

DIS-ORIENTING INTERACTIONS: AGATHA CHRISTIE, IMPERIAL TOURISTS, AND  
THE OTHER

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green  
State University in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2018

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## ABSTRACT

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This postcolonial feminist analysis of Agatha Christie novels uses the activity of tourism. In order to narrow the study of Christie's work, I concentrated on Western tourists (mainly English and American) in non-Western locations such as the Middle East, the Caribbean, and South Africa. The tourists are of different social classes, but by narrowing these white Westerners by activity and behaviors performed according to that activity my research provides a more targeted approach. Focusing on *The Man in the Brown Suit*, *Appointment with Death*, *Death on the Nile*, *Caribbean Mystery*, and *They Came to Baghdad*, which have specifically tourist interactions with locals and tour workers, my research shows not only Orientalist attitudes presented by the protagonists and narrators, but also how such perspectives are questioned by those they other in the stories. Examining the behaviors of tourists through a postcolonial feminist lens illuminates the subject of gendered orientalism and imperial feminism—Western women are championed, often at the expense of people of color.

Christie's life experiences, especially those related to her second husband's archaeological work in the Middle East, challenged some of her views on the superiority of the British empire and that played out in her books. Therefore, while her older protagonists like Miss Marple remained conservative and hierarchical, Victoria Jones from *They Came to Baghdad* could see a commonality with the people of Iraq beyond race and culture. Although they never took center stage, the people of color spoke back to the Westerners in a number of her novels, thus rupturing their perceived lack of agency. Christie's work may romanticize the bygone days of British power, but there are enough cracks of modernity to allow the Other to shine through.

For Tom, my love who I could not forget, and Gaya, who is just discovering the fun of Agatha Christie. Thank you for being my home. For my parents, who have always encouraged academic inquiry and a lifetime love of learning. For any avid reader who thought to themselves, “Well, that isn’t how I pictured it.”

In memory of James T. Ivey, who shared my love of Agatha Christie and gave me my first copy of *Caribbean Mystery*.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sincerest thanks to Dr. Jeremy Wallach and Dr. Esther Clinton who not only read the earliest version of this manuscript, but were always a source of support and fountains of knowledge. Studying popular culture has helped me salvage joy and hone my critical thinking skills. If I had never met you, I would not be in this program.

Dr. Rebecca Kinney's class on cultural tourism helped me create the earliest version of this thesis. The class was beneficial in looking at the approaches to cultural tourism and how literary works could be considered in relation to tourism. Her advice on how to focus one of the chapters has proved useful on guiding other chapters as well.

Thank you to Dr. Stephannie Gearhart for taking on this popular culture topic. You provided me with thought-provoking questions that I think will help make my work more accessible to readers who are not necessarily Agatha Christie fans. Your comments helped ground my literary analysis.

I truly appreciate Dr. Becca Cragin's input on this committee because of her understanding of Agatha Christie's work. Your understanding of her literary style was truly helpful in finding resources and making necessary adjustments. Thank you for giving me insight on how to structure different chapters for future publication.

Last, but not least, deepest thanks to Dr. Kristen Rudisill. She has been my department advisor, my thesis chair, and professor for one core class and my two favorite seminar courses. I am truly thankful for your thorough reading and prompt reviews of my work. In a year that has been extremely busy for you, you were able to keep me to a manageable schedule. I am much obliged to you for your guidance.

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## INTRODUCTION

Although she may not be as famous as she once was (behind only Shakespeare and the Bible in publication during the height of her fame), Agatha Christie is still highly popular. Her prominence is her influence. The BBC keeps producing shows based on her works, there are international museum exhibits based on her work, many vacation spots in the Middle East and South Africa still use her as a reference or are visited by her fans, a new film version of *Murder on the Orient Express* with famous Hollywood actors was released in November 2017, and Amazon just bought the U.S. rights to adapt her work into seven new dramas. Christie is so ubiquitous that she, her novels, and her characters are referenced everywhere in popular culture as shorthand for murder and detective work. Edmund Wilson's essay title "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" shows scholars use the brand recognition of Christie and her work to attack the detective fiction genre.<sup>1</sup> In spite of this or possibly because of this, she has not garnered the same respect of academic researchers as some of her lesser known male counterparts, like Anthony Berkeley and John Dickinson Carr. While there are exceptions, works written by male authors or even an obscure writer are more likely to obtain elite status. Agatha Christie outsold many male mystery writers. As such, she did not appeal to the chauvinist male academics who would willingly take on the role of male savior. Even Martin Edwards, who takes a more even-handed approach towards Christie in *The Golden Age of Murder*, ends up waxing poetic about the potential of Anthony Berkeley. Berkeley had a severely limited output compared to Christie which Martin suggests is due to her complicated personal life. However, that ignores the drama that went on in Christie's life, from an affair that ended her marriage to her disappearance that led to a field day for the newspapers to the devastation of World War II. Yet, she still managed to write through it all and wrote books that readers still wanted to read.

Christie started publishing during the beginning of British modern travel, which was still the heyday of colonialism and the British empire. Her first book, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, was published in 1920 and was well-received. Her works started out as part of what is considered the Golden Age, a period of expansion of detective fiction between the world wars which eventually led to the modern detective novel. Although Christie's short story "Manx Gold," is the only publication to be directly associated with tourism (it was part of a treasure hunt to promote tourism to the Isle of Man), many of Christie's works have influenced tourists to travel to locations in her books or places Christie cited as inspiration for her stories (Medawar 116-121). The novels have influenced the way that many Westerners view places like Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and South Africa because Christie used locations from her own tourist experiences in her writing. While her work does not offer detailed descriptions, Christie mentions the names of real places, some of which still exist. In addition, museum exhibits of her life and work underline how her work, as imperial tourist narrative, appear to celebrate Orientalism. Then the museum exhibit subsequently becomes a tourist attraction in and of itself. Christie maintained Orientalist views in spite of her travels and she passed them on to her readers, who are both literary and armchair tourists, which makes it important to analyze her depictions of tourists and their gaze.

The novels *A Caribbean Mystery*, *The Man in the Brown Suit*, *They Came to Baghdad*, *Appointment with Death*, and *Death on the Nile* are long enough for an investigation as to whether the benevolent racism in Christie's work is reinforced, contradicted, or simply goes unchallenged.<sup>2</sup> In my thesis, I am concerned with the specific interaction between the Western tourists and those they considered as Others. In novels, the main narrative may be challenged by the voices of the other characters. Since there are different narrators for the novels (and sometimes multiple ones within the same novel), I will address differences in their viewpoints.

Additionally, I will explore any instances where the main character is challenged by the author. One limitation is that Christie's focus is on the mystery as opposed to full details on the lives of the marginalized people, which could be considered an aspect of the genre more than author's intent. My analysis will mainly examine if the desire to maintain hierarchy is based on race/ethnicity or gender, or any combination of them, but may involve class indirectly, as well. That's why I have grounded the thesis in the theoretical work of postcolonial scholars and postcolonial feminists as well as scholars and non-academic critics looking into Christie's work.

### Detective Fiction and the Golden Age

Christie is part of what is called classic detective fiction. In this type of detective fiction, the murder is treated as a problem to be solved. The focus of the story is to figure out how to make the pieces fit using information about the characters and setting. Because the narrative concerns itself with working out the puzzle instead of going into great detail about the characters or setting, as elite literature might, classic detective fiction has been viewed as simplistic. Yet, some of the mechanisms in solving the mystery can be quite intricate. For instance, In *A Is for Arsenic: The Poisons of Agatha Christie*, former research chemist Kathryn Harkup uses her knowledge to put Christie's science to the test, and found that unlike other detective fiction writers, Christie was overwhelmingly more correct or scientifically sound than not and, in rare cases, her understanding was later validated by future chemical/medical research. However, when it comes to aspects like the setting, Patricia D. Maida and Nicholas B. Spornick's *Murder She Wrote: A Study of Agatha Christie's Detective Fiction* make the argument that while other authors may spend pages going over details, Christie's concise descriptions provide just enough information to trigger understanding of the location (171, 174-175). Maida and Spornick touch

upon how Christie uses contrast between areas that the tourists travel through or appeals to the senses like spotlighting a color. Detective fiction critics typically favor brevity in scenic description. Edward Powys Mathers, known as the critic Torquemada, and E.R. Punshon, gave Christie favorable reviews for *Death on the Nile*, but Christie's contemporary Freeman Willis Crofts's *Found Floating* received no such attention (Edwards 226). Croft's book, published the same year, verges into travelogue territory, spending a chapter describing the ship. Even so, Christie books like *They Came to Baghdad* have offered more realistic detail than some actual travel guides for travelers to the Middle East. The 1928 version of the Thomas Cook Handbook, a guidebook of the famous travel company, for example, suggested Scottish tweed for Syria, which would be completely inappropriate (Eames 236). Eames shows that the clothing suggestions indicate that whoever wrote the guide never visited the place.

The Golden Age of classic detective fiction is the period between World War I and World War II, when there were many prominent detective fiction writers and a large body of classic detective works were published. Although Christie's body of work spans longer than most of the Golden Age authors, the period is worth mentioning because not only did that period influence her, but she influenced that period. Christie had a relationship with some of the writers during the Golden Age because she was part of the Detection Club, which included Dorothy L. Sayers, G.K. Chesterton, Anthony Gilbert, Ronald Knox, John Dickson Carr, A. A. Milne, and Baroness Orczy (Edwards xix). Many of the members took their inspiration from headline stories like murders or trends like the fascination with archeology (Edwards 151). Christie's books and stories on archeological murders benefited from this trend as well as from her personal experience. Martin Edwards, who studied many of the writers in the Detection Club in his book *The Golden Age of Murder* states, "Agatha Christie was not an ivory towered academic like

Queenie Leavis and she was not intellectual elitist either. Writing a novel of manners held no attraction for her” (278). Since some Golden Age authors dabbled in comedy of manners, critics characterized Christie’s work as perpetuating that convention even if she did not. Christie also used some conventions in order to subvert them. For instance, Golden Age writer Ronald A. Knox wrote a list of tropes to avoid “like the use of a Chinamen” (Curran *Murder* 44). In the short story, “Adventure of the Western Star,” of the book *Poirot Investigates*, Christie’s solution involves a play on that trope—a white man theatrically dressing like a Chinaman to fool another white man. She played with different types of storytelling, like first person point of view in a diary to third-person omniscient. Even if she used the same device in different books, she would employ them in differing ways. Although there was no uproar with her use of first-person in a diary in *The Man in a Brown Suit*, there was protestation for the same usage in *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?* many years later. Even within her own conventions, Christie would break the rules. Martin Edwards, in *The Golden Age of Murder*, commented, “The widespread consensus is that Christie and company never questioned the status quo” (Edwards 358). He disagrees with the view that the Golden Age writers did not have conflicting views in different novels. His example points out that although Christie usually employed a basic crime and punishment method, she had stories where miscarriages of justice could and did occur. Christie established and broke formulas regarding how detective fiction should be written in that time.

Examining what Christie followed and subverted can open a window to her mindset towards the blatant Orientalism in her novels and why she Othered people in the way she did. Although the novels are based on real places and, in some cases, real incidents, the structure of the detective novel hints toward artifice. George N. Dove in “The Detection Formula and the Act of Reading” states that “the transaction between reader and text” through the formula allows for

the “communication between the author and reader and constitute[s] the real basis of experience of the text” (26). The reader develops a relationship with the author by realizing the point of the formulaic structure, but scholars who simply point out the recurring patterns and criticize them miss the underlying reasons for the use of those conventions, which allow for the reader to have agency as well as the author. Nicholas Birns and Margaret Boe Birns in “Agatha Christie: Modern and Modernist” say, “Christie should not be criticized for doing what all successful fiction does—make the reader partially aware of how and why it is made” (121-122). A formulaic aspect in classic detective fiction is not a weakness. It is not there to goad readers to unquestioningly accept the story because it provides a signal they understand, as some critics believe. Instead, it makes readers aware that there may be duplicity and urge them to seek truth. Viewed in this way, detective fiction is not mindless reading, but encourages the reader to perform negotiated and possibly even oppositional reading. The reader may then be able to see the racist stereotypes as flawed part of the detective fiction formula and call these texts out for their Orientalist imaginings.

### Popular Culture Popularity of Christie

Academics have an on-going debate about Agatha Christie because many consider her to be too middlebrow to be worthy of study. Middlebrow refers to works that are popular, but do not have the quality to be high culture (highbrow). The charge laid against middlebrow it is only fashionable for a time so its influence is ephemeral. Christie is worth studying because like Shakespeare she was popular in her day and yet her work continues to affect culture today. My point is not to argue that Christie’s work meets the requirements for consideration as high brow, but her writings have had a last influence on global culture and, therefore, analysis of them is

important. Her two main detectives, Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot, are iconic and her work is referenced everywhere. The Muppets have had actors play the character of Hercule Poirot twice. They hosted Peter Ustinov, who played the Poirot in a number of film and television movies (“Muppet Show”). More recently, Jason Alexander played Poirot in *Muppets Tonight* (“Muppets Tonight”). Hercule Poirot is the name for an arrangement of production music composed by Gerhard Trede for *SpongeBob SquarePants*, which is used at times for the character of Plankton (“Gerhard Trede;” “Hercule Poirot”). Plankton is not a detective, but he commits sinister acts that are then uncovered. *Family Guy*’s episode titled “And Then There Were Fewer” was a parody of *And Then There Were None*; the protagonist of Andy Weir’s novel, *The Martian*, reads *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*; the Doctor and Donna meet Agatha Christie in the *Doctor Who* episode titled “The Unicorn and the Wasp;” and Eminem mentions Agatha Christie by her full name in his 2016 rap song “Campaign Speech” (“How Many”). Joe Hill’s book *Strange Weather*, released in 2017, refers to a character as the love child of Miss Marple and Rambo.

There are awards based on Christie’s style of writing and what she has contributed to the mystery genre so she has become a unit of measure. Malice Domestic™ is “an annual fan convention in the metropolitan DC area that celebrates the traditional mystery, books best typified by the works of Agatha Christie” (“About”). At this convention, the Poirot Award is presented to honor individuals other than writers. In 2003, David Suchet, who played Poirot from 1989-2013) received that award (“AGATHA AWARDS MALICE DOMESTIC AWARDS”).

Christie is also international. There are Miss Marple tea rooms in Australia and Ireland. Volume 3 of *Detective Conan*, a Japanese detective manga series written and illustrated by Gosho Aoyama, features Hercule Poirot. There are videogames of Poirot and Marple cases. Christie or her two main sleuths have been on stamps for Antigua and Barbuda, Central African

Republic, Dominica, Great Britain, Guinea, Guernsey, Isle of Man, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somali Republic, and Uganda (“Detective Fiction on Stamps”). She and her characters outnumber any other detective fiction authors and characters when it comes to stamps. Hungary started publishing Christie novels later than some countries, but her works have been continuously in print in Hungary since the 1930s, even through political upheaval that severely limited publishers (Hudácskó 131). While other books, (including those of Hungarian authors) were not published, publishers continued printing Christie.

In addition, there are ways that her characters are used as a shorthand for investigation or discovery. For instance, these online news articles use Poirot and Marple that are detached from the stories they appear in. For instance, Dateline’s headline was “Bill Maher’s Russia Yarn: ‘Real Time’ Host Plays Poirot To Reveal Whodunit,” while the *Daily Mail* headline reads, “How to Catch a Cheat: Spying on His Texts, Checking His Satnav and Even Tracking His Bike Rides...ANTHEA TURNER became Miss Marple to expose her husband’s lies. Now read her advice to all suspicious spouses” (Evans; Turner). Because headlines have to be succinct, the fact that Poirot and Miss Marple are used shows that just the usage of their name counts on an understanding from the general public.

These various examples support the idea that Christie’s works and her characters have place in popular culture that is not inconsequential or limited to a specific time or place. Therefore, it is worth looking at how these text can be read and how these characters present themselves.

### Scholarship and Critics

Research suggests that the argument against studying Christie arises mainly from the fact that she was a woman who wrote extremely popular fiction. If she wrote esoteric novels or was



male, her work might have been more acceptable to academics, who were overwhelmingly male when detective fiction first received critical attention.<sup>3</sup> However, critics have condemned her due to the combination of gender and popularity. In contrast, no scholar has apologized for studying Arthur Conan Doyle or Edgar Allen Poe for their contribution to the mystery genre because they were too popular. When Earl F. Bagnall wrote *The Gentle Art of Murder: The Detective Fiction of Agatha Christie* (1980), one of few early academic books on Christie, he felt it necessary to make clear in the preface that work was not a defense of Christie (6). His preface indicates that it was contentious for an academic book to try to validate Christie's work. Robert Barnard's book *A Talent to Deceive: An Appreciation of Agatha Christie* has so much negative criticism than praise that it seems he is disgusted with himself for his appreciation of her work. For example Barnard says:

At best, she can manage no more than a plain, journeyman's style, rather loosely grammatically, totally lacking in vividness or any ability to use language in a pictorial way...Nor is her writing often funny. It may be entertaining, jolly, but it almost never rises to wit. Sometimes, to be fair, she can cunningly insert a brief, sharp piece of observation or comment...But the occasional sharp point...is lost in the suet pudding of her habitual style. (6-7)

Barnard says in his preface that the book was not as much a literary criticism of Christie as it was in recognition of the joy he has had reading her books, but the converse seems true reading the chapters. John Cawelti had a similar mindset to Barnard in rejecting/downplaying Agatha Christie's work when he discussed the mystery genre in popular culture in his book *Adventure Mystery and Romance*. Cawelti's book is a standard in teaching popular culture genre theory. Jowett in his review of Cawelti's book in the *Journal of American History* commented,

“Cawelti has taken an important step forward in the melding of popular literature and social and cultural history, and he provides readers with valuable insights into the relationship between formulaic plot and the influence of historical context” (786). That is highly problematic. Cawelti’s book is still used as a textbook for cultural studies, but trends in popular culture have proven Cawelti’s statements about classic detective fiction to be wrong. Cawelti, like many other scholars, favors hardboiled crime fiction to detective fiction: “In addition, the classical detective formula has never been acceptable to the media of film and television as the more action-oriented hard-boiled detective and crime formulas” (136). David Suchet and Joan Hickson have made careers acting as Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, respectively. And almost no sooner than they retired the character, then someone else took it on. Both Geraldine McEwan and Julia McKenzie have recently played Miss Marple. Kenneth Branagh played Hercule Poirot in the 2017 film version of *Murder on the Orient Express*. In addition to what the BBC has been producing and what Amazon will soon produce, it is worth noting that Christie’s work has spawned forensic science shows or forensic aspects within police shows. These types of shows exist in a greater abundance than the gritty crime shows.

Many early scholars who were well-versed in Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle read a few Agatha Christie novels and made a pronouncement about her body of work. They evaluated Christie in relation to the formulas and style of Poe and Doyle, instead of objectively examining Christie on her own merit.<sup>4</sup> In *Resisting Arrest: Detective Fiction and Popular Culture* (2007), Robert A. Rushing provides a corrective lens to these prejudiced reviews of Christie’s work. He comments, “In so many respects, Christie is the paradigm of classic detective fiction, but her work tends to be obscured by and reside behind the more memorable icons of the deerstalker cap, the pipe, and the magnifying glass” (52). Rushing, here, refers to

how the semiotics associated with Arthur Conan Doyle's protagonist Sherlock Holmes are considered more indicative than the formulas Christie is responsible for, like the exculpation scene where the killer is announced among the suspects, which has been replicated consistently by works that seek to identify themselves as detective fiction. Rushing is separating Christie from Conan Doyle's shadow and he is not the only one. Martin Edwards notes that the BBC's postmodern take on Sherlock Holmes, *Sherlock*, uses the convention of a murder rehearsal, which is a Christie, not a Doyle, convention (432-433). Although the show's format does allow for a mix and match approach, it is worth noting that Christie is again in service of the Doyle's imagery as Rushing pointed out.

Scholars also use Dorothy L. Sayers, who had a more limited output and period of writing than Christie, to point out Christie's inadequacies, even though this kind of analysis is often followed by a list of Sayers' shortcomings.<sup>5</sup> They want to appear egalitarian by championing another woman. Wilson's essay "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" is a great example of a scholar devaluing Christie while indirectly crediting the popularity of her work. His essay uses the title of a famous Christie book and talks about detective fiction authors, but does not even analyze Christie's work. As Wilson actively attempts to deride Christie's work and make her an inconsequential writer using scholarly analysis and theory, he rails against the reality that people read her and her work has value. Jessica Mann, whose book *Deadlier than the Male: Why Are Respectable English Women so Good at Murder?* was published a year after Cawelti's book, brings to the foreground the difficulty of considering Agatha Christie for academic research:

But if a novel has attracted readers for years it must have some quality which human beings want. If Agatha Christie is the writer whose books have sold more

copies than those of any other writer, then, rather than assuming that the world-wide public has degraded tastes, surely it would be more logical to accept that she was meeting a universal, spontaneous need, which is not recognized by the critics and editors who reflect form and educated tastes. (49)

On behalf of readers, Mann criticizes the early academics and critics for their reluctance to truly examine Christie's work without a condescending bias. Indeed, saying Agatha Christie is too popular to be studied is a false argument because other popular authors, like Dr. Seuss, have been studied with careful critical engagement already.

Dr. Seuss scholarship is worth noting because, while he is not comparable in terms of detective fiction, he is from a popular genre, picture books, which generally does not engender academic interest. Scholars have argued that Theodor Seuss Geisel's political cartoons during World War II informed his later work so that it is important for us to study his picture books. Could we not say the same for Christie? Her experiences in both world wars, her impressive understanding of science, and her archeological acumen have inspired her stories as well as infused them with special details. Furthermore, there is much more of her text to study. There have been scholars who wrote highly critical books about her work only to then admit she has some ingenious ideas. Then there are Agatha Christie critics like Bargainnier who apologize for studying her in the first place. Researchers must sift through the earlier critiques to see if the criticisms are warranted or stem from sexist and/or misogynist bias. As the societal mindset changes and more women and people of color are writing academic criticism there is more of a balance, but what the earlier critics have written still permeates because they are part of the history of the critical analysis of Christie's work. Sigmund Freud was actually a fan, noting that he enjoyed *Murder on the Orient Express* (Roazen 675). However, he did not weigh in on her

work as a scholar. Birns and Birns realized that most critics belittled Christie and classic detective fiction in favor of hardboiled crime fiction like Chandler. They defended her noting, “The casualness with which Christie is dismissed as ‘formulaic’ whereas the hardboiled writers are praised for giving us full unhindered access to our primal selves is untenable in the face of contemporary discussions about the constructed nature of all fictional representation” (121). Indeed, mean streets and untrustworthy dames are as much tropes as nosy maids and well-kept manor houses. Academics may view hardboiled crime fiction as a more insightful genre because its generally pessimistic point of view of life rejects the tidy or happy ending. David Schmid’s chapter, “‘From the Locked Room to the Globe: Space in Crime Fiction,” compares Christie to Chandler and comments that “when one considers the arc of her career as a whole, it is incontestable that these apparently idyllic spaces are in fact as blood-soaked as Chandler’s mean streets” (13). The appearance of order does not guarantee safety any better than a disordered setting, it could even be considered more sinister. Critics also find fault in the fact that murders are consistently solved. Although murders in real life are not as quickly and cleanly solved, detectives in real life do solve murders.

