

The Role of Medical Knowledge in Agatha Christie's Murder Mysteries



Rowjatun Jannat

212013013

Department of English and Humanities

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The Role of Medical Knowledge in Agatha Christie's Murder Mysteries

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Rowjatun Jannat
212013013
Thesis Supervisor: Anika Tahsin
Lecturer, Department of English & Humanities (DEH)

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Tahsin', is written over a faint, circular, textured background.

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(Anika Tahsin)

Lecturer

Department of English and Humanities

DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

Rowjatun Jannat

(Rowjatun Jannat)

212013013

Department of English and Humanities

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Abstract

Agatha Christie's murder mysteries are renowned for their intricate plotlines, sometimes combining sophisticated scientific knowledge and psychological insight with elements of the supernatural. Christie, who had taken training as a pharmacist during World War I, easily combined experience in medicine, chemistry, and psychology, which she avidly inserted into her novels. The current study considers Christie's novelty, grounded in basing her criminal plotting and solving thereof on science and human psychology, from one point of view, and on tensions between rationality and the apparently otherworldly, on the other. Applying Tzvetan Todorov's dual narrative and taking Michel Foucault's concept of the medical gaze as a base in theory, the present research intends to survey Christie's display of such a medical character, his analytical objectivity, and further participation in crime detection. Todorov's theory of detective fiction provides an understanding of how Christie's narratives build upon mysteries and investigations, each turning on the unmasking of scientific deception. The concept developed by Foucault of the medical gaze has been applied in showing exactly how objectivity and power relations within the medical arena are brought into manifestation in Christie's characters. The research will also focus on the psychological investigation of criminality by Christie, indicating the way she can construct an intellectual portrait of human behavior, motivations, and what the meaning of psychological tools is in the commission and solution of a crime. This aspect brings to light a hitherto unexplored area by any literature that has focused on how Christie used medical and psychological knowledge beyond the presentation.

Keywords: medical gaze, psychological insight, scientific deception, detective fiction, Tzvetan Todorov, Michel Foucault

Chapter 1

Introduction

Agatha Christie's murder mysteries were famous for their convoluted plots and artful use of science and psychology. Christie, who trained as a pharmacist during World War I, had on her hands an arsenal of medical knowledge to be gleaned from and skillfully wove this into her novels, especially in depicting crimes whose *modus operandi* was based on scientific progress to cover up the truth. Yet concurrent in her work is also the tension between science and the supernatural; many times, Christie created villains who, in order to concoct something otherworldly, commit crimes through their knowledge of medicine and chemistry (Bunson 374).

This study will also consider Christie's work through two theoretical lenses: Tzvetan Todorov's dual narrative and Michel Foucault's concept of the medical gaze. Todorov's theory of the detective narrative—a story which unravels both as a crime and as an investigation into that crime—provides a useful framework through which to consider Christie's narratives, in which it is frequently the case that resolution of murder depends on the unmasking of scientific deception. The work of Foucault will add depth to the discussion through his development of the concept of the "medical gaze," an analytical and objective regard for the human body. Further, the research will examine the ways in which Christie integrates psychological insight—thru a deep and nuanced understanding of the human nature and a respect for the use of psychology as not only a tool of criminality but also as a tool of detection—nearly a dozen years prior to her writing that psychology (Ajar and Vasari 176).

In Agatha Christie's murder mysteries, this juncture of medical knowledge, psychology, and crime sustains a plot whereby science continues to be both the helper in solving and in

committing the crimes. But again, as such, it raises some critical questions about what role science and objectivity are to play in both evil-doing and detection of crime (Osborne 259). Usually, Christie uses her profound knowledge of medicine and psychological insights to serve the purpose of deceiving perceptions, while the crime in reality has been hidden by some seemingly supernatural or inexplicable phenomenon. While most research has focused on her use of poisoning and forensic detail, less notice has been given to the deeper implications of how Christie portrays medical professionals and their analytical detachment through the prism of Foucault's "medical gaze." Moreover, her investigation of human psychology both as a tool of criminal intelligence and detection remains scantily explored (Roth 19-23). This paper, therefore, tries to fill the gaps outlined above by critically analyzing Christie's use of medical knowledge and psychology in the light of Todorov's dual narrative and Foucault's theory of power and knowledge.

This paper seeks to understand how Christie blends science, medicine, and psychology to craft complex mysteries that appear supernatural but are ultimately solved through rational, scientific, and psychological means through the question — *How does Agatha Christie utilize advanced science, medical knowledge, and human psychology to create a guise of the supernatural while simultaneously exposing power-knowledge dynamics and unraveling crimes in her murder mysteries?* This question also explores how she reveals the power and authority that come with knowledge, as reflected in her characters and plot developments.

