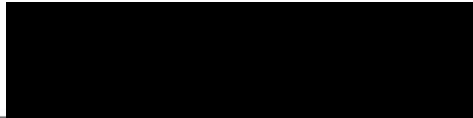


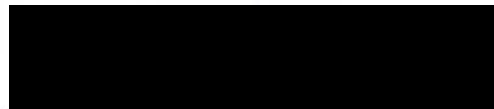
Reading Beyond the Blood: A Post-Colonial Reading of Agatha Christie's Works
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Since my early childhood, I have been compelled by mysteries. The allure of the mystery-to-be-solved was irresistible to me; it determined my favorite films and T.V. episodes to watch, my favorite books to read, and my favorite games to play with my friends. I even planned my own birthday parties around mystery themes, challenging my friends to follow clues and find the solution of the missing party favors, for example. As I grew up and began focusing more on academia than freeze tag, the love of mystery remained with me and very much affects the works I enjoy today.

I'd like to thank Dr. David Kaplin, not only for taking me on as a thesis student (which was probably not always an easy task), but for showing me that the genre I love does matter in the academic world. Without taking his Mystery and Detective Fiction course in the Fall 2009 semester, I'm not sure what this thesis would be about and if I would be as engaged with it as I am with this one. All of my gratitude will still never be enough.

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Introduction:

“All around us are people, of all classes, of all nationalities, of all ages. For three days these people, these strangers to one another, are brought together. They sleep and eat under one roof, they cannot get away from each other. At the end of three days they part, they go their several ways, never, perhaps, to see each other again.”
Murder on the Orient Express (28)

“It is the question, too, that Archaeology asks of the Past - *Come, tell me how you lived?* And with picks and spades and baskets we find the answer.”
Come, Tell Me How You Live, foreword

Mystery and detective fiction is a well-known and well-loved genre of literature; from Sherlock Holmes to Kinsey Millhone, the genre provides many beloved detectives and their adventures to a wide world of readers. Agatha Christie was the legendary creator of many mystery stories. For many years in the early twentieth century, she penned a plethora of novels, short stories, and plays, entertaining readers worldwide with complex murders, plots, and motives. Christie has become a household name over the years and still sells millions of copies to this day, her works selling as well as the Bible and Shakespeare’s texts, while also achieving the Guinness World Record for World’s Bestselling Novelist (“How Well”).

Christie’s many mysteries have set a standard for readers’ expectations for the genre, along with other writers from mystery and detective fiction’s ‘Golden Age¹.’ She utilizes a number of devices familiar to fans of the genre (like the red herring), and she also made her endings noteworthy. By creating clean, fully explained closures, Christie erases all of the questions a reader could possibly be left with: Who did it? Why? How? What happens to the culprit(s) now? Where are the rest of the characters left after this? Even in Christie’s more

¹ The Golden Age is described in full detail in Julian Symons’s book *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel*, but can be summarized as a group of mystery and detective fictions writers between approximately 1920-1940 who followed a similar set of rules and conventions. Christie’s habit of explaining everything in full detail at the ends of her novels is one example of a Golden Age convention. Other Golden Age authors included Francis Iles, Dorothy L. Sayers, S. S. Van Dine, and many more.

experimental works like *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* or *And Then There Were None*, she still wraps up everything and answers every question, unlike other classic and contemporary writers in the genre.

Because of this technique, as well as the work of other authors in the genre that follow these conventions, readers of mystery and detective fiction have certain expectations when they approach a mystery in any form. Whether the text is a novel, short story, play, film, television episode, or any other format, readers/viewers expect to be taken for an entertaining ride while getting all of their questions answered. But, there are still plenty of entry points throughout her works where readers are left with questions that are not necessarily answered.

Christie utilizes another entry point that many writers share; she provides in her work an historical snapshot of the world as it existed during her time. By capturing British society in the years surrounding both of the world wars, Christie gives telling descriptions of society and creates both genuine and stereotypical characters to enhance this snapshot. This technique is quite helpful in the process of engaging readers and is frequently found in works by authors like John Steinbeck, Jane Austen, and Charles Dickens. By providing these images and platforms for readers, Christie invites readers into the text to experience the events and attitudes of war, assumptions about imperialism and foreigners, day-to-day life of English folk in every walk of life, and the current impressions of psychology of her time. The historical snapshot as an entry point, like questions of closure, is effective in hooking readers and encouraging active participation within the text.

Another one of these entry points is addressed in Phyllis Lassner's work, "The Mysterious New Empire: Agatha Christie's Colonial Murders," published in 2009 in *At Home and Abroad in the Empire: British Women Write the 1930s*. As the title implies, Lassner's work

raises questions about how the ideas of empire and colonization come into play in Christie's works. Christie wrote for many decades, including, as I have already mentioned, the time surrounding the two world wars. Through the lens of Lassner's article, it is quite interesting to view Christie's works as an historical artifact and a bundle of perceptions about this time period. Given these questions, this project asserts that it is imperative to consider Christie's works through this lens in order to expand the accessible entry points for the readers' intellectual engagement.

Lassner begins her article by discussing Christie's place in the literary world. This is also a topic that is frequently discussed, especially by fans of genres like mystery and detective fiction, young adult fiction, science fiction, and others in this vein; readers ask, why is my favorite genre not considered 'real' literature? Why do these books fall into the category of 'leisure' reading? Lassner acknowledges this gulf, saying, "Agatha Christie, who remains the best-selling novelist of all time, has yet to win a secure place in the canons of modern fiction" (31). While to some scholars this separation from the works of Milton, Chaucer, Faulkner, and Shakespeare seems appropriate, fans of genres that fall outside of the literary canon are usually left out of academic discussion. Readers of genres like fantasy fiction, science fiction, and mystery and detective fiction are often forced to feel like the reading they do is of no consequence in the literary world ("It's great that you're reading that, but what are you reading next? Hemingway? Flaubert?"). In order to combat this public attitude, Lassner points out an element that carries across Christie's body of work: the presence of the 'Other' and British attitudes of its Empire.

Christie was writing during a pivotal time in England, so her work viewed through this lens provides a new angle that hasn't received a great amount of attention in the context of her

writings. What were Christie's feelings about the British Empire? How did she process the idea of 'Englishness' in relation to the 'Other'? How did her travels around the Empire affect her work? Through the examination of Christie's novels and personal writings, this project asserts that Christie's novels complicate English ideas and assumptions about the Other; rather than simply condoning or condemning these ideas and assumptions as good or bad, Christie presents multiple circumstances in her novels to establish more of a grey area than an absolute. In order to engage in this project's argument and Lassner's discussion, it is necessary to consider the profound influence of the British Empire and how ideas of 'Englishness,' the 'Other,' imperialism, colonialism, and postcolonial theory come into play in this argument.

The British Empire refers to Britain's possession of territories outside of its own physical sphere for political and economic purposes. The British possessed territories across the continents, including Africa, Australia, Asia, North America, Central America, South America, and areas of Europe. During Christie's lifetime, she witnessed the Empire's final expansions and eventually its dissolution in conjunction with both of the world wars, and she also traveled extensively around its territories throughout her life.

"Englishness" refers to a means of identification amongst groups of people. It is mostly used, especially in the works of Agatha Christie, to differentiate between the English people and other cultures. In Christie's works, it also sometimes refers to the stereotype of English people, teasing out representations of pure 'Englishness.' These representations are utilized in Christie's works both as characteristic ideals (for example, Tommy and Tuppence as patriotic defenders of the nation) or amusing mockeries (for example, the 'typical, thoroughly English' military personas who stomp about brimming with patriotism but contributing very little).

This project's references to the 'Other,' like 'Englishness,' differentiate the English from other cultures and peoples. The 'Other' stands out to the English, especially in Christie's works, and is sometimes a symbol of fear as well as difference. Stereotypes also exist in conjunction with this term. For example, English characters in Agatha Christie's novels may refer to Arabs, Italians, and many other nationalities in stereotypical terms in order to differentiate themselves from the Others as well as to isolate feelings of fear and suspicion to those specific groups.

Imperialism refers to the absorption of smaller cultures by powerful countries like Great Britain in order to increase economic gain as well as to expand the empire's influence on the rest of the world. It is characterized as a parasitic relationship in which one dominant country feeds off of the benefits of a subjugated country. Through the influences of imperialism, an uneven dichotomy is formed, and the subjugated country usually only exists to serve the other.

Imperialism is also characterized by the primary country, Great Britain in this case, viewing its forced influence as an issue of morality; this attitude asserts that the citizens of these smaller cultures are not civilized and it is therefore the dominant country's mission to improve them. On the other hand, colonialism is when colonies are created abroad primarily to increase economic benefits, but not necessarily to expand the political empire. For example, a crop that is not native to the primary country may be created in a colony abroad. Examples of Britain's role in imperialism and colonialism can be found in many of Christie's novels as she creates characters and locations in her mysteries that specifically refer to these types of country-to-territory relationships both positively and negatively.

Finally, postcolonialism is a term that refers to the methodological framework used for this particular project. Postcolonial arguments analyze literary texts through a lens that considers the influences of colonialism and imperialism on the text, its authors, and its readers both in past

and contemporary time periods. It is also through this lens that Lassner conducts her argument. By studying Christie through a postcolonial lens, readers not only engage in Christie's historical snapshots; they can also think critically about the history of the British Empire and analyze Christie's works outside the realm of their genre. This type of engagement with Christie's texts is the driving force for the argument articulated in this project.

In her article, which I analyze in more depth in Chapter One, Lassner argues that certain specimens of Christie's novels betray these assumptions and varying perceptions of the Other and the British Empire. Lassner utilizes four of Christie's novels to support her claims, all of which feature the detective figure Hercule Poirot. These four novels all take place in locations abroad, like Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Balkans. Whether for purposes of business or pleasure, British characters are placed in these settings and a murder mystery unfolds. Lassner argues that attitudes of the Other and empire are revealed by what we see happening when British characters are placed into these exotic settings, a common feature of the travel literature genre as a whole.

In this project, I extend Lassner's argument further into Christie's works than the four Poirot novels she discusses in her article can accommodate. For all the persuasive strength of Lassner's work, I also sense a bigger picture in my reading of a significant number of Christie's works; I argue that this historical snapshot of the English and their Empire, while prominent and imperative in the texts that take place abroad, is also, if not more so, crucial in the texts that take place in Britain. It is in the English homeland where we can glimpse another intriguing perspective of this historical snapshot. Because the characters are not prone to the assumed dangers abroad, there are usually no overarching themes of the Other like the texts Lassner utilizes in her argument. However, just because this is not the case in British settings does not mean that ideas of Otherness and the Empire are not still present. In short, there are fascinating

moments where these imperial ideas shine through in many novels with British settings, but they are veiled in the background of the imaginative murder mystery. By digging up these harder-to-find moments and closely analyzing them, the reader can see how Christie problematizes ideas of Englishness and the Other.

Although these homeland settings do not contain the excitement of an archaeological dig in a foreign land or the glimpse of other cultures during travel, surveying the happenings in these novels can be just as fascinating. By considering the articulation of possible murder motives, side conversations, as well as characters and their attitudes of the Other, the reader can discover an entirely separate snapshot from the one Lassner speaks to. Because of the position of these elements in the background of the plot (usually), it is easier for readers to skip over them entirely or to quickly pause in thought but then move on in the story.

