

About agatha !!!

Very prolific British author of mystery novels and short stories, creator of Hercule Poirot, the Belgian detective, and Miss Jane Marple. Christie wrote more than 70 detective novels under the surname of her first husband, Colonel Archibald Christie. She also published a series of romances and a children's book.

Agatha Christie was born in Torquay, in the county of Devon, as the daughter of Frederick Alvah Miller, an American with a moderate private income, and Clarissa Miller. Her father died when she was a child. Christie was educated home, where her mother encouraged her to write from very early age. At sixteen she was sent to school in Paris where she studied singing and piano. Christie was an accomplished pianist but her stage fright and shyness prevented her from pursuing a career in music. In her books Christie seldom referred to music, although her detectives, Poirot and Miss Marple, show interest in opera and Poirot sings in *THE A. B. C. MURDERS* (1936) a World War I song. When Christie's mother took her to Cairo for a winter, she wrote there a novel. Encouraged by Eden Philpotts, neighbor and friend in Torquay, she devoted herself into writing and had short stories published.

In 1914 Christie married Archibald Christie, an officer in the Flying Royal Corps; their daughter, Rosalind, was born in 1919. During World War I she worked in a Red Cross Hospital in Torquay as a hospital dispenser, which gave her a knowledge of poisons. It was to be useful when she started writing mysteries. Christie's first detective novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, introduced Hercule Poirot, the Belgian detective, who appeared in more than 40 books, the last of which was *CURTAIN* (1975). The Christies bought a house and named it 'Styles' after the first novel.

Poirot was an amiably comic character with egg-shaped head, eccentric whose friend Captain Hastings represents the "idiot narrator" - familiar from Sherlock Holmes stories. Poirot draws conclusions from observing people's conduct and from objects around him, creating a chain of facts that finally reveal the murderer. "He tapped his forehead. "These little gray cells. It is 'up to them' - as you say over here." Behind the apparently separate details is always a pattern, which only Poirot is able to see.

Miss Marple, an elderly spinster, was a typical English character, but when Poirot used logic and rational methods, Marple relied on her feminine sensitivity and empathy to solve crimes. She was born and lived in the village of St. Mary Mead. Both Poirot and Marple did not have any family life, but Poirot also travelled much. Marple was featured in 17 novels, the first being *MURDER AT THE VICARAGE* (1930) and the last *SLEEPING MURDER* (1977). She was reportedly based on the author's own grandmother. Miss Marple made her first screen appearance in 1961 in *Murder She Said*, starring Margaret Rutherford. It was based on the novel *4:50 FROM PADDINGTON* (1957). It was followed by *Murder at the Gallop* (1963), *Murder Ahoy* (1964), and *Murder Most Foul* (1964), all directed by George Pollock. The BBC TV series starring Joan Hickson ran 1984-87. Gracie Fields played Miss Marple on television in an adaptation of *A Murder Is Announced* (1956).

Poirot, a former policeman, was forced to flee his country after the German invasion of Belgium in 1914. His assistant Captain Hastings married in the early 1930s and Poirot settled to London's Whitehaven Mansions. Poirot is short - only five feet four inches tall. He has waxed moustache, egg-shaped head and small feet. Poirot first appeared on screen in *Alibi* (1931). It was based on *THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD* (1926), which was partly inspired by Anton Chekhov's novel *The Shooting Party* (1884-1885). "Every murderer is probably somebody's old friend," Christie wrote in it. With these kind of insights in motives and methods of a murder Christie proved that she could have been a competent teacher at police academies. Peter Ustinov played Poirot in *Death on the Nile* (1978), *Evil under the Sun* (1982), and *Appointment with Death* (1988). David Suchet was Poirot in the UK television series (1989-91). In *Murder by the Book* (1986) Ian Holm's Poirot investigated his own murder. Tony Randall played Poirot in Frank Tashlin's unorthodox adaptation *The Alphabet Murders* (1965), in which Anita Ekberg galloped on horseback through Kensington Gardens.

