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The spinster sleuth and the funny little man from
Belgium

Domesticity and traditional stereotypes as markers of femininity in Agatha
Christie

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I confirm to have conceived and written this thesis in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references, either in the footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are truthfully acknowledged.

HINWEIS

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1. Introduction

Few associate Agatha Christie's detective novels with domesticity as the author's works are first and foremost known for her suspenseful plots, puzzling mysteries, and amusing detectives Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot. Nevertheless, Christie's novels expose distinctive domestic elements which are apparent in the sleuths' feminine detection methods, gendered settings, and a construction of evil which can be located within the domestic sphere. Therefore, this diploma thesis aims to analyse Christie's construction of domestic elements in the context of Great Britain's socio-historical circumstances between the two World Wars. The interwar period challenged existing gender roles and stereotypes, assigning female fictional characters a more valued position in detective novels. For this reason gender studies will function as the main methodology of this thesis. Moreover, insights from the field of psychology, in particular from psychoanalysis and family psychology, will also be useful for investigating the research questions.

Chapter two and three will provide the necessary theoretical framework as well as the historical context for the following chapters. The introductory part aims to define and grasp the scope of domesticity. As Christie's novels emerged during the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, the succeeding chapter focuses on how socio-historical changes during the interwar period transformed the genre of detective fiction. Moreover, an analysis of the domestic and sensation novel provides a literary background on domesticity as well as crime and aims to expose how these two genres pioneered the way for Christie's work.

As the main focus of this thesis is the analysis of domestic elements and traditional female stereotypes, chapters five, six, and seven address the main research areas most accurately: the detection methods, gendered locations, and the evil from within. Following a brief characterization of Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot in chapter four, chapter five examines their feminine detection methods including information gathering by the means of gossip, their reliance on intuition, their distinctive interrogation mode as well as their domestic knowledge. Furthermore, as gossip is traditionally attached to the female gender, a comprehensive theoretical framework on this phenomenon is

included as well. In addition to illustrating typical contents, functions, and outcomes of this specific conversation mode, the etymology of the term as well as the question why gossip gained such a disrespected if not negative reputation are of main interest. Similar gender related issues are the focus in the theoretical framework on intuition, which attempts to investigate whether female intuition is a stereotype or an empirical fact.

Chapter six examines Christie's settings including her crime scenes in the context of the separation of private and public spheres, which emerged during the Victorian era. Which roles do domestic settings play? Did Christie select locations which assign victims to gendered places, or rather are female or male victims murdered in typical gendered domains? Apart from investigating crime scenes, an analysis of a possible link between the private public division and the gender of the detective is included as well. From which spheres do the detectives Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot enter a crime? From which sphere do they operate and to which sphere do they withdraw after the crime is solved?

Chapter seven is titled the evil from within and aims to analyse Christie's construction of evil. Freud's theory of the uncanny is relevant in this regard as it revealed that uncanny impressions are linked with familiarity. In this sense, the murderer has to be someone close to the victim, operating within the domestic sphere and using domestic weapons. Furthermore, the domestic ideal and stability is of main importance since Christie's plots revolve around its destruction and reconstruction. On the basis of four selected novels, namely *Sleeping Murder*, *Appointment with Death*, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, and *4.50 from Paddington*, this pattern will be demonstrated. Domestic stability is threatened and temporarily destructed by an evil force. By the process of detection the threat and the evil are eventually removed, ultimately leading to the reconstruction of domestic stability.

2. Domesticity: Definitions and meanings

Consulting the Oxford Reference Online on the current usages of the noun domesticity, it lists these definitions: “home or family life” (domesticity *n.*, “Oxford English Dictionary”) and “[t]he state of being domestic” (domesticity *n.*, “Oxford American Dictionary”). A similar definition can be found in the Oxford English Dictionary which reads “[t]he quality or state of being domestic, domestic character; home or family life; devotion to home; homeliness” (domesticity, *n.*). Since the meaning of the word revolves around home and family, it might be useful to approach the term from two angles. Firstly, home as an enclosed space and secondly with a focus on the group of people who linger there. As this thesis’ objective includes an analysis of domestic crimes, Christie’s selected locations, specifically the crime scenes, as well as her fictional murderers are of main interest. Therefore, the villains as well as the crime scenes are expected to be linked to an enclosed space, namely a household or a village.

Firstly, the adjective domestic is used when describing a defined space which one might call his/her home. In this sense, the term might denote a larger space as it is used when talking about a country’s domestic affairs, meaning that something “[exists] or [occurs] inside a particular country [which is] not foreign or international” (domestic *adjective*) or a smaller space such as one’s home. Similarly, domestic chores refer to “the running of a home or to family” (domestic *adjective*) and if the police are called to mediate in a domestic, they are asked to sort out “a violent quarrel between family members” (domestic *adjective*), most likely to occur in their dwelling. However, as pointed out by Batz Cooperman, the term home does not necessarily have to apply to an “actual space” (109) as it can also assume a symbolic function. Therefore, one might not be physically present at home, but may feel homey due to familiar routines and trusted people. (see Batz Cooperman 109)

The current meaning of home evokes associations of comfort and trust. However, tracing the etymology of the meaning of domesticity, currently used

interchangeably with home, John Tosh and Davidoff & Hall (referred to in Harvey 73) emphasize that domesticity only started to acquire an emotional significance from the late 18th century on. This alteration affected writers soon enough as idyllic scenes, such as content family members enjoying one another's company by the fireside, began to appear in their writings at the end of the 18th century. (Davidoff and Hall, referred to in Harvey 73) Previously, the concept of home had been lacking an emotional dimension. Harvey (see 72) emphasizes that the dictionary *The New World of Words* of 1706 defined home as a space with no positive emotional meaning attached to it, if not a negative meaning. The impassive definition of the 'House or Place of Abode' reads "[h]omely, ugly, disagreeable, coarse, mean" (qtd. in Harvey 72). It was the socio-cultural events in Great Britain in the 19th century which led to the emergence of the workplace as an exclusive site. Since the workplace was no longer situated at home, this place gained a different meaning. Home assumed the new function of a comfortable space where family members gathered to enjoy their privacy. (see Harvey 72-73)

Secondly, while investigating the scope of domesticity, it is inevitable to take a closer look at the people who dwell in these places, since some of them are assumed to be the evil force in Christie's novels. One definition of domestic is "having the character or position of the inmate of a house ... to be of the household of" (domestic, adj. and n.) and alludes to the people who live there, the owner and his entourage as well as the domestic staff employed at someone else's home. Historians and scholars agree that the social and economic implications of Queen Victoria's reign led to a new enjoyment of domesticity for the middle class and gave members of the working class job opportunities as servants, gardeners, cooks, and parlour maids at the same time (see Parker 10).

A family, a unit of people who are occupants of the same place, is typically associated with emotional stability and considered to be fundamental for psychological health and growth. However, similarly to the concept of home, the family acquired its emotional dimension in the course of time. David Sabeau and Naomi Tadmor (referred to in Harvey 71) illustrate the meaning of family

before the 19th century and point to a hierarchical structure as well as to a management aspect. Sabeen emphasizes that in the 19th century, the term *Haus* was used for a family or group of people connected by power, management, and the economy. Similarly, Tadmor points out that the house was connected to the management of the household which is crucial in building and maintaining a certain hierarchy within that space. Consequently, this order had an impact on the allotment and maintenance of gender as well as social roles. Although this gendered ranking still exists in some families and cultures more than in others, the economical connection between family members has been replaced by emotional ties. (see Harvey 71)

3. The Golden Age of Detective Fiction

Scholars and literary critics agree that Agatha Christie's work can be classified as a "whodunit" (Light 65), a British subgenre of crime fiction which came into existence in the Golden Age of Detective Fiction. This distinctive form of detective fiction emerged during the period between the two WWs, to be more precise between 1918 and 1945. (see Knight, "golden age" 77)

3.1. Historical background

Significant transformations within the genre were due to the socio-historical changes and hardships Great Britain had to face between the two WWs. A nation, traumatized by the bloody war and the deaths of millions of soldiers, lost its trust in the leading politicians, who were held responsible for the war largely regarded as senseless in retrospect. The supposed protective male heroes, regardless of whether they were the authorities who gave the orders to fight or those who were on the battlefield themselves, had failed to protect the nation. (see Ackershoek 120-121) The decrease of the British male population led to an imbalance between the two sexes, leaving behind a surplus of widows and spinsters. Already in 1911, three years before the beginning of WW1, the

females in England and Wales exceeded the male population by 1.3 million, a number which peaked at 1.7 million in 1921. (see Shaw and Vanacker 38) As traumatizing and painful as the time was, the changes in the social structure made emancipatory changes necessary and possible. Women had to take over traditional male jobs such as those in factories and Agatha Christie herself became a nurse. This occupation offered her the opportunity to acquire her comprehensive knowledge of poison which would later turn out to be a valuable tool when pursuing her career as a crime author. From 1918 on, the social changes were anchored in the law which permitted women over 30 to vote for the first time and granted them not only full access to professions and spheres formally dominated by men, such as the field of law, but also unrestricted admittance to the University of Oxford. (Graves, Hodge, and Morgan, referred to in Ackershoek 119-120)

3.2. Literary reception

Martin Priestman, Alison Light, Gill Plain, John Scaggs, Stephen Knight, and Susan Rowland, the most frequently cited literary critics of the Golden Age period of Detective Fiction, provided valuable insights into newly emerging genre trends and attributed those to the historical circumstances of the interwar period.

Rowland approached the surfacing literary characteristics from a feminist perspective and discussed the gender of the fictional sleuths as well as their newly emerging feminine detection methods in the context of psychoanalysis, gothic literature, and colonialism. (see Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* vii-ix) Moreover, Rowland compared the detectives' methods prominent during the Golden Age with those of their predecessor Sherlock Holmes. Whereas authors prior to the Golden Age period, such as Arthur Conan Doyle, portrayed inconvincible male detective heroes, the interwar writers created more effeminate and down-to-earth sleuths, who did not have to be endowed with extraordinary skills to solve a crime. (see Rowland, "Golden Age" 117-127) Consequently, the Golden Age reader was able to partake in the detection

process. This development was described by Stephen Knight who identified the “clue-puzzle” (*Crime Fiction 1800-2000* 88) as characteristic of one significant genre change. It transformed the interaction between the author and the reader as the detective no longer assumed the role of the omnipresent hero solely responsible for solving the crime. Now the reader was able to actively participate in the detection process and could have potentially surpassed the abilities of the detective by discovering the solution and the villain first. The authors accomplished this author- reader interaction by constructing detectable and comprehensible clues. (see Knight, *Crime Fiction 1800-2000* 88)

Whereas Rowland and Knight discussed newly emerging trends, Light, Priestman, Plain, and Scaggs¹ addressed the reader’s needs. In the articles “Agatha Christie and conservative modernity” and “A Version of Pastoral” by Light and Priestman respectively, a description of the distressed state of post-war Britain was offered, which was decisive for the construction of fictional crimes characterized by a clear detachment from violence, blood, and brutality.

Light classifies the Golden Age works including Christie’s novels “a literature of convalescence” (65) which addresses the needs, attitudes, and values of the post-war crime audience. The construction of violence in its vivid descriptions of cruelty, stabbed victims, obsessive murderers, and gruesome weapons which had been decisive for the success of the former crime novels was no longer desired nor appropriate since it could not have been dealt with at that time. As much as sensation novels tried to include sensation, thrill, and blood, the crime authors of the post-war period restricted or avoided these elements entirely. The audience regarded the novels as “a sedative for the nerves” (Light 71) and “a light reading to kill time” (Light 69). Whether it be remaining family members anxiously waiting for a sign of life from their loved ones, or soldiers trying to cope with posttraumatic stress or the prospect of life as an invalid, the nation’s nerves had already been strained enough. An emotional engagement in death was the last thing readers desired and authors reacted to this state by constructing plots which included red herrings, enclosed

¹ Scaggs’ literary reception focuses on typical Golden Age settings and murderers, which will be elaborated on in chapters 6.2. and 7.1.

settings such as “locked-room mysteries” (Scaggs 52) as well as “country-house murders” (Scaggs 52), misleading clues, and unrealistic motives. Artificial and dispassionate elements aimed to detach the reader from the reality of the crime. The hero, who was previously the owner of his own destiny, was replaced by protagonists who were made fun of and who were “de-consecrated” (Light 71). The “literature of convalescence” (Light 65) is perceived as art with a therapeutic function which avoids triggering deep emotions in order to remain on the safe surface of the psyche. (see Light 65-75)

Light underlines that the Brits were not keen to re-encounter the “butchery” (70) and “slaughter” (74) in crime novels and Gill Plain traces a similar line in her article “The Corporeal Anxieties of Agatha Christie”. Plain examines how Christie portrays corpses, namely to which extent vivid and detailed bloody scenes are included. She comes to the conclusion that a comprehensive depiction of violence is rarely present. Nevertheless, Plain calls the bodies “both bloody and bloodless” (43) and justifies this by drawing comparisons with Freud’s hysteric body and the nation’s hysteric state after the war. Both are haunted by the traumatic recollections. The hysteric nation has the compulsion to relieve the trauma in some way and detective fiction is a secure and controlled realm in which this process can be performed. (see Plain 29-54)

Martin Priestman terms the British detective literature between the two WWs “A Version of Pastoral” (151). A rather broad definition of the term pastoral refers to the kind of literature which portrays idyllic country scenes such as sentimental devoted shepherdess and shepherdesses looking after their sheep. In poems, drama, prose fiction, or lyric, rural surroundings provide an opportunity to escape and assume a stark contrast to aggressive city life. (see Baldick, “pastoral”; pastoral) Similar to Light, Priestman regards the emerging combination of “literary [and] social innocence” (151) as a consequence of the war. However, unlike Light, who emphasizes the impact the nation’s psychological state had on detective literature, Priestman cites Nicolson’s claim that “the detective story ... is escape not from life, but from literature” (qtd. in Priestman 151) and excludes the Golden Age literature from “serious literature” (Priestman 151). Consequently, his categorization can be interpreted in two

ways. Firstly, Knight elucidates Priestman's label "a version of the pastoral" (151) simply as how literature was intended to relax the post-war audience (see Knight, "golden age" 90). However, the second interpretation is based on Devas (see 254-255), although she does not directly refer to Priestman in this context. She points out that Golden Age literature is often degraded and considered as middlebrow or trivialized literature. Considering the high number of emerging popular female writers and the "feminisation of the genre" (Devas 254) at that time, it can be assumed that partly because of these facts, Golden Age literature is excluded from serious or highbrow literature.

3.3. Genre changes and characteristics

The first main area of change pertains to the gender of the detective. In order to illustrate the genre changes, Susan Rowland, like various other scholars, frequently compares the Golden Age works with those of Arthur Conan Doyle's. (see Rowland, "Golden Age" 120-123) In the works of Doyle, the creator of world-famous detective Sherlock Holmes, and his contemporaries, men were always the dominant characters embodying the classical detective hero, whereas women were portrayed as weak human beings who either needed protection or posed a threat to the detective. The only female character who came close to being fully respected for her detective skills by Holmes was Irene Adler. (see Reddy 192) The Golden Age of Detective Fiction brought about a significant change and employed "feminized male detectives" (Rowland, "Golden Age" 121) who occasionally relied on female helpers. According to Light, this character portrayal was the result of the search for a new masculinity, a transition "from the present to the past" (73), an effete version in contrast to the manly British soldiers who had failed to defend and protect the nation (see 73). As women had to fill previously male dominated positions in the work force, the emergence of the "spinster sleuth" (Gavin 262) was a reaction to the surplus of British women. This newly innovated female protagonist challenged the stereotype of an elderly, underestimated and marginalized female character and portrayed a strong figure who could outrun the male dominated police and assume a central role in the genre of crime fiction. (see Gavin 263)

Secondly, as Rowland points out, the “linear” (“Golden Age” 120) mode of crime solving applied by Holmes can be differentiated from the “circular” (“Golden Age” 120) way Golden Age detectives preferred. Holmes is typically called in to solve a crime and in his quest to find the solution and the culprit also has to overcome obstacles. Despite this he usually succeeds relatively effortlessly. His success depends more or less on the exposure of material clues, whereas his emotional involvement is reduced to a minimum. The only kind of personal relationship evident is with his subordinate Watson, while the interaction with people involved in the case remains detached. Like Holmes, the Golden Age detectives also succeed but the route which leads to their ultimate triumph is more twisting and “circular” (Rowland, “Golden Age” 120) and occurs in a “domestic and psychological” (Rowland, “Golden Age” 120) fashion. The detectives are emotionally more attached and a regular interaction between suspects is part of the detection process. In the process of solving the crime, “[cooking] the suspects” (Rowland, “Golden Age” 120) which refers to the simple act of listening is inevitable. Of course, material clues, logical reasoning, and rationality are also unavoidable, but the knowledge of the human psyche derived from the science of psychology as well as the appreciation for intuition is equally as important. The detective is personally more connected to the victim and suspects since s/he sincerely cares about their destinies. (see Rowland, “Golden Age” 120-123)

Another approach to interpreting the contrastive detection processes is emphasized by Rowland as she distinguishes between “separation” (“Golden Age” 123), which is how the Golden Age critics categorize Holmes’ methods, and “connection” (“Golden Age” 123), more typical for the Golden Age detective. This classification is made based on the assumption of the Christian creation myths of Sky Father and Earth Mother which describe the origin of consciousness and culture and explain how knowledge is gained. The legend of Sky Father is linked to the accumulation of knowledge by the process of rationality, whereas the myth of Earth Mother is associated with knowledge obtained by “connection, empathy, or ethical feeling” (“Golden Age” 123). The latter describes the detection methods of the Golden Age detectives. The Sky Father myth is based on the assumption that he is separated from the world below him which leads to calling women and nature the “other” (“Golden Age”

123). Although the name of Earth Mother suggests that “she” (“Golden Age” 123) is female, that is not the case since she originated in the time before the separation of gender. The Earth Mother myth stresses that “body, connection, sexuality” (“Golden Age” 123), and emotions are vital elements in structuring “consciousness and knowledge” (“Golden Age” 123). This is due to the legend that her son transformed into her lover and continued to live in her recollections after his passing. (see “Golden Age” 123)

In the context of the creation myths, Rowland refers to Light who ascribes Christie’s whodunits a “modernist spirit” (61). For Rowland the modernist label is tantamount with the dispute in the Golden Age detective, which revolves around the knowledge obtained by separation and by connection. Patriarchy and gendered knowledge are linked to the creation myth of Sky Father and are the result of an imbalance between the two creation myths. Nevertheless, in the Golden Age novels a proper balance is achieved which is synonymous with the aim to restore the health of the (modern) world after WW1. (see Rowland, “Golden Age” 123). In this sense, both creation myths are relevant when analysing Miss Marple’s and Hercule Poirot’s detection methods. What is revolutionary about the Golden Age period is first and foremost the detective’s feminine approach to crime solving, including the exposed empathy towards the victims and suspects. Nevertheless, empathy, a quality which is associated with the Earth Mother creation myth, is as crucial for Marple’s and Poirot’s detection process as rationality, an attribute relevant in the accumulation of knowledge by Sky Father.

3.4. Domesticity: The literary background

In order to detect domestic elements in Christie’s novels, the domestic as well as the Victorian novel is expected to provide further insights into home life. The sensation novel, a literary genre which starkly resembles the genre of detective fiction, is assumed to provide additional knowledge about crime and mystery.

3.4.1. The domestic novel

The popularity of domestic fiction reached its peak in the middle of the 19th century, shortly before the end of the Industrial Revolution in 1860, which was a decisive time period for the rise of domestic ideology (see “domestic fiction”). Although the hardships of the working class are often depicted in literature, the main focus of this thesis pertains to the domestic ideals and the cracks that appeared within the middle as well as the upper class. Considering the historical fact that the private/public dichotomy only applied to these classes in its full extent and that Agatha Christie’s novels are typically set in these households (see Scaggs 48), this selection is justified.

The domestic ideal and its deviants, relevant in Christie’s novels as her plots recurrently revolve around the destruction and reconstruction of domestic stability, were frequently addressed in contemporary paintings as well as in Victorian and domestic novels. A famous painting from 1845 with the title *The Queen and Prince Albert at Home* portrays the domestic ideal, advocated by the ruler of the British monarchy. It shows the Queen and her husband in a rather informal pose playing with their children. (see Parker 3)

Evidence of this can also be found in literature. In *A Christmas Carol* the Victorian writer Charles Dickens describes the delights of domestic life vividly. At the centre are well-behaving children who enjoy the protection and company of their loving parents. Other essential elements of the idyll which convey comfort and security include a clean and orderly domestic space, a cosy hearth lighting up the room and a dinner-table set with hot delicious food. (see domesticity) Food and the custom of sharing and celebrating it plays a significant role in family life. Anderson points out that food is a “social marker” (124) as it unites or separates people. It offers enjoyment and is an integral part of the family routine since certain messages are linked with feasts. In this sense, a special dinner might be organized when a beloved family member returns from a long journey, or to celebrate the birth of a child, or when rites of passage are acknowledged. (see Anderson 124-125)

Freedgood emphasizes that plots in the domestic novel revolve around “courtship, marriage, and childbearing- [activities] that reproduce domesticity”

(183). In this sense, the ideal middle-class family relies on the woman being *The Angel in the House*, as portrayed in Coventry Patmore's identically named poem. As much as women as submissive, tame, and well-behaving human beings and picture-perfect families were idealized, the Victorian author Charles Dickens portrayed dysfunctional versions which did not abide to these behavioural norms and roles. (see domesticity) As Freedgood emphasizes, the domestic novel portrays the home as a sheltered retreat from the harsh world outside. However, many authors portray the domestic sphere as a place where danger originates. Examples include Dickens' novel *Dombey and Son* in which a little baby faces the danger of being burnt alive since his cradle is being put too close to the hearth, or in *Bleak House* when the shelter of the home cannot save its residents from the consequences of the chancery. Another example includes Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* in which she portrays tyrannical, abusive and incestuous behaviour among family members. (see Freedgood 183-184)

As it will be put forward in chapter 6.1., the ideal site for domesticity is the countryside, a fact which is also represented in Dicken's *Great Expectations*. As Freedgood points out, the main character Wemmick adjusts his behaviour according to his whereabouts. On the premises of his employer's Mr Jagger law firm, located in London, he exposes relentless behaviour. These actions are in stark contrast to the compassionate behaviour shown when taking care of his elderly father. The devoting behaviour towards his father in the suburban Wandsworth would be unconceivable in the London law firm since sympathy and an altruistic attitude would be interpreted as weakness and possibly result in hostile actions from his competitors. (see Freedgood 183-184) This exposed behaviour coincides with the gender norms expected in each space. Just as men were expected to expose aggressive and competitive behaviour in the public sphere, women were ideally tame, withdrawn and silent in the private sphere.

3.4.2. The sensation novel

The genre of the sensation novel, popular between the 1860s and 1870s, features some basic elements of the domestic novel and combines them with features of a crime story such as murder, mystery, dark secrets, and obsession; all elements which are also crucial in Christie's plots. The main protagonists belong to the respectable Victorian middle-class family and have to face the "hidden fears, anxieties, and obsessions behind the dominant Victorian cultural institution" (Hughes 260). While domestic and Victorian novels occasionally shattered the domestic ideal by portraying the domestic sphere as a potential place of danger, this was the rule in the sensation novel. The middle-class home could no longer provide shelter from the cruelty of the urban industrialized landscape. Consequently, the threat always comes from the immediate surroundings as a trusted neighbour might be unmasked to be a cold-blooded murderer or a beloved blood-relative might have masterminded a poisoning. (see Hughes 260-261) The threat, once at a safe distance for readers as well as for the novel's characters, moves closer into the realm of personal surroundings in the sensation novel and urges vigilance of anything and anybody that seems well-known and common. In addition, the settings and the characters in the sensation novel expose parallels to those of the Golden Age works. The sensational novel author Elizabeth Braddon refers to her work *Aurora Floyd* as "the simple drama of domestic life" (Hughes 265). The domestic interior such as drawing rooms and boudoirs assume a central role in Braddon's crime story and are therefore described extensively by the author. Ordinary and seemingly insignificant minor matters such as laundry lists, mailing tags, garments and jewellery are not overlooked by Braddon's amateur or her professional detectives and are thus treated as crucial trails and substantial pieces of evidence. Furthermore, specific stock characters which are familiar to the readers from domestic fiction reappear in this genre. No matter if it is the vicar, the flawless domestic female of the house, the tutor, the solicitor, or the banker; they are all likely to be either identified as the culprit or as the advancing hero. What they all have in common is their ordinariness and their honoured status in the community. Moreover, in the sensation novels the plots are of higher significance than the character's portrayal. This affects the characterization of male characters whose forceful traits, determination over their own destiny and

triumph over life's coincidences has to yield in favour of a characterization distinguished by the protagonist's frail nature and a life path controlled by its unpredictable incidents. (see Hughes 263-265) In the sensation novel the home is depicted as a potential place of danger which harbours people capable of exerting evil deeds. This will become relevant when analysing settings, crime scenes, and murderers in Christie's novels. Moreover, drawing deductions based on minutiae of domestic life, the character portrayal of males and the selection of ordinary and familiar characters are all elements the reader encounters in Christie's novels. Especially the characterization of the effeminate protagonist Poirot, his and Miss Marple's feminine detection methods as well as the selection of minor familiar characters are quite distinctive in Christie's novels. Christie's characters therefore deserve the label familiarity as they are all introduced to the reader early on from a narrative standpoint and the relationship between the murderer and the victim is characterized by an intimate aspect. Furthermore, considering the features of the sensation novel, it can be concluded that this genre first brought crime from the outside to the inside and can therefore be regarded as a forerunner of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction.