This study will investigate the role of advanced scientific knowledge in Agatha Christie's mysteries and how it is disguised as supernatural elements. This objective focuses on how Agatha Christie uses advanced scientific knowledge, such as medicine and chemistry, in her murder mysteries. Christie often disguises scientific facts as supernatural elements, creating the

illusion of otherworldly forces at play, while in reality, the crimes are grounded in logical, scientific reasoning. This paper will further analyze the portrayal of medical professionals and their use of objective, analytical perspectives, drawing from Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge. This objective aims to explore how medical professionals are portrayed in Christie's works. It draws on Michel Foucault's theory of the "medical gaze," which emphasizes the detached, analytical view of the human body. The research will examine how Christie's medical characters use their scientific knowledge and objective perspectives, reflecting Foucault's ideas about the power dynamics between knowledge and authority. Additionally, this paper aims to explore how Agatha Christie incorporates human psychology into her depiction of criminal intelligence and detective work. This objective investigates how Christie incorporates psychological insights into her stories. It examines her understanding of human behavior, motivations, and criminal intelligence, both in committing crimes and in solving them. Christie's use of psychology as both a criminal tool and a method of detection is key to her narratives.

Agatha Christie's use of medical knowledge, especially in poisoning and forensic details, has been the subject of much debate within literary studies. Meanwhile, there has actually been a lack of critical thought with regard to how she explores the juncture at which scientific knowledge, psychological insight, and crime intersect, particularly through the lens of narrative theory and that of Foucault's concept of the medical gaze. Christie's medical professionals often appear to function with clinical detachment, but through Foucault's theory of power and knowledge, such a portrait has not been contextualized appropriately. While her use of psychology in criminal motives and detection is recognized, for example, the full extent that she applies human psychology as a tool of criminal intelligence and its role in crime resolution has not been duly explored. This paper, therefore, tries to fill these gaps by researching the ways in

which Christie interrelates high levels of scientific knowledge with supernatural deception, how she has presented the role of medical professionals through the prism of Foucault, and the way in which psychological insight is integrated into her detective fiction.

This is important research because it opens a new light on Agatha Christie's work and points out her view on the portrayal of the use of science and psychology through Tzvetan Todorov's dual narrative structure and by Michel Foucault's concept of the medical gaze. While Christie is more or less known for her plots and poisoning incidents, this research underlines her even deeper exploration of how the knowledge of medicine and psychological insights are used both as tools of the crime and its detection. In the light of Foucault's theory of power and knowledge, this research gives way to a broader understanding of how Christie can make the detachment and objectivity of medical professionals powerful yet dangerous.

Furthermore, the integration of human psychology into the solving of crimes precedes many forensic techniques considered modern today; hence underlining the forward-looking approach Christie took toward detective fiction. During a time when psychology was still an emerging field, Christie's subtlety in deploying the same within character motivation and crime detection makes her work of interest to both literary analysis and criminological studies alike. The current research thus outlines how crucial it is to learn the way Christie managed to merge scientific advancement with human psychology in creating layered narratives that still continue to influence detective fiction and psychological thrillers today.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Based on the research topic, “The role of medical knowledge in Agatha Christie's Murder Mysteries,” this article will focus on examining the role of medical knowledge in two of Christie’s novels, *The Pale Horse* and *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. A qualitative research method has been used as the paper is based on reading and analyzing media texts and research papers. The methodology the paper uses is textual as this paper will provide an analysis of the elements of medical knowledge present in the narrative of the two novels. This paper also provides a brief summary on the research of other scholars who had examined Christie’s novels from a medical viewpoint.

This paper majorly uses two theoretical frameworks, Foucault's medical gaze and Todorov's dual narrative, to properly analyze the texts in a qualitative fashion. Michel Foucault’s medical gaze, as discussed in *The Birth of the Clinic*, refers to the dehumanization of patients in order to create an objective and factual perspective for medical professionals. On the other hand, Todorov’s dual narrative structure, as discussed in *The Poetics of Prose*, refers to the coexistence of two parallel narratives in the plotline — underlying crime narrative (the first narrative) and a surface level investigation narrative (the second narrative). The deeper, underlying narrative contains the entire storyline in its completeness while the surface narrative is explored as the novel progresses, with sufficient hints for the readers to follow along the detective’s thought process. These methods are associated well with this paper because this paper will be purely based on the scope of medical knowledge integrated in the novels to enhance the mystery factor.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

This study reviews how Agatha Christie used advanced science, medical knowledge, and human psychology in her murders. It explores how Agatha Christie's wartime pharmaceutical experiences influenced her depiction of poisons as a means to uncover the moral ambiguities of science. The review also covers the author's portrayal of health professionals, where the connection between her works and Michel Foucault's concept of the medical gaze is examined in detail. Recent scholarship has rewritten Christie's image as a politically tuned author speaking to British imperialism, modernity, and anti-colonial sentiment. For this review, important academic perspectives will be considered regarding their work revealing both the presence of larger social issues within Christie's works and the critique of contemporary power relationships.