A particularly effective example of this type of moment can be found in the novel *And Then There Were None*, one of Agatha Christie's bestselling novels that has also been featured on stage and in films. In this novel, ten characters from across the nation have been lured to Soldier Island in Devon under varying pretenses (a social visit, employment, a holiday, etc.). However, when all of the characters arrive, their host is absent. Despite the confusion, the guests all sit down to dinner together, when a hidden gramophone plays a record, loudly accusing each guest of a murder he/she had gotten away with. While the guests begin mysteriously dying after this exclamation, the survivors look to each other for answers and explanations. Some guests recall the incident prompting their own accusations with great sadness and remorse; for example, the character Vera is guilty of allowing the child she was in charge of to drown so that her lover, the child's cousin, would inherit his fortune. The character Philip Lombard, however, discusses his accusation in quite a different way:

Lombard spoke. His eyes were amused. He said:

“About those natives-“

Marston said:

“What about them?”

Philip Lombard grinned.

“Story’s quite true! I left ‘em! Matter of self-preservation. We were lost in the bush. I and a couple of other fellows took what food there was and cleared out.”

General Macarthur said sternly:

“You abandoned your men – left them to starve?”

Lombard said:

“Not quite the act of a *pukka sahib*, I’m afraid. But self-preservation’s a man’s first duty. And natives don’t mind dying, you know. They don’t feel about it as Europeans do.”

Vera lifted her face from her hands. She said, staring at him:

“You left them – to *die*?”

Lombard answered:

“I left them to die.”

His amused eyes looked into her horrified ones. (ch. 4, pt. II)

This passage, less than two pages in a three hundred-page novel, is a fitting example of a thought-provoking circumstance that can be easily passed by in a plot-centered reading. A reader may reasonably want to quickly read through this kind of section to get to the next exciting murder, but it is exactly this type of moment that needs to be scrutinized in accordance with this project’s argument. By closely reading this passage, several intriguing choices can be examined.

Lombard's own attitude is clearly revealed in this passage, or at the very least an attitude that he desires to convey to his audience. He flippantly tells his story to his listeners (as well as the readers), leaving out any serious feelings of guilt or regret. It could even be argued that he purposely narrates his story in this fashion, trying to get a rise out of his audiences both in and out of the text. Word choices like "amused eyes" and "grinned" could be read in concordance with this interpretation, as well as the carefree way he expresses his actions ("Not quite the act of a *pukka sahib*, I'm afraid").

Lombard's narration also details his feelings about the victims of his heinous act. Although his act contains the highest number of victims in comparison to the rest of the characters (who were only responsible for one or two deaths), he does not seem perturbed by it. He even openly says, "And natives don't mind dying, you know. They don't feel about it as Europeans do." Lombard could be making this assumption for many reasons, but what is clear is that he does not consider 'natives' as equals to Europeans. This may be why he considers the number of victims from his act as insignificant. Despite any act Lombard could be trying to perform for his audience, his words convey his true feelings and an alignment to imperialistic thought.

The other characters in this particular scene contribute to the dimension a close reading recognizes in this passage. Anthony Marston, the conversation's first respondent in the passage above, is himself guilty of running down two people with his flashy sports car. His interest in Lombard's explanation could stem from several areas, mostly Marston's own affectation of not feeling any regret. General MacArthur, on the other hand, feels deep regret for his own crime: sending a valued comrade on a mission of a certain death in order to eliminate romantic competition for MacArthur's wife. Therefore, his disgust with Lombard is rooted in his own

personal guilt as well as Lombard's neglect for his military responsibilities. Vera Claythorne's reaction is the most dramatic perhaps because her crime is the most dramatic in terms of 'Englishness.' Allowing little Cyril to drown so that his cousin Hugo could inherit the family fortune is an act Vera frequently reflects on throughout the novel with a great amount of guilt and regret. Her reaction to Lombard's narrative, drawing her out of her own guilt-ridden thoughts, serves as her moment of realizing who exactly she is surrounded by on Soldier Island.

This textual example, which could be easily read over in pursuit of reading the rest of the novel and solving the mystery, is definitely worth some thought and consideration. Although this is a brief instance of a character's attitude regarding the Other (in Lombard's case, the natives), by reading Christie's novels as historical snapshots the readers may stop and consider this moment more in depth: Why is this moment important? Where does Christie derive the inspiration for character attitudes such as Lombard's? And perhaps more crucially, why in *And Then There Were None* in particular is this one of only two specific mentions of Lombard's crime (in which over twenty people were left to die) in comparison to Vera's crime (the death of one English child), which is mentioned over and over again throughout the novel? This last question is perhaps the most perplexing of all.

If the reader spends time thinking about these questions before moving forward in the mystery, even more questions come up. A reader may wonder if Christie merely created characters that would provoke reactions (either compelling or repulsive) in the reader; perhaps she was mocking these attitudes which she saw in her own society; maybe she, in fact, believed in these attitudes herself; or perhaps the act of writing could have been a method of processing her own ideas from her travels around the Empire. In this project, through the examination of historical and biographical contexts, the answers to these questions are studied by examining

Christie's historical moment. Biographical texts about her life as a writer and as a British citizen are also examined, as well as her own non-fiction writings concerning the Empire and her travels abroad. I also view other moments like Lombard's revealing explanation in many of Christie's novels, analyzing these textual moments utilizing prominent postcolonial theorists like Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. This project makes sense of Christie's ideas of the Other and the Empire, and argues for a reading of her work in this context.

If Christie's work can be read with these contexts in mind, consider how these readings can be applied to a wider examination of the genre of mystery and detective fiction through the utilization of historical snapshots. If canonical authors like Jane Austen, John Steinbeck, Charles Dickens, and Virginia Woolf are recognized partly because of their ability to bring this snapshot to life in their works, it should follow that authors in the mystery and detective fiction genre should be recognized for the same technique. Authors usually cast aside as 'leisure' or 'escapist' reading, like Agatha Christie, Sue Grafton, Raymond Chandler, Dorothy Sayers, and Elizabeth George (among many, many others), can be recognized through this lens for their ability to capture their contemporary attitudes surrounding them in their writing careers. The genre holds more potential in the world of literature; it can do more than appeal to and entertain readers. This project that focuses on Agatha Christie can be considered in its own way as an entry point to this bigger picture.

I begin in the first chapter by closely examining the historical context surrounding Christie's life as well as applicable postcolonial theories, summarizing and analyzing the works of main contributors to post-colonial thought, Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. The first chapter aims to set the reader up for the application of these ideas to a refreshing analysis of Christie's works. By identifying crucial concepts from these theorists, Christie's works and the unique

historical snapshot she captures (the social and cultural attitudes of the English people that Christie characterizes) begin to make more sense through this lens.

In the second chapter, these theoretical ideas are specifically applied and examined in Christie's works. By examining brief moments like the example of Lombard throughout the body of her work, the evidence builds up and points to the accumulation of certain elements. Christie provides many moments similar to the example with Lombard for readers to examine and scrutinize in conjunction with a postcolonial framework: characters (whether genuinely developed or reproduced from 'stock' or stereotypes) and their differing attitudes regarding the Empire and the Other; side conversations that may or may not be related to the mystery-driven plot; and the possible murder motives articulated by the detective figures and other characters. A collection of moments throughout Christie's novels demonstrate these aspects. When examined in chronological order in conjunction with Christie's biography and the historical context, intriguing patterns are discovered and readers can witness Christie's problematizing of ideas of Englishness and the Other as they grow more veiled and complicated.

The last chapter discusses the implications of a postcolonial reading of Christie's works. How does this lens change the impression made by Christie's works? Does it alter the importance of her association with the genre of mystery and detective fiction? Through the overall argument articulated in this introduction and what is laid out in chapters one and two, as well as Christie's own non-fiction writings concerning the Empire, I articulate how these questions may be answered.

CHAPTER ONE: Christie In Context

Many readers enjoy the work of Agatha Christie sheerly for entertainment purposes, but there is much more to read between the lines. By understanding the state of Britain during Christie's life as well as the functioning and demise of the Empire, readers become more involved with conversations in the novels surrounding war and the affairs of the country. By learning more about the Empire and its effects on people worldwide, it is feasible to partake in a postcolonial reading of Christie's works, thereby showing readers a bigger picture of how Christie's works can be read and analyzed outside of the murder mystery plots.

--- Christie's Life in Wartime Britain ---

Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller was born in 1890², and was almost twenty-four years-old when Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Bosnia in the summer of 1914. Tensions in Europe were high after Ferdinand's assassination, and Britain was already concerned about national affairs before World War I began. According to Kenneth O. Morgan³ of the University of Wales, "the 'triple alliance' of miners, railwaymen, and transport workers was threatening a mass united strike to back up the railwaymen's claim for union recognition and a 48-hour week... [presenting a] prospect of nationwide industrial paralysis" (Morgan 1). With the threat of war on the horizon and the endangerment of the Empire, Britain was truly in a precarious state. There was clearly a great deal going on politically and economically in the years of Miller's young adulthood.

Miller, however, grew up quite isolated from these concerns, born and raised in the beautiful town of Torquay. According to her autobiography, her father had made enough money

² For biographical information, I primarily utilize Agatha Christie's own autobiography (2010). However, I also consulted Janet Morgan's biography (1985) as well as a few brief summaries (New Word City, 2012 and Hyperink, 2012) to confirm information.

³ For historical information, I directly cite Morgan because he provides a great historical survey of twentieth-century Britain. I have examined this information against other texts like D.C. Somervell's *Modern Britain: 1870-1950* (1962) and Lawrence James's *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (1996) for neutrality and accuracy.

to eliminate the need for he or any of his family members to work and they lived comfortably. With her two older siblings away at school, Miller had her two parents and her beloved nanny, Nursie, all to herself (*Autobiography* Part I, chp. 2). When she turned sixteen, she was sent to finishing school in Paris and then returned home to a country on the precipice of war (Part III, chp. 4). Miller had already begun writing by this time, more as a hobby than anything else, but she had also been around Europe and the British Empire as well, attending school in Paris and going on trips with her family to places like Versailles and Cairo (Part III, chp. 5). Even at a young age, Miller was already glimpsing a lot of the world around her and the people who inhabited it. Although she didn't start her writing career until later, she was always a keen, interested observer of people, their behaviors, and their habits.

The world of Miller's young adulthood was not the same sheltered world of her Torquay childhood; just when Miller was starting to begin her life as a young woman in British society, many chaotic events were unfolding in Great Britain and its Empire. On August 4th, 1914, Britain declared war on Germany, and preparations were made in great haste, nearly draining the Treasury and the Bank of England. The military aspect of the war did not start off so well for Britain either; Britain suffered heavy losses from the start in their own attacks, and only France's military resistance stopped German advancement for a while (Morgan 2).

By the time the war began, Miller was almost twenty-four years-old and engaged to Archie Christie, a pilot in Britain's Flying Corps. Miller had been training as a nurse before the war, and she mainly attributed this to the popularity of the skills in her contemporary society:

First Aid and Home Nursing classes were popular during 1913, and at the beginning of 1914. We all went to these, bandaged each other's legs and arms, and even attempted to do neat head-bandaging: much more difficult. We passed our exams, and got a small

printed card to prove our success. So great was female enthusiasm at this time that if any man had an accident he was in mortal terror of ministering women closing in on him.

‘Don’t let those First Aiders come near me!’ the cry would rise. ‘Don’t touch me, girls. Don’t *touch* me!’ (*Autobiography* Part IV, chp. 9)

The popularity of women learning nursing skills came in handy for a country that was soon in total war. As Morgan observes, “The supreme irony was that a war which brought the loss of human life on such a colossal scale also saw the preservation of life at home through improved medical arrangements, better conditions for children, old people, and nursing mothers” (12).

Although many lives were being lost in battle abroad, social reform was improving in the mother country, which meant young women like Miller had more opportunities than their predecessors. This led to more options for the kinds of lives women like Miller could have in modern Britain.

