange the evidence" (*Gaudy Night* 222). Thus Harriet's variously competing roles of detective, sidekick, writer, and love interest to Peter finally coalesce at the end of *Gaudy Night*. Her status as equal partner, scholar, and accomplished writer allows Sayers to address women's roles in the professional world, and the necessity of bringing women into the professional sphere. Harriet's ability to belong to and imagine what the community of Shrewsbury College should be establishes her position there, as well as help her find her own 'equilibrium'. Once she manages to find her place in this community, she can find her place in the public community of her own social world, married to Peter in *Busman's Honeymoon*.

Harriet and Peter's progression towards mutual recognition of equality transcends the pair's abilities as detectives; it is also tied to their romantic relationship. The equality in their love partnership thus further blurs the line between Harriet's portrayal as both detective and sidekick as the novels work

through their multifaceted relationships. Though Peter had always acknowledged Harriet as an equal and as the woman he hoped to marry, it is only once Harriet understands that he recognizes the importance of her work as a writer, and then that he also acknowledges her as an equal detective – not someone who is to be protected but can face her own decisions (so he no longer forces her into the sidekick role) – that she is finally able to actually marry him. Sayers brings her readers into conversation about the ways in which an equal partnership can be imagined. In this she is more deliberate in her ideological conversation with her readers than Christie: while from the beginning Agatha Christie simply presents Tommy and Tuppence as having this united and equal front through the novels that they occupied as well, she does not endow them with the struggles which plague Harriet and Peter. In Christie's *N or M?* (1941), Tommy and Tuppence are undercover to discover fifth columnist Nazi spies during World War Two, and their handler asks Tommy:

> "But I suppose even you couldn't persuade your wife to keep out of danger."
>
> Tommy said slowly:
>
> "I don't know that I really would want to that…Tuppence and I, you see, aren't on those terms. We go into things – together!"
>
> In his mind was that phrase, uttered years ago, at the close of an earlier war. A *joint venture*…
>
> That was what his life with Tuppence had been and would always be – a Joint Venture…
>
> (original emphasis, 50).

Christie presents this joint venture to her readers in everything Tommy and Tuppence do, detecting and marriage. While Tommy and Tuppence are equal partners in detection, Harriet is not a detective, but rather someone whose professionalism and success as a writer make her equal partner to Peter. Sayers inserts a complex feminist social critique into her works. Once married, Harriet and Peter become true equals – like Tommy and Tuppence – albeit not as two detectives, rather as two professionals who find a "repose of a very delicate balance." (*Gaudy Night* 339-340).

Busman's Honeymoon (1937), or "A Love Story with Detective Interruptions", fully highlights the importance of equality and the importance of mutual respect that Peter and Harriet have for one another. Spending their honeymoon in the new home they bought in the country, the corpse of the previous owner is found in the cellar the day after their wedding night. Sayers uses the murder plot to show how Harriet and Peter can learn to live with one another through a difficult situation. The murder plot creates the purpose of the story; the theme is Sayers's narrative of how men and women can find the 'delicate balance' of mutual respect when living together. Thus they grapple with learning to live together, while simultaneously solving a case for the first time as true partners; there are many scenes and discussions of the role of detection means for Harriet and Peter in their married life. A culminating scene comes towards the close of the case, as Harriet realizes that in finding the murderer, her husband becomes as a hangman. Finding the truth is what matters to them both, but she does not know if she can be so intimately connected with the man who ultimately sends murderers to the gallows, especially with her remembrance of waiting for this in prison. Peter declares: "Well, Harriet, we are married now. We are bound, I'm afraid the moment has come when something will have to give way – you, or I – or the bond" (291). Their argument continues, until Peter offers to give up detecting:

> His voice was the voice of a beaten man. She was appalled, seeing what she had done.
>
> "Peter, you're mad. Never dare to suggest such a thing. Whatever marriage is, it isn't that."
>
> Isn't what, Harriet?"
>
> "Letting your affection corrupt your judgement. What kind of life could we have if I knew that you had becomes less than yourself by marrying me?" (291)

Just as in *Gaudy Night* when Peter refuses to 'run rough shod' over Harriet and instead waits for her to come to an intellectual realization of her own self-worth and then make the decision to be with him or not, so Harriet determines in *Busman's Honeymoon* that she will not use her own power to make Peter do

what she wants. Peter must make his own choices of what he thinks is right, regardless of Harriet's own feelings. Emotions cannot be allowed to get in the way of doing what is right:

> Her own scorn lashed herself…"They boast of it—'My husband would do anything for me…' It's degrading. No human being ought to have such power over another."
>
> "It's a very real power, Harriet."
>
> "Then," she flung back passionately, "we won't use it. If we disagree, we'll fight it out like gentlemen. We won't stand for matrimonial blackmail."
>
> …"Harriet…Do you mean to say we are to play out our domestic comedy without the great bedroom scene?"
>
> "Certainly. We'll have nothing to vulgar" (291-292).

Peter was not going to employ emotion to force Harriet into a relationship for his own benefit; now Harriet acknowledges she will not use her own power to force Peter to change what he thinks is right:

> "You *must* do what you think right. Promise me that. What I think doesn't matter. I swear it shall never make any difference."
>
> He took her hand and kissed it gravely.
>
> "Thank you, Harriet. That is love with honour."
>
> They stood so for a moment; both conscious that something had been achieved that was of enormous – of overmastering importance. (original emphasis, 292)[259]

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[259] In this scene in *Busman's Honeymoon*, Sayers is referencing an important conversation that Harriet has with Miss de Vine at the beginning of *Gaudy Night*. This conversation provides context to the theme of *Gaudy Night* for the importance of intellectual honesty and integrity despite personal or private cost.
"Miss Vane – I admired you for speaking as you did to-night. Detachment is a rare virtue, and very few people find it lovable, either in themselves or in others. If you ever find a person who likes you in spite of it – still more, because of it – that liking has very great value, because it is perfectly sincere, and because, with that person, you will never need to be anything but sincere yourself".
"That is probably very true," said Harriet, "but what makes you say it?"

In *Gaudy Night* Harriet realizes her own loyalty to her work; she had stuck to it which was 'proof of its mastery'. In *Busman's Honeymoon*, Harriet and Peter come to a balance of loyalty to their work as well as loyalty to their relationship. Peter and Harriet's equal partnership, coming at the culmination of their growth of character through their four novels together, highlights Sayers's emphasis on equality between the sexes, and the importance of recognizing the qualities and worth of another person as well as their specific individual talents both in their private and professional spheres.

6.3 Conclusion

The first Lord Peter Wimsey novel, *Whose Body?* (1923), begins: "'Oh damn!' said Lord Peter Wimsey at Piccadilly Circus" (1). He has forgotten a catalogue in his flat and returns in a taxi in time to be called upon to take part in a murder investigation. This frivolous opening is contrasted to what would be the final novel with Peter, where he cries huddled against his wife so he cannot hear the clock strike which signals that the murderer he discovered in *Busman's Honeymoon* is to be hanged:

> Quite suddenly, he said, "Oh damn!" and began to cry – in an awkward, unpracticed way at first, and then more easily. So she held him, crouched at her knees, against her breast, huddling his head in her arms that he might not hear eight o'clock strike. (380)

The character of Peter has grown through his relationship with Harriet Vane. Across the Lord Peter Wimsey novels Sayers thus manages to effectively play with the detective fiction genre's conventions of roles - having fluctuating sidekicks and detectives - while at the same time inserting her

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"Not any desire to offend you, believe me. But I imagine you come across a number of people who are disconcerted by the difference between what you do feel and what they fancy you ought to feel. It is fatal to pay the smallest attention to them."
"Yes," said Harriet, "but I am one of them. I disconcert myself very much. I never know what I do feel."
"I don't think that matters, provided one doesn't try to persuade one's self into appropriate feelings."…
"But one has to make some sort of choice," said Harriet. "And between one desire and another, how is one to know which things are really of overmastering importance?"
"We can only know that," said Miss de Vine, "when they have overmastered us." (31-32)

own commentary for equality between the sexes: the importance of recognizing the potential and abilities of even those who are unconsidered by society, such as the 'superfluous' spinsters or the women who break do not preform to their gender. Peter hires Miss Climpson for her 'magnificent abilities' and is able to fully respect her without the complication of personal feelings. And the respect that Peter offers Miss Climpson - acknowledging her intelligence and her ability to do her job - is the same respect that Harriet realizes he offers to her in *Gaudy Night*.

As noted, Miss Climpson's roles as detective and sidekick remain strictly professional. Yet in Miss Climpson being professional, her character can subvert the sidekick expectation of the detective fiction genre while also contributing directly to the plot. Her character then opens the space for Harriet Vane and the social conversation she embodies. Harriet as sidekick, detective, and love interest becomes both aligned with and eventually supersedes the detective plot. Sayers includes discussion of Harriet's professional and personal life. Therefore, though Harriet's marriage to Peter has been criticized as undermining the strong woman that she was originally portrayed to be, through her marriage Harriet is actually able to finally bring herself to an equal level with Peter, not as needing to be rescued and not needing to stay as love-interest (as she is in *Strong Poison*), not as a sidekick (as she is in *Have His Carcase*), not as a detective (as she is in *Gaudy Night*), but rather, as Harriet realizes at the end of *Gaudy Night*, as a true partner (as she finally becomes in *Busman's Honeymoon*). In their four novels and through her discussion of the intellectual integrity which is necessary in all professions in life, Sayers also works out her "equal citizenship" (*Gaudy Night* 26) for each person in establishing a community of equal citizens who are "diligently perform[ing] their parts, trusting that these parts will ultimately combine well with the others so that the ritual [of community] will be 'faultlessly performed'" (Colón 2).

Chapter 7
Conclusion

Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers are remembered as two of the four queens of crime from the 'Golden Age' of detective fiction.[260] In 2022, separate *Companions* to their mystery fiction were published; in J.C. Bernthal's Introduction to *Agatha Christie, A Companion to the Mystery Fiction*, he states that Christie is "more than a popular author", instead asserting that she is an "institution" (*Agatha Christie* 1). Eric Sandberg's Introduction to *Dorothy L. Sayers, A Companion to the Mystery Fiction* emphasises that her fiction, especially the novels with Peter Wimsey, are "touchstones of Golden Age detective fiction" (1), further declaring that "her work also offers a classic example…of the way the detective genre can exceed its ostensible limitations by integrating complex characterization, powerful human relationships, and important social material with its mystery plotting" (2). As I argued in my Introduction, the lasting effect of the novels of both of these women, as well as their cultural value when first published, further emphasises that Christie and Sayers did not just "simply reproduce the values of their culture", nor did they write in "inherited formulas". Rather, their detective fiction offers readers the potential to examine the ways in which social and cultural artefacts can influence communities, and in turn, they employed these to create fictional communities imagined with a "delicate internal and external balance of freedom, equality, and the means of livelihood" for all (Sayers, *Begin Here* 33).

[260] As noted in the Introduction, the 1930s is remembered as belonging to the four 'Queens' of Crime - Christie, Sayers, Margery Allingham, and Ngaio Marsh - who all produced several highly successful crime fiction novels in this decade. Eric Sandberg comments that these authors "dominate our cultural memory of the genre and the era" (he references Cora Kaplan's "'Queens of Crime': The 'Golden Age' of Crime Fiction", who noted this as well) (1). Yet there were also male writers of the genre, whom he names, but also admits that their reputations "by and large, [have] not fared as well over the past century as their female competitors and collaborators" (1). This is a shift from what I note in Chapter 2, when Colin Watson's chapter on the Golden Age focuses on these male authors, including Chesterton, Freeman Wills Crofts, Anthony Berkeley Cox, and Nicholas Blake, and mentions Christie once, and Sayers twice, both in reference to criticism (with which he agrees) by Raymond Chandler (100-102).

As acknowledged in this thesis, the increasing focus in the past few decades of critical study on the works of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers has opened up new avenues for scholars in recognizing the importance of their fiction. Building upon this critical foundation, this thesis has emphasised that broadening the range of study of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers to include their personal lives and the ways in which they became professional detective fiction authors through their use of the cultural artefacts of the newspaper and the novel then further allows us to focus attention on their fiction and find the ways in which they create communities for their readers. They reference a world within their novels which reflects that of the world outside, but with a key difference: the world within their novels comments on and then creates embodied social communities, communities where characters, and then their readers, can experience 'equal citizenship'. This equality that they were striving for was still sorely lacking in the interwar years, especially surrounding the opportunities for women as they represent in their fiction in finding jobs, going to university, or having 'equal citizenship' in interwar British society.