In his work *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, Michel Foucault provides a valuable insight into how medical observation developed in history and how such perception has regularly intervened in the treatment of a patient. Foucault introduces the concept of the "medical gaze" and describes how medicine moved from symptomatic orientation regarding a patient to the analytic attitude toward the body. It is that gaze, which is at the same time, power and knowledge since the medical personnel looks and classifies the patient, reducing him to a case. According to Foucault, such a point of view started the revolution in the practice of medicine but also considerably influenced the general structure of surveillance and discipline within the greater society. The book is a critique of this gaze which objectifies patients and sets up a structured hierarchy between the medical professional and the private individual.

Tzvetan Todorov's "The Typology of Detective Fiction" (1966), represented in *Crime and Media*, and provides a structuralist theory on how to take on detective fiction because it discusses the division into sub-genres by naming rules for each. The idea of Todorov's dual narrative fits here since he represents a division between various narrative structures in detective fiction. The dual storyline often brings together an actual plot of crime and investigation with a secondary layer that reveals the depths of thematic and character articulation. Duality gives meaning to the genre in the way the plot progression combines with other deeper narrative elements, engaging readers through multifaceted means. This typology by Todorov evidences the interaction that occurs in these narratives to generate suspense and deliver resolution, a capability of the genre to merge structural conventions with innovative storytelling techniques.

This is the review of "The Poisonous Pen of Agatha Christie" by Michael C. Gerald by Eunice Bonow Bardell. Bardell writes that the reviewer states, in this volume, the central role taken by the knowledge of poisons acquired by Christie as a World War I pharmacist in her murder mysteries. Gerald speaks to the use of medicinal drugs and chemicals in Christie's novels to point out their dual nature-to heal and to murder. The paper discusses how Christie's writings constantly confront the moral ambiguity of science, where poisons used to commit crimes are camouflaged as natural acts. Additionally, the review covers how the healthcare professionals are portrayed and their dispassionate, analytic approach to life and death, which certainly relates to Michel Foucault's concept of the medical gaze.

A close reading of Agatha Christie's oeuvre after World War II in the article "Agatha Christie in the American Century" by Judy Suh is a lever into British Imperialism and modernity, critiquing them with nuance. Whereas critical opinion would uniformly construe Christie as nostalgic and in reaction to newer ways, recent scholarship in fact reveals a far more

problematically engaged writer with her times. Suh points in the article, how Christie's novel *They Came to Baghdad* (1951) captures anxieties about decolonization and critiques imperial stereotypes. This novel differs from her previous ones in that it is more dynamic in presenting Baghdad and engages more in post-war shifts in global power. Conventionally conceptualized as middle-class and materialistic, Christie's middlebrow status is revised herein to constitute an integral component of mid-century British ethos and anti-colonial sentiment. Suh insists that Christie uses imperial discourse strategically to subvert and satirize colonial ideologies.

The chapter titled “T is for Thallium: *The Pale Horse*” from Kathryn Harkup’s *A is for Arsenic: The Poisons of Agatha Christie*, discusses how one of the lesser-known but deadly poisons, thallium, ingeniously found its place in Agatha Christie's novel *The Pale Horse*. Harkup, in turn, gives a deeper understanding of thallium as a poison and in relation to Agatha Christie's tale. This chapter reveals just how scientifically proper Christie was, along with her skillful storytelling, to bring into light the deadliness of thallium and its realistic effect in the world. Harkup depicts how medical practice has been influenced by Christie's novel since many professionals credit her for helping them diagnose thallium poisoning. The most curious case, however, was when a nurse who was acquainted with Christie's works diagnosed a patient with thallium poisoning and thus treated him in time to save his life. This just goes to show how indirectly literature may affect science and how deeply Christie has influenced the science of toxicology-the improbable linkage of fictional stories to real life.

Similarly, in the chapter titled “S is for Strychnine: *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*” from the book *A is for Arsenic: The Poisons of Agatha Christie*, Harkup tells in great detail about Strychnine as a poison and its role within Agatha Christie's narrative. The chapter expands the discussion of strychnine-a most powerful poison that lies at the heart of Agatha Christie's *The*

Mysterious Affair at Styles-into a wide-ranging discussion regarding its historical, chemical, and biological attributes and how it was used in Christie's first Hercule Poirot mystery. This chapter discusses how Christie judiciously intersperses strychnine throughout the novel, especially with regard to the murder of Emily Inglethorp by poisoning her with it. It becomes readily apparent that Christie possesses precise knowledge of strychnine from the time of poisoning through the development and presentation of symptoms and mode of delivery-so in line with scientific fact. Through marrying toxicology with the literary critique, Harkup explores how scientific detail helps give Christie's mysteries verisimilitude and tension. This chapter thus helps the readers appreciate not only the fully notorious reputation of strychnine but also the role it played as a formidable murder weapon in one of Christie's most iconic stories.

Herbert Kinnell's "Agatha Christie's Doctors" reviews how Agatha Christie portrayed doctors as murderers through the continuity of a villainous theme relating to medical professionals throughout her novels. The review discusses how Christie's own experiences and family background may have influenced her depiction. A theory that could apply to the article is iatrophobia, or the fear of doctors, which might be reflected in Christie's stories. The article remarks that due to their specialization and earned confidence that society places in them, doctors are treated by Christie as the perfect suspects. In analyzing Kinnell's arguments, it would seem that in writing about doctors, Christie used a mixture of historical ideas about physicians and her own experiences with the medical profession.