It took awhile for Britain to get on its feet in the battlefield; the war started off with thousands of casualties and the risk of immediate loss. Miller, like Morgan, points out a possibility for this military misstep: “But in 1914 there had been no war for - how long? Fifty years - more? True, there had been the ‘Great Boer War,’ and skirmishes on the North-west Frontier, but those had not been wars involving one’s own country - they had been large army exercises, as it were; the maintenance of power in far places. This was different - we were at war with Germany” (*Autobiography* Part V, chp. 1). One reason for Britain’s false start of sorts can be attributed to their lack of any recent war involvement.

In the end the war was won, and life returned as close to normal as was possible; Miller married Archie, formally changed her name to Agatha Christie, and got her first mystery, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, published in 1920. She had completed the manuscript during the war and submit it to a few different publishers, two of whom immediately rejected it. Finally, a few

years later, *Styles* was published. This was a great surprise to Christie, and she wrote, “To tell the truth, I had forgotten all about *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*... in the excitement of the war’s ending, Archie’s return and our life together such things as writing and manuscripts had gone far away from my thoughts” (Part V, chp. 4). Realistically, the war had been at the forefront of everyone’s minds; Christie’s novel had been relegated to the ‘back burner.’ Although Christie says this, her work demonstrates that even if she was not physically writing at the time, she was mulling over ideas of the Empire and the feelings of ambiguity toward foreigners.

The Mysterious Affair at Styles was not only Christie’s first novel, but it was also the first appearance of Hercule Poirot. Keeping in mind what she loved about other mysteries and detectives like Sherlock Holmes, she created Poirot’s character. She reflects on this creation in her autobiography, explaining:

Why not make my detective a Belgian? I thought. There were all types of refugees. How about a refugee police officer? A retired police officer. Not too young a one... I settled on a Belgian detective. I allowed him slowly to grow into his part. He should have been an inspector, so that he would have a certain knowledge of crime. He would be meticulous, very tidy, I thought to myself, as I cleared away a good many untidy odds and ends in my own bedroom. (*Autobiography* Part V, chp. 3)

Poirot and his ‘little grey cells,’ not to mention his inane tidiness and clean-cut (though somewhat eccentric) fashion sense, became very popular with readers, making *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* and the Poirot novels that followed a smashing success. Although characters like Holmes had their own eccentricities, they were still ‘thoroughly British.’ In a society dealing with the aftermath of war and instabilities in the British Empire, the world was opened much wider than the streets of London and Britain’s little rural towns; there was a lot of allure in the

mysterious, the ‘Other,’ and the character of Hercule Poirot filled this role while still being a noble British patriot.

Meanwhile, life was getting a bit chaotic for Christie outside of her writing. Although *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* had just recently become a bestseller, Christie discovered her husband and the father of her child was in love with another woman and intended to leave her. This revelation came shortly after the Christies had traveled the world together, including many locations in the British Empire. Archie asked her for a divorce and, after an unexplained disappearance on Christie’s part due to shock and then amnesia, the divorce was finalized and Christie and Rosalind were on their own. Christie’s family was very supportive and helpful to her and Rosalind throughout this time (Part VII, chp. 5).

The British Empire was also in a precarious state. Some deals and legislation that can be best described as shady took place at the end of the first World War. Morgan refers to these political happenings:

Indeed, the secret treaties of the war years ensured that at the peace the mandate system or other stratagems would leave Britain with an imperial domain larger than ever, with vast new territories in the Middle East and up from the Persian Gulf. Buoyed up by the eccentric operations of individualists such as ‘Lawrence of Arabia’ and fired by the heady prospects of vast oil riches in Mesopotamia and elsewhere in the Middle East, the bounds of the British Empire extended ever wider. (Morgan 13-14)

Although the war was over, the Empire was still in existence, though admittedly “it was all becoming increasingly impractical to maintain” (Morgan 14). Even British citizens were beginning to question the viability of the Empire, especially in conjunction with Britain’s current interference in other European countries. While many questioned it, one of the strongest voices

of opposition was J.M. Keynes, author of *Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919). His work assessed all of these factors, as Morgan summarizes: “The premier’s efforts to act as the peacemaker of Europe in successive international conferences become unpopular. Britain refused any longer to act, in Bonar Law’s striking phrase, as ‘the policemen of the world.’ The Empire might be larger than ever, but it must be accompanied by a withdrawal from commitments in Europe” (Morgan 18-20). Although the British Empire did indeed have more territories post-World War I, instabilities and questions were already becoming apparent, which would eventually lead to the retreat from the Empire in a few more decades.

In between the World Wars, Christie met and married a new husband, Max Mallowan. He was an archaeologist, and the pair spent many years traveling around the Empire. This traveling inspired a lot of writing, too, both personal and fictional works. Her travel memoir *Come, Tell Me How You Live* shares a great number of Max and Christie’s travel experiences around the Empire. She also wrote bestsellers like *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Death on the Nile*, *Murder in Mesopotamia*, and *Appointment with Death*, along with other bestselling novels that took place inside Britain, like *The ABC Murders*, *And Then There Were None*, *Three Act Tragedy*, and *Cards on the Table*. The period in between the wars was a very positive one for Christie’s personal and writing life.

The second World War was in many ways similar to the first, both for the country and for Christie. Morgan confirms this, writing, “As in 1914, the war was represented publicly as a crusade on behalf of oppressed nationalities and persecuted races - which, indeed, it largely was, and far more plausibly so than in 1914” (44). The influx of refugees during and after the first World War illustrated to the British the seriousness of the social implications of war. The main difference between the wars from Britain’s perspective was that, while the first World War’s

major concern was keeping Britain safe from invasion, the second World War had a wider range of concern:

From being initially a conflict to preserve Western and Central Europe from the aggressive menace of German Fascism, the war rapidly turned into a broader effort to sustain the Commonwealth and empire as they had endured over the decades. The white dominions - Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and, far more hesitantly, South Africa - lent immediate support in terms of raw materials and armed naval and other assistance...the cosmic structure of the British Empire would come under acute threat.

(Morgan 49)

Britain was concerned not only with the safety of its own borders, but also the safety and vitality of the surrounding Commonwealth as well as the Empire.

Christie's life also took on a familiar form when war returned to her mother country. Her beloved Max enlisted in the Home Guard and later got in the Air Force. Rosalind, too, became involved in the war effort. As for Christie, she returned to her occupation during the previous war: nursing (*Autobiography* Part X, chp. 1). Christie continued her writing during the war. In regards to this possibly perplexing idea, Christie says, "I never found any difficulty writing during the war, as some people did; I suppose because I cut myself off into a different compartment of my mind. I could live in the book amongst the people I was writing about, and mutter their conversations and see them striding about the room I had invented for them" (Part X, chp. 2). She wrote more of her bestselling works, including *Evil Under the Sun*, *N or M?*, *The Moving Finger*, and *Towards Zero*.

Although Christie didn't seem to be overwhelmingly impacted by the war, this war set the stage for many changes in the Empire. This war began much like the first; despite the

country's own sense of preparedness this time, they were not immediately prepared for the kind of warfare their enemies were utilizing. Morgan discusses this failing:

There were dreadful losses. The most fateful of all involved the sinking of the battleships *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* by Japanese bombs and torpedoes on 10 December 1941.

There followed a Japanese advance through Malaya and on 15 February 1942 the surrender of over 80,000 British and empire troops in Singapore. This disaster, the result of grave miscalculations by the commanding officer, General Percival, and by Churchill himself (who underestimated Japanese fighting power), was described by the prime minister in the House as 'the worst capitulation in British history.' It was a landmark in the fall of the empire. Henceforth, for instance, Australia and New Zealand were to look to the USA for protection in the Pacific rather than to the imperial mother country. (51)

Events like this one taking place early on in the war assisted in setting up the demise of the British Empire. Because Britain did not have the resources or the military manpower necessary to defend their own territories, it began losing its footing in these distant lands. Not eager to repeat the losses of the first war, Britain relied more on the other Allied countries this time, and that also assisted Britain in losing its foothold on the Empire.

After the war, the retreat from Empire started happening right away. Only a couple years after the end of the war, changes were beginning in the Empire. Slowly but surely, the Empire was losing its territories, though it was officially termed as the granting of independence and self-government. Morgan explains this in depth, stating,

The granting of self-government to India, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) by the Attlee government in 1947-9 was the key moment in the transfer of power. It was an unambiguous statement of Britain's military and financial inability, and above all lack of

will, to retain possession of distant lands by force. The process of decolonization gained momentum in the fifties, with territories in West and East Africa and elsewhere receiving their independence, even Kenya and Cyprus, where there were bloody engagements against native nationalist forces... By the early 1960s, only a scattered handful of miscellaneous territories - British Honduras, the smaller islands in the Caribbean, the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Aden, Fiji, and a few other outposts - were still under direct British rule. There was little enough nostalgic hankering for the mystique of empire now. (69-70)

Despite the long time it took to accumulate the territories of the Empire, they were mostly gone within a couple of decades. Simply put, post-war Britain wasn't the same as its pre- and in-between wars predecessor. The sun was finally setting on an empire that was centuries in the making.

Christie's career as a writer continued after the wars, but the British Empire was as good as gone; the Empire no longer existed, and its formerly subjugated countries had to create new identities out of their independence. Although Christie still had plenty of travel opportunities after decolonization, especially with an archaeologist as a husband, it wasn't quite the same as taking the 'grand tour,' a trip around the Empire. The wars had left a huge impact on the country, but they also left Christie with a lot to think about. In her autobiography, she reflects on the wars:

Sometimes one cannot help a tide of rage coming over one when one thinks of war. In England we had too much war in too short time. The first war seemed unbelievable, amazing; it seemed so unnecessary. But one did hope and believe that the thing had been scotched then, that the wish for war would never arise again in the same German hearts...But one is left with the horrible feeling now that war settles *nothing*; that to *win* a

war is as disastrous as to lose one! War, I think, has *had* its time and place. (Part X, chp. 4)

Luckily for her readers, Christie reflected on war and the Empire not only in her autobiography, but in her personal and fictional writings as well. By having an idea of what these influences meant for Christie and the Britain of her time, readers can better understand why certain topics, as well as the attitudes connected to them, come up in her writings. Chapter Two examines specific readings through this lens, and readings of this kind lend themselves to more meaningful interpretations of Christie's works as historical snapshots. Post-colonial theory provides a helpful framework from which to engage in these readings.

--- From Context to Theory ---

Post-colonial theory is a relatively recent framework in literary study. Jonathan Culler defines it as "the attempt to understand the problems posed by the European colonization and its aftermath" (130). Newton states that "post-colonial critics and theorists attack the explicit or implicit claims made for Eurocentric art and literature as having universal application, thus relegating non-Western cultural forms to the margins" (283). These definitions both clearly lay out the purpose of post-colonial application: to critically examine Western literature in search of stereotypical, incomplete portrayals of non-Western cultures and peoples. Christie is as open to examination under this lens as any other first-world British writer.

Post-colonial criticism became formally recognized in the late 1980s, and the main names associated with the field are Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. Said's first major work in this field, *Orientalism* (1978), poses many questions to its readers. According to Newton, *Orientalism* discusses the "biased representation of the Orient in Western writers, who either regarded it as an inferior 'Other' or projected onto it characteristics Westerners do not accept as typical of

themselves, such as inhuman cruelty and pathological sensuality” (283). Said begins by pointing out how the West handles non-Westerners: “dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3). This parasitic relationship is described by Said as “a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (5). By understanding how this relationship happens and the forms it can take, those who study post-colonial theory can better identify where ‘othering’ is taking place.