Christie and Sayers create this community through characters, especially through the ways in which their female characters imagine or participate in a certain social community or relationship. For example, in Agatha Christie's *N or M?*, Tommy Beresford reiterates that he and his wife are embarked upon a "joint venture" in their life, which includes any dangers which may come along: "Tuppence and I, you see, aren't on those terms. We go into things – together!" In his mind was that phrase, uttered years ago, at the close of an earlier war. A *joint venture*…That was what his life with Tuppence had been and would always be – a Joint Venture… (original emphasis, 50). Rather than dissuading his wife from the "joint venture" to keep out of danger, Tommy and Tuppence build their life by sharing their experiences. Sayers ensures that there is a similar 'joint venture' between Harriet and Peter: although they have different careers, they come to share a mutual respect and emphasis on life together, building each other up for the better of themselves and the other. In turn, these couples ensure that the communities they live

in are created with equal citizenship and thus work towards bettering the lives of those in their own communities. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson asserts that novels help verify communities, especially national ones, by providing empathy with the hero (30).[261] While the Introduction to this thesis asked how the characters within the novels help to shape their individual community (both within the text and for its readers), as this thesis has shown, these authors built for their readers – through judicious use of the cultural artefacts of the newspaper and novel – strong emotional attachments to social imagined communities. They did this through characters who worked towards building up social communities which emphasised 'equal citizenship'. I highlight this 'joint venture' of these characters to emphasise that the detective fiction of Sayers and Christie – where murder exposes the cultural and social anxieties of communities – can likewise be seen as a joint venture between detective fiction and social commentary, to create communities which value freedom and equality for readers to imagine. The many ways in which they offer representations of this freedom and equality additionally are built upon their own experiences as women detective fiction authors who struggled with balancing personal and public lives in order to publish their fiction. Understanding the ways in which they built these communities – in their lives and in their fiction – allows us to further re-evaluate and again assert (as I did in the Introduction and borrowing Maria DiCenzo's phrase), that Sayers's and Christie's writing(s) can be seen as "serv[ing] as the vehicles for the articulation of feminist goals and challenges", and thus one can find the "compelling evidence of the pluralisation and diversification of interwar feminist discourses" ("Feminist Media and Agendas for Change: Introduction" 313) throughout the interwar period and within the various texts of the newspapers and the novels. Additionally, it allows us to increasingly understand and examine the literary, cultural,

[261] Anderson writes, "Here again we see the 'national imagination' at work in the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside" (30)

social, and lasting influence of these two women detective fiction authors, whose contributions extend far beyond their influence on the detective fiction genre, a genre which they both, significantly, re-imagined.

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Appendix A

Figures

Figure 1: “The Pursuit of Crime”. Pall Mall Gazette, Friday, January 20, 1922.

YESTERDAY'S HAPPENINGS AND TO-MORROW'S EVENTS.

FOR AND ABOUT WOMEN

THE PURSUIT OF CRIME
HOME-PACKED LUNCH IDEAS
THE SLIM SILHOUETTE

THE TALK OF THE TOWN.

By DAMARIS.

The Reception.

We are all looking forward to the big political reception to-night at Devonshire House—and would I were a thought reader! Sir Arthur and Lady Crosfield are giving a dinner party for the P.M. and Dame Margaret Lloyd George at Claridge's beforehand.

Last Night.

Mr. Asquith, who came to the Strand Theatre with Lady Tree and Mrs. Curtis Moffat, joined in the enthusiastic applause which greeted the curtain-raiser, "Me and My Diary," last night. I don't remember a one-act play so well received since "The Twelve Pound Look"—but they couldn't get Miss Gertrude Jennings to take a call, and, after all, Miss Ellis Jeffreys was at least jointly responsible for its success.

Congratulations.

Congratulations to Mr. Henry Lytton on his really entertaining book, "The Secrets of a Savoyard," which is published to-day. Even the unlucky few who do not love the operas will delight in the adventures in its pages—and every autograph fiend will lurk round the stage door for his inscription on the fly-leaf. [I have mine, thank you!]

Autograph Fiends.

By the way, even the heavy rain last night which greeted us as we left the theatre had not driven away the autograph fiends, and I saw Marjorie Gordon signing book after book on the steps as she waited for a taxi.

Last Night's Bal Masqué.

Masks always have such a horrid habit of catching the eyelashes, so it was not surprising to find most of the dancers at last night's Bal Masqué with theirs reposing on their foreheads like a pair of spectacles not in use. This happened very early in the evening. Then some of us were rather disappointed we were not "filmed," for, of course, to be filmed is absolutely the thing now. Something went wrong with the works, but my one consolation is that I shall still be able to live in a sort of fool's paradise, believing that I, too, like Lady Di, have a "film" face.

My Prize.

There were prizes for lucky tickets, and someone had one which entitled them to a flight to Paris and back in a Handley Page aeroplane. There, again, I felt resigned, because what would be the use of going to Paris if you hadn't the wherewithal to stay until the new spring frocks appeared on the scene and then no money to buy them? I did get a prize, though, a box of Turkish cigarettes, and other people got jewel cases and little silver salt cellars and all sorts of other things, while the one who secured a sitting and a dozen photographs at a Bond-street photographer's was very pleased with life.

Russian Again.

Quite an original idea was that conceived by Miss Maud McKelvie and her friend, Mrs. Sanderson, when, for her wedding yesterday at St. James's, Piccadilly, to Lord Fairfax, she was followed by three children dressed in smart Russian costumes. The two pages, Master Donald MacIntyre and Master John Eastwood, escorted Miss Esme Henderson, and the smart white velvet and fur coats, with high furry hats and red leather top boots, made it almost impossible to distinguish between the girl and boys.

* * *

Poinsettias and white lilac made a bower of flowers the whole length of the centre aisle, and in the church were many Americans living in London, as well as Colonel and Mrs. Brian Fairfax, Cora Countess of Strafford (greeting many friends), Mary Lady Lawrence, Sir Lionel Phillips (with two young girls), Miss Mander and Miss Keith Wright, the Hon Mrs. Eric Long with Mr. and Mrs. Hague Cook, Lady Alice Leslie, and the Hon. Arthur and Mrs. Crichton.

A Quiet Wedding.

Sir Charles and Lady Walpole certainly had the quiet wedding they desired, for they and the church officials were the only people in the building during the ceremony, taken by the Rev. F. J. Nixon. Consequently, the clerk and verger acted as witnesses and signed the register. The bridegroom, who is seventy-four, arrived first at the church, and very soon Mrs. Henry Seton, who writes lyrics under her name of "Marie Seton," hurried in wearing a draped dress of soft brown crêpe, with fawn shoes to match, and a moleskin coat. Her hat was of brown and rust red, with a feather mount forming curious stiff quills around the brim.

A Prisoner of War's Wedding.

Petal frocks still run first favourites for bridesmaids' gowns, and Sir John Simon's two pretty girls wore them in deep flame chiffon yesterday, when their step-brother, Mr. Brian Manning, was married at All Saints' Church, Margaret-street, to Miss Gertrude Bithell, who put in a tremendous amount of nursing at the Dreadnought Seamen's Hospital during the war, her fiancé being a prisoner of war for fifteen months.

Film Making.

Life on the film must be very wearying for the actors and actresses, but I should have straws in my hair in a very short time were I a producer. I found Mr. Kenelm Fosse yesterday being in six places and doing a dozen things at once down at Walthamstow.

While Mr. Matheson Lang was wandering about waiting his turn to be "taken" in "A Romance of Old Bagdad" he told me that he finds it all very interesting—it is such a complete change from his stage work. He is a Persian Prince.

MISS ELLIS JEFFREYS' FROCK.



The newest way of wearing the now almost inevitable flower adornment to a "party" frock is this—adopted by Miss Ellis Jeffreys in "Me and My Diary" at the Strand Theatre last night. Shaded velvet flowers and leaves with golden veins were attached at the side of her silver grey satin and ninon frock, to form a kind of oval-shaped plastron. The flowers lay quite flat instead of in a trail, and very effective they looked—but then the frock was lovely, anyhow, and Miss Jeffreys has that art known to only a few Englishwomen of wearing her clothes well.

THE PURSUIT OF CRIME.

By Agatha Christie.

Mrs. Agatha Christie, who leaves England to-day for a trip round the world—South Africa, Ceylon, Australia, New Zealand, Canada—all our Dominions, in fact—is leaving just a few hours after the publication of her second "detective" book—"The Secret Adversary." Her first was "The Strange Affair at Styles."

(IN AN INTERVIEW.)

Once I wrote poetry. That was in my age of innocence before crime, its fascination and its lure attracted me. When once you adopt crime it's difficult to give it up, I know I can never do so.

Besides writing poetry I used to sing. I trained in Paris for two years—but finally decided that I would rather take music for a recreation and crime as a trade. Even my little two-year-old daughter, Rosalind does not deter me, for while I am fleeing from the "Secret Adversary," and before I return to England's shores, yet another story of crime will be to my credit—or shame—in the publishers' list.



Agatha Christie.

And the tools of my trade are going round the world with me. The typewriter, notebooks, and heaps and heaps of paper. Sometimes the people who liked the poems that were published in various reviews and in "The Bookman" rejoyeth me. I tell them I have a sordid mind; there is no money in poetry, and lots in criminals and their ways—provided you have a sense of humour!

My One Doubt.

I am not sure that the people in the Overseas Dominions are going to like me; they may find my love of crime objectionable, for I believe they have less tolerance than London and Londoners. It cannot be helped!

My friends shake their heads and sigh that one so young—I am rather young, I admit—should refuse to dwell only on the seamy side of life; but as long as right triumphs in the end—and in my books it does—what does it matter? To tell you the truth, that is the only thing that gives me a twinge of remorse. Suppose I led the young and innocent to believe that the good always do come out on top, and the wicked end their days in misery or terror? They would find life so disappointing!

Yet crime is like drugs. Once a writer of detective stories and, though you may stray into the by-paths of poetry or psychology, you inevitably return—the public expect it of you!

THAT HOME-PACKED LUNCH.

More Ideas, Please.

The business girl, the school girl and boy, the traveller on a long distance journey—they all need at some time or another, regularly or occasionally, to take a luncheon with them.

Yet how few people know what to pack in such circumstances, and fall back on sandwiches or sausage rolls—all very well once in a while, but dreadfully monotonous.

Will my readers send me their ideas on a practical "attache-case" luncheon. Then those mothers or sisters who have to pack lunches regularly will get some new ideas—and to the sender of the suggestion I like best I will send 5s.

The last day for receiving suggestions will be next Wednesday, January 25, and I shall hope to publish the results on Friday, the 27th.

Write one one side of the paper only, not more than 250 words; address to "Damaris," 8, Temple-avenue, E.C. 4; and put "Ideas" on top left hand of envelope, please.

MODES OF THE MOMENT.

THE SLIM SILHOUETTE—AND THE SUNNY SOUTH

So many women are busy just now considering dress for Riviera wear that interest seems centred on this branch of sartorial art, which undoubtedly exercises the greatest influence upon dress for to-morrow.

Contrary to a great many prophecies, the slender silhouette still predominates—while the materials employed to fashion the same have not introduced any very startling surprises.

Colours remain more or less neutral. Pale tones of mauve, soft greys and an exquisite shade between apricot and champagne, seem to be favoured hues of the moment, while from Paris comes a rumour of a rage for pale pink, which is being shown for both day and evening wear.

The long overdress type of gown, similar to the one shown in our sketch to-day, remains the most favoured of all models. Made of embroidered duvetyn, this is worn over an underslip of plain white serge, and produces a remarkably smart effect; while the soft duvetyn has is trimmed with a tuft of the ever-popular crane's feathers which has become an obsession in smart millinery circles of to-day.

Other hats that are enjoying a popular vogue for Riviera wear are made of white felt or white duvetyn, and their brims show linings of dull white crêpe, which makes a most becoming background for the face.

Some of the newest of these show binds and bands or appliqués of shining black leather, while others are simply trimmed with one of the new fringed Spanish scarves that are worn knotted at one side.

Russian peasant embroideries and drawn thread work are being used as a novel trimming for simple tennis frocks made of dyed Shantung silk, a new variety of which is to be found showing boldly printed Chinese designs.