Around the early 1990s, when few critics or scholars were writing about Agatha Christie, Charles Osborne started adapting her plays and then analyzing her other work. Then John Curran deciphered and published his research on Christie’s notebooks in *Agatha Christie's Secret Notebooks: Fifty Years of Mysteries in the Making* and *Agatha Christie: Murder in the Making*. While Curran is still working on his doctoral thesis at Trinity College in Dublin, his attention to Christie’s writings is thorough (“About Me”). More recently, Andrew Eames’ *The 8:55 to Baghdad* and Martin Edwards’ *The Golden Age of Murder* have become prominent non-academic works. J.C. Bernthal bridges academic and non-academic. He edited *The Ageless*

*Agatha Christie: Essays on the Mysteries and the Legacy* and wrote *Queering Agatha Christie: Revisiting the Golden Age of Detective Fiction*. Bernthal has been encouraging scholars to revisit Christie's work, both in conferences and publications. In the recent years, there have been academics doing just that while looking at social constructs such as sexuality, race, gender, and class. As I discuss my methodology, I will note some of those scholars and the lens they are applying to Christie's work that has made them valuable to my research.

### Tourism

The focus of this research is the Orientalist view of the tourists in Agatha Christie's novels, which one would expect to seem archaic since the British empire is not what it was when she was writing these stories. Yet, the stories continue to be published without changes and people continue to use them as guides. While some people travel because of the stories, others travel because they are searching for the author's inspiration. Eames' *The 8:55 to Baghdad* is a mass market book about following in the footsteps of Christie. This move from armchair to pilgrim is not the focus of this thesis, but her use of tourists and tourism in her novels is a reason why they should be examined. In *Literature and Tourism: Reading and Writing Tourism Texts*, editors Hans Christian Anderson and Mike Robinson write "As aesthetic cultural tourism, literary tourism is distinctive...The author and reader are closer to sharing the art, you may say, than the sculptor or ceramic artist and their audience...if we can speak, we can talk to other people about ourselves and other people, then we are already in the world of the author, we share some understanding of the author's linguistic raw material, simply through our everyday purposes" (xiv). The focus of *Literature and Tourism* is more about the tourism influenced by the text than the text that influences the tourism, but they are pointing out that the text has to

draw the readers or there would be no associated travel. What better way to draw the readers to travel than a story about traveling, which may be unconsciously instructive. Eames may be one of the few people who have written a book, but he is not the only fan moved to travel because of Christie's work. In fact, in Istanbul, he leaves a copy of *The Man in the Brown Suit* for another fan to find (Eames 194). The book is about South Africa, but he is counting on Christie's popularity for the book he left behind to be meaningful to the person who finds it. Outside of work like Eames, where the reader's response is directly connected to the text, my research will not look into audience reaction. My evaluation will be about the text and what responses could trigger a reader to view the culture in a certain way.

#### Tools of Detection (Methodology)

I will focus on close textual analysis of Christie's books, look at how they compare to her life, and review the analysis of other academics and non-academics. My primary sources of data is her fiction. I will be looking at *The Man in the Brown Suit*, *Death on the Nile*, *A Caribbean Mystery*, *Appointment with Death*, and *They Came to Baghdad* because they specifically show the intersections of race and gender in the interactions between the white Western tourists and the local people of color in non-Western countries. *A Caribbean Mystery* is the only Miss Jane Marple book where Miss Marple leaves England. Miss Marple, as the quintessential rural British spinster, is easily out of place on a tropical island. Christie's Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot, knows what it is like to travel and be treated as a foreigner through most of his adventures in England. However, in *Death on the Nile* and *Appointment with Death*, he becomes a representative for British imperial order in the Middle East. In *The Man in the Brown Suit* and *They Came to Baghdad*, young British women go on tour and meet up with British murderers.

Anne Beddingfield travels to South Africa in *The Man in the Brown Suit*. Victoria Jones has a similar trip to Iraq in *They Came to Baghdad*, but emerges with a different outlook than Anne. In addition, I will look at the interactions of the non-white characters experiences with the Western tourists in those novels. Except for *Death on the Nile*, each book has at least one person of color who directly interacts with a tourist. Batani nurses Anne in the *The Man in the Brown Suit*. In *Appointment with Death*, Mahmoud has to deal with complains from many tourists as he takes them across the Middle East. In the *Caribbean Mystery*, Victoria is a local woman who works for a hotel run by a British couple, which caters mainly to Westerners. In *They Came to Baghdad*, hotel owner Marcus likes Western tourists, but local girl Catherine hates the British. Then I will look at John Curran's work on Christie's notebooks to find any notes that did not make it to her edited novels or her biographical/autobiographical books (e.g., *Come Tell Me How You Live*; *The Grand Tour*). While his notes on her notebooks are detailed, Curran is not employing academic theories in analyzing them. He does, however, provide excellent data.

Since my thesis concerns the Othering that occurs in non-Western tourist destinations, I will not engage with Christie's work in terms of narratives regarding the lives of people in the West. Her works that are about touring the United Kingdom, Europe, or the United States are not within the scope of my project because my emphasis will be on her Orientalist perspective. I will not cover *Murder on the Orient Express* because it is a locked room mystery, meaning there is little outside interaction with the countries the train goes through. Also, the direction of the travel in this book is towards Europe and away from the Middle East. I am not the first one to realize that *Murder on the Orient Express* is not really about Poirot in the Orient. Berkeley Publishing Company published a bundled book of three Christie novels under the title *Poirot in the Orient* and *Murder on the Orient Express* was not one of them. I am excluding *Murder in Mesopotamia*



as well because it is about an archeology group stationed at a site. I want to focus on the novels dealing with the representation of tourists and their interactions with the Other. *Death Comes As the End* involves an ancient Egyptian family so it does not have Westerners and is outside of the time period of modern travel. I will also skip Christie's short stories on tourists because there is not enough detail in the character depictions for me to analyze.

The key theorists I will be using are Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Chandra Mohanty, Dwight Conquergood, Dean MacCannell, Valerie Amos, Pratibha Parmar, John Urry, Jonas Larsen, and Stuart Hall because their theories relate to popular culture, performance, travel, Orientalism, postcolonialism, settler colonialism, benevolent racism, and imperial feminism. *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity, and Representation*, by Reina Lewis, is also instrumental to my research because she makes distinctions between gender and race and how the gender of an Orientalist can influence their perspective. Instead of directly using Cawelti, I use books published by the Bowling Green University Popular Press that discuss popular culture, detective fiction, and Agatha Christie. These include Maida and Spornick's *Murder She Wrote: A Study of Agatha Christie's Detective Fiction*, Bargainnier's *The Gentle Art of Murder: The Detective Fiction of Agatha Christie*, and Dove's *The Reader and the Detective Story* take into account the theories of Cawelti, but are slightly more evenhanded and direct in their approach to Christie.

Christie's strong white Western female characters have been lauded by feminist scholars, I will be touching upon how the focus on them often obscures the oppression that women of color face in Christie's work. Christie's continued popularity allows her to have some influence on how her readers view the settings she uses in her books, including those in non-Western countries. I will not be spending time in my thesis weighing in on the debate as to whether or not

Christie herself was a feminist, but it can certainly be argued that she wrote strong female characters. Angela Devas' "Murder, Mass Culture, and the Feminine: A View from the 4.50 from Paddington" comments that Christie's texts present "an appropriation of a traditional femininity...that in its search for justice, repositions itself as active and able to speak" (263). Devas argues that Christie created strong characters, but they existed within circumscribed traditional roles. M. Vipond's "Agatha Christie's Women" argues that Christie's characters may be two and a half in dimension, possessing the qualities that are both stereotypical and yet recognizable to us as people (119). Vipond is discussing characters who were mainly white women of the middle class to upper classes, but they represent a spectrum of capability and age, and while they may not have upturned the status quo, their active characters did represent a change in representation. I will look at how some of those females did transcend traditional roles and expressed frustration about being trapped in those roles, yet they rarely engaged in solidarity with other marginalized people in the Christie books I will cover. This type of centering of white women's concerns while displacing the concerns of all others fits in with imperial feminism because although they may question the hierarchy in terms of gender, they have no issue with whiteness. This type of feminist character also lacks the understanding of how intersectional identities complicate the issues women face. As well as looking at the white female protagonists through an imperial feminist lens, I will investigate whether the scholars' analyses on gender can also be applied to race. Some of the characters are locals that rely on Western tourists to make a living and they have to perform in circumscribed racial roles. Dwight Conquergood's "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," talks about performance, which can be used to look at how both the tourists and natives perform. As Dwight Conquergood says, "Oppressed people everywhere must watch their backs, cover their tracks, suck up their feelings,

and veil their meanings” (372). Conquergood is stating that people who are in subordinate positions must accommodate those with privilege. He uses Zora Neal Hurston’s *Mules and Men* as an example so he allows for the performance of characters within a text to count as much as performances in real life. Therefore, Conquergood links power dynamics, literature, and performance of the Other so, although he represents performance theory, he acts as a conductor to other theories as well, like postcolonialism and theories about tourism.

Phyllis Lassner’s “The Mysterious New Empire: Agatha Christie’s Colonial Murders,” Alison Light’s *Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism between the Wars*, R. A. York’s *Agatha Christie: Power and Illusion* and analyze Christie in terms of how she relates to her time period and literary studies. Their works provide a grounding for me as I try to ascertain the cultural meanings in the text. However, they also scrutinize her work as a writer for the empire.

One way my work expands on previous material on Christie is to introduce postcolonial, tourism, and performance theories to already established feminist and genre theories. Said and Bhabha give a way to return the Western gaze of the Christie’s novels, to analyze Orientalist imaginings. *Gendering Orientalism* ties Amos and Parmar’s imperial feminism, Said’s Orientalism, and postcolonialism from people like Homi Bhabha to show how a work can be supportive of the rights of white women at the expense of all people of color, even women of color. Mohanty’s article “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” allows for a postcolonial feminist conversation with scholars Lassner, Light, Rowland, and York, who do consider Christie’s work in terms of white feminism. Dean McCannell’s book *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* is instructive on how to try analyze all aspects of tourism. John Urry and Jonas Larsen also add to the tourism conversation in *The Tourist Gaze*

3.0. Michael Haldrup and Jonas Larsen's *Tourism, Performance and the Everyday: Consuming the Orient* connects Orientalism and tourism. Jennifer Laing and Warwick Frost's *Books and Travel: Inspiration, Quests and Transformation* connect literature, travel, and culture. Laing and Frost see "books as a cultural phenomenon that affect our conceptualization of travel" (2). Even if the readers are aware of formula as artificial, they may still accept some of what they glean about non-Western cultures in fiction as fact or a kind of truth, especially when the works are supposed to represent situations that are more realistic than fantastic. Since the academic research on Christie is already limited, there are even fewer secondary sources that deal with Agatha Christie and Orientalism. Books that seemed suited to address it did not. Michael Diamond's *Lesser Breeds: Racial Attitudes in Popular British Fiction, 1890-1940* states "Christie's prejudices are only interesting because her books have sold so many copies" (150). He briefly mention Christie's less than favorable descriptions of Jewish people, but does not go into detail in any of her other depictions considering that she is a prominent writer in the time period he is studying. A number of my sources analyzing Christie's Orientalism have been published in journal articles by non-Western writers such as Mevlüde Zengin's, "Western Image of the Orient and Oriental in Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*: A Postcolonial Reading" and "Western Self Images in Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*: A Postcolonial Reading," JoAnn McGregor's "The Victoria Falls 1900-1940: Landscape, Tourism and the Geographical Imagination," Sami Atassi's "Mapping Representations of the Queen of Mystery's Middle East: Adaptations, Anxieties, and Geopolitics of Agatha Christie's Appointment with Death," and Leon Wainwright's "Solving Caribbean Mysteries: Art, Embodiment and an Eye for the Tropics." Besides the journal articles, I will use Tiina Tuominen's thesis entitled, "'Down into the Valley of Death': The Portrayal of the Orient in the Interwar Fiction of Agatha Christie."

These works tie Christie's oeuvre to Orientalism and tourism while giving a perspective and analysis not found in the works of white Western scholars. Zengin focuses on the tourists' Orientalist views in Christie's *Death On the Nile*. McGregor uncovers the reality behind the South African tourist setting in *The Man in the Brown Suit*. Atassi talks about how Christie's story may have been influenced by the reach of the British empire. Wainwright critiques Christie's stereotypical tourist images in *Caribbean Mystery*. Tuominen discusses Oriental stereotypes and settings in Christie's fiction, but she only considers works in the interwar period and does not address aspects of the narrative that challenge the Orientalist perspective.

### Research Justification

The scope of my research is not necessarily to label Agatha Christie as a racist or non-racist writer, but to analyze what her work says about culture as much as her. Aspects like benevolent racism and imperial feminism can be thought of as positive by dominant groups and even accepted by marginalized ones. In addition, a writer's works can inadvertently advocate for social changes while the writer remains separate from those movements. While Christie's genre focused on puzzles, the little snippets of human nature in the types of people she presented have been recognizable to people globally. She did incorporate the places where she travelled, but she did not do so uniformly. The formulaic style of the genre may have made it both expedient for Christie to rely on stereotypes, while at the same time clueing the reader in to the artifice at play. In addition, the structured nature of the detective fiction genre may have been enough of a clue to take the characterization with a grain of salt. However, since this genre is known for its double bluff, Christie may have been reinforcing, not really challenging Orientalist viewpoints with her stereotypes.

My analysis involves the study of popular culture through a popular author. What I am looking at is how the cultural and racial ideas inherent in the text can be read by the audience. While Christie's texts have been changed for adaptations in film and television, the material in its original medium has not changed. That's why it is imperative to analyze the viewpoints it represents because the main texts have not changed to respond to the changing times, nor has there been any call for them to do so. An Agatha Christie book now has the same wording as an Agatha Christie during the prime of the British empire. While there may be changes in translations, both Harper Collins and Agatha Christie Limited have kept a strong hold on the publishing of Christie. In fact, at least two of the non-academic books that reference Christie are published by Harper Collins. My research will try to look at how Christie's work is situated, with an awareness that I am in some ways talking back. However, placing any work within a certain time period does not mean that what it represents stays within that time period. Additionally, as some scholars note, while she was heavily influenced by the interwar period she also employed some modern approaches that not all Golden Age authors did, avoiding some of the popular tropes. This thesis will bring new insight because I am not looking at Christie just in relation to her time period, her genre, or in relation to feminism, but am using postcolonial feminism to analyze how her tourists perform in their roles as Westerner tourists and what those performances could be signaling to readers, given the fact that the nature of detective fiction encourages a relationship based on established formulas.

## Notes

1. Edmund Wilson was a preeminent cultural critic who was published in the periodicals such as the *Nation*, *The New Republic*, and *The New Yorker*. He served on the staff of *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, and *Vanity Fair*. For more on his writings, see *The Edmund Wilson Reader* and *Classics and Commercials: A Literary Chronicle of the Forties*. Responses to his article, “Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?” are in the Critics and Bias section of CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSION.
2. Agatha Christie’s books will have shortened titles in the in-text citations: *Caribbean* for *Caribbean Mystery*, *Brown Suit* for *The Man in the Brown Suit*, *Appointment* for *Appointment with Death*, *Nile* for *Death on the Nile*, *Autobiography* for *An Autobiography*, *Come Tell Me* for *Come Tell Me How You Live*, *Grand Tour* for *The Grand Tour*, and *Hercules* for *The Labors of Hercules*.
3. A more detailed chronological analysis of Christie and her critics is in the Critics and Bias section of CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSION.
4. Edmund Wilson’s essay, “Why Do People Read Detective Stories?”; Colin Watson’s chapter entitled, “The Little World of Mayhem Parva” in his book *Snobbery with Violence*; and John Cawelti’s chapter entitled, “The Formula of the Classical Detective Story” in his book *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories* are just a few examples of critics using Arthur Conan Doyle and/or Poe as a yardstick to measure Christie’s work and characters.
5. John Cawelti’s chapter entitled, “The Art of the Classical Detective Story” in his book *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories* is a great example of using Sayers’ ability as a cudgel towards Christie’s skill only to belittle Sayers a few pages later.

Edmund Wilson's "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" was a dig at Christie and other female detective writers. He uses a Christie title for the article and then proceeds to go after Dorothy Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, and Margery Allingham. Wilson spends a good portion of the article discussing the rave reviews of Sayers' work, only to dismiss the value of it later along with Marsh's and Allingham's, but admits to enjoying the work of John Dickinson Carr, a male writer of the Golden Age. However, even Martin Edwards' *The Golden Age of Murder* tends to favor Sayers' work over Christie.



CHAPTER I. QUINTESSENTIAL BRITISHNESS OF MISS MARPLE  
IN *CARIBBEAN MYSTERY*

Miss Jane Marple is Christie's best known female detective. She first appeared in the novel *Murder at the Vicarage* (1930). Marple is othered by the fact that she is a spinster. She is middle class, but not well-to-do. She has maids, but she relies on the kindness of others, mainly her nephew Raymond West to help keep her financially afloat. There have been female detectives since the 1860s and Anna Katherine Green's Amelia Butterworth was the first detective spinster in 1897 (Shaw and Vanacker 35). However, Miss Marple has become an iconic representation for a female detective, not just another prototype in classic detective stories.

Edward W. Said in *Culture and Imperialism* states that "stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and existence" (xii). Miss Marple's international fame still speaks to the members of the former British Empire and those they colonized, as well as the rest of the world and younger generation in both these regards. One example of Christie's legacy in writing is how it affected the career of her fan H.F.R Keating. Keating edited a book about her, *Agatha Christie: First Lady of Crime* (1977). He also went on to write 11 books in her tradition, but what he became famous for were stories about Inspector Ghote of the Bombay Police, which in actuality were "an Indian functioning as a British author's alter ego" (Tamaya 3). Keating's depiction of a person of color, but it was more of a ventriloquist act. He received praise using a brown body to say what was considered uninteresting when his white characters said it.

In *Books and Travel: Inspiration, Quests and Transformation*, Jennifer Laing and Warwick Frost "discuss the role of books in empowering and inspiring the would-be tourist,"

arguing that fictional books can motivate readers to travel (17). In their analysis as tourism academics, they argue that Miss Marple stories cater to the dream of a sleepy English village for tourists wishing to travel to England (Laing and Frost 61). The forte of Miss Marple's semiosis is how she stimulates nostalgia for the rural old-fashioned aspect of Britain. A consequence of Miss Marple's popularity is how she acts as a symbol of British tradition for its people and the tourists who want to go there. That is part of the reason her novel *Caribbean Mystery* is discordant with the rest of her stories. *Caribbean Mystery* is the only book where she leaves England. At the same time, Miss Marple tries to overlay the pattern of the old English countryside on her tourist interactions with people of color in a world that is reaching towards global in *Caribbean Mystery*.

In *Caribbean Mystery*, Miss Marple goes to recuperate in a hotel on a fictitious island called St. Honoré in the Caribbean run by white Westerners, Tim and Molly Kendal. The hotel acts almost like an all-inclusive resort that caters mainly to white Westerners. Another guest, Major Palgrave, tells Miss Marple he has a photograph of a murderer, but Miss Marple does not pay attention until he dies. Then she spends the rest of the novel sorting out if the photographed murderer is indeed on the island killing people. Published in 1964, *Caribbean Mystery* is a later Agatha Christie novel. She may have been writing to amuse herself at this point because she was already an established and best-selling author. In *Agatha Christie's Secret Notebooks: Fifty Years of Mysteries in the Making*, John Curran's research, which involved going through Christie's notebooks, found that plots, characters, and setting details were written in pieces in different notebooks over a period of years, mixed in different stories, before she coalesced them into a book for publication. In *Caribbean Mystery*, Christie takes her most quintessentially British character not only out of the English environment she champions, but also of the surroundings

that act as part and parcel to define her. Douglas R. McManis, in “Places for Mysteries,” highlights Christie’s “distinct preference for village-rural landscapes” (322). *Caribbean Mystery* could be considered incongruous to the rest of the series because Miss Marple, above any other Christie protagonist, typified the mentality of a very traditional English citizen. Yet, Christie could have used this unorthodox setting for Miss Marple’s character to her advantage. If Miss Marple socialized more with the local people of the island, Christie would have had the opportunity to fashion a more varied storyline than the most Marple books. In different books, Christie showed she was more than capable of changing up patterns, even if the formula had worked well for her in previous books. There is a great variety in her writing, so although her books follow the conventions of the detective genre, Christie introduces inventions that did not violate the rules, but expanded how a classical murder mystery could be presented to make it fresh (e.g., *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*). However, just as in other Christie novels that show the adventures of white Western tourists, Miss Marple chooses to primarily interact with other white Western tourists in a setting that is segregated from the surrounding local area. Christie did base *Caribbean Mystery* on a trip to Barbados (Fido 124). However, unlike her trips to South Africa and countries in the Middle East, she did not spend so much time in the area, nor did she write about it in her personal notes or letters to her family. Her travels in the Middle East were covered in her autobiography and *Come Tell Me How You Live*. Her travel to South Africa was also covered in her autobiography and in letters and photos that her grandson, Matthew Pritchard, compiled in the book *The Grand Tour*. In comparison to her other travels, Christie’s time in Barbados may have been brief and limited so her representation of the island life is shallow and based more on basic imagery used to promote tourism than actuality.

A popular critique of Christie is that her setting detail is scant, yet scholars like McManis in “Places for Mysteries,” Earl F. Bargainnier in *Gentle Art of Murder: The Detective Fiction of Agatha Christie*, and Marion Shaw and Sabine Vanacker in *Reflecting on Miss Marple* have argued that Christie’s descriptions are not only in line with the style of the genre, but she also provides enough points of reference to allow her readers to identify a place and attach meaning to that identification. Laing and Frost’s research supports the argument that readers of Miss Marple have found enough in Christie’s description of the English countryside to be motivated enough to visit there. Of course, how genuine rather than stereotypical the imagery is may depend on the area she is describing. Leon Wainwright’s critique of the novel in *Solving Caribbean Mysteries: Art, Embodiment and an Eye for the Tropics*, is not about how sparse the description of the Caribbean island is, but rather whether that imagery is more like a picture postcard than grounded in reality. While most non-academic authors have pointed out that *Caribbean Mystery* is the only one where Miss Marple leaves England, Wainwright is the only academic scholar that both acknowledges the book and tries to sort out what the displacement of Miss Marple means for the work and genre. Wainwright remarks that the “incidental backdrop to Christie’s plot is borrowed from the same archive of associations..., in which tourism and the tropics collide at the locus of vision and the painted, printed and photographic picture” (134). Wainwright is talking about how the West has imagined the Caribbean, how that differs from the actual place, and how photography can both present an actuality and reinforce the othering. He is saying that the narratives of Christie’s books perform the same kind of exotification with words, but also give a glimpse of the reality and reinforce the stereotype. Through her setting, Christie’s book appeals to both the nostalgia and idealized view of the tropics by white Westerners.

Patricia D. Maida and Nicholas B. Spornick, in *Murder She Wrote: A Study of Agatha Christie's Detective Fiction*, argue that:

A survey of all the lands and communities that Agatha Christie depicts—the exotic, the London scene, the estate, and the village—reveals a basic concern for the social environment. It is the people and their lifestyles that matter, for crime is inherently anti-social, an assault upon the community” (190).

Maida and Spornick are not necessarily refuting what Wainwright finds problematic about the setting in *Caribbean Mystery*. They are simply adding that even in within a stereotypical representation there is still room for breaks in the hegemonic view of the other. There are two distinct communities at play in St. Honoré: the hotel and local area. While the hotel is predominantly white and the local area is predominantly black, they are permeable separations that are both affected by the murders, especially when one victim works at the hotel, but lives in the town.

In poring over Agatha Christie's notebooks, which covered the span of over fifty years, Curran has noted that Christie's notes for *Caribbean Mystery* was spread over 14 notebooks and at one point in notebook 3, she thought of making Poirot the main detective (*Secret Notebooks* 279, 281). Given the fact that Poirot was an international traveler, using him as the protagonist seems more appropriate than Miss Marple. Even though Curran says a bulk of it was notebook 2, the amount of notebooks suggests that there could have been significant changes over a long period of time. The detail of the glass eye was logged into notebook 62, twenty-five years before *Caribbean Mystery* was published (Curran *Secret Notebooks* 173). Since Curran does not itemize all the stories in the books, it is hard to tell the complete amount of time Christie worked on *Caribbean Mystery* and what were the old versus new details in regards to race and nationality.