In his article, "Agatha Christie's Drugs and Disease," Michael G. Gerald discusses the important role of chemical substances not only as poisons but also as medicines in the works of Agatha Christie. Entering into Christie's experiences with pharmaceuticals as a ward nurse and dispenser during the First and Second World Wars, Gerald sets a very significant background in

which the advantage of depicting drugs and diseases in her fiction is set. The article outlines the diverse therapeutic uses of drugs in Christie's novels and short stories: to put people to sleep, for pain relief, and against infections. Gerald underlines that Christie used antidotes very imaginatively and was able to incorporate knowledge of medicine into the story plots, showing how drugs were often important components of story development. This discussion is adapted from a chapter in *The Poisonous Pen of Agatha Christie*, which demonstrates the depth of Christie's engagement with pharmacological themes.

In another article "Agatha Christie's Helpful and Harmful Health Providers: Writings on Physicians and Pharmacists.", Michael C. Gerald discusses Agatha Christie's presentation of doctors and druggists, shaped by her own work as a nurse and dispenser during the war. Health professionals in Christie's novels and stories are frequently murderers or figures of ridicule. As Gerald notes, Christie objects to the over-prescription practiced by doctors as well as the commercializing of pharmacies, thus showing a skepticism of modern medicine more broadly. Her stories often involve health professionals who use their knowledge for evil ends, such as poisoning. Such portrayals reveal Christie's view of the medical profession in a critical way and mimic the societal frustration with healthcare and its practitioners during her writing years. The following analysis will highlight how Christie's works reflect public discontent and criticisms of the healthcare system.

Shaimaa Alobaidi's work "The World of Mystery and Crime: Agatha Christie Technique" serves as perfect examples of her mastery in the murder mystery genre through the diverse methods of narration that both novels adopt. Christie achieves the completed puzzle through parallel layers of storytelling, interweaving mystery and resolution in both novels. Both novels present parallel layers of storytelling that intertwine mystery and resolution, creating a complex

and engaging plot. Her plain style and conversational appropriation are theories by Todorov, who designates a narrative that maintains a balance between the known and disturbing. The concept of the medical gaze by Michel Foucault serves to shed more light on Christie's attention to details and manipulation of clues, similar to a diagnosis whereby every character and clue is brought under systematic scrutiny. Her novels combine unadorned prose with elaborate plotting, their dialogue and judiciously selected detail creating suspense and engaging the reader until the murderer is revealed in a dramatic denouement.

Tim Appignani's work " Murder and Emancipation: Agatha Christie and Critical Qualitative Methods " has been common for high-profile cultural studies thinkers to emphasize and stress how mystery novels valorize scientific methods of crime-solving. Such a view has often failed to acknowledge and explore how Agatha Christie's work embeds qualitative methods that enable the power of marginal characters. Christie's iconic sleuth, Miss Marple, is an outstanding example of this approach through her critical qualitative methods in collective inquiry, which results in the emancipation of outcomes. While this research does touch upon scientific methods reflected in Christie's novels, it especially stresses how these novels challenge and complicate the dominant discourses of institutional authority. Focusing instead on Christie's use of these qualitative methodologies, one finds a dimension to her work that has indeed progressive elements: offering an alternative to empirical focus that is usually characteristic of mystery fiction, and thereby contributing to discourse on scientific and social inquiry.

Agatha Christie's works are known for their intricate puzzles and character appeal, which have presently been considered significant, not merely light reading, winning parallels with the works of James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence. In fact, T.S. Eliot suggested a scholarly work on Christie detective fiction. Her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, from the 1920s

introduces Hercule Poirot into the consciousness of the reading public and is representative of post-World War I Britain in transition, both socio-culturally. Christie's novels are full of such minute social observations that form a valuable gain for historians concerned with the features of British life over decades of transformation. The atmosphere, the setting, and the characters- popular ones like Captain Hastings and the Red Cross worker Cynthia-emerge with refreshing vividness as a snapshot of the era's evolving social dynamics, illustrating how deeply Christie was concerned with contemporary issues.

Overall, Agatha Christie's murder mysteries transcend simple whodunits by integrating advanced scientific knowledge, medical expertise, and psychological insight. Her use of poisons and portrayal of healthcare professionals reflect a critical stance on the moral complexity of science and the medical profession, aligning with Michel Foucault's theory of the medical gaze. Christie's nuanced engagement with imperialism and modernity challenges conventional perceptions of her work, revealing a writer deeply attuned to societal anxieties and shifting power dynamics. Through her blending of narrative, science, and cultural critique, Christie remains a significant figure in both literary and historical discourse.