For casino wear one finds rich-coloured lace frocks that are made with elegant chiffon or union cloaks to match. The latter, although extremely elegant, often completely hides the real beauty of the frock worn underneath, as, no matter how handsome it may be, it does not look complete without its accompanying wrap.



The over-dress has come to stay, quite evidently. Embroidered material over plain serge and plain materials over embroidered fabrics are both correct. In most cases the over-dress is a little longer than the slip.

A GOLDEN ROAD TO KNOWLEDGE.

Most mothers know that an appeal to the eye is an excellent method of teaching children anything that it is necessary for them to remember and to interest them in what would otherwise be regarded as a nuisance or a task.



ONE OF THE ILLUSTRATIONS.

That is why the new history—"The Story of the British Nation"—will interest them. I have just seen the first number—it is to be issued in fortnightly parts—and have fallen in love with it. Not, I confess, because of the pictures; other "popular" works of this discription have left nothing to be desired on that account—but because the pictures are the gilding for real history and up-to-date history. So much of our history—the history that was taught in schools thirty years ago—has been rewritten owing to further discoveries, and people with preconceived ideas about history and economics have taken such liberties with facts that it is a relief to find that this work is to be written by leading historians. It will be, perhaps, a little beyond the smaller members of the family; here will be the use of the pictures. Mothers and fathers will revive their own often rusty knowledge by reading the history, and will give little bits of the information to the nursery folk, to whom the pictures will be a stimulation—a very useful stimulation, since the teaching of history is slowly being recognised as a hitherto much neglected part of education.

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Figure 2: “The Missing Novelist”. The Civil and Military Gazette. Lahore - Tuesday, December 14, 1926.

The
Civil & Military Gazette.

Registered No. L—816.
VOL. XLIX. No. 30225.

LAHORE:—TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 1926.

TWO ANNAS.

Another Combing of the Downs: Public Co-operation Invited.

THE MISSING NOVELIST.

AMAZING POLICE DECISION: A HUGE PUBLIC SEARCH.

FURTHER COMPLICATIONS.

THREE POLICE THEORIES: SUICIDE, FOUL PLAY OR INTENTIONAL DISAPPEARANCE?

There has been a curious and unexpected development in connection with the Police investigations following the disappearance of Mrs. Agatha Christie. The Deputy Chief Constable of Surrey has issued an appeal asking the public to participate in a search of the Downs in the neighbourhood of Newlands Corner, where it is still thought that the woman novelist's body may be hidden.

OTHER THEORIES.

Mr. Edgar Wallace, the well-known author of mystery stories is of the opinion that Mrs. Christie herself engineered the disappearance to spite someone. He rejects the theory of suicide. Mrs. Christie's secretary, however, says that the idea of a deliberate disappearance is preposterous, and she strenuously denies that Mrs. Christie would so court publicity.

"MASS ATTACK ON DOWNS.

CO-OPERATION OF PUBLIC INVITED.

London, Dec. 11.

Given reasonable weather, England's greatest "hunt" is staged for to-morrow. Mr. Kenward, Deputy Chief Constable of Surrey, has issued an appeal to the public to assemble on Sunday for a "massed attack" on the Downs in the hope of testing the official theory that Newlands Corner holds the secret of Mrs. Agatha Christie's disappearance.

Any fine Sunday finds thousands of motorists and cyclists enjoying the panoramas of the neighbourhood, but to-morrow will certainly be unique if the fine weather continues. The Police will control the traffic, directing volunteers to where they are wanted. They are asked to co-operate in four beats which will be conducted by Police Sergeants. Men of the Surrey Volunteers will safeguard cars, cycles and other property left while the search lasts.

Mr. Kenward advises beaters to wear old clothing and thick boots, and to carry stout sticks. The owners of bloodhounds are asked to help, not because the scent is believed to linger but, if the body is concealed in a thicket a bloodhound is likely to detect its presence. He asks the public to concentrate on the scrub, because the open country has been fully secured already.

Mr. Kenward does not mean to indicate by these preparations that he is certain that Mrs. Christie is still near Newlands Corner, and points out that the Police are simultaneously working other clues. Personally, he believes that Newlands Corner is most likely to provide a solution of the mystery, and he wishes to dispose of this district first. He says, "In my opinion the solution will be found around Newlands Corner. I have sergeants there day and night and expect developments every hour."

He receives a hundred letters a day relating to the affair, many offering suggestions and outlining theories. Officially there are three theories—foul play, suicide and deliberate disappearance. The Police found a little evidence in support of the first and they are quietly working on the third, taking up every likely clue. But the second remains in official favour, hence the grand mass move to search the country where the abandoned car was found.

Mrs. Christie's secretary, Miss Fisher, says that the idea of a deliberate disappearance is preposterous, adding that Mrs. Christie was in no wise the sort of person to court such publicity or to work out a plot by such an experiment. Meanwhile, Mrs. Christie's daughter, Rosalind, plays merrily, believing her mother to be away, writing a new book.—"Times" Service.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

MORE LETTERS DISCLOSED.

London, Dec. 10.

The *Daily News* asks whether the whole truth concerning Mrs. Agatha Christie has yet been told. Every day new revelations are increasing the mystery. For example, two more letters are now disclosed, consisting of one to her husband which the latter told the police he threw on the fire, and another which was incompletely addressed to a friend for whom the Police have been searching; also, a note to her secretary, which the Police were told had been destroyed, has now been found.

The Police believe that Mrs. Christie is still alive. Superintendent Goddard says "When she has worked out her problem, she will return."—"Times" Service.

The Letter.

London, Dec. 11.

Col. Christie states that the letter from his wife which was burnt was of a purely personal nature and did not refer to her disappearance. He added, "She had something to tell me which I cannot discuss."

He is convinced that it was written before Mrs. Christie decided to leave home and stated that the letter was handed him when he returned home on Saturday.

Mr. Wallace's View.

London, Dec. 11.

Mr. Edgar Wallace, the author of mystery novels, is of the opinion that Mrs. Christie's disappearance originated in a desire to spite somebody. He rejects the idea of suicide, because she deliberately created a "suicide atmosphere." Possibly, he thinks, she has left England, but there is no evidence that she possessed a passport in addition to the one she left behind. If she has not died from exposure she is probably hiding in London or another large town. She may be in possession of her faculties, but lacking in will-power to disclose her identity, owing to the tremendous consequences of her impulsive action.

AUSTRALIAN BUSH FIRES.

ENORMOUS DAMAGE IN NEW SOUTH WALES.

Sydney (New South Wales), Dec. 11.

Bush fires are causing enormous damage to livestock and crops in the north, south and west of the State. The thermometer has registered 100 Fahrenheit. A gale is fanning the flames and many townships are deserted. A change of the wind saved Coolamon, where the women worked heroically carrying water to the men who were exhausted from fighting the fire. Fourteen large State sheep properties in the Yass district are ablaze. The shearing sheds, outbuildings and stud sheep have been burned.—Reuter.

GERMANY NOT DISARMED.

OPINIONS OF MILITARY EXPERTS.

MATTER REPORTED TO FOREIGN MINISTERS.

Paris, Dec. 11.

The question of the withdrawal of the Allied Military Control from Germany has not been advanced as a result of the Conference of Ambassadors meeting. It is learned that the Allied military experts are unanimously agreed that Germany's disarmament is by no means complete and the Ambassadors decided to send a full report to the Foreign Ministers at Geneva. The experts declared that the German General, von Pawel's, explanation regarding the crucial points of the eastern fortifications and traffic in war material are unsatisfactory. The next move lies with the Foreign Ministers.—Reuter.

German Allegations.

Berlin, Dec. 10.

The disarmament of fortresses in East Germany and the export of war material are outstanding points requiring adjustment by the "Big Five" in the discussion at Geneva.

The newspapers here allege that Britain has demanded the prohibition of the export of a number of unfinished steel products on the ground that they can be used for military purposes, whereas the Germans contend that such prohibition will be the deathblow to many factories, and hint that commercial considerations are behind the British attitude.—Reuter.

NOBEL PEACE PRIZE.

APPRECIATION OF RECIPIENTS.

Rugby, Dec. 11.

Interviewed at Geneva yesterday on the award to him, jointly with General Dawes, of the 1925 Nobel Prize, Sir Austen Chamberlain expressed appreciation of the honour, because it set a seal of international approbation on the peace work done at Locarno. He added: "Representatives of seven powers contributed to the results there obtained. The largest share of whatever merit is due to M. Briand and Dr. Stresemann, and it doubles my pleasure that in the awards my name is associated with theirs."

Dr. Stresemann emphasised his gratification at being the first German whom the Peace Prize had ever been awarded, and hoped that the future would justify the expectations of the present.

M. Briand said: "For the past two years Sir Austen Chamberlain, Dr. Stresemann, myself and colleagues have worked continuously to procure the peace of Europe and of the world. I hope that history will show that the award was not misplaced.—British Official Wireless.

Estimates of Value.

Rugby, Dec. 10.

It is stated, though unofficially, that the value of the Nobel Peace Prize for 1925 is £6,500, in which case Sir Austen Chamberlain would receive £3,250.—British Official Wireless.

London, Dec 11.

The *Daily News* believes that the Nobel Prize recipients receive between £7,000 and £8,000, as the prize has not been awarded since 1922.—"Times" Service.

EMPEROR OF JAPAN'S ILLNESS.

SON RECALLED FROM ENGLAND.

Rugby, Dec. 11.

In consequence of the Emperor of Japan's serious illness, Prince Chichibu, his second son, is returning home from London. He expects to leave early next week, travelling via Canada.

The Prince has just completed his first term as an undergraduate at Magdalen College, Oxford and had intended to proceed on Monday to Madrid on a visit to the King of Spain. This arrangement was cancelled last night.—British Official Wireless.

VICEROY IN CALCUTTA.

CLOSE CO-OPERATION BETWEEN BRITISH AND INDIAN INDUSTRY.

GOVERNMENT AND THE FURTHERANCE OF HIGHER MOSLEM EDUCATION.

A host of subjects were touched upon by Lord Irwin in his replies to addresses of welcome presented to him in Calcutta by the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, the Marwari Association and the Central National Mahomedan Association. In the last-mentioned he dealt with the difficulties of the Mahomedan cultivator; the importance of the co-operative movement among landholders and tenants; the question of Moslems and Government service; and the problem of communal ill-feeling.

Calcutta, Dec. 11.

His Excellency the Viceroy in reply to the address of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce said that he was most grateful for the cordial terms in which they had welcomed Lady Irwin and himself to the great city which was the centre of their Chamber's activities. "As you truly say," declared His Excellency, "Calcutta is supreme in the commercial world of the East and you need have no doubt that I shall fully appreciate the many opportunities it offers to a Viceroy, both of acquiring useful experience and enjoying its amenities. I have indeed been looking forward to coming into personal contact with the business man of Calcutta and to getting the benefit of that keen shrewd point of view from which he surveys, not only his own particular interest, but affairs at large. It is of the essence of a successful man of business to take quick decisions, to estimate risks at a moment's notice, and his advice may always be counted on to contain a large measure of that valuable quality, common sense.

"All through Calcutta's fascinating history, since its foundation by the enterprise of the old John Company merchants, runs a strain of close co-operation between British and Indian industry. Recent years have seen giant strides in the industrial development of India, and in this development Indian enterprise, Indian brains and Indian capital have taken their full share. They have had their ups and downs, and experience has often been bought at the cost of disappointment and misfortune. The aftermath of a world war shook to the core those mushroom growths in which old accepted rules of trading were disregarded in the pursuit of quick returns, but the great variety and number of interests which your Chamber represents today are sufficient indication that confidence still attaches to the well established Indian concerns. The storm you have weathered is now low on the horizon, and I trust that a period of fair weather and favouring winds lies before you.

Importance of Agriculture.

"It is only a few days since I spoke at Cawnpore in some detail on the position of Indian trade and the policy of the Government as regards its future development. I will only, therefore, say that like you, I attach the greatest importance to the agricultural development of India, with its inevitable reaction upon trade. I am following with the deepest interest the proceedings of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, though I may remark in passing that you wrongly attribute its inception to myself and I may take this chance of acknowledging the assistance which bodies like your own have rendered in preparing material for the Commissioners consideration. It is hardly necessary for me before an audience of businessmen to enlarge on the dependence of Indian industry on the agricultural well-being of the country. All the experience that commerce and industry can offer should be placed freely at the service of those who are striving to solve this important and many-sided problem.