Said’s theories are applied to literature in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), specifically the chapter “Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories.” Although he leans more towards a discussion of the field of comparative literature, he also discusses the world of literature in general, even mentioning authors like Jane Austen as examples. He emphasizes this point: “To speak of comparative literature therefore was to speak of the interaction of world literatures with one another, but the field was epistemologically organized as a sort of hierarchy, with Europe and its Latin Christian literatures at its centre and top” (Newton 285). Said argues, “Academic work in comparative literature carried with it the notion that Europe and the United States together were the centre of the world, not simply by virtue of their political positions, but also because their literatures were the ones most worth studying” (285). This sense of literary hegemony creates a hierarchy and minimizes not only the contributions of other cultures, but the conception of other cultures in general.

Not only does Said argue for the equality of literature from other cultures besides the European and American contributions, but he also argues that European and American literature should be read in conjunction with post-colonial arguments so that bigger picture can be

unveiled. He states as an example, “To read Austen without also reading Fanon and Cabral - and so on and on - is to disaffiliate modern culture from its engagements and attachments. That is a process that should be reversed” (Newton 292). In a way, Said is making the same argument for all European and American literature that I am making for the reading of Christie’s works: without considering the bigger picture, without paying attention to the treatment of non-Western cultures and peoples, a true understanding of the Britain of Christie’s time cannot be glimpsed in her works. However, with this awareness, Christie’s fictional and personal writings can be studied on another level, providing insights not only into wartime Britain but to Christie as a product of this culture.

Bhabha has also made a strong impact in the post-colonial field; in reference to Bhabha’s work, Newton claims, “His particular concern is with the construction of the subject and...he focuses on how the colonial subject as ‘Other’ is constructed as a stereotype in colonial discourse and how such discourse operates as an ‘apparatus of power’” (284). In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha argues for the revisiting of cultural conceptions. He writes that “The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition” (2). *The Location of Culture* also argues for moving beyond these constructions and creating new ones, or as he says, “to turn the present into the ‘post’” (18). While it is important to be critical of previously established constructions of other cultures and peoples, it is also important to create new constructions. Writers like Toni Morrison already do that according to Bhabha, but it’s crucial to see how these constructions compare in a historical and biographical context, even if they’re outdated and stereotyped. Students of literary theory cannot move forward without at least glancing back to the origins of particular constructions.

Nation and Narration pushes these ideas forward by glancing at countries and cultures through their narratives. By examining the works that come out of different countries and cultures, readers can glimpse representations of these elements and how they affect readers. Bhabha says, "To study the nation through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself" (3). This work also emphasizes the continuing passage of time and the changes it brings. "Meanings may be partial," Bhabha continues, "because they are *in media res*; and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of 'composing' its powerful image" (3). This claim illustrates that readers may find works that were created in the process of something bigger happening, but unavoidably not be aware of it yet. Perhaps readers can consider Christie's works in the same way - that she was writing in a particular moment of the Empire, which is why certain conceptions and attitudes can be glimpsed.

Bhabha's essay "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse" zooms in on the stereotype of the 'Other' in particular and how these stereotypes contribute to constructions and readings. By constructing stereotypes of the 'Other,' Bhabha argues that this is how people deal with cultures they don't understand. "It is the force of ambivalence," he states, "that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved and logically construed" (Newton 293). It is clear that by continuing to be naive and buy into stereotypes, people are providing the reason for them to

continue. The 'Other' is not understood, so this person is lumped into a category of ambivalence and alienated there.

Considering the arguments of both Said and Bhabha, the reader is given a lot more to consider when viewing Christie's works. Readers can not only witness the use of stereotypes, assumptions, and attitudes in Christie's works, but they can also consider how a reading of her work along these lines can create a construction of its own. With the importance of identifying constructions and stereotypes emphasized as a common thread in post-colonial criticism, this is a reading that can easily be applied to Christie's writings, especially considering her historical moment and life experiences. Whether this is a reading that positively reflects on Christie is discussed in Chapter Three.

--- From Theory to Application ---

After considering the historical, biographical, and theoretical contexts surrounding Christie's work in this project, it is crucial to examine Lassner's argument since she is one of the pioneers to make connections between Christie and post-colonial theory. By adding more detail to the historical snapshot of Christie's life in Britain and the Empire and what it means to think critically about the Empire, readers can consider Christie's contributions to the genre of mystery and detective fiction outside of a creative writing lens.

Lassner parallels my idea of reading Christie's works as historical snapshots taken during Britain's concern with its Empire, though she examines it from a different angle. In her brief article she points out the position of Hercule Poirot (one of Christie's main detective figures in her works) as a Belgian 'foreigner' solving the mysteries in Christie's texts, as opposed to classic detective figures like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, as well as Dorothy Sayers' Lord Peter Wimsey, who are British. The character of Hercule Poirot, despite

his obvious Otherness, is one of Christie's most loved characters, and he appears in many of Christie's novels and short stories. Lassner claims, "This spotlight on Poirot's alien persona serves as a clue to a plot running parallel to the novel's murder mystery. Poirot's own Otherness directs our attention to the cultural and political tensions created by a different kind of murderous clash, and this is the one resulting from seeing the fates of the English middle classes as implicated in global politics" (33). At this early point in her article, Lassner is already identifying that there is a bigger picture in Christie's work outside the murder mystery the story revolves around. Lassner confirms this idea, reiterating, "The necessity of employing an alien to solve a mystery that threatens the cohesiveness of British identity highlights a relationship deeply embedded in Christie's Oriental plots of the 1930s, that is, between Britain and all those Other nations that constitute its sphere of influence" (33). Thus, the historical snapshot Christie provides in her work specifically identifies Britain's concern about its Empire and how its subordinate cultures interact with their main unifier.

This historical snapshot also displays for the readers how this concern embeds itself in the social and cultural identities of the characters. It is here where Lassner's argument reaches its full form. Lassner utilizes four of Christie's novels to point out concern about the Other and the British Empire: *Murder in Mesopotamia*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Appointment with Death*, and *Death on the Nile*. Utilizing these texts and various scholarly responses to them, Lassner develops an excellent argument regarding these "Oriental mysteries" that specifically take place abroad with English characters (35).

Outside of the 'safe' confines of their own country (whether for reasons of business or pleasure), Christie's characters in these novels must contend with a murderer in these exotic settings. Lassner explains, "However exotically romantic the Middle East is imagined, from

Egypt to Syria, it is the presence of the Westerner that makes that Other place significant. In effect, only Westerners make the Orient worthy of lending an exotic atmosphere to an Occidental melodrama” (35). In the context of Lassner’s argument, this plays out in Christie’s works through archaeological digs, establishments like prisons, and instances of travel. In other words, Christie’s mysteries wouldn’t take place in these areas abroad unless English characters were encountering them.

Lassner works off of her early analysis of *Murder in Mesopotamia* to characterize all of Christie’s novels taking place in Oriental settings as archaeological expeditions of sorts. Although *Murder on the Orient Express* does not involve an actual dig like *Murder in Mesopotamia*, Lassner points out that Poirot’s solution involves, like a dig, “unearthing the past” (40). By discovering the true identities and mutual histories of the characters aboard the Orient Express, Poirot can then discover the solution to the murder that took place aboard the train. A similar technique is used in *Death on the Nile*, where Poirot must make sense of the characters and their personal histories before he can accurately solve the mystery. In these stories of the English peoples’ adventures abroad, Lassner’s argument begins to pave the way to the consideration of Christie’s historical snapshots in her texts.

However, I argue that Lassner is only discussing the tip of the iceberg. While she utilizes contemporary scholars in the field like Light and Barnard, there is also a lot that is left out. By exclusively utilizing scholars in the genre, Lassner is narrowing her argument when it has great potential to expand. By not discussing post-colonial theory in a broader sense, and not displaying any consideration of the work of Said, Bhabha, or any other post-colonial theorists, Lassner is staying in the comfortable zone of the genre.

This exclusivity is problematic for a few reasons. Scholarly work in the genre of mystery and detective fiction is a relatively small field to begin with, compared to other categorizations like Victorian literature and 20th century American literature. Because of this smaller size of scholarship, it is even more difficult to find material that discusses post-colonial readings of mystery and detective fiction. Lassner's article is also somewhat problematic because she assumes that the reader is fully informed about concepts like the 'Other,' imperialism, colonialism, post-colonialism, and the British Empire. When being published in a book discussing British women, inter-war writers, it is understandable that some of this may be implied, but certainly not in great depth. Lassner's use of Christie's books specifically taking place in exotic places also limits the larger argument that could be made. By examining specific passages in Christie novels taking place within Britain in Chapter Two, I demonstrate how Lassner's argument leads to a deeper reading of Christie's works and how an understanding of post-colonial theory as well as historical and biographical context can assist with that reading.

CHAPTER TWO: Christie's Works Through A New Lens

It is not a difficult task to identify telling moments in Christie's mysteries that take place in exotic destinations, the moments where certain characters' attitudes about Otherness and 'foreigners' are on full display. In fact, it is harder to read one of these books and *not* find many of these moments. *Death on the Nile*, for example, has a number of these moments; though the moment below is not part of the main plot, it illustrates Poirot and the other tourist-characters' constant awareness of the foreign element they're exposed to:

Five watchful bead-sellers, two vendors of postcards, three sellers of plaster scarabs, a couple of donkey boys and some detached but hopeful infantile riff-raff closed in upon [Poirot and Rosalie]...

"You want postcard - very cheap - very nice...."

"Look, lady... Only ten piastres - very cheap - lapis - this ivory...."

"This very good fly whisk - this all-amber...."

"You go out in boat, sir? I got very good boat, sir...."

"You go back to hotel, lady? This first-class donkey...."

Hercule Poirot made vague gestures to rid himself of this human cluster of flies. Rosalie stalked through them like a sleepwalker.

"It's best to pretend to be deaf and blind," she remarked.

The infantile riff-raff ran alongside murmuring plaintively: "Bakshish? Bakshish? Hip hip hurrah - very good, very nice...."

Their gaily coloured rags trailed picturesquely, and the flies lay in clusters on their eyelids. The others fell back and launched a fresh attack on the next corner. (chp. 2)

This scene illustrates a depiction of the Egyptian people, but from the characters' perspectives. As tourists in Egypt, this kind of encounter is expected, though the characters respond in different ways: Poirot is quite unsure what to do and Rosalie already has a routine for handling it.

There is a lot to be interpreted here. Besides the actual incident taking place, one could analyze Christie's representation of foreigner-to-British-tourist communication, their particular vocabulary and the repetition of 'very good,' 'very nice,' and 'very cheap.' There's also the obvious contrast between the Egyptians' language and Rosalie's: Rosalie's perfect grammar and the Egyptians' broken English, a mix of incorrect grammar, missing articles, and other facets highlighted in Rosalie's only line of dialogue in this passage. In *Orientalism*, Said acknowledges this contrast, discussing how writers highlight "the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny, and so on" (2-3). By creating a contrast in language between the main characters and the Egyptians, this incident is also creating a 'starting point.' For the duration of the novel, the Egyptians are not fellow people to the main characters, but a separate group distinct from them.

The repetition of pesky flies is thought-provoking, too, whether they're literal flies on the Egyptians' eyelids and the flies that one would need a flyswatter for, or Poirot's paralleling of the Egyptians as a 'human cluster of flies.' Through this parallel, the Egyptians are being equated with common pests, a technique combined with their poor language structure to dehumanize them completely. From the perspective of the main characters, the Egyptians are not really people, but an overarching stereotype of foreigners in their homeland. "The stereotype," Bhabha states, "is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place,' already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (Newton 293). In this

case, the stereotype of the Egyptians falls into the latter category; the poor language structure is reiterated through repetition and contrast, as well as the parallel to pesky flies. It is clear how the characters and the narrator of the novel feel about the Egyptian Other.