Curran believes that Christie's decision to finish the book came from her own experience visiting the West Indies at an age like Miss Marple. Unlike locations for the stories of Poirot or other Christie characters, Miss Marple stories do not give the real names of places. Instead, for the most part, they are fictional places based on real places. Miss Marple's town of St. Mary Mead is not a real place, but rather based on the idea of a typical English country village. St. Honoré stands in for an island in the West Indies. Janet Morgan, in *Agatha Christie: A Biography*, notes that St. Honoré was a composite that came from Christie's memories of a trip to Barbados and "a book about the birds and flowers of Tobago" (335). St. Mary Meade was based on the English landscape that Christie knew very well so even if she employed a limited description she knew what to use for best and accurate impact, while St. Honoré was a mix of a limited visit and an imagined view of a country that was highly superficial. In addition, Miss Marple's decrying the changes in her village makes more sense than on a location that is foreign to her. Cora Kaplan in an "Unsuitable Genre for Feminist," notes that Christie's "simpler moral universe is typical of Christie's nostalgia for a social system long gone" (201). Therefore, even though Christie updated aspects of the novel to deal with the racial and political changes, the viewpoint espoused by Miss Marple may still be reminiscent of the English sentiment of the interwar period. However, the traditional version of St. Honoré is unlike the traditional St. Mary Meade. Miss Marple's nostalgia is linked it to the artificial tourist setting created by the Kendals, which makes Miss Marple's sense of nostalgia out of place on the island.

### Setting the Idea of Island Otherness

Location is one the most identifiable indicators of otherness in *Caribbean Mystery*. The Western guests are supposed to come to the island to experience its culture, but they simply recreate an English community in a tropical location. In *Staging Tourism*, Jane C. Desmond talks about how colonial control turned to capitalist control for Hawaii, which looks like the same trajectory in Christie's description of St. Honoré in *Caribbean Mystery*. A place that had been used for raw materials for a colonial power is now used by the people who come from the country of the colonial power for their own personal profit. St. Honoré's owner is no longer another country, but the citizens from that country. Wainwright points out, that *Caribbean Mystery* was "published squarely at a mid-point on the timeline of Caribbean decolonization" (144). The hierarchy is still there, but now people are working under a capitalist as opposed to colonial rule. For instance, while talking to Miss Marple about the Kendals, Mr Rafael, a rich white businessman who is staying at the hotel, says, "They've both worked like blacks, though that's an odd term to use out here, for blacks don't work themselves to death at all, so far as I can see. Was looking at a fellow shimmying up a coconut tree to get his breakfast, then he goes to sleep for the rest of the day. Nice life" (Christie *Caribbean* 206).<sup>1</sup> He rejects the work the man did to get food as easy, even though he could not do it. He then uses one instance to stereotype an entire people. When the West uses "all those generalities unquestioningly," that is othering (Said *Orientalism* 102). Mr. Rafael's statement allows for no individuality among black people and anecdotal evidence becomes hard data. Mr. Rafael is also ignoring the unseen work of the maids, cooks, and other workers of color. In *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, Dean MacCannell refers to the area where the unseen labor occurs as the back region (or stage) of the area of tourism (92-93). The hoteliers, Molly and Tim, who are white, occupy front region (or stage), which can be seen. However, the labor of their service staff, who are all people of

color, must be hidden to avoid disruption of the front stage, i.e., ruining the perfect presentation of the hotel. Molly and Tim's jobs involve public interactions with the guests, but their hotel would not function if their employees did not do their assigned work.

Miss Marple is very dismissive when she compares the hotel setting against her village life:

Lovely and warm, yes—and so good for her rheumatism—and beautiful scenery, though perhaps—a trifle monotonous? So many palm trees. Everything the same every day—never anything happening. Not like St. Mary Mead where something was always happening. Her nephew had once compared life in St. Mary Mead to scum on a pond, and she had indignantly pointed out that smeared on a slide under the microscope there would be plenty of life to be observed. Yes, indeed, in St. Mary Mead, there was always something going on (Christie *Caribbean* 7-8).

First, the placidness, which she describes as monotony, is deliberate. She is at a hotel that caters to people on vacation. The emphasis is on an environment that provides relaxation. MacCannell refers to the Western-style hotel as a cultural production, a model that links producers with their audience (24). The Kendals are the producers—their job is to provide the ideal of a Westerner's view of a tropical experience that does not remind guests of their daily travails in their regular life, but is not too jarring for them. Tim Kendal asks Miss Marple, “Nothing special you want, is there?...Because you've only got to tell me and I could get it specially cooked for you. Hotel food, and semi-tropical at that, isn't quite what you're used to at home, I expect?” (Christie *Caribbean* 21). He is not encouraging her to try something new, but rather trying to figure out if he can get anything English for her to make her stay more pleasurable. MacCannell comments that cultural productions “may add to the ballast of our modern civilization by sanctifying an



original as being a model worthy of copy” or “establish a new direction...presenting new combinations of cultural elements” (26). While the hotel may seem to be mixing cultural elements (e.g., Westerners enjoying a steel band), the cultural hierarchy is still maintained. The mixing is not uncontrolled and equal. The white owners are choosing what to expose their guests to and the guests accept what they are being offered for the most part. As owners of the hotel, Tim and Molly Kendal engage in settler colonialism. In settler colonialism, those who are colonizers are no longer connected to their original country, but they impose their culture, a kind of colonial rule, in the new area and act in ways that displace the local populace (Veracini 13). The hotel is not a satellite colony of the British Empire, but a capitalist enterprise that favors Western ideals. They are establishing a space specifically geared for white Westerners on the island. They are taking aesthetics from the island to dress up their hotel, but this is not an equal interchange. Even though the visits are temporary, the guests reinforce this system by patronizing the hotel.

Another reason why Miss Marple’s comparison of St. Honoré and St. Mary Mead is inappropriate is that she does not really venture outside to see the daily life of the people on the island. She is not visiting homes or even local vendors the way that she does in her own village. Miss Marple stays within the confines of the hotel or goes to the beach instead of visiting the town. Her experience on the island consists primarily of what has been manufactured for her consumption. She only engages in talking about the sights with Dr. Graham, another hotel guest, in order to get him to reveal if his conversations with Major Palgrave could provide clues to the identity of the murder. Later, when the maid who is a local woman is killed, Miss Marple considers traveling outside the confines of the hotel into the local area in order to try to figure out the reason for the murder. However, she never follows through on this thought and decides to

solve the crime from the hotel with the help of Mr. Rafael instead.<sup>2</sup> We learn about Victoria's home life through outside third person omniscient narrative.

To support the idea that this tropical location is completely different from the Western world, Christie Orientalizes the drug used by the murderer. Christie has used the drug atropine before, but here she exotifies it by referring to it by one of its sources, the plant datura, and attaching it to stories in India. Jackson, Mr. Rafael's white valet, thinks someone may have put datura in Molly's face cream and talks to Miss Marple about it. Instead of immediately discussing the active chemical ingredient, atropine, which he is knowledgeable about because of his medical training, he tells the story about how it might be abused in India:

India, for example, in the bad old days, a young wife who married an old husband. Didn't want to get rid of him, I suppose, because she'd have been burnt on the funeral pyre, or if she wasn't burnt she'd have been treated as an outcast by the family. No catch to have been a widow in India in those days. But she could keep an elderly husband under drugs, make him semi-imbecile, give him hallucinations, drive him more or less off his head (Christie *Caribbean* 264-265)

Since the location is not India, he does not need to go into detail in his anecdote. Jackson's tale appears to simply reinforce the idea that atropine is a foreign poison, collapsing the differences between the West Indies and India, and subconsciously underlining the dangers of what is non-Western. From here Jackson goes on to talk about belladonna, another plant that is also a source for atropine. Although belladonna is found in England, Jackson mentions its use in Syria and Lebanon instead. Miss Marple reinforces this by saying, "'Who told you these stories about India, about the doping of husbands with Datura?...Was it Major Palgrave?'" (Christie *Caribbean* 266) Later, during the denouement, Marple goes back to the face cream spiked with atropine and

remarks, “Jackson was on the right track. Maybe he got the idea from Major Palgrave’s stories about the use of datura by Indian women on their husbands” (Christie *Caribbean* 308-309).

Since this was already covered in her previous talk with Jackson, there seems no purpose other than to restate that this drug has had a non-Western history of abuse. Kathryn Harkup, in *A is for Arsenic: The Poisons of Agatha Christie*, comments, “It was the stories of datura’s use in India that inspired Agatha Christie and her fictional poisoner in a *Caribbean Mystery* and *The Labors of Hercules*” (54). Yet, Hercule Poirot in “The Cretan Bull” story in *The Labors of Hercules* spends more time discussing the effect of atropine in datura on people and only brief mentions its derivation from India: “Well the active principle of datura is closely allied to, if it is not actually, the alkaloid atropine—which is also obtained from belladonna or the deadly nightshade.

Belladonna preparations are fairly common and atropine sulfate itself is prescribed freely for eye treatments” (Christie 161). Here, Poirot is domesticating datura by connecting it to local plants that contain the same potent chemical. Christie demystifies datura’s use when the setting is in England, whereas with Miss Marple, she uses stories about its folk usage in India to make the drug sound more foreign.

### People of Color

Aside from the setting, the people of color who visit and work at the hotel and live in St. Honoré are the major signifiers of difference. In contrast to the setting and the poison, some of the people of color are not simply left to the interpretation of the white Westerners, as they are given the chance to speak in the novel. Bargainnier argues that “secondary characters are the principal conveyors of the social scene...they all have something to say about twentieth century British life” (132-133). In *Caribbean Mystery*, this British life has become more cosmopolitan,

mixing with the rest of the world, and turning post-colonial. By 1964, Christie could not ignore the growth of international travel and the changing of national policies that would affect how she had to tell her stories to make them believable. Shaw and Vanacker note that in many of her stories, at least from the 1950s on, “Christie causes Miss Marple to register the passage of time and arrival of new ideas” (58). While Miss Marple is a highly nostalgic character, she has a begrudging awareness of how times have changed. Therefore, even though Christie’s protagonist is unhappy about changes with the passage of time, experiences different from Miss Marple’s are allowed to filter into the narrative. With this door open, the people of color are given some space to comment about their lives to the white Westerners. Christie presents non-white individuals from the tourist, police, and hotel workers communities. Since the people of color do not all occupy the same social status in the novel, it helps counteract the idea that all people of color are a monolithic group.

Additionally, *Caribbean Mystery* actually has the most multicultural grouping of tourists of all of Christie’s novels:

There were middle-aged couples from the North of England. There was a gay family from Caracas complete with children. The various countries of South America were well represented, all chattering loudly in Spanish or Portuguese. There was a solid English background of two clergymen, one doctor and one retired judge. There was even a family of Chinese. (Christie *Caribbean* 19)

In spite of this sense of diversity, all but one of the guests of color are not characterized any further than this though. The readers never learn what the make-up of those Chinese or South American families are much less the names of the family members or their motivations for travel. These nameless guests of color exist one slight step above the island inhabitants and

workers, but one step below the British and American guests at the hotel. They add to the scenery.

Señora de Caspearo is the only exception to this rule because she seems to have enough socioeconomic clout to associate with the white people on the beach. She is the only guest of color who gets to speak and perform as an individual, even if it is simply for limited time on the beach. Señora de Caspearo is described as a “handsome woman from Venezuela.” (Christie *Caribbean* 66). Indeed, Señora de Caspearo speaks only in terms of appearances of the other hotel guests. Her dialogue is relegated to deriding the physical features of Major Palgrave and Mr. Rafael, conversing about how charming the Hillingdons are (not realizing that underneath their pretense their marriage is in trouble), and commenting on Lucky Dyson’s fading beauty. When Señora de Caspearo says that Lucky is “not so young anymore” and Greg, Lucky’s husband, has roaming eyes, Miss Marple, retorts “I expect you would know” (Christie *Caribbean* 75). Miss Marple makes the remark to check Señora de Caspearo’s cattiness, which is the only time she speaks directly against anyone, even though there are other Westerners that Miss Marple does not approve of either. In different circumstances, Miss Marple shows her ability to work around the person. She humors Major Palgrave and changes the conversation when Esther Walters is getting annoyed with her. Miss Marple does not even confront Jackson for going through his employer’s things, although she witnesses him going through the items in Mr. Rafael’s room. She does not intercede, which is generally something she would do with a maid, but she alerts Mr. Rafael about the incident later. Therefore, her snarky attitude seems to be tied to race rather than gender, class, or age. Miss Marple’s censure of Señora de Caspearo seems hypocritical when she thinks a similar thought about Lucky later: “Forty, if she’s a day, and looks it this morning” (Christie *Caribbean* 100). Miss Marple seems to have more sympathy for

white women like Lucky trying to remain young and beautiful than for a woman like Señora de Caspearo, especially when later Miss Marple reproaches herself for what she thought about Lucky, but not what she actually said to Señora de Caspearo. Señora de Caspearo is portrayed as superficial, yet what she has said out loud is exactly what Miss Marple has thought to herself. Señora de Caspearo's speech shows that she notices details in the way Miss Marple does, something that Miss Marple uses to solve crimes. Whether or not Señora de Caspearo's observation is astute or catty, her remark to Miss Marple, provides an instance of a non-white character judging the white characters. In that situation, the white gaze here is turned back by a minor character with a meager part in the story. The fact that Señora de Caspearo has enough privilege to be catty to a white tourist may be one of the things that bothers Miss Marple about her. We can also see that the narrative allows for space that the protagonist may not when the epilogue mentions Señora de Caspearo. The epilogue reports Señora de Caspearo's return to South America after the murder investigation so she is the only person of color who gets a postscript.

Another person of color with visibility and some power in *Caribbean Mystery* is Inspector Weston, who is part of the local police in St. Honoré. Scholars Maida and Spornick state that:

All of Christie's law enforcement officers share positive traits: They are honest, even-tempered, and polite... They are careful of their relations with the public and mindful of their position with subordinates. Socially adroit, these men move smoothly through the social spheres from the lowly cottages of the poor to the estates of the aristocrats... Christie may treat her policemen with humor or satire, with deference or compassion; but basically she builds respect for them. (168)

This is categorically true for Western and British officers. Regardless of location, Christie's characterizes them in a commendatory manner and imbues them with a great sense of capability. Meanwhile, in these tourist stories, local authorities are predominantly presented as bumbling or acting in deference to a white official. Inspector Weston, however, has both authority and presence, far more than most people of color in a Christie novel. In *Caribbean Mystery*, Inspector Weston conveys that he is as much in command as the white Administrator Daventry, who seems to be in a holdover position from the colonial administration. When Tim tries to suggest that it was something sordid from Victoria's past that got her killed, Inspector Weston is quick to shut that down. He is also pragmatic, but not unkind in dealing with Jim Ellis, the partner of the murdered maid. He does not interrogate the anxious Jim further because he realizes it would be fruitless. Inspector Weston relays this to Daventry after he sends Jim off. Inspector Weston also jumps in to defend the character of the dead maid, Victoria, when there is a question of whether or not she tried to leverage money for her silence. He says (scathingly according to Christie), "I don't know that I'd even call it that. I doubt if the girl would even understand that word. Payment for being discreet isn't thought of as blackmail. You see, some of the people who stay here are the rich playboy lot and their morals won't bear much investigation" (Christie *Caribbean* 148). Inspector Weston is directly talking about the bad behavior of rich white people who have more money than class and how the people on the island have to deal with it. Weston may be allowed to speak because he espouses the same disapproving view of modern socialites and their illicit acts that Miss Marple reveals in her talk with Major Palgrave. Shaw and Vanacker point out that "Christie, in particular, is a shrewd judge of the gradations of wealth and social class and often uses Miss Marple, who is poor but well-bred, as a measure of both" (32). Even if Inspector Weston is simply reiterating a belief already expressed by Miss Marple, he is

still speaking up for Victoria as another person of color and as a member of the police. While this can be considered Christie throwing her views into characters mouths to amplify her argument, by castigating the white people, Weston is still the Other talking back. It is a short moment, but important because of Inspector Weston's position and upstanding character.

While the hotel workers are a group of people of color like the St. Honoré police force, they have varying ethnicities. From the text, we learn that black women from St. Honoré have jobs at the Kendals' hotel as maids and doing dining room service. Inspector Weston's conversation with Administrator Daventry in defense of Victoria's discretion to suggests that although the hotel isolates itself from the rest of the island, the police keep tabs on the workers and the situation there. Inspector Weston knows enough about Victoria's family to comment that while she and Jim are not married, their children are baptized. The other workers of color at the hotel are the two Cuban cooks and one Puerto Rican waiter. The cooks Enrico and Manuel are not given names until Daventry and Inspector Weston interview them about the murder. Enrico gives evidence to Daventry on page 149, but his name is not divulged until Inspector Weston is talking to Tim Kendal about his statement on page 151.

Victoria, a West Indian maid, is the only service personnel who is treated as an individual. She deals with many of the white English guests, including Miss Marple and Major Palgrave and is the only hotel employee who can be noted as more than a generic background character. In fact, in the Cast of Characters list, which accompanies some editions of the novel and highlights characters for readers to pay attention to, Victoria is the only person of color to be noted. In another Agatha Christie book entitled, *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?*, the protagonists realize that the maid held a big key to the mystery. In that regard, *Caribbean Mystery* could have been titled, *Why Didn't They Believe Victoria?* because Victoria runs around for a good part of



the novel telling everyone her evidence before she gets killed. She talks to the Kendals and the hotel guests, including Dr. Graham, a retired doctor. While she is not the only maid to get killed in an Agatha Christie novel (e.g., *Death on the Nile*; *And Then There Were None*) or even one with Marple as the protagonist (e.g., *The Moving Finger*, *Pocketful of Rye*), Victoria is one of the most fleshed out in terms of character. Shaw and Vanacker state that the “servants in Christie’s novels are stupid and amiable” (20). They do not bridle against the rules or rebel. While this oversimplifies the entire category of Christie’s maids, many of them are classistly depicted as tractable. It is true that Christie chiefly characterizes them in that manner because to make them equal to their employers or resistant to domination “would make the story too political, too subversive of the class domination which was part and parcel of its ideology” (Shaw and Vanacker 20). Victoria is so interesting because she is a maid who does speak up instead of quietly obeying orders. She works for the Kendals, but is not so subservient that she will not make her voice heard.

Victoria is described first as a “black West Indian girl” who is “so happy and smiling” (Christie *Caribbean* 35). This is already a more detailed and favorable description than most Christie maids. The narrator goes even further to describe Victoria as “magnificent creature with a torso of black marble such as a sculptor would have enjoyed” (64). Christie does not talk about people of color in terms that regard them as aesthetically pleasing. Even for white characters, Christie is stingy with her praise when it comes to their features. She generally describes the physical beauty of people of color as inferior to white Western characters so this is very rare. Victoria tries to alert people to what she has witnessed regarding Major Palgrave through almost half of the novel until she is murdered. The minute she realizes that there was something wrong with Palgrave’s crime scene she tells her partner, Jim Ellis: “That Major man who died.

Something I don't like. Something wrong about it" (Christie *Caribbean* 61). In other Christie novels, the maid's information is told directly to the detective or told by the detective so Victoria's ability to speak for herself shows more agency than the usual Christie maid. Her discussion at home with Jim without Miss Marple gives her presence that even some of the white characters in the novel do not get. Jim tells her that she "[s]houldn't bother" and "Don't let's look for trouble" (Christie *Caribbean* 65). In terms of gender, this can be read similar to instances when men discount what Miss Marple is saying because she is a woman. However, it can also be read in terms of race. Jim could be seen as cautioning Victoria by saying that the white people would not appreciate a person of color interfering in their business. While Jim thinks he has the final say, Victoria does not change her mind. She informs Molly Kendal, who behaves as Jim predicted. She tells Victoria that she will look into it, but cautions her against "starting a lot of silly rumors" (Christie *Caribbean* 77). Unlike Victoria, who faces situations head on, Molly does not want to hear that there is anything wrong at her hotel. Victoria is so adamant about it that the Kendals discuss her idea with Dr. Graham because he has connections on the island. Although Dr. Graham tries to discourage Victoria by saying that her suspicion is "[s]heer nonsense," he feels uneasy after she leaves (Christie *Caribbean* 82). For the early part of the novel, while Miss Marple is asking vague questions about Major Palgrave's photos, Victoria is talking to everyone about his death and directly challenging the common view that it was a natural one. Race comes in again when Daventry, the Administrator, says, "Well, the St. Honoré people are very excitable, you know. Emotional. Work themselves up easily" (Christie *Caribbean* 107-108). He seems quick to reject the evidence because he does not trust the mental capability of the local people of St. Honoré. Daventry is responding to Dr. Graham giving Victoria's evidence. If Daventry was reluctant to hear it from Major Palgrave, another white

man, he definitely would not have listened to Victoria. Unlike some Christie maids who are portrayed as calculating, Victoria's death due to her interest in financial gain is excused. Not only does Inspector Weston explain to Administrator Daventry that Victoria thought the payment was a reward for her discretion, but we get a glimpse at her difficult home life as well. She lives in a shanty and has a sick child. Overall, Christie's depiction of Victoria as a character is a positive one. She is beautiful. Miss Marple even comments that Victoria has "lovely white teeth" and "[n]ice nature" (35). This is as high as Miss Marple's praise goes for anyone of color. Victoria is also intelligent, sensing that the missing medicine was related to the murder. However, the narrator notices Victoria's qualities more than the other characters do, except for the murderer.

### Marple's Sympathy

Since Miss Marple is known for her relationships with maids, it is worth looking into how her relationship with Victoria differs from her usual pattern. Miss Marple calls her "that poor girl" when she talks about her murder (Christie *Caribbean* 309). That is as far as her sympathy goes. In contrast, Miss Marple avenges the death of Gladys in *Pocketful of Rye*. Admittedly, Gladys was a maid for Miss Marple for a longer time than Victoria, but in the story Miss Marple interacts with Victoria. Victoria brings Miss Marple her breakfast repeatedly (34-35). Although, she calls Victoria "poor girl" she does not really think of doing anything for her family. Cora Kaplan writes in "Unsuitable Genre for a Feminist?" commented the female writers of the Golden Age were more anti-feminist, supporting traditional conventions, like marriage, over progressive platforms, like careers, for women (199). Therefore, while they provide their characters with agency, they are not so interested in developing a sisterhood. Agate Nesaule

Krouse and Margot Peters argue, in their article “Women Who Kill,” that in “Christie’s conservative class-bound view of society” the maid “is a likely victim, although her death is neither the first nor the crucial murder” (98). Victoria’s death is not first, but it is instrumental to revving up the investigation, not incidental. Miss Marple becomes more certain that Palgrave’s story was true and that he was murdered once she learns Victoria was killed because of Victoria’s convictions about her observations. She is spurred on by Victoria’s murder, but not because Victoria was murdered. She is not concerned with retribution for Victoria’s sake.

Kimberly Maslin, in “The Paradox of Miss Marple: Agatha Christie’s Epistemology,” notes that in Miss Marple’s “quest for verification, however, she seeks legitimation in traditional sources of authority” (113). In fact, Miss Marple tends to side with the white patriarchy that provides her with benefits. She does not even consider going to Inspector Weston or the St. Honoré police. She substitutes her usual ally Sir Henry Clithering, the retired commissioner of Scotland Yard in England, with Mr. Rafiel in St. Honoré to get her way and solve the mystery. Bargainnier comments that “[s]nobbery and narrow chauvinism, even xenophobia, have been characteristic of the interwar English upper classes” (33). Miss Marple is of that period so while her lack of empathy is not excusable, it is understandable. She does not align herself with someone who she views as less powerful than herself so she rejects people of color. In “Murder, Mass Culture, and the Feminine: A View from the 4.50 from Paddington,” Angela Devas argues that Miss Marple provides a “gendered perspective” that is not “necessarily feminist” (263). She can see Victoria and realize what she was trying to say because Miss Marple is very familiar with domestics and domesticity, but she has no interest in social uplift for more marginalized people. She sees protection in the hierarchy.