"I thank you, gentlemen, for the graceful reference you have made to my family associations with India, and for the good wishes you have offered me in the task that lies before me. The next few years will, as you have said, be important years in Indian history. It is not for me to anticipate, even by conjecture, what may be the outcome of the statutory enquiry which must take place in the near future, but I will reiterate my earnest desire that the passage of events between now and the date of that investigation will be such as to justify the hopes of those who are most concerned to see the future of India established upon unshakable foundations.

"I have no illusion as to the difficulties which will beset this path and it means much to me to know that in approaching them I am followed by those kindly feelings which your Association, in common with many other bodies, have been good enough to express."

Reply to Marwari Association.

Replying to the address presented by the Marwari Association on Saturday Lord Irwin said that it gave him much pleasure to receive an address from the representatives of such an important and influential section of the citizens of Calcutta and he thanked them warmly for the cordial manner in which they had welcomed Lady Irwin and himself.

"A few hours spent in Calcutta," he continued, "are enough to impress the visitor with the wealth and enterprise of this great city, and the labour and activity on which its prosperity is founded. I suppose that no single community has taken a greater share in this sphere of city life than the Marwari, whose spirit of commercial enterprise has led him and his ancestors to leave the plains of Rajputana and seek their fortune in distant parts of India.

(Continued in Page 10.)

PAREX HOT-WATER-BOTTLES

We have now received these well-known rubber Hot Water Bottles, which we sell with 2 years' guarantee. All sizes in stock. Prices from Rs. 4-4-0.

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Figure 3: “The Ideal Sleuth and Mrs. Christie”. By Dorothy L. Sayers. (Author of “Whose Body?” “Clouds of Witness,” etc). The Daily News, Friday, December 10, 1926.

On with the "Movies" in the drawing room



"THE SCREEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR"

Scene: A very modern living room with a well polished floor. There are signs that a dance has been in progress. Cast: Ivor Novello, Gladys Cooper, Will Rogers, Ellen Terry, Lon Chaney, Noah Beery . . . . and others.

"Give the light a push, somebody," and immediately the cosy "parlour" is in darkness. A beam of light steadies upon the screen. We lean back in our comfortable armchairs to enjoy the revelation. It's Carnival and we're away holidaying among charmingly fantastic scenes. We are refreshed by the breeze of a Texan prairie. To-day's stage favourites revive for us the fascinating dress and manners of an older day . . . Now the lights go up. We're back in our own time, our own living room, blinking. There's a great uproar. "Tophole!" "Core!" "Where d'you collect this outfit?" . . . It's a "Kodascope."

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Brings the cinema home

"Kodascope" is not a toy—a perfect miniature film projector, which can be worked from any electric light fixture. You hire films from the 5,000 or more contained in "Kodascope" Library. Sport and travel pictures, popular dramas and comedies—made only on non-inflammable Safety Film. And some day you may like to make your own . . . with the Cine-"Kodak"—a perfect and moving picture camera—as easily as you take a "snap" with a "Kodak."

Inquire at the nearest "Kodak" dealer for list—"Kodascope" £15, Cine-"Kodak" "16" £16 16s.

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WEATHER FORECAST.

ENGLAND, S.E. and S.W. MIDLANDS, S. and W.: (with London).—Wind westerly, light to moderate; mainly fair, local showers later; moderate temperature.

English Channel: Sea slight.

Weather Forecast for Continental: Mainly fair, with moderate day temperature; perhaps night frost and fog.

Lighting-up time: London 4.43, Exeter 5.0, Cardiff 5.1, Birmingham 4.56, Liverpool 4.46, Manchester 4.46, Leeds 4.36, Hull 4.25 p.m.

Sun rises 7.53 a.m., sets 3.55 p.m.

Moon rises 1.54 p.m., sets 2.0 a.m.

High water at London Bridge: 8.56 a.m., 9.20 p.m. Lowest temperature last night: 37 degrees.

Meteorological Office, Air Ministry, Kingsway, London, W.C. 2. Issued at 10.0 a.m. Monday 45 p.m.

WHAT IS WRONG IN THE R.A.F.?

Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for Air, appealing yesterday at Birmingham for support of the Territorial Air Force scheme, stated that no "panaces" had been discovered for the prevention of flying accidents, and asserted emphatically that the authorities have taken every possible precaution, and that the system of supervision and training in this country is the best in the world. The machines and engines, he said, are more rigidly inspected than those of any other nation; and in the case of an accident there are always two separate inquiries. Almost at the very moment when the Air Minister was offering those words of official comfort, a skilled R.A.F. officer was killed through the crashing of his machine at Hawkinge. It was the second fatal R.A.F. accident this week and the fifth in 16 days. There have been 93 deaths in the Force this year. There is no doubt at all that the public is becoming seriously perturbed by this continuous and steadily increasing death-roll. We should not be surprised if the Air Force itself is beginning to develop "nerves." Everybody realises that the risk involved in military flying is infinitely greater than in ordinary commercial flying; and many of these risks are, of course, necessary. But, without desiring to raise a scare on this subject, we are not by any means satisfied with the Minister's explanation of what seems unfortunately to be passing from a weekly to a daily death-roll. What is wanted from him is not a series of platitudes about the impossibility of finding a "panacea" or an occasional dose of soothing syrup in the form of a vague generalised description of the measures taken to ensure reasonable safety in the air, but a detailed reply to definite points of criticism.

Sir Samuel Hoare says the British methods of organisation and training and inspection are the best in the world. How is it, then, that the French, with a very much larger air force and machines supposed to be inferior to ours, have had to record in their service little more than half the number of accidents suffered by British flying men this year? In the House of Commons last week the Minister made the significant admission that 32 per cent. of the accidents involved machines used before 1917. Admiral Bacon, who had much to do with the creation of the Royal Naval Air Services, has asserted that out of more than 90 machines in the R.A.F. no fewer than 23 are equipped with machines of out-of-date design, and that the majority of accidents have occurred with these types. It is also freely alleged that the system of training is not at all the same of perfection that Sir Samuel Hoare makes it out to be, that young flying officers are required to carry out dangerous duties before they are fitted for the task, that a great deal of valuable time is wasted on excessive routine on the ground, and that in the higher branches of the services there is a certain lack of enthusiasm knowledge of actual flying technique and of other essential requirements. All hope pressure will be brought to bear on the Air Ministry to investigate such serious criticisms thoroughly and to make a full and impartial report. If it is really the case, for instance, that the Force is equipped with inefficient machines through lack of funds, the public, we are pretty sure, will insist that the Government shall at the earliest opportunity divert for the use of our air defences some portion of the vast sums of money which are still improperly lavished on our lanless, voracious and dictatorial administrators in the Admiralty.

HOPE FOR THE MEN IN GAOL

Lord Birkenhead made a characteristically generous reply last night to the Labour deputation which waited him, as the acting Home Secretary, to review the cases of imprisoned miners, with special reference to the sentences on Mr. Arthur Jenkins, the Monmouthshire leader. The case for review was presented with conspicuous ability by members of the deputation; and Lord Birkenhead's answer was a model of fairness, common sense and conciliation not usually associated with the gentleman whose office he temporarily holds. There is now a very good prospect that the Government will do as Mr. Herbert Smith suggested, and let bygones be bygones in this deplorable dispute. Nothing we can think of would contribute more effectively at the present moment to peace and goodwill in the coal mine than the declaration of a general amnesty for those who in a time of bitter struggle had allowed their feelings to outrun their discretion. If that is the practical outcome of this friendly appeal to the Labour leaders and his friendly response, we shall rejoice in the knowledge that the personal discussions of the "Daily News" have had not a little to do with so beneficent a result.

THE BARRIER.

Mr. Locker-Lampson, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, stated fairly and succinctly in the House of Commons the obstacles to negotiations with Russia. He claimed that the Government had plenty of evidence of anti-British propaganda by the Russian Government, and in answer to a further question he explicitly stated that he was quite prepared to give the dates on which these incidents took place. He added that if the Russian Government guaranteed that they would stop anti-British propaganda and recognise their obligations like any other civilised country it would be possible to enter into negotiations. It is good to have this assurance that the barrier to loan negotiations is not one erected merely by political prejudices. It is impossible for one country to have cordial relations with another that is engaged in an elaborately planned and richly subsidised attempt to stab it in the back. In all the rhetorical nonsense that is talked about Russia on both sides that is the one patent and arresting fact. For one's enemy to want to cut one's throat and burn down one's house is at any rate a comprehensible position. But it is a little unreasonable for him to complain at the same time that one does not ask him to dinner. Until Russia realises the absurdity of her present attitude negotiations are both mischievous and futile.

A "REFANED" AGE.

There is considerable substance in the request made by a judge recently that misconduct should not be employed as a euphemism for adultery. There is a tendency in this age to think that ugly things become less offensive if they are disguised under a pretty name. The significance of a lie becomes less obvious if it is described by such tame pseudonyms as untruth, fib, tarradiddle or terminological inexactitude. The same is true of stealing. Thieving becomes a less anti-social crime when it takes on the innocuous form of winning, inking, pinching. It is not a mere question of euphony. It is illustrative of a subtle and definitely harmful alteration in standard of values. To belittle the word for a crime has the definite psychological effect of belittling the crime itself. Many men and women would be outraged if their petty frauds on the railway or omnibus companies or persistent refusal to settle sailors' bills or restore "borrowed" money were stigmatised as thefts. This refusal to call things by their right names is clouding the whole moral horizon of our minds. The eighteenth century is described as a brutal age. It had ugly names for ugly sins. This age has substituted pleasant names, but it still commits ugly crimes. A nation is not necessarily reformed because it is "refaned."



Miss Olga Abernethy, daughter of the late Robert Abernethy, M.D., F.R.C.P.E., of Edinburgh, and of Mrs. Abernethy, is to marry Mr. Edward A. Reid.

THE BIGOTS.

To the Editor of the "Daily News."

Sir,—Your statement that "narrow, formal bigotry has done as much as anything to reduce the Liberal Party to its present straits" deserves to be driven home again and again.

The men who are wanted in order to advance causes in this imperfect world are such as are tolerant, broad-minded, and willing to believe that there are other men of goodwill in the world besides themselves. As a Liberal of 40 years' standing, I tell Mr. Crump that men worth their salt are being utterly disgusted with those of the Party who seem to assume that they, and they alone, are the salt of the earth.

This attitude is rapidly leading to the disintegration of the Liberal Party as it exists at present.

I enclose my card. F.

"CONTEMPTUOUS" CONCERT-GIVERS.

From Mr. GEORGE SAMPSON.

Mr. Robert Lynd's excellent article on Mr. Poulsinoff and his lost piano says something that needs saying often and severely. The contemptuous attitude of concert-givers to the mere worms who are graciously allowed to pay the money is getting past endurance.

This evening I went to a concert. Among the items announced for performance was the string quartet of Verdi, which I was specially anxious to hear. I was heavily engaged, but I had arranged to have time free whenever the quartet should be played. At 3.30 I ascertained by telephone that the quartet was the first item. I went, therefore, to the hall at 3.30, paid sixpence for a wretched rag of a programme, and found that the Verdi quartet was duly placed first. And then, about one minute before the concert began, somebody appeared on the platform and announced that the Verdi quartet would be played last, and not first!

I at once sought out the announcer and complained of the breach of faith. My complaint was received with haughty surprise, and I was given to understand, in effect, that if I didn't like it, I could lump it. I am going to lump it. The oppressed public have few rights left; but they still have the right of stopping at home. I propose to exercise it, and leave the musicians to take in each other's music.

GEORGE SAMPSON.

Reform Club, S.W.1, Dec. 9.

THE LARGEST ORGAN.

Sir,—In last Saturday's "Daily News" we read, not without amusement, that a certain professor of science has at last succeeded in naming the largest organ in Europe. This instrument is alleged to be in a Piccadilly cinema theatre.

Now it seems only fair that as organ builders of some experience on the Continent we should be allowed to scotch such fables publicly. The simple fact is that the Plein organ is not even the fiftieth largest in Europe, or even in Great Britain. No doubt American publicity deserves all the business results it secures, but there comes a time when this sort of thing does harm even to those who are supposed to benefit by it.

HENRY WILLIS AND SONS, Ltd.,
(Builders of Liverpool Cathedral Organ).

25a, Ferndale-road, S.W.9, Dec. 7.

MSS. not accompanied by stamped envelope cannot be returned.