4. The detectives

4.1. Miss Marple: "A four-starred Pussy"²

By creating Miss Marple, often referred to as a "spinster sleuth" (Berglund 144) or an "old tabby[y]" (Berglund 144), Christie alluded to the remaining surplus of single women after the first WW (see Berglund 144). Miss Marple's "very *feminine way*" (Christie, *Rye* 230) of investigation, as the character herself describes her method, as well as the sphere she operates from will be dealt with in the succeeding chapters. This part focuses on Christie's figurative

² Christie, *Murder is Announced* 385

language, in particular feminine symbols and symbols of domesticity that the author employs when portraying the female detective.

Firstly, as Shaw and Vanacker (see 47) point out, knitting assumes a central role in Miss Marple novels as it is an actual detection aid used as a cunning pretext to engage people in conversation, and as it has a significant metaphorical meaning. Since Miss Marple is repeatedly portrayed “busily engaged [in] knitting” (Christie, *Sleeping* 205), preferably “close to the fire” (Christie, *Murder is Announced* 467) and on rare occasions “crocheting” (Christie, *Paddington* 564), the author highlights Marple’s role as a spinster as well as her feminine attributes. Moreover, the domestic past time activity of knitting and the paraphernalia wool is used continuously by Christie for introducing Miss Marple to the reader and therefore provides an instant figurative imagination of the character: “She had snow-white hair and a pink crinkled face and very soft innocent blue eyes, and she was heavily enmeshed in fleecy wool. Wool round her shoulders in the form of a lacy cape and wool that she was knitting and which turned out to be a baby’s shawl.” (*Murder is Announced* 386)

The creative domestic leisure activity of knitting evolved into a pleasurable activity once it ceased to have an economical function to produce (see Groeneveld 264). Moreover, needlework has various metaphorical meanings which are first and foremost associated with the female gender. Batz Coperman (see 56) underlines that women piecing quilts, sewing dresses, weaving textiles, mending socks, and embroidering artistic patterns are undoubtedly traditional popular female images. She refers to a metaphorical meaning which connects these domestic activities with stereotypical female character traits such as “warmth, protection, shelter, nurture, ... , sentiment, time, care ... ” (56). Another metaphorical link is drawn by Gainor (see 195) who compares the image of quilting with detective work. In this sense, like quilting which involves sewing several pieces together to make a whole quilt, putting together clues might similarly result in solving a crime.

Along these lines, Shaw, Vanacker, Ackershoek, and Devas have interpreted Miss Marple's knitting. Shaw and Vanacker point out that the several occasions when she is knitting "[f]or a baby" (Christie, *Rye* 314) can be read as her aim to protect the weak and the innocent (see 47). Moreover, Ackershoek (see 122) interprets Marple's knitting as a creative process where not only a thread is followed but by which proceedings a mere thread is being transformed into a woolly comfortable garment. In a way knitting and crocheting resemble the detection process during which following the clues and traces entails the removal of the evil and the resulting comfort and protection. In the film *Murder, She Said*³, Devas (see 262) suggests that Inspector Craddock is temporarily empowered in the literal sense as he sits down on Miss Marple's armchair only to be pricked by her knitting needles, a "paraphernalia of feminine domesticity" (Devas 262). This physical discomfort, although only short-termed, can be compared with the uneasiness male chief inspectors have to face when being excelled by Miss Marple's superior detective skills. In *Murder Most Foul*⁴ Miss Marple is introduced to the audience as a member of the jury who disturbs the explanations of the judge with the noise of her knitting needles. The judge remarks on this audible interruption with "either you will have to cease knitting ... or I will have to cease judging" (*Foul*) to which Miss Marple replies that knitting does "help [her] to concentrate" (*Foul*). This scene is very similar to the scene in *Murder, She Said* where the inspector is pricked by Marple's knitting needles. Both men, the inspector and the judge, are representatives of the male dominated law enforcement and are assaulted, in both a literal as well as in a metaphorical sense, by the utensils required for a female domestic activity. In *Murder, She Said* Miss Marple clearly outshines the detective by contributing decisive proof and conclusions to the final solution. Similarly, in *Murder Most Foul* Miss Marple is selected as a jury member in the legal proceedings against Harold Taylor, who appeared to be caught red-handed at the crime scene. The guilt of the defendant is unequivocal for the rest of the jury as well as for the judge, whose puzzled facial expression reflects his astonishment that the case cannot be closed since one member of the jury, namely Miss Marple, is not fully persuaded of the suspect's guilt. It is because of Miss Marple's efforts and

³ *Murder, She Said* is the screen adaptation of the novel *4.50 from Paddington*.

⁴ *Murder Most Foul* is the screen adaptation of the novel *Mrs. McGinty's Dead*.

persistence that the life of an innocent man is saved and justice is done to the guilty person. Here she triumphs over the initial assessments of the male judge.

Secondly, in addition to Marple's knitting, the domestic device of a sink provides another metaphorical meaning relevant for the analysis of the spinster sleuth's characterization. Various characters repeatedly refer to Miss Marple's mental faculties with the expression "a mind like a sink" (Christie, *Murder is Announced* 447), a typically British colloquial expression which the OED uses to characterize people's imagination "[tending] to put an indecent construction on events" (sink). The noun sink, on the contrary is a cesspool, a domestic device used to receive grime (see sink). In *The Body in the Library*, Christie lets Miss Marple accurately clarify what this simile signifies: " 'As I've told you, I've got a very suspicious mind. My nephew Raymond tells me (in fun, of course, and quite affectionately) that I have a mind like a *sink*. He says that most Victorians have. All I can say is that the Victorians knew a good deal about human nature ... '." (*Body in the Library* 150)

In 4.50 from *Paddington* Marple explains to the chief detective that by attempting to walk in the murderer's shoes, she often succeeds in reconstructing the culprit's motives. When listening to her explications, the detective utters the words " '[r]eally, your mind ... ' " (*Paddington* 604) to which Miss Marple responds " '[l]ike a sink ... ' " (*Paddington* 604) and emphasizes that " '... sinks are necessary domestic equipment and actually very hygienic' " (*Paddington* 604). What is particularly interesting in this verbal exchange is that Miss Marple herself substantiates the likeness between her mind and the utility of a domestic device. As a suspicious mind and the adoption of the suspect's mindset lead to success in a murder case, consequently restoring order in a community, the sink is used in a similar way to keep a household in order.

4.2. Hercule Poirot: A feminized anti-hero?

Sally Munt characterizes Christie's creation of the Belgian detective Hercule Poirot with these words: "Hercule Poirot embodies clearly the 'feminine' [hero]. He is a parody of the male myth; his name implies his satirical status: he is a shortened Hercules, and a *poirot* - a clown. He is narcissistic, emotive, feline, apparently irrational, eccentric, quixotic [and] obsessed with the domestic." (8)

Taking into account that his first name Hercule alludes to a Greek mythology figure who was believed to have superhuman strength (see Hercules Family History), a hero in the classical sense, it is worth considering what the label hero implies and if the antonym anti-hero is indeed appropriate for the Belgian detective. In its historical definition the OED restricts the label hero to males possessing "superhuman strength, courage, or ability" (hero, n.), a category to which detectives prior the Golden Age era belong. Moreover, contemporaneous with the Golden Age detective tradition in Great Britain, the rougher Hard Boiled or Noir tradition surfaced in the U.S.A (see Baldick, "hard-boiled"). One major difference between these two literary styles pertains to the characterization of the detective, endowing the Hard Boiled investigators with attributes similar to those of the classical hero. Raymond Chandler, the most well-known critic of the Golden Age works and author of several Hard Boiled novels, insists on the physical activeness and courage of the male detective. According to him the detective has to operate in the city⁵ and should not be a foreigner or dandy. (see Devas 256) Comparably, the Hard Boiled author Robert E. Skinner emphasizes the physical attributes of the ideal detective. His idea of a perfect detective hero is a tall unafraid person who is heroic enough to defend himself and those in need of protection, possibly with the aid of a gun or in the dangerous streets of a city. (see Munt 1)

Contrastive to these descriptions of the classical hero is the anti-hero, who clearly lacks physical strength and courage. Instead, this person is endowed with ordinary and inadequate character traits and is therefore a parody of the classical hero. (see anti-hero *noun*) In this regard, Hercule Poirot

⁵ The country city dichotomy and its relevance for domesticity as well as for the differentiation between the Golden Age and Hard Boiled detective will be elaborated on in chapter 6.1.

is deprived of the attributes of a traditional hero and exudes those of an anti-hero, evoking associations with the weaker sex. Christie constructed a detective who is neither athletic nor tall and would therefore fail miserably in protecting and defending himself and victims physically from culprits. Poirot is “hardly more than five feet, four inches” (*Styles* 15) and consequently repeatedly referred to as a “funny little man” (*Styles* 9). In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Poirot hints to the fact that he would not possess the strength to defend himself physically: “ ‘A trap with myself as the bait! ... but I am not sufficiently heroic for that’ ” (224). Although climbing a hill poses a tremendous physical challenge to the Belgian, it is his attire which receives his utmost attention in this situation. When drawing attention to his leather shoes being an inappropriate piece of footwear for the athletic activity of climbing, he responds by emphasizing that he prefers “to have the appearance soigné⁶” (*Appointment* 288).

Hastings, friend and assistant of Poirot, comments on Poirot’s neat clothing with the statement that “a speck of dust would have caused him more pain than a bullet wound” (*Styles* 15). Indeed, he is recurrently referred to as a “great dandy” (*Styles* 9) even leading one character to the assumption that he is a “retired hairdresser” (*Roger Ackroyd* 20). When attempting to retrieve a ring, an important piece of evidence, from a pond, Poirot is most perturbed about the “few microscopic drops of water” (*Roger Ackroyd* 94) on his coat and later remarks that he “does not run the risk of disarranging his costume without being sure of attaining his object” (*Roger Ackroyd* 95). His obsession with a neat and proper outfit is also evident when it comes to the attire of the people who surround him. He notices right away if a “tie ... [isn’t] straight” (*Styles* 84) or in its proper place and reacts to this scruffiness by rearranging it unsolicitedly or by addressing the wearer immediately. Besides his persistence on a prim and proper attire, he seeks a clean domestic surroundings even in households where he is a guest. He is so disturbed by a bookcase which apparently had not been dusted that he instantly cleans it himself (see *Styles* 41). When a match is tossed into a flower bed, Hastings interprets this action as “too much for Poirot’s feelings [since] [h]e retrieve[s] it, and burie[s] it neatly” (*Styles* 25).

⁶ An appearance *soigné* can be translated with a well- groomed appearance.

Makinen (see “Agatha Christie” 419) links Poirot’s desire for a well-groomed outfit and clean domestic surroundings with his way of thinking, which relies on “method, order, and little grey cells” (*Roger Ackroyd* 81). Therefore, his longing for order, whether it concerns his actual surroundings or his thoughts, can be read as feminine and therefore “inappropriate for heroic masculinity” (Makinen, “Agatha Christie” 419).

5. Detection methods

Broadly speaking, as Ackershoek points out, Miss Marple’s and Hercule Poirot’s detection methods can be characterized as trivial, ordinary and mundane. Moreover, both detectives operate on the basis of knowledge obtained from the female sphere. Although deductive reasoning also contributes to their success, the main focus of this thesis is the analysis of methods and knowledge associated with the female gender. Firstly, both detectives rely on gossip as their main form of information gathering. Miss Marple combines this with typical female past time activities such as knitting as well as domestic chores like gardening and cooking. Secondly, they draw conclusions based on their domestic knowledge and pay attention to even minor domestic details. Key elements for their victories include thoroughness and ascribing each detail a priority, no matter how insignificant it may seem. Whereas other detectives may only perceive isolated pieces of information, they are rigorous enough to link the vast minor details to a whole network. Thirdly, they value intuition and form hypotheses based on their knowledge of psychology and human behaviour, especially female manners. (see Ackershoek 121) Lastly, “cook[ing] the suspects” (Rowland, “Golden Age” 120), which is characterized by the simple act of listening, can be regarded as a female metaphor for interrogating suspects (see Rowland, “Golden Age” 120-122). Rowland grounds Marple’s and Poirot’s detection methods on “[o]ther unofficial forms of knowledge” (*From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 93), characterized by a relational aspect as well as an appreciation of intuition, which can clearly be differentiated from official methods male dominated authorities such as the police prefer. In this sense,

“formal interrogations” (Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 93) and a prioritisation of material evidence represent “masculine” (Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 93) methods, occupying a superior status, whereas the less traditional feminine detection methods are associated with a subordinate position in society. (see Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 93) Moreover, Marple’s and Poirot’s “peripheral” (Ackershoek 121) position in the community proves to be a clear benefit as culprits underrate their skills (see Ackershoek 121).

As it will be elaborated on in chapter 5.2.1., western societies contrast “experimental knowledge” (Epstein, qtd. in Myers 29) with “rational knowledge” (Epstein, qtd. in Myers 29) and ascribe the female gender the first label. By portraying a male detective who values intuition, makes use of gossip and observes minor domestic details as well as a female detective who exposes a sharp rational mind, Christie refutes the persisting traditional gender stereotypes. In this sense she demonstrates that the contrastive detection skills do not necessarily have to be used exclusively but that a combination of both approaches is the decisive key element for solving a murder case. Broadly speaking, Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot are stereotypes of the different⁷. However, the label of triviality which the ORO defines as a “lack of seriousness or importance” (triviality *noun*) and “of little value” (trivial *adjective*) can be attached to Poirot’s and Marple’s methods. Moreover, this definition of triviality is tantamount to women’s traditional position in society and is used when describing the typical female communication mode of gossip⁸ as well as the domestic sphere. By creating Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot, Christie challenges the existing notion of triviality and increases the value of typical feminine detection methods.

A similar observation was made by Heilbrun (referred to in Makinen, *Feminist Fiction* 106), who ascribed the British detective fiction the label “androgynous” (qtd. in Makinen, *Feminist Fiction* 106) as this genre tackles traditional gender stereotypes. Instead of portraying traditional gender-

⁷ “Difference” has to be discerned from “otherness”. Whereas the first term combines the awareness of difference and similitude, the latter one excludes any kind of similitude (see Cranny- Francis 59).

⁸ For an elaborated analysis of gossip see chapter 5.1.1.

conforming characters, British crime authors frequently created “androgynous” (qtd. in Makinen, *Feminist Fiction* 106) characters such as feminized male detectives. Lee Horsely notes that the author’s motives in creating female detectives in the beginning of the 20th century have to be differentiated from the motives of contemporary female writers. Although female Golden Age authors gendered the genre of crime fiction significantly, creating detectives such as Miss Marple with her feminine, “uncombative” (Horsely 245) way of sleuthing coupled with her sharp-witted intelligence, they did not intentionally incorporate gender matters in their novels nor did they consider themselves as feminist writers. On the contrary, contemporary female authors are “preoccupied with difference” (Horsely 245) explicitly integrating gender issues in their novels, thus making it obvious for the reader that their novels are “female authored texts” (Horsely 245). (see Horsley 245)

5.1. Gossip

Since Miss Marple as well as Hercule Poirot rely on gossip as their main method of information gathering and since gossiping women are recurrent characters in Christie’s novels, a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of gossip is inevitable. In this regard, Bjelland Kartzow’s research on *Gossip and Gender* in pastoral epistles proved to be a valuable starting point.

5.1.1. Theoretical framework on the phenomenon of gossip

In order to find an accurate and comprehensive definition of the phenomenon of gossip, Bjelland Kartzow approaches gossip from a semantic as well as from a social angle. Based on the semantic field theory, communication functions as the umbrella term for gossip. Moreover, gossip as a social phenomenon can be separated from other communication varieties on the basis of three criteria: the content of what is being communicated, the function as well as potential outcomes and how authors portray gossipers in written texts. (see Bjelland Kartzow 44-46)

Before establishing which contents are typically being conversed about, it is crucial to draw attention to the people involved: the gossip, the listener and a third party who is not present but who is the main focus of interest. First of all, Bjelland Kartzow stresses that many scholars agree on labelling the talk about a third person “evaluative talk” (41). The contents of this “evaluative talk” (Bjelland Kartzow 41) are likely to contain details of incidents which occurred quite recently or are relevant for the present situation and were intended to be kept private since they contain intimate facts. These details might be correct or not but in the majority of cases they are more likely to be based on rumours than on facts. Rumours are passed on from the gossip to the listener who then resumes the role of the gossip in the next stage. The more people involved, the greater the chances that the initial source remains unknown and the original assertion is distorted. Secondly, gossip is related to a pleasurable activity where participants are amused, entertained and relaxed. The mode is rather light since trivial elements are expected to be predominant compared to a serious conversation. Because the contents of the talk might spread swiftly from party to party, the outcome may have a harmful impact. By distributing and adding false information people can be manipulated easily and the group or single person being gossiped about is confronted with disparagement. Thirdly, authors often rely on stereotypes, exaggeration and humour in portraying a gossip. In most cases this person is old or a busybody. A typical character trait is nosiness which is beneficial when collecting certain rumours that are passed on instantly and willingly. Another impression which authors often create is the omnipresence of the gossip who can be detected in most of the scenes, eagerly waiting to get involved in other people’s affairs. (see Bjelland Kartzow 45-46)

Since it is also apparent in Christie’s novels that this disrespected conversation mode is first and foremost linked to the female gender, it is useful to research the etymology of the word as well as society’s perception of gossiping women.

Consulting the Oxford English Dictionary on the etymology of the term gossip, it is evident that the word has evolved from a gender-neutral spiritual term to one which describes a trifle conversation mainly carried out by women

(see Rysman, referred to in Bjelland Kartzow 35). The Old English godsib was first detected in the written sermon “Sermo Lupi Anglos” by the archbishop of York, Wulfstal II in the year 1014. The term applied to a person, both male and female, who acted as a sponsor for a person being baptized. The gender-neutral meaning remained well until the end of the 14th century but lost its spiritual association when it started to be used exclusively for friends or acquaintances. It was around 1600 when gossip was first linked to the female gender. In Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* the term referred to women who visited a friend while she was in labour. The meaning of gossip has remained the same from the beginning of the 19th century up to this day. In this regard, gossip is a social phenomenon which cannot be taken seriously and which is often based on rumours. (see gossip, n.) Gossip is defined as “idle talk; trifling or groundless rumour; tittle-tattle. Also, in a more favourable sense: Easy, unrestrained talk or writing, esp. about persons or social incidents.” (gossip, n.)

Why gossip evolved into a typical female kind of communication can be attributed to the traditional public private dichotomy. Bjelland Kartzow refers to Karen Jo Torjesen, who pointed out that different speech characteristics were common in each sphere. Men who had to succeed in a competitive environment acquired more formal speech, while women communicated in more trivial ways in the private shelter of their homes. (see Bjelland Kartzow 36)

In this regard, Bjelland Kartzow refers to two studies. The first one was conducted by Juliet du Boulay and exposed the gendered communication forms in a Greek mountain village in the 60’s. It turned out that the location, either voluntarily chosen or assigned by society, corresponds with the extent of exchanged private information. Therefore, the home was the ideal site for passing on bits of private news, whereas the café, a typical male venue, was considered inappropriate to reveal intimate details. In the second study, conducted by Bourdieu, the water fountain was identified to be a favoured location among Algerian women. As their daily domestic duties included collecting water from the fountain, their assigned place in the house was extended further outside. On the contrary, men who stayed at home too much raised eyebrows, since spending too much time in the women’s sphere was

associated with gossip and by no means respectable for them. (see Bjelland Kartzow 37)

As illustrated in the preceding part, the term gossip derived from a gender-neutral meaning with positive connotations to one that describes the disreputable act of communication between women. Exposing the correlation between gendered spaces and gendered discourse explains why the trivial communication form is ascribed to women, but does not elucidate why it gained such a negative reputation.

As a starting point it is useful to take a more detailed look at why and by whom stereotypes are formed. Stereotypes are formed to establish and maintain a social order. Therefore, it is easier to draw a line between what is standard and what is not, who belongs to a certain group and who does not, and whose behaviour can be categorized as morbid and whose as healthy. This categorization by no means considers all of the facts nor does it prioritize critical thinking since it is a selective and restricted way of thinking. Stereotypes are established and spread by people who are non-members and are not in close contact with the group being stereotyped. The circulation of stereotypes has the simple aim to maintain an authoritarian powerful position in the social hierarchy. The success of a stereotype always depends on whether the group spreading it is in a recognized and dominant position. However, for whatever reason, this position is threatened and needs to be secured. Stereotypes are not exclusively negative. Positive ones do exist and are usually ascribed to highly influential groups, whereas fringe groups are faced with negative ones. Nevertheless, members of powerful groups who do not meet their group's expectations are faced with dishonour and are object of ridicule. (see Cranny-Francis 140-142)

Alexander Rysman points out that men are predominately responsible for spreading and maintaining the negative stereotype of gossiping women and attributes it to their fear of losing their superior position. Since gossip is a social phenomenon by which means social bonds are formed, men might be threatened by the emerging solidarity among women. Mary Leach refers to gossip as "a weapon for outsiders" (qtd. in Bjelland Kartzow 33) and concludes

that it is carried out by marginalized groups whose moral attitudes are dissimilar from the traditionally male dominated world. (see Leach; Rysman, referred to in Bjelland Kartzow 33; 35)

In this context, Bjelland Kartzow proposes that witchcraft and gossip display several significant parallels. She refers to Scott who defines “gossip [as] the linguistic equivalent and forerunner of witchcraft” (qtd. in Bjelland Kartzow 36). Women as witches were feared for their supernatural powers and were accused of using gossip as a weapon. The cause for torturing witches might be attributed to the fact that men feared losing their dominant social position. However, as Strathern points out, not only men were responsible for establishing this stereotype. Women’s gossip also contributed tremendously to the female deaths at the stake. (see Bjelland Kartzow 36)

In the context of society’s perception of gossiping women, Bjelland Kartzow refers to a study conducted by Chenjerai Shire who investigated the dishonour Zimbabwean men have to face when accused of being gossipers. Moreover, it also exposes that boys are raised to believe that gossiping is a shameful form of communication which should exclusively be carried out by women. At the *dare*, a location where only men and young boys were permitted, the conversation revolved around sexual experiences. The boys were welcome to listen to the verbal interactions as long as they did not start to circulate this information. Whenever they failed to fulfil this requirement, they earned humiliation and were called names like “weak hearted”, “cowards”, and “girl” (Shire, qtd. in Bjelland Kartzow 38). Consequently, as this attitude towards women and gossip was passed on from generation to generation, it became an indispensable part of raising a child. (see Bjelland Kartzow 38-39)

A similar case study coordinated by Bailey revealed how inhabitants of a small village in the French Alps scorn women who are seen talking together. Gossip is acceptable for men but women’s gossip is perceived as vicious. As a result of this social humiliation, women restrict their social interactions among each other to a minimum and remain inside their home as much as possible. Whenever they have to run errands such as fetching some groceries from the

shops, they simply ask their children or husbands to assume that task. In the course of this undertaking, men are often seen gossiping in a local coffee shop. However, this communication act was perceived as appropriate since it was assumed to be benevolent. (see Bjelland Kartzow 38-39)

Taking the described studies into account, it can be concluded that society determines what is acceptable and deviant for whom. Still, although society has undergone a female friendly transformation, it is still dominated by men. In this sense, Shire's study exposed that children in Zimbabwe are raised to believe that the exchange of information between men is acceptable, whereas the gossip between women is not. Although some accurate definitions about gossip exist, the line between what is gossip and what is just exchanging information is blurry and by no means clear cut. In this regard, like the experiment in the French Alps exposed, the trivial communication between men is interpreted as benevolent talk, whereas women's talk is labelled vicious. A misogynistic attitude can be detected in the history of gossip which is passed on from generation to generation in order to secure existing gender roles. However, once an idea or a stereotype is established, it is hard to modify. This scorn towards gossiping women also emerges distinctively in Christie's novels.