### Artificial vs. Natural?

In a number of Miss Marple's mysteries, she champions rural life and points out artifice to solve the case. A good example of this is in *The Body in the Library* where she uncovers that Basil Blake is pretending to have an affair with Dinah Lee to upset the locals, but the two are really married. Blake is a man with family from the area, but he is acting like a London sophisticate as a way to buck the conservative views he came from. Unlike Poirot, Miss Marple is from the rural countryside and that is what she favors. Slick city folk tend to be the villains or tamed in her stories. Blake is tamed by the exposure of his marriage. In *A Pocketful of Rye*, Miss Marple exposes the disingenuous world traveler, Lancelot Fortescue, who manipulated her former maid Gladys. Many of her mysteries are solved when she pulls back the veneer from people's presentation of themselves or how the setting is originally depicted. Her acceptance of *Caribbean Mystery*'s hotel setting as unmanufactured goes against the grain of her style. Perhaps to do that would be to consider it and the Westerners on the island an imposition on the people of St. Honoré's way of life, means Miss Marple would have to question Britain. She is too proud of being a British citizen to do that.

*Caribbean Mystery* sets up a dichotomy between artificial and natural aspects throughout the book: Molly's real and Lucky's bottle-blond hair; Major Palgrave's glass eye; Esther suggesting Molly is faking her mental anxiety; Tim playing a both a true and false suitor to win over Molly's family. However, here the false pieces, unlike most Miss Marple mysteries, are more connected to the victims, not the killer. Everyone knows that Lucky's hair is chemically treated to look like Molly's so it does not have to be revealed as fake. However, its approximation to Molly's color is why Lucky is targeted. Miss Marple knows that Major Palgrave's eye is fake, but her problem is that she forgets. Maurice Richardson, in his review of

*Caribbean Mystery* in *The Observer*, praised Christie by saying, “A most encouraging return to somewhere very near her best unputdownable form” (26). Classic detective fiction is about imposing an order, which fits in line with the concepts of modernity and Western civilization that the hotel seems to embrace. In comparison to the other tourist novels I cover in this thesis, *Caribbean Mystery*’s setting is closest to the contained English manor house style that is popular in detective fiction. The Kendals are maintaining an English village artificially in the tropics. Miss Marple has no problem with this imposition because she favors a traditional English village to the tropics. She does not feel acclimatized to her situation in the hotel until she finds parallels between the white guests staying there and the village people she has known. Despite the fact that Miss Marple chats with Señora de Caspearo, she never considers her in relation to the British villagers. She also complains about the sunny weather in comparison to England. Victoria is set up as a natural beauty and native of the island. As such, Victoria cannot be part of an English village, unlike all the other Marple maids. As a result, she is not afforded the benefits of its membership and sympathy that Miss Marple generally bestows to maids.

### Conclusion

*Caribbean Mystery* presents a limited amount of social interaction between the white Westerner tourists and the local people of among the Christie novels. However, at the same time Victoria, Inspector Weston, and Señora de Caspearo are more fleshed out than many people of color in the Christie novels. In *Death on the Nile*, there is no person of color singled out, yet there are a number of interactions between the tourists and locals depicted. While it is rare that a person of color is depicted at Señora de Caspearo’s class level in the other Christie novels, she is never truly integrated into the tourist community at the Kendals’ hotel.

Christie's use of imagery in a setting that is not a British or Western one matters because she relies on stereotypes of the Other instead simply generalizations of an area she knows. Since she has written about the countryside of England in many novels, even if one proved to be insufficiently descriptive others could be used as comparison and support for that novel. In addition, characters like Mr. Rafiel and Daventry make racist comments that denigrate the industry and intelligence of the people of St. Honoré. In addition, the non-Western setting is made a site of othering, and Christie's characters' comments and actions belie racist attitudes towards people of color within the text. Miss Marple is more antagonistic towards Señora de Caspearo than she is to the white Western tourists or even the white man servant Jackson. In the experiences of the white and non-white characters, there is this sense that people of color are forced to negotiate the systems that control and confine them. While after the murder, the affected white tourists affected can go home, but there is no recourse for Victoria and Victoria's family. Inspector Weston uses his power to defend Victoria's character and her partner Jim from Daventry's aspersions. Since the book is detective fiction and Miss Marple is the main detective, it ultimately must reinforce her views and beliefs. Yet, there are points where the narrative diverges from her point of view and follows other characters, like Victoria. Because the narrative does break away from Miss Marple's point of view from time to time in *Caribbean Mystery*, while one cannot call Christie's work progressive, it is transcending the conservative boundaries of the genre and allowing for social commentary, which is still not the same as endorsing that viewpoint. Depicting the home life of people of color, showing them as proficient in their jobs, and giving them the same socioeconomic status as white people moves them closer to a full representation in a genre that is rather black and white.

## Notes

1. Agatha Christie's books will have shortened titles in the in-text citations: *Caribbean* for *Caribbean Mystery*, *Brown Suit* for *The Man in the Brown Suit*, *Appointment* for *Appointment with Death*, *Nile* for *Death on the Nile*, *Autobiography* for *An Autobiography*, *Come Tell Me* for *Come Tell Me How You Live*, *Grand Tour* for *The Grand Tour*, and *Hercules* for *The Labors of Hercules*.
2. A brief discussion of how television adaptations can add to the postcolonial critique of Agatha Christie's work, using the example of *Caribbean Mystery*, is in the Outside the Limits of Research section of CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSION.



CHAPTER II. HIERARCHY AND SERVITUDE IN *APPOINTMENT WITH DEATH* and  
*DEATH ON THE NILE*

*Caribbean Mystery* was the only non-Western travel story where the setting was static, thus, evoking the feel of an English manor house that typified classic detective fiction settings. Because of her love of the Middle East, due to her travels with her husband, archeologist Max Mallowan, Christie “makes the works set there the most significant sub-group of this [foreign travel] category, for she provides more description in them than in any of the others. Yet, though the exoticism of these works is quite different from the familiarity of the English works, Christie still continues to create closed circle societies no matter what the country” (Bargainnier 30).<sup>2</sup> However, setting still does matter in how you tell these stories. A closed group that includes the locals views the land and culture differently than a closed group made up of entirely of tourists. In addition, because these tourists traverse different areas of a country or different countries, they must interact with the local people or tour providers. Yet, the tourists in Christie’s work remain isolated and provide only the imperial view to readers. Some scholars defend Christie asserting that since she wrote books during the time of the empire, she just unconsciously projected that view in her work. Yet, Sami Atassi in “Mapping Representations of the Queen of Mystery's Middle East: Adaptations, Anxieties, and Geopolitics of Agatha Christie's *Appointment with Death*,” argues that Christie’s choice of setting was intentional to avoid critique of the empire. He explains, “For political reasons, a setting in Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, or Syria would have been far more provocative than the more stable and controlled region of Petra in the British Mandate Transjordan” (28). As a person who toured those areas, Christie would be more aware than other British citizens of the time about the political upheaval going on. She chose an area that was favorable to the British Empire at the time as the location for the murder mysteries in order to avoid any questions regarding the British Empire’s authority in the Middle East.

Agatha Christie's books present readers with an Orientalist perspective that is not diluted because the works are fiction, rather the fact that the readers enjoy that fiction makes it more palatable for them to accept that point of view.<sup>1</sup> In *New Patterns in Global Television: Peripheral Vision*, John Sinclair, Elizabeth Jacka, and Stuart Cunningham make the argument for "multiplier effects" for Egyptian film industry (21). They argue that the popularity of films can create an acknowledgement and acceptance of cultural and political aspects from its country of origin. Although Christie's novels are a different medium, the same theory could apply to them especially since they have also spawned adaptations in other media. Jumeirah Hotels and Resorts group just launched a travel package based on *Murder on the Orient Express* in September 2017 (Anderson). The group owns hotels that span the length of the train's travel. Although the package is capitalizing on the recent movie, one of the hotels that is part of the package, the Pera Palace Hotel Jumeirah in Istanbul, where Christie stayed and supposedly wrote the book *Murder on the Orient Express*.

Colonial authorities are then easily able to take charge of the murder cases in those stories because there is imperial control over the area already. Contemporary readers have the opportunity to encounter that mentality, which supports the former British Empire, because Christie's books are still being published without clarification or annotation.<sup>3</sup> After all, the process of "[r]eading books may transmit a form of cultural heritage. This might help us to anticipate contact with *the other* and the nuances of culture and tradition we might encounter through a journey, as well as understanding our own culture more deeply" (Laing and Frost 2 [italics theirs]). Since their publication in the interwar period, *Death on the Nile* (1937) and *Appointment with Death* (1938) have acted as travel guides for many tourists. The novels have framed the way that many Westerners view places in the Middle East because Christie used

locations from her own tourist experiences in her writing. *The Independent*, a British newspaper, mentioned the Old Cataract Hotel and the steamship travel, utilized in *Death on the Nile* in a 2015 article about real tourist locations mentioned in her novels and how to visit them (Mutel) . Professor Barbara Korte examined an exhibit on Christie and her work entitled *Agatha Christie and the Orient* in 2000 at Ruhrland Museum in Essen, Germany. She observed that the “original posters advertising travel to the East and its antiquities, postcards and hotel vouchers that intimate something of the style in which Christie and other Europeans of her class travelled to the Orient. This section is a treasure trove for students of Orientalism...it reveals a lot about the prevailing European conceptions and myths of the East with which Christie embarked on her trip” (Korte 158). Korte realized that these pieces were more than mere decoration. These materials were exhibited in conjunction with Christie’s own materials because they showed the link between the ideologies inherent in tourism at the time and how it influenced and reflected the same themes in Christie’s work. Christie had Orientalist views that were not eliminated by her travels and she passed them on to her readers. While the focus of this chapter is not on museum exhibits and travels that have resulted from Agatha Christie’s work, they do provide a compelling reason to analyze her depictions of tourists and their gaze in her work.

Edward Said has said that Orientalism is about Western projection onto the Orient and its people (78). Scholars note this type of Orientalism is inherent in Christie’s books, especially *Death on the Nile* and *Appointment with Death*, whether they are analyzing her work from cultural, literary, or historical standpoints or even whether they think her point of view is racist or not. Since “Christie avoids any undue discrepancy between the voice of the narrator and the world of the characters,” her tourist gaze, which she shares with her readers, frames the imperialist view of these places (York 144). The tourist gaze Christie uses to take the readers

through her novels guide their perspective on how to see these places and the people that live in them. However, they have not focused as much on how the Other responds to these tourists because while the tourists are the dominant group, those who are othered do speak in Christie's work or may have any ally in the tourist group. In addition, the discrepancy between the support her story gives white women versus people of color should be analyzed as well.

### Situating Agatha Christie as Tourist and Travel Writer

Agatha Christie inadvertently became part of the growing middle class in Britain that her work would influence because her family's dwindling finances made them slide from the upper class, but they still had enough credit and could work to maintain a certain social lifestyle. Neither of Christie's parents worked or kept an eye on their money. As a result, Christie had a coming out party, as expected of her class, but she had it in Cairo, which was more affordable than London (Fido 13, 20; Christie *Autobiography* 167-168). Still, Christie remained in the upper middle (if somewhat struggling) class for the early part of her life until her books made her rich. Even when she and her family were struggling they still had connections that afforded them high end social travels. The fact that she had a coming out party in Cairo still speaks to a status that was higher than many other people in England. After all, "travel is a marker of status" (Urry and Larsen 6). Analyzing Christie in terms of tourism is important because delegating status through travel has not changed.

R. A. York, in *Agatha Christie: Power and Illusion*, defines Christie's work, especially in regard to the third world, as travel writing and he cites *Death on the Nile* and *Appointment with Death* directly (136). In addition, because Christie's books have "captured something in the minds of a reasonably large segment of the reading public...the literature is all the more valuable

as a historic tool” (Rabinowitz 409). The fact that Christie’s colonial gaze pervades her work and is still popular means that her readers make allowances for it or have the same view. If you take Michael Haldrup and Jonas Larsen’s argument in *Tourism, Performance and the Everyday: Consuming the Orient* that “imagination, fantasy and ‘making sense’ are embodied, and part of the embodiment,” meaning that tourism is a multidimensional practice that is not only the tourist act itself, but all the influences that led to it, then Christie imbuing her fictional tourists with her personal point of view encourages the colonizer’s mentality through tourism (62). Long after her death, her books are still calling on other tourists to behave in the same way. Derek Gregory in the “Scripting Egypt” chapter of *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing* argues that fictional Orientalism has its place in setting up tourist expectations (139). People want to experience what they have read about, so Christie’s work serves as her fans’ guide, which frames their tourist experiences before they reach their destination. Although the work is fiction, the world Christie presents to readers can still be tangible and her descriptions could be integral to how they process those areas, even if they visit them.

#### Hercule Poirot as British Other

Unlike Miss Marple whose adventures are primarily in England, Hercule Poirot is a global traveler based in London, England. He is a former Belgian police officer who became a refugee in England because of the German invasion. Poirot is “a foreigner, in particular a Belgian which to the English mind, means being exceptionally insignificant, even for a foreigner” (Shaw and Vanacker 30). In England, he is continually othered by the British and often mistaken for a Frenchman. In *Seventy Years of Swearing upon Eric the Skull: Genre and Gender in Selected Works by Detection Club Writers Dorothy L. Sayers and Agatha Christie*, Monica L. Lott states,

“Her Belgian character, so separated from others in the stories by his non-native origins, his mannerisms, and his detecting activities, has come to represent the quintessential Golden Age detective” (139-140). Lott is describing how Poirot, a former Belgian policeman turned private detective in England has come to represent a British detective throughout the world. In England, he is often treated as a foreigner and must rely on his British friends, like Captain Arthur Hastings and Inspector James Japp to vouch for him to members of English society or the police force. When he travels abroad alone in *Death on the Nile* and *Appointment with Death*, Poirot becomes a symbol of Britishness as well as judicial authority. In both cases, British colonels he has previously met pull him into service, Colonel Race in *Death on the Nile* and Colonel Carbury in *Appointment with Death*.

Poirot’s watchwords are order and method. While he does not say it in every novel he states it twice in *Death on the Nile* when talking with Colonel Race: “I think so. It is always well to proceed with order and method” and “You do well. Method and order, they are everything” (Christie *Nile* 167; 175).<sup>4</sup> With order and method, there is a hierarchy that is enforced. In both novels that hierarchy depends on socioeconomics and race, with a strong emphasis on favoring the West over the East. Whether or not the tourists are financially struggling, they still have more power than the locals. Lott argues that Christie’s work seeks to console British citizens with “optimism” and a sense of “unity” to deal with “post-war” concerns like “changing social gender roles” (79). Christie appears to be trying to unify the British subjects based on their superiority to the rest of the world by acknowledging the shift in women’s roles, whether or not she approves of it, while obfuscating other sociopolitical issues of the time. Poirot’s role is to solve “a mystery within the Middle East—without divulging the inequities of the Empire” (Atassi 30). British colonial authorities are calling upon a Belgian refugee they saved so he can discreetly clean up

their mess. Bill Schwarz in “Politics and Rhetoric in the Age of Mass Culture” comments, “In the classic age of empire, the idea of the frontier was one which was active in holding the line between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ which showed up in mass culture (132). They are not entrusting the investigation to the local police, even if they were colonized because they were still further from Britishness than Poirot.

While Poirot is the protagonist of these novels, he has a lot of interactions with these female travelers, allowing readers to see their viewpoint in the stories. Christie said of Poirot, “In spite of his vanity he often chooses deliberately to stand aside and let the main drama develop” (qtd. in Curran *Murder* 187). As mentioned previously, Christie is not feminist, but her creation of strong female characters is feminist. This progressive treatment of white Western women coupled with a disregard for all people of color, even those who are women, is indicative of Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar call “imperial feminism.” Amos and Parmar coined the term in their journal article “Challenging Imperial Feminism,” in which they argue how the ethnocentric focus of mainstream feminism renders women of color invisible and adds to their oppression. Poirot supports centering white women and upholding the structure of the British Empire rather than questioning this hierarchy and treatment of the Other in his travels. Although he can be more respectful to the locals and tour providers than other Western tourists, he does not use his experience as an Other in English society to advocate for people of color in the non-Western world. This may be due to the fact that he is a highly pragmatic man of his time (Hastings often plays the emotional or sentimental role in their cases together) and his allegiance to Britain becomes more pronounced when he leaves the country, even though he is not British. Miss Marple cannot be accused of imperial feminism because she represents a traditional femininity that rejects feminism in favor of domesticity and conservative nationalism. Yet, many

of the women in *Death on the Nile* and *Appointment with Death* model imperial feminism in how they work in various occupations (e.g., writers, politicians, doctors) outside of the home and choose to travel. Many of them take pride in their agency and disregard or reject the agency of the native people in the Middle Eastern countries of Jordan, Syria, and Egypt. Mrs. Allerton complains that they are “always pestering you for money” (Christie *Nile* 74). Lady Westholme says, “These men need discipline” (Christie *Appointment* 183). Because the narrative privileges Western female characters, it obstructs the power dynamics towards the locals. Their ability to challenge the men makes it seem that equality could be had among people, but it is only among the white Western tourists. In Monica Lott’s analysis, she says Christie’s war experience led her to imbue her writing with the idea that “Britons could be shown a model of citizens coping with the trauma of death and finding peace after their suffering” (86). Indeed, in these tourist tales, many of the travelers see death, not as devastating, but rather an added inconvenience that requires better service. They praise their own perseverance when problems develop, but turn a blind eye to the realities of the people who live and work in the areas they visit, even when those people offer them assistance.

#### Tourism in *Death on the Nile*

Agatha Christie took a trip in 1933 up the Nile with Mallowan and her daughter Rosalind Christie on the *SS Karnak*, the same name she gave the steamship in her book, *Death on the Nile* (Morgan 212; Christie *Nile* 110). Christie made up characters’ names, but she would often use the names of actual modes of transportation and places, which connected her stories to the real world. She stayed at the Old Cataract Hotel so often that she has her own suite named after her (Kotb). Since her second husband worked in the Middle East, she continuously travelled there. In



*Agatha Christie's Secret Notebooks: Fifty Years of Mysteries in the Making* and *Murder in the Making*, John Curran's research shows how Christie's work on the novels overlapped in her notebook.

*Death on the Nile* is about a murder that occurs when a group of tourists travel on a steamship on the Nile, visiting places in Egypt. The group includes drunken novelist Mrs. Otterbourne and her daughter Rosalie, Marxist aristocrat Mr. Ferguson, rich American Miss Van Schuyler with her nurse Miss Bowers and a dependent cousin Cornelia Robson, not so rich Mrs. Allerton and son Tim, very rich American Linnet Doyle, her husband Simon Doyle, and her husband's ex-fiancee Jacqueline de Bellefort, and the detective Poirot. R. A. York says the novel presents, "images of luxurious exclusion" (117). Here the stratification of class based on money is shown. This novel depicts the start of middle class touring that "at its most expensive could include Nile cruises" (Light 89). Therefore, it's more than a diversion for armchair tourists. It could be aspirational for actual tourists. Susan Rowland, in *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British Women Writers in Detective and Crime Fiction*, explains, "The novel locates Englishness as beset by consumer capitalism and its international dimensions" (74). Consumption and experience are used to mark class among the tourists. How much they can have or do is predicated on their money. In this novel, tourism for the middle class is glamorized through the imperial tourists who will conquer the Orient by traveling it.

Although there are a lot of Western characters in *Death on the Nile*, Christie works hard to delineate them by describing their backstories and the motives behind their behavior. As a result, different tourists showcase a variety of Orientalist views. For instance, Mrs. Otterbourne is trying to use the trip to spice up her novel. As evidenced by the title of her proposed novel, *Snow on The Desert's Face*, she is not really interested in the local color or reality of the location

(Christie *Nile* 63). Christie put this in as a joking reference to her unpublished novel *Snow on the Desert* (York 136). She had written it as a young girl based on what she imagined deserts to be like before she actually traveled to them. Mrs. Otterbourne is not a foolish young girl, but a conceited woman who believes she is a brilliant, but underappreciated novelist. She does not want to write a novel from her actual experiences in Egypt. She already set up the novel's agenda with the title and is merely looking for Oriental items to decorate it with: "Englishness requires a native other for representation, but it mimics rather than appropriates the authentically other culture" (Rowland 73). Her focus is on how the Other can help bolster her book sales by adding Oriental flavor to her novel. Mrs. Otterbourne is fine with staged authenticity, an inauthentic performance that pretends to show the inner workings of Egyptian culture (MacCannell 98). She is not interested in learning anything that will make her change her point of view so she is willing to take what is presented and her understanding of it as fact. In addition, Mevlüde Zengin in "Western Image of the Orient and Oriental in Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*: A Postcolonial Reading" points out that Mrs. Otterbourne blames her anxiety on Egypt, not her inability to write or financial problems, applying "the stereotyped image of the East as degenerate" (849). Mrs. Otterbourne's comments about the threatening atmosphere of the country is Orientalist. Said spoke about this dark envisioning of a culture in terms of "silent shadows to be animated by the Orientalist" (*Orientalism* 208). The Orient becomes a force that contains the anxieties and fears of the Other.

While Christie's depiction of this tour group "takes into account the individualization of each European character, she classifies [E]astern characters under one group" (Zengin "Western Self" 167). The undifferentiated Oriental Others like the Nubian boatman, Nubian children, native porters on the train, and one Nubian boy working on the ship have neither voices nor

names. The level of interaction between these people and the tourists is nominal and often antagonistic. Mrs. Otterbourne may be an extreme example, in her desire to appropriate the culture for her writings, but her Orientalist view is shared by the other tourists. When she is approached by curious local children on Elephantine Island, Mrs. Allerton says, “I suppose it would be quite impossible to get rid of some of these awful children... If there were only any peace in Egypt I should like it better” (Christie *Nile* 74). Mrs. Allerton wants the landscape to be devoid of the people who really live there. Earlier, passages of the novel are written to gain sympathy for this British woman on a vacation she cannot really afford. She also says, “I yell ‘Imshf and brandish my sunshade at them and they scatter for a minute or two, and then they come back and stare and stare and their eyes are simply disgusting and so are their noses” (Christie *Nile* 74). Mrs. Allerton does not see them as curious children, but rather like pests. She goes on to complain “[S]omeone is always pestering you for money, or offering you donkeys, or beads, or expeditions to native villages, or duck shooting” (Christie *Nile* 74). Mrs. Allerton is unaware that she is in the tourist trap or front stage and does not realize that these are entrepreneurial offerings. The front stage is the presentation for the tourists, which can be set up so that it is visibly showcases its purpose as a tourist attraction or it can be a staged version of what the locals assume the tourists want as a representation of that culture, what MacCannell calls, “staged authenticity” (101). Mrs. Allerton is relating this to Poirot who she can categorize as British because he has a distinguished personage in British society. Poirot’s response is noncommittal, which could be considered complicit. Rosalie Otterbourne echoes Mrs. Allerton’s dislike of the sellers by saying, “It’s best to pretend to be deaf and blind” (Christie *Nile* 40). Rosalie shows herself to be as disinterested as her mother, Mrs. Otterbourne, in the native people’s reality. The narrative also describes the sellers as a “human cluster of flies” thus

reducing their humanity (Christie *Nile* 40). Instead of simply calling the sellers aggressive or loud, the description demotes them into pestilential creatures. Said states “Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even as people, but as problems to be solved or confined or—as the colonial powers who openly coveted their territory—to be taken over” (*Orientalism* 207). The Western tourists clearly want Egypt and its pleasures without the natives who inhabit it and serve them. Even though this is a fictional novel, how these tourists treat the Egyptians as an Other is not inconsequential because if “the role and power of discourse in the construction of reality...[is considered], Christie’s is a way of othering the [O]riental people and thus creating a textual reality about them” (Zengin “Western Self” 168). Readers of that time would be unlikely to challenge Christie’s construction. John Curran notes, “In 1937 the Nile was as exotic to the majority of Christie’s readers as Mars is to her current audience: very few travelled for the holidays, if they took any holidays at all” (*Secret Notebooks* 207). Even though they may understand that the murder and characters are fictional, the descriptions of the places and people could be considered factual. We know her *Death on the Nile* is still taken seriously because it is still mentioned as a tourism selling point for the Old Cataract Hotel (Kotb; Mutel). Publicity from a real place can validate descriptions in fictional works. If the hotel did not make money by the name reference, if there was no cultural capital for Christie readers, the reference would no longer be made. Gregory argues, “The Egypt of those imaginative geographies was constructed with little or no reference to those who lived there, and no doubt its assumptions and appropriations provoked distrust and dissent: but it was none the less a ‘real’ Egypt too, and its productions had real consequences” (145). Tourists’ views of a place can be framed by the literature they read before going there, whether it is a pamphlet or Christie’s book, so they will compare how authentic the experience is by how well it lines up

with their reading. In addition, if we take into account Dove's discussion about the collaborative relationship between the reader and the writer in the detective genre and Barthes discussion of how the meaning is created between the reader and the text, then what was placed by Christie's cultural understanding can still be picked up by how the reader accepts the meaning in the genre. In *Gendering Orientalism*, Reina Lewis argues that "imperial meanings are not simply inherent in texts, but are reproduced through the various and mediated mechanism of reading" (25). Therefore, not only should we look at the text in terms of what the writer is saying, but consider what possible messages the reader is gathering from the work.