Chapter 4.1

Dual Narrative: The Crime and the Investigation through the Use of Then-Advanced Science Disguised as the Supernatural in Agatha Christie's Murder Mysteries

Agatha Christie is famous for plot twists and undercover detective work, with the help of then science to commit evil deeds masquerading as supernatural occurrences. Todorov's theory about dual narratives and Foucault's theory on medical gaze both point to Christie skillfully leading the reader in their perception by creating a labyrinth wherein the supernatural is unraveled piece by piece into scientific fact.

Todorov's concept of the double narrative in detective fiction suggests that these novels have two separate, yet intertwined, stories: one that has happened. Christie further complicated this when the crime in her novels is camouflaged as a supernatural event (York and Clive Bloom 23). The supernatural cloaks the scientific method of committing the crime, with an initial suggestion of something inexplicable or eerie in cause.

For example, in *The Pale Horse*, several unexplained deaths appear somehow to be linked with witchcraft, and the characters in the novel believe that some supernatural forces are involved. However, as the investigation unfolds, the detective reveals that the deaths had been caused by thallium poisoning—a method enshrined in advanced scientific knowledge. As Christie writes, "There was no reason why it shouldn't be poison, but that idea of witchcraft got everyone so worked up that no one thought of poison at all" (Christie 278). Here the first story of the crime as a supernatural evil is rewritten as a scientifically understandable crime. Such plotting twists develop the duality within the narrative structure in which the investigation works out the truth of the illusion.

Take, for example, Agatha Christie's use of the double pattern of an apparently supernatural motive and scientific explanation in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. The beginning of the murder plot is framed by the sense of eerie foreboding associated with a mysterious foreign servant and a possibly cursed inheritance. However, as Hercule Poirot draws deeper into the investigation, he finds that the crime was carefully contrived with the aid of knowledge of the properties of strychnine. Christie underlines the contrast between the perceived mystery and the rational solution: "Poirot's method was not to be swayed by what he had not seen" (Christie 95). This reinforces Todorov's notion of a double narrative even more strongly, where the actual investigation of the crime reveals its true, rational nature, which was hidden beneath an initial veneer of the supernatural.

Additionally, the application of Foucault's medical gaze works at demystifying the supernatural in Christie's murder mysteries. Michel Foucault's medical gaze refers to the disinterested and clinical observation by which medical persons outline the diagnosis and subsequent treatment for a patient. The gaze allows the observer to look beyond "superficial signs and manifestations" of a condition into the deeper reality behind it (Rendell 37). Christie's novels often operate with a detective assuming this very role—that is, with a kind of "investigative gaze" similar in ways to Foucault's medical gaze in seeing past the disguise of the supernatural to find scientific truth.

In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, Hercule Poirot does just that. The murder of Emily Inglethorp at first seems to be steeped in an atmosphere of mystery, even supernaturality. Yet, Poirot's step-by-step investigation peels away the superficial layers of the crime. He says, "The case was not only a question of discovering the truth but of disproving the false" (Christie 120).

The approach is parallel to the medical gaze, concerned with finding the underlying realities rather than the appearance of surface phenomena.

In *The Pale Horse*, too, Christie has created an atmosphere immersed in supernatural overtones; the so-called witchcraft is connected with a series of deaths. However, Poirot's investigative gaze cuts through these illusions and uncovers the scientific truth behind the deaths. Poirot says "It was the method of the poison that solved the mystery, not the phantoms of witchcraft"(Christie 278). This assertion underlines the dual narrative going on here whereby the apparently supernatural is explained rationally. Christie's characterization of Poirot's method of investigation therefore aligns with the medical gaze posited by Foucault wherein both investigate the reality of certain phenomena beyond their usually misleading initial appearances.

It is here, in Christie's use of the then-advanced science for a tool of evil-doing, that the morality of scientific knowledge is brought into question. Most of her novels have the perpetrator in possession of some sort of specialized knowledge in medicine, chemistry, or other such fields, which they exploit to ill ends. The duality of science being both a tool with which to solve mysteries and also a means of committing the crimes works to deepen the narrative and speak to the complexity of human motives.

For example, in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, the murderer depends on his or her mastery over poisons to carry out the killing, attempting to disguise the death as if due to natural causes. For Poirot, experience with poison is profoundly meaningful: "Poisons are the method of the expert, not of the amateur. To use a poison, unless you have an expert knowledge of the properties of it, is to court disaster" (Christie 143). This misuse of scientific knowledge on the part of the criminal introduces the moral layer-the implication that science, like any Agatha

Christie's *The Pale Horse* expresses the theme of the moral ambiguity of scientific knowledge with the way in which the characters take advantage of their own areas of expertise and use it for nefarious ends. At the core of the novel is, apparently, a supernatural plot-line theorized by the deaths of numerous people, ultimately found out to be traced to a highly contrived scheme using poison. One can consider the following quote of the protagonist Mark Easterbrook when he thinks over the crime nature: "It is as if the knowledge of chemistry is a sort of evil magic, which can be used to bring about death" (Christie 202). This passage brought under focus the dual nature that scientific knowledge possesses: it might be used in one or another way for solving a crime, but it might also be used to commit one. Another relevant quote comes from the character of Mrs. Oliver remarking on the greater ramifications of science gone wrong: "Science, like everything else, can be a double-edged sword. It can be used to save lives or to end them" (Christie 215). This comes forth from the way the novel extensively looks at how a potent variety of knowledge is bought with several moral risks and responsibilities.

