

Agatha Christie: The World's Best-Selling Novelist [B1]

Fenomeno assoluto della letteratura mondiale, autrice di bestseller mai eguagliati, l'affabile scrittrice inglese ha inaugurato un sottogenere del romanzo poliziesco che scava nel lato oscuro della società benestante.

Detective writer Agatha Christie wrote sixty-six novels, fourteen short-story collections and twenty [stage plays](#) in her long life. She sold over two billion copies in one hundred languages, making her both the world's top-selling novelist and the most-translated author in history. The Queen of Crime built her success on our fascination with discovering evil in ordinary people, as well as her ability to create [plots](#) which have [fooled](#) millions of readers. Her novels weren't [appealing](#) to everyone, though. Before her death, many of them were criticised for expressing racist and anti-semitic sentiments.

SELF-TAUGHT

Agatha Miller (her real name) was born on 15 September 1890, in Torquay, Devon, into an upper-middle-class family. Her mother did not want her to read until she was eight, but a bored Christie taught herself by the age of five. She also had no school lessons until she was sixteen! She began writing as a teenager, she said, because she "never had any education ... and there's nothing like [boredom](#) to make you write."

A DARE TO WRITE

In 1914, she married Archie Christie, a member of the Royal Flying Corps. While her husband was fighting in France in World War One, Agatha worked as a [nurse](#) in Torquay, before passing the exam to become an apothecary (forty-six of the sixty-seven novels she later wrote involved the use of poison.) Her sister Madge first [dared](#) her to write a detective story, and *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* was published in 1920, one year after the birth of her only child, Rosalind. The book was an immediate success. Christie had

decided to make her detective Belgian, with an elaborate [waxed](#) moustache and an egg-shaped head. The iconic Hercule Poirot was born.

CHRISTIE TRICKS

The [literary devices](#) that would become known as ‘Christie [Tricks](#)’ were present from her first book: the [genteel](#) country house setting, the closed circle of suspects, the [red herrings](#), the [cunning](#) solution, and the reveal in front of a captive audience (often in a library.) Five books later, in 1926, Christie published *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Breaking all the rules of the mystery genre, the novel — with its legendary final [twist](#) — would influence generations of writers. In 1927, Christie created a new amateur detective, a white-haired old lady called Miss Jane Marple. The novel *The Murder at the [Vicarage](#)* would be the first of twelve, and the [shrewd](#) Miss Marple would join Poirot as two of the best-loved characters in English literature. Christie was now at the peak of her fame, dominating the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, as the period was known. Stylised publicity photos [boosted](#) her image as the Duchess of Death. For [tax](#) reasons, she was publishing just one novel a year now, giving rise to the expression ‘A Christie for Christmas’.

WEST END TO THE END

In the 1940s and 1950s, Christie also turned [her hand to](#) writing plays. At one point, she had three plays in the West End at the same time, including the world-famous [The Mousetrap](#). Hollywood also started to turn her books into movies, most notably Billy Wilder’s *Witness for the Prosecution* in 1957. Multiple TV and radio adaptations soon followed. In 1975, Poirot appeared — and died — in his thirty-third and last case, *Curtain*. The New York Times published the first-ever obituary for a fictional character. His much-loved creator, Agatha Christie, followed him on 12 January 1976. Theatre lights [dimmed](#) in the West End, and audiences gave her a standing ovation. The Queen of Crime had left the stage.

Glossary

- **Vicarage** = casa parrocchiale
- **her hand to** = dedicarse a
- **appealing** = attraenti
- **boredom** = noia
- **waxed** = cerati
- **cunning** = astuta
- **tax** = fiscali
- **fooled** = ingannare
- **nurse** = infermiera
- **dared** = sfidare
- **boosted** = promuovere
- **red herrings** = piste false
- **twist** = colpo di scena
- **The Mousetrap** = trappola
- **dimmed** = scendere
- **plots** = trame
- **literary devices** = espedienti letterari
- **Tricks** = trucchi
- **genteel** = elegante, raffinata
- **stage plays** = opere teatrali
- **shrewd** = accorta