Christie allows for the characters to have contradictory viewpoints from each other in order for the reader to see them as individuals. Even in this large group, Mr. Ferguson appears to be the only Western tourist questioning the unthinking consumption of a culture:

They make me sick...Take the Pyramids. Great blocks of useless masonry. Put up to minister to the egoism of a despotic bloated king. Think of the sweated masses who toiled to build them and died doing it. It makes me sick to think of the suffering and torture they represent. (Christie *Nile* 78)

His speech acknowledges the people who toiled to build the pyramids. Mr. Ferguson is pointing out appropriately the work that is hidden from the tourists as they view the ruins. He is critical of the tourists who see the grandeur, but never the sacrifice. He is interested in the backstage. Mrs. Allerton contradicts him by remarking that the tourists' ability to enjoy these ruins is more important than the welfare of those forced to make them. Ferguson seems to be fighting the dehumanization of the Egyptian people when he contends, "I think human beings matter more than stones" (Christie *Nile* 78). Christie closes the conversation on Ferguson's stand on behalf of the workers by using Poirot to argue that unlike great works of art, people do not endure. These

ruins are, therefore, to be consumed in the knowledge that the greater Western empires have succeeded. The emphasis is on the frontstage for the tourists and objects over people.

Of course, since Mr. Ferguson himself is a tourist speaking on behalf the worker, it does not carry much weight. The argument is further weakened when Ferguson tells Cornelia later, when she is upset by a murder, “That's because you're overcivilized. You should look on death as the Oriental does. It's a mere incident hardly noticeable” (Christie *Nile* 226). Ferguson's romantic notions of the Orient as uncivilized and too savage to care about death are problematic. By saying what he does, Ferguson proves he is using the Oriental tourist gaze as much as the other tourists because “the anti-[O]rientalist and anti-colonial discourse” shows “that the figure of the Other was projected on the [E]astern, primitive, uncivilized and savage and the European identity was built up through contrasts such as the occidental vs. the [O]riental and the civilized vs. the uncivilized” in Orientalism (Zengin “Western Self”166). Ferguson projects his Marxist desires on the Egyptian people. By his callousness towards the murders he negates the empathy he conveyed earlier when he said that people matter more than monuments to civilization. Marx is the correct theorist for Ferguson because Marx's “socio-economic views” are hampered by his “romantic Orientalist vision” (Said *Orientalism* 154). Ferguson's attitude then shows he is indeed a student of Marx, which is later validated when it is revealed that he is “Lord Dawlish” who “became a communist when he was [a student] at Oxford” (Christie *Nile* 231). Ferguson spouts the idea of everyone deserving equality, however, he is not truly interacting with the native people, just showing off his education.

Jacqueline de Bellefort, who has joined the tour to upset her ex-fiancé on his honeymoon receives more sympathy from Poirot than any of the locals or workers. In spite of the fact that he has to work on his vacation because of Ms. de Bellefort's actions, Poirot shows concern for her.

In York's analysis of Poirot's intervention, he finds that for Jacqueline, "there is a hint of travel not just as self-discovery but as discovery of a dangerous self, faintly echoing Conrad's savage Congo River in *Heart of Darkness* (137). Not only does this echo Mrs. Otterbourne's feelings towards Egypt in the beginning of the novel, but in evoking this dark self in Conrad's novel, it presents another Orientalist imagining. Mevlüde Zengin notes in "Western Self Images in Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*: A Postcolonial Reading" that Christie fleshes out her Western characters so "despite their defects" they are normalized (179). The Western characters are allowed to be flawed human beings through this imperialist gaze while the people of Egypt are an undifferentiated part of the scenery, directing the reader's compassion towards the Westerners. For Jacqueline, her (non-white) Latin blood is mentioned when she behaves badly, thus, in a way, othering her actions and absolving her of her crimes. Linnet says, "She threatened to-well-kill us both. Jackie can be rather-Latin sometimes" (Christie *Nile* 59). Jacqueline herself is not othered, but excused because she contains something supposedly primitive.

Jacqueline, although she is not well off, has the means to travel. Cornelia Robson, on the other hand, is unpaid helper to a richer British relation so she can have the luxury of traveling. She seems more sympathetic character than most of the white Western tourists, but Cornelia still upholds the hierarchy. She rejects Ferguson's assertion the "everyone is born free and equal" (Christie *Death* 115). She is fine with the socioeconomic stratification of society and puts value on physical beauty, although not her own, and does not question the inequity of wealth.

Even lower on the social rung than Cordelia is Fleetwood, an engineer on the boat. He is the only local worker who gets a name, but he is a Westerner. Christie tips off the reader that Fleetwood is a white Westerner because his wife is described as a "wife of colour you understand, a wife of this country" (Christie *Nile* 149). Fleetwood is not named or seen until the

murder occurs and he is viewed as a possible suspect. Although he may be trying to rationalize his affair, Fleetwood's comment, "It wasn't like that. I married one of the locals out here. It didn't answer. She went back to her people. I've not seen her for half a dozen years" (Christie *Nile* 156). He tries to make it sound like the marriage was not a true one because his wife was a woman of color. Like with Ms. de Bellefort, the Otherness is linked to a character deficit, except this one is even more of a stretch because is related to a former marital relationship.

*Death on the Nile* is one of Christie's longest books and what is apparent is how she takes time to articulate and weave the stories of the Western tourists. Christie shows how the gentry are managing in reduced circumstances and how women take on jobs that allow them to travel. On the other hand, the sellers and service providers are mentioned briefly only when there are problems or in annoyance. In her autobiography, Christie recounts that most of "her friends [in Cairo during her coming out] were subalterns" (174). These appear to be the locals because she noted the other Westerners by nationality. If she remembers these people so fondly, it surprising that she did not mention them by name as she did the Westerners she knew.

#### Tourism in *Appointment with Death*

Christie's experience with the Middle East started with her societal coming out. She had her coming out in Cairo because it was more affordable than England (Christie *Autobiography* 167-168). Later in her life, she travelled to Palestine, Al-Haram al-Sharif (also known as the Temple Mount) in Jerusalem, Dead Sea, Jericho, Jordan, and Petra as a tourist accompanying her second husband, Max Mallowan, an archeologist. In fact, her experience in Petra in the 1930s provided some of the background for *Appointment with Death* (Morgan 214). Christie's dealing with Cook's Tours company in real life is mirrored by tourist Sarah King dealing with Messrs. Castle



tour company in *Appointment with Death* (Christie *Autobiography* 361; Christie *Appointment* 82). Cook's Tours company becomes an important component of international British modern travel and its reach to places like Egypt becomes conflated with British imperialist power. Historian Martin Anderson's research in "The Development of British Tourism in Egypt, 1815 to 1850" shows that Cook's company merely benefited from already established markets for tourism in Egypt (279). However, the imperial conquest of the Orient for British tourists by Cook's Tours becomes the accepted narrative, much like the narrative in Christie's books.

American tourists (the Boyton family, Jefferson Cope), British tourists (a newly qualified doctor Sarah King, politician Lady Westholme, and Miss Annabel Pierce, retired governess with inheritance), and the French tourist psychiatrist Dr. Gerard go on a tour that starts in Israel and ends in Jordan. At Petra in Jordan, a tourist dies so Hercule Poirot, who is also touring in the area, is brought in to investigate. Again, although this is a Hercule Poirot novel, Christie does not keep the narrative strictly to his experiences and point of view. In *Appointment with Death*, Sarah King's tourist performance is presented and her tourist gaze is described throughout the book. King's tourist gaze shows her as she "stood in the precincts of the Temple, the Haram-esh-Sherif. Her back was to the Dome of the Rock...Little groups of tourists passed by without disturbing the peace of the [O]riental atmosphere" (Christie *Appointment* 49). The wording of the text indicates that Miss King definitively views Haram-esh-Sherif as part of the Orient. In Petra, Sarah uses her privileged gaze as well to view Petra's "emptiness" (Christie *Appointment* 68). She can pretend that there are no people on the land. She can project her desires upon it: "[T]here is a fine sense Sarah King's response to the emptiness of the wide open landscape near Petra...[—]the vast solitude of the desert means peace and escape" (York 72). Miss King, for all her desire to be progressive and modern woman acts like the other Western tourists who see the

Orient as a blank canvas for their pleasure or piece of mind (e.g., Mrs. Allerton in *Death on the Nile*). Christie's "self-conscious deployment of Orientalism in the construction of psychic Englishness" is shown in Miss King's appraisal of the "desert landscape" (Rowland 67). Rowland's analysis reinforces Said's statement of how the West constructs the Orient in its imagination. If King's gaze were not imperialist or Orientalist, she would be aware that the land is not hers for consumption. Sarah King projects her romantic desires on the desert in Petra and its people like Ferguson projects his Marxist desires on the Egyptian people and landscape. She even makes a statement similar to Ferguson's about civilization: "'Civilization's all wrong—all wrong! But for civilization there wouldn't be a Mrs. Boynton! In savage tribes they'd probably have killed and eaten her years ago!'" (Christie *Appointment* 110). Although she is blaming modernity for Mrs. Boynton, King is asserting the strict dichotomy that has the West as the model of civilization and the East as primitive like Ferguson in *Death on the Nile*. Said states that "[t]he very possibility of development, transformation, human movement in the deepest sense of the word—is denied the Orient" (*Orientalism* 208). The West has the ability to change and possibly move past the Mrs. Boynton type, but the East is static and can never move towards progress. Phyllis Lassner in "The Mysterious New Empire: Agatha Christie's Colonial Murders" chapter, from the book *At Home and Abroad in the Empire: British Women Write the 1930s*, states that:

Christie's construction of Other landscapes as inscrutable satirizes and therefore shows the weakness of those who tour its ancient sites searching for truths that will confirm their own power. The truth these sites reveal is the overweening imperial confidence that masks concerns about emerging imperial threats. (47)

While Christie may poke fun at Western tourists using ancient sites to discover truths about themselves when in actuality they are merely placing internal imaginings onto those places, there is nothing in the action of the novel that occurs to contradict or even make them question their feeling of superiority and belief in the right to use the land as they wish. Since their gaze is the one that is privileged, they believe their view of the world is the only perspective that can exist.

Sarah King's "gaze that orders and regulates the relationships between the various sensuous experiences while away, identifying what is visually out of the ordinary, what are the relevant experiences and what is the 'other.'" (Urry and Larsen 14). Only through Miss King is the backstage seen in the novel. The dragoman Mahmoud, who goes through the journey with the tourists from the Solomon Hotel in Jerusalem to Petra, is not mentioned by name until King speaks to him (Christie *Appointment* 116). Even though as a dragoman, he serves the tourists as a guide and interpreter, Mahmoud is not treated as though he has his own agency. The Bedouins who work in Petra are also relegated to the backstage until after the murder of one of the tourists when a non-Westerner is believed to be the killer. Mahmoud furnishes the service workers' names when Poirot interrogates him. There is also one Castle agent who may be a Western service provider, but he has no name or description. Regardless of the ethnicity of the Castle agent, he is lumped in with all the Oriental Others because he is in a service capacity in the Orient, allowing Christie to create "a hierarchy between the [E]asterner and [W]esterner by which the [W]esterner is recognized as superior to the [E]asterner" (Zengin "Western Self" 178). Lady Westholme happily browbeats the Castle agent into getting the tour group a larger car and bullies Mahmoud and other workers to make sure they do things to her standard.

Not only do these Western tourists assert their dominance, they willingly admit that their gaze does not see the people of the Middle East as individuals. Miss Pierce says, "All these

Arabs look alike to me” and Lady Westholme repeats the same statement minutes later (Christie *Appointment* 182-183). One would expect more sympathy considering that Miss Pierce worked in service her whole career and Lady Westholme is a highly motivated public servant. Christie could be taking a glib jab at British tourists by the repetition of witness statements. However, that levity may not be apparent because Lady Westholme shows her imperialist attitude early on in the interview, by saying “to have servants about who cannot understand a word of English is very trying, but what I say is that when one is traveling one must make allowances” (Christie *Appointment* 182). Superficially, this is simply about Western tourists expecting everywhere they travel to provide the same amenities that they are used to at home. Furthermore, when this is presented after the listing of Lady Westholme’s public service, which includes “Welfare work amongst Women,” and her comment that “Men think they can always impose upon women,” she reveals her hypocrisy by harassing the Castle agent showing that she considers herself and other white women before any people of color. Amos and Parmar note how white women’s engagement has been selective and is “rooted in the prejudices of the colonial and neo-colonial periods” (5). Lady Westholme is fictional, but she represents a type of woman existed in Christie’s time because Christie’s white people were people who would be recognizable as Westerners. Lady Westholme’s public policy did not incorporate the Other. Lewis argues that “imperialism played a role in the very construction of professional creative opportunities for women” (3). Lewis believes these opportunities were possible for women like Christie and Westholme. She states that “an analysis of the production and reception of representations by women will develop and understanding of the interdependence of the ideologies of race and gender in the colonial discourse” (Lewis 3). Lewis contends that Said’s positioning of the colonial subject as male is limited and does not adequately address power dynamics. Indeed,

Lady Westholme, a British MP, and Mrs. Boynton, a former prison wardress, are the most domineering characters in *Appointment with Death* regardless of gender. While Mrs. Boynton treats her family members like prisoners, Lady Westholme bosses around all the workers involved with her travel itinerary.

Lady Westholme also provides an in-text illustration of how Western travel books manufacture Orientalist expectations. She runs around with her Baedeker, a German guidebook for Western travelers that was considered definitive for many decades (Bamforth 947). Lady Westholme would use it to criticize the service of the locals and the information Mahmoud provided. She considered the European book a better authority on the area than the people who lived there. When Poirot mentions Mahmoud in conversation, she retorts, “That man is grossly inaccurate. I have checked his statements from my Baedeker” (Christie *Appointment* 179). At this point, Poirot has not even said anything about what Mahmoud has said or done and Lady Westholme is already disparaging Mahmoud’s possible contribution to the situation using her book and her privilege.

Although Christie does not make the murderer someone from the Middle East, the “‘suspicious Arab’ is a mask employed by a murderer wholly indigenous to the white upper-class tourists” (Rowland 66). Christie’s Orientalist perspective presents these tour workers (the Bedouins and Mahmoud) as plausible murder suspects without any real proof. Lady Westholme tells Poirot, “One of the Bedouin servants attached to the camp. He went up to her... perhaps she was angry with him for going into her daughter's tent” (Christie *Appointment* 183). What Lady Westholme saw and what she imagines the scene is about are presented as the same thing. No one questions her supposition that the incident has something to do with an Arab intruding into a young girl’s tent. They are more concerned about what this Arab looks like. The assumption of

this perspective is that people of the Orient are “depraved” while those of the West are “virtuous” (Said *Orientalism* 40). Therefore, the Middle Easterner is inherently a criminal. The view of the Easterner as villain was such an overused trope that detective writer Ronald Knox, when writing rules to gird detective fiction put “No Chinamen may figure into the story” (Curran *Murder* 44). Christie does not use a Chinaman in this story, but uses the local men as criminal figures nonetheless.

Christie does allow Mahmoud to speak for himself as if to provide a balance. Mahmoud complaining to King and then later Poirot is one of the rare instances of a service worker and an Other displaying their point of view in a Christie novel. There are numerous times where Mahmoud is trying to placate guests, from dealing with their travel arrangements to arguing over the guide books to seeing to their physical comfort (Christie *Appointment* 113, 116-117, 188). King may be willing to be understanding, but she does try not equalize the power balance between them at any point. When Poirot questions him about the murder, Mahmoud says, ““Always, always, I am blamed. When anything happens, say always my fault. Always my fault...My life all one misery!”” (Christie *Appointment* 228). It sounds at first that he is upset that he is being blamed for murder. However, he then relates an incident with a tourist from a previous tour: “When Lady Ellen Hunt sprain her ankle coming down from Place of Sacrifice, it my fault, though she would go high-heeled shoes and she sixty at least—perhaps seventy. My life all one misery!” (Christie *Appointment* 228). There is no Lady Hunt on this tour so it is clear he is mentioning a past occasion where a peril that befell a tourist was blamed on him. He treats the murder accusation as the ultimate customer complaint because he’s always dealing with tourists’ requests or complaints. When he is asked to describe the situation at the camp leading up to the murder, he says:

At five I, who am soul of efficiency—always—always I watch for the comfort of ladies and gentlemen I serving, I come out knowing that time all English ladies want tea. But no one there. They all gone walking. For me, that is very well—better than usual. I can go back sleep. At quarter to six trouble begin—Large English lady—very grand lady—come back and want tea although boys are now laying dinner. She makes quite fuss—says water must be boiling—I am see myself. Ah, my good gentleman! What a life—what life! I do all I can—always I blamed—I—

(Christie *Appointment* 229)

From his own description, we can see how taxed Mahmoud is to follow the specific needs of the tourists and how seriously he takes his job. Mahmoud's inability to realize that the murder presents a different type of problem stresses how this book is as much about tourism as it is about a murder. In discussing the backstage, MacCannell says, "This is a sharing which allows one to see behind others' mere performances, to perceive and accept others for what they are" (94). The dragoman, who always acts kindly even though he is often put upon, finally breaks down under scrutiny. He rambles about the tourists who do not listen to him and then blame him. However, the only reason the reader are getting this view is because "the Arabs are noticed only when they can be conveniently accused of sabotaging the American-European mission" (Lassner 36). These Others and their work are only noticed when something goes wrong during tourists' excursion. They are there to serve and be scapegoated: "[Christie] dichotomizes the world into two as [E]astern and [W]estern and she marginalizes the [E]astern and centers the [W]estern. This is exactly another indication of her [O]rientalism" (Zengin "Western Self" 165). Mahmoud's moment exists because Poirot needs his help to fix what went wrong during the tour.

Mahmoud's speech is cut short and his difficulties are not really given any sympathy because readers are supposed to associate with the tourists not him. Additionally, Christie defines one of his few characteristics as anti-Zionist, without any qualification to balance out his representation, unlike the tourist characters. Christie wants the readers' concerned with the worries of the tourists, not the service workers. Yet, at the same time one of the keys to her mysteries are the "nobody-looks-at-a servant gambits" (Bargainnier 152). Therefore, by being acknowledged with a name and slight voice in the text, Mahmoud is set up as a racial red herring.

### Conclusion

Agatha Christie's tourists travel around the world, yet their imperialist views persist. As Alison Light, in *Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism between the Wars*, says, "Agatha Christie's travellers make a circular and not a linear progression" (91). They project their desires on Oriental landscapes and people rather than using their actual experiences in those places to modify their views. Although she travelled to these places and incorporated aspects of her experiences into her novels and short stories, because Christie does not have her characters interact with the local people, it is staged authenticity. Even though she talks about actual historical landmarks, famous hotels, and specific destinations, her books present the colonial gaze, which merely recreates daily Western drama with an African or Middle Eastern backdrop.

Christie takes the time to delineate the different levels of Western society in the women she represents, but not the locals. She personally went to these places and she interacted with the local people there. Since she is writing in a conservative genre, it may be understandable for her to reject upending the societal structure in the novel by making a person of color a killer.



However, she could still give one of them a presence and backstory, as much as Cordelia and Miss Pierce, who are and have been in service. Servants comprise the largest number of working people in Christie's novels (Bargainnier 141). Yet, while travel for these Western tourists would be impossible without all the local help, the narrative renders them and their work invisible.

In addition, her imperialist viewpoint negates the sense that the people (especially those of color) who live and work in those countries Middle Eastern countries are real people. Even though Christie gives Mahmoud a voice and uses Ferguson to shame the other tourists, these tepid concessions fall short of truly acknowledging the value of the work that the local people do for the tourists. Mahmoud is treated as a complainer and Ferguson is outed as a Marxist Orientalist who has no understanding of people. Orientalism has no "ontological stability" so "[i]t has to be continuously produced and reproduced" through travel writing and tourism (Haldrup and Larsen 85). Instead of colonizing through the military control of land, economic control is established through tourism. Western tourists do not seek to understand the Other, but instead prize this Otherness for how it reflects them and what they can consume from it. And Christie's texts about the Middle East convey this process.

Under the imperialistic tourist gaze, tourism is not a way for the Westerners to gain perspective about the subalterns, like the ones Christie has known. Tourism acts as a symbol of the way the West asserts its dominance over the Orient and the people who live there. The idea of "might is right" in the colonial period has morphed into "the customer is always right" in the modern capitalist tourism period. Christie's tourists are only enamored with the Orient as a space on which to stage their Western perspective. Through them, Christie promotes the countries in the Orient, not as specific places for Western tourists to learn from and respect, but rather as

spaces to experience in only a frontstage manner with the understanding that the people who inhabit it are merely there for the West to derive pleasure and a sense of self-assuredness from.

## Notes

1. The terms Other, Orient, Western, Eastern, and their variations have been standardized throughout the text.
2. Christie documents her love of the Middle East in an autobiographical book entitled *Come, Tell Me How You Live*.
3. The one exception to the rule is the *Appointment with Death* sold to English language learners by the Collins Education, which is an elementary school book publishing branch of Harper Collins in the UK. It has one page that briefly discusses the sociopolitical history of Palestine and Transjordan in the 1930s. However, the mass-market division of Harper Collins does not seem to be providing this information.
4. Agatha Christie's books will have shortened titles in the in-text citations: *Caribbean* for *Caribbean Mystery*, *Brown Suit* for *The Man in the Brown Suit*, *Appointment* for *Appointment with Death*, *Nile* for *Death on the Nile*, *Autobiography* for *An Autobiography*, *Come Tell Me* for *Come Tell Me How You Live*, *Grand Tour* for *The Grand Tour*, and *Hercules* for *The Labors of Hercules*.

CHAPTER III. IMPERIAL ADVENTURESSES IN *THE MAN IN THE BROWN SUIT* AND  
*THEY CAME TO BAGHDAD*

*The Man in the Brown Suit* and *They Came to Baghdad* are not as famous as some of the Christie titles helmed by Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, but they were and are popular. In fact, Anthony Boucher gave *They Came to Baghdad* a great review in the *New York Times* in 1951 and the novel was placed on a *New York Times* list of recommended books that same year (211). These books still have a following. Zimbabwean writer Bryony Rheam blogged about her journey to the Victoria Falls Hotel just to see the inspiration for Christie's *The Man in the Brown Suit* (Rheam). Rheam tried to find a visitors' log from the time of Christie's visit without success. Tim Edensor in "Staging Tourism: Tourists as Performers" asserts that tourist themselves, not only those who cater to them, can perform acts that define tourism. According to Edensor, if a reader attaches meaning to a book, then that reader can perform behaviors according to their understanding of the book and adjust the way they behave as a tourist in a certain place (326). As Rheam's experience showed, fiction can also convince a reader to journey to a destination they would not have considered otherwise.