Chapter 4.2

The Role of Medical Knowledge in Agatha Christie's Murder Mysteries: Analytical Perspective through Foucault's Theory of Power and Knowledge

Agatha Christie's murder mysteries more often than not dwell on the correlation between advanced medical knowledge and crime, showing how the objectivity and analytical attitude of medical men turn out to be an instrument of power (İlmek 165). The following analysis, informed by Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge, investigates the way in which Christie's characters—detectives and criminals alike—manipulate, control, and dominate their targets by using medical knowledge to their advantage. Foucault's notion of the medical gaze—an objective, detached regard that reduces the patient to a site of knowledge—parallels the way in which Christie's protagonists and antagonists alike employ their expertise in a sort of exertion of control over their respective worlds. Integrating this with Tzvetan Todorov's dual narrative theory, wherein Christie's stories unfold in layer upon layer of hidden knowledge, shows that within such a framework of mystery and suspense, the knowledge of medicine becomes an almost dangerous weapon.

In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, for example, Dr. Bauerstein utilizes his medical knowledge in attempts to mislead the investigation. He really is representative of the authoritative figure who should have put poison and medicine apart, presenting a truth obscured bluntly. As Poirot himself says, "Poisons are the method of the expert, not of the amateur.", "To use a poison, unless you have an expert knowledge of the properties of it, is to court disaster" (Christie 143). In this context, the aspect of power happens to be closely associated with the

possession of knowledge in the medical line and the crime itself gets committed by the possession of that knowledge by the villain.

The medical gaze also influences the way Poirot and other characters set their gaze on the crime scene through detached, clinical observation. This surely echoes Foucault's ideas of the doctor's gaze in medical settings, where the authority taken by the doctor reduces the patient into sets of symptoms and conditions. Christie's work is replete with the gaze of the detective removing layer after layer of deception to bring to light the truth. Poirot, with his highly scientific mode of investigation gives vent to the objective detachment similar to a medical man: "Everything must be taken into account. If the fact will not fit the theory—let the theory go" (Christie 85). This quotation really sums up how Poirot, like a doctor diagnosing a patient, dispassionately considers the clues until he reaches the truth.

This power of medical knowledge in Christie's work is not about diagnosis and understanding but about life and death: it is a way in which one human being can command the course of another's life, or can prevent them from dying, often leading to the very commission of the crime itself. This manipulation may be insidious; more often, it hides under the cloak of normality or concern and is thus much more insidious.

In *The Pale Horse*, for example, the deaths that apparently take place through witchcraft come from thallium poisoning—a method of murder that requires very specialized medical knowledge. The scientific understanding here reflects the underlying power within medical knowledge and the control over the power of life and death. As one of the characters says, "There was no reason why it shouldn't be poison, but that idea of witchcraft got everyone so worked up that no one thought of poison at all" (Christie 278). In such a manner, the comment

makes clear how the medical knowledge of the villain allowed him to manipulate not only the fate of the victim but also the perceptions of other people around them, controlling the very narration of the crime in question up until the detective interferes.

In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, Agatha Christie reveals how medical knowledge works in the direction of twisting life and death according to one's fancies. It is the poisoned dose of strychnine, administered with carefully calibrated medical precision that enables the committed crime. This kind of knowledge helps the antagonist camouflage the real nature of the crime and to come out successful in fooling the investigation process. As Poirot reveals, "It was the poison that was the key... but the knowledge of its effect was a rare one" (Christie 125). This quotation underscores how the murderer's intimate knowledge with poison not only orchestrates the victim's death but also misleads the investigation to show the profound power of medical knowledge in dictating life's outcomes and manipulating perceptions.

One of the strong ways in which medical knowledge manifests itself in power relates to the objectification of victims. Medical professionals or persons who have acquired knowledge of medical procedures often think of individuals as mere objects to be studied, hence denying them their most basic humanity. This explains why they are able to perpetuate all sorts of violence or manipulation against them without feeling they have committed the atrocities against human beings (Rai et al. 8511).

This clinical objectification of victims is brought in through the murderer's point of view, where the victim is simply the means by which the murderer achieves his end in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. The victim's life is an experimental subject as this murderer, a medical professional himself, kills using strychnine. As Poirot comments, "The murderer had treated the

victim's death as a clinical experiment" (Christie 133), highlighting how the dispositions of a medically knowledgeable perpetrator allow him to contemplate his victim's death with Olympian detachment. In *The Pale Horse*, this element of objectification is equally manifested in the deliberateness of the murders in which the villain employs thallium poisoning. The view of the character is encapsulated in the line, "The poison was administered with the precision of a surgeon, devoid of any emotional regard for the victim" -Christie 282. This quote shows how clinical competence contributes to the murderer viewing victims as subjects of scientific manipulation. In both novels, Christie shows how medical knowledge can engender a dispassionate, clinical view of victims that enables violence and manipulation without weight on the consciences of the perpetrators regarding the human lives concerned.