Another facet of this passage that contributes to the dehumanization of the Egyptians is the use of the word “picturesquely” in their description (“Their gaily coloured rags trailed picturesquely”). While it may initially come across as a partially flattering description of their clothing (though they’re gaily colored and trailing picturesquely, notice they’re still “rags”), the choice of the word “picturesquely” is quite telling. In reference to the romantic notion of the ‘picturesque’ in the literary and art world, Wolfson and Manning describe its origins: “Connoisseurs with tastes formed on the seventeenth-century artists Claude Lorrain, Salvator Rosa, Nicolas Poussin and his brother Gaspard Dughet sought in nature the compositions and colors they knew from art, generating an endlessly oscillating loop between the two realms” (“Perspectives” 31). These two realms are simply the real world as it exists in nature and the idealized world depicted in romantic artwork. Seeking the sublime in the natural world inspired many writers, including Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Jane Austen. Writers were awe-inspired by seeking out or stumbling upon views and vistas that looked like artwork or something divinely designed. The picturesque, however, accounted for the smaller details seen in the natural world and its populations. A small detail, like the Egyptians’ rags, adds to the overall image romanticized by the viewer/writer. Coming of age in the early twentieth century, Christie would have most likely read the works of the romantic period and would be exposed to the idea of the picturesque and sublime. By using “picturesquely” in this description, the Egyptians are further dehumanized; no longer characters even comparatively human to Poirot and Rosalie, they are no longer relegated as part of the exotic, inspiring landscape.

Christie truly found the landscape and its inhabitants quite inspirational. *Death on the Nile* was published in 1937, when Christie was almost fifty years-old. She'd already lived through one world war and one failed marriage, and she had those experiences to draw upon. But she also married her second husband and traveled around the Empire with him by this time; many of her published works in the '30s clearly draw off of these experiences in her travels. A number of Christie's stories from this time take place abroad, including the four texts Lassner utilizes in her argument. The characterization of the Egyptians in *Death on the Nile* begins to highlight the conception of the Other.

Even in the same book we begin to see the moments I'm pointing out as an extension of Lassner's findings. Before the characters begin their journey to Egypt, there are brief moments where seemingly conventional attitudes about foreigners are revealed. Simon, for example, says, "She threatened to - well - kill us both. Jackie can be rather - Latin sometimes" (chp. 4). The word 'Latin' conveys many different ideas to the reader. If Jackie is being referred to as 'Latin,' it is not because she belongs to that stereotypical category - Jacqueline de Bellefort is the daughter of a Frenchman and an American. Simon seems to be pinpointing a tendency on Jackie's part towards anger, drama, and violence. So by saying that she can be 'rather Latin' at times, Simon is relating Jackie to an established stereotype, a stereotype even the alien Poirot understands since he responds "I see."

While the more prominent moments that Lassner points out displaying British characters immersed in exotic societies are no doubt fascinating, it is these smaller moments between the lines that are entitled to consideration, too. It is also this kind of moment, Simon's flippant, stereotype-laden description of Jackie, that can be found in Christie's novels that take place in the homeland. Although the characters are not surrounded by Egyptian sands or Caribbean

bungalows in these novels, they are still discussing foreigners and the ‘Other’ in various ways. Whether it is a passing remark like Simon’s statement or an entire scene like Lombard’s enthusiastic confession described in this project’s introduction, these moments are present throughout Christie’s Britain-placed novels, too.

War is typically a topic where these attitudes come into play; due to Britain’s interactions with its Empire as well as the war against Germany and the other Axis Powers, many attitudes and stereotypes quickly spread among British citizens. Sometimes these attitudes worked to create a construction of the ‘Other,’ but they also worked to display a strong sense of patriotism. British patriotism is seen frequently in Christie’s novels in the depiction of military characters. Scattered throughout her mysteries are majors, colonels, and generals; many critics accuse these characters of being stock characters and unoriginal. While this may apply to some of them, other military characters stand out, especially when discussing the ‘Other’ and Britain’s place above its Empire.

One set of Christie’s British patriots are Thomas and Prudence Beresford, more fondly known as Tommy and Tuppence in the five books in which they star. These two are arguably Christie’s detectives most involved in the World Wars; although Poirot is introduced as a Belgian war refugee in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, he (at least not in the reading I’ve done) does not often refer back to wartime or get involved in political affairs. Tommy and Tuppence begin their adventures in *Secret Adversary*, and their lives as detectives (as well as husband and wife) take off from there.

In *Secret Adversary*, one of Christie’s more action-packed novels and the second book she had published, Tommy and Tuppence, who were trying to make a quick buck, quickly get tied into a serious government issue of national security. The book begins with the sinking of the

Lusitania, a British ship torpedoed by German U-boats during World War I, so the reader is already set up with the ideas of war and patriotism. Tommy and Tuppence, in the search of crucial documents and the mysterious Jane Finn, get into all sorts of precarious situations. Tommy at one point gets captured while sneaking into the enemy's safe house and is immediately interrogated and threatened. Out of self defense, Tommy adopts a sense of bravado and pretends he knows more than he actually does:

Suddenly Boris stepped forward, and shook his fist in Tommy's face.

"Speak, you swine of an Englishman - speak!"

"Don't get so excited, my good fellow," said Tommy calmly. "That's the worst of you foreigners. You can't keep calm. Now, I ask you, do I look as though I thought there were the least chance of your killing me?"

He looked confidently round, and was glad they could not hear the persistent beating of his heart which gave the lie to his words.

"No," admitted Boris at last sullenly, "you do not." (chp. 15)

Tommy has trespassed into the safe house of the enemy by pretending he was one of them, only to be caught and have his life threatened. The situation is pretty comical despite the intensity, but why does it come off this way? In this passage the humor begins with Tommy's response to Boris's threat and insult; he responds in a calm, stereotypical British manner, using phrases like 'my good fellow.' Christie is clearly crafting as much of a contrast between the German Boris and British Tommy as possible. Tommy also makes his own remark about the tendencies of foreigners to get riled and angry, which is very similar to Simon's offhand remark in *Death on the Nile*. Both Boris and Tommy have turned this confrontation around into a stereotype of each other's cultures in general. There is also humor in the implied stupidity of Boris and his fellow

gangsters when they buy into Tommy's charade. The reader can quickly read through without reflecting on Tommy's behavior in the situation, or the depiction of his captors' 'Otherness.'

Published in 1922 when she was thirty-two years-old, Christie was already beginning to create contrasts between British characters and the Other. Like *Death on the Nile*, there is a clear separation between these groups. Unlike *Death on the Nile*, this contrast is not laced into the details; it is instead explicit and vocal, the characters from both sides expressing their thoughts to one another, though obviously not in the most positive fashion. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* addresses this frequent conflict: "Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively" (2). In Tommy's situation, cultural engagement is definitely taking place in an antagonistic, performative manner. Tommy and Boris clearly find fault with each other: Boris for Tommy's Englishness and Tommy for Boris's Otherness (not to mention their differing motives in relation to the plot). Although it is not as craftily depicted as *Death on the Nile*'s contrast fifteen years later, Christie's early writings already begin falling into patterns of separation and stereotypes.

A more complex example of the military patriot can be found in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, published in 1926; Major Hector Blunt, a good friend to Roger Ackroyd, has made a life out of traveling the world and shooting animals, so he carries this 'worldly knowledge' around with him, and the other characters respond to it:

Blunt had entered the room now with his own peculiar, deliberate, yet soft-footed tread. He is a man of medium height, sturdily and rather stockily built. His face is almost mahogany coloured, and is peculiarly expressionless. He has grey eyes that give the impression of always watching something that is happening very far away. He talks little,

and what he does say is said jerkily, as though the words were forced out of him unwillingly.

He said now: "How are you, Sheppard?" in his usual abrupt fashion, and then stood squarely in front of the fireplace looking over our heads as though he saw something very interesting happening in Timbuctoo.

"Major Blunt," said Flora, "I wish you'd tell me about these African things. I'm sure you know what they all are." (chp. 4, pt. I)

Blunt's description on its own is already laden with references to the Other. His speech is portrayed as jerky and forced, saying things in an abrupt and unfeeling manner. A parallel between Blunt and the Other could be argued for with this characteristic; someone who is not fluent in a language speaks in quick, awkward segments, afraid of embarrassment if something is said incorrectly. Blunt, in speaking this way, is arguably coming off as a foreigner or a native. His complexion being physically described as "almost mahogany coloured" is also revealing; this feature not only demonstrates his frequent adventures outdoors, but also speaks to his Englishness. The addition of "almost" into the description is key. Being completely mahogany colored would take away Blunt's Englishness and completely separate him from the other British characters in the story. Being "almost mahogany coloured" reflects his worldly experience and knowledge without giving up his Englishness.

Blunt brings his knowledge of the world to the small village of King's Abbot, and he is referred to as the expert on anything foreign or 'Other' in this story. When Ackroyd is stabbed, Blunt identifies the dagger as being of Tunisian origin. He has a knack for identifying various curios and animals. He shows a great deal of patriotism and love for his country; his value of the British over other cultures bleeds through. In a conversation with Flora about the opera, the text

reads, “‘People take me [to the opera] sometimes,’ said Blunt sadly. ‘Funny idea of pleasure - worse racket than the natives make with their tom-toms.’ Flora laughed” (chp. 9). Although Blunt seems to be delivering a compliment in this moment, the fact that he refers to the tom-tom players as ‘natives’ making ‘racket’ still demonstrates a sense of superiority of the British over the other culture, even if he doesn’t enjoy the British opera himself.

These conversational moments, though no actual character representing the Other is directly involved, still reflect two contrasting groups: the British and the natives. Conversations in Christie’s British-soil novels reveal just as much as actual interactions with the Other. In regards to this negative alignment of the Other, Said comments, “So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of the ‘mysterious Orient’” (*Orientalism* 26). Even simple moments of conversation, like Blunt’s reference to the natives’ “racket,” promotes the stereotyping and dehumanizing of the Other.

The positioning of Englishness above the Other, the foreign element, continues to be a theme in Christie’s British-based novels. However, as Christie gets older and develops more as a writer, the reader can see this theme asserting itself in different, more complex ways. When viewing Christie’s novels chronologically, this theme goes from being overt to becoming more subtle, though still laden with meaning. The appearances of these incidences arguably become more meaningful in their subtlety. *The ABC Murders*, published in 1936, highlights such incidences.

The ABC Murders concerns the character of Poirot; although it is frequently pointed out that Poirot himself, a Belgian, is the Other (and often mistaken as French, much to his chagrin), *The ABC Murders* focuses on this quality in a unique way. Murders are being committed, but

Poirot is receiving letters with clues directly addressed to him before the murders happen. In this way, he is being individually targeted. Earlier in the book, Poirot reflects on this unusual circumstance:

“I ask myself,” said Poirot, “what passes exactly in the mind of the murderer? He kills, it would seem from his letters, *pour le sport* – to amuse himself... But no, he seeks, as we all agree, to make the splash in the public eye – to assert his personality... A final suggestion: Is his motive direct personal hatred of *me*, of Hercule Poirot? Does he challenge me in public because I have (unknown to myself) vanquished him somewhere in the course of my career? Or is his animosity impersonal – directed against a *foreigner*? And if so, what again has led to that? What injury has he suffered at a foreigner’s hand? (chp. 13)

At this moment in the book, this comes off as an idea Poirot is merely bouncing off his fellow detectives; he is hazarding many different guesses as to the motive, and Poirot’s status as a foreigner is only one of those guesses. However, it is this line of reasoning that Poirot pursues to solve the mystery, a theme that is quite unique in his mysteries. Towards the end of the story, Poirot brings up this idea again: “Why, then, Hercule Poirot? Was it for some *personal* reason? There was, discernible in the letter, a slight anti-foreign bias – but not enough to explain the matter to my satisfaction” (chp. 34). Unlike most of the mysteries Poirot solves, the letters that are being sent to him from the murderer provoke questions Poirot usually doesn’t have to ask himself. The unique set-up of this book allows Poirot to view his own Otherness as a construction that the murderer is buying into and attempting to exploit.