These books are also significant because they depict tourist adventures that overlap with Christie's own non-fiction experiences in, as narrated in her autobiography and *Come Tell Me How You Live*, an autobiographical sketch of her time in Syria and Iraq. Comparing these works with her voice in her non-fiction allows us a closer glimpse at how her narrative is tailoring the story for her readers. Additionally, the similarity in storylines even though these novels were written at different points in her life, allows us to examine the shift in the Orientalist perspectives in her work.

Tourism in *The Man in the Brown Suit*

Christie used her trip to South Africa with her first husband, Archie Christie, as the basis for this novel. They were at Victoria Falls, Rhodesia, and Johannesburg in 1922 to participate in the British Empire Exhibition 1924 (Christie *Autobiography* 286, 292-293; Rheam).<sup>1</sup> Her husband was not always traveling as a tourist because he was traveling on behalf of the British Empire Mission, but Agatha Christie had no function other than to play the tourist. Major Belcher, who hired her husband, allowed her to join her husband on the trip for free (Christie *Autobiography* 286). Christie's only recommendation for going on the trip was that Belcher sensed she liked to travel. In her letters about Cape Town, she talks about skulls at a museum (possibly what is now the South African Museum and Planetarium), buying wooden animals, and eating fresh fruit (Christie *Grand Tour* 70-72; McGregor 727). Christie performed like a tourist on a package tour in South Africa because she depended on acquaintances to take her around and indulged in resort activities like surfing instead of interacting with the locals. Edensor states that, "Performance and performativity are socially and spatially regulated to varying extents" (326). Indeed, Christie had to go where her connections took her because she was reliant on their knowledge of the area and transportation. As a result, she spent more time at the homes and social gatherings of privileged whites than mingling in the daily lives of the black people of Cape Town.

Even though their sightseeing was limited by their connections and her husband's work, it seems she and her husband went by themselves to a uniquely tourist moment at the Victoria Falls resort: "Archie and I went on a quick trip to Victoria Falls...wandering through the forest with Archie, and...mist parting to show you for one tantalizing second the Falls in all their glory pouring down. Yes, I put that down as one of my seven wonders of the world" (Christie

*Autobiography* 292). In her autobiography, Christie admits she was happy not to go back because returning would change this memory. Christie even admits that she started working on the plot for *The Man in the Brown Suit* when she was still in South Africa (Christie *Autobiography* 311). Therefore, she was already taking note of she wanted to remember about South Africa in her writing, such as the scenery and local products, and disregarding things she considered not worth highlighting, like the local people.

The *Man in the Brown Suit* is the story of a young girl named Anne Beddingfield, who is about the same class as Christie, who goes to South Africa in search of adventure. Christie splits the narrator's voice between Anne and the diary of Sir Eustace Pedler, a rich merchant who she meets on her trip. Beddingfield has no money, but she has enough class to become friends with rich people like Mrs. Suzanne Blair who pay for her or allow her to join them. Mrs. Blair, Miss Beddingfield, and Sir Eustace stay at the Mount Nelson Hotel in Cape Town, where Christie also stayed (Christie *Grand Tour* 67, 77; Christie *Brown Suit* 150, 157, 169). The wooden animals Mrs. Blair and Anne get in the novel bear a similar description to the wooden animals Christie herself purchased in South Africa. Christie wrote about these wooden figures in her letter to her mother and in her autobiography as well: "From the train journey I brought back carved wooden animals, held up at various stations by little native boys, asking three-pence or sixpence for them...I still have several of them, carved in wood and marked" (Christie *Autobiography* 292). A photo of Christie with these pieces can be seen in Martin Fido's book, *The World of Agatha Christie: The Facts and Fiction behind the World's Greatest Crime Writer*. The National Trust Collections has images of wooden pieces on the Greenway portion of the National Trust website ("Greenway"). Considering the condition of the items and how long she held onto them, these products seem to be treasured souvenirs of her trip to South Africa. In fact, not only does

Christie spend a lot of time talking about the wooden animals in her autobiography, both narrators of *The Man in the Brown Suit* also talked about them in detail, much more than all the people of color in the entire novel. In Anne's narrative, she recalls:

[H]orde of natives materialized out of the empty landscape, holding up mealie bowls and sugar canes and fur karosses and adorable carved wooden animals. Suzanne began at once to make a collection of the latter. I imitated her example—most of them cost a "tiki" (threepence) and each was different. There were giraffes and tigers and snakes and a melancholy-looking eland and absurd little black warriors. We enjoyed ourselves enormously (Christie *Brown Suit* 218)

While it is true that she had the figures to view long after her journey the contrast of Christie's description between of wooden carved figures versus the people selling them shows that the items and the joy of purchasing them take precedence over the Black people of South Africa.

While the contrast between the sellers and their wooden figures is the most marked example in how Anne disregards their individuality, there are other instances where she chooses to see them en masse instead of as separate people. Using her tourist gaze, Anne foregrounds herself and forces the people of South Africa to recede to the background: "I strolled about, seeing the sights, enjoying the sunlight and the blackfaced sellers of flowers and fruits" (Christie *Brown Suit* 193). Her description continually dehumanizes the people. She often describes them as an indistinct grouping, from the "horde of natives" who sell the wooden creatures to the "smiling blacks" who push them on the trolley (Christie *Man* 248, 270). There is no name or other marker to differentiate them from one another. Tuominen states that the "representational practice in Christie is the depiction of natives according to essentialist standards: as a faceless mass – the majority of the characters are given no names" (49). These South Africans are not

treated as individuals so the readers cannot relate to them much less view them with sympathy as people. This facelessness silent crowd then “in Christie, as in most colonialist literature entails the notion of homogeneity as well as ambivalence” (Tuominen 49). Christie’s portrayal of Black South Africans as a faceless group rather than individuals speaks to the imperialist view of the Other. Anne Beddingfield generally acknowledges the locals when they provide her a service or become a kind of show for her. Anne notices a local woman because she “seemed to have the entire household belongings piled upon her head! The collection included a frying-pan” (Christie *Man* 236). Anne and Mrs. Blair gawk at the woman. Edward Said in *Orientalism* talks about how “the European, who sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher, never involved, always detached always ready for new examples of... ‘bizarre jouissance.’ The Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness” (103). The imperial tourists queer the normal life of the South Africans under their gaze because it does not mirror their everyday in the West and Orientalism is about how the West uses the East to define itself.

Christie uses the tourist frame she had on her trip to present the same view as Beddingfield: “The narrator, a lively but unintellectual young woman, announces that there will be no local colour in the book” (York 135). By this announcement, Christie is openly stating that the novel will not provide actual information about South Africa or its people. She is allowing herself the luxury of treating the country like a static location, like a diorama in a museum. We can get some corroboration that this aligns with Christie’s point of view because she has a similar pronouncement in the foreword of *Come Tell Me How You Live*: “This is not a profound book—it will give you no interesting sidelights on archaeology, there will be no beautiful descriptions of scenery, no treating of economic problems, no racial reflections, no history” (17).



Twenty-two years after *The Man in the Brown Suit*, Christie still chooses to play it safe and gloss over the realities of non-Western people.

In *The Man in the Brown Suit*, Anne Beddingfield's view and voice are privileged far above the non-Western inhabitants, just like Christie's in *Come Tell Me How You Live*. Carla T. Kungl in *Creating the Fictional Female Detective: The Sleuth Heroines of British Women Writers, 1890-1940* points out how Beddingfield's characterization marks her as intelligent and self-assured (126). Not only is Anne capable of solving a mystery, she will enjoy herself doing it. In *Gendering Orientalism*, Reina Lewis writes that it is worth looking at:

how discourses of femininity constrained women's access to positions of power and participation in colonialism and culture even whilst that very limitation, couched and understood in terms of gender, was also animated by imperial ideology – the gender specificities that accrued to women qua were always built on their difference as *white* women. (15)

While Anne Beddingfield is constrained in terms of gender and finances, her class and race provide benefits to her. In England, she was able to count on the kindness of other white people helping her out after her father died even though she had no money because of her class. She gains greater advantage going to South Africa where the racial divide creates an even more stark contrast. Although Anne still has the same finances in South Africa as she did in England, she is a white woman and, as such, is accepted into the company of the rich white people.

In “The Victoria Falls 1900-1940: Landscape, Tourism and the Geographical Imagination,” JoAnn McGregor looks at both the reality of the Victoria Falls Resort and how *The Man in the Brown Suit* portrays it. She comments, “[T]ourism popularised racialised imperial and settler identities in which Africans often featured as a generic exotic or servile

other” (McGregor 719). McGregor takes note of Christie’s book because its message is similar to the materials encouraging Western tourism at Victoria Falls, which disregards the humanity of the people of color that work there. Beddingfield is not interested in knowing anything about them beyond the services they provide for her. McCannell says, “‘tourist’ is a derisive label for someone who is content with...obviously inauthentic experiences” (94). Anne would wear this title proudly as she attests in the beginning of her narrative. Christie fans still travel to those places based on Christie’s stories and cite her influence (Rheam; Mutel). The empire may be over, but the performance of the imperial tourist as a person is still ongoing, whether it is conscious or not. Edensor confirms, “All these performative processes ceaselessly reconstitute the symbolic values of sites and reproduce them as dramaturgical spaces” (326). Tourism becomes then a practice of what has been gleaned from the books. Before, Christie’s book provided a colonial view for armchair travelers. Now, readers traveling to these destinations because of the book reinforce the value of the book as a motivation to tour. In his introduction to *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Jean Paul Sartre said, “Moments of colonialism, they sometimes condition one another and sometimes blend (xxvii). Orientalist views do not exist in isolated pockets, rather, like rituals and beliefs they can be carried through time. The *Man in the Brown Suit* and other Christie books on travel are not viewed as archaic, but rather at this point evoke a sense of nostalgia for that period that encourages readers to not only imagine it, but to travel to see if they can relive the glory days of the empire or somehow pay homage to it.

Miss Beddingfield does have one positive personal interaction with a person of color when she is injured at the Victoria Falls resort: “The African who features (briefly) as part of the background in this white playground, Lozi woman servant on the island” (McGregor 733).

Anne's interaction with the woman named Batani does not dispel the myth of the Other however. Even though Batani is caring for her, Anne remains the imperial tourist:

She was hideous as sin, but she grinned at me encouragingly. She brought me water in a basin and helped me wash my face and hands. Then she brought me a large bowl of soup, and I finished it every drop! I asked her several question, but she only grinned and nodded and chattered away in a guttural language, so I gathered she knew no English. (Christie *Brown Suit* 242)

She disparages the woman's features and her inability to speak English. Miss Beddingfield presents the negative view of the colonizer towards the native: "Another illustration of the simple-mindedness of the natives from the Western perspective relates to the Orientals' English skills" (Tuominen 61). She expects Batani to speak her language, ignoring that this is Batani's country. By mocking Batani's verbal skills, Anne is asserting her own superiority. She is the civilized human and Batani is the Other. She is also derisive about Batani's physical appearance. Anne says, "A black face grinned into mine—a devil's face" (Christie *Brown Suit* 240). Race is clearly a factor in Anne's appraisal of Batani. Anne does not appreciate the kindness of Batani because she feels entitled to receive it. Miss Beddingfield never wants to know the backstage of the black people in South Africa, the reality behind their performance to the tourists, no matter how intimate the setting (MacCannell 93). She only wishes to associate with them at the point of service.

Anne's relationship with Batani at Victoria Falls hints at "tourist images of scenery, leisure and luxury at the Victoria Falls...all Africans (other than the occasional glimpse of... 'dusky servants'), and the failure to mention those who bore the costs and laboured to build the resort" (McGregor 733). Anne disregards Batani's labor much like the tourists at the Victoria

Falls resort ignored the labor of the resort workers. While Anne falls for the Westerner (Harry) who Batani is helping, Batani's actions do not individualize her in the eyes of Anne. Tiina Tuominen in "'Down into the Valley of Death': Portrayal of the Orient in the Interwar Fiction of Agatha Christie," upbraids Christie's fiction for endorsing the colonialist tradition of a "dichotomy between the colonizer and the colonized" with "the ideology of the white man possessing the superior position" (61). Anne still thinks kindly of Sir Eustace, even when she learns that his travels were really about creating political upheaval and devastation to the people in South Africa for personal profit and although he tried to kill her twice! Anne Beddingfield expresses the same fondness for the autocratic Sir Eustace that Christie had for the imperious Major Belcher, on whom Sir Eustace is based.

Major Belcher once derided South Africa and its "'second class' people" (Christie *Grand Tour* 64; Fido 33). Christie basing an important character on Major Belcher may indicate that Christie's sympathy with lay with the colonizer, not the colonized. Yes, Sir Eustace is a villain, but Anne still likes him after he is unmasked and his point of view is presented in half of the narrative. Not only does Christie prevent the black South African people from speaking in her novel (after all, Anne does not bother to ask what Batani said to her), Anne continues to think fondly of Sir Eustace, who devalues South African life. Due to Anne's narrative as much as his, Sir Eustace is presented like a loveable scamp, even though he is a murderer and criminal.

Anne may not be troubled by Sir Eustace's machinations to control South Africa because she shares his sentiment that Westerners have a right to the land. She and her white husband Harry live on their island in Rhodesia with their son like settler colonials in the end of the book: "My son is lying in the sun, kicking his legs. There's a 'man in a brown suit' if you like. He's wearing as little as possible, which is the best costume for Africa, and is as brown as a berry"

(Christie *Brown Suit* 351). The idea of nakedness as costume and tan acting as skin color suggests that the Westerners can appropriate the land and culture of the Other seamlessly. The people of color are completely erased from their own land and the story of their land because “settler colonial fantasy allows settlers to occupy the literal and symbolic positions of indigenous people” (Anderson 1009). Anne and Harry build their Eden on colonized land. As McGregor’s research shows, the local people were forced out from the area surrounding Victoria Falls (734). Kungl argues that “[t]hrough Anne, Christie is able to comment upon social debates going on around her, especially society’s limitations of women” (129). However, the only one that Anne has empowered has been herself and possibly, by extension white women more generally, so this is imperial feminism if we can attribute it to any social movement. Anne has not aided women like Batani, who may remain in servitude to her and Harry for life. Furthermore, the fact that Anne allows Sir Eustace to share the narrative with her is acquiescing to patriarchy, not challenging it.

#### Tourism in *They Came to Baghdad*

*They Came to Baghdad* shares many similarities with *The Man in the Brown Suit*. They both have murders, young female protagonists going into non-Western parts of the world, romance, political upheaval, and support for the British empire. They are differentiated by time and Christie’s experiences. Christie wrote *The Man in the Brown Suit* after World War I while she wrote *They Came to Baghdad* after World War II. In that time, Christie has gained more experience living in the Middle East as her second husband Max Mallowan does archeology work in the region. She writes a non-fiction book about it called *Come Tell Me How You Live*. After World War II, however, she continues to travel with her husband to The Middle East.

Therefore, in *They Came to Baghdad* Christie evokes some nostalgia for the heyday of the British empire, yet, her protagonist's growing awareness of real life in Iraq provides a critique of the romanticized Orientalist outlook on the Middle East.

In spite of the prominence given to Western voices, narration is in third person omniscient so there is a plurality of points of view. M. M. Bakhtin said, "For the writer of artistic prose, on the contrary, the object reveals first of all precisely the socially heteroglot multiplicity of its names, definitions and value judgments" (278). Christie, as author, has a specific goal and is driving her characters towards that goal, but since she allows multiple points of view, she cannot control other readings. Victoria Jones, a British orphan, is the protagonist of *They Came to Baghdad*. She develops a crush on fellow countryman, Edward Goring, who has to go to Baghdad because of his job. Victoria decides to go and meet him there. Victoria has no connections, no profession, and no money. She has no experience in travel so everything is new to her. Christie takes time to describe aspects of travel she generally glosses over with the seasoned tourists. Through Victoria's first-time experiences, Christie illuminates the rituals of modern travel, from riding in airplanes to dealing with lodgings to situating oneself in an unfamiliar city. By drawing attention to the practices, Victoria is making readers aware of how much of a regulated act touring is, even outside of a packaged tour, and of her gaze as an inexperienced traveler. Since Christie is attempting to present travel through new eyes, there are details here usually eschewed in her other narratives. In addition, Victoria is more amenable to adapting to her circumstances as opposed to Christie's other tourist characters so her gaze becomes less Orientalist as she travels.

## Ruins

One way to measure the change in tourist perception between Victoria Jones and the other Christie characters is how she responds to the ruins because Christie does incorporate ruins as travel sites in *They Came to Baghdad*, just like in her other novels about the Middle East. Victoria compares her real view of Babylon to her Orientalist imaginings:

But little by little her disappointment ebbed as they scrambled over mounds and lumps of burnt brick led by the guide. She listened with only half an ear to his profuse explanations, but as they went along the Processional Way to the Ishtar Gate, with the faint reliefs of unbelievable animals high on the walls, a sudden sense of the grandeur of the past came to her and a wish to know something about this vast proud city that now lay dead and abandoned (Christie *Baghdad* 135)

Victoria reconciles the reality with the image in her head and then she is moved by the atmosphere of the place. Tuominen notes that ruin sites allow tourists to romanticize the East as preserved in time: “This fixation on the Orient of the past not only historicizes the region but places it in a vacuum where time and development stand still: as a subject for Europeans to observe and study in museum-like conditions” (34). This the Orientalist idea that the East is locked in the past and can never progress. In this mindset, Iraq is then set up as merely a site for tourist consumption with the people and the land nonexistent except in service to Western tourism. The West then sees the country as cut off from modernity and does not treat its people as equals. As we have seen in *Death on the Nile* and *Appointment with Death*, Christie’s tourists participate heavily in this kind of Orientalism. Yet, although Victoria has this moment, she has interactions with the Iraqi people, Marcus running the Tio Hotel and the women in a rural

neighborhood, and the sights of storefronts selling global goods that force her to view Iraq and its people in the present, not just the past.

Moreover, in *They Came to Baghdad*, Christie's descriptions of ruination and wreckage are not confined to the ancient tourist sites. She uses a lot of the same language to talk about the local people and their neighborhoods: "a litter of confusion and dark passages, with five or six dirty children playing in rags" to "rusty barbed wire" to "small shanties with children playing in the dirt and clouds of flies hanging over garbage heaps" (Christie *Baghdad* 134). In the local neighborhood everything is falling apart, suggesting that even if the daily life is not as primitive as it used to be, it seems like these people cannot cope with living in contemporary times. Inside one of the rural houses there is still a "floor...of beaten earth," limited furniture, "a dirty rug," a "rickety table with a cracked enamel basin on it," and "wooden lattice work...in the final stages of decrepitude" (Christie *Baghdad* 219-220, 224). Nothing is unblemished or intact down to the soft home goods like the "ragged quilt" and ragged "abba" (Christie *Baghdad* 143-144, 146).<sup>2</sup> Every part of the house is in disrepair or shows signs of neglect making the house seem like an unofficial modern ruin whose decay continues on into the inside as well.

The derelict condition of everything in the house the rural people live in fits in with a negative Orientalist view of the land and people. They are not stuck in the past, but they are backwards in the present. When you combine these descriptions with Orientalist critiques of Victoria's early travel companion, Mrs. Clipp, that "nothing is ever really clean if you know what I mean," it becomes another Orientalist view of the East as the unclean other (Christie *Baghdad* 50). Said's comment about the classification of Orientals as "backward, degenerate, uncivilized," sounds like what Mrs. Clipp is generally saying (*Orientalism* 207). Mrs. Clipp comments further, "'The filth of the streets and the bazaars you wouldn't believe. And the



unhygienic rags the people wear. And some of the toilets—why, you just couldn’t call them toilets at all!’” (*Baghdad* 50). However, Mrs. Clipp is not the protagonist and Victoria tunes her out after she starts speaking in this manner.

Furthermore, even in Victoria’s travails in the ramshackle house, there are breaks in the Orientalist language. Christie does not describe the food as negatively as the house and although it is unfamiliar to Victoria, she does not stress how alien it is:

There was a large bowl of rice, something that looked like rolled-up cabbage leaves and a large flap of Arab bread. Also a jug of water and a glass. Victoria started by drinking a large glass of water and then fell to on the rice, the bread, and the cabbage leaves which were full of rather peculiar tasting chopped meat.

When she had finished everything on the tray she felt a good deal better (Christie *Baghdad* 145).

The food is new to Victoria, yet not distasteful. This local food, even though it is not made to appeal to a Western palate, like something Marcus could serve, is still meaningful to Victoria. While it can be argued she was starving for the first time, Victoria enjoys her second meal as well, finishing all of it (Christie *Baghdad* 147). Christie’s generous description could be acclimating readers to the food. Other than the word “peculiar” Christie does not exoticize the food in her discussion of it. The reviewer for the publisher critiqued the plot, but valued the “depiction of life in Baghdad” (Curran *Murder* 272). While there is Orientalizing, the amount of detail in the description allows for a fuller picture. The reader starts with Victoria’s expectations and then sees how her perspective changes when what she imagines the Middle East to be is challenged.

One challenge to Victoria’s perspective is how she witnesses the rural area after she escapes her abductors. The rendering of the landscape is more descriptive than in the usual

Christie story: “The scene was beautiful in the early morning light. The ground and horizon shimmered with faint pastel shades of apricot and cream and pink on which were patterns of shadows” (Christie *Baghdad* 151). In this fictional narrative, she contradicts her rule in her archeological memoir to not describe the scenery. Furthermore, instead of an ominous landscape to suit Victoria’s situation, she sees the natural beauty of the country. Earl F. Bargainnier, in *The Gentle Art of Murder: The Detective Fiction of Agatha Christie*, says, “The natural world plays little part in the unnatural happenings of her detective world” (23). This is how it works in *The Man in the Brown Suit*, but not in *They Came to Baghdad*. Victoria has an emotional reaction to the rural Iraqi setting: “‘I know what it means now,’ thought Victoria, ‘when any one says they are alone in the world...’” (231). This can be read as the Western tourist out of place or a contradiction of how an Oriental atmosphere is normally described to be so very dark to suggest that it is sinister. Although, the reading here is ambiguous, Victoria contrives to see the beauty of Iraq even though she feels isolated.

Although Victoria is kidnapped and stuck in the countryside like Anne in *The Man in the Brown Suit*, Victoria’s reaction to her experience is different from Anne. Anne does not try to relate to the locals or henchmen. She acts as though her escape was predicated on her abilities alone. Victoria does not hold the people who were watching her in any contempt. She does not think of them as evil henchmen, but more like locals led astray, which is different from how Anne views her captors. Victoria even tries to speak to the women, but finds she cannot because her understanding of Arabic is rudimentary. Unlike Anne who mocks Batani for not speaking English, Victoria tries to communicate with the Iraqi women without judgment. Even if their characterization is limited and they are not afforded the same amount of agency as Victoria, the

rural people in *They Came to Baghdad* possess much more humanizing qualities than those in *The Man in the Brown Suit*.