In 56 years Christie wrote 66 detective novels, among the best of which are *The*

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Murder of Roger Acroyd, MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS (1934), DEATH ON THE NILE (1937), and TEN LITTLE NIGGERS (1939). The film version of Ten Little Niggers (1945, US title: And Then There Were None) by the French director René Clair, starring Walter Huston and Barry Fitzgerald, is one of the most faithful Christie adaptations. In addition to these mysteries, Christie wrote her autobiography (1977), and several plays, including THE MOUSETRAP, which run more than 30 years continuously in London, and had 8 862 performances at the Ambassadors Theatre in London. The play was based on the short story 'Three Blind Mice', and was produced in 1952 in Nottingham and London. The original company at the Ambassadors Theatre included Richard Attenborough as the detective.

Christie's marriage broke up in 1926. Archie Christie, who worked in the City, announced that he had fallen in love with a younger woman, Nancy Neele. In the same year Christie's beloved mother died. After hearing that her husband had left for Miss Neele's house, Christie disappeared for a time. "I would gladly give £500 if I could only hear where my wife is," said Colonel Christie. The story of her real life (love?) adventure in the 1926, when she lived in a Harrowgate hotel under the name Mrs. Neele, was basis for the film Agatha. It was directed in 1978 by Michael Apted. In title role was Vanessa Redgrave. Christie's divorce was finalized in 1928, and two years later she married the archaeologist Max Mallowan. She had met him on her travels in Near East in 1927, and accompanied him on his excavations of sites in Syria and Iraq. Later Christie used these exotic settings in her novels MURDER IN MESOPOTAMIA (1936) and Death on the Nile (1937). Her own archeological adventures were recounted in COME TELL ME HOW YOU LIVE (1946). Mallowan was Catholic and fourteen years her junior; he became one of the most prominent archaeologist of his generation. Of her marriage the writer told reporters: "An archaeologist is the best husband any woman can have. The older she gets, the more interested he is in her." Mallowan worked in Iraq in the 1950s but returned to England, when Christie's health grew weaker. His most famous book was Nimrud and its Remains.

Christie's most prolific period began in the late 1920s. During the 1930s he published four non-series mystery novels, fourteen Poirot novels, two Marple novels, two Superintendent Battle books, a book of stories featuring Harley Quin and another featuring Mr. Parken Pyne, an additional Maru Westmacott book, and two original plays. In 1936 she published the first of six psychological romance novels under the pseudonym Mary Westmacott. After visiting Luxor in 1937, where Christie saw Howard Carter, she wrote the play AKHNATON, which was not published until 1973. It dramatized the fate of the Egyptian pharaoh Akhnaton, who tried to replace the old gods with monotheism, and Nefertiti, his wife. Curiously, the Finnish writer Mika Waltari, who gained later international fame with his historical novel The Egyptian (1945), wrote also in the same year a play about the same king, Akhnaton, auringosta syntynyt (1937). Christie's play was produced in New York as Akhnaton and Nefertiti in 1979 and next year in London.

During WW II Christie worked in the dispensary of University College Hospital in London. She also produced twelve completed novels. After the war she continued to write prolifically, also gaining success on the stage and in the cinema. Witness for the Prosecution, for example, was chosen the best foreign play of the 1954-55 season by the New York Drama Critics Circle. Play had opened in London in October 1953 and by December 1954, it was on Broadway. With Max Mallowan she traveled in 1947 and 1949 to expeditions to Nimrud, the ancient capital of Assyria, and in the Tigris Valley.