When Poirot identifies the murderer at the end of the book, it is largely based on his ruminations about the murderer’s ‘anti-foreign bias.’ By carefully observing the suspects who

reflect this same characteristic, Poirot is able to find the solution. As he always does, Poirot explains everything at the end in ‘the big reveal’: “I was quite sure then. The man I had known a long time in my secret mind *was the same as the man whom I had known as a person...* The daring adventurous character, the roving life, the partiality for England that had showed itself, very faintly, in the jeer at foreigners” (chp. 34; emphasis in the original). This last characteristic that Poirot points out continues the thread he’s been weaving throughout the book. The identified murderer attempts to kill himself, but when he finds out that Poirot’s servant has unloaded his gun, he shouts, “You unutterable little jackanapes of a foreigner!” (chp. 34). This exclamation confirms Poirot’s suspicions of the murderer’s bias. Poirot, however, gets the final word by taking a verbal stab at the murderer’s ‘Englishness’: “You are very full of an insular superiority, but for myself I consider your crime not an English crime at all – not aboveboard – not *sporting*” (chp. 34).

The ABC Murders, besides demonstrating one of the rare scenarios when the Other gets to respond, also shows another characteristic of the evolution of constructions of the Other in Christie’s novels. While the murderers have been more than two-dimensional characters in past novels, it is in this novel where we begin to witness how minute the revealing details can be; Poirot was able to identify the murderer not just by evidence and deduction, but also by identifying a similar attitude towards foreigners as the attitude in the letters. In this way, Poirot has utilized the very constructions that stereotype him to his advantage. As Christie continued to write, more and more complex constructions of Otherness are presented.

Published in the same year, *Cards on the Table* provides a similar focus on the Other, but takes the focus off of Poirot’s Otherness and places it instead on Mr. Shaitana, an intriguingly eccentric man who hosts a dinner party. While other characters throughout Christie’s body of

work frequently voice their own ideas about other cultures and their feelings about them due to paranoia or common belief, often it's a personal reaction to another character's Otherness. Anne Meredith in *Cards on the Table* offers a perfect example of this instance in her reaction to Mr. Shaitana's character during a conversation with Poirot:

Miss Meredith gave a little gasp as she said:

“What a queer man he is!”

“Dr. Roberts?”

“No, Mr. Shaitana.”

She shivered a little and said:

“There's always something a little frightening about him, I think. You never know what would strike him as amusing. It might – it might be something *cruel*.”

“Such as foxhunting, eh?”

Miss Meredith threw him a reproachful glance.

“I meant – oh! something *Oriental!*” (chp. 2)

Meredith is frightened by Mr. Shaitana's strangeness, his Otherness. Although she seems to be referring to his personality when she wonders about his cruelty, she associates her feelings about his strangeness with a stereotype of his nationality. In fact, the only physical description of Shaitana that readers are given merely describes the “Mephistophelian effect” of his fashion choices and then goes on to elaborate, “Whether Mr. Shaitana was an Argentine, or a Portuguese, or a Greek, or some other nationality rightly despised by the insular Briton, nobody knew” (*Cards on the Table*, chp. 1). Although part of this fear of Mr. Shaitana is due to his eccentric personality and style, it could be argued that another part of this fear is due to his indefinable Otherness; because he cannot even be placed in a category, he represents a fear to the British

characters like Meredith. This is a scenario where, as Bhabha describes, “the stereotype, then, as the primary point of subjectification in colonial discourse, for both colonizer and colonized, is the scene of a similar fantasy and defence - the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, colour and culture” (Newton 298). While originality is generally admired in human nature, Shaitana’s eccentric habits combined with his indefinable Otherness is too much for Christie’s British characters to accommodate.

Poirot deftly manages to work a mode of contrast into this conversation as well. Although this incident is not as straightforward as the confrontation between Tommy and Boris, there is still a contrast between Englishness and the Other. Meredith is pointing out what disturbs her about Shaitana and his potential amusement in cruelty; Poirot’s first guess is that Meredith is disturbed by fox hunting, a very English sport. Although this is a subtle inclusion, quickly rejected by Meredith for the true reason, it is still present and offering a contrast for readers to see.

Meredith is not the only character disturbed by Shaitana’s Otherness; Major Despard also takes issue with Shaitana’s eccentric persona. Like Major Blunt, Despard has been all around the world and is a man of many experiences and opinions. Unlike Blunt, however, Despard is less reserved about them. While Blunt was a quieter, more thoughtful character, Despard is vocal with a devil-may-care attitude. Like Blunt, Despard is considered an expert of the ‘wilds’ outside of Britain:

On the opposite side of the table Mrs. Oliver was asking Major Despard if he knew of any unheard-of-out-of-the-way poisons.

“Well, there’s *curare*.”

“My *dear* man, *vieux jeu!* That’s been done hundreds of times. I mean something *new!*”

Major Despard said drily:

“Primitive tribes are rather old-fashioned. They stick to the good old stuff their grandfathers and great-grandfathers used before them.”

“Very tiresome of them,” said Mrs. Oliver. “I should have thought they were always experimenting with pounding up herbs and things. Such a chance for explorers, I always think. They could come home and kill off all their rich old uncles with some new drug that no one’s ever heard of.”

“You should go to civilization, not to the wilds for that,” said Despard. “In the modern laboratory, for instance. Cultures of innocent-looking germs that will produce bona fide diseases.” (chp. 2)

Mrs. Oliver clearly has her own assumptions about non-British cultures, but Despard seems almost bored talking about it (probably in part due to his conversation companion). Although he offers a defense for the natives in comparison to murderous British characters Mrs. Oliver might be inspired by, he discusses the tribes he’s visited as if they’re no more interesting than a piece of gum at the bottom of his shoe; he clearly isn’t fascinated by their customs or excited about his adventures. He is, whether intentionally or unintentionally, placing Britain above these ‘primitive tribes.’

Even more insight is offered into Despard’s character when he is being interrogated about the murder of their dinner party host, Mr. Shaitana. Poirot and Superintendent Battle, who were also guests at the dinner party, interrogate the other guests one by one, and Despard’s interview proves to be very interesting:

“Had you any motive for disliking Shaitana?”

“Every motive.”

“Eh?” The Superintendent sounded startled.

“For disliking him - not for killing him,” said Despard. “I hadn’t the least wish to kill him, but I would thoroughly have enjoyed kicking him. A pity. It’s too late now.”

“Why did you want to kick him, Major Despard?”

“Because he was the sort of Dago who needed kicking badly. He used to make the toe of my boot fairly itch.”

“Know anything about him - to his discredit, I mean?”

“He was too well dressed - he wore his hair too long - and he smelt of scent.”

(chp. 7)

Contrary to how most people would behave in an interrogation, Despard has no desire to hide his true feelings about Shaitana. He also refers to Shaitana as a ‘Dago,’ an ethnic slur for someone of Hispanic, Italian, or Portuguese descent. This slur doesn’t seem to bother Poirot or Battle at all since the conversation continues without delay. To a more crucial point, it seems to be more than Shaitana’s ambiguous nationality that bothers Despard; it can be argued that Despard also seems to be questioning Shaitana’s sexuality. Although the beginning of the passage denotes a clear dislike, when asked if he knew anything to Shaitana’s “discredit,” Despard thought it important to bring up Shaitana’s appearance. Being “too well dressed,” “his hair too long,” and smelling “of scent” are not what one would usually list as qualities to someone’s discredit, but in the context of homophobia it makes more sense. Along racial lines as well as lines of sexuality, more complex contrasts are formed in this novel than Christie’s earlier novels.

We've already seen how *And Then There Were None* supports a post-colonial reading, but it also presents another moment of complexity between two of its characters where the Other is concerned. Vera and the extremely religious Emily Brent are discussing the crimes of the other characters when the only other mention of Lombard's actions comes up:

Emily Brent's brow, which had been frowning perplexedly, cleared.

She said:

"Ah, I understand you now. Well, there is that Mr. Lombard. He admits to having abandoned twenty men to their deaths."

Vera said: "They were only natives..."

Emily Brent said sharply:

"Black or white, they are our brothers."

Vera thought:

"Our black brothers – our black brothers. Oh, I'm going to laugh. I'm hysterical.

I'm not myself..." (chp. 7, pt. I)

Brent may be the only character in this book that sees the true scope of Lombard's crime, but Vera dismisses it due to the race of the victims, much like the other characters seem to dismiss it or pay no special attention to it for the same reasons. From Brent's perspective, a rare one as far as Christie's characters usually go, Lombard's crime is the most atrocious; many of today's readers would understandably agree, even if they don't have Brent's religious convictions. Lombard's abandonment of over twenty men is, in comparison, much, much greater than everyone else's murders combined. This scene demonstrates the two differing attitudes in relation to Lombard's crime: Brent's (and presumably the reader's) disgust and Vera's dismissal ("They were only natives..."). Having insight into Vera's thoughts during this conversation is

telling, too; even considering natives of another race as her 'brothers' in the scope of humanity is too much for Vera and her Englishness to digest. This brief conversation between two characters is exactly what Said is pointing out in *Orientalism*: "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (3). By relegating the Other to a subordinate position, the British characters can be more assured in their superiority and Englishness in comparison. This is another explanation for why Vera struggles to even consider Lombard's victims as equals in the same way Brent does; to her own developed British identity, it doesn't make sense. This is one of the few moments in Christie's novels where the reader not only gets to witness a side conversation about the Other, but he/she also gets to witness the internal struggle of a character as she faces this conflict head-on.

Christie presents more of these internal conflicts in her writing prior to World War II. Beloved British patriots Tommy and Tuppence are enlisted by the British government prior to World War II (though the war was only anticipated while Christie was writing) in another novel, *N or M?* (published in 1941). Although Tommy and Tuppence have married and raised a couple of children since the events of *Secret Adversary*, they are still through-and-through British patriots who yearn to serve their country when the threat of war arises once again. Because they are now middle-aged, they are left out of common wartime opportunities like the military and nursing, but a friend in the government finds something important for them to tackle: going to a hotel undercover and discovering the secret German, Fifth Column agents known as 'N' and 'M.'

When Tommy and Tuppence are at the hotel in disguise, they're surrounded by a number of interesting characters. Among them is Carl von Deinim, a German refugee working as a research chemist. His nationality and surly manner immediately identify him as a possible

suspect, and not just to Tommy and Tuppence, but to everybody at the hotel. After overhearing a questionable conversation, Tuppence walks along outside the hotel with von Deinim:

[Tuppence and Carl von Deinim] walked in silence for some moments. Two men passed them. One of them shot a quick glance at Carl. She heard him mutter to his companion:

“Bet you that fellow is German.”

Tuppence saw the colour rise in Carl von Deinim’s cheeks.

Suddenly he lost command of himself. That tide of hidden emotion came to the surface. He stammered:

“You heard - you heard - that is what they say - I -”

“My dear boy,” Tuppence reverted suddenly to her real self. Her voice was crisp and compelling. “Don’t be an idiot. You can’t have it both ways.”