### Hybridity and the Other

Since Victoria is looking at Iraq with fresh eyes, that are not influenced by years of travel or expectations arising from it, she is more open to accept it for what it is:

Baghdad was entirely unlike her idea of it. A crowded main thoroughfare thronged with people, cars hooting violently, people shouting, European goods for sale in the shop windows, hearty spitting all round her with prodigious throat clearing as a preliminary. No mysterious Eastern figures, most of the people wore tattered or shabby Western clothes, old army and air force tunics, the occasional shuffling black-robed and veiled figures were almost inconspicuous amongst the hybrid European styles of dress...In spite of herself she was intrigued by the curious mixture of things in the shop windows. Here were babies' shoes and woollies, toothpaste and cosmetics, electric torches and china cups and saucers—all shown together. Slowly a kind of fascination came over her, the fascination of assorted merchandise coming from all over the world to meet the strange and varied wants of a mixed population. (Christie *Baghdad* 78)

This resonates with Christie's lived experience of the hybridity in a Middle Eastern city rather than an Orientalist description. In *Caribbean Mystery*, the descriptions were vague with nothing more complicated than a postcard image. Here, there are traditional aspects of the East, but also vehicles, clothes, and products that show how much influence has invaded the East from the West. Hybridity is apparent through the varied arrangement of offerings in the windows and

stores and how the people dress. The materials that Victoria sees cater to the Westerners who are in the East, but they are also marketed to Middle Easterners who like such things. After all, Europeans in Baghdad are not the only ones participating in hybridity.

Victoria meets people in Iraq whose hybridity break up the dichotomy of East and West established by Orientalism. Marcus Tio, the owner of the Tio Hotel is a hybrid. He not only plays the genial and always helpful host, but he has servants under him. In the general model of the Orient, the Other is only in a servile position and is not capable of more than manual labor. Marcus converses easily with all his guests and understands the needs of Westerners. He is proud of his establishment and he tells stories of how the English love him: “Every topic found them returning to the point of departure – Marcus!” (Christie *Baghdad* 72) Far from silent, Marcus is capable of self-promotion and he does it unabashedly. He also talks of how wonderful the food of his culture is to Victoria:

[W]e have a dish with fish – very nice – a fish from the Tigris, but all with sauce and mushrooms. And then there is a turkey stuffed in the way we have it at my home – with rice and raisins and spice – and all cooked so! Oh it is very good – but you must eat very much of it – not just a tiny spoonful.

(Christie *Baghdad* 87)

Christie rarely talks about food, especially in this much detail, in her stories. Here there are not only descriptions, but numerous references to food. Christie is familiar with the food because by the time of the publication of *They Came to Baghdad* she had lived in the region for a period of time. She does not describe the food this much in her novels with European settings. Christie’s original intention with the food descriptions may have been to exotify the atmosphere. However, when Marcus talks about local food he juxtaposes it against the Western food so both are offered

equally. Although food and the desire to share food add to Marcus' character, it also presents a way of positively speaking about the culture. Marcus' continual talk about his country's food acts as a direct advertisement to Victoria as a tourist and possibly a subliminal one to readers who are interested in touring Iraq. Edenson notes that the "efficacy of the performance relies equally upon the ability of the audience to share the meaning the actor hopes to transmit" (327). Within the text, Marcus gets the response he wants from Victoria. She comments, "That would be lovely" (Christie *Baghdad* 87). Marcus is able to get Victoria as interested in the food from his culture as she is in the European-style food he offers.

There is more than simply frontstage to Marcus however. Despite his friendly attitude, Victoria knows he is not a fool. She realizes Marcus is not "careless in business matters" (Christie *Baghdad* 88). Victoria knows that Marcus would not let her get away without paying for her hotel bill just because she is a Westerner. When a murder occurs, another level of complexity is shown in Marcus' character. Richard Dakin, a secret agent for the British government, remarks, "Marcus has a great deal of sense, though one doesn't always realize it in talking to him" (Christie *Baghdad* 97). Dakin is able to rely on Marcus to help him discreetly move a body and cover up the murder. Dakin's interaction with Marcus is a departure from the distrust or condescension the British agents had towards natives in *Death on the Nile*, *Appointment with Death*, and *Caribbean Mystery*. Marcus not only has position, he has brains too.

Catherine is an Other who feels qualified to talk back to the Westerner in *They Came to Baghdad*. Unlike Batani in *The Man in the Brown Suit*, Catherine can speak English. Her relationship with Victoria is antagonistic. She is secure enough in her intellect as well as English to use it to put Victoria in her place: "Because you are English, you are so proud and stuck up.

What does it mean to be English? Next to nothing. Here we spit upon the English” (Christie *Baghdad* 130). In the span of almost thirty years, the position of British power has changed and not just in relation to other Westerners like the Americans. Catherine may work for a British man (Mr. Rathbone), but she does not have a timid servile attitude towards the British. She also sees herself as more than equal to Victoria.

Catherine even challenges Victoria’s intelligence: “Why do you read Karl Marx? You cannot understand it. You are much too stupid. Do you think they would ever accept you as a member of the Communist Party? You are not well enough educated politically” (Christie *Baghdad* 130). The British men, Mr. Dakin and Edward, tell Victoria how smart she is, but Catherine can take her down. When Victoria retorts that she is a worker, Catherine says, “You are not a worker. You are a bourgeoisie. You cannot even type properly. Look at the mistakes you make” (Christie *Baghdad* 130). Catherine not only refuses to be subservient to the Westerner, but points out her flaws. An Other who is vocal and aggressively so is an enigma in a Christie novel. In addition, Catherine calls out Victoria on her level of class. Ernest Mandel, in *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story* states, “Bourgeois legality, bourgeois values, bourgeois society, always triumph in the end. It is soothing, socially integrating literature, despite its concerns with crime, violence and murder” (47-48). While Victoria will triumph, since she is the protagonist, Catherine chastising Victoria for being part of the bourgeoisie indirectly calls out Christie’s general audience as well.

By the time *They Came to Baghdad* was published, Christie was already a well-renowned author throughout the globe. After years of catering to a white Western audience and on the strength of an international audience, Christie may have been in the perfect position to push the envelope when it comes to the Other asserting themselves and questioning the belief of British

superiority. Robert A. Rushing, in *Resisting Arrest: Detective Fiction and Popular Culture*, states that “Agatha Christie regularly has her proper British subjects suspect foreigners in the group, but typically as a way of mocking their insular small-mindedness” (135). Christie doing that with Miss Pierce and Lady Westholme in *Appointment with Death* is much more apparent. Here, Victoria is a protagonist that is not as well-bred as Miss Marple so Catherine’s critique is more biting.

Yet, in the end there is ambiguity when it comes to Catherine. She may have been as much a pawn as Victoria in the international political affairs through Edward’s promises of romance. This is a valid reading because Edward shows Victoria how to manipulate Catherine: “A smile appeared on Catherine’s usually sour face, and Victoria thought how right Edward had been about flattery” (Christie *They* 217). This implies that Edward has been playing both women for his own ends, meaning that the neocolonial is taking advantage of both the native and the tourist under the claims that he is doing it for their benefit.

Yumna Siddiqi, in *Anxieties of Empire and the Fiction of Intrigue*, contends that “[p]opular fiction of intrigue, in particular, generates interest in Empire by affording its readers the pleasure of mystery and mastery—it exploits cultural anxieties in such a way as to entertain a wide audience” (18). Siddiqi says that the anxiety of the Other allows for a more global audience and yet does not disrupt the Western audience’s fear of losing their status of superiority. Marcus’ and Catherine’s ambiguous positions add to the intrigue, but they do not disrupt the status quo. Their characters could be considered just modifications to Christie’s general use of the Other as a red herring in a murder investigation (Lassner 36). However, the performance of Catherine and Marcus seems reminiscent of Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, where the Other gains the skills of the colonizer to the point he/she can usurp the colonizer’s position. The English rely on

Marcus in Iraq as Dakin shows. Catherine works at the same job as Victoria and she understands Marx better than the Englishwoman.

### Imperial Dominance versus Respect

In *They Came to Baghdad*, the community is not a closed community controlled by Western tourists. It is global. Dakin, who recruits Victoria in the middle of her tour tells her, “Those who are out only to line their own pockets can do little harm—mere greed defeats its own ends. But the belief in a superstratum of human beings—in Supermen to rule the rest of the decadent world—that, Victoria, is the most evil of all beliefs” (Christie *Baghdad* 103). Dakin is talking about the power of ideology as more of a force than money, a concept known to scholars who use Marx to examine cultural theory, but not necessarily detective fiction readers. Using Dakin and the other characters, Christie seems to wrestle with the dangers of maintaining a hierarchy while still longing for the time when the British empire controlled the world.

The change of worldview in Christie’s writing seems not to arise just from Anne’s treatment of the Other in *The Man in the Brown Suit* to Victoria’s treatment of the Other in *They Came to Baghdad*, but within Victoria’s own experiences in the book as highlighted by her relationships. Edward, although Christie seemed to want to make him the new embodiment of fascism, has many qualities of old British imperialists. Archaeologist Richard, however, seems to respect people of non-Western cultures and at the same time does not assume his knowledge of them means he can be them. Victoria tells Richard, “You talk Arabic very well, don’t you. If you were dressed as one could you pass as an Arab?” and he replies, “Oh no—that takes some doing. I doubt if any Englishman has ever been able to pass as an Arab—for any length of time, that is.” (Christie *Baghdad* 166-167). As opposed to Western tourists who think that they can absorb and



replicate the culture by traveling through it, Richard's knowledge makes him aware of the falseness of cultural appropriation. He understands and respects the culture so he will not pretend. Richard rejects the Orientalist idea that the Other is a raw material or a product that can be consumed by the West. In *Come, Tell Me How You Live*, Christie says:

Accustomed as we are to our Western ideas of the importance of life, it is difficult to adjust our thoughts to a different scale of values. And yet to the Oriental mind it is simple enough. Death is bound to come—it is as inevitable as birth; whether it comes early or late is entirely at the will of Allah. And that belief, that acquiescence, does away with what has become the curse of our present-day world—anxiety” (Christie *Come* 96)

She is romanticizing the difference between the West and the East and praising the East for its simplicity. That is key in Orientalist imaginings. It is important to note that although the book was published in 1946, Christie had finished writing all but the epilogue by 1940. Most of *Come, Tell Me How You Live* was written in the late 1930s. Therefore, Richard may seem more progressive than Christie in *Come, Tell Me How You Live* because there is almost a decade between the writing of the archeological memoir and *They Came to Baghdad*, though the publication dates are only five years apart.

Richard tries to educate Victoria by explaining, ““Arabs find our Western impatience for doing things quickly extraordinarily hard to understand, and our habit of coming straight to the point in conversation strikes them as extremely ill-mannered. You should always sit round and offer general observations for about an hour – or if you prefer it, you need not speak at all”” (Christie *Baghdad* 158). When Victoria challenges this view on the basis of her experience working in London and considers it a waste of time, Richard replies, ““Yes, but we’re back again

at the question: What is time? And what is waste?” (Christie *They* 158). This is almost a postcolonial counterargument. Just like Dakin wanted Victoria to critically think through the political issues as opposed to accepting ideology, Richard wants her to realize her point of view is a Western one. *Come, Tell Me How You Live* reminisces about Christie’s experiences in Syria and Iraq during World War II so with that nostalgia, it may have been easier to romanticize the Orient. However, *They Came to Baghdad* is about five years after World War II. She had also resumed accompanying Max on his archeological digs at that point (Christie *Autobiography* 522). *They Came to Baghdad* shows Christie mulling over the social influences that led to World War II and presenting her current experiences in the Middle East through Victoria’s voice.

#### The Performance of Tourism, Artifice, and the Detective Novel

If tourism is a performance as Edensor says, then performing Britishness becomes more murky for Christie in *They Came to Baghdad* in comparison to her earlier books. There are more ways to get it wrong because if the style of detective fiction aligns the audience with the protagonist, then *They Came to Baghdad* appears to be going for a more nuanced conversation between the East and the West than Christie is typically known for. Additionally, one of Victoria’s defining characteristics is her ability to convincingly lie or play a role. While some Christie characters do lie or omit the truth, Victoria’s ability to embellish a story is one of her main traits. Dakin says, “Strangely enough, your capacity to think up a convincing lie quickly is one of your qualifications for the job. No, it’s not dishonest. On the contrary, you are enlisted in the cause of law and order” (Christie *Baghdad* 101). Dakin uses Victoria’s abilities to sense duplicity and her performance skills to help him discover the truth.

Victoria's ability to witness performances discerns the duplicity of Edward: "He had no story ready – his face was suddenly defenceless and unmasked" (Christie *Baghdad* 187). As opposed to Anne in *The Man in the Brown Suit* who cared mainly for the frontstage, Victoria peeks into the backstage. She realizes Edward was manipulating her because he believes in the dangerous hierarchy that Dakin discussed. Nicholas Birns and Margaret Boe Birns in "Agatha Christie: Modern and Modernist" state:

The psychotic temperament may be lurking underneath, but, as elsewhere in Christie's universe, criminality is manifested in and through many of the forms, the self-assumed roles, that people play in ordinary civilized life. Rather than being simply flat, the shallow personae in Christie's dramas are endowed with a tantalizing, mysterious, and very deliberate artificiality. This is why, in a Christie mystery, we are immediately aware that any of her characters may prove personally malevolent, since all of them seem to be masking some troublesome aspect of their identity. (123)

Edward was dangerous because he believed in cultural superiority. He held some of the views that plunged the world into World War II. He was against brotherhood and equality. Victoria sees through Edward's ideology of superiority:

All the thousands of ordinary people on the earth, minding their own business, and tilling the earth, and making pots and bringing up families and laughing and crying, and getting up in the morning and going to bed at night. They were the people who mattered, not these Angels with wicked faces who wanted to make a new world and who didn't care whom they hurt to do it. (Christie *Baghdad* 190)

What is interesting here is who Victoria picks as the ordinary people. Instead of picking the typists or other workers in London, she picks the people in Iraq. The use of “tilling the earth” seems to be more about farmers than archeologists who would dig rather than till. And since she is talking about them in reference to Edward’s plans, she is not thinking about these people in the past, but in the present on a equal timeline to her own.

### Shifting Perspective?

While time period, Christie’s experiences and point of view are key to understanding the differing politics of these novels, the difference in tone between these two novels is really significant. *The Man in the Brown Suit* is a jolly British adventure where the British can usurp the land in the end and consider themselves natives. *They Came to Baghdad* is a meditation on global policies, traveling, authenticity, and power. The villain is forgiven and gets away with murder and political upheaval for financial ends in *The Man in the Brown Suit*. *They Came to Baghdad* asks the protagonist to consider what happens to people, including those who are not like her. She cannot just take comfort in British power because there is the realization that some of the British are the problem. Victoria Jones goes through a more introspective journey than Anne Beddingfield. She is tasked with critically thinking about the sociopolitical situation in the world. For Beddingfield, the upheaval in Johannesburg is a backdrop to her story and she does not consider the lives it affects. Victoria is repeatedly forced to see people as people, from the traveling artists she watches with Richard to even her captors. Because Victoria shows sympathy and empathy, Christie is bringing the readers down that path as well. Birns and Birns say that in reading a Christie novel “we are asked not only to judge, but to judge wisely. Christie’s formal subtleties, her fractured yet resonant selves, and her often brilliant modernism demand the kind

of treatment that their complexity solicits” (134). *The Man in a Brown Suit* is easier to read according to formula because it has two dominant voices to guide the reader. Anne goes merely from happy imperial tourist to settler colonialist. However, the complexity of secondary characters and cultural discussions that *They Came to Baghdad* raises reveals it to be more than the usual Christie novel, especially in comparison with *The Man in a Brown Suit*. Because Victoria allows her experiences to challenge her original assumptions of the Orient, she ends up with a Western gaze that questions itself. Christie may have been only a tourist in South Africa, but in the Middle East she becomes invested in the cultures and the people that live there. Therefore, the shift in the narratives between the two books shows how the imperial tourist view has been complicated if not changed.

## Notes

1. Agatha Christie's books will have shortened titles in the in-text citations: *Caribbean* for *Caribbean Mystery*, *Brown Suit* for *The Man in the Brown Suit*, *Appointment* for *Appointment with Death*, *Nile* for *Death on the Nile*, *Autobiography* for *An Autobiography*, *Come Tell Me* for *Come Tell Me How You Live*, *Grand Tour* for *The Grand Tour*, and *Hercules* for *The Labors of Hercules*.
2. An abba is a shawl that can be used for prayer.

## CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSION

Just like criticisms of the classic detective fiction genre have made assumptions that did not apply to all writers of the genre, there has been the same tendency to believe that Christie's work was uniform throughout her entire career. Since at the height of her fame Christie was published as much as Shakespeare, an example of how his work cannot be generalized can explain how superficial the analysis on Christie has been. One can argue that the representation of Shylock is racist, but you cannot unequivocally say that *Merchant of Venice* represents Shakespeare's entire oeuvre when it comes to race. Like Shakespeare and other dead authors, we can talk back to Christie because the depth of her work allows for examples where she could and did handle the narrative differently. In "Death of an Author," Roland Barthes says, "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (1324). Fully disconnecting the work from the author seems highly drastic, but in the next few years, a number of these works will be celebrating their hundredth birthday and now there are readers who know the works without an understanding of the time period they were written in or the mystique attributed to Christie herself. As I have mentioned in the introduction, these works continue to be referenced in newspapers, blogs, museum exhibits, television and other areas of popular culture. My research shows that understanding the time period when she wrote and her experiences impact the text so we have to be aware of that Orientalist gaze and also when the text questions it because Christie's views towards the East, especially the Middle East, did evolve in some respects.

My focus on novels that highlight race and gender within the act of tourism gives a sense how Christie's white tourists behave with people of color. Limiting the scope of my research

specifically to Western tourists interacting with people who live and work in non-Western countries allows for a more discrete analysis. This creates a separation of race by making the tourists mostly white Westerners and the locals and non-white service providers. At the same time, unlike the early academic scholars who criticized Christie, my sampling is large enough to make some distinctions about this subset in Christie's body of work.

### Critics and Bias

My focus was to delve into Christie's work, not to measure her on how well critics think she did as an author, but how they analyzed her texts. A major factor of this research was evaluating the scholars themselves. In order to adequately assess their criticisms, I had to take stock of the possible biases of the people criticizing Agatha Christie and also their time period. As I mentioned in the introduction, although John Cawelti wrote one of the books that academically supported the study of popular culture, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*, he clearly favored hard-boiled detective fiction, which was not the type of mystery Christie wrote. Cawelti is so intent in his defense of hard-boiled detective fiction that he disparages Christie and all authors who write classical detective fiction. Ironically, in an academic collection of chapters to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Agatha Christie's birth, Cawelti had to revise his derogation of classic detective fiction. In *Theory and Practice of Classic Detective Fiction (Contributions to the Study of Popular Culture, No. 62)*, Cawelti admits that Christie's work continues to have influence in his chapter entitled, "Canonization, Modern Literature, and the Detective Story." Yet even in that chapter, he reverts back to praising hard-boiled detective fiction.



I chose fewer early critics who were disparaging of Christie, not because they were negative, but because they were not as thorough. They were not criticizing her work by an in-depth study of her titles, but what she represented to them—a woman unqualified to be a best-selling author. In his chapter “Christie’s Narrative Games” in *Theory and Practice of Classic Detective Fiction (Contributions to the Study of Popular Culture, No. 62)*, Robert Merrill takes many scholars’ books on Christie to task for their lack of a close reading of her narratives (87). The fight over Christie is often about her as a symbol of lack substance in detective fiction and as such they tend to conflate her with attributes of the genre in a kind of bargain basement structuralist analysis. For instance, Christie did not always fashion the murderer as the least suspected character or have a preoccupation with social manners to the extent that other classic detective fiction writers did. Yet, many of her critics described these attributes as integral to her style. As I mentioned in the introduction, Edmund Wilson was viewed as Christie’s main critic, after he attacked her directly in his *New Yorker* article “Why Do People Read Detective Stories?” In this article, he used one of her more experimental titles, *Death Comes As the End*, in order to criticize her writing. He was clearly capable of understanding which works signified her style because he went on to use one of her most famous titles, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (which had been published before *Death Comes As the End*), to later to attack the genre in the article “Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?” Because Wilson did this, many scholars have responded that many people care who killed Roger Ackroyd and continue to do so in their defense of detective fiction. Robin Winks discusses, in *Detective Fiction: A Series of Critical Essays*, how the academic fight over Christie bled onto popular publications. Winks mentions how Joseph Wood Krutch, who was also a professor, could have responded to Wilson in an academic article, but chose to do it in the *Nation*, a popular magazine instead (11).

At the time, these elitist men who belittled Christie in academia chose to question her in the realm of public opinion, where she did have power, and tried to sway popular or at least elitist opinion against her. Academics like Bargainnier and Wagoner wrote books on Christie with disclaimers in the introductions that they would not examine her in a scholarly manner demonstrating the reality that for a long time academia barred the serious analysis of Christie. Wagoner even made specific note that she restrained her critical analysis in a book that was neutral to positive about Christie's work. Robert Barnard's *A Talent to Deceive: An Appreciation of Agatha Christie* is one of the first books by an academic that is supposed to be in support of Christie. However, he does not seem to support the idea that Christie is worth of study. In his "Counsel for the Defense" chapter, he states that is not worth arguing with critics like Wilson and a Christie fan should not "act as an evangelist for the detective story" (107-108). Barnard defends reading Christie as a diversion, but seems to think that analyzing her would not be fruitful, yet that is exactly what he does in his book. Oddly, he may have been slipping in a better defense by comparing her to Arthur Conan Doyle, who other scholars were viewing as elite literature already. Many of the scholars who were dismissive of Christie wrote during her lifetime or the time shortly after her death, before a number of important articles and books on race, feminism, and popular culture were written. These scholars were overwhelmingly white elitist men. Therefore, they often compared her disparagingly to white male writers and tended to discount issues of race, gender, and sexuality that were not white, male, and heteronormative. Melissa Schaub argues in *Middlebrow Feminism in Classic British Detective Fiction the Female Gentleman* that detective fiction scholars labeled Golden Age authors "feminine" and "conservative," which she sees as "an artifact of the long dominance of high literary modernism, with its almost violent insistence on the masculinity of avant-garde expression" (11). Schaub's

assessment may explain why some scholars were willing to consider a connection between hard-boiled detective fiction and highbrow fiction, but reluctant to do that for classic detective fiction. After all, classic fiction had a number of female authors like Christie and limited violence because it was more concerned with intellectual puzzles.

Chronologically, the next group of scholars studying Christie ascribed to a more egalitarian or feminist lens. They tended to look at gender and class in her work. They raised arguments as to whether or not Christie was a feminist. Schaub, for instance, argues “Female agency is feminism, even if one does not believe in feminism” (132). Therefore, by presenting empowered women is still feminist because it is a positive representation of women, even if it was not the author’s original agenda. Among some feminist critics, there appears to be an unspoken theory that if Christie was a feminist or convincingly espoused feminist views in her fiction, it would explain why male critics responded negatively to her and why she should be salvaged from their criticism. While they expanded the issues they would cover, many still focused on her interwar period or just after. Although her research focuses on Christie’s interwar work, Alison Light’s *Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism between the Wars* in 1991 is one of the first to provide an unapologetically academic analysis of Christie’s work. From Light on, there were more academics seriously engaging with Christie’s text, not just her persona. I think the analysis is richer because they are also incorporating theory and methods from areas like feminist and gender studies. At this time, scholars were starting to consider popular culture a credible field of study. Additionally, female scholars increased in number and prominence in academia. They are mostly white ethnocentric Western scholars, however, and, as such, the focus is on gender and, to some extent, class rather than race.

The most recent set of critics have been examining at Christie in terms of sexuality and race in addition to some of the previous lenses, and are incorporating more than one text to measure Christie, considering her work across different time periods to focus on underlying themes. In *The Ageless Agatha Christie: Essays on the Mysteries and the Legacy*, John C.