THE IDEAL SLEUTH AND MRS. CHRISTIE.

By DOROTHY L. SAYERS.
(Author of "Whose Body?" "Clouds of Witness," etc.)

If one is a "mystery-monger" by profession, one's friends are apt to ask, on reading of any mysterious occurrence in the papers: "Well now, haven't you got a theory about this?"



Miss Dorothy Sayers.

But, quite apart from the fact that it is a great deal easier to unravel a plot when one has previously invented it, the newspaper reports, which are all one has to go on, are necessarily very incomplete. One cannot ask all the questions which one's own ideal detective would instantly put, and

that, though one might readily invent a dozen plausible stories to fit the known facts, one has no means of verifying them.

Let us take the case of the missing Mrs. Christie as an example. In any problem of this kind there are four possible solutions: loss of memory, foul play, suicide or voluntary disappearance. The first—loss of memory—is bound to present us with a baffling situation, because it implies an entire lack of motive, and it is an axiom of detection that where there is a motive there is a clue. But a voluntary disappearance, also, may be so cleverly staged as to be exceedingly puzzling—especially if, as here, we are concerned with a very skilful writer of detective stories, whose mind has been trained in the study of ways and means to perplex.

The Abandoned Car.

In an ordinary case, of course, one looks for the motive behind the disappearance—domestic trouble or financial trouble, for example. But supposing Mrs. Christie had asked herself whether it was really possible for a person to "disappear" in modern England, and had decided to put the matter to the most practical of all tests—by disappearing! In that case we should again be faced with the same difficulty—the absence of all the usual motives, and the consequent absence of "clues."

As we read the papers, a thousand points crop up which call for more information. Take the questions we could ask about the car alone. When it was seen by Harry Green at 7 o'clock the headlamps were still burning; when Dene examined it an hour or so later, the lights were out and the batteries run down. Mrs. Christie left home at 9.45 on the Friday evening; were the batteries then fully charged? Were the lights good? Or were they already dim—so dim that a careless or nervous driver might have accidentally run off the road?

How long did the car stand in the bushes? One early account stated that the car, when found, was "covered with hoar-frost." Where? On the hood and seats only? Or on the bonnet and radiator as well? If the latter, then the whole motion that Mrs. Christie could have been seen with the engine running at 6.45 a.m., as was at one time suggested, becomes absurd; it would take many hours for the radiator to cool to the point of becoming frosted.

Then, again, if, according to the latest theory, she had run straight up to town and only abandoned the car on the way in order to frost on the radiator, if present, would set an early time-limit for her return.

Marks on the Grass.

Then the frost is said to have covered up any footmarks left upon the ground. But what of the tyre tracks? If the brakes had been applied—as they would be, instinctively, in an accident—there would be pressure-marks to show it. If the brakes were never put on at all, then only two explanations seem possible. Either the car was left to run down the bank under its own power or weight till it was brought up by the trees, or somebody manœuvred it very skilfully into position—"planted" it, in fact, so as to simulate an accident.

Which was it? Were the gears engaged? If so, were they in top, as though the car had plunged off the road at high speed? Or in bottom, as they would be if its owner were tenderly driving over rough ground?

Then the clothes found in the car—had they been taken out of the attaché case, or merely spilled out by a hurried clerk who shook the case open? Had she, or had she not, changed her dress? The accounts are contradictory. Was Mrs. Christie an experienced, careful driver, or erratic, as the servants say? Mrs. Hemsley might seem to suggest it. Without knowing the answers to such questions as these, one cannot theorise, one can only guess.

Our ideal detective would go on to ask, as no doubt the real detectives have done, whether Mrs. Christie's family knew of the intended visit to Beverley; when it had been arranged, and whether she was known at the boarding-house.

These are only a few of the things one wants to know about before one can even begin to "have a theory" about a mystery. We can only hope that the explanation will turn out not to be a tragic one, and with the real detectives a speedy success in their quest.

WHAT STRUCK ME MOST ABOUT WIESBADEN.

The discretion of the British Army of Occupation.

The puffs of steam rising from the streets.

That they came from boiling lake three miles below level of the city.

That the steaming hot lake water spurts up at 21 points at the rate of 350 gallons a minute.

That the springs which the Roman Army occupied, A.D. 90, enclosed and protected by a fort, are now palatial "cures" and hotels.

That you get the water from the springs in large jugs through the box water tap in your hotel bath-room.

That the Opera House is open 10½ months in the year.

That "Othello" was played there one night last week, and the "Festival Memory" of Shakespeare was proposed by a German at a supper in the Kurhaus following the performance.

That every bookseller is displaying Bernard Shaw, Galsworthy, Ibsen and Conrad.

That there are as many horse cabs as taxis, and that the drivers of the former wear the shiny top hats familiar to Londoners of the Victorian age.

ERNEST SMITH.

LONDON CALLING. . . .

EVEN the most resolute anti-Bolshevik may find his nursery invaded this year by Russian toys made under the ægis of the Soviet.

I was told yesterday that Frumkin, the chief of the "Narkomtorg," or Ministry of Foreign Trade, is taking particular pains to popularise Russia's peasant toys amongst the bourgeoisie of the West, and particularly in Great Britain.

However, as neither carved white wood birds and animals from Bogorodsk, nor cigarette boxes of Karelian birch from Viatka, nor yet papier mache vanity boxes from the Sergiewsky Arcade in Moscow itself, can carry any particular propaganda, even the members of the "Clear out the Reds" campaign can suffer no hurt.

On with the Dance.

ONE of the largest and most dignified of the Women's Clubs in the West End is starting a dancing class for its members.

In future instruction in the Charleston will rank among the club's soberer attractions—lectures, art shows, dinners and readings of thought, and so on.

The woman doctor, artist, writer and writer now finds political worker and writer now finds her relaxation on the dance floor.

"As a consequence of the innovation, I anticipate a series of dance teas at the club next season."

A Ch'nese Preacher.

IN view of Lord Inchcape's attack on Chinese Christians, it is worth noting that Dr. Stewart Yui, a leading Chinese Christian, who is Professor of Political Science at Tsinghua University, Pekin (the institution founded out of American Boxer Indemnity money), is to preach in a City church on Sunday evening next.

He will be in the pulpit at All Hallows, Lombard-street, which, under its new rector, Dr. Tissington Tallow,

STORY OF THE DAY.

"Put those feet in line, will you," roared the drill sergeant.
"Please, sergeant," meekly answered the recruit addressed, "they're not mine. They belong to a man in the rear rank!"

of the Student Christian Movement, is rapidly becoming known as the "Students' Church."

Dr. Yui tells me that he will preach "just a straightforward sermon" and will not deal with events in China.

He is not very perturbed by Lord Inchcape's attack, for he says the Chinese welcome Christian teaching.

What they are averse from is the idea that behind the missionary are the guns of a foreign Power.

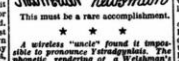
Many Americans are Victorians, and it is by no means confined to this idea as regards the Chinese do.

A Mirror Writer.

A RECENT note of mine about the queer case of the mirror-writing boy has brought me news of an even stranger freak of caligraphy.

From a Bulham reader, for whom is claimed the power of writing in the ordinary way with his right hand and at the same time, mirror-writing with the left.

Add to write the signature which appears at the bottom of this column, he produced this, the two being written simultaneously:



This must be a rare accomplishment.

* * *

A wireless "uncle" found it impossible to pronounce Ystradgynlais. The ground landlord of a Welshman's pronunciation of it is "Is-trad-gun-lo-is." Savoy Hill, please copy.

Hectors.

IT is not generally known that the people behind Hectors, the new dance club, which has just been opened in the West End, were all associated with the Wembley Exhibition, which perhaps accounted for the strong strain of the fairly placed Government officials among the guests last night.

Children's Concerts.

MR. ROBERT MAYER, whose children's concerts in the West End have proved so popular, is turning his attention to the East End.

Last spring he gave a very successful concert of high-class orchestral music in the People's Palace for the benefit of East End children, and yesterday afternoon he gave the second of what he hopes will be many similar concerts in the fine concert hall in the Mile End road.

His ambition is to do for London children what Mr. Frank Damrosch has done for New York children. The son of Walter Damrosch, the famous conductor and friend of Wagner, Mr. Frank Damrosch founded in New York the People's Choral Union 34 years ago, the success of which induced him to turn his attention specially to children, and for many years the Damrosch children's concerts at the Carnegie Hall have been so popular among New York children that Mr. Carnegie, who promised to meet any deficit, was never asked to honour his promise.

I sincerely hope Mr. Mayer will be as successful in London as Mr. Damrosch was in New York. Such missionary work is badly needed.

Baronet's Engagement.

AMONG the engagements announced yesterday there is one of especial interest. Miss Jane Arundell Clarke, of Fremington House, North Devon, who is to marry shortly Sir Stewart Stewart-Clark, of Dundas Castle, Scotland, is a pretty girl, who has been described as typical of the "English rose" tradition in the freshness and colour of her beauty.



Miss Jane Clarke.

Sir Stewart Stewart-Clark is the second baronet, and succeeded his father two years ago, when he was 38. His seat, Dundas Castle, is at South Queensferry.

Sweet and Low.

WHAT did the modest and soft-voiced Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister say in his second-reading speech on the Sale of Food Bill?

He was dealing with a technical point about tare on paper (not tea nor sugar) and the whole Press Gallery thought he said "grammes."

"It turns out the word he used was 'drams,'" but as the leading Conservative organ lefty remarks in printing the correction, "the right hon. gentleman was almost inaudible in the Press Gallery throughout his speech . . ."

Sir Philip's voice is the gentlest that ever rises from the Treasury bench.

It has the crooning softness of a lullaby; the timid restraint of a visitor in a sick room; the faint clairvoyance of the far-away.

It is an additional reason why inaudible owner should be translated to the House of Lords, where although its acoustics are bad, every speaker is provided with a microphone.

Voice Production.

TALKING of House of Commons voices, the Prime Minister in the Vote of Censure debate, though perfectly audible, gave that curious impression of a slight vocal strain which takes away from the effectiveness of his best speeches.

It is as if he were falling short at the time of just the necessary amount of tone.

Mr. MacDonald is sometimes inaudible because he talks too loud.

If the exigencies of the Opposition leadership would allow him more time for the preparation of his speeches, he would make a far deeper impression.

Vehement extemporisation does not allow him to do justice to the best qualities of his intellect, or to the musical charm of his voice.

A Threatened Terrace.

IT is to be hoped that the threatened destruction of Lombard-terrace, a Charing Cross Walk, Chelsea, will be stayed.

The terrace is made up of a little row of delightful 17th century houses, which form a characteristic part of the fast-disappearing riverside architecture of Old Chelsea.

To replace them by big new buildings would be to destroy the glamour of the place, and would be very hard on the delightful old parish church next door, where Henry VIII. was married to his last wife.

A memorial signed by the Governor of Chelsea Hospital, Archdeacon Sinclair, Dame Ellen Terry, Miss Sybil Thorndike, Sir Valentine Chirol, Mr. Augustus Harris and many other lovers of London is being prepared to send to the ground landlord, Major Hans Stanley, asking him not to let the terrace be pulled down.

A Wesley Performance.

THE music Samuel Wesley is all too rarely heard nowadays. One of his compositions, "In Exile Jam," for double chorus, will be heard at the Queen's Hall on Monday, when Liebe's Choir, St. Michael's singers, and the London Symphony Orchestra will give a choral and instrumental symphony concert. Mr. Geoffrey Toye, who will be remembered as the conductor of an orchestra for Gilbert and Sullivan seasons before he gave up music professionally in 1920, will conduct.

Mr. Pringle.

I AM not surprised that Mr. W. M. R. Pringle has resigned his candidature at Luton.

For I hear that his partisanship in the Liberal disputes had considerably affected his personal position and had deprived him of a certain amount of support, particularly from the young Liberal side of his organisation.

It will be interesting to see if Mr. Pringle joins that group of dissentients who very much as it has finding a political refuge in Cornwall.

NEWSMAN.

WORDS OF ABUSE.

By E. V. KNOX ("Evoe" or "Punch").

I am charmed to see that Mr. Oswald Mosley has been guilty of dragging into a controversy that most peculiar of all adjectives used in this island—I mean the word "un-British."