5.1.2. Information gathering by the means of gossip

Marple and Poirot rely on gossip as one of their main detection aids. Whereas their value towards gossip is indistinguishable, their approach in participating in this form of communication varies, which is partly due to their origin and gender. The majority of Poirot's cases occur in Great Britain and in the rare cases when the crime takes place outside the borders of Great Britain, he is mostly surrounded by Brits and Americans, such as in *Appointment with Death*, and thus the only fellow country man of his native Belgium. This circumstance makes him a "foreign outsider" (Makinen, "Agatha Christie" 421), whereas the British spinster Miss Marple remains a "village insider" (Makinen, "Agatha Christie" 421).

5.1.2.1. *Miss Marple and gossip*

What contributes to Miss Marple's success in gathering information by the means of gossip is firstly her status as a "village insider" (Makinen, "Agatha Christie" 421), secondly the prevailing stereotypes about gossiping spinsters and finally the way she combines gossip with traditionally feminine domestic activities.

As most of the murder cases occur in Marple's home village of St Mary Mead, she is well informed about any recent incidents involving the inhabitants as well as their habits and personality traits. Shaw and Vanacker (see 48) point out that in *The Murder at the Vicarage* (see 556), her garden proves to be a geographically convenient location as it is right next to the crime scene. This circumstance does not only enable her to observe and eavesdrop on the guests and incidents at the vicarage but also gives her the opportunity to engage passing villagers in conversation. Whenever she solves a crime outside of St Mary Mead, but still within Great Britain, her nationality makes her win the trust of potential gossipers faster. However, not only her country's domestic status makes it more effortless to participate in gossip, also the prevailing stereotype that gossip is a female activity proves to be an advantage. Since society presupposes that gossip is primarily carried out by spinsters and its contents mainly remain trivial elements, this form of communication is often underestimated. In this regard, scenes in *Murder at the Gallop* show Miss Marple and her assistant Mr. Stringer talking to the local vicar, to a villager at her doorstep, to the shop assistant at the grocer's, and to the waitress in the local pub. Miss Marple refers to gossip as one "means at hand" (*Gallop*) and stresses that no complicated tools are necessary in the process of information gathering. Furthermore, her status as a member of the community Milchester⁹ enables her to access the latest news more easily. By remarking that "[the police] have their methods, we have ours" (*Gallop*), Miss Marple elucidates the obvious investigation differences between the police and herself.

⁹ In Miss Marple novels her hometown is named St Mary Mead.

The author's favoured rural and suburban setting with its distinctive population provides an ideal setting for spreading and gathering gossip. The narrator in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and inhabitant of King Abbot comments on this fact with "[w]e are rich in unmarried ladies and retired military officers. Our hobbies and recreations can be summed up in the one word, 'gossip'." (*Roger Ackroyd* 12) Moreover, the vicar of St Mary Mead remarks on her pastime activity with "[m]y duty as a Vicar [is] [t]ea and scandal at four-thirty" (*Vicarage* 509). In her conversation with St Mary Mead's vicar, Miss Marple emphasizes that a spinster's daily routines and habits combined with the characteristics of a village lay the perfect foundation for gossip and therefore crime solving. Miss Marple remarks to the vicar: " ' ... you underestimate[s] the detective instinct of village life. In St Mary Mead everyone knows your most intimate affairs. There is no detective in England equal to a spinster lady of uncertain age with plenty of time on her hands'." (*Vicarage* 527-528) According to this quotation, Marple's status of being a retired spinster provides her with extensive time to participate in gossip (see Devas 259). Her family status of being unmarried and childless prompts her to seek interpersonal verbal interactions among villagers.

As pointed out in the preceding chapter, authors often rely on stereotypes when portraying gossipers and frequently include elderly people as well as omnipresent characters. This portrayal can also be observed in Christie's novels. The author recurrently creates the atmosphere of the typical lovely British village being invaded by gossiping spinsters indulging in this light, entertaining, and pleasurable mode of conversation. However, as Devas (see 259) points out, Christie clearly separates Miss Marple from the rest of the villager's gossip since she is the one who uses gossip constructively, namely to piece together the puzzles of a murder case. In *The Murder at the Vicarage*, the contrast between the women who use gossip destructively, which can be humiliating as well as misleading, and Marple's handling is especially significant (see Devas 259). In this sense, a former villager returns to St Mary Mead under a fake name since she fears that the knowledge about her true identity will lead to nasty gossip among the villagers. Moreover, the vicar is summoned by three villagers who believe that their discoveries and knowledge connected to the

murder are indispensable. Indeed, their seemingly valuable information is rather based on assumptions and incorrect rumours and consequently in no way beneficial but rather misleading. The vicar is well aware of the harmful potential the village's gossip might have and remarks to Miss Marple that " '... [i]nestimable harm may be done by foolish wagging of tongues in ill-natured gossip' " (*Vicarage* 517). Whereas this statement is applicable to the majority of St Mary Mead's female villagers, Miss Marple is aware of the valuable insights gossip can provide, presumed it is used constructively: " '... I dare say the idle tittle-tattle is very wrong and unkind, but it is so often true, isn't it?' " (*Vicarage* 518).

As pointed out by Shaw and Vanacker, Miss Marple's detection tools include bird-watching, gardening, knitting and cooking. Whereas bird-watching is commonly used to observe her surroundings, her favoured pastime activities of gardening and knitting provide a cunning pretext to engage people in gossip. Moreover, the domestic activity of knitting and the chores of gardening as well as cooking are all situated in the domestic sphere. (see Shaw and Vanacker 47-48)

In order to solve a cold case in *Sleeping Murder*, Miss Marple seeks to accumulate information about the village's former inhabitants and occurrences in an art and needlecraft shop. Her knowledge about knitting and knitting accessories cunningly masks the real purpose of her visit. By discussing knitting patterns and techniques, browsing through children's knitting books and conversing about her intentions to knit an infant's garment she gradually engages the shop assistant in a conversation. Miss Marple wins over the trust of the shop assistant, who "prefer[s] these gentle, gossipy, rambling old ladies" (*Sleeping* 247) to other customers, and eventually manages to elicit the required information.

Miss Marple's garden emerges to be an ideal location for exchanging gossip. The vicar of St Mary Mead is well aware of "the danger point of Miss Marple's garden" (*Vicarage* 522) as he is expected to be drawn into verbal interaction whenever he passes the spinster's house. In *The Murder at the Vicarage*, Miss Marple herself confirms that she uses her garden only as an

excuse to gather information. When she invites Miss Cram into her garden, Miss Marple is well aware of the fact that the villager is not really keen to admire her beautiful plants. However, the invitation “makes a very useful excuse for talk” (*Vicarage* 631) in which the villager “volunteer[s] a lot of information - really a lot of information” (*Vicarage* 631). As Miss Marple seizes every opportunity to waylay passing strollers in her garden, she actively roams the streets and seeks contact to the locals whenever she is out of her home town. In *A Murder is Announced*, a murder case takes her to Chipping Cleghorn and in order to access the local gossip, Miss Marple compliments a villager on her garden. This compliment proves to be the decisive factor for being introduced to the village’s latest scandals and rumours.

Whereas gardening and knitting are recurrent domestic pastime activities undertaken by Miss Marple, readers rarely encounter her cooking. However, in *A Pocket Full of Rye* she uses her culinary experiences to engage the cook of the household, in which Marple’s former domestic help Gladys was murdered, into a conversation. Miss Marple later reveals her tactics to the investigating detective: “ ‘ ... I was in the kitchen, talking to Mrs Crump. I was congratulating her on her pastry ... I always think, you know, it’s better to approach a subject gradually ... a great deal of unnecessary talk. And the way to a cook’s heart, as they say, is through her pastry.’ ” (*Rye* 294) In another murder case, a “recipe for a baked apple pudding ... [and] gingerbread” (*Sleeping* 248) leads to the disclosure of the identity of a chef formerly employed in the victim’s house. By uttering her wish to retrieve this specific recipe, Miss Marple firstly pretends to be acquainted with the servant in question. Moreover, this tactic turns out to be effective as in the course of the conversation the cook’s name as well as her current whereabouts are revealed.

5.1.2.2. *Hercule Poirot and gossip*

Poirot is likewise aware of the “great deal of valuable information ... local gossip” (*Roger Ackroyd* 125) provides. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, the village’s domestic rumours about an extramarital affair emerge to be a decisive factor for Poirot in convicting the culprit and are deliberately utilized by the murderer Alfred Ingelthorp as they assume a specific role in his master plan.

Moreover, rumours initially mask the real identity of Dr. Bauerstein whose camouflage as a spy is divulged in the course of the detection process. Poirot attributes the successful maintenance of Bauerstein's masquerade to the dynamics of gossip and notes " '[s]o long as gossip busied itself in coupling their names together, any other vagaries of the doctor's passed unobserved' " (*Styles* 88). Alfred Inglethorp, initially the prime suspect in his wife's death, was witnessed purchasing strychnine, the substance partly responsible for Emily's death, at the local chemist's. However, when he is called into the witness stand at an inquest, he denies his presence at this location but fails to provide a reasonable alibi which he attributes to an insufficient memory for that specific time period. His insistence on not being the person at the chemist's is confirmed by several eye witnesses' who claim to have seen him in the company of Mrs. Raikes, Alfred's rumoured mistress, close to her home. As rumours about an extramarital affair between those two emerged even prior to his wife's death, the eye witnesses' accounts contribute significantly to the credibility of his alibi. Why he did not admit the truth about his presence for the time in question, he justifies with this explanation: " 'With my poor Emily not yet buried, can you wonder I was anxious that no more lying rumours should be started ... ' " (*Styles* 68) and did not want to start "a scandal" (*Styles* 68) as Poirot follows Alfred's train of thoughts. Nevertheless, as the villages' rumours and gossip were used intentionally as part of Alfred's vicious plan, they are determined to bring him to justice. Poirot recapitulates that "when [he] discovered that it was known all over the village that it was ... [someone else] who was attracted by [Mrs. Raikes]" (*Styles* 115), he started to realize that the rumours about the affair were indeed only rumours with no grain of truth in them and that Mr. Inglethorp had never had a reason to fear "a scandal" (*Styles* 68).

Whereas Poirot recurrently uses gossip passively since listening to it supplies him with valuable information about victims as well as suspects, in *Peril at End House* he employs gossip actively by deliberately starting rumours. As already noted, one characteristic of gossip is that its contents spread swiftly from person to person. Since gossip is primarily passed on orally, the original subject matter might be altered significantly. The greater the number of people involved and the more time elapses, the greater the prospects that further rumours, interpretations, and opinions are added. The validity of the initial

message is therefore further diminished. In *Peril at End House*, Poirot makes use of this dynamic by deliberately spreading false information. Hastings reflects that “Poirot and Poirot alone was responsible for the spreading abroad of these lying reports” (*End House* 234). In order to shed light on the mysterious attempts on Miss Buckley’s life, her will is assumed to be a significant piece of evidence. However, as this will cannot be retrieved, Poirot disseminates the lie that Miss Nick Buckley has finally passed away. As this rumour is passed on from party to party, it eventually reaches the people responsible for the disappearance of the will, enabling Poirot to follow the emerging clue.

5.2. Intuition

Intuition is another one of Miss Marple’s and Hercule Poirot’s main detection aids. Before analysing the detectives’ understanding as well as their appreciation of this skill, some background knowledge about this phenomenon will be presented.

5.2.1. *Stereotype or empirical fact? A theoretical framework*

The following theoretical framework on intuition provides a classification as well as a definition of the phenomenon. Following this, various studies should clarify whether the assumption that women are more intuitive than men is a stereotype or an empirical fact. The last part of this chapter focuses on society’s perception of feminine intuition.

Intuition is a label which is likely to be attached to the female gender. Myers points out that western societies regard intuition and rational thinking as contrastive faculties, linking the first one to females and the latter one to males (see 48). The Oxford Reference Online (see intuition *noun*) considers the Latin word *intueri* to be the origin of intuition and reasoning the antonym. Moreover, it defines intuition as “a thing that one knows or considers likely from instinctive feeling rather than conscious reasoning” (intuition *noun*). The psychologist

Seymour Epstein (referred to in Myers 29-30) classifies intuition as an instance of “experimental knowing” (qtd. in Myers 29) which he differentiates from “rational knowing” (qtd. in Myers 29). “Experimental knowing” (qtd. in Myers 29) pertains to the knowledge which is based on previous experiences, emotional aspects, and non-verbal clues. On the contrary, “rational knowledge” (qtd. in Myers 29) stresses the logical aspect as well as differentiation, which refrains from generalization. (referred to in Myers 29) Similarly, Myers stresses that emotional and social aspects are decisive in being intuitive, as he regards social and emotional human beings as intelligent people. They are the ones who expose appropriate behaviour in social interactions based on their intuition, and know how to decode emotions in other people as well as how to express their own. (see Myers 127)

In clarifying whether the assumption that women are more intuitive as their male counterparts is a stereotype or if it is indeed based on empirical facts, Myers firstly points to Judith Hall, who analysed the results of 125 studies measuring the ability of decoding emotions. One study included the assignment to read facial expressions. Based on non-verbal stimulus material, the results allowed conclusions about the men’s and women’s sensitivity to non-verbal signals. Examples featured a short video clip in which participants had to detect whether the facial expression of a woman hinted to a situation in which she actively criticizes her counterpart or whether the person is debating over her impending divorce. Moreover, in another task, test subjects had to determine the dominant person in a photo. An additional study required participants to decide whether the facial expressions of a couple hinted to them being real-life lovers or fake ones. On the whole, the results indicated that women were far more successful in discerning facial expressions and making correct deductions about a person’s intentions and emotions. (see Myers 48-50) Secondly, Myers claims that women are far more empathic than men. His assertion is based on surveys which exposed that the female gender is likely to adapt their emotions, negative or positive, to those of their counterparts. This empathy leads to a faster and more accurate perception of facial expressions as well as the emotional state of others and consequently impacts the ability of intuition. (see Myers 48)

Riggio attributes the causes for the women's exceedingly good intuition skills to their traditionally low position in society. This social rank offered women more opportunities to observe those in influential positions and led to a certain expertise in decoding non-verbal signals. (see Riggio) Genetic dispositions as well as cultural gender roles are regarded by Riggio and Meyers as another possible source. As the testosterone endowed men were assigned to hunting in order to sustain their families' survival, women developed more elaborate skills in interpreting their children's as well as their confidant's demands. (see Myers 48)

Compared to the studies described in the previous paragraphs, which revealed that the female gender is clearly more successful in decoding emotions, as well as exposing and observing empathy, a different study conducted by William Ickes showed that females do not excel at empathic ability. While participants in the first test situation were not aware that this ability was being measured, the participants in the second test situation were advised of the aims of the study, namely to measure empathic ability. In the second test the results changed significantly since women outshone men, a fact which psychologists attribute to an increased motivation. Therefore, in this case the prevailing stereotype of women's intuition had a positive impact on their behaviour as they strived to live up to society's expectations. (see Ickes)

Separation and connection, two labels which are used by Rowland when describing the detection processes in the Holmes and Golden Age era, surface in the context of intuition. Moreover, taking the mentioned women's traditionally low place in society, their genetic disposition, and their assigned roles in culture into account, associations of subordination, tranquillity, and tenderness instantly come to mind. Women had to be silent since society prohibited or limited them to verbalize thoughts and in order to perceive other people's needs, softness is known to be a prerequisite. In this sense, the traditional female's quietness goes hand in hand with what Penny Peirce regards as a precondition for intuition: "Activating intuition always starts with a shift into softness and silence" (Peirce, qtd. in Myers 47).

As various studies on empathetic ability and decoding emotions suggest, there is no homogenous opinion on whether women's superior sense of intuition is a stereotype or an empirical fact. However, when comparing the labels of intuitive women with gossiping women, it is obvious that the connotation of the first is a more neutral one, whereas a stigma is attached to the latter one. That might account for the study's results referred to by Ickes. This exposed that women excelled over men on empathic ability when they were advised of the experiment's purpose. In this case, society's label and expectation functioned as a positive force since it significantly contributed to additional motivation. By Christie's portrayal of gossiping and intuitive women, the author substantiates the impression that the term gossip has negative connotations. Her fictional gossiping characters receive far more ridicule, scorn, and disrespect than the intuitive characters.

5.2.2. *Intuition as a method of detection*

As outlined in the preceding chapter, Epstein labels intuition as an instance of "experimental knowledge" (qtd. in Myers 31), which relies predominately on past experiences. Epstein's approach is almost indistinguishable from Miss Marple's understanding of intuition. The sleuth remarks that " '... [i]ntuition ... is a very sound way of arriving at the truth. ... Intuition is like reading a word without having to spell it out. A child can't do that because it has had so little experience. But a grown-up person knows the word because they've seen it often before...'. " (*Vicarage* 568) Miss Marple's life-long experience and study of human nature, which she repeatedly considers as one of her favoured past-time activities, enables her to assign people to specific groups in the same way that species of birds and flowers are categorized. If a situation or person reminds the spinster sleuth of something or someone she encountered in the past, she instantly draws parallels and uses former experiences as a basis for new deductions. Although she is occasionally mistaken, as she willingly admits herself, the mistakes are less likely to occur as her progressing age endows her with advanced practical knowledge.

According to Myers' definition, which equates intuitive people with social intelligence, Miss Marple is an intuitive person. In this regard, Miss Marple is

endowed with the capability to decode facial expressions and knows which behaviour is appropriate and expected in certain interpersonal encounters. This valuable knowledge combined with her shrewd observation skills are the decisive elements in identifying the culprits in *The Murder at the Vicarage*. In order to save Mrs Anne Protheroe's marriage to her husband, her lover Lawrence Redding and herself decide to end their extramarital affair. On their way to Redding's studio, where the lovers plan to bid farewell to each other, they pass Miss Marple's garden. The culprits, Anne and Lawrence, are well aware of Marple's prying eyes but do not anticipate the spinster paying special attention to their facial expressions after the farewell. As sad and distressed faces are to be expected when two lovers have to end their relationship, Miss Marple comes to the conclusion that their publicly announced farewell was never their real intention since "[t]hey simply *dare* not appear upset in any way" (*Vicarage* 685).

Miss Marple's "unofficial" (Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 93) methods are in stark contrast to the official ways employed by the police. In *Murder Ahoy* and *Murder at the Gallop* the police are initially convinced that the deaths of the male trustee Cecil Ffolly-Hardwicke and Mr. Enderby were due to natural causes, an assumption which is additionally reinforced by the male physician's diagnosis. However, in both cases, Miss Marple relates her doubts concerning the diagnosis to the police. In *Murder Ahoy* she draws attention to her observation that the victim's snuff vanished from his snuffbox after his death. She suspects a cunning motive behind this disposal. Although her theory is rejected and derided by the police, she pursues her suspicions and notes that "[p]olicemen ... are only convinced by proven fact" (*Ahoy*). Based on her gut feeling, she continues to investigate the case since she is convinced that "[t]here's something wrong there" (*Ahoy*) as she can "feel it in [her] bones" (*Ahoy*).

In *They Do It With Mirrors*, Miss Marple follows the request of her friend Mrs Van Rydock, who expresses her concern about their mutual friend Carrie Louise. Mrs Van Rydock, whose worries are not based on facts but on a gut feeling initially discerned during her stay in Carrie Louise's home, remarks that "[she] felt all along that there was something wrong" (*Mirrors* 516). It could be sensed "[i]n the atmosphere – in the house" (*Mirrors* 516). Upon Miss Marple's

arrival at Carrie Louise's property Stonygates, the sleuth is instantly stunned by the "vast edifice of Victorian gothic" (*Mirrors* 525), which is also present on the interior. Miss Marple notices the "Gothic gloom of the library" (*Mirrors* 602) immediately. The household's predominant fear that someone is attempting to take the landlady's life is reinforced by Carrie Louise's husband Lewis, who constantly emphasizes that "[his] wife [is] being slowly and cold-bloodedly poisoned" (*Mirrors* 575). However, as Rowland (see *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 124) points out, Carrie Louise's intuition about her family's groundless solicitude is in stark contrast to her husband's persistence on protection. It is Miss Marple's deliberate decision to have faith in her friend's intuition and dismiss the masculine worries. Indeed, the trust in feminine intuition puts the detective on the right track and leads her to the disclosure that Carrie Louise's life was never at risk. Miss Marple remarks to Carrie Louise: " '... [I]t was reality you were in touch with, and not the illusion. You are never deceived by illusion like most of us are. When I suddenly realized that, I saw that I must go by what *you* thought and felt ...' " (*Mirrors* 648) Rowland analyses why Gothic and intuition are linked in this context. She ascribes the Gothic a modern aspect since it represents what used to be dismissed and suppressed by society. By ignoring "the social privileging of reason, consciousness, masculinity, materialism, and the law" (Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 110), the Gothic alters society's traditional course towards a greater appreciation of attributes associated with the female sphere. In this sense, Miss Marple arrives in Carrie Louise's Gothic home and her home is metaphorical for Carrie Louise's intuition. By trusting her friend's intuition, Miss Marple identifies Carrie Louise's husband, the alleged protector and advocator of reason, as the culprit. His removal from the Gothic house does not only entail a safe continuance of domesticity but is also a reminder to rely more on intuition. (see Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 110)

In Hercule Poirot novels, the association between intuition and its traditional ascription to the female gender is more distinct than in Miss Marple novels. The following quote by Hercule Poirot draws attention to this conventional link. Moreover, Poirot's claim that he himself possesses intuitive skills justifies the

recurrent label “feminized” (Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 27) once more.

‘Les femmes’ ... ‘They are marvellous! They invent haphazard - and by miracle they are right ... Women observe subconsciously a thousand little details, without knowing that they are doing so. Their subconscious mind adds these little things together - and they call the result intuition. Me, I am very skilled in psychology. I know these things.’ (*Roger Ackroyd* 126)

As noted by Rowland (see *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 27) in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, the distinction between logical reasoning and intuition is clearly highlighted. In the introductory chapter, Dr Sheppard and his sister Carolyn debate over the causes and motives of Mrs Ferrars’ death, which Rowland interprets as a competition between the “masculine science and feminine gossipy intuition” (*From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 27). As Dr Sheppard attributes Mrs Ferrars’ death to an accidental overdose of the prescribed sleeping medication veronal, his sister hypothesizes based on her observation as well as on village gossip about a deliberate overdose. Carolyn’s presumption that remorse might have been a potential motive for her suicide is justified by local villagers’ accounts of Mrs Ferras agonized facial expressions in the months prior to her death. Dr Sheppard describes his sister’s suppositions as “[r]ushing along without rhyme or reason” (*Roger Ackroyd* 9), not being “very logical” (*Roger Ackroyd* 10) and “arriv[ing] at the truth simply by a kind of inspired guesswork” (*Roger Ackroyd* 10-11), all stereotypical labels of intuition. As soon as Poirot surfaces, he acknowledges and praises Carolyn’s intuition and detection skills and advocates her feminine approach to crime solving. Carolyn proudly recites Poirot’s verbalized appreciation: “ ‘... He said I had the makings of a born detective in me - and a wonderful psychological insight into human nature’ ” (*Roger Ackroyd* 113). Poirot’s emphasis on the importance of comprehending human nature reminds the reader of Miss Marple’s understanding of intuition, which is derived from her life-long experience and study of mankind. In this sense, both detectives attribute their advanced intuition skills to their knowledge about psychology.