Bernthal comments:

For too long Agatha Christie has been spoken of and written about as a vaguely interwar novelist, belonging to some airily-defined olden days that exists chiefly in the mind of the reader. In fact, her first publication, a poem about trams, appeared within month of Queen Victoria's death in 1901, and she went on to write about space travel, electric dishwashers, teddy boys and computers. She wrote through two world wars, two waves of feminism and the dissolution of the British Empire. When she died in 1976, she was still writing. (5)

Not only did Christie live during these changes, but she also incorporated them into her work. How she incorporated events, trends, and politics varied, of course. She also mixed new and old like in *Caribbean Mystery*, which finds Victorian Miss Marple in the period of modern travel, where people of color traveled alongside white Westerners and countries were shifting from colonialism to capitalism. These current scholars have expanded the criticism of Christie to issues of sexuality, race, and nationality and their analyses utilize postmodernism, intersectional feminism, and postcolonialism. As a result their approach is slightly more nuanced. However, none of the scholars teased out the difference in analysis between race and gender, at least for the specific books of my research. Schaub does acknowledge that while Christie “sometimes allows characters to use ‘white man’ as a sincere expression, she also problematizes the term ‘pukka sahib’” (15). Schaub is one of the few feminist scholars who deal with Christie in terms of both

race and gender. For example, Schaub mentions one incident in *Murder on the Orient Express* where Christie subverts the idea that whiteness is equal to goodness. However, she does not expound on race any further and concentrates mainly on gender. Therefore, I had to incorporate scholars like Mohanty, Amos and Parmar, and Puwar so I could look at the intersection of those issues in many of the books.

Although Christie supports or even centers the white women, she does not do so for people of color, even if they are women and even after all her experiences in the Middle East. The scholars who evaluated Christie based on race were almost as critical as her early white male scholars, but they are actually critiquing her on an understanding of her work not her as a figure. However, Christie's centering of whiteness did lead Zengin to make suppositions on race that were not clearly supported by the texts to try to prove Christie racist. I disregarded those sections because there is enough in the texts themselves to show that Christie overwhelmingly favored the Western and white characters over people of color and the East.

### Why Those Characters?

Poirot and Miss Marple are Christie's most famous characters. Since they travel to non-Western countries and represent the imperial gaze in those countries, they fit within the scope of my research and I was able to analyze them in *Caribbean Mystery*, *Appointment with Death*, and *Death on the Nile*. Poirot's stories start with the trip as a vacation from work and he becomes a British emissary in these non-Western countries when a murder occurs. Miss Marple simply maintains the quintessential rural Victorian Britishness she always does. Miss Marple should stick out in the Caribbean locale, but she remains situated in an artificially Westernized part of the island. In Victoria Jones, the protagonist of *They Came to Baghdad*, Christie is able to

combine her tourist experiences with her writing experience to give a detailed description of the physical and other sensory experiences of a first time traveler.<sup>1</sup> Since Victoria Jones is open to experiences as a new traveler and does not cling to assumptions like the other British travelers, her gaze is not wholly Orientalist. She does go to Iraq with Orientalist imaginings according to British literature. Victoria Jones recites a portion of the William Ernest Henley's poem about Babylon when Edward takes her there. However, she can let go of those as false views when she has the real interaction as opposed to comparing whether the experience will pass or fail according to the assumptions. Anne Beddingfield, who is supposed to be a more modern young girl in *The Man in the Brown Suit*, really has a traditional imperialist view like Miss Marple, but she is less self-aware. She has a very Eurocentric view towards South Africa so while her age and tourist adventure is similar to Victoria Jones, the revelation at the end is different. Anne and Harry become settler colonials in Africa while Victoria Jones rejects Edward's narrative that some men were meant to rule over everyone and takes him down. As Edward is telling her about his plans to be one of the "Supermen," Victoria Jones thinks "All the thousands of ordinary people on the earth, ...[t]hey were the people who mattered" (Christie *Baghdad* 190). Her remembrance of the artifacts of daily life she sees at the archeological excavation makes her value ordinary people instead of power-hungry white men trying to maintain a hierarchy. Anne, Miss Marple, and all the white tourists never contemplate the shared humanity between them and people of color. It is possible to argue that Victoria Jones's cultural experience is more meaningful because it was not simply a production for the tourists (front stage), but a back stage view. At the dig she saw the remnants of daily life without any influence on how she should see them except for Richard's explanations of what they were. Even in a museum, the presentation

and signage would direct her experience. This was as unadulterated a cultural experience as she could have because it was not set for tourists.

### Illuminating the Others in Christie's Novels

People of color do exist in Christie's works, even beyond the few novels that I have covered in this research. The novels I covered differ on how much voice and space they allow to people of color. *Caribbean Mystery* provides the largest number of characters of color who are named and speak for themselves. Even in these non-Western locations, since her murders are specifically among white Westerners, people of color are not as prominent. Señora de Caspereo in *Caribbean Mystery* is the only person of color who is both a tourist and speaks for herself. Yet, Miss Marple others her in the novel. In addition, this means that abuses and crimes against people of color in Christie's stories are most often disregarded because they lack the financial/political clout to be heard. Inspector Weston and Victoria in *Caribbean Mystery* are still stronger characters than Mahmoud in *Appointment with Death* and Batani in *The Man in the Brown Suit*. Yet, they must speak outside of the center of the story, even though the land is theirs. There also is a suggestion that Victoria supersedes her racial boundaries by speaking up in *Caribbean Mystery* and is dispatched as a result.

Through the murder investigation in *Death on the Nile*, Poirot learns that one of the local women has married a white man named Fleetwood who is working on the ship, but she returned to her people. The woman is never named and only is used as a way to cast doubt on Fleetwood. While not overtly racist, his interracial marriage is viewed as a mark against Fleetwood's character. Fleetwood's attempt at an extramarital affair is conflated with his interracial marriage. The reality for people of color, especially women, is completely ignored in *Death on the Nile*.

The people of color are described mainly by service occupations, from sellers to porters. In comparison, Mahmoud in *Appointment with Death* and Victoria in *Caribbean Mystery*, who also deal with tourists directly, are provided with a way to talk about their jobs so we see the back stage and the Other talking. We even see a little of Victoria's home life, which further serves to humanize her. In *They Came to Baghdad*, Catherine is already cast as a villainess in comparison to Victoria Jones because she is an Other who speaks against the superiority of the West and competes against a white girl for a white man. Yet, Catherine is definitely not submissive and there is enough ambiguity in the text to read Catherine's alliance with Edward as an act of survival, which is obscured because the protagonist Victoria Jones views her as a rival.

While the people of color are the norm in the non-Western places that these tourists are visiting, they are out of place in Christie's detective fiction. Colonization and detective fiction have made white Western people the default in Orientalist imaginings. In *Space Invaders: Race, Gender, and Bodies Out of Place*, Nirmal Puwar says, "The imagery of land as female is a prevalent feature of voyages and discovery. Foreign places were rendered intelligible within a language that imaged the land through the figure of a woman's body" (27). From conquering in the colonial period to tourism in the imperial capitalist period, these non-Western places are feminized—made weak and dependent on the West—in order to validate the belief of white superiority. Then the fiction presents the colonization of these non-Western places as a natural state, as if the native people would not be able to run their country without Western interference.

#### Tourists Behaviors with the Others

As evidenced in the books used in this research, Christie focused on Western tourists, mostly from the England and the United States. Christie's tourists engage in general tourist acts



like buying souvenirs, getting lost, and looking for authenticity yet expecting the comforts of home. For Poirot, it is a vacation to escape from work and home. Even though he is among Christie's characters who are seasoned travelers, his pre-occupation with personal comfort makes him similar to the Western tourists who expect other countries to be exactly like England. The very things these Westerners are doing hone in how often tourism is the West Orientalizing the Other. Anne and Suzanne are fascinated by the wooden animals in *Man in the Brown Suit*, but they do not see the South Africans who make them as artists. There is a disconnect between the white women's obsession with the figures and acknowledgement of the capabilities of the people who created the objects. Sometimes it is how the Other falls short of value in comparison to the West. Miss Marple disparages people's fondness for the tropical fruits while voicing her desire for an apple instead in *Caribbean Mystery*.

On the other side of the spectrum, some tourists exhibit the desire to be conquerors, to know a place better than the natives, yet not blend in with them. For instance, Lady Westholme in *Appointment with Death* compares everything to what her Baedeker guide tells her. Many of Christie's tourists (e.g., Lady Westholme, Mrs. Allerton) want to consume a place which is about their enjoyment and the expectation that it should live up to their fantasies, but are unconcerned with any type of reciprocation to the people or the land. Said notes, "Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (7). These kinds of tourists never actually try to meaningfully engage with the people and their culture. The experience is all about consuming the Other to define themselves. The cultural productions then cater to these Western ethnocentric views by displaying the "attitudes [the tourists] have towards models and life" (MacCannell 27). The way these places profit is to cater to tourists'

expectations of them. While service providers, like Mahmoud in *Appointment with Death*, may argue with the tourists, they never disabuse them of all their Orientalist imaginings because that will discourage tourists from coming back or recommending the tour to their friends. Instead, they sell tourists what the tourists will think is authentic, to meet unrealistic expectations. The natives' negotiation with the Western tourists is a subtle form of agency. Meanwhile, the tourists seeking their enjoyment alone may neglect to see these people of color as people instead focusing on whether or not they are providing a welcome service. Poirot and Rosalie's encounter with sellers in *Death on the Nile* show this view with the use of disembodied voices and animalistic description of the sellers.

#### Decolonization and British Subjects

Christie was aware of the imperial power of Britain and international upheaval, which is why she used certain Middle Eastern countries and not others in *Appointment with Death*. *Caribbean Mystery* was published in 1964, and this novel includes some modern touches that show the changing of the guard. Administrator Daventry is clearly a part of the empire. Yet, we can see he no longer has the clout that Colonel Race had in *Death on the Nile* or the local power of Colonel Carbury in *Appointment with Death*. Daventry does not even have the rank of those men. Therefore, he cannot hold his own in a dispute with Inspector Weston, a local man on the police force. However, the mindset of *Caribbean Mystery*'s protagonist, Miss Marple, is closest to Anne Beddingfield in *The Man in the Brown Suit*. As mentioned in the "Quintessential Britishness of Miss Marple in *Caribbean Mystery*" chapter, *Caribbean Mystery* was written in over 14 notebooks. As a result, many aspects could have been decided earlier and just exoticized to fit in with the tropical location right before publication. She may have modernized aspects like

colonial governance, but she allowed Miss Marple to cling to her traditional views. While readers could view Miss Marple as representative of a long gone era, her position as the narrator does have some weight. Miss Marple is a character who always espouses nostalgia for the golden days of British Empire. Miss Marple's comment that nothing is really new could either allude to her belief that the island's government, which was shaped by the military might and political policy of empire, has not changed under settler colonialism and capitalism or that she does not see a beneficial change in people of color governing themselves. Additionally, Miss Marple is the tourist who is most resistant to her surroundings because she associates such a trip with modernity, which she rejects. However, *Caribbean Mystery* is her book, so the artificial takes precedence over the native or real. In *Bertram's Hotel*, Miss Marple realizes her uneasiness stems from an awareness that the hotel has been artificially maintaining a style of an earlier time period. Yet, Miss Marple has no such revelation in *Caribbean Mystery* even though an English setting on a tropical island is more contradictory than a hotel that presents an old-fashioned style. Miss Marple's reluctance to embrace change caused by modernity may make her impervious to the shifting of governmental power.

*They Came to Baghdad* is much more progressive and touches modernity more in some ways. A large part of that perspective comes from Victoria Jones. She is an unworldly protagonist who is willing to change her stance when she finds her assumptions are wrong. Her naiveté as a tourist and her comments on her new experiences give us a larger sense of the people and the environment of Iraq than Miss Marple, who uses rural England as her yardstick. Victoria Jones showing interest towards what she does not understand and empathy to people who are different from her changes the imperial lens and makes her less of an imperial tourist. Instead of the view of Miss Marple, Lady Westholme (*Appointment with Death*), and Colonel Carbury

(*Appointment with Death*), who believe that the native people are reliant on the British, Victoria Jones thinks about how the British are harming the local people. Although the narrative's description of rural Iraq focuses on everything as broken down, Victoria Jones does not see it as a reason to hate the place.

The difference between *They Came to Baghdad* and *Caribbean Mystery* could have come from the fact that Christie's reminiscences for *Caribbean Mystery* arose from an actual tourist trip combined with a plot already constructed for Miss Marple as opposed to *They Came to Baghdad*, which drew heavily upon her years living in the Middle East. Mary Wagoner in *Agatha Christie* commented that *Caribbean Mystery* resembled Christie's English house mysteries more than her other travel stories (90-91). However, *They Came to Baghdad* shows a shift from previous tourist narratives in the Middle East, *Death on the Nile* and *Appointment with Death*. Christie's archeological experiences in the Middle East made her more invested in the people and the culture there in comparison to places where she was simply a tourist. Yet, she did not really dwell on it until Victoria Jones in *They Came to Baghdad*, so time and experience may play a role in how her tourist stories are told, especially in regard to depth of description.

### White Privilege While Traveling

As a seasoned traveler, Poirot shows that he is more aware of other cultures than the British or American tourists. So while he often corrects the Westerners, he humors them as well because he is also an Anglophile. In these Poirot stories, there is the tendency to share the narrative with the white female characters so while whiteness is directly privileged in these stories, it is often white women who get the spotlight. Christie's characters have an awareness of the financial cost of travel, even if they do not realize the other perks of it. She has more than a

few characters of upper class who are poor or just getting by. While they grumble about the cost, they see it as their right. This is true of Mrs. Allerton and Mrs. Otterbourne. Anne Beddingfield has no problem relying on her rich friends. For all her talk about people being equal, Sarah King thinks she has the right to roam the world too.

By choosing someone who has no social standing like Victoria Jones in *They Came to Baghdad*, Christie departs from the strict adherence to the class system that the Golden Age is known for and she herself often exhibits. Victoria Jones does not establish friendships with rich Westerners like Anne Beddingfield does in order to ease her travel in a foreign country. Yet, Victoria Jones does lie about her references in order to go on a trip that she does not have the financial means to afford. Because she has misrepresented herself in order to go on the trip, she is very aware of the performance of identity that very few Christie characters grasp. Victoria Jones does have same attitude of British superiority towards the rural people that most of Christie's white female tourists display. She is the closest to a protagonist Other in Christie's tourist novels. However, her race still grants her privilege. People do not think the worst of Victoria Jones when she admits she is lying. They do not ascribe any issues of her faults to her race or culture. They assume that deep down Victoria Jones is a good person because she is white. Her interactions with Mr. Dakin and Mrs. Clipp show that even when Victoria Jones is caught in a lie people are willing to forgive her or accept her excuse for it.

#### Dealing with Race and Gender Instead of Race versus Gender

While the debate rages about how feminist Christie's characters are, the fact is they asserted agency as women, from Miss Marple who used traditional femininity to Sarah King who advocated for equality among the sexes. My research focuses on how Christie handles both

gender and race because it appears that while Christie was challenging one oppression (gender), she was less concerned about the other (race). This shows the author had the ability to pick and choose what to confront and what to ignore. Miss Marple is undeniably conservative and old-fashioned, from her rant about preferring the days when sex was considered a sin to her desire to wear grey lace as a symbol of her elderly age. Miss Marple is also aware of how she performs the stereotype of a traditional English old lady. For example, she uses the gossipy stereotype of old women to elicit information from Esther Walters. Miss Marple is supportive of Molly running a hotel, even though that is a modern occupation for a woman. At the same time, Miss Marple is not as empathetic towards Victoria, though she has a history of being kind to maids. Sarah King in *Appointment with Death* argues with Miss Pierce that we should not support women just because they are women and yet she is willing to counsel Carol Boynton, who wants independence from her controlling mother. Sarah also witnesses how other tourists make life difficult for the dragoman, Mahmoud, and she expresses some sympathy for him. Sarah's observation is one of the rare instances where a tourist is aware of the person of color's labor behind the scenes. Yet, she does not come to his defense or even speak to his character when Lady Westholme blames the murder on one of the tour workers. Through these instances, we can see white women willing to support other white women, but not extending that compassion towards people of color.

If you take into account how Amos and Parmar and Mohanty say white women merely supplant white men in the racial hierarchy without changing it, then it is possible to agree with Devas that the patriarchy remains intact and with it white supremacy. As Mohanty says, the "assumption of privilege and ethnocentric universality" has to be investigated carefully in Western women's writing (398). Even though Christie never said she was a feminist, she has

represented a type of feminism for her feminist critics that licenses a review of her work in such a way. Mohanty is writing specifically about Western feminist writing, but she uses the work of Amos and Parmar on imperial feminism and scrutinizes race and gender concurrently instead of favoring one or the other like academics examining Christie's text. This combination of race and gender can show how Christie makes white women the "referent" in comparison to women of color. As mentioned in the previous chapter entitled, "Servitude and Hierarchy," although Christie allows Rosalie, Mrs. Otterbourne, Jackie, and Mrs. Allerton to voice their struggles in *Death on the Nile*, the only defense of people of color comes from white male tourist Ferguson. Not only is he speaking for the Other, but he has proven himself to be an untrustworthy ally because of his sexism and benevolent racism. Meanwhile, we never hear the words of the local women.

White women want the privilege of white men so they will use benefactors like Miss Marple, marry men with social standing like Lady Westholme, or go into traditionally male professions like Sarah King. That privilege is so seductive and powerful that it may be easy to disregard people who are racially and culturally different from them as fellow human beings. Lady Westholme has the opportunity to throw suspicion on white women who are of a lower class than her, but instead she implicates people of color. By using the locals as scapegoats instead of her fellow tourists, Lady Westholme shows that she recognizes the power dynamics of race can be stronger than the power dynamics of class.

While it is not worth arguing against sexist and superficial structural critiques of Christie, glossing over the ways she is problematic is shortsighted. There is enough material for thorough reading to demonstrate how her treatment of gender could have been applied to race. Generalizing her work and trying to collapse it to fit one basic structural view does not validate

any argument, but rather shows a lack of understanding of her work. Gender and race are equally important issues to address in her work as shown by the approaches that television adaptations have had on those topics.

### Outside the Limits of Research

Outside of the scope of this research is how the adaptation of the Christie's work into another medium like film or television could add to the discussion of Orientalism and othering, but I wanted to mention one television example in order to discuss how race is clearly a concern in Christie's work. In the most recent television adaptation of *Caribbean Mystery* (2013), we see the practice of voodoo and the local police telling Miss Marple that the empire is over. The use of voodoo seems to be an attempt to add the missing local color, not add cultural perspective. Yet, the introduction of the new character of Mama Zogbe shows that the voodoo may be another performance of authenticity for the tourists. Since Miss Marple meets with Mama Zogbe, providing viewers with a little bit of back stage, there might be an awareness on the part of screenwriter Charlie Higson about how locals perform for tourists. Meanwhile, the switch from a white Administrator Daventry and a Black Inspector Weston to Inspector Daventry and Sergeant Weston who are both Black and local men is a more apparent changing of the guard compared to the novel, which only subtly hinted at it. They verbally acknowledge the change of government by telling Miss Marple and Mr. Rafael, a rich white man, that the British are no longer in charge. Another update is that Miss Marple goes out of the tourist area to solve the case, which was only a thought in the book. This adaptation also shows Victoria's home life like in the novel and her partner (now named Errol instead of Jim) to flesh out her character. However, her death seems to come more out of financial need, rather than the determination to speak the truth. In addition, there is no Señora de Caspearo. Oddly, they kept some of her lines and gave them to a white



female tourist. One of the trends in the recent adaptations, has been to update the politics of gender, sexuality, and race while keeping the plot very close to the original, which seems to show that the story can still be told without necessarily maintaining the racist views presented by the characters or other parts of the narrative. Yet, as we can see in the case of Señora de Caspereo, these updates can still be uneven in terms of representation.

### Conclusion

Christie was very much a supporter of the British Empire, which may have led to a colonizer mentality in her work. Yet, at the same time her work stretched into the period of modernity and she had a sense of how the East could view the West from her time in the Middle East. She was always anti-fascist and her experiences from World War II may have made her more guarded. Although her archeological experiences seemed to push her view towards more of a shared humanity, she may have read the rapid changes of contemporary life as more of a danger than needed progress. In her autobiography, she voices her final thoughts that the world needs “to avoid war” and she fears the time of “rogues and charlatans” and yet hopes for the dawn of a “kind of good will” among men (503). Therefore, her increasingly conflicted views show up in her work. Christie may not be aggressively or actively racist. She may be just representing her fellow Westerners as she sees them, which may be showing racism the Brits and Americans exhibit or reveal Christie’s own underlying racism.

No matter how much we believe Christie infused her beliefs into her work, her minority characters do show a gray area. Christie does not make any person of color a protagonist or even one of the characters who the protagonist consistently interacts with, a sidekick or love interest. At the same time, people of color are never the villains. They may be possible suspects,

witnesses, or victims, but the binary of good and bad is never delineated by race, unlike in novels by Ian Fleming, her contemporary. Christie did not have enough of an affinity with people of color to center them or have her main characters listen to them. Yet, like other conventions of the genre, Christie's use of people of color could either show the ways she reinforced the genre or the ways she challenged the genre. The fact that some of these non-Western Others can speak their minds within the text does allow for a little agency. When you compare texts like *Death on the Nile* and *Appointment with Death*, you can see that Mahmoud's ability to speak in *Appointment with Death* humanizes him even if King and Poirot trivialize him, which is still better than the white man Ferguson speaking for people of color in *Death on the Nile*. There might not be enough to argue against charges of conservatism in her work when it comes to race, but the fact that Christie allows these breaks in novels that are meant to represent a white Western perspective makes her work operate in a similar way to Shakespeare's, where showing white people's racism and people of color speaking against it creates an ambiguity, which could present a kind of stand against racism or no stand at all. While other estates have been highly proprietary, Agatha Christie Ltd., has maintained and fostered relationships with other entities to continue to make Christie a relevant part of popular culture. Kenneth Branagh's Hercule Poirot, in the latest film adaptation of *Murder on the Orient Express* (2017), receives a message that there has been "a death on the Nile" foreshadows that the next film to be made will be based on *Death on the Nile*.

Christie's texts in English have been pretty much unedited for almost a hundred years. Shakespeare has had more variation in printing. That is of course due partly to the fact that one of her original publishers, Harper Collins, and her estate Agatha Christie Ltd., run by her grandson Matthew Pritchard, are both still in existence and maintain control over the printing of

her text. Christie's texts are still popular and they still contain Orientalist views. Despite the fact that some readers can ascribe that to the time and style, there may be those that do not. In which case, we need to look closely at the text because the relationship between reader and writer in detective fiction may be more influential than other types of literature because of the nature of the genre. Barnard's description alludes to this:

[T]he pattern of all her best books, she mirrors the deceiving surfaces of it, the facades other people put up before their neighbor's inquiring gaze, which gradually come down and give way to a deeper knowledge of the passions that drive them. Her books are the literary equivalent of the most universal human curiosity, the desire to penetrate the secrets of our fellow humans' lives. (124)

Barnard probably means white men and women, but by using the concepts of MacCannell on tourism and Conquergood on performance with postcolonialism, there is a way to see the Other. These books about white tourists in non-Western locales show the Other performing front stage for the tourists and in the back stage talking back. Scholars can critique how these Westerners fail to see the Other except through an Orientalist window. Additionally, Christie's work presents gray areas in the text between some protagonists and the narrative that allow for different interpretations. While the power dynamics in Christie's book favors Westerners, especially the British, there are instances in her text where negotiated and resistant readings are possible.

## Notes

1. I have used Victoria for *Caribbean Mystery* and Victoria Jones for *They Came to Baghdad* to avoid confusion.
2. There have been three television versions of *Caribbean Mystery*. The first one was with Helen Hayes as Miss Marple in 1983, where Miss Marple and the Western tourists seemed very American. The second version was in 1989 with Joan Hickson as part of Hickson's *Miss Marple* series for BBC. The third version, which I discuss, has Julia McKenzie as Miss Marple. It is part of the *Agatha Christie's Marple*, which is partially a reboot of the Hickson series along with some episodes injecting Miss Marple into some Christie stories she was never a part of originally.

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