He turned his head and stared at her.

“What do you mean?”

“You’re a refugee. You have to take the rough with the smooth. You’re alive, that’s the main thing. Alive and free. For the other - realise that it’s inevitable. This country’s at war. You’re a German.” She smiled suddenly. “You can’t expect the mere man in the street - literally the man in the street - to distinguish between bad Germans and good Germans, if I may put it so crudely.”

He still stared at her. His eyes, so very blue, were poignant with suppressed feeling. Then suddenly he too smiled. He said:

“They said of Red Indians, did they not, that a good Indian was a dead Indian.”

He laughed. “To be a good German I must be on time at my work. Please. Good morning.” (chp. 2)

This passage offers a lot of food for thought for its readers. Not only do we see Tuppence's almost maternal response to von Deinim, but we also see von Deinim's range of emotions. Although he's a potential suspect, he's by no means a stock character - von Deinim has a history, dreams, and feelings that give him dimension as a character. In this passage he goes from angry to shocked to smiling to dismissive. Despite this abrupt roller coaster of emotion, Tuppence does not for a second attribute this to von Deinim's nationality. It is von Deinim who jokingly equates himself to a 'Red Indian.' Carl von Deinim is suspected throughout almost the entire novel, and patriotic characters like Major Bletchley and Commander Haydock are entirely overlooked as suspects. In this novel, Christie is clearly depicting the sense of paranoia that the British felt towards the Other, especially exacerbated in wartime.

The language of the passage offers a lot of material for analysis as well. Carl von Deinim, a three-dimensional character, is still considered the Other, but he is portrayed as a normal human being. Like any normal human, his composure cracks under the scrutiny of strangers ("Suddenly he lost command of himself. That tide of hidden emotion came to the surface"). However, it seems like Christie does not want readers to forget that von Deinim is the German Other; the passage reminds the reader of "his eyes, so very blue," a stereotypical Aryan quality, shortly before von Deinim returns to his curt, dismissive manner. His goodbye to her is also a reminder that, as the Other, he still has something to prove to the British characters by working for their government as a chemist.

Tuppence's behavior in this situation is also noteworthy. Although she's initially making conversation with von Deinim for investigative reasons, this quickly changes into something else after the other walkers pass them. But what exactly is this change? The text tells us that "Tuppence reverted suddenly to her real self," and part of her 'real self' is her role as a mother.

Once this transition takes place, Tuppence speaks to von Deinim as if he is one of her children, starting off with “my dear boy.” She explains the situation to him and turns it into a didactic moment about the world around him. Although this is a touching moment and a humanizing moment for von Deinim, it still relegates him to the category of Other. Besides the references to his nationality in this passage, Tuppence’s mothering response to him also makes him inferior; written this way, it appears that the German von Deinim needs British Tuppence to care for him and put things in perspective, a very imperialistic characteristic. Even though this moment is complex and multifaceted, the British are still blatantly placed above the Other.

Thirty years (in Tommy and Tuppence’s world) after *Secret Adversary* unfolds, readers can still view Tommy’s flippant comments on ‘foreigners’ as well. While visiting Commander Haydock’s home, fondly known as Smugglers’ Rest, Tommy notices Haydock’s capable manservant. Although Tommy is in disguise as Mr. Meadowes, he gets to portray himself most of the time: a typical Englishman. This scene in *N or M?* illustrates how even middle-aged Tommy hasn’t changed much from his twenty-something self in their first adventure:

Smugglers’ Rest was in its usual condition of apple-pie order. A tall middle-aged manservant waited on them with the professional deftness of a waiter. Such perfect service was somewhat unusual to find outside of a London restaurant.

When the man had left the room, Tommy commented on the fact.

“Yes, I was lucky to get Appledore.”

“How did you get hold of him?”

“He answered an advertisement as a matter of fact. He had excellent references, was clearly far superior to any of the others who applied and asked remarkably low wages. I engaged him on the spot.”

Tommy said with a laugh:

“The war has certainly robbed us of most of our good restaurant service.

Practically all good waiters were foreigners. It doesn't seem to come naturally to the Englishman.”

“Bit too servile, that's why. Bowing and scraping doesn't come kindly to the English bulldog.” (chap. 9, pt. II)

Although Haydock makes his own commentary on the Englishman's ability (or lack thereof) to be a servant, it is Tommy who initiates the comparison between the Englishman and the foreigner in their abilities to be servile. There is an attitude being conveyed here which positions the British culture over other cultures. This attitude begins with the narrator's description of Smuggler's Rest: “its usual condition of apple-pie order.” The Western phrase ‘apple-pie order’ conveys a state of domestic perfection. Even the servant's name (Appledore) contains the word ‘apple’ inside of it, clearly making the connection back to this image of perfection and Englishness. This image is further enhanced by the conclusion that follows (“Such perfect service was somewhat unusual to find outside of a London restaurant”): only London's restaurants, the narrator implies, can provide perfect service. When it comes to the discussion of foreigners being good waiters, the reader can truly see the trumpeting of Englishness. Both characters agree that the English are not usually good waiters or servants because being servile does not come naturally to their nationality. They assume that because foreigners are placed in an inferior position in their frames of mind, that they're in a better position to serve the British. Tommy and Haydock do not know each other very well; in fact, Tommy, though he gets to behave mostly like his normal self, is not even Tommy to Haydock - he is ‘Mr. Meadowes.’ Yet, the two men are completely comfortable having this conversation and discussing the Other and

their abilities to be servile to the English. The setting of the novel contributes to this factor as well; in a time of war-related paranoia and the suspicion that an attack could come any day, it's more comforting to the characters to think of the Other in subservient, docile, and domestic positions.

British patriotism receives another intriguing perspective in *N or M?*; Tommy gets involved in a conversation that questions the value of patriotism at all. Tommy finds a moment alone with the daughter of the hotel's mysterious owner:

He found Sheila Perenna leaning over the terrace wall staring out at the sea. He came and stood beside her.

By her hurried, quick breathing he knew that something had upset her badly. He offered her a cigarette, which she accepted.

He said: "Lovely night."

In a low intense voice the girl answered:

"It could be..." ...

"If it weren't for the war, you mean?" he said.

"I don't mean that at all. I hate the war."

"So do we all."

"Not in the way I mean. I hate the cant about it, the smugness – the horrible, horrible patriotism."

"Patriotism?" Tommy was startled.

"Yes, I hate patriotism, do you understand? All this *country, country, country!* Betraying your country – dying for your country – serving your country. Why should one's country mean anything at all?"

Tommy said simply: “I don’t know. It just does.”

“Not to me! Oh, it would to you – you go abroad and buy and sell in the British Empire and come back bronzed and full of clichés, talking about the natives and calling for Chota Pegs and all that sort of thing.”

Tommy said gently:

“I’m not quite as bad as that, I hope, my dear.”

“I’m exaggerating a little – but you know what I mean. You believe in the British Empire – and – and – the stupidity of dying for one’s country.”

“My country,” said Tommy dryly, “doesn’t seem particularly anxious to allow me to die for it.”

“Yes, but you *want* to. And it’s so *stupid!* *Nothing’s* worth dying for. It’s all an *idea* – talk, talk – froth – high-flown idiocy. My country doesn’t mean anything to me at all.”

“Some day,” said Tommy, “you’ll be surprised to find that it does.”

“No. Never. I’ve suffered – I’ve seen –”

She broke off – then turned suddenly and impetuously upon him.

“Do you know who my father was?”

“No!” Tommy’s interest quickened.

“His name was Patrick Maguire. He – he was a follower of Casement in the last war. He was shot as a traitor! All for nothing! For an idea – he worked himself up with those other Irishmen. Why couldn’t he just stay at home quietly and mind his own business? He’s a martyr to some people and a traitor to others. I think he was just – *stupid!*” (chp. 4)

This is one of the few times in Christie's novels where British patriotism, or any type of patriotism, is brought into question. Sheila and her mother, like Carl von Deinim, are constantly under an umbrella of suspicion throughout the novel, especially since they are running the hotel that's supposedly harboring enemy agents. Although, like Tuppence, Tommy is initially utilizing this moment to try to get some more information for the investigation, it turns into another conversation entirely. Sheila may not be part of the Other like von Deinim, but she is associated with him and therefore equally suspicious. She and Tommy, through this unique conversation, demonstrate questions Christie's British society was asking.

Between Carl von Deinim's complex characterization and Sheila Perenna's rebellious anger, *N or M?* presents many moments worth contemplation. Witnessing the moments that both value and question British patriotism creates a more complex reading of Agatha Christie's works, especially those that take place on British soil. Despite whatever Christie's intentions may have been as a writer, the many different scenes discussing British patriotism throughout her works offer readers the opportunity to think about what it means to care about one's country and the many manifestations of that passion or the lack of it entirely.

A Murder is Announced, a Miss Marple mystery and the last novel analyzed in this project, was published in 1950 after the second World War. In this novel, the small, rural village of Chipping Cleghorn is thrown into excitement when a murder is announced in the local paper; the murder, however, is not a news item but an announcement for something that will take place. The address of Letitia Blacklock is given, as well as a date and time, so the whole town shows up at Blacklock's home at the announced time. Everyone gathers into the sitting room, and just when they are convinced nothing is actually going to take place, the power goes out and

gunshots are fired. When the scene is re-illuminated, they find a strange man shot dead in the hallway. He is later identified as Rudi Scherz, a worker from a nearby hotel.

The incidents discussing Otherness in this novel take place when the police are interviewing witnesses and suspects, similar to the other Christie books discussed above. This aspect on its own is an intriguing feature. Although we've seen interviews and conversations with suspects in the other novels, most of the conversations about the Other in *A Murder is Announced* take place in the interrogation setting. Therefore, the police are the major audience to the characters' ideas about the Other and the readers witness their response to these ideas throughout the mystery.

At first, the primary topic of interviews is the late Rudi Scherz. A fellow hotel worker provides a telling portrayal of how Rudi will be thought of throughout the book:

[Myrna] was alarmed and wary, and deeply conscious of the indignity of being interviewed by the police.

'I don't know a thing about it, sir. Not a thing,' she protested. 'If I'd known what he was like I'd never have gone out with Rudi at all. Naturally, seeing as he worked in Reception here, I thought he was all right. Naturally I did. What I say is the hotel ought to be more careful when they employ people - especially foreigners. Because you never know where you are with foreigners. I suppose he might have been in with one of these gangs you read about?' ...

'But you were friendly?'

'Oh, we were friendly - that's all, just friendly. Nothing serious at all. I'm always on my guard with foreigners, anyway. They've often got a way with them, but you never

know, do you? Some of those Poles during the war! And even some of the Americans!

Never let on they're married men until it's too late.'(chp. 4, pt. III)

Although he seems to have been a nice enough man, Myrna is quick to throw Rudi under the bus, despite nothing being proven against him yet (except perhaps being in the wrong place at the wrong time). She also emphasizes his Otherness to further distance him from 'civilized' British people like her. Myrna even uses the opportunity to bring up other classes of foreigners she dislikes, and it sounds like her negative experiences with them (especially the married men) have helped create these perceptions. Myrna herself is a silly character who is easy to laugh at, but that doesn't mean her outright xenophobia should just be dismissed; this brief scene captures what was commonly said in Christie's time about the Other and demonstrates that these ideas existed even after the wars and the end of the Empire.

A Murder is Announced presents another foreign character under scrutiny: Blacklock's maid Mitzi. Described early on as being temperamental and high-strung by the other characters, Mitzi quickly falls under the suspicion of the police, as illustrated in this conversation:

'Don't see how [Rudi Scherz] could have tampered with the fusebox because it's out by the scullery and he'd have had to go through the kitchen, so the maid would have seen him.'