5.3. Interrogation: “[Cooking] the suspects”¹⁰

As already pointed out, Rowland uses the phrase “cook[ing] the suspects” (*From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 120) when illustrating the distinctive verbal interaction between the Golden Age detectives and the suspects. The “circular mode” (Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 120) of the detective’s interrogation methods applies to Poirot more so than to Miss Marple. Owing to Poirot’s respectable public reputation as a former member of the Belgian police force, the British police grant him additional privileges. These prerogatives enable him to participate in the official investigation more actively as he is firstly authorized to be present and secondly occasionally even permitted to conduct it. “[Cook]” (Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 120) Hercule Poirot reflects on his interrogation tactic with “ ‘ ... to investigate a crime it only necessary to let the guilty party or parties *talk* – always, in the end, they tell you what you want to know!’ ” (*Appointment* 256-257). Poirot’s intention to elicit relevant information from the suspects which they intended to be kept hidden, is referred to in psychoanalysis as slips of the tongue (see Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 93). The methods of a psychoanalyst and Poirot bear significant resemblances as both use the “talking cure” (Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 93) or “free association” (Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 93) as their main tools to access significant details from the client’s or suspect’s unconsciousness. These details emerge unintentionally in the form of slips of the tongue, from which further deductions are possible. Gray refers to the phenomenon of slips of the tongue, which will be elaborated on in the context of Freud’s theory in chapter 7.1.1., as a form the uncanny can take, namely revealing something familiar.

In *Appointment with Death*, a slip of the tongue reveals the innocence of the character Carolyn and thus further limits the circle of prime suspects. Since Poirot overheard the conversation between her and her brother, divulging their desire to murder their tyrannical mother, the Belgian detective requests Carolyn to later clarify that they never seriously considered putting their plan into action. As “[s]he does not swear that *they* are not guilty [but] ... swears [only] for

¹⁰ Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 120

herself, not her brother" (*Appointment* 264), Carolyn involuntarily reveals that she is certain of her own innocence but not of the innocence of her brother whom she had attempted to protect all along. Owing to Poirot's "special attention to the pronoun" (*Appointment* 264), he can exclude Carolyn but not her brother from the circle of suspects. Similarly, Mrs Boynton's murderer, Lady Westholme, provides an indication of her untruthfulness with her slip of the tongue. As the victim is found dead in front of her tent in a Bedouin camp, Poirot patiently listens to all of the eye-witness accounts in order to detect which person might have been close to the victim before her passing. Lady Westholme admits to having spotted a person close to the victim's tent. She assumes that this person was most likely a Bedouin servant with "a pair of very torn and patched breeches ... [with] his puttees ... wound most untidily" (*Appointment* 173). However, despite the great distance between her and the servant, Lady Westholme is not able to identify him. Combining her eye witness accounts with the fact that Lady Westholme was "two hundred yards" (*Appointment* 293) away from the victim's tent, Poirot concludes that the woman involuntarily revealed too much detailed information, namely details about the servant's attire which could not have been conceivably spotted from that great distance.

Apart from the exposed similarities between Poirot's interrogation tactics and a psychoanalyst's method, Rowland's expression "cook[ing] the suspects" (*From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 120) implies additional references to domesticity and feminine detection methods. Firstly, by "[Poirot's] theory ... that criminology is the easiest science in the world ... [since] [o]ne has only to let the criminal talk - sooner or later he will tell you everything" (*Appointment* 217), he attaches a trivial and ordinary aspect to the scientific field of criminology. Secondly, Rowland's expression "cook[ing] the suspects" (*From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 120) suggests a metaphorical meaning as well as a comparison with the actual domestic activity of cooking. As cooking describes the process of "gathering bits and scraps; rearranging and transforming them to allow the healthy continuance of life" (Batz Cooperman 57), the proceedings and objective of "cook[ing] the suspects" (Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 120) display resemblances. By eliciting and collecting pieces of information from the suspect's unconsciousness, Poirot interconnects these, for

some other detectives seemingly irrelevant and minutiae, to a meaningful network. In later stages this network is decisive for the conviction and removal of the culprit and thus enables a safe existence for the people affected by the crime. Moreover, the interrogation and the process of cooking are both processes which describe a transformation. In the context of his “culinary triangle” (qtd. in Batz Cooperman 57), Claude Lévi-Strauss notes the transformation from raw food to its cooked state (referred to in Batz Cooperman 57-58). As some raw food cannot be eaten and digested by humans, unconscious material is likewise unusable if it remains in the subconscious. However, the process of cooking transforms raw food so that it can be digested. Similarly, Poirot’s distinctive form of interrogation utilizes unconscious material, thus making it useable for further deductions. In addition to the trivial aspect and the metaphorical meaning the term “cook[ing] the suspects” (Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 120) suggests, the manner in which Poirot interrogates the suspects is likewise characterized by attributes associated with the female sphere. He attempts to elicit valuable information by exposing an empathetic attitude towards the suspects and conveys the impression that he can be trusted. This relational approach is obvious in Poirot’s expressions such as “ ‘ ... [b]e of good courage, and place your faith in Hercule Poirot’ ” (Roger Ackroyd 207) and his offer “ ‘ ... [i]f you should need a father confessor, madame’ ... ‘remember, Papa Poirot is always at your service’ ” (Styles 95). The demanding and aggressive interrogation mode the police frequently exert contradicts Poirot’s polite sympathetic language. When requesting information the police are unlikely to use expressions such as “ ‘it is Papa Poirot who asks you this. The old Papa Poirot who has much knowledge and much experience ...’ ” (Roger Ackroyd 121)

5.4. Domestic knowledge and observation of domestic details

Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot rely on knowledge derived from the domestic sphere, including accurate observation as well as consideration of domestic details, and occasionally ensure incriminating evidence by means of domestic evidence. Moreover, both are well aware of certain female dressing habits and trace inconsistencies and deviant female behaviour back to their causes.

In *A Pocket Full of Rye*, the police are confronted with the poisoning of Rex Fortesque, whose death was triggered by a deadly dose of taxine, a poison likely to be extracted from the berries of a Yew tree located in the victim's garden. As the chief detective is still in the dark about how this poison was fabricated and how the murderer disposed the supporting evidence inconspicuously, he relies on Miss Marple's domestic experience. He believes that "[Miss Marple is] the sort of old pussy who would make homemade liqueurs, cordials and herb teas herself. She would know methods of making and methods of disposal." (*Rye* 230) Moreover, since the deadly poison potassium cyanide is detected in a tea cup belonging to Rex's wife Adele Fortesque, Miss Marple confirms the detective's assumption that she is knowledgeable about domestic uses of this substance. Miss Marple warns about the deadly substance potassium cyanide, which she utilizes for the domestic purpose of "[taking] wasps' nests" (*Rye* 231). Furthermore, her observation of domestic trivialities as well as her knowledge about domestic routines leads to the determination of the time of death and crime scene. As the body of housemaid Gladys is later discovered under the clothes line in the garden, much later than the bodies of her employers are found, the detectives consequently assume that she was strangled at that place around the same time. However, Miss Marple is well aware that the duty of taking clothes down is usually not carried out in the evening and supposed she did take them down at that time of the day, the low temperatures would require a coat, a piece of clothing which was not detected on the corpse. This input takes the investigation in another direction and results in the conclusion that the real purpose of leaving the house was not Gladys' domestic work but that someone or something lured her outside. This person must have transported the dead body to the washing line, creating the impression that this was the place where the crime occurred. Moreover, not wearing a coat suggests that the crime occurred earlier in the day.

A similar pattern emerges in *Murder Most Foul*, in which Miss Marple's observation of domestic trivialities lead to the conclusion that the murdered victim walked right into a deadly trap set for her. Moreover, her expertise with kitchen appliances leads to the discovery of how the lethal poison was administered and her knowledge about almonds are decisive in determining the

deadly poison. When the corpse of Dorothy is discovered, Miss Marple puzzles over a hot iron found close to the victim on an ironing board. Based on the hot iron and her recollection of “washing on the line” (*Foul*) in the victim’s room, Miss Marple is able to reconstruct the sequences from the night of the tragedy. She assumes that Dorothy must have done her ironing that evening but unfortunately forgot to turn the iron off. Unfortunately, with this absent-mindedness, Dorothy signed her own death warrant. As Dorothy realized her mistake in the middle of the night, she went straight downstairs to the kitchen in order to turn the iron off, only to be poisoned with the cyanide-filled air in the room. This reconstruction of events helps Miss Marple to make sense of a peculiar note she discovered earlier on the doorstep in front of her room. The note saying “[t]he old bat may be on to us, search her room and meet me in the kitchen at one a.m.” (*Foul*) was a trap to lure her into the kitchen. When Miss Marple approaches the kitchen, almost walking right into the trap, she is suddenly alerted by the scent of “bitter almonds” (*Foul*) and concludes that “cyanide” (*Foul*) must be in the air. Her conclusion might originate from her knowledge about the substance cyanide, which is a natural ingredient in many fruits. Although not referring to Christie, Lutz points out that detectives in murder novels frequently determine the lethal murder weapon cyanide by the smell of bitter almonds. This determination is derived from their knowledge that cyanide exists in its natural form in foods such as bitter almonds, apples, peaches, apricots and barley. Furthermore, based on Miss Marple’s understanding of the functions of a gas stove and success in unearthing the depiction of a similar weapon in the play “Out of the Stew Pot” (*Foul*), she uncovers how the poisonous cyanide was administered. That way she provides crucial evidence relating to how the murderer turned a gas stove into a deadly weapon. By demonstrating the functions of the kitchen appliance to the puzzled detective, she reconstructs the progression of the murder:

The murder set the dials so that the gas ... came on at 12:55 precisely ... under this saucepan that contained ... a small wax cup of acid ... and a pellet of sodium cyanide. The wax melted, the acid flowed over the pellet. Result: sudden release of cyanide gas. Lethal And at 1:00 precisely ... the gas turned itself off. ... Leaving nothing but an innocent saucepan on the hob. (*Foul*)

In *Murder Ahoy* Miss Marple's accurate knowledge about the parts of a mousetrap are decisive for explaining how the poisonous curare was injected into the victim's body: "The wheal across the back of her hand: consistent. The puncture: a sharp point attached to the snapper." (*Ahoy*) Although no domestic knowledge is required when analysing the remaining ingredients of the victim's snuff in the film *Murder Ahoy*, the requisites in the scene are partly domestic. In order to determine whether there are any toxic substances in the victim's snuff, Miss Marple sets up the "Slogums advanced chemistry set for girls" (*Ahoy*) in her kitchen. The kitchen accessories Miss Marple uses in combination with the chemistry set's equipment convey an extremely domestic impression in this scene. In her domestic home laboratory she uses a small adorned milk jug to pour some liquid into a container, which is held over a candle. Another little milk jug is used as a container for test tubes. Two clothes pegs are utilized, whereas one is used to attach the test tube and one is clipped onto the test tube in order to avoid holding it.

As Miss Marple's domestic knowledge and precise observation proves to be beneficial for gaining further insights into weapons, time of death, and murder scenes, Hercule Poirot's proficiency about laundry contributes to the final solution in several cases. In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* his knowledge about laundry rituals leads to the conclusion about the suspects' presence at a specific location¹¹. As he and his helper examine the floor of a summer-house, located on the premises of the murdered victim, Poirot discovers a piece of "stiff white cambric" (*Roger Ackroyd* 86). His helper immediately suggests that this piece of fabric might be a torn part of a handkerchief. Based on the circumstance that Roger Ackroyd resided in an affluent household prior to his death and Poirot's knowledge that "a good laundry does not starch a handkerchief" (*Roger Ackroyd* 86), the detective can immediately exclude the handkerchief as the possible origin of the discovered piece of cambric. Poirot later reveals that this piece of fabric was likely to be part of a maid's apron and is thus able to pinpoint the name of a parlour maid, who had incidentally failed to provide a reasonable alibi all along.

In *Death on the Nile*, Poirot's domestic expertise that "[red] ink easily washes out of linen, leaving a pale pink stain" (*Nile*) and the accurate

¹¹ This is also pointed out by Knight (see *Crime Fiction 1800-2000* 91)

observation of the victim's remaining toiletries in the bathroom turn out to be the crucial elements in reconstructing the proceedings on the night of the murder. When Hercule Poirot searches the crime scene, he detects two bottles of coloured nail polish in the victim's bathroom. What arouses his attention immediately is the observation that the remaining "bright red" (*Nile*) drops of nail polish do not comply with the colour rose, which is indicated on the label. When he opens the bottle of nail polish, his nose detects the unusual smell of vinegar. As soon as a stained linen handkerchief and a pistol wrapped up in a stole are retrieved from the bottom of the Nile, Poirot is finally able to identify the murderer as Simon Doyle, the newlywed husband of the victim Linnet Doyle. Moreover, Poirot is capable of explaining how Simon and Jacqueline, his partner in crime, deceived their fellow passengers on the Nile river cruise. The events preceding the discovery of the victim's body include a fierce argument between the apparent ex-lovers Jacqueline and Simon, the latter being on his honeymoon with his newlywed wife Linnet. The dispute ends with Jacqueline accidentally shooting Simon in his leg, an incident witnessed by two fellow passengers. Since a physician confirms that Simon could not have possibly moved with his wounded leg, he is initially excluded from the list of prime suspects. However, as Poirot is well aware that "ink easily washes out of linen" (*Nile*), he concludes that the soaked linen handkerchief retrieved from the bottom of the Nile was not stained by blood as initially assumed but stained by red ink. The red ink was added to Linnet's bottle of nail polish before the murder and explains the odd odour of vinegar. By hiding the bottle of nail polish behind the linen handkerchief, Simon pretends to staunch the blood flooding out of his wound. When the emotionally upset Jacqueline is accompanied by two witnesses to her cabin, Simon is unattended and hurries to his wife in order to shoot her in the head in cold blood. He returns the bottle of nail polish to the bathroom, hastens back, shoots himself in the leg and deadens the pistol noise with the stole. Afterwards, he throws the incriminating evidence, the pistol, the stole, and the stained handkerchief into the Nile.

Moreover, based on Poirot's extensive knowledge concerning stain removal, the detective is able to determine the approximate time when "candle grease" (*Styles* 27) stained the floor. When investigating material clues in the late Mrs. Inglethorp's bedroom, Poirot's supposition that "a good housemaid

would have at once removed [the large splash of candle grease] with blotting-paper and a hot iron" (*Styles* 27) guides him to the conclusion that the floor was likely to have been stained quite recently, namely on the night of the murder. As the victim herself was accustomed to "[having] no candlesticks in [her] room" (*Styles* 28), the stain itself and the colour of the "candle grease" (*Styles* 27) provide further insights into the identity of the person present in the victim's bedroom shortly before her passing.

Similarly, an accurate observation of domestic habits proves to be beneficial when constructing the last hours of Roger Ackroyd's life. The police and Hercule Poirot discover the body of Roger Ackroyd in his study with the door bolted and the windows opened. These facts bring about speculations about the victim's motive for opening the window. The motives are finally narrowed down to two possibilities: either the victim wanted to air the room since it got too hot or he deliberately opened the window in order to let someone else in. As the police remain in the dark about these puzzling questions, it is Poirot's consideration of the fire place that leads to the correct answer. Based on the butler's statement that the fire in the hearth was smouldering very low, almost extinguished, and Poirot's awareness of the fact that the temperatures during the night were rather low, the variant of airing the study can be excluded. Therefore, the victim opened the window to admit someone to enter, most likely a person he trusted.

Similarly, in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, the identity of the person who destroyed the will is revealed by Poirot's observation of a "bedroom fire in midsummer" (114). The person who gave orders to light a fire in the bedroom is disclosed to be the same person who destroyed the will. As a fire on a day with temperatures of "80 degrees in the shade" (*Styles* 109) is quite unusual, and the post-war government's demand for thriftiness prohibited waste paper to be disposed of, the reason for lighting a fire could only have been the intention of destroying a piece of paper.

As domestic knowledge as well as an accurate observation of domestic minutiae helps Poirot to deduce important facts, it is his insistence on cleanliness in his domestic surroundings that contributes to the solution in several murder cases. "Method, order, and the little grey cells" (*Roger Ackroyd* 81), as well as organizing his ideas and assigning them to their "appointed

place” (*Roger Ackroyd* 108) are essential methods. These are also reflected in Poirot’s domestic habits, which are crucial for retrieving incriminating evidence. In this sense, in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, Poirot’s desire to straighten disarranged objects leads him to the discovery of a missing letter. Hastings’ observation that his friend’s hand was shaking as he was straightening the adornments on the mantelpiece¹², later provide a new clue for the Belgian detective. Owing to Hastings’ coincidental remark, Poirot is reminded that he had already arranged the ornaments, including a vase, that morning and deduces that the reason for repeating this action is likely to have one cause. He concludes that “ ‘... if [the ornaments on the mantel-piece] were already straightened, there would be no need to straighten them again, unless, in the meantime, some one else had touched them’ ” (*Styles* 117). As the content of the letter presented incriminating evidence for the murderer, the culprit had to dispose this document urgently. Ripping the letter apart and depositing the shreds into a nearby closed container, namely a vase, was the only reasonable alternative the murderer had at that moment in time. It was unfortunate for the murderer that his haste led to the disarrangement of the objects on the mantelpiece and that the detective Hercule Poirot always noticed that kind of untidiness.

Moreover, Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple collect and ensure material evidence from domestic activities. In *Peril at End House* Poirot draws material evidence from cooking and remarks on this proceedings with “ ‘ ... I am glad that [the suspect] was doing the cooking when we arrived. He left an excellent impression of a greasy thumb and first finger on a corner of the newspaper that covered the kitchen table. ... We will send it to our good friend Inspector Japp of Scotland Yard’ ”. (*End House* 187)

In *Murder at the Gallop*, Miss Marple retrieves a piece of incriminating evidence from the crime scene and transforms it into a useful tool by baking it, which enables conclusions about the identity of the person visiting the deceased shortly before his death. Miss Marple “[cooks] the piece of mud [she] found [at the crime scene] and then [fills] the hole with plaster” (*Gallop*). As mud would probably crumble after some time she preserves the piece of

¹²This is also pointed out by Makinen (see “Agatha Christie” 420).

incriminating evidence “in plaster forever” (*Gallop*) by firstly putting it in a pastry tin filled with dough, then filling the imprint with plaster and finally baking it. Based on the imprint she is able to recognize a stirrup iron from a riding boot, which immediately suggests that the person at the crime scene was an equestrian.

Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot are well aware of female rituals and habits concerning attire and therefore notice any slight inconsistencies.

In this regard, Miss Marple’s attention is immediately aroused as she spots the fellow villager Grace Lambie at the weekly church service “wearing her Sunday hat the wrong way round” (*Mirrors* 518)¹³. Since Miss Marple is accustomed to Grace’s neat appearance, this unusual manner of dressing strikes Miss Marple as odd. Further investigations reveal that shortly before the church service a domestic crisis between Grace and her furious father had erupted. During the fiery argument the father threw a “marble paperweight” (*Mirrors* 518) at Grace but fortunately hit the mirror instead. Grace’s inattentiveness concerning her attire can be accounted for by the emotional distress experienced during this incident.

Since Miss Marple’s prying eyes are notorious among the villagers in St Mary Mead, the murderer Anne Protheroe in *The Murder at the Vicarage* attempts to take advantage of these observation skills. On Mrs Protheroe’s way to the vicarage, where her husband’s dead body will later be discovered, she passes Miss Marple’s garden and engages the old lady in conversation. The real purpose of this conversation, however, is to exonerate the murderer Mrs Protheroe. In relying on Miss Marple’s accurate observation, she hopes that the old lady would notice that she was not carrying a bag and thus had no opportunity to hide a murder weapon. Nevertheless, it is Miss Marple’s knowledge about women’s dressing rituals that arouses the old spinster’s attention. By noticing that “ ‘ Mrs Protheroe took no handbag with her [which is] [r]eally a *most* unusual thing for a woman to do’ ” (*Vicarage* 685), Miss Marple begins to see through Mrs Protheroe.

¹³ This is also pointed out by Makinen (see “Agatha Christie” 423)

Poirot also pays special attention to female attire as well as female beauty articles and thus detects any slight inconsistencies. In *Evil Under the Sun*, Poirot notices that the “bizarre nature of [Christine’s] beach apparel”, namely the selection of a piece of clothing which “[covers] her from wrist to neck”, is a rather peculiar selection for a hot day on the beach. Based on this observation, Poirot later reveals that the murderer Christine had selected this attire as she intended to hide her unusually tanned body. Moreover, a detailed investigation of the victim’s toiletries, namely Arlena’s perfume bottle, leads to an accurate reconstruction of the murder. The smell of the victim’s fragrance instantly reminds Poirot of the place where he had noticed the scent before. It was in a grotto, close to the location where the dead body of Arlena was discovered. This association eventually leads Poirot to the conclusion that the victim must have been hiding there before she was strangled.

In *Peril at End House*, a black dress and Poirot’s assumption that “[a] girl would not buy mourning before she knew her lover was dead” (282) are decisive elements for solving the murder of Maggie Buckley. Poirot and his partner Hastings investigate a series of peculiar occurrences at End House which seem to threaten the life of its resident Miss Nick Buckley. In order to protect Nick, Poirot is assisted by Nick’s cousin Maggie, who agrees to stay at End House until the person behind the murderous attempts on Nick’s life is caught. However, at a dinner party tragedy strikes and Maggie is found shot wearing a “black evening dress” (*End House* 92) and “a scarlet Chinese shawl” (*End House* 100). These circumstances immediately raise the suspicion that the murderer mistook Maggie for Nick since both were dressed in black dresses and the shawl Maggie was wearing was Nick’s. As Poirot observed earlier that Nick never wore black attire before the tragedy, he wonders why she selected exactly this coloured garment for an entertaining fun evening. Poirot is well aware that “ ‘ ... [i]f a woman thinks she does not look well in a colour, she refuses to wear it ’ ” (132) and expresses his disapproval towards Hastings’ “ ‘ ... very little appreciation of feminine psychology ... ’ ” (*End House* 132) as he cannot relate to the female mind. Nick later admits that she purchased the dress to mourn the death of her fiancé Michael Seaton. However, Poirot reveals that Nick could not have bought the dress for this purpose as she had received the

notification of her fiancé's passing after her purchase. In the course of the detection process, Poirot discloses that acquiring and wearing the black dress on the evening of the dinner party had only one reason. Maggie and Nick, Maggie's murderer, had to be dressed alike as Nick wanted to sustain the impression that her life was still endangered and that the murder of her cousin had been a mistake. Poirot eventually reveals that Nick's life was never periled and that her masquerade of being Michael's fiancée would make her the legal heiress of his fortune, a fortune which was destined for Michael's real fiancée Maggie.

6. Gendered spaces

The succeeding historical outlook on the Victorian era provides a good starting point for investigating and understanding domesticity. However, since the concept of domesticity is still evolving up to this day and is not yet homogenous in all parts of the world, and never will be, this chapter aims to focus on the historical knowledge relevant for analysing Christie's works, namely the ideal location for domesticity as well as gendered domains within the private sphere. As it will be pointed out in this chapter, the traditional and ideal role of a woman is clearly within her home. However, as Priestman also emphasizes, women confined or restricted to the domestic sphere seldomly play a role in Christie's work (see 167). Nevertheless, linking the masculine sphere with the public and the city and the feminine with the private and the countryside will be necessary information for analysing settings and crime scenes. Furthermore, the gendered rooms within a house give us an insight into gendered items, activities likely to be carried out in this space as well as knowledge and skills needed there. In this sense, it is conspicuous that the male domains such as the office, the study, and the library are places where intellectual ability is performed and required most. This discovery coincides with the claim that masculinity is associated with "rationality and authority" (Devas 257).

6.1. The Victorian era: The emergence of public and private spheres

Batz Cooperman attributes the birth of domesticity to the end of a nomadic lifestyle, which was given up in favour of a more settled one. Once the former nomads became accustomed to having a steady place to live and to work, they were also presented with the opportunity to accumulate goods. The new lifestyle brought about new responsibilities for both men and women. As men house-trained the ox and the plough came into use, the female duties shifted to the newly established household and family. While nomadic hunting restricted women from having several babies in a short time, as carrying an infant would impose an immense burden, the convenience of the new lifestyle allowed for swifter reproduction. Other female activities included cooking, making pottery and needlework or weaving. New tools were not only invented for agrarian work, also more advanced household appliances facilitated the women's work. In this regard, Elizabeth Wayland Barber (referred to in Batz Cooperman 20) points out that the invention of a bigger loom enabled women to produce more high quality clothes in larger sizes. Besides these production benefits, women's social interaction among each other increased as they were able to bring out smaller crafts into communal places. (see Batz Cooperman 20)

Another milestone in the history of domesticity, which brought about a set of changes in Great Britain, can be pinpointed to the 19th century. Queen Victoria's reign, from 1837 to 1901, assigned the middle-class a respected and central role in society and promoted family-orientated values. Queen Victoria and her husband Prince Albert were parents to four sons and five daughters themselves and conveyed the pleasures of an ideal family life perfectly to their subordinates. (see Victoria, Queen) The Industrial Revolution, from 1790 to 1860, introduced machinery and steam power and in order to cover the demands of mass production, bigger and more advanced factories had to be created (see Industrial Revolution). The family home, previously the location for production and work as well as family life, assumed the function of a site exclusively for the family (see domesticity).

