

# The Duchess of Death [B2]

Agatha Christie ha vissuto una vita segnata da successi straordinari e sfide personali che hanno profondamente influenzato la sua scrittura.

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Born in the late 19th century, murder mystery writer Agatha Christie dominated global book sales throughout the 20th century. Christie was an intensely private person, but she loved travel and adventure. She compared herself to the Vikings and the master mariners of the Medieval Ages. On official [forms](#), her modesty [kicked in](#), and she always described herself as "[housewife](#)"!

## WOMANHUNT

1926 was the saddest year of Agatha Christie's life. First her mother died — her father had died when she was eleven, in effect ending her childhood, she said —, leaving her suffering from [grief](#), insomnia and depression. And then her husband Archie told her that he had fallen in love with a family friend, Nancy Neele, and wanted a divorce. In early December, she kissed her daughter goodnight, left the house, got into her car and disappeared for eleven days. Christie was now a major celebrity, and the police organised the biggest [manhunt](#) in British history. As well as one thousand police officers, there were also fifteen thousand volunteers, numerous dogs and even aeroplanes looking for her. The story was covered by newspapers around the world. In one newspaper interview, her husband called her "[cunning](#), [devious](#) and [money-grabbing](#)." She was finally found in a hotel in Harrogate, Yorkshire, where she had booked in under a false name. Christie was possibly [concussed](#) and suffering from amnesia. She had no recollection of who she was and did not recognise her husband. Her only comment on her disappearance, in her autobiography, was: "After illness came [sorrow](#), despair and heartbreak. There is no need [to dwell on](#) it." She also wrote: "A man who remains a child is the most frightening thing in the world." In 1930, Christie met and married archaeologist, Max Mallowan, fourteen years younger than her.

## CONTROVERSY

After the Second World War, Christie came under attack, especially in the US, for racist and anti-semitic comments in some of her books. According to one critic, the novelist was ahead of her time in portrayals of homosexual and [disabled](#) characters, and she often questioned the hypocrisy of upper-class society. The same critic, however, said that her depiction of Jewish and characters of colour was often stereotyped and even [vicious](#). Famously, the title of her biggest-selling novel, written in 1939 (originally titled Ten Little Niggers), had to be re-named as And Then There Were None to avoid the use of racist language. This criticism, however, never affected sales of her books.

## THE MOUSETRAP

Christie is also history's most-performed female [playwright](#), and The Mousetrap is the world's [longest-running](#) play. The Mousetrap had its [opening night](#) in November 1952 and had its 29,500th performance last February. In this [whodunnit](#), a group of seven strangers are [snowed in](#) at a remote countryside [guesthouse](#). They discover, to their horror, that one of them is a murderer — but who? For years, the play has been one of London's top tourist attractions, with 30 per cent of the audience being foreign visitors.

## EVIL WILL COME

Agatha Christie basically wrote about and for people like herself. She wrote about the world she knew and saw, filling her pages with military officers, lords and ladies, and widows and [spinsters](#). Her [plots](#) centred on village politics, family jealousies and local rivalries. She had a unique style of [readability](#) combined with shocking human malice and even evil. Her novels have a serious undercurrent of a preoccupation with the dark side of human nature. They are not just [cosy](#) entertainment. She always talked about being aware of the “dangerous [lure](#) of evil”. In Death on the Nile, Poirot [warns](#) one character, “Do not open your heart to evil. Because, if you do, evil will come.

It will enter in and make its home within you, and after a while it will no longer be possible [to drive it out.](#)

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# Glossary

- **concussed** = commozione
- **to dwell on** = soffermarsi su
- **guesthouse** = pensione
- **lure** = attrattivo
- **devious** = subdola
- **money-grabbing** = avida di denaro
- **sorrow** = tristezza
- **playwright** = drammaturga
- **longest-running** = null
- **to drive it out** = scacciare
- **grief** = dolore
- **housewife** = casalinga
- **disabled** = disabili
- **vicious** = crudele
- **opening night** = con più rappresentazioni
- **spinsters** = zitelle
- **readability** = leggibilità
- **warns** = avvertire
- **forms** = registri
- **manhunt** = caccia all'uomo
- **cunning** = astuta
- **whodunnit** = giallo
- **snowed in** = bloccati dalla neve
- **plots** = trame
- **cosy** = accogliente
- **kicked in** = farsi sentire