Personal attacks, if he is quoted correctly, are what Mr. Oswald Mosley considers to be un-British. Oh shades of the mighty dead! What Mr. Mosley means, of course, and what most people mean when they use this word, is unhistorical, inconsistent with the tradition of good form in public affairs which was fostered during the last half century by the nineteenth century gentlemen Englishmen. Rather a long definition for such a little word.

But manners unfortunately change, and the Mr. Oswald Mosley who considers himself a Victorian, and it is quite questionable whether personal attacks, so far as the law allows them to be made, will continue to remain unBritish for the New-Georgian world.

For how many things that were once un-British have become British now! Lord Inchcape mentions that he recently received a letter protesting against mixed bathing in the swimming baths on Hampstead Heath. Mixed bathing is far more un-British than personal attacks. While personal attacks merely require from a mild stump during a part of the Victorian era, mixed bathing only ceased to be un-British about twenty years ago. How shyly, and how fully clothed, the Victorian damsel entered the waves may be seen in drawings of the period. Some time before that we may confidently say that any kind of bathing was un-British in the extreme.

Cocktails are un-British, and so are black shirts and red—much more un-British than mixed bathing, and much more un-British than personal attacks.

"Un-British," in fact, is the mark of an Englishman, is a word to enable us to anything he doesn't happen like. Mr. Mosley doesn't like personal attacks. Few of us do. But whether a Frenchman calls personal attacks un-French, or a Chinaman calls Chinese. Personally, I don't object to mixed bathing. In fact, I rather like it. But if I did object to it, I should have no hesitation in calling it un-British, just as when two coloured trains come into my nearest Tube station destined for a place to which I do not wish to go, I always say to the official on the platform: "This is becoming a very un-British line."

* * *

"Un-British," in fact, means simply and "British" means pleasant. Yet even these meanings are not fixed for the English tongue. I remember a book written for children which I used to read when I was very young. It was an American book. In one story some boys and girls were playing croquet, and one boy cheated, and hit the ball into a better position with his foot. Mixed bathing is not the only thing which was pooh-poohed out to us other by the grown-ups that this was only a as expected, because it was British.

I remember that this passage caused me very much at the time, because I had been taught that cheating at croquet was a very un-British thing to do. Even now I consider it to be not a Russian device.

And having finished this article, I intend to write a letter to my neighbour complaining of the singularly un-British barking of the fox terrier next door.

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Figure 4: “Writer of the Most Brilliant Detective Novel of the Day”. The Sketch, Feb. 28, 1923.

Writer of the Most Brilliant Detective Novel of the Day.



AUTHOR OF "THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT STYLES": AGATHA CHRISTIE, WHO IS TO CONTINUE "THE INVESTIGATIONS OF HERCULE POIROT" IN "THE SKETCH."

"The Mysterious Affair at Styles," by Agatha Christie, was published in 1921, and created a sensation, as being the finest detective novel since the war. Mrs. Christie wrote it for a bet, the wager being that she could not write a detective story in which the reader would be unable to "spot" the murderer, although supplied with the same clues as those given to the detective. She won her bet and rose to fame as a writer of detective fiction, and as creator of Hercule Poirot, the expert in criminology. Poirot is a Belgian, and possesses a distinctive and attractive personality, while his handling of mysteries is both masterly and unlike any other detective methods previously described in fiction. Poirot is shortly to figure in "The Sketch," for Mrs. Christie has written a special series of detective stories entitled "The Investigations of Hercule Poirot," which are even more enthralling than the wonderful tale unfolded in "The Mysterious Affair at Styles." Mrs. Christie is also the author of "The Secret Adversary"; and her latest book, "The Murder on the Links," will shortly be published by John Lane.

Photograph by Boorhorn.

Image © Illustrated London News Group

Figure 5: “The Maker of ‘The Grey Cells of M. Poirot’.” CREATOR OF THE MOST INTERESTING DETECTIVE SINCE SHERLOCK HOLMES: AGATHA CHRISTIE. The Sketch, March 7, 1923.

The Maker of "The Grey Cells of M. Poirot."



At the telephone.



With her daughter, Rosalind: Agatha Christie, the great detective-story writer.



At her writing table. At work with her type-writer.



In her drawing-room: the author of the series of detective stories we begin this week.



With "Tutankhamen" cushions: Agatha Christie and her little girl.

CREATOR OF THE MOST INTERESTING DETECTIVE SINCE SHERLOCK HOLMES: AGATHA CHRISTIE.

Agatha Christie (who is in private life Mrs. Archibald Christie, the mother of a charming little daughter, Rosalind) is the brilliant writer of detective fiction, and creator of Hercule Poirot, the most fascinating character any novel-reader could wish to meet. Her first book, "The Mysterious Affair at Styles," introduced Poirot, the detective who, by the aid of what he calls "those brave little grey cells" of his brain, unravels the strangest tangles of crime. A series of stories dealing with Poirot's further exploits has been written for "The Sketch," and opens this week—on the page opposite. The tales are a thrilling set of detective yarns which equal anything ever published in that style.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALFIERI, SPECIALLY TAKEN FOR "THE SKETCH."

Image © Illustrated London News Group

Figure 6: “A Family Study”. The Creator of Hercule Poirot, with her Daughter: Mrs. Agatha Christie and Rosalind. The Sketch, April 4, 1923.

A Family Study.



THE CREATOR OF HERCULE POIROT, WITH HER DAUGHTER: MRS. AGATHA CHRISTIE AND ROSALIND.

Mrs. Agatha Christie is the brilliant writer of detective fiction and the creator of Hercule Poirot, the detective whose exploits rival those of Sherlock Holmes. He made his first appearance in her novel, "The Mysterious Affair at Styles," and his further adventures are being retailed each week in "The Sketch." Mrs. Christie is the wife of Wing-Commander Archibald Christie, C.M.G., D.S.O., the distinguished airman who did so well in the war. He is the son of Mr. Archibald Christie, I.C.S. Mrs. Christie is the daughter of Mr. F. Miller, was married in 1914, and has a little girl, Rosalind, who is shown with her in our beautiful portrait study.

Portrait Study by Marcus Adams, The Children's Studio, 43, Dover Street, W.

Image © Illustrated London News Group

Appendix B

Timeline of Events 1900-1950

Date	Agatha Christie (1890-1976)	Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957)	Detective Fiction: People, Literature, and Events	Literary Events (Miskimmin, "Timeline" 314-320)	Historical Events (Miskimmin, "Timeline" 314-320)
	Born September 15, 1890	Born June 13, 1893			
1900		Begins learning Latin; Feb writes letter to mother telling about Latin lesson (Reynolds 15)		Net book Agreement Finalized Boots library Launched	Salisbury becomes Prime Minister. Labour Representation Committee founded (becomes the Labour Part in 1906).
1901	Death of father, Frederick Alvah Miller. First publishes in a local newspaper (July).		*The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Sir Author Conan Doyle's third Sherlock Holmes novel.	World's Classics launched.	Death of Queen Victoria and succession of Edward VII. First transatlantic wireless transmissions. Census reveals population boom.
1902			"A Defense of Detective Stories" by G.K. Chesterton in *The Defendant*. (Haycraft 3)	Establishment of *Times Literary Supplement*. Establishment of *Daily Mirror* newspaper.	End of Boer War. Balfour succeeds Salisbury as Prime Minister. Balfour Act provides for secondary education and establishes LEAs.
1903					Emmeline Pankhurst forms Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).
1904	Second husband, Max Mallowan, born May 6			Opening of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin.	'Entente Cordiale' is signed.

				Establishment of the Prix Femina-Vie Heureuse. The *Times* Book Club launched.	Worker's Educational Association founded.
1905			*The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, third short story compilation of Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Author Conon Doyle.		Sinn Féin is formed. Campbell-Bannerman becomes Prime Minister. First Suffrage jailings.
1906	Attends finishing school in Paris			Foundation of the English Association. Establishment of the Anarchist magazine, *Mother Earth*. Everyman's Library launched.	Liberal government elected. Labour representation Committee becomes the Labour Party. Foundation of Women's Labour League. Eleven members of WSPU, including Sylvia Pankhurst, jailed in Holloway Prison. Introduction of free school meals.
1907				Riots in Abbey Theatre over *The Playboy of the Western World*. *Cambridge History of English Literature* launched.	British Eugenics Education Society founded. Women's Freedom League (WFL) established.
1908	First musical publication "One Hour with Thee".			End of the 'Book War', as *The Times* signs the Net Book Agreement. Mills and Boon launched. Establishment of *English Review* magazine.	Austria annexes Bosnia. Asquith becomes Prime Minister. Introduction of Old Age Pensions. Emmeline and Christobel Pankhurst jailed.

					Women's Anti-Suffrage League founded. Britain stages the Olympic Games.
1909		Begins at Godolphin School in Salisbury. Publishes some early poems and fiction pieces in school magazine (Sandberg 19).			Lloyd George's People's Budget. Institution of old age pensions. Suffragette hunger strikes begin. 'Younger Suffragists' founded.
1910			G.K. Chesterton publishes first Father Brown short story, "The Blue Cross", in *The Story-Teller* magazine.	Establishment of *The Woman Journalist* magazine.	Death of Edward VII and succession of George V. Miner's strike, First Labour Exchanges Open.
1911	Travels to Egypt in the winter with her mother Clara. Writes *Snow upon the Desert*, her first full-length novel (unpublished).	First in all of England in the Cambridge Higher Local Examination, with distinction in French and spoken German (Reynolds 42)	G.K. Chesterton compilation of Father Brown short stories, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, published.	Establishment of *The Masses* magazine. Establishment of *Freewoman* magazine (becomes the *New Freewoman* in 1913 and *Egoist* in 1914). Establishment of *Woman's Weekly* magazine.	National Health Insurance Bill. Copyright Act. First Official Secrets Act. Parliament Act reduces powers of House of Lords. WFL boycott the census.
1912	Engaged to Reggie Lucy. Archie Christie qualifies as a pilot, July. Agatha meets Archibald 'Archie' Christie, Oct 12.	Enters Somerville College at Oxford on full three-year scholarship: The Gilchrist Scholarship to Somerville College (Reynolds 43) Starts the Mutual Admiration Society		Death of Poet Laureate, Robert Bridges (father of Elizabeth Daryush). John Masefield becomes new Laureate. Lady Ritchie is the first female President of the English Association,	First Balkan War. Irish Home Rule Bill. Ulster Solemn League and Covenant drawn up, Miners', Dockers' and, (sic) general transport strikes. National Insurance Act.

		(MAS) with Charis Barnett, Dorothy Rowe, Muriel 'Jim' Jaeger, and others (see Moulton).		Establishment of The Poetry Society. Establishment of *Poetry Review* magazine. Establishment of the *Georgian Poetry Review* magazine.	*Titanic* sinks. British Film Censor appointed.
1913	Engaged to Archie, Jan 4. Breaks engagement with Reggie.		E.C. Bentley publishes *Trent's Last Case*. Dedicated to G.K. Chesterton. This book is often hailed as beginning the 'Golden Age' of Detective Fiction.	Establishment of *New Statesman* magazine. *First Edition of *Labour Woman* in May, journal of the WLL. (Hunt 239).	Second Balkan War. Ulster Volunteer Force established, Cat and Mouse Act. Death of Suffragette, Emily Davidson, under the King's horse. East London Federation of Suffragettes established. Emily Dawson is the first female magistrate.
1914	Archie leaves for France, Aug 5. Begins work at the Voluntary Aid Detachment of the Red Cross (Oct to May 1915; June 1916 to Sept 1918). Marriage to Colonel Archibald Christie, Christmas Eve	On holiday in France, has to flee as war breaks out in August. More than half the Oxford male students enlist for war.	*The Valley of Fear*, Sir Author Conan Doyle's fourth Sherlock Holmes novel.	Vorticist movement founded by Wyndham Lewis. First publication of *Blast*. First publication of the *Egoist*. Authors' Declaration in support of the war.	Germany invades Belgium, World War One begins. Battles of Ardennes, Mons, Marne, and first Battle of Ypres. Irish Home Rule Bill suspended. Panama Canal opened. Suffragettes protest at Buckingham Palace.
1915		War Office takes over Somerville rooms, women are moved to rooms in Oriel College and elsewhere.			Battle at Loos and second Battle of Ypres. Gallipoli landings. Coalition government formed under Asquith.