The Victorian era with its social and economic changes as well as inventions led to the coinage of the private and public spheres. This assigned each gender and class a new role and a specific space. The Victorian ideology was especially keen to advocate middle-class values which promoted the idea that women should remain in the shelter of their private homes, whereas men were expected to succeed in the public sphere. The picture of a woman strolling around in the urban area penetrating the male's public sphere did not correlate with the idea of gendered separation desired by the Queen. However, especially for working class women, the privilege to remain at home and to be excluded from public life did not exist since only one family income could not guarantee survival for the whole family. Several working class women found jobs in factories while others were servants in middle-class homes. (see domesticity) As Cranny-Francis points out, the public private division did not only apply to gender but also served to separate the working class from the middle class as well as the bourgeoisie (see 211).

The domestic ideal of the Victorian era was primarily situated in rural or suburban surroundings which were regarded as appropriate, safe, and natural places for middle-class women responsible for endowing their children with a valuable moral upbringing. On the contrary, the city was by no means an appropriate place for women as it posed too many threats. Cities were likely to become the origin of revolutions, crowded working and living places were unhygienic and thus ideal sites for the outbreak and spread of diseases, and corruption and crime was part of daily life. (see Nead)

The British art critic John Ruskin draws attention to the fact that typical proceedings in each sphere were clearly determined. It was the responsibility of men to participate in the competitive economical and political life, provide a living for his family, take care of financial matters, and interact with other men while travelling. On the contrary, women were assigned the task of managing the money and merchandises the bread-winner brought home, keeping the house clean by giving orders to the servants, raising the children, and limiting their verbal interaction with others to a minimum. (see domestic fiction)

Oakley deals with how the responsibilities of men and women were honoured and respected by society. The daily obligations of women were called “duties” (Oakley, qtd. in Danahay 77) and have to be clearly distinguished from “occupations” (Oakley, qtd. in Danahay 77) such as those of lawyers and doctors as well as “work” (Oakley, qtd. in Danahay 77), a term used to label industrialized labour. In the late 18th century, families were the main site for production, a fact which entailed equal respect for men’s and women’s work. However, this circumstance changed in the course of the Industrial Revolution when factories took over this role and female “duties” (Oakley, qtd. in Danahay 77) were restricted to consumption. This shift resulted in a “gender hierarchy of labour” (Danahay 77) which placed the female duties at the lower end of society’s respect and economic revenue. (Oakley, referred to in Danahay 76-77) Another categorization along the lines of public and private spheres comes from McKeon who points out that the “inside labour” (107) performed by females was synonymous with “unwaged labour” (107), whereas “outside labour” (107) was tantamount with “waged labour” (170).

6.1.1. Men’s domains within the private sphere

Before elaborating on the privacy of men and women, which they occasionally enjoyed in separate rooms, it is worth noting that the current usage of privacy has to be differentiated from the usage in Early Modern England as well as in the Victorian era (see Abate 5). Consulting the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary on the noun privacy, it lists the following definitions: “the state of being alone and not watched or disturbed by other people” (privacy, noun) and “the state of being free from the attention of the public” (privacy, noun). The second definition applies better to the Victorian context since honoured middle-class women were not welcomed in the public sphere. However, as Abate emphasizes, only in exceptional cases did middle-class women enjoy solitude. During the day they were frequently surrounded by servants and during the night they commonly shared a bedroom with their husband. Moreover, the lower the class the denser a living space becomes as it was not unusual for the poor to share a bed with five or six other people. (see Abate 5)

Although the majority of men pursued their vocation in the public sphere, clearly distanced from their living space, it was possible for them to work in the private sphere. Carlyle and Tosh suggest that professional writers might have met their obligations in the domestic sphere, far away from the competitive and aggressive public life. As the city was an inappropriate place for respected middle-class women, men who spent too much time in the private sphere, trying to fulfil their professional obligations earned disapproval and scorn from their peers who regarded their work place as a potential threat for masculinity. Nevertheless, the spatial arrangements in a house clearly reflected the social status of both genders. In this sense, men usually occupied spaces clearly separated from the rest of the inhabitants. Soundproofed rooms enabled them to avoid audible interruptions and the location of their offices at the top of the house suggests a higher appreciation for their occupations compared to their wives' duties. (referred to in Danahay 74-75) Moreover, Tosh (referred to in Hamlett 122-123) and Hamlett herself stress that the retreat to male territories such as to the den, the study, the smoking room, the library, or the billiard room was often an escape from female dominated domesticity. Especially during the end of the 19th century when certain domestic rituals such as afternoon tea became an integral part of the daily routine, men often sought a getaway to their own rooms.

As men who worked at home were often confronted with doubts about their masculinity, Hamlett stresses that gendered rooms within a household were indeed a privilege. Only upper-middle class, blue-blooded and noble households were spacious as well as wealthy enough to provide separate rooms for their family members. (see Hamlett 125)

6.1.2. Women's domains within the private sphere

As men withdrew from the newly established domestic routines and customs of the 19th century, females found their privacy in dressing rooms (see McKeon 231), morning rooms, or boudoirs (see Hamlett 123). While the morning room offered privacy in the early hours of the day (see morning room *noun*), the boudoir provided the quietness to pursue undisturbed interests such as

needlework and reading (see Clarke and Clarke). However, the drawing room, originally named the withdrawing room, offered the lady of the house a retreat after dinner up until the 17th century. The privacy that females enjoyed in this room ceased to exist after that time as it was mainly used to welcome guests or to gather and entertain family members. (see Deverson) Though the solitude for women could not be enjoyed there anymore, Hamlett still categorizes the drawing room as a female terrain. Moreover, James Knowles labels the closet as a “gendered space” (qtd. in Abate 7). This area was treasured by women since it was used to store valuable and beloved items such as household accessories, jewellery, and clothes. Synonymously, men treasured places like their office, library, or muniment room¹⁴. (referred to in Abate 7)

Hamlett stresses that supposing a family was wealthy enough to afford a spacious home, it was quite common for a married couple to reside in two separate bedrooms. Hamlett does not classify the bedroom as an exclusively male or female terrain. It is McKeon who provides an insight into a period in history when the bedroom was temporarily turned into a female terrain and the admittance of men was not tolerated. Whenever the birth of a child advanced, the gender neutral bedroom was transformed into a female space as it assumed the function of a “lying-in chamber” (McKeon 233), an alteration which was common among various classes in the English culture. The pregnant woman terminated her duties, which included household chores as well as the sexual satisfaction of her husband, and withdrew only accompanied by the midwife and several befriended females or gossips who would eventually become god-mothers after observing the birth. Since the assistance of a male person, the male-midwife, was not common before the beginning of the 19th century, the room was exclusively filled with women. The mid-wife, commonly a domestic help of the household, provided her medical knowledge, whereas the gossips offered emotional support. The pregnant woman’s privacy was accomplished and emphasized by cordoning the bedroom from the rest of the house. Keyholes were stuffed in order to prevent air from entering and dark heavy curtains were drawn in order to block out the daylight. McKeon calls this exclusively female dominated proceedings an event where “women [were] on

¹⁴ A muniment room is a place for storing archives. (see muniment)

top" (234). He refers to a tract from 1683, in which a husband emphasizes that the "lying-in ceremony" (McKeon 233) gives the gossips the opportunity to interact verbally as he utters "[t]is a time of freedom, when women, like parliament men have a privilege to talk petty treason" (Fletcher, qtd. in McKeon 234). (see McKeon 233-238)

As McKeon brings attention to the fact that women ceased their "sexual services" (233) before giving birth, it is reasonable to conclude that the joint bedroom was a place where male domination was exerted. However, before the 19th century the bedroom was an exclusively female space during childbirth and it remained a gendered segregated room among wealthy couples.

6.2. Enclosed spaces: Villages and country houses

The public and private dichotomy which emerged in the Victorian era and assigned middle-class women to the domestic sphere, ideally located in the country, and males to the public sphere, typically situated in the city, determines a clear distinction of gendered spaces. This historical outlook, which is relevant for analysing Christie's domestic settings, suggests that the domestic sphere is either the home or to a greater extent the country side. Moreover, Priestman's "A Version of Pastoral" implies an idealization of country, rural and suburban surroundings. Moreover, in his literary reviews, Scaggs depicted the favoured Golden Age's subgenres such as the village mystery, country-house murder, and locked-room mystery. The Golden Age's locations differ tremendously from the typical Hard Boiled settings such as those from Raymond Chandler, who insists on a detective being "a person of the city, not of the suburbs or commuter train" (Devas 256).

As noted in the introductory chapter, one aspect of domesticity applies to an enclosed space, in a broader sense a country or a village and in a more restricted sense a house or a room. In this regard, Scaggs sees a therapeutic motive in the Golden Age author's selection of enclosed settings, as it was comforting to reduce the threatening world to a controllable, defined space (see 52-53). Therefore, it is worth taking a closer look at some of the subgenres of

crime literature which are set in defined settings: the “village mystery” (Stasio 76), a subgenre favoured by female authors (see Stasio 70), the “country-house murder” (Scaggs 52) and the “locked-room mystery” (Scaggs 52; Gripenberg 84).

The “village mystery” (Stasio 76) and the “country-house murder” (Scaggs 52), as their names suggest, are both set in the country. Scaggs links the seemingly peaceful atmosphere in the country to Priestman’s “A Version of Pastoral”. The importance of reinstating order after a tragedy is something desired by the Golden Age audience as well as a central theme in pastoral literature. (see Scaggs 50) As the “village mystery” (Stasio 70) is equally labelled as “cosy mystery” (Stasio 70) or “teacup mystery” (Stasio 70), images of elderly ladies gossiping about the latest village news and picture-perfect families surrounded by a charming landscape are aroused. The village’s idyllic atmosphere prevails at the beginning of the story only to be interrupted by a crime which needs to be solved by a dull and empathetic but sharp detective. As shocking and unexpected as it might be for a lovely village, the villain does not come from the dangerous city but operates from within and might even be unmasked as a respected member of the community. (see Stasio 71)

The “country-house murder” (Scaggs 52) is based on a similar setting. The restricted space of a country house is the sole location where the murder occurs and where it is solved. This circumstance entails that potential suspects can be restricted to a specific group of people who cannot leave for the duration of the crime solving. They are people who live there permanently, either the owners and their family members, the domestic staff, or guests. Since no new suspect can surface, the murderer has to come from within. (see Scaggs 52) The enclosed setting of the country house might even be restricted further to a locked room, which also prevents the suspects from entering or escaping the crime scene (see Scaggs 146). Other varieties include “murder afloat” (Scaggs 53), such as Christie’s *Death on the Nile* and “murder on the train” (Scaggs 53), like *Murder on the Orient Express* (see Scaggs 53). Although preferred by Golden Age authors, the restricted setting of a locked-room was already used by the author of the first detective story. In 1841, Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, a classical “locked-room mystery” (Scaggs 52; Gripenberg 84), was published. (see Gripenberg 84)

If Christie's stories are set in England, which is the case in the majority of her novels, they typically take place in the country. Her partly fictional villages include Baydon Heath, which is "inhabited by rich city men ... only 20 miles from London" (*Rye* 167), "their little place in the country" (*Rye* 175), "the village of Chipping Cleghorn" (*Murder is Announced* 323), and the seaside town St Loo in Southern England (see *End House* 9). The estates in which the crimes occur are often former country houses such as Rutherford Hall, surrounded by "small suburban houses" (*Paddington* 554) where "[b]ustling urban life goes on all around it, but doesn't touch it" (*Paddington* 565), or the "Styles Court" (*Styles* 5) "[the owner's] country-place" (*Styles* 5). When Miss Marple's friend solicits the sleuth's visit at their mutual friend's estate Stonygates, the prospect of "a nice long rest in lovely surroundings" (*Mirrors* 517) makes this request even more appealing. The remoteness of the area is noticed right upon Marple's arrival at the local train station Market Kind, "a large empty windswept station with hardly any passengers or railway staff to be seen on it" (*Mirrors* 522). In another novel, Miss Marple convinces her family physician that a short abode in "a small seaside town [named] ... Dillmouth, [a] [p]retty little place [which is] [r]ather dull" (*Sleeping* 215) would be beneficial for her well-being. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* occurs in the "village ... King's Abbot" (12) whose few public places include "a large railway station, a small post office, and two rival 'General Stores' " (12). To sum up, the majority of the crimes occur in seemingly peaceful villages, the ideal site for Victorian domesticity. Even more threatening, Christie's murders frequently take place in country homes, places which are supposed to provide shelter from the outside world and the demoralizing, corrupting, and dangerous cities. Metropolitan cities such as London do appear but assume supporting scenes as they are the places where material evidence is occasionally sent, where minor investigations take place, or where Miss Marple's nephew Raymond West resides. Christie's villages and country houses are commonly inhabited by "the upper class [and] the upper middle class" (Scaggs 48), who have the financial means to afford domestic help such as parlour maids, cooks, and gardeners. By the author's recurrent references to the shortage of domestic labour, Christie alludes to the economical consequences of the first WW.

Although Miss Marple's cases are not exclusively set in her hometown of St Mary Mead, the reader gains due to the spinster's vivid portrayal of her home town an extensive insight into life and people in a small village. As descriptions of St Mary Mead appear so frequently, Miss Marple's home town assumes the role of the prototype of all villages. Furthermore, St Mary Mead is often estimated to be an "idyllic retreat" (*Mirrors* 518) by outsiders, a place which cannot possibly harbour murderers. As pointed out by Marty S. Knepper, the stereotype of the seemingly tranquil village is often articulated by Miss Marple's nephew Raymond West, an aspiring crime author who resides in urban London. He depicts St Mary Mead as "the kind of village where nothing ever happens, exactly like a stagnant pond" (*Sleeping* 203). However, the stereotype of St Mary Mead as a dull village and its comparison with a stagnant pool is not justified according to Miss Marple: " 'Nothing, I believe, is so full of life under the microscope as a drop of water from a stagnant pool' " (*Vicarage* 629). (see Knepper 48)

Apart from crediting her success in crime solving to her fascination and knowledge about "*Human Nature*" (*Vicarage* 667), Miss Marple's habit of grouping people into types is in many ways a "valuable guide" (*Paddington* 648) and is just as crucial for the detection process. Therefore, a village like St Mary Mead with its limited inhabitants provides the perfect location for acquiring that kind of knowledge. The spinster sleuth remarks that " '[o]ne has an opportunity of studying things there that one would never have in a town' " (*Mirrors* 583). and implies that the enclosed manageable area of a village presupposes her success as an amateur detective.

6.2.1. Female crime scenes

As Christie's murders occur in distinctive locations, a certain correlation between the gender of the murdered person and gendered rooms is discernible. The correlation does not pertain to specific locations in a house exclusively but also includes gender-related activities, objects, and pieces of furniture.

As already noted, the bedroom was temporarily turned into a "lying-in chamber" (McKeon 233) for the special circumstance of childbirth, thus transforming it into an exclusively female domain. Moreover, a certain affluence enabled a married couple to reside in two different bedrooms, making this

space a distinctive female or male domain. In Christie's novels the pattern of female victims meeting a violent death in their bedrooms is quite noticeable. In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, the doctor pinpoints Mrs Ferras time of passing to "the night of the 16th-17th September" (7). Since there are no contradicting references, it can be assumed that Mrs Ferras drew her last breath in her bed in her bedroom. Mrs Inglethorp perishes during a night in which she has to endure painful convulsions in her bed, which are witnessed by her housemates. Miss Dora Bunner's dead body is discovered "in her bed" (*Murder is Announced* 455) in the morning. The doctor assumes that she "died in her sleep" (*Murder is Announced* 455). In *Death on the Nile*, Linnet is shot right in her temple while resting in her honeymoon cabin on a Nile cruise ship. Helen, the victim in *Sleeping Murder*, is strangled in the hall of her house and then carried upstairs to her bedroom where her lifeless body is later discovered. Apart from Helen and Linnet, the women in the preceding examples did not share a bedroom with their husbands. Mrs Ferras was widowed, Mrs Inglethorp's financial situation enabled her to reside in a bedroom right next to her husband's, and Miss Dora Bunner remained a spinster until her death. The bedroom, a room in which people rest, in which tranquillity predominates and in which people assume a rather passive role, evokes associations with the female's traditional position in society as well as competences attributed to them. As already pointed out¹⁵, the passive and subordinate role of women has had a long tradition in society as it was uncommon and in some cases even legally prohibited for women to participate in public life. A hindrance in one way, which some women nevertheless transformed into a competence as they used their imposed passiveness and silence constructively. They learned how to interpret non-verbal expressions accurately and also developed intuitive skills as intuition presupposes silence according to Peirce¹⁶.

Although the drawing room ceased its original purpose of the withdrawing room for women, it continued to be a place for domestic and family rituals. In *A Pocket Full of Rye*, the domestic help finds her mistress in this room. "The lights had not been turned on in the drawing-room though Adele Fortescue was still sitting on the sofa behind the tea tray" (*Rye* 220). Moreover, the ritual of

¹⁵ See chapter 5.2.1.

¹⁶ See chapter 5.2.1.

drinking tea while gossiping about private matters concerning the victim is also associated with the female gender.

Whereas the previous examples focused on traditional female rooms as crime scenes, typical female activities which the victims seemed to have carried out shortly before the murder are the main interest in the succeeding examples. In this regard, domestic routines such as cooking, cleaning, and doing the laundry are considered typical female activities, activities which maintain domestic order in the private sphere. When the housemaid Ellen recalls her forgetfulness about taking the washing down in the garden, she stumbles over the body of the housemaid Gladys, who is found “with a stocking round her throat ... [and] a *clothes peg clipped on her nose*” (Rye 223). Based on this observation, Ellen concludes that Gladys must have been taking the garments down when her murderer overwhelmed her. As this murder is later reconstructed by Miss Marple, it turns out that Gladys met her murderer, someone familiar, someplace else and was then carried over to the location where her corpse was finally discovered. By placing her body below the “clothes line” (Rye 309), the murderer prevents further suspicions among the detectives as this spot is a location where a female maid is likely to be expected. Moreover, by marking Gladys’ face with a “clothes peg” (Rye 223), the murderer selects a domestic device, an object which facilitates the domestic activity of doing the laundry. Miss Murgatroyd suffers a similar fate in *A Murder is Announced*. In order to save her jumpers and woollen garments from the approaching rain, she focuses on retrieving them from the line while her murderer creeps up on her. Miss Murgatroyd is oblivious to the fact that she is sealing her own fate when she complies with the murderer’s offer to put a scarf around her neck. In the screen adaptation *Murder Most Foul*, Dorothy’s corpse is discovered in the kitchen. The various camera angles expose several appliances used for domestic chores. Above the corpse, clothes are hanging on a clothes line and the hot iron on the ironing board reveals the domestic chore being carried out shortly before her death. Cups, plates, tea, coffee jugs, and pans in various shapes and sizes are neatly stored in an open kitchen shelf. Moreover, spatulas and soup ladles are hung up on the wall and a saucepan as well as a kettle is visible on the hob.

6.2.2. *Male crime scenes*

As Christie's preferred settings and crime scenes are located in the country, the location of Rex Fortesque's passing is an exception. His death comes upon him when indulging in a tea drinking ritual in his "city office" (*Rye* 160). In *Murder Ahoy* Miss Marple and other trustees of the "Cape of Good Hope Youth Reclamation Centre" witness the passing of their fellow member, Cecil Ffolly-Hardwicke, at an annual meeting. The male victim perishes right in front of their eyes in an office premise. As Rex's and the trustee Cecil Ffolly-Hardwicke's occupations were carried out in the public sphere, other male victims are murdered in typical masculine domains within the shelter of the private sphere. Although some home offices, libraries, and studies are located in the domestic sphere, they are nevertheless male domains to some extent since activities for public purposes such as business correspondence are conducted there. However, these rooms also evoke effeminate associations as men working from these domains were ridiculed from their peers. In this regard, Mr Roger Ackroyd is stabbed with a Tunisian dagger in his study, supposedly while carrying out some business matters. Similarly, Colonel Protheroe is murdered in the study of St Mary Mead's vicar, again a male domain within the private sphere. "Colonel Protheroe ... [is found] lying sprawled across [the vicar's] writing table in a horrible unnatural position" (*Vicarage* 534). Although Christian Guldbrandsen's place of murder is a bedroom, the furniture and the objects which surround the victim hint to the tasks conducted before his death. A working place, which he temporarily set up as he visited his step-mother's house, reminds the reader of an office or study. "It was a room furnished as a sitting-room more than a bedroom ... Christian Guldbrandsen had been sitting at the big mahogany desk with a small portable typewriter open in front of him" (*Mirrors* 565).

Although the next three male victims are not murdered in typically male realms of the domestic sphere, the locations evoke associations with the public. Rudi Scherz, the victim in *A Murder is Announced*, is lured into his murderer's living room. Before Rudi's murder, the inhabitants of Chipping Cleghorn are rather astonished as they come across an odd announcement in the village's local paper. This advertisement announces a murder and requests the villagers to gather at Little Paddocks, the home of Miss Blacklock, at exactly 6:30 p.m. Miss Blacklock is as clueless and appalled as her neighbours are, nevertheless

the curiosity prevails and the neighbours gather to attend the announced party. Indeed, at the appointed time the lights are suddenly extinguished and a murder occurs. Rudi Scherz, who was initially believed to be an intruder, is shot in the living room. Although the living room cannot really be considered a public space, as it assumes the function of a family room, Miss Blacklock's living room is temporarily turned into a public space as neighbours gather there for this more or less public event. In the midst of it Rudi Scherz is shot. In *They Do It With Mirrors*, Alexis Restarick and Ernie Gregg are found at the "theatre ... [with] [t]heir heads crushed in - [as] the big counterweight must have fallen on them" (642). Although this specific theatre is not accessible to the public, as it was established to provide an artistic outlet for the Criminal Juveniles Centre's patients, the public aspect of a theatre is nevertheless present. In this regard, the dead bodies are supposedly discovered on or close to the stage, the heart of a theatre and a public space as actors' and actresses' movements are traditionally observed by the prying eyes of the audience. Similarly, in *Murder Most Foul*, the actor George Rowton stumbles on the stage and takes his last breath before his body finally succumbs to the received poisonous substance. This occurs while Miss Marple is auditioning for a role. The covered corpse remains on the stage while the cast members discuss the tragedy.

6.3. Spaces and detectives

As the previous chapters investigated whether Christie selected domestic settings as gendered crime scenes, the focus of this chapter is the analysis of the correlation between the gender of the detectives and the spaces they come from, operate in, and withdraw to after their mission is accomplished.

6.3.1. Female sleuths

The female's traditional affiliation to the private sphere is used by Miss Marple and her female assistants for their own benefits. The success of the women in 4.50 from *Paddington*, which Devas partly attributes to their traditional place in the private sphere, can also be discerned in other Christie novels featuring female sleuths. In this regard "they are ... able to operate successfully by using

their ... gendered positions to provide them with a cover" (Devas 261). (see Devas 261-263.)

Before Miss Marple surfaced in her first novel *The Murder at the Vicarage*, Christie created the figure of Carolyn Sheppard in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Several literary critics regard her as the precursor of Miss Marple. (see Shaw and Vanacker 35-36) Apart from their similar family status, age, and interest in the latest village gossip as well as crime stories, they are indistinguishable concerning their detection methods and the sphere they operate from. Carolyn's brother, the narrator of the story, comments on the sphere from which his sister gathers her information with "Caroline can do any amount of finding out by sitting placidly at home. ... I suspect that the servants and the tradesmen constitute her Intelligence Corps. When she goes out, it is not to gather in information, but to spread it." (*Roger Ackroyd* 7)

6.3.1.1. Miss Marple

Apart from the adopted role of the "armchair" (Shaw and Vanacker 84) detective in *4.50 from Paddington*, in which Miss Marple gives orders to her assistant on the crime scene (see Shaw and Vanacker 84), her operation from within the private sphere is a distinguishing mark of her sleuthing. Moreover, her sojourn in the domestic sphere is not restricted to the duration of the detection process itself, both her initial involvement as well as her withdrawal to this realm after the crime is solved expose strong ties to the private sphere.