'Unless she was in it with him?'

'That's very possible. Both foreigners - and I wouldn't trust her a yard - not a yard.'(chp. 5)

Mitzi does not stand much of a chance from the outset of the mystery; the British characters are pretty annoyed with her and the police don't trust her. Blacklock, her boss, even warns the police about Mitzi's behavior: "You will find Mitzi rather difficult, I'm afraid. She has a kind of

persecution mania” (chp. 5). This proves to be quite truthful, but Mitzi definitely has reasons to feel this way. By being a foreigner in a rural village, she is judged by the other villagers and assumptions are made about her, much like the police assume it’s likely she’d have plotted with Rudi Scherz.

There’s a lot of opportunity here to humanize a foreign character, much like Carl von Deinim is given plenty of dimension in *N or M?* Apparently it does not work this way in Chipping Cleghorn, though; Mitzi is continually portrayed as an annoying, silly character, and this opportunity to create a three-dimensional Other is cast aside. The police officers in this novel perpetuate these impressions as well. They’re quick to throw all of their suspicion onto the characters of Rudi and Mitzi, and it takes Miss Marple’s adept observations to discover the final solution. Ironically, this involves complete surprise on the reader’s part when the murderer turns out not to be either of the foreign characters, but instead a character that is the epitome of Englishness.

Although World War II was over, this novel demonstrates the post-war regression society was falling into. After the trauma of the war, similarly to the United States, it seemed simpler to go back to old assumptions and ideas than to forge new ones. By setting this novel in rural England, Christie’s choice fits well with the idea of regression; Chipping Cleghorn is stuck in the past and so are its residents’ ideas about the Other.

By analyzing these novels chronologically in conjunction with the historical and biographical context of Christie’s life, an interesting pattern and progression of her discussion of the Other in her novels is discovered. By witnessing overt examples of xenophobia, like Tommy’s in *Secret Adversary*, transition into more subtle, complex instances and considerations

of the Other, these brief scenes throughout the novels can be viewed overall in a post-colonial reading of Christie's works.

CHAPTER THREE: A New Perspective

All of these textual examples through a post-colonial lens reveal a new angle that has not received much attention in the literary world. At the few-and-far-between times when Christie's works are the subject of academic discourse, the focus is usually upon Poirot's alien features, Christie's techniques as a mystery writer – usually viewing Christie's works in isolation or in the context of her genre. What Lassner began with her work, this project continues; through this examination, not only is a new interpretation opened up to readers, but also wider contexts in which to consider Christie's works.

“Once you see it, it cannot be unseen.” Once even one of these moments is examined as a post-colonial, historical snapshot, it's difficult to read another Christie text without noticing more of these instances. Whether the text stars Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple, Tommy and Tuppence Beresford, or no detective figure at all (like *And Then There Were None*), the reader can always keep an eye out for these moments; with this new perspective, the reading is not isolated to one series or another, unlike some other projects with Christie's works. Even though this project focuses on the reading of texts taking place on British soil, it is not solely isolated to that category either. The four texts Lassner studies, as well as other texts like *A Caribbean Mystery* (one of Miss Marple's rare adventures outside the English countryside), can be read through this lens as well.

Reading passages through this new perspective provokes many questions, especially concerning Christie's true feelings about the Empire and the Other. Reflecting on the scenes featuring military characters, what inspired those characters? Did Christie actually encounter men like this? She was, after all, a military nurse, and her first marriage was to a military pilot. She would no doubt have been exposed to many different military personalities throughout her

life. What about the other characters and their comments about the Other? Where did Christie derive her inspiration for those characters and their feelings? Why do characters like Anne Meredith and Vera Claythorne fear the Other, and why is this important enough for Christie to include repeatedly in her characterizations?

Although we can no longer ask Christie these questions, she has published many pieces of a personal nature, including an autobiography and travel memoirs. Authors of course can portray themselves in any manner they wish to in their personal writings, so it's difficult to deem the material completely reliable. However, having access to personal writings is still more helpful than working with the fiction in isolation. The travel memoirs are especially helpful in this instance; with her second husband Max Mallowan, an archaeologist, Christie was able to travel around the Empire on digs and expeditions. Examining these memoirs for the same clues as the novels allows us to begin answering these questions.

Beginning an expedition, Max is assembling a crew of locals in the Middle East who will drive around with him, seeking possible dig sites, also known as 'tells.' Christie records the process, and her writing style reflects how both she and Max feel about their possible travel companions: "Abdullah is summoned to an interview. He bears a remarkable resemblance to a camel, and Max says with a sigh that at any rate he seems stupid, and that is always satisfactory. I ask why, and Max says because he won't have the brains to be dishonest" (*Come, Tell Me How You Live*, chp. 2). Although Max is the one implying Abdullah's stupidity aloud, Christie does directly describe him as camel-like. She also comments on how Abdullah spends the money he has earned, explaining:

I am struck as often before by the fundamental difference of race... Abdullah lets hardly a day pass without clamouring for an advance of salary. If he had had his way he would

have had the entire amount in advance, and it would, I rather imagine, have been dissipated before a week was out. With Arab prodigality Abdullah would have splashed it about in the coffee-house. He would have cut a figure! He would have ‘made a reputation for himself.’ ...At the end of the trip Abdullah will be penniless once more, and will doubtless be again adorning the water-front of Beyrout, waiting with Arab fatalism for the goodness of God to provide him with another job. (chp. 2)

By making assumptions and using phrases like ‘Arab prodigality’ and ‘Arab fatalism,’ Christie, whether intentionally or unintentionally, is resorting to stereotypes, or as Bhabha would say, constructions. Although she’s relating her adventures abroad to her readers, her presentation of her travel-mates is usually less than flattering.

Christie continues perpetuating these constructions as she relates other encounters. There is a moment when Max is trying to hire workers who live nearby the dig site, and he enlists Hamoudi, another one of his assistants, to help him:

We make a start with Tell Mozan. There is a village there, and with Hamoudi as ambassador we try and obtain workmen. The men are doubtful and suspicious.

‘We do not need money,’ they say. ‘It has been a good harvest.’ ...

‘A little extra money,’ says Hamoudi, like the serpent of Eden, ‘is always welcome.’

They answer simply: ‘But what can we buy with it? We have enough food until the harvest comes again.’

And here, alas! the eternal Eve plays her part. Astute Hamoudi baits his hook. They can buy ornaments for their wives.

The wives nod their heads. This digging, they say, is a good thing!

Reluctantly the men consider the idea. There is another thing to be taken into account - Dignity. His dignity is very dear to an Arab. Is this *dignified*, and *honourable* thing to do? (chp. 3)

Hamoudi, in the attempt to set up an arrangement profitable for his boss and thus also for himself, seeks and discovers the vulnerable area for the villagers; although they do not need food or money, their wives want nice things, and Hamoudi zones in on this aspect to get the villagers interested in the work. Christie also makes biblical references in this passage. She depicts Hamoudi as the serpent in the Garden of Eden, tempting the villagers into a commitment they're not initially interested in. Although the men, like Adam, are able to resist at first, it is the women who are sucked in by the temptation of money and nice things. They encourage their husbands to make the commitment, like how Eve shared the tempting apple with Adam. Another troubling facet of this depiction is that the villagers are most likely not Christian; therefore, Christie is also pressing Western religion onto the villagers. This scene is constructing a clear contrast between Christie's group and the villagers.

Christie concludes by once again perpetuating a construction of the Arab; Christie has not indicated that the village men actually said anything about dignity, so this is most likely her own addition based on the constructions and stereotypes that she is familiar with for this nationality. By casting Hamoudi as the negotiator, the serpent in Eden, she's also demonstrating how the Empire employs the subjugated as agents. Throughout Christie's travel narrative, the Other is constantly being subjugated through stereotypes and assumptions, much like the depictions in her novels.

She also discusses Hamoudi's carefree way of spending his money, much like Abdullah. In each passage discussing their assistants' handling of their wages, Christie is clearly annoyed. As to Hamoudi's habits, she complains:

Hamoudi has been throwing money about rather grandly in Amuda lately, mindful of our 'reputations.' The spending of money seems a point of honour with Arabs - that is to say, the practice of entertaining notables in the coffee-house! To appear mean is a terrible dishonour. On the other hand, Hamoudi beats down remorselessly the charges of old women who bring milk and other old women who do our washing for what seems an incredibly small sum. (chp. 3)

Although Christie is relating what seems merely observational, there are subtle gestures of stereotypes at play here as well involving the financial desires of Middle Eastern culture. Christie is under the impression that money is of great importance to Middle Eastern culture, not only for comfort but for social status. This is also how Western cultures could be described, but Christie does not mention her own culture in relation to this idea. She instead, as Bhabha emphasizes, repeats this assumption about the Middle Easterners. When she mentions 'reputations,' she is referring back to Abdullah's spending of money to assist with their group's reputation in the village societies they were passing through. Automatically assuming Hamoudi is spending money for the same reasons as Abdullah not only perpetuates the stereotype she then bluntly states ("The spending of money seems a point of honour with Arabs"), but it lumps the two together in a group, a construction, instead of focusing on them more as individuals. Christie is falling into and perpetuating constructions about Arabian people. With these passages in mind, readers can think a lot more about the post-colonial questions Christie's novels raise.

Based on this analysis, it seems like Christie was a product of her time. She was doing what a lot of great writers do; she created realistic characters and scenarios that reflected her own time period. She didn't necessarily endorse racist ideas about the Other, but she didn't necessarily condemn them either. Although we cannot know for sure how she felt, asking these questions while reading her fiction and personal writings provides another engaging perspective.

However, there is one argument that can be made with absolute certainty; although Christie does not aim to send any kind of message, she is definitely problematizing ideas about the Other. The examples listed in this project, through a chronological approach, increase in complexity as Christie goes through two World Wars and develops more as a writer. She goes from overt contrasts in her early works, like *Secret Adversary*, to veiled, complicated contrasts and considerations of the Other, like *N or M?*

So where can we go from here? If Lassner's work was the tip of the iceberg, this project's argument is only beginning to dive underwater, getting just a glimpse of its gargantuan potential. A reading of all of Christie's works, both fictional and personal, would assist in solidifying this argument further, but the work of Christie's contemporaries could also be examined for similar hidden gems. Examining the works of other Golden Age authors like Dorothy L. Sayers could prove quite fruitful.

It would also be beneficial to continue the study of Christie along post-colonial texts. Besides the addition of more theorists, it would also be intriguing to examine Christie's works alongside authors like Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling. Not only are these authors major contributors to colonial literature, but they're also considered a part of the literary canon. By examining these texts alongside Christie, more comparisons can be made between the texts, especially in the texts' treatment of the Other and the Empire.

It would also be intriguing to apply this type of reading to more time periods and more authors. What could be found in mystery and detective fiction from the 1960s, for example? Even contemporary authors like Sue Grafton, Elizabeth George, and James Ellroy could be examined for similar qualities in their works. Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia*, a fictionalized version of the unsolved mystery, definitely captures assumed attitudes about people of Hispanic and Japanese heritage in 1940s America, for example. As was stated earlier, the genre of mystery and detective fiction holds more potential in the world of literature; it can do more than appeal to and entertain readers. It can encourage them to think critically about how we view other cultures and how these constructions affect society. Christie's detective Hercule Poirot is always reminding readers of this, too. He says in Christie's debut novel, "This affair must all be unraveled within.' He tapped his forehead. 'These little grey cells. It is up to them'" (*The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, chp. 10).

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