Among the many film adaptations are Murder on the Orient Express (1974), directed by Sidney Lumet and with Albert Finney as Poirot, and Death on the Nile (1978), with Peter Ustinov as Poirot. (see list below) Both films were nostalgic costume dramas. Sidney Lumet wrote in Making Movies (1995) that clothes contribute an enormous amount to the style of the picture. "When Betty Bacall makes her first appearance in Murder on the Orient Express, she's wearing a full-length peach-colored bias-cut velvet dress with a matching hat and egret feather. Jacqueline Bisset, for her first appearance, wears a full-length blue silk dress, a matching jacket with a white ermine collar, and a tiny pillbox hat with a feather... The object was to thrust the audience into a world it never knew - to create a feeling of how glamorous things

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used to be." Even the small parts in *Murder on the Orient Express* was filled by famous stars. Richard Widmark was the victim, Lauren Bacall the American matron, Vanessa Redgrave the lady with the husband, Ingrid Berman the nurse, and John Gielgud the Jeeves character. Also Sean Connery and Anthony Perkins appeared.

According to Billy Wilder, Christie herself considered his *Witness for the Prosecution* the best film adaptation of her work. Wilder rewrote with Harry Kurnitz Christie's dialogue but did not change the clever plot with a surprise ending. In the film Charles Laughton was Sir Wilfrid, a barrister, who defends Leonard Vole (Tyrone Power), an inventor, accused of murdering a middle-aged widowed woman. Marlene Dietrich was his German wife Christie, an actress, eager to testify against her husband. Wilfrid has just recovered from a severe heart attack. The role of his dominating nurse, Miss Plimsoll, was played by Laughton's wife, Elsa Lanchester. In one scene she threatens to resign, if Wilfrid doesn't go to sleep. "Splendid," he replies. "Give her a month's pay and kick her down the stairs." Dietrich's performance had everything - she sang, kissed passionately Tyrone Power, said "I never use smelling salts because they puff up the eyes," and had a double role as a hard Cockney woman and a coldly articulating German woman. She was very disappointed when she did not even earn an Oscar nomination.

Christie's characters are usually well-to-do people. Often the comfortable lifestyle of his characters is undermined by financial problems, which lead to murder. Although her villains use very complicated plans, they are not impossible, but are firmly grounded on the everyday reality: "Miss Lyall's hobby in life, as has been said, was the study of human beings. Unlike most English people, she was capable of speaking to strangers on sight instead of allowing four days to a week to elapse before making the first cautious advance as is the customary British habit." (from 'Trinagle at Rhodes' in *Murder in the Mews*, 1937) In many stories the reader is fooled to suspect an innocent character, but most innovative Christie was when she revealed the guilty party: it has been the narrator, a group of people, a serial killer who tries to hide an obvious motive for his killing one of the victims, and so forth. Christie's world view was conservative and rational, but there is always a place for accidents: "'...Does it not strike you that the easiest way of removing someone you want to remove from your path is to take advantage of accident? Accidents are happening all the time. And sometimes - Hastings - they can be helped to happen!'" (from *Dumb Witness*, 1937). Christie gives always a logical explanation for crimes, but society is not blamed. Murder is not a sign of degeneration of middle-class values. After the crime is solved, life continues happily. Although Christie's writing career spanned over six decades, she was conscious of social change without fixating on the period between the two World Wars. "When I reread those first books," she said in 1966, "I'm amazed at the number of servants drifting around. And nobody is really doing any work, they're always having tea on the lawn." However, she did not like editing her own text and was even reluctant to change the spelling unless a word has actually been misspelt.

By 1955 Christie had become a limited company, Agatha Christie Ltd, which was acquired in the late 1960s by Booker Books. It had already acquired Ian Fleming. In 1967 Christie became president of the British Detection Club, and in 1971 she was made a Dame of the British Empire. Christie died on January 12, 1976 in Wallingford, Oxfordshire. Malrowan died two years later, but he had married after Christie's death an old family friend. With over one hundred novels and over one hundred translations into foreign languages, Christie was by the time of her death the best-selling English novelist of all time. As Margery Allingham said: Christie has "entertained more people for more hours at time that any other writer of her generation." (New York Times Book Review, 1950)