Christie repeatedly characterizes Miss Marple as a "[r]eal Victorian type" (*Murder is Announced* 447). The chief inspector notes that her facial expressions reveal a "truly feminine Victorian appreciation" (*Murder is Announced* 388) and her nephew Raymond describes her as "Victorian to the core" (*Sleeping* 203). What the label Victorian implies is declared by her nephew Raymond: " 'She's what I should describe as a perfect Period Piece. ... All her dressing-tables have their legs swathed in chintz. She lives in a village, the kind of village where nothing ever happens, exactly like a stagnant pond' ". (*Sleeping* 203)

Apart from the fact that Miss Marple's predilection for the Victorian period is reflected in the interior of her home, this quotation exposes once more that a tranquil village is the ideal home for a respected Victorian middle-class woman.

Despite her childless existence, she clearly values the institution family. This appreciation is discernible in her fondness towards her relatives. The family member who she seems to be most attached to and the one who she stays in touch with on a regular basis is her nephew Raymond West. Moreover, Raymond's second son David is mentioned in *4.50 from Paddington* as his occupation at the British Railways proves to be beneficial for pinpointing a crime location. Moreover, nameless nieces and nephews are referred to in *A Murder is Announced*, whose existence is used by Marple as a pretext to elicit information about the suspect's family members. Although Miss Marple is not the traditional Victorian middle-class mother in the actual sense, it is her caring, loving, and protective manner towards the characters which evoke associations of a mother, the archetype of the female gender. These attributes are often decisive when getting involved in a case and are the major forces for her sleuthing apart from her general interest in crime novels and the lacking excitement in her spinster life. When Miss Marple's former domestic help Gladys is strangled in the Fortescue household, she is willingly admitted to their home. By noting that she feels "responsible" (Rye 229) for Gladys and intends to solve the mystery she arouses sympathy among the residents. In *Sleeping Murder*, Gwenda and Gill intend to investigate a cold case and Miss Marple "feel[s] [she] ought to be there to look after them" (216) since they are so "young and inexperienced" (216). In another novel, it is "a question of duty" (*Paddington* 546) to provide the evidence that her friend Elspeth's eye witness account of an actual murder is indeed reliable. Furthermore, in *Murder at the Gallop*, collecting donations for a charity function leads her to the estate of Mr. Enderby, who collapses shortly upon her arrival. A cat, feared so much by the victim, and a "piece of mud" (*Gallop*) on the crime scene corroborate Marple's suspicion that the victim's death was not precipitated by a natural cause. Supposed Miss Marple was not supporting charitable organizations, Mr Enderby's death would have never been investigated as the police's initial assessment insisted on the natural death theory.

Miss Marple's success in gathering relevant information about victims and suspects can be attributed to her cunning operation from within the private sphere. Moreover, she relies on knowledge derived from female habits and

rituals. She indulges in domestic activities, sojourns in the sphere where society expects her to sojourn and thus does not raise any suspicions that her real objective is the disclosure of the murderer. Marple is aware of this tactic, which she points out to the chief inspector by noting that her sleuthing “won’t be noticeable if [she does] it, because ... it won’t be official” (*Murder is Announced* 411). Therefore, since the murderer is among the family members in the majority of cases, consequently making the crime a family matter, “a policemen keeping an eye on things would be little good if the danger was in the family circle” (*Murder is Announced* 412). As already pointed out, Miss Marple uses gossip extensively; a form of communication which is characterized by its trivial contents and considered appropriate to be exchanged in the private shelter of the home. Although gossip is not exclusively collected in the private shelter of a home, the seemingly private and trivial contents are assumed to prevail when women are involved. Moreover, as middle-class women in the Victorian era were responsible for chores within the domestic sphere, including caring for relational matters such as the emotional well-being of their husbands and children, attributes of “connection, empathy, or ethical feeling” (Rowland, “Golden Age” 123) come to mind, traits which Rowland used to describe the detection process of the Golden Age sleuths. In *Murder Most Foul*, Miss Marple is willingly admitted to the victim’s sister house. She does not arouse any suspicions as she pretends to “[collect] jumble for the church bazaar” (*Foul*). She is granted access to the late McGinty’s room, in which she has the opportunity to snoop around the victim’s personal items, eventually picking up the trail of a drama group. In *A Pocket Full of Rye*, being admitted and taking up temporary residence in the private sphere of the Fortescue family is a promising precondition for extracting valuable details from the remaining family members. This “unofficial” (Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendel* 93) way of interrogation would not have been possible for the authorities as the chief detective ascertains upon Miss Marple’s arrival:

Miss Marple would be useful to him ... and she had, like most old ladies, time on her hands and an old maid’s nose for scenting bits of gossip. She’d get things out of servants, and out of the women of the Fortescue family perhaps, that he and his policemen would never get. Talk, conjecture, reminiscences, repetitions of things said and done, out of it all she would pick the salient facts. (*Rye* 228)

When Miss Marple visits Rutherford Hall in *4.50 from Paddington*, the landlord's son replies to the announcement that an "old aunt" (709) is coming to tea with "[w]hat a bore" (709). Never would he have thought that this old boring lady is eventually responsible for convicting a cold-blooded murderer and that the domestic ritual of the afternoon tea is a trap for the culprit. As Miss Marple pretends to be choking on a fish bone, Dr Quimper, the murderer, rises immediately to save her by grabbing her throat. That way he replicates a posture likely to be recognized by the person who witnessed the murder. At this instance, Elspeth is led into the room and identifies Dr Quimper as the man she observed on the train.

Gossip and women are inseparable as the vicar of St Mary Mead notes: " ' ... There is a lot of talk. Too many women in this part of the world' ". (*Vicarage* 546) Miss Marple recurrently extracts valuable information from gossip at domestic rituals such as when "[she] [c]omes to [t]ea" (*Murder is Announced* 412) at the Blacklock household, the place where an alleged intruder was recently shot. When Miss Marple admits her constant fear of burglars, none of the present women suspect that the real purpose for introducing this topic is her interest in how a burglar might gain access to Mrs Blacklock's house. In the same novel, Miss Marple approaches subjects through her beloved family members. By mentioning that she enjoys keeping various pictures of her nieces and nephews as infants, she discovers that Letitia Blacklock does not possess any pictures of her apparent nephew and niece and thus substantiates the suspicion that their real identity is unknown. (see Shaw and Vanacker 65-66)

Miss Marple emerges from the private sphere, operates from within it and withdraws to this sphere when the crime is solved. Mezei notes that although Miss Marple was the decisive force in solving *The Murder at the Vicarage*, the first Marple novel which was published in 1930, she returns to the private sphere and relinquishes the public acknowledgement and praise to the police. The vicar notes that "great credit was reflected upon Inspector Slack, whose zeal and intelligence had resulted in the criminals being brought to justice [and that] ... [n]aturally, nothing was said of Miss Marple's share in the business" (*Vicarage* 691). (see Mezei 110) Miss Marple's humbleness towards her success is obvious in *A Murder is Announced* as she notes to the chief

detective that “[a]ny little efforts on [her] part were quite incidental. ... It was [him] who wouldn’t let the case be closed” (*Murder is Announced* 515). In *Sleeping Murder*, the novel written 10 years after *Murder at the Vicarage*, the chief detective intends to credit her past achievements with a proper acknowledgment in the public. He notes that Miss Marple is “a very celebrated lady [who] [g]ot the Chief Constables of at least three counties in her pocket. She’s not got [his] Chief yet, but ... that will come” (*Sleeping* 328). This contrastive positive attitude towards female sleuths in law enforcement might be the result of society’s transformation from patriarchal hegemony to a gender heterogeneous variety. However, although a slight change of thinking can be recognized on Christie’s part, in the film adaption of *Murder Most Foul* which was released around 1964 and in which Hercule Poirot was replaced by Miss Marple, Inspector Craddock receives the major credit for solving the case. In spite of Miss Marple’s indispensable contributions, Inspector Craddock has to confess hesitantly to the spinster sleuth that “as a result of [his] work... on this case, [he is] to be promoted. Chief Inspector” (*Foul*).

6.3.1.2. *Elspeth, Lucy, Jane: Female solidarity in 4.50 from Paddington*

Devas points out that in *4.50 from Paddington*, Christie portrays the three women Elspeth McGillycuddy, Jane Marple, and Lucy Eyelsbarrow, whose contributions are decisive for bringing the murderer to justice, with stereotypical feminine attributes which emphasize their traditional role in society. These feminine traits as well as the traditional sphere these women are associated with are by no means highly appreciated by society and the police, however, they contribute enormously to the disclosure of the murderer. Moreover, it is the female solidarity, the way how these women support each other which leads to the ultimate triumph. Elspeth “witness[es], [Miss Marple] believe[s]” (Devas 261) as well as “uncover[s]” (Devas 261) ,and Lucy “investigate[s]” (Devas 261) the murder, a crime initially dismissed by the police.

Elspeth, the woman who “witness[es]” (Devas 261) the murder is portrayed with typical characteristics of the female gender: “dotty, deluded, or dreaming” (Devas 259). As Elspeth’s activities prior to the murder included an extensive shopping trip to the crowded metropolitan London, her fatigue does not necessarily contribute to the credibility and reliability of her eye witness

account. When Elspeth passes her observation on to the ticket collector, she is instantly aware of the impression she might have left on him. She fears that he might dismiss her as hysterical, one of those “elderly women travelling around, fully convinced that they had unmasked communist plots, were in danger of being murdered, saw flying saucers and secret space ships, and reported murders that had never taken place” (*Paddington* 535). (see Devas 259-261) Hysterical behaviour is undoubtedly linked to the female gender (see Devas 261), not only because the English word hysteria derives from the Greek language in which *hystera* was used for the womb, but also because physicians initially believed that the uterus had an impact on mentally abnormal behaviour (see Goodman 117). In this regard, being hysterical somehow excludes rational thinking, which is required in the public sphere (see Cranny-Francis 213). As no corpse is discovered shortly after Elspeth’s observation, the credibility of her account is further diminished, resulting in no legal action by the authorities. The murder would probably have never been solved if Miss Marple had not “reli[ed] on what [Elspeth] said” (*Paddington* 554) and had not been determined to discover the body. (see Devas 259-261)

As Miss Marple’s advanced age and physical unfitness prevent her from searching for the body herself, she assumes the role of the “armchair” (Shaw and Vanacker 84) detective. Miss Marple coordinates the detection process from a safe distance, while Lucy works undercover in Rutherford Hall, the household where the corpse was likely to be disposed. (see Shaw and Vanacker 84) Although an Oxford graduate and “expected to take up a distinguished academic career” (*Paddington* 551), Lucy preferred to pursue the career path of a domestic maid. When Lucy takes up the post in Rutherford Hall, she certainly does not arouse any suspicions since women are expected to pursue occupations in the domestic field. She operates from within the domestic sphere and cunningly uses her feminine weapons such as “coping, caring, and clearing up” (Devas 263). She cares for the tyrannical landlord Luther and the motherless child Alexander, and never fails to take care of the other family members by nurturing them with delicious food and keeping the house clean, despite being well aware that the murderer might reside under the same roof. Lucy acts within the female gender boundaries, which enables her to keep up the masquerade. The chief inspector remarks that “ [the family are]

completely dependent on her ... [e]ating out of her hand - literally as you might say' " (*Paddington* 605). Society's low appreciation for domestic chores is repeatedly reflected in the novel as one character remarks that Lucy is certainly "[t]oo smart to waste [herself] cooking and cleaning" (*Paddington* 627). (see Devas 259-263)

Christie firstly refutes the stereotype of the hysterical woman imagining things and not being reliable as soon as Lucy discovers the dead body at Rutherford Hall. Secondly, by portraying a heroine who decided to pursue an occupation in the domestic field despite her "brilliant mind" (*Paddington* 551) and by making typical feminine attributes such as "coping, caring and clearing up" (Devas 263) decisive forces in a murder case, Christie raises the status of domestic labour. Miss Marple is the mastermind of the detection process and the connecting link between Elspeth and Lucy. By portraying a female detective whose accomplishments range from believing her friend, to pinpointing the place where the body could have been disposed, employing a spy in Rutherford Hall, identifying the murderer, and finally providing the evidence, Christie refutes the stereotype that only men are capable of mastering challenges in various stages of the detection process. (see Devas 259-263)

6.3.2. Male sleuths

Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot both rely on knowledge derived from the domestic sphere. However, Miss Marple's affiliation to this sphere is stronger due to her gender, which further facilitates the detection process in the domestic sphere. Moreover, Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot differ concerning their origin, namely from which sphere they enter the murder case, and to which space they withdraw once the detection process has been completed.

Firstly, the form of addressing both detectives indicates their traditional role in society. For instance, the family status of the female detective is repeatedly emphasized as Christie always refers to her as Miss Marple, a form of address for unmarried ladies. She is seldom addressed by her first name Jane, which is the rule when addressing Hercule Poirot.

Secondly, Hercule Poirot emerges clearly from the public sphere as his former position in the Belgian police force gained him a public and highly valued reputation. While Christie frequently creates the impression that Miss Marple

forces her aid upon the police and happens to be in the surrounding area of the crime scene by chance, Hercule Poirot is repeatedly approached and his assistance demanded outright. In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Ackroyd's niece requests Poirot's aid in solving the murder of her uncle. She explains her choice with " ' ... [t]hey say he's done the most wonderful things - just like the detectives do in books ... ' " (*Roger Ackroyd* 65). Frequently Poirot is described as "[t]he greatest [detective] the world has ever known" (*Roger Ackroyd* 153).

Thirdly, as Miss Marple clearly operates from within the private sphere, in the sense that she is frequently admitted to the private sphere under various pretexts, Poirot assumes a more official role since he works more closely with the police. Moreover, Makinen (see "Agatha Christie" 422) points out that Miss Marple is never portrayed as the main investigator, although her detective skills are the decisive factors in solving the crimes. Therefore, the reader follows the line of thoughts of the chief investigator, who is always male and who conceives the spinster's presence as a millstone around his neck. On the contrary, Poirot's investigations are characterized by a public aspect, as he is the main investigator and authorized to work hand in hand with the police. However, his relationship to the suspects evokes associations with the private sphere. His gentle interrogation mode aims to win over the suspects' trust and suggests his main motivation for solving the crimes at the same time. In *Peril at End House*, Poirot's main concern is the safety of Miss Nick Buckley's life. Poirot remarks that "[he] want[s] [Nick] to feel safe" (*End House* 109) and the way of addressing her, namely "*mon enfant*"¹⁷ (*End House* 109), suggests the role of the protective father figure.

Lastly, towards the end of the detection process, namely the announcement of the murderer as well as the remaining mysteries of the crime, the public aspect in his characterization is predominant. Whereas Miss Marple only communicates her final deductions to a few people including the police, and is humble when it comes to taking credit, Hercule Poirot cherishes the public acknowledgment that his crime solving entails. In the majority of the cases Poirot summons all the suspects and then presents the remaining mysterious details to his audience like an actor on stage. He indulges his explanations to the utmost and thrives on his public role. In this regard, his

¹⁷ *Mon enfant* in French can be translated with *my child*.

enunciations include expressions such as “ ‘Messieurs, mesdames’ ... ‘let me introduce you to the murderer, Mr. Alfred Inglethorp!’ ” (*Styles* 113) and aim to satisfy the prying ears of the audience. Prior to the arrival of the suspects, Poirot’s audience, he usually arranges the room like a stage including “[p]ulling out a chair here, [or] altering the position of a lamp there, occasionally stooping to straighten one of the mats that covered the floor” (*Roger Ackroyd* 211). A character observing the detective’s ritual comments on Poirot’s preference “to dramatize things” (*Appointment* 251) to which the Belgian replies “ ‘ ... [i]f one plays a comedy, one must first set the scene’ ” (*Appointment* 251).

By the partly contrastive portrayal of her detectives, Christie emphasizes the traditional gender allocation to each sphere. In this sense, Poirot pursued the occupation of a policeman in the public sphere before his retirement. However, Christie never mentions anything related to Miss Marple’s previous employment, therefore restricting the spinster sleuth’s existence to the private sphere. Moreover, Christie alludes to the historical fact that in the interwar years, the British police force was predominately a patriarchal institution. According to Makinen (see *Feminist Fiction* 98), in 1918, two years before the first Poirot novel was published, the Metropolitan Police force in London admitted 25 women with restricted authority. Four years later these women were dismissed due to their male colleagues’ as well as the public’s mocking. Only in 1973 were they fully reintegrated and were assured equal authority in all aspects of the Metropolitan Police force work. (see “History of the Metropolitan Police”)

7. The evil from within

As the heading the evil from within indicates, destruction and culprits recurrently originate and operate from within the domestic sphere in Christie’s novels. Furthermore, the domestic ideal and stability is of paramount importance since her plots revolve around its destruction and reconstruction. In this sense, the main objectives of this chapter include an analysis of how domestic stability is destructed and constructed, the familiar relationship between the victim and the

culprit as well as the means by which the murderer operates. Domestic weapons are repeatedly used in planning and conducting the evil deed and are therefore suitable for the murderer as the domestic sphere offers a certain transparency of the victim's routines. The theoretical framework for this chapter is firstly based on Sigmund Freud, who approached the connection between uncanny experiences and familiarity from a psychoanalytical angle and secondly on the Golden Age literary critic John Scaggs, who identified the evil from within in the context of the interwar period's historical circumstances.

7.1. Theoretical framework

Before elaborating on Scagg's and Freud's approach, it is appropriate to start with a feminist approach on home, as this place is a murder scene in the majority of Christie's novels. From a feminist approach, home is often interpreted as an ambivalent space, a place which is likely to accommodate pleasure as well as pain. McDowell draws attention to the prospect that the home might offer a private and secure retreat, a place where familial bonds are formed and maintained and which evokes feelings of belonging. On the contrary, it can also be a place of danger and domestic violence, exerted by male patriarchy. (see McDowell 14) However, "domestic confinement" (qtd. in Goodman 109), which Elaine Showalter lists in addition to "emotional disturbances in women" (qtd. in Goodman 109) as one definition of "the female malady" (qtd. in Goodman 109), is not restricted to the female gender. Although family members who are tyrannized and imprisoned by the matriarch are not that common and therefore have not often been subject matter in literature, they nevertheless exist as is the case in Agatha Christie's works. The novels *Sleeping Murder* and *Appointment with Death* expose a very distinctive correlation between "domestic confinement" (Showalter, qtd. in Goodman 109) and "emotional disturbance" (Showalter, qtd. in Goodman 109).

With his detailed accounts of typical Golden Age settings, Scaggs describes an enclosed space, a term recurrently used to describe the domestic sphere. Furthermore, the restricted setting which prohibits characters to enter or

to leave the crime scene presupposes that the murderer is already present, therefore close and familiar. This literary characteristic reflects the main fear of the Golden Age audience, namely that the evil force entailing destruction in the community has to “[come] from within” (Scaggs 46). In this regard, Scaggs discusses the disruption of order a crime entails and the resulting longing to restore the “status quo” (46). He applies this process to the Golden Age’s narrative structure. Here the narrated time proceeds towards its end as the truth is revealed but simultaneously moves backwards to the past when the detective discloses information, guaranteeing a gapless solution of the crime. At this point, Scaggs refers to Porter who compares the whodunit’s narrative structure with the Golden Age audience’s desire to return to the pre-war period, a time in which order and secureness prevailed. Moreover, Scaggs emphasizes that in Christie’s novels, the reinstatement of social order is tantamount to a romantic ending for some characters, as common in Gothic novels. (see Scaggs 47)

7.1.1. A psychoanalytical approach: Freud’s uncanny

It was the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud who linked the uncanny with the concept of home and the domestic sphere. His theory is therefore relevant for the analysis of Christie’s novels as it links two crucial elements of this thesis: evil and familiarity. In his work *The Uncanny*, which was published in 1919, he explains the semantic meaning of the words canny as well as uncanny and shows how the meaning of the latter one changed throughout history. Moreover, he links the two concepts by showing which circumstances might lead to feelings of uncanniness. Since the English language does not convey the various meanings of un(canny), Freud uses his native language German to demonstrate the link between *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. He also points out that uncanny situations and feelings are initially associated with the unfamiliar, however it is the link between the uncanny and the familiar that is of main interest here. (see Freud 2-3) Moreover, Freud’s explanations about the psychological process of repression as well as the forms and origins of the uncanny are described in great detail, as they are relevant in the analysis of the main protagonist Gwenda in *Sleeping Murder*.

The first meaning of *heimlich* evokes rather positive connotations such as “belonging to the house”, “familiar”, “tame”, “intimate” and “friendly” (Sanders, qtd. in Freud 2). However, its second meaning suggests deceitful behaviour. Expressions such as “to do something behind someone’s back”, “kept from sight”, or a “secret love-affair” (Sanders, qtd. in Freud 3) indicate that there might be a good reason for concealing something from other people. On the contrary, one meaning of *unheimlich* alludes to an “uneasy”, “eerie”, “bloodcurdling” (Sanders, qtd. in Freud 3) sensation. A less frequent definition of uncanny comes from Schelling who defined it as something “that ought to have remained ... hidden and secret and has become visible” (qtd. in Freud 4). Freud further elaborates Schelling’s thoughts and highlights that *das Unheimliche* originates from *dem Heimlichen*. Therefore, the uncanny is not anything “new or foreign but something familiar and old” (Freud 13). (see Freud 2-4) As Rob McMinn expands on the dimension between *heimliche* and *unheimliche* secrets, he assigns a private and public dimension to them. *Heimliche* secrets are private since they are kept hidden within the spheres of the home, whereas *unheimliche* secrets gain a public aspect since they are revealed. (see McMinn)

Within the theory of psychoanalysis, Freud suggests that every single emotional affect is transformed into “morbid anxiety” (13) by the psychological process of repression, regardless of whether it was of traumatic nature or not. This morbid anxiety is labelled the uncanny. It is due to the process of repression that certain affects are temporarily buried in the deep, hidden layer of the human mind, only to surface at a later stage. (see Freud 13) Linguistically speaking, *unheimlich* is a sub-term of *heimlich* which resulted out of a changed semantic meaning and links the *heimlich* with the *unheimlich*. Moreover, the prefix ‘un’ which was added to *heimlich* in the course of time making it *unheimlich*, represents the process of repression. (see Freud 15)

Based on several case histories, Freud firstly equates home with the female and secondly ascribes an uncanny aspect to it. Several male patients repeatedly complained about the uncanny feeling which female genital organs evoked. Freud concluded that this uncanny feeling originated from a place, namely the body of the mother, which was once familiar and homey. The body is familiar at one point, as life begins here, but it gains an uncanny aspect over time or as a result of repression. Those case history examples shows that the source of experiencing uncanny sensations as an adult can be traced back to infantile years and illustrates once more that uncanniness originates from the familiar. (see Freud 15)

Based on Freud's theory, several researchers elaborated on potential forms the uncanny can take. Gray points out that *unheimliche* secrets, which were supposed to be kept hidden, might emerge in the form of slips of the tongue. A person might make accidental mistakes by revealing pieces of information which are thus useful in interpreting unconscious material. (see Gray)

Moreover, Bennett and Royle list the impression of re-experiencing the same situation, the occurrence of a double or a déjà-vu as a manifestation of the uncanny (referred to in Punter 131). Freud illustrates the incidents of the double and déjà-vu with a situation he encountered himself. As he once wandered some lonely streets in Italy, a sudden uncanny feeling overcame him for no apparent reason. To escape this eerie sensation, he urgently left the street only to find himself involuntarily in the same spot shortly afterwards. In further consequence, Freud ascribed the action of returning to the same place to the psychological process of "repetition compulsion" (11), although it evoked uncanny feelings. The compulsion to repeat, which is based upon instincts and has its origins in infantile beginnings, is carried out by the unconsciousness. (see Freud 10-12)

As Punter and Smith interpret and elaborate on Freud's explanations, it becomes obvious that an uncanny experience can be linked to traumas from the past which were locked away by means of repression. Punter stresses that the uncanny impression that a place has been visited previously and is somehow haunted, is due to the fact that this place evoked incomplete

recollections of a psychological past. (see Punter 130) Smith's interpretations explain the cause of these involuntarily repeated actions. They are carried out since they represent the desire to face and overcome a repressed trauma. As repeatedly encountered uncanny places and situations point to a psychological trauma, Smith emphasizes that the impression of experiencing ghosts assumes a similar function. The border between physical and psychological becomes fuzzy when the most vital anxieties are projected onto ghosts. (see Smith 148)

However, as Freud points out, not everything that emerges from repression is uncanny and not everything that is experienced as uncanny is of traumatic nature. In this sense, the uncanny experience of the double has its origins in the infantile stage when it was created as part of a normal mental developmental process. The double is formed for narcissistic reasons, as it enables the child to take a stand against the remaining parts of the ego and to objectively criticize itself. (see Freud 15) Nevertheless, the uncanny feelings which originate from traumatic experiences are of paramount importance when interpreting Christie's work.