		Earns first-class honours in French. Leaves Oxford in June.			Defence of the Realm Act. Women's Institute Movement founded. *Lusitania* sunk.
1916	Begins work on *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*	Begins work in Hull as French Teacher. Undergoes aerial raids. *Op. I.*, a poetry collection published		Establishment of *Vogue* magazine.	Battle of the Somme, Easter Rising in Dublin. Lloyd George becomes Prime Minister. Conscription introduced by the Military Service Act.
1917		Becomes publisher's apprentice to Basil Blackwell in Oxford. Contributes to edited collection of Oxford Poetry (includes work by Siegfried Sassoon), translating twelfth-century French Poetry. MAS reunion in Oxford. Rejects marriage proposal from Rev Leonard Hodgson.	*His Last Bow*, fourth short story compilation of Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Author Conon Doyle.	*Virginia and Leonard Woolf found the Hogarth Press.	Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Battle of Passchendaele and their Battle of Ypres. United States enter war.
1918	End of War service and move to London with Archie, September. Finishes writing *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (Edwards 60), accepted for publication (Bernthal 7)	Publishes *Catholic Tales and Christian Songs*. Writes anonymous letter writing campaign with friend to stir up controversy in newspapers to advertise her collection. (Reynolds 81)			Battle of Amiens. Armistice ends World War One, November. Representation of the People Act means suffrage granted to women over 30 (*those who met the property requirements, DiCenzo "Feminsit Media", 313).

					Commons vote to allow women MPs. Influenza pandemic (to 1919)
1919	Only child, daughter Rosalind, born August	Begins working freelance for Blackwell, takes on tutoring and some journalism. September, moves to France as a secretary in the educational exchange bureau. October: elected member of the Modern Language Association. Mac Fleming (future husband) publishes *How to See the Battlefields* (Reynolds 154)		Establishment of *Peg's Paper* magazine.	Treaty of Versailles. Covenant of the League of Nations. Ministry of Health established. Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act. Nancy Astor becomes first woman MP.
1920	*The Mysterious Affair at Styles* published by John Lane (United States). Serialised in England. Introduction of Hercule Poirot.	Converses with Jim about Sexton Blake series and popular culture. Experiments with writing for the Sexton Blake syndicate – has a character 'Wimsey' (McGregor and Lewis 20). Moves to London, plans to be a full-time writer. October 14, officially matriculates from Oxford in "first batch of women" to be given degrees.	*The Cask*, first detective fiction novel by Freeman Wills Crofts.	Cicely Hamilton, *William an Englishman* (1919) awarded the Prix Femina-Vie Heureuse. Establishment of the 'Memoir Club'. Establishment of *Time and Tide* magazine. *Sayers' friend Muriel 'Jim' Jaeger works briefly as a journalist here and then for *Vogue* whilst sharing a flat with Sayers. Establishment of *The Dial* magazine.	End of Russian Civil War. Government of Ireland Act passed, separating Ulster from Eire. League of Nations founded, Formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). Oxford University confers its first degrees on previous women students and admits first 100 females to study for full degrees.

		Teaching post – Clapham High School (McGregor and Lewis 211) December, moves to Mecklenburgh Square. Meets John Cournos.			
1921	*The Mysterious Affair at Styles* published by The Bodley Head (United Kingdom) in February.	January: Inspiration and rough notes for what would become *Whose Body?* Quits teaching because of ill health. Summer: completes *Whose Body?* New teaching post, Acton. November: *Whose Body?* is typed. Begins writing *Clouds of Witness.* Begins negotiating terms for *Whose Body?* Leaves Mecklenburgh Square, takes a three year lease on an apartment: 24 Great James Street would be her London address for the rest of her life. Frustrating relationship with John Cournos.		Constance Holme, *The Splendid Fairing* (1919) awarded the Prix Femina-Vie Heureuse. Foundation of Jonathan Cape Publishers. **Home & Politics* Journal launched by the Conservative Party (Hunt 240)	Hitler takes over as leader of the German Workers' Part (DAP), which he renames the National Socialist German Workers' Part (Nazis). Anglo-Irish Treaty Signed and Separate Irish Parliaments established. CPGB reformed. The Newbold Report, concerning the teaching of English, published. Six Point Group established. Marie Stopes opens first family planning clinic. School leaving age raised to 14.
1922	*The Secret Adversary*; Introduction of Tommy and Tuppence. January: leaves England on the British Empire Mission "Mission to the Dominions" with Archie	Allows Cournos to stay in her flat while away despite crisis in relationship. Cournos fictionalizes this relationship in his 1932		Rose Macaulay, *Dangerous Ages* (1921) awarded Prix Femina-Vie Heureuse. Establishment of *The Criterion* magazine.	Creation of Irish Free State (Eire). Bonar Law becomes Prime Minister. Irish Civil War. British Broadcasting Company begins radio

	and Colonel Belcher. (Edwards 61)	novel, *The Devil is An English Gentleman*. April: finds agent Andrew Dakers. May: accepts job at advertising firm S.H. Benson. July: receives offer from American firm, Boni and Liveright for *Whose Body?*. Receives $250 advance royalties and looks for a UK publishing firm, hoping first to serialize. Cournos leaves London in October. Brings Bill White home for Christmas.		Establishment of *Good Housekeeping* magazine. *Publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.	transmissions (becomes the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1927).
1923	*The Murder on the Links*; Poirot (Bernthal puts this in Dec, 1922) First appearance of Hercule Poirot in *The Sketch*. A series of short Poirot stories commissioned by editor Bruce Ingram.	May: discovers her pregnancy with Bill White's child. Bill leaves her, Sayers decides to keep her pregnancy and child a secret from her parents and her friends. *Whose Body?*; introduces Lord Peter Wimsey. November: takes 8 weeks leave of absence, goes to nursing home.	January 9 hanging of Edith Thompson and Frederick Bywaters for the murder of Percy Thompson; first hanging of a woman since 1907 (Edwards, *Golden Age* 36). Inspires many detective stories and members with interest in real crime (Anthony Berkley, Sayers, Christie)		Irish Civil War ends. Baldwin becomes Prime Minister. British Fascist organization founded. Matrimonial Causes Act gives wives equality in divorce. Establishment of the *Radio Times* magazine.
1924	*The Man in the Brown Suit*; introducing Colonel Race.	January 3, birth of only child, son, John Anthony. Brings him to a home for	"The Art of the Detective Story" by R. Austin Freeman (creator of Dr. Thorndyke).		First Labour government. MacDonald becomes Prime Minister (Jan).

	Serialization in *The Evening News* for £500. Signs book contract with Collins.	children run by her cousin on January 30. Starts back at work in February. Discovers Cournos has married an American Detective Fiction Author. April: breaks with Bill completely. Writes short stories for magazines, negotiates serializations.	Freeman Wills Crofts introduces his detective, Inspector Joseph French in *Inspector French's Greatest Case*.		Conservatives win election. Baldwin becomes Prime Minister (October). The first CPGB women's conference held.
1925	*The Secret of Chimneys*; introducing Superintendent Battle.	Easter – earns money from serializing *Clouds of Witness*, entitled "Guilty Witnesses" (abridged serial version), published in *Detective Story Magazine*, 30 May – 27 June (Sandberg 7) March – buys first motorcycle (Reynolds 167; McGregor and Lewis 48). (Sometime later in the year) Meets future husband Oswold Arthur, professional name Atherton Fleming, known as 'Mac'. Freelance writer and reporter for *News of the World*. Various short stories published in *Detective Story Magazine* and	First Anthony Berkeley Cox published: *The Layton Court Mystery*. Introduces Roger Sheringham.	Shaw wins Nobel Prize for Literature. *Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*. * Liberal Party's *Liberal Women's News* (Hunt 240)	Guardianship of Infants Act. Unemployment Insurance Act. *Amendment of Criminal Justice Act: married women who commit crimes now not assumed to be under the coercion of their husbands; "Women were thus at last legally recognized as morally responsible persons" (Graves and Hodge 32)

		Pearson's Magazine (see Sandberg 7).			
1926	April: death of Mother, Clara June: *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*; Poirot. First Major Success, creates international recognition. August: Archie asks for a divorce December 3-14: Mysterious disappearance of Agatha Christie. December 12: The "Great Sunday Hunt for Mrs. Christie".	*Clouds of Witness* published. April 13 married to 'Mac' Fleming. June – disagreement with Mac because wants to drive her own motorcycle. July, sells motorcycle 'Ner-a-car' and buys two seater car (keeps solo bike for own use) (Reynolds 166-167). Writes four short stories, starts on *Unnatural Death*. Participates in the "Great Sunday Hunt" for Agatha Christie.	December 3-14: Disappearance of Agatha Christie. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle hires a psychic to find Christie.	Mary Webb, *Precious Bane* (1924) awarded Prix Femina-Vie Heureuse. Vita Sackville-West, *The Land* (1926) awarded the Hawthornden Prize. Magdalen King-Hall, *The Diary of A Young Lady of Fashion in the Year 1764-1765* (1925) is declared a hoax by the *Daily Express*. *Brothers William and Gomer Berry buy Amalgamated Press (AP) after the death of owner Alfred Harmsworth (Lord Northcliffe) (Hackney "Woman Appeal", 294)	General Strike. Miners' Strike.
1927	*The Big Four*; Poirot. The Canary Island with Rosalind and Carlo. "The Tuesday Night Club" introduces Miss Marple in short story format. *The Royal Magazine*.	*Unnatural Death*; introduces Miss Climpson.	*The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*, fifth and final short story compilation of Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Author Conon Doyle.	Radclyffe Hall, *Adam's Breed* (1926) awarded Prix Femina-Vie Heureuse and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize.	Trade Disputes and Trade Union Act.
1928	*The Mystery of the Blue Train*; Poirot. Divorce from Archie granted in April.	*The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*. Editor for *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror*	Unofficial start of the Detection Club by Anthony Berkeley (Edwards 81).	Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927) awarded Prix Femina-Vie Heureuse.	Suffrage granted to women of 21 and over.

	Brother Monty dies in France. First adaptations of Christie's works in Germany and England in film (*The Passing of Mr. Quinn*) and on stage (*Alibi*). Visits the Middle East for the first time. Travels alone after her divorce. Meets Max Mallowan (Bernthal 7)	which includes her famous and comprehensive "Introduction". *Lord Peter Views the Body* (short story collection) Death of Father, Rev Henry Sayers (Edwards, *Golden Age* 29)	"Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories" by the creator of Philo Vance, S.S. Van Dine (Willard Huntington Wright) in American Magazine. Detective fiction novel *Enter Sir John* by Clemence Dane and Helen Simpson.	Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* banned as its British publishers are successfully prosecuted for obscenity. First *Oxford English Dictionary* completed.	
1929	*The Seven Dials Mystery*; Superintendent Battle. *Partners in Crime*; short stories with Tommy and Tuppence Beresford.	Translated edition from Old French of *Tristan in Brittany* (Thomas) with Introduction published by Ernest Benn (Reynolds 189). Death of Mother, Helen Mary Sayers (née Leigh) (Edwards, *Golden Age* 29)	First Margery Allingham, (Queen of Crime with Christie, Sayers, and Ngaio Marsh), *The Crime at Black Dudley* published. Introduces detective Albert Campion. Margery Nicolson "The Professor and the Detective" in the *Atlantic Monthly* (Haycraft 110)	Founding of the Book Society. *Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.	Collapse of the New York Stock Exchange. Beginning of the Depression. Second Labour Government.
1930	April: *Giant's Bread*, first of six stories under the under the nom-de-plume Mary Wesmacott. September 11: marries Max in Edinburgh. October: *The Murder at the Vicarage*; Miss Marple's first novel.	*The Documents in the Case* with Robert Eustace; epistolary novel and mystery without Lord Peter Wimsey. *Strong Poison*; introduces Harriet Vane. Fictionalizes her relationship with John	March 11: Formal formation of The Detection Club. Various members included Anthony Berkeley, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Ronald Knox, and E. C. Bentley. G.K. Chesterton is the first	*Birth of Collins' 'Crime Club' (Walter 15)	National Family Birth Council Association (later Family Planning Association) established. Amy Johnson flies solo to Australia.