In addition, Tzvetan Todorov's dual narrative theory further complicates Foucault's ideas by highlighting the way Christie's novels often develop in layers of concealment. The first narrative buried is the crime, perpetrated via medical knowledge. It is uncovered through the second narrative-the investigation-which unravels the structures of power: the detective with his knowledge dismantling the criminal's power.

Through Christie's murder mysteries, one sees the entwining of power and knowledge within medical discourse. The first is the Foucaultian idea of the medical gaze and the application of power, as manifest through the use of knowledge to lord over others, to manipulate life and death for purposes of dehumanizing one's victim (Pfohl). Inversely, the detective, himself a personification of the analytical mind, uses knowledge in the ultimate attempt to tear these structures down to divine the truth behind the crime. In the series of works by Christie, the dual-edged nature of knowledge seems apparent: it helps the solving of a crime,

while it can be used as one weapon in the hands of those who want to outsmart and dominate their opponents.

In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, Agatha Christie employs a double narrative strategy wherein the crime, cloaked by medical expertise, is revealed through investigation. Poirot investigates how the criminal misused his knowledge of medicine: "The truth was hidden behind layers of deceit, only revealed by understanding the intricacies of the crime" Christie 145. This underlines how, in fact, the detective's narrative does take apart the criminal's power of concealing the crime.

Similarly, in *The Pale Horse*, the double narrative does succeed in the way in which the crime, draped in the garb of witchcraft and poison, unfolds through the process of detection. This is stated by the detective, "The veils which surrounded the deaths fell away as a result of the scientific fact" (Christie 299). Here, Christie's narrative offers one path in which the detective's revelation of the criminal use of medical knowledge reveals and resists the working of power.

Chapter 4.3

Incorporating Human Psychology as Part of Criminal Intelligence in Agatha Christie's Mysteries

The murder mysteries of Agatha Christie are known not only for their ingenious plots and their brilliant denouements but also for their intense investment in human psychology. Christie constantly weaves in a fabric of psychological inputs in her representation of both criminals and detectives in order to emerge with the connection between the mind and criminal behavior. In investigating the psychological motives of the crimes, Christie furthers criminal intelligence to go beyond mere logical deduction into "an understanding of human nature" (Baučeková 37). The application of a psychological dimension is a vital ingredient in her detective fiction, wherein characters perform their actions in battle against their internal desires, traumas, and conflicts; hence, psychological analysis turns out to be as significant as physical evidence for unraveling the mystery of the crime.

In Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, the key to the solution of the crime lies in psychology as psychology is used as a tool of criminal intelligence. Poirot makes his investigation into the psychological motive of the murder when he says, "To understand the crime, one must first understand the criminal mind and what drives the person to commit such a crime" (Christie 156). Christie shows how inner battles and yearning of characters are of importance to influence their behaviors while emphasizing that psychological insight is as crucial as physical evidence.

Similarly, in *The Pale Horse*, the psychological dimension is integrally part of the detective's way of reasoning. Further investigation unfolds that the murders were not simple

poisonings but were based upon motives and traumas that were deep-seated in nature. Then, the detective says, "The true nature of the crime lay in the psychological manipulation of the victims, not just the method of murder" (Christie 307). This quote shows that Christie's portrayal of the internal struggles and psychological complexity of her characters enhances the knowledge of criminal behavior.

Throughout both novels, Christie shows that psychological analysis is complementary to criminal intelligence and will be important in solving mysteries impossible to solve by using only logical deduction.

Christie's villains are usually the charming manipulators, using psychological pols to influence and deceive their victims and camouflage the truth. The power of psychological manipulation is presented here as some kind of dangerous intelligence that enables the criminal to commit his or her misdeeds with impunity. Often, Christie characterizes her villains as those who understand the minds of others as well as they understand their own and use their grasp for the exploitation of weaknesses and the manipulation of events to their advantage (Domjanović and Oklopčić 27).

The villain in Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* is a perfect example of how to use psychological manipulation in orchestrating the crime. A charming and cunning murderer takes advantage of the psychological weaknesses of the persons around him. According to the observations of Poirot, "The poison was unimportant, the important thing was the ability of the human psyche to be manipulated and switched off from realities in order to throw off suspicion" (Christie 168). This quote really depicts how the knowledge of human psychology

helps the villain create a web of innocence, which keeps the reader's suspicion off him and manipulates the story to elude detection thus committed with apparent impunity.