7.2. Destruction and reconstruction of domestic stability

7.2.1. *Sleeping Murder*

The dangers from within as well as the depiction of the home as a place of horror play a crucial role for the two main protagonists Gwenda and Helen. Freud's theory of the uncanny as well as Showalter's approach to the female malady provide the theoretical framework for the novel's analysis.

Upon her arrival in England, 21 year old Gwenda Reed begins searching for a new home for herself and newlywed husband Giles. Prior to her arrival in Great Britain, Gwenda had considered New Zealand to be her home, believing that she had never set foot on English soil. However, while visiting a potential new house an eerie feeling suddenly overcomes her: "They were starting down the stairs when quite suddenly Gwenda felt a wave of irrational terror sweep over her. It was a sickening sensation, and it passed almost as quickly as it came. ... 'The house isn't - haunted, is it?' demanded Gwenda." (*Sleeping* 194)

Despite the uncanny feeling, Gwenda purchases the house, only to be confronted with further uneasy incidents, which also arouse familiar feelings. The wallpaper in a former nursery seems familiar and Gwenda's hunch that a connecting door as well as a path to the lawn were used by the former residents proves to be correct. After fleeing from the play *The Duchess of Malfi*, in which an actor utters the lines " 'Cover her face. Mine eyes dazzle, she died young ...' " (*Sleeping* 204), memories of a strangled woman named Helen suddenly surface. Supported by Miss Marple, Gwenda, who fears that she is going mad, discovers that she did indeed reside in her newly purchased house as a child and must have witnessed the murder of her stepmother Helen. Miss Marple concludes that the "house stirred memories" (*Sleeping* 208), which were repressed in her unconscious due to their traumatic nature. Moreover, the spinster sleuth remarks that " '.... [i]f [children] are badly frightened, especially by something they don't understand, they don't talk about it. They bottle it up. Seemingly, perhaps, they forget it. But the memory is still there deep down'." (*Sleeping* 209) Further investigations about Helen lead to the disclosure that her father Kelvin Halliday did not strangle her stepmother, as everyone initially assumed, but that Helen's older brother Dr. Kennedy, recurrently approached by Gwenda in her attempt to investigate her traumatic past, was responsible for Helen's death.

Rowland emphasizes that home is a place of danger for both women, ultimately leading to the death of one. When the story unfolds and various mysteries from the past are revealed, Helen's as well as Gwenda's fates are linked. Both women suffer the same destiny as they both encounter dangers originating from their own home. (see Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 170-171) Chronologically speaking, the home was initially a place of danger when Gwenda witnessed the murder of her step-mother, which could have potentially led to her own death presuming the murderer was aware of being watched. Secondly, as soon as she moves back into her old home 18 years later, Gwenda is haunted by her traumatic memories. According to Freud's theory, the young Gwenda used to live in a secure home but the safety she felt there was shattered when she witnessed her stepmother's murder. It was due to repression that her traumatic experience was buried into the depths of her unconscious. While visiting her old home, Gwenda faces what Bennett

and Royle describe as a manifestation of the uncanny, namely the impression of reliving a situation and the occurrence of a *déjà-vu*. Gwenda is confronted with uncanny feelings which originate from something which was once familiar. The once *heimliches*, the place of safety where she was supposed to grow up in peace, was turned into *das unheimliche*, a place of terror. The uncanny impression that her newly purchased house might be haunted stems from the incomplete recollection of her traumatic past. Thirdly, as Gwenda, her husband Gill, and Miss Marple track down her step-mom Helen's murderer, they come too close to the malicious truth. Further investigations are prevented by Dr Kennedy, Helen's murderer, when he attempts to take Gwenda's life on two occasions in her own home. First he adds a poisonous substance to a bottle of brandy located in her house and then he assaults her physically, by trying to strangle her.

As already pointed out, Elaine Showalter used the term "female malady" (qtd. in Goodman 109) to refer to domestic imprisonment as well as "emotional disturbance" (qtd. in Goodman 109) of the female gender. The link between women and the domestic sphere has been discussed to a great extent in this thesis. Therefore, it is reasonable to investigate "domestic confinement" (Showalter, qtd. in Goodman 109), as this is imposed on the female protagonists in their allocation to the domestic sphere, and to examine links with "emotional disturbance" (Showalter, qtd. in Goodman 109).

The first definition of "female malady" (Showalter, qtd. in Goodman 109) pertains to the domestic confinement which is forced upon Helen by her obsessive half-brother Dr Kennedy. By mistreating Helen's infected foot and by cutting the tennis strings when his sister desired to play tennis with her peers, Dr Kennedy effectively prevented any kind of social relationship outside their home. He did not only hurt Helen physically by withholding the right medicine, but also emotionally as he averted any kind of interaction between his sister and other people. When Helen eventually married Kelvin Halliday, she hoped to escape the home dominated by her incestuous tyrannical brother. As much as Helen longed for a new home that accommodates pleasure, it once again becomes the origin and site of terror when her brother finally "kill[s] her physically" (*Sleeping* 335) to avenge his sister's detachment from him. While

Helen was confined physically, Gwenda is imprisoned in a psychological sense as her traumatic memories of the past prevent her from starting a safe and blissful existence in her (new) home.

The impression of being emotionally disturbed, the second aspect of female malady, is raised in Helen's case by her brother as he repeatedly describes his sister as "man mad" (*Sleeping* 335). Gwenda fears she is "going mad" (*Sleeping* 206) when she is confronted with uncanny incidents in her (new) house. It is Miss Marple who absolves both women of the label mad. In the course of the detection process, Miss Marple clarifies that only Helen's brother was responsible for spreading the lying rumours about his sister being "man mad" (*Sleeping* 335). Furthermore, Miss Marple relates Gwenda's surfacing repressed recollections to a traumatic event, namely witnessing a murder, and thus dismisses the unsubstantiated label of the hysterical female. In both cases the label of emotional disturbance originates from their home; in Helen's case her brother is the source of spreading the lies and Gwenda's emotional distress is due to her observation of a traumatic event in her home. (see Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 171)

Madness and domestic confinement are traditionally linked to women according to Goodman (see 109). However, in *Sleeping Murder* Christie challenges this association by creating the male character Kelvin Halliday, who exposed "delusional obsessions" (*Sleeping* 233). Although Kelvin was never confined in the domestic sphere the way Gwenda and Helen were, he was nevertheless controlled by an evil but familiar force. Dr. Kennedy operated from within Kelvin's own home as the administered drugs caused Kelvin's mental blackout. Upon regaining consciousness, Kelvin saw his wife's dead body, which caused him to believe that he had killed her. As a consequence of this traumatic experience, Kelvin was hospitalized to a mental sanatorium in which he eventually committed suicide.

Though the solution of the cold case does not bring Helen back, her murderer is finally brought to justice. Moreover, Gwenda's father, the late Kelvin Halliday, is eventually cleared of the suspicion of having murdered his wife. Why Gwenda returns to the exact same village and house where she encountered the most

horrible things can be explained by Freud's "repetition compulsion" (11), a compulsion which aims to overcome a repressed trauma. As the cold case is solved and justice is restored, the uncanny sensation the place previously evoked vanishes: " 'Poor Helen Poor lovely Helen, who died young ... she isn't there any more - in the house - in the hall. I could feel that yesterday ... There's just the house. And the house is fond of us. We can go back if we like...'. " (*Sleeping* 340) As Helen's presence is not discerned in the house anymore, Gwenda's initial assumption that "Helen [is] using [her] - and [Giles] - so that the truth will be known" (*Sleeping* 276) proves to be correct (see Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* 171). Helen's killer had to be disclosed in order to allow Gwenda and Giles, whose upcoming parenthood is indicated at the end of the novel, a safe and blissful existing in their new home.

7.2.2. Appointment with Death

As pointed out in the introductory chapter, Batz Cooperman differentiates between home as an "actual space" (109) and home as a "state of mind" (109). Whereas home as an "actual space" (Batz Cooperman 109) poses a threat and domestic confinement for the female protagonists in *Sleeping Murder*, in *Appointment with Death* Christie portrays the Boynton family's psychopathological behaviour as a result of their mother's tyranny. Since the story is set in a foreign country, therefore far away from the Boynton's native United States of America and actual home, the meaning of domestic confinement assumes a psychological purport.

Christie portrays the family from a psychological perspective and exposes possible roots of the Boynton's psychopathological behaviour. In this regard, approaching the family from the field of psychology, Petzholz defines a family as "a social group, characterized by intimacy and intergenerational relations" (qtd. in L' Abate 69). The members of this group are ideally connected by emotional bonds which are based on mutual worries, devotion, and confidence. However, a repeated violation of these ties might entail psychopathological issues and dysfunctional behaviour. (see Jurkovic 237) Moreover, Christie's portrayal of the Boynton family can be linked to the Family System Theory, which regards "the family as a whole" (Day 52). In this respect,

difficulties of a single member can only be cured if existing patterns of the complete family are evaluated. (see Day 52)

Mrs Boynton, the head of the family since her husband's passing, travels with her daughter Jinny, her stepson Lennox, his wife Nadine, her stepson Raymond, and her stepdaughter Carol to the area of the Dead Sea. The family dynamics and the dysfunctional control the mother exerts are obvious to the fellow passengers. Sarah, a young doctor, and the French psychologist Dr. Gerard describe Mrs Boynton as a "matriarchal type" (*Appointment* 19), "a complete tyrant" (*Appointment* 19), a "sadist", (*Appointment* 57) who "[prevents] a tree from growing" (*Appointment* 46). Mrs Boynton's behaviour has taken the most severe toll on her daughter Jinny whose exhibited behaviour indicates the mental disease schizophrenia, an illness which prevents her from differentiating between reality and fantasy. Nadine's and Lennox's marriage has been strained for an extended period of time resulting in Nadine's desperate longing to escape the golden cage, even if it entails a divorce from her husband. Lennox is well aware that his step-mother "gives [them] every luxury ... [e]xcept freedom" (*Appointment* 77) but is nevertheless incapable of abandoning his parental home even at the age of 30. Similarly, Carol and Raymond are pathologically attached to their stepmother and psychologically confined in their parental home, despite their advanced age. This leaves them unable to start their own family. Mrs Boynton's actions towards her children aim to chain them and her "morbid dislike of any outsiders penetrating into her family circle" (*Appointment* 71) is apparent for everybody surrounding them.

As Mrs Boynton's corpse is discovered in front of her tent in Petra, Poirot takes on the case and promises to solve it within 24 hours. Although Poirot is well aware of the victim's torture of her children, he clearly disapproves of vigilantism and regards every attempt to claim the life of another human being with detest, despite well justified motives, and therefore does not condone it. Poirot identifies the murderer not as one of the Boynton family, as everybody initially assumed, but as the aspiring politician and fellow passenger Lady Westholme. Lady Westholme was once a prisoner in the penal institution where Mrs Boynton used to be a wardress. Therefore, the murderer was no stranger for the victim

but somebody familiar from her past and was desperate to keep her criminal past concealed, which the victim threatened to reveal.

After the crime is solved, the remaining Boyton family members are able to embark on a new life as their long-lost domestic stability is finally constructed. As unethical as it may seem but “[Mrs Boyton’s] death ... was beneficial for the community [since] it has brought freedom to her family” (*Appointment* 146). The circumstance that the murderer is not one of the Boyton family just secures this new established domestic stability even further, as having a murderer in the family would entail additional hardships. Credit has to be given to Hercule Poirot who unearths the truth and thus restores the psychological health and balance of the remaining family members. Jinny, who had exposed symptoms of schizophrenia prior to her mother’s demise, is on the path of mental convalescence. Her experiences with this mental illness are assimilated creatively as she takes on the role of Ophelia¹⁸ in the play *Hamlet*. The other family members experience comparable promising future prospects. Lennox and Nadine rekindle their marriage and Raymond and Carol find new lovers in their fellow passengers Sarah and Jefferson Cope. The novel is finally concluded by Jinny’s recitation of the poem *Cymbeline*. It can be interpreted as a eulogy to her mother but also as a retrospective view on her painful life. Jinny is well aware that her own mother’s death led to the end of the tyranny, enabling a healthy and content existence. However, at the same time she is compassionate towards her mother.

‘Fear no more the heat o’ the sun,
Nor the furious winter’s rages;
Thou the worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and ta’en thy wages....’ (*Appointment* 303)

7.2.3. *The Murder at the Vicarage*

The novel *The Murder at the Vicarage* can be classified as a village mystery as it is set in Miss Marple’s home village of St Mary Mead, a village inhabited by mostly dull gossiping spinsters. The narrator of the story, the vicar, is a respected trusted member of the community and well aware of the parishioner’s

¹⁸Ophelia, a character in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, turns insane and eventually commits suicide. The portrayal of Ophelia’s madness influenced the further perception of mad woman in real life. (see Button)

inclinations. In the introductory chapter he notes the general attitude towards the greedy local magistrate Colonel Protheroe: “[A]nyone who murdered Colonel Protheroe would be doing the world at large a service” (*Vicarage* 507). A similar aversion is displayed by the Colonel’s daughter Lettice who calls him “dreadful” (*Vicarage* 512) and verbalizes her desire for her own father’s death with the words “ ‘... [i]f only father would be decent and die, I should be all right’ ” (*Vicarage* 513). Lettice is not surprised that her birth mother escaped his tyranny years ago and will therefore not be astonished if her stepmom Anne retreats into an extramarital affair. Lettice’s and the vicar’s wishes are finally granted as the Colonel’s dead body is discovered in the study of the vicarage. The murder brings several parties into focus: Firstly, the household of the vicarage where the vicar, his wife Griselda and their domestic help Mary reside. Secondly, the dysfunctional family of the late victim Colonel Protheroe including his daughter Lettice and his younger wife Anne. Moreover, a woman named Mrs Lestrangle has aroused the vicar’s interest for a while. Since Mrs Lestrangle has recently moved to St Mary Mead, not many details are known about her past as well as about her current life. Why this “woman of the world ... [buries] herself in a country village” (*Vicarage* 520) excites the vicar’s curiosity. As the vicarage assumes the location of the crime scene, its residents, relationships as well as their living arrangements are suddenly the centre of attention.

Mezei (see 110) notes that the domestic chaos in the vicarage hints to “moral disorder” (110). By addressing this kind of domestic disorder, Christie alludes to the interwar years, which led to an enormous decline of proficient domestic servants in the middle-class households and in turn caused further responsibilities for the mistress of the house (see Humble 124). In this sense, domestic chaos is apparent in the vicar’s household since Griselda honestly admits that “[she is] evidently *not* a housekeeper by nature” (*Vicarage* 508), even “a shocking [one]” (*Vicarage* 507). The existing chaos cannot be restored by their housekeeper Mary, who is responsible for “[b]ad food and lots of dust and dead wasps” (*Vicarage* 508) as Griselda notes. Moreover, a “domestic crisis” (*Vicarage* 624) occurs when Mary plans to leave the household, leaving Griselda desperate as Mary’s departure means she will have to search for a new domestic maid. The crisis was initially triggered by Lettice who had sneaked into the vicar’s study, attempting to dispose of evidence likely to

incriminate a beloved person. When Lettice is caught by Mary, she accuses the housemaid of insufficient cleaning and therefore cunningly avoids probing questions about her unattended presence. In addition, the domestic chaos is also an indicator for tensions between the vicar and his wife. As Lawrence Redding is eventually accused of having murdered the Colonel, Griselda finally admits her dishonesty towards her husband concerning her relationship with the suspect. Griselda concealed the fact that they had been romantically involved prior to Lawrence's move to St Mary Mead and had not been mere acquaintances as she had initially claimed. (see Mezei 110)

After identifying the culprits as Anne Protheroe and her lover Lawrence Redding, two well-known members of the community and in Anne's case a family member of the victim, justice and order are eventually restored in St Mary Mead. The detection process and the discovery of truth have certainly affected and transformed the life of the villagers.

Firstly, Griselda has evolved and matured tremendously during this time, eventually emerging with a more sensible outlook on life's prospects. Was it the shock of being in love with a murderer, or the dishonesty concerning her past towards her husband, or the fact that a murder occurred in her home that changed her attitude? No matter which factor contributed most to her development, her perspective concerning her duties in the domestic sphere varies significantly compared to before the murder. Her initial admission of neglecting the domestic chores and the self-proclaimed duty "[t]ea and scandal at four-thirty" (*Vicarage* 509) belong to the past (see Mezei 110): " '... I've decided that now I'm going to be a real 'wife and mother' (as they say in books), I must be a housekeeper too. I've bought two books on Household Management and one on Mother Love, and if that doesn't turn me out a pattern I don't know what will! ...'." (*Vicarage* 693)

Secondly, by the process of detection, the real identity and purpose of Mrs Lestrangle's sojourn in St Mary Mead are revealed. When Mrs Lestrangle's doctors diagnosed a terminal illness and thus gave her only a short time to live, she started to long for a reunion with her long-lost daughter. Her biological daughter Lettice, the product of her marriage with the victim, later reveals that her mother approached the Colonel with her last wish. However, Colonel

Protheroe denied her request by making her believe that Lettice assumed that her mother had been dead for a long time. It took the death of a person as well as Miss Marple's detection skills to reunite mother and daughter and to free Lettice from her father's tyrannical clutches. For Lettice and her mother the long-lost domestic stability is constructed as they resume their life together. Lettice concludes that " '[i]t's queer. She and I belong to each other. Father and I didn't. But mother - well, anyway, I'm going abroad with her. I shall be with her till - till the end...'. " (*Vicarage* 692)

7.2.4. 4.50 from *Paddington*

After completing her Christmas shopping in London, Elspeth McGillcuddy boards a train to return to her home in Paddington. After awaking from a short nap, she observes in horror how a man, whose back is visible, strangles a woman in a passing train. As soon as Elspeth realizes that she has just witnessed a murder, she immediately alerts the ticket collector who rather ridicules her observations. However, her friend Miss Marple is convinced of her reliability and takes up the challenge to investigate the crime. Nevertheless, this undertaking is quite demanding as Elspeth's observation is the only indication that a crime occurred, however, a dead body cannot be found. As Miss Marple pinpoints the area around Brackhampton including the estate of Rutherford Hall as a possible disposal location, the ageing Miss Marple requests the support of thirty-two year old Lucy Eyelesbarrow. In order to search for the missing body, Lucy applies for the post of a domestic servant in Rutherford Hall.

Similarly to *The Murder at the Vicarage*, the neglected household in 4.50 from *Paddington* of Rutherford Hall suggests tensions among the residents. As Lucy is admitted to the large property, she observes "what had originally been a small lodge which now seemed completely derelict, whether through war damage, or merely through neglect" (*Paddington* 556). Moreover, a drive leading to the mansion is lined up with "large gloomy clumps of rhododendrons" (*Paddington* 556) and the "gravel sweep [is] green with neglected weeds" (*Paddington* 556). When entering the mansion Lucy instantly recognizes the "dark hall" (*Paddington* 557) and the "[desperate] cold inside" (*Paddington* 557). As Lucy later assesses, the predominant gloom and neglect the exterior and interior convey are characteristic for the relationship of the Crackenthorpe

family. The two permanent residents include Luther Crackenthorpe and his adult daughter Emma. Although Emma is constantly tyrannized by her greedy, bullying, and physically handicapped father, she dutifully remains at his side. Emma's brothers Harold, Cedric, Alfred, and her brother-in-law Bryan and his son Alexander rarely visit the mansion, since their relationship to their father (-in-law) is even more strained. Alexander, motherless after the death of Luther's daughter, remarks that his father " 'Bryan needs a proper home life' " (*Paddington* 666) as in London, their main place of residence, he always interacts with the wrong kind of women.

Not long after her arrival, Lucy discovers the body of a woman in a sarcophagus, located in a barn on the property. Murder on the home turf and the aim of revealing the dead woman's identity, who the family fear to be the lover of their late brother, reunites the family temporarily. Furthermore, as the house and its surroundings are representative for the family dynamics, the sarcophagus assumes a similar function. Devas (see 262) notes that the sarcophagus is a metaphor for Rutherford Hall: "old, ugly, and filled with death" (262). Facing the fact that a corpse is discovered on their property adds even more pressure and hostility to the already strained relationships in the Crackenthorpe family. Luther notes that "[n]one of [his] sons are any good [as they are a] [c]rowd of vultures, waiting for [him] to die, [which is] their real occupation in life" (*Paddington* 602). The suspicion that one of his sons plans to end his father's life in order to receive a considerable inheritance is further reinforced by the family physician and secret admirer of Emma, Dr Quimper. The physician investigates potential causes of Luther's gastric disturbances around Christmas, a time when all family members were present. By enquiring "who prepared [the food] and served it" (*Paddington* 655), Dr Quimper indirectly attributes the cause of Luther's health problems to one of his children. When the whole family is suddenly poisoned, causing the death of Alfred and Harold, the physical threat is even more severe than the hostile relationships and mistrust among the family members.

When the dead woman is eventually identified as Dr Quimper's wife, the relief among the Crackenthorpe's is great since they are not connected with the victim. Although the murderer is not one of the Crackenthorpe family, as he is

identified as Dr Quimper, he was nevertheless a trusted and familiar person for the late victim. The murderer operated cunningly from within the domestic sphere by spreading rumours that one of Luther's sons was attempting to poison their father. Although these harmful rumours elevated the hostile attitude among the family members even further, the tension is eventually relieved when the rumours are proved to be false. Dr Quimper's malicious plan relied on tontine, an annuity scheme in which the inheritance of the deceased family members is accumulated to the shares of the remaining members. Therefore, he first killed his wife in order to be permitted to wed Emma, which would make him a legal member of the Crackenthorpe family, thus clearing the way for him to murder the Crackenthorpe's one by one. The disclosure of his evil intentions prevented even more deaths and removed the actual physical threat from Rutherford Hall. Although the surviving Crackenthorpe's do not unite to become a harmonious family, some start to experience their own domesticity. Since "[m]urder has made [Lucy] practically one of the family" (*Paddington* 610), she formed a relationship with Bryan. "Wedding bells" (*Paddington* 717) will be ringing for them in the near future, which would give Bryan a proper home life and a new mother for his son Alexander. Moreover, a new beginning is also expected for Emma, far away from her tyrannical father, "on a cruise or perhaps [during a] stay abroad" (*Paddington* 717). (see Devas 257) On the whole, the Crackenthorpe's domesticity is constructed by the detection process, which revealed that none of the family members had tried to kill their father, that the corpse discovered in their barn was not tied to the family in any way and also removed the culprit Dr Quimper.

Moreover, as Devas points out, a "woman's credibility" (260) is also constructed in the course of the detection process. The witness of the murder, Elspeth McGillicuddy, who was initially ridiculed as nobody apart from Miss Marple believed her accounts, is finally cleared of the stereotypical label of being a hysterical woman. (see Devas 260f.)

The previous part provided a detailed analysis of a typical Christie plot construction, which revolves recurrently around the destruction and

reconstruction of domesticity. Moreover, it summarized the various meanings the term domesticity can take on.

The evil from within was firstly discussed in context of Freud's psychoanalytical theory of the uncanny, stressing that uncanny experiences are not "new or foreign but ... old and familiar" (13). Secondly, Scaggs identifies the evil from within as a central characteristic of the Golden Age novels as it represented the main fear of the post-war audience. Indeed, in all of the analysed novels as well as in all of Christie's screen adaptations, the murderer is always a trusted and familiar person. In the majority of the cases the murderer is a family member of the victim. In *A Pocket full of Rye* Rex's murderer is revealed to be a blood-relative, his own son, who also succeeds in killing his step-mother Adele. Other murderous family members include Helen's step-brother in *Sleeping Murder* and Maggie's cousin in *Peril at End House*. Moreover, the murderer of Dora Bunner in *A Murder is Announced* comes from her surrogate family and is identified as Dora's trusted and beloved friend and housemate Letitia Blacklock. In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and *4.50 from Paddington* the victims are killed by their family physicians, who were not only respected members of the community but also companions of the victims before the killings. Although Mrs. Boynton's murderer in *Appointment with Death* is not a confidant, she is nevertheless no stranger to the victim as she used to be a prisoner during Boynton's time as a prison warden. Finally, Arlena Marshall, the victim in *Evil Under the Sun*, would certainly never have believed that her own murderer was the man who openly flirted with her and thus did not arouse any suspicions as he lured her onto a deserted beach.