	December: *Black Coffee* first original play opens in London.	Cournos in the character of Philip Boyes. "Plotting a detective story" dialogue with Anthony Berkeley, BBC, July 23 (Sandberg 8)	president. (see Edwards 82-85) June 28: Episode 3 of radio play *Behind the Screen* aired on the BBC by members of the Detection Club. July 7: death of Sir Author Conan Doyle.		
1931	*The Sittaford Mystery*.	*Five Red Herrings*. Leaves S.H. Benson advertising firm. Editor: *Great Short Stores of Detection, Mystery, and Horror – Second Series.*	*The Floating Admiral* – the first round robin detective novel written by members of the Detection Club including Christie and Sayers.	E.H. Young, *Miss Mole* (1930) awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. Kate O'Brien, *Without my Cloak* (1931) awarded the Hawthornden Prize.	National Government formed by MacDonald. Split in Labour Party. New Party founded by Sir Oswald Mosely (renamed British Union of Fascists 1932).
1932	*Peril at End House*; Poirot.	*Have His Carcase*; second in the Harriet Vane series.		Stella Benson, *Tobit Transplanted* (1931) awarded the Prix Femina-Vie Heureuse Kate O'Brien, *Without my Cloak* (1931) awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. Establishment of *Scrutiny* magazine. *Oxford Companion to English Literature* first published.	British Union of Fascists founded. Unemployment rises.
1933	*Lord Edgware Dies*; Poirot. Accompanies Max to Arpachiyah for his first dig.	Begins reviewing for the *Sunday Times.* *Murder Must Advertise*. *Hangman's Holiday* (short story collection	*Ask a Policeman* – with members of the Detection Club including Sayers, but not, Christie (declined).	Anne Bridge, *Peking Picnic* (1932) awarded the Atlantic Monthly Prize. Vita Sackville-West, *Collected Poems* (1933)	Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany. Unemployment peaks at 15 per cent.

		with Lord Peter and others)		awarded the Hawthornden Prize. Establishment of *New Verse* magazine.	
1934	*Murder on the Orient Express*; Poirot. One of the most popular and successful Poirot stories. *Unfinished Portrait* second of Mary Westmacott. *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?*. "The Case of the Discontented Soldier". Short story introduces Mrs. Adrianne Oliver.	*The Nine Tailors*. Editor: *Great Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror – Third Series*.	First Ngaio Marsh (Queen of Crime with Christie, Sayers, and Margery Allingham) novel, *A Man Lay Dead*. Introduces detective Chief Inspector Roderick Alleyn.	Stella Gibbons, *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932) awarded Prix Femina-Vie Heureuse. Establishment of *Left Review* magazine.	Fascist and anti-Fascist demonstrations in Hyde Park. Unemployment Act creates Assistance Boards. Peace Pledge Union Founded.
1935	*Three Act Tragedy*; Poirot. *Death in the Clouds*; Poirot.	*Gaudy Night*; third in the Harriet Vane series.		Establishment of Left Book Club, *Victor Gollancz. Penguin Books launched. *Christie and Sayers only authors to have two works published simultaneously in the new paperback format from the Greenback Crimes Series (Walter 18)	Baldwin becomes Prime Minister. The seventh Comintern Congress establishes a Popular Front against fascism, uniting the British Marxists and the Independent Labour Party.
1936	*The A.B.C. Murders*; Poirot. *Murder in Mesopotamia*; Poirot. *Cards on the Table*; Poirot. First novel with Mrs. Adrianne Oliver.	*Busman's Honeymoon: A Detective Comedy in Three Acts.* Stage play written with Muriel St. Clare Byrne.	June 14, death of G.K. Chesterton. John Dickson Carr elected to Detection Club.	Kate O'Brien, Mary Lavelle banned on grounds of obscenity.	Spanish Civil War begins, Death of George V and succession of Edward VIII.

		Nativity play *He That Should Come.* Broadcast on Christmas day.			Abdication of Edward VIII and succession of George VI. Jarrow March, BBC begins broadcasting its London service. First 'Butlin's' holiday camp established.
1937	*Dumb Witness*; Poirot. *Death on the Nile*; Poirot.	*Busman's Honeymoon*; fourth and final novel with Harriet Vane. Final full-length detective fiction novel. "Gaudy Night" in *Titles to Frame* edited by Denys Kilham Roberts. *The Zeal of Thy House* (religious drama) which was written and then performed for the Canterbury Festival (Sandberg 21, 24).	Newspaper survey finds Detective fiction one of the most popular types of literature serialized in the press (Bingham "Cultural Hierarchies", 63). Nicholas Blake elected member of the Detection Club. Ngaio Marsh guest at a Detection Club dinner (Edwards 3-6)	Ruth Pitter, *A Trophy of Arms* (1936) awarded the Hawthornden Prize. Winifred Holtby, *South Riding* (1936) awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. Launch of *Women* magazine.	Chamberlain becomes Prime Minister. Public Order Act. Mass-Observation organization founded.
1938	*Appointment with Death*; Poirot. *Hercule Poirot's Christmas*; Poirot.	Invited to be President of the Modern Language Association in 1939.			Munich Agreement. Hitler's troops enter Vienna. Government committee appointed to investigate abortion laws.
1939	*Murder is Easy*; Superintendent Battle. September: Volunteers at University College Hospital, London, during the war November: *And Then There Were None*. The	Becomes third President of the Detection Club *In the Teeth of the Evidence* (short story collection with Lord Peter and others) Last collection of detective fiction stories published.	Acknowledged critical end to Golden Age of Detective Fiction as detective fiction takes new direction in dealing with WWII. Christie's stories still seen in style of Golden	Book Club Proposition established.	Spanish Civil War ends. Germany occupies Czechoslovakia, signs non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union and invades Poland. End of Appeasement.

	best-selling crime novel in history (Bernthal, *Agatha Christie* 7).	*Striding Folly*, including "Tallboys" published after her death in 1973. *The Devil to Pay* (religious drama), again, for the Canterbury Festival. *He That Should Come* (drama). *The Wimsey Papers* published in the *Spectator*. Joins the register for war service by the Society of Authors, Playwrights, and Composers at the request of the Ministry of Labour.	Age, even though does not match with the historical timeline. *Double Death*, another round robin detective novel with members of the Detection Club including Sayers.		Beginning of World War Two.
1940	*Sad Cypress*; Poirot. *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* Poirot. Writes *Curtain* (sent to publisher in 1941) which was to be held in a vault until her death. Finally published in 1975.	*Begin Here* (non-fiction)		Paper rationing instituted (continues until 1949).	Germany occupies Norway, Denmark, Benelux, and France. Dunkirk evacuation. Battle of Britain. Churchill forms national Government and becomes Prime Minister. Blitz begins. Mosely and other interned by the Security Service.
1941	*Evil Under the Sun*; Poirot. *N or M?*; Tommy and Tuppence. *Sleeping Murder*, last Miss Marple, to be held	*The Mind of the Maker* (non-fiction) *The Mysterious English* (non-fiction) *The Man Born to be King* (12 part radio play,		Book Production War Economy Agreement reached by The Publishers' Association. Establishment of *Our Time* magazine.	Germany invades Soviet Union. National Service Act legalizes the conscription of British females.

	in vault until Christie's death. Published posthumously in 1976. London home, 58 Sheffield Terrace, is bombed (Bernthal 8).	religious. Broadcasted monthly from 1941-1942).		Kate O'Brien, *The Land of Spices* banned on grounds of obscenity. Around 20 million books destroyed in the Blitz.	
1942	*The Body in the Library*; Miss Marple. *Five Little Pigs*; Poirot (There is confusion as to dates of this novel, some say 1943).				Beveridge Report calls for a full-scale reform of social services.
1943	*The Moving Finger*; Miss Marple. Birth of only Grandchild, Matthew Prichard.				Germans surrender at Stalingrad and in North Africa. Allies invade Italy.
1944	*Towards Zero*; Superintendent Battle. *Absent in the Spring*; third of Mary Westmacott.	*Even the Parrot* (fiction)			Normandy landings. Butler Act creates Ministry of Education. Education Act introduces universal secondary education.
1945	*Death Comes as the End*; historical fiction mystery. *Sparkling Cyanide*; Colonel Race.				Hiroshima. End of World War Two. Labour Government elected and Attlee becomes Prime Minister. Family Allowance Act.
1946	*The Hollow*; Poirot. *Come, Tell Me How You Live* published under Agatha Christie Mallowan.	*Unpopular Opinions*, including "are Women Human" and "The Human-not-so-human". *The Just Vengeance* (drama)			National Insurance Act. Nationalization of Bank of England and mines. Creation of New Towns.

1947	*The Labours of Hercules*; short story collection of Poirot. Christie writes a half-hour radio play, *Three Blind Mice*, for special broadcast in celebration of Queen Mary's birthday. (This would become *The Mousetrap*, opened in London,1952)	*Creed or Chaos? And Other Essays in Popular Theology* (non-fiction)		F. Tennyson Jesse becomes a member of the Royal Society of Literature.	Nationalization of railways, School leaving age raised to 15.
1948	*Taken at the Flood*; Poirot. *The Rose and the Yew Tree*; fourth Mary Westmacott. Max prepares for dig at the historical site of Nimrud.	*The Lost Tools of Learning* (non-fiction)			Welfare State introduced. National Health Service established.
1949	*Crooked House*. Christie accompanies Max to Nimrud (excavations continue for ten years) Exposed as the author behind Mary Westmacott.	Translation of *The Divine Comedy* of Dante Alighieri, from the Italian (*Hell*-1949, *Purgatory*-1955, *Paradise*-1962, with Barbara Reynolds)			Eire becomes 'Republic of Ireland'.
1950	*A Murder is Announced*; Miss Marple. This was published and advertised as her 50th book. Christie begins to write her *Autobiography* at Nimrud, published posthumously in 1977.	Death of husband Mac in June. Honorary doctorate, University of Durham (Sandberg 24).		Stella Gibbons elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.	Labour Government re-elected.

	Elected fellow of Royal Society of Literature.				
After 1950	1956 - awarded CBE 1961 - honorary doctorate in literature, University of Exeter 1971 - awarded damehood. Died on January 12, 1976	Died on December 17, 1957.			

References

"Literary Events" and "Historical Events" are reproduced from Esme Miskimmin's "Timeline" in *Encyclopedia of British Women's Writing, 1900-1950* pp. 314-320 unless marked *. All * are my own insertions and relevant/important for my Dissertation.

"Detective Fiction: People, Literature, and Events" is my own inclusion. All events are included as deemed important for the understanding of the detective fiction genre. They are referenced as needed.

All Agatha Christie books mentioned are important for various milestones of the author and to show the tremendous output of her work. This list is incomplete; its intention is to give a selection of the important texts for this monograph. I have given original titles as published in England excepting *And Then There Were None*. Titles were changed in the United States with some texts having at least three titles. For a complete list of various titles, short stories, publication dates, and alternative titles, see Dennis Sanders's and Len Lovallo's *The Agatha Christie Companion* (1984) as well as J.C. Bernthal's *Agatha Christie, A Companion to the Mystery Fiction* (2022). I also referred to H.R.F. Keating's edited anthology *Agatha Christie: First Lady of Crime* (1977). There is some discrepancy for publication dates amongst various critics. Given this, I tried to reference as many companions as possible and listed the titles in the most often cited year.

Details of Agatha Christie's life are taken from her *An Autobiography* (published after her death in 1977), Janet Morgan's *Agatha Christie* (1984), Lucy Worsley's *Agatha Christie* (2022), Martin Edwards's *The Golden Age of Murder* (2015), and Bernthal's *Agatha Christie* (2022).

Dorothy L. Sayers's detective novels are included in full as well as many of her short story compilations. This is to show the breadth of time in which she completed her detective fiction writing, comparatively short within the timeframe of her life as a professional author and writer. Publication dates are taken from The Marion E. Wade Centre's *Select Bibliography* of her works as well as Eric Sandberg's *Dorothy L. Sayers, A Companion to the Mystery Fiction* (2022). See Colleen B. Gilbert, *A Bibliography of the Works of Dorothy L. Sayers* (1978) for as complete a list as possible for her writing output.

Details on Dorothy L. Sayers's life are taken from Mo Moulton's *The Mutual Admiration Society* (2019); Barbara Reynolds's *Dorothy L Sayers: Her Life and Soul* (1993) and *The Letters of Dorothy L Sayers* (1996); Martin Edwards's *Taking Detective Stories Seriously: The Collected Reviews of Dorothy L. Sayers* (2017) and *The Golden Age of Murder* (2015); Robert Kuhn McGregor and Ethan Lewis *Conundrums for the Long*

Week-end: England, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Lord Peter Wimsey (2000); and Eric Sandberg's *Dorothy L. Sayers, A Companion to the Mystery Fiction* (2022).

All other notes have specific citations which can be found in the Bibliography.