The Pale Horse also evinced the use of psychological manipulation this time through the antagonist, with his charm and psychologically gaming people to deceive and mislead. Actually, the sophisticated use of psychological manipulation by the villain is exposed as "The perpetrator's true strength lay in their mastery over the psychological dynamics of fear and trust, which they used to orchestrate the murders" (Christie 295). This is not confined to mere actions of physical manipulation but rather deeper into exploiting the fears and insecurities of the victims so as not to let the crime be recognized. The way Christie portrays villains as adept in psychological manipulation underlines dangerous intelligence, which is deployed to exploit human weakness, thereby ranking them as formidable opponents in her mysteries.

Moreover, Christie is not content simply to use the contrast between the psychology of the criminal and that of the detective, rather, she focuses on the interplay between criminal psychology and detective work. Usually, Christie's detectives are portrayed as characters that, naturally enough, are rather good at understanding the psychology of others, using this skill to outsmart the criminals, who base their success on their ability to manipulate (Maslin 105). This is the psychological play between the detective and the criminal that forms the core of many of Christie's novels, where, in order to identify the criminal, the detective has to outthink and outplay him psychologically.

In Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, the relationship between criminal psychology and the detective work is right in the middle of the action. Poirot's ability to deliver on the personality of human psychology helps him to overcome manipulative tactics by the

criminal. This was not only the facts from the case, but psychological insights into the characters, as Poirot said: "Little grey cells. It is the little grey cells on which one must rely. One must always consider the psychology of people who surround us, and then make full allowance for that psychology" (Christie 174). The above quote brings out how Poirot's psychological acumen helps him in outsmarting the villain, who hitherto would have succeeded with his manipulative way of lying.

Similarly, in *The Pale Horse*, the detective has to see through the smoke screen set up by the murderer's psychology. As the former admits, "The solution of the problem depended on recognizing how the villain's psychological games were contrived to deceive" (Christie 310). Indeed, this kind of criminal trick and the detective's awareness do suggest that psychological insight into human character and motivation in Christie's novels turns what is otherwise a whodunit into a disquisition of complex human motivation and behavior.

This portrayal of psychology as both a tool of criminal intelligence and detective work showed a certain maturity in understanding the human mind. The plot often revolves around the psychological motivations and manipulations of Christie's characters, while the resolution often depends on the detective's perception of this aspect. Interweaving psychology within the dispensation of criminal intelligence allows Christie's novels to be multi-dimensional, shifting them away from mere whodunits to layered inquiries into the human condition and everything that comes along with it (Kellog 46).

Chapter 5

Conclusion

To sum up, given the interaction of high science and supernatural elements in Agatha Christie's murder mysteries, it becomes clear that Christie skillfully uses scientific knowledge in challenging perceptions of the supernatural at the same time the writer raises moral questions concerning its use. By using Todorov's theory of dual narrative, along with the concept of the medical gaze by Foucault, Christie will present a balanced argument on how crimes draped in apparently supernatural phenomena are, after all, based on rational and scientific explanations. The duality in this approach gives birth to a multilayered narration: it amuses readers by keeping them suspicious yet inspires debate on the ethical consequences of scientific progress.

The dual narratives in Christie's novels constitute major plot features that shape the way readers engage with the text. At one superficial level, many of her stories induce an atmosphere of the weird, the supernaturally intriguing, and yet, as the investigation unfolds, the detective gradually reveals the banality, scientific rationale behind the crime. For example, in *The Pale Horse*, the witchcraft implication is revealed to be a cover for poisoning, based on expert medical knowledge; and this would be right on cue to bring Christie's use of science into play-to camouflage and unravel. This initial veneer of supernatural explanation not only deceives the characters in the novel but also gives the readers a run for their money, as the latter are obliged to reconsider the true character of the events as the scientific explanation is gradually brought to light. In weaving the supernatural with scientific fact, Christie produces a work which is entertaining and stimulating on an intellectual level, engaging the reader interactively with the mystery as it unfolds.

Foucault's concept of the medical gaze does quite a bit in complementing this narrative structure through the function of objectivity and detachment in unveiling the truth. Detectives, like Hercule Poirot, assume the clinical investigating gaze like that of a doctor in diagnosing his patient, peeling away the superstition layers to get to the scientific reality of a crime. This is reiterated in the case of *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, when Poirot refused to take up the supernatural evidence and launched a planned investigation based on reason and science. The way this detective could look beyond the supernatural illusions and come back to tangible facts creates an analogy between Foucault's arguments that medical men with the objectifying gaze turn patients into objects of study. The investigative gaze means that the detective in Christie's novels is able to demystify the crime at hand by drawing a clear line between appearance and reality, between superstition and science.

In sum, the murder mysteries created by Agatha Christie employ tropes of advanced science masquerading as supernatural elements to enthrall the reader with deeper reflection on the relations between knowledge, power, and morality. The double narrative structure, explored with the theory of Todorov, and the application of Foucault's medical gaze reveal the ambiguity of scientific knowledge as an instrument of both discovery and manipulation. Christie's work, in that regard, invites the reader to begin considering the ethical and moral responsibilities that accompany knowledge derived from within a specialist understanding and allows us to remember that while science offers the promise of progress, it can also be used as a means to deny or misrepresent our accepted ideas of morality and justice.

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