In several novels the victims are murdered by their spouses, either by their husbands as it is the case in *Death on the Nile*, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, *4.50 from Paddington*, or by the wife such as in *The Murder at the Vicarage*. In this context Shaw and Vanacker (see 82) draw attention to Christie's portrayal of the institution marriage, in which she repeatedly contrasts vice and virtue. It is also the case in the four listed novels that the spouses misuse their marriage by murdering their partners in order to inherit a great amount of wealth or to gain a higher class status. However, these novels are always concluded with "an endorsement of respectable marriage" (Shaw and Vanacker 82). Whereas marriage is exploited by the murderers, it offers

promising prospects for other characters. Credit has to be given to Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot, whose superior detection skills are responsible for the disclosure of the masquerades, not only of the murderers, but also of other characters. In all the novels the detection process either entails a reconciliation of a troubled marriage such as in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, upon which reunion Poirot remarks “ ‘ ... [n]othing but the great danger through which they have passed could have brought these two proud souls together again’ ”(120), or a courtship turns into a romantic relationship, or marriage, or a pregnancy is indicated. This pattern which Freedgood¹⁹ classifies as an integral part of domestic novels, namely as its plots revolve around “courtship, marriage, and childbearing - [all activities] that reproduce domesticity” (183), can also be analysed in Christie’s novels. Moreover, Scaggs emphasizes that the solution of the crime is tantamount with the restoration of social disruption, namely the return to the state which existed prior to the evil deed (see 47). However, Shaw and Vanacker even go as far to argue that the solution of the crime improves the existing pre-crime state. They support their claim by stressing that the community’s close observation of the murderous betrayal in other marriages and the resulting disturbance induces a re-evaluation of their own values, attitudes, and priorities towards family duties. These considerations are thus accountable for society’s transformation towards a healthier state as well as a greater appreciation of traditional family values. (see Shaw and Vanacker 82)

7.3. Domestic weapons

In addition to domestic settings as crime scenes and trusted family members as murderers, Christie also selected her weapons from the domestic sphere. Alison Light points out that the author’s “domestication of weaponry” (94) often involves familiar, trivial, and “everyday things to kill” (94). They are usually customary parts of a household which are used for domestic purposes. As Christie’s weapons hardly leave any bloody crime scenes behind, Read compares her works with “a housewifely neatness in the slaughterhouse” (qtd. in Light 95). (see Light 94)

¹⁹ see chapter 3.4.1.

According to Batz Cooperman, the domestic acts of cleaning and cooking have a similar pattern, namely “gathering bits and scraps; rearranging and transforming them to allow the healthy continuance of life” (57). As innocent as cooking and cleaning may seem, this description implies that a proper handling of domestic chores has the power to entail a healthy life. However, this power can also be misused to reach contrastive results and do harm. (see Batz Cooperman 57) As a wild animal is tamed to be a domestic one, humans undergo the same transformation within the domestic sphere. By carrying out and participating in rituals at home, they are consciously or unconsciously observed by their housemates which makes their behaviour, preferences, and dislikes transparent, predictable, and thus easy to take advantage of. Harm and joy can be achieved by manipulating the housemates’ psychic state since the restricted space of a home offers the opportunity to observe housemates’ behaviour accurately. (see Batz Cooperman 99-100) Moreover, a household in which domestic chaos exists, such as dirty dishes, dusty and worn out furniture, disturbed meals, and untidiness often hints to social tensions among members of the household. (see Batz Cooperman 105-106)

In this regard, food’s specific preparation could have an impact on the housemates’ physical as well as psychological state. Sau-Ling Cythina Wong points out that besides its most basic function to survive, food has more elaborate functions. Undeniably, without food there would be no life but it can also be a powerful tool to control and intervene. Selected ingredients are known to heal the sick, milk is used to gradually stop feeding a baby with its mother’s milk and aphrodisiac foods are known to seduce. However, food and its handling can also be used to make people intentionally sick or poison them. (referred to in Batz Cooperman 57)

7.3.1. Poison

Although some of Christie’s victims are shot, strangled, stabbed, or slain, poisonous substances used as murder weapons are included in the majority of her novels. Poison is a killing aid which has to be differentiated from others as its effective use requires specific circumstances as well as specific surroundings. One character describes the fascination of poison with these

words: “ ‘Poison has a certain appeal ... It has not the crudeness of the revolver bullet or the blunt weapon ...’ ” (*Mirrors* 598). Indeed, as stabbing, strangling, and shooting a victim requires mainly physical strength, administering poison necessitates more elaborate planning and specific inside knowledge, which can easily be acquired by someone who is in the victim’s immediate surroundings. The domestic sphere, which is the ideal site for observing the behaviour and routines of the housemates according to Batz Cooperman (see 99-100), offers a certain transparency, enabling the manipulation of the housemates’ psychic state as well as their physical health.

Approaching poison from the field of toxicology, Ottoboni points out that in order to turn an even harmless substance or chemical into a toxin, several factors are decisive. Like her book title *The Dose makes the Poison* suggests, the dose, the quantity of the substance, as well as the time, meaning how frequently during a phase someone is exposed to a specific substance, contribute to whether it is deadly or not. Moreover, she differentiates between “acute ... and chronic toxicity” (39). “Acute toxicity” (Ottoboni 39) applies to the cases where humans get severely ill or die after being exposed to the substance once. Nevertheless, the dosage of the poison is high enough to be harmful. On the contrary, some substances are only lethal when they are administered frequently during an extended time period. This is the case of “chronic toxicity” (Ottoboni 39), a type of toxicity which is only effective and diagnosable after some time. (see Ottoboni 39-40) From the perspective of a murderer, as he/she plans and conducts the murder of a familiar person, “chronic toxicity” (Ottoboni 39) might be more convenient. The murderer may have the opportunity to administer poison over a specific time period without raising too many suspicions.

7.3.1.1. Access and inside knowledge

In *Appointment with Death*, a detailed consideration of how the poison was administered to the victim Mrs Boynton helps Poirot in determining whether the murderer was an insider, namely a member of her family, or an outsider. The fact that the victim took medication on a regular basis and the location of the storage place were well-known among her family. Based on these particulars, Poirot assumes that if the murderer had been one of the family, the easy access

to her medicine could have been a clear advantage to administer the poisonous digitalis into the victim's medicine bottle. However, since a puncture was detected on the victim's wrist, Poirot ascertains that a syringe was used to deliver the substance. This enables him to exclude the remaining family members from the circle of potential murderers and diverts his suspicions towards the people who had no access to the victim's medicine.

In *They Do It With Mirrors*, Miss Marple reacts to a request from an old school friend, whose presentiment concerns the safety of their mutual friend Carrie Louise. As soon as Miss Marple arrives at Carrie Louise's premises, everyone surrounding the landlady seems to be worried about a killer attempting to take Carrie Louise's life. Since Carrie Louise exposes painful cramps, nausea, and rheumatism, her husband Lewis supports the other's suspicion by drawing attention to the possibility that the exposed symptoms might be due to slow arsenical poisoning. Since slow arsenical poisoning, "the classic method of arsenic poisoning" (*Paddington* 657), can only be accomplished by someone who is well aware that arsenic can be delivered to Carrie Louise's body by mixing it discretely into her medicine bottle, who knows where her medicine is kept, and is familiar with the routine of the household, the culprit has to come from within. Lewis affirms that " ' ... [p]oisoning - slow poisoning - is an intimate family matter. It must be one of our closely-knit little household - '." (*Mirrors* 584) Furthermore, Carrie Louise also receives a box of chocolates containing her favourite Kirsch flavoured pralines, which are the only ones in which traces of the lethal aconitine are detected. Being knowledgeable of Carrie Louise's culinary preferences, it would be an easy game for the murderer to administer the poison to her favourite pralines, likely to be selected and eaten solely by her.

Whereas Christie raises the suspicion that Carrie Louise is the victim of slow poisoning, an instance of "chronic toxicity" (Ottoboni 39), in *4.50 from Paddington*, Luther, the landlord of Rutherford Hall seems to be threatened by "acute toxicity" (Ottoboni 39). As symptoms of arsenic poisoning exclusively occur when all family members gather to celebrate feasts such as Christmas, Luther's family physician Dr Quimper suggests that the poisoner must be one of his blood-relatives. Indeed, adding poisonous substances to Luther's food

would only have been possible by someone who had access and opportunity to tamper with his dishes.

While in the majority of the murder cases Christie employs poison as an actual weapon, in *They Do It With Mirrors* and *4.50 from Paddington*, it only serves as a red herring. Red herrings (see red herring, n.), a literary device favoured by many Golden Age authors, aim to confuse the reader by distributing misleading clues, thus distracting attention away from the real issue. In this regard, Christie misleads the reader by initially creating the impression that Carrie Louise's and Luther's lives are threatened by poison. By suggesting that someone from the family aims to poison the two, the culprits, Lewis and Dr Quimper, cunningly intend to distract the police from their actual misdeeds. However, by the mere articulation of being the target of a familiar murderer, Luther's and Carrie Louise's psychic state is certainly manipulated, possibly entailing harmful effects on their health.

In *A Pocket Full of Rye*, inside knowledge as well as access to the victim's food are the essential elements in succeeding to poison Mr Fortescue. As the detectives discover traces of the lethal taxine in the marmalade the victim consumed the very morning of his death, the mystery of how the poison was administered to the victim is finally solved. Since it was widely known among his housemates and domestic staff that " 'Mr Fortescue was the only one that took marmalade for breakfast ... The others had jam or honey' " (*Rye* 235), the murderer could only have been masterminded by someone who had the opportunity to observe the habits and culinary preferences of the victim closely. Consequently, the detective deduces that "anyone who was in the house or had access to the house could have tampered with [the marmalade]" (*Rye* 235). Rex Fortescue's and his wife's death, which were caused by poisonous potassium cyanide, are both cases of "acute toxicity" (Ottoboni 39). As Batz Cooperman (see 99-100) points out, the domestic sphere tames its residents and enables them to let their guards down. Unfortunately, exactly this lack of caution is the death warrant for Adele Fortesque. The fact that the poison was administered almost in front of her eyes hints to the circumstance that she indeed felt safe in the shelter of her home, in the presence of her stepson, who delivered the potassium cyanide into her cup of tea.

Letitia Blacklock benefits from predictable behaviour in the domestic sphere when she conducts the murder of her housemate Dora Bunner. Since Dora Bunner is not able to find the bottle of aspirin she had recently purchased, she takes one from Letitia's bottle. Letitia, having hid the aspirin, anticipated this and filled her own bottle with deadly poison.

In *Sleeping Murder*, Dr Kennedy, Kelvin Halliday's trusted physician and brother-in-law, mixes his patient drugs in the whisky. This substance causes Kelvin to lose consciousness and the doctor uses this time to murder his own sister Helen. 18 years later, Dr Kennedy attempts to murder Gwenda, who continuously admits the doctor into her house as she believes him to be a reliable friend. Her confidence gives the culprit the opportunity to add poison to a bottle of Brandy, likely to be consumed by Gwenda or her husband Giles.

Although detailed chemical knowledge is required in killing Mrs Inglethorp, it is once more the knowledge about the victim's routines as well as about her medication that leads to the successful delivery of the poison. The murderers Alfred Inglethorp and Evelyn Howard are well aware that Mrs Inglethorp has a box of bromide powders, a sedative, which she occasionally takes before going to bed. Furthermore, Mrs Inglethorp is ordered to consume the medicine strychnine on a regular basis. Since the murderers possess the chemical knowledge that the combination of bromide powder and strychnine, both innocuous when taken separately, is lethal, they dissolve the bromide powder in Mrs Inglethorp's bottle of medicine. Moreover, the culprits are aware that the combination of the substances will not be lethal until a fortnight later. Pinpointing the death to a certain day diverts initial suspicion from them as they planned to be absent on the night of the tragedy.

As underlined in the preceding paragraphs, arsenic, strychnine; and potassium cyanide are labelled as domestic weapons since their effective administration demands specific inside knowledge and access. Moreover, since these substances are additionally used for domestic purposes, the label domestic weapons is justified. Arsenic's domestic use as herbicide and insecticide is addressed by one character with the statement " ' ... [o]ne extracts it from weed killer or flypapers ... ' " (*Mirrors* 599).

This assertion proves to be reliable since Emsley (111) points to a similar use in real-life horticulture. According to Emsley, arsenic is used to destroy insects on apple trees or as a wood preservative to prevent wood from rotting as well as being destroyed by termites. Moreover, until 1971 this chemical was utilized for potatoes in order to defoliate them before the harvest. Furthermore, in *A Pocket Full of Rye*, Miss Marple notes that potassium cyanide is used “to take wasps’ nests” (231). Bailey points out that strychnine, the lethal poison administered in *Murder Ahoy* and *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* is applied as a pesticide to cause the death of rats. The domestic use of strychnine is also described in the novel itself as one character notes that it is effective when intending to “poison a dog” (*Styles* 58).

7.3.2. Domestic and female killing aids

Similarly to *Murder Most Foul*, where a gas cooker is transformed into a lethal weapon leaving nothing than an “innocent saucepan on the hob”, it is a “mousetrap primed with deadly poison” which causes the death of one victim in *Murder Ahoy*. In *Evil Under the Sun*, “a pair of nutcrackers” is featured as a potential murder weapon. One character suggests to Poirot that the murderer might have “finished [the victim] off with pressure on the carotid artery” (*Sun*), simply exerted by a “pair of nutcrackers” (*Sun*). Since the character suspects a specific woman who appears to possess insufficient physical strength to strangle someone, this domestic device is convenient for a weak female. She justifies her assertion with a real case in which a merely “eleven year old child” (*Sun*) used this kitchen appliance to carry out a murder.

In addition to employing weapons which are used for domestic purposes or which require inside knowledge about the victim’s routines and preferences, Christie includes several typical female killing aids as well. In this regard, the victim Cora in *Murder at the Gallop* is stabbed in her back with a beautifully adorned hatpin. The inspectors classify this killing aid as “a woman’s weapon” (*Gallop*) and remark that it is a “funny weapon to use” (*Gallop*). However, Miss Marple corrects their statements by stressing that it may also be used by a man “wishing everyone to think it was a woman’s” (*Gallop*). Moreover, in other novels various female beauty products assist the culprits in staging and

conducting their evil deeds. In *Death on the Nile*, the perpetrator uses a bottle of nail polish to pretend to staunch his bleeding wound and in *Evil Under the Sun* the culprit utilizes “a bottle of sun tan stain” to reproduce the tanned body of the victim.

An attribute shared by all of the weapons in Christie’s novels, whether they be domestic or typical female weapons, is their ordinariness and triviality. In *Peril at End House*, Poirot labels Nick Buckley’s method of adding cocaine to chocolate pralines, which she sends herself as a get well soon gift in order to sustain the suspicion that someone is attempting to take her life, as “simple” (*End House* 277). Similarly, as Carrie Louise in *They Do It With Mirrors* receives “an attractive box of chocolates tied up with gold ribbon” (622), only few suspect that her favourite pralines contain the deadly substance aconitine.

8. Conclusion

The main focus of this thesis was the analysis of domestic elements in Agatha Christie’s novels. Chapter five demonstrated that both detectives succeed by relying on feminine detection methods. Miss Marple’s and Hercule Poirot’s distinctive way of gathering information, interrogation, following their intuitive hunches as well as their domestic knowledge are in stark contrast to the male dominated police. The theoretical background on gossip exposed clearly which factors had been decisive for the negative connotation of the term and how this negative stereotype has been sustained throughout time. In answering the question whether intuition is a particular ability of the female gender, various studies exposed partly contrastive results. Nevertheless, no matter if intuition is a stereotype or empirical fact, it is a label with positive connotations compared to gossip. On the whole, by constructing two detectives who succeed specifically because of their feminine ways of investigation, ways which are by no means valued highly by society, Christie revalues typical feminine past time activities as well as traits.

Based on the historical background of the public private dichotomy, chapter six investigated whether Christie favoured domestic settings. Indeed, the author repeatedly selected domestic locations, namely the countryside,

which has been the ideal location for domesticity since the Victorian era. Moreover, Christie constructed murder scenes which assign the victims to gendered places. Although male and female characters are not exclusively murdered in gendered domains, the pattern of female victims being murdered in conventional female rooms and males in traditional male spaces emerges reasonably frequently. In spite of creating Miss Marple, a very revolutionary person who outshines her male counterparts, Christie pursued a more traditional line as she repeatedly assigned the spinster sleuth to the domestic sphere. Both detectives operate from within the domestic sphere and benefit from knowledge derived from this domain. However, after the crime is solved Miss Marple withdraws silently, without any public recognition, to the private sphere and remains there until the next corpse appears. On the contrary, Hercule Poirot's characterization exposes more affinity to the public sphere.

Chapter seven revealed that the evil force recurrently originates and operates from the domestic sphere. Murderers are commonly relatives or confidantes of the victims and the weapons used in conducting a murder are domestic. However, the claim in the introductory chapter that Christie's plots recurrently revolve around the destruction and reconstruction of domestic stability has to be partly corrected. It can be affirmed that domestic stability is established by the detection process. Nevertheless, the murder did not destroy the existing domestic stability, as the victim's household was often determined by tensions, disorder, and malicious intentions even prior to the evil deed. Therefore, domestic stability rarely exists prior to the murder.

Literary critics repeatedly contrast the gentle Golden Age of British Detective Fiction with the tougher American Hard Boiled tradition. Both nations were involved in the First World War and suffered the traumatic aftermath. Nevertheless, why did the British detective novel evolve into a more gentle and feminine variety, whereas the American tradition was determined by tough masculine elements? So far, scholars have not discussed this question in great detail. Therefore, it opens an interesting research area for future explorations.

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11. Appendix

Zusammenfassung

Agatha Christies fiktive Charaktere Miss Marple, die alte Jungferndetektivin, und Hercule Poirot, der lustige kleine Mann aus Belgien, entstammen der *Goldenen Zeit des Detektivromans*, eine Periode als Großbritannien unter den traumatischen Nachwirkungen des ersten Weltkrieges litt. Der Krieg veränderte die gesellschaftlichen sowie politischen Gegebenheiten des Landes, die in Folge die bis dato existierenden Geschlechterrollen sowie Geschlechterstereotypen neu definierten und somit weiblichen Detektivinnen und Detektivmethoden einen neuen Stellenwert gaben. Wie der Untertitel „Häuslichkeit und traditionelle Stereotypen als Kennzeichen der Weiblichkeit in Agatha Christies Werken“ signalisiert, beschäftigt sich diese Diplomarbeit unter dem Aspekt der Geschlechterforschung, mit der Detektivarbeit, geschlechtsspezifischen Plätzen sowie mit der Darstellung des Bösen.

Anhand von zwölf Primärwerken Christies wurden zu Beginn der Diplomarbeit die von Miss Marple und Hercule Poirots angewandten weiblich trivialen, oft als minderwertig bezeichneten, Detektivmethoden analysiert. So ist Klatsch und Tratsch eine effektive Methode der Informationsbeschaffung über Verdächtige und Opfer. Weiteres tragen Intuition, eine durch Empathie fähigkeit geprägtes Verhör sowie ein umfassendes Wissen über häusliche Abläufe und Gewohnheiten zur erfolgreichen Lösung der Mordfälle bei.

Ein zweiter Schwerpunkt dieser Arbeit war die Untersuchung etwaiger geschlechtsspezifischer Orte. Dieser fokussierte sich, ausgehend von der in der viktorianischen Zeit entstandenen privaten und öffentlichen Dichotomie, um die Rolle der häuslichen Lokalisationen in Christies Romanen. Die Forschungsfragen, ob Christie private, also weibliche Lokalisationen sowie geschlechtsspezifische Mordschauplätze bevorzugte und ob eine Verbindung der beiden Detektive zu deren traditionellen Bereichen erkennbar ist, standen dabei im Mittelpunkt. Die Analyse ergab, dass die Schauplätze in den Romanen tatsächlich, gemäß dem Ideal der viktorianischen Zeit, ländliche Gegenden sind. Weiters weisen die Romane eine gewisse Regelmäßigkeit bezüglich geschlechtsspezifischer Mordschauplätze auf. So werden Frauen größtenteils in traditionell weiblichen

und Männer in traditionell männlichen Domänen innerhalb des privaten Bereiches ermordet. Die Verbindung von Miss Marple zu der privaten Sphäre ist vor dem Mord, während der Detektivarbeit und nach der Mordaufklärung eindeutig gegeben. Im Gegensatz dazu weist Hercule Poirot, obwohl seine Detektivarbeit durch feminine Methoden geprägt ist, vermehrt Verbindungen zur öffentlichen Sphäre auf.

Der dritte Forschungsbereich beschäftigte sich mit der Darstellung und der Herkunft des Bösen. Ist der Mörder oder die Mörderin im inneren Kreis der Opfer zu finden und somit eine vertraute Person? Stammen die Tötungsmittel des/der MörderIn aus dem häuslichen Bereich? Ist anhand des Handlungsverlaufs ein Schema zu erkennen, bei dem das häusliche Ideal durch den Mord zerstört und in weiterer Folge durch die Detektivarbeit wieder hergestellt wird? Sigmund Freuds Kernbotschaft aus den Schriften über *Das Unheimliche*, die in diesem Forschungsbereich auch das theoretische Hintergrundwissen lieferte, wonach das Unheimliche nichts neues, sondern etwas vertrautes und altbekanntes ist, schien zugleich auch Christies Botschaft zu sein. Das Böse, das heißt Mörder und MörderInnen, sind überwiegend Familienmitglieder oder enge Vertraute der Mordopfer. Auch die Tatwaffen, in den meisten Fällen Gift, mit denen der/die MörderIn seine/ihre grausame Tat vollstreckt, sind im häuslichen Bereich zu finden. Die Hypothese, dass das häusliche Ideal durch den Mord zerstört und anschließend durch die erfolgreiche Detektivarbeit wiederhergestellt wird, trifft nur teilweise zu. Grundsätzlich führt die Detektivarbeit immer zu einer gewissen häuslichen Stabilität und zu einem romantischen *Happy End* für die ProtagonistInnen. Oftmals ist jedoch schon das häusliche Glück vor der Schreckenstat getrübt und verstärkt der Mord nur noch diesen Zustand.

Lebenslauf

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- 2001 - 2004 Pädagogische Akademie für Hauptschullehrer
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Abschluss: Lehramtsprüfung
- 2002 Auslandssemester an der *Western Kentucky University*
- 2001 Fremdsprachenkurs (Englisch, Französisch) am *Oakland Community College* in Michigan, USA
(1 Semester)
- 1998 Reifeprüfung am Bundesrealgymnasium Wien III
- 1989 - 1998 Wirtschaftskundliches Realgymnasium in Wien
- 1985 - 1989 Volksschule in Wien

Berufserfahrung

- 2010 Kursleiterin bei *EF (Education First)* in London, GB
- 2009 Kursleiterin und Unterrichtstätigkeit bei *EF* in Hastings und Torquay, GB
- 2004 - laufend Lehrverpflichtung an der *SPAR- Akademie*
(Fächer: Berufsbezogenes Englisch, Betriebswirtschaftliches Praktikum), englische Vorträge für diverse Delegationen, Mitglied im Sozialkompetenzteam (Vertrauenslehrerin)
- 2004 - 2005 Lehrtätigkeit beim Nachhilfeinstitut *Einfach Lernen*
- 1999/ 2001 18 Monate Au-Pair in Michigan, USA
- 1999 Sechs Monate Urlaubsbetreuerin bei *Gulet/Touropa* in Korfu, Griechenland

Sprachkenntnisse

- | | |
|---------------|------------------------------|
| ■ Deutsch | Muttersprache |
| ■ Englisch | fließend in Wort und Schrift |
| ■ Französisch | Grundkenntnisse |

Sonstiges

- Prüfungskurs zur Leiterin einer Wintersportwoche (Pädagogische Akademie)
 - Ausbildung zum Skilehrer
 - Ausbildung zum Snowboardlehrer