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THE WESTERN PERCEPTION OF THE EAST AS THE ORIENT  
IN AGATHA CHRISTIE'S APPOINTMENT WITH DEATH AND  
DEATH IN MESOPOTAMIA

Vedoucí práce: Einat Adar, M.A., Ph.D.

Autor práce: Adéla Hovorová

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I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

České Budějovice, 18. 7. 2024

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Adéla Hovorová

## **Poděkování**

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## Anotace

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analýza motivů orientalismu, které nepochybně přispěly k vytváření fenoménu zvaného Orient, a to ve vybraných dílech Agathy Christie, jakožto autorky západního světa na počátku 20. století, postaveného na evropském kolonialismu. Práce nejprve přibližuje komplexitu pojmu orientalismus, tedy způsobu, jakým byl Východ chápán a jakým s ním bylo zacházeno ve prospěch západní společnosti, v tomto případě Brity, kteří byli v době vzniku zkoumaných děl světovou mocností. Dále se tato práce krátce zabývá Agathou Christie a jejím spisovatelským i cestovatelským životem, jelikož jde o neodmyslitelnou část celého rozboru. Události, které zažila jak na Západě, tak i Východě, nepopíratelně ovlivnily její tvorbu v mnoha aspektech především z pohledu vyobrazení Orientu. Nejvíce je tento vliv Východu patrný zejména v jejích detektivních románech *Appointment with Death* a *Murder in Mesopotamia*, které budou zkoumány v poslední kapitole. Práce se tedy v neposlední řadě zaměřuje na způsob, jakým Agatha Christie promítá dobový diskurz Západu do svých děl a kterým ovlivňuje a následně i vytváří stereotypní představy o Východu.

**Klíčová slova:** Orientalismus, Britské impérium, kolonialismus, imperialismus, Agatha Christie, román, Blízký východ, *Schůzka se smrtí*, *Vražda v Mezopotámii*

## **Annotation**

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the motives of Orientalism, which undoubtedly contributed to the creation of the phenomenon called Orient, in selected novels written by Agatha Christie, as the author of the Western world in the early 20th century, built on European colonialism. The thesis focuses on the complexity of the concept of Orientalism, which is the way the East was understood and treated for the benefit of the Western society, in this case the British, who, at the time of the analysed novels, were the most significant world empire. Furthermore, this thesis briefly deals with Agatha Christie, her career of a writer, and of course travelling, as it is an inherent part of the analysis. The events she experienced both in the West and in the East have undeniably influenced her work in many aspects, nonetheless, the depiction of the Orient is the most obvious one. This influence is particularly evident in her detective novels *Appointment with Death* and *Murder in Mesopotamia*, which will be analysed in the last chapter. Last but not least, this thesis focuses on the way Agatha Christie projects the period discourse of the West into her novels, influencing and subsequently creating stereotypical ideas about the East.

**Keywords:** Orientalism, British Empire, colonialism, imperialism, Agatha Christie, novel, Middle East, stereotypes, *Appointment with Death*, *Murder in Mesopotamia*

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## INTRODUCTION

The interlinking of literature and history offers an insight into a particular time, the mindset of its society and of the author as well. This is common thing, however, assuming that texts are purely autobiographical and straightforward descriptions of life can be problematic. Literature simply should not be expected to precisely replicate or directly correspond to objective reality. It is necessary to approach this issue with sensitivity and caution since the texts are mediated by discourse and cultural norms of the time. (Mills 36) In many cases, therefore, it may not be the author's opinion as the view accepted and further constructed by the society to which the author seeks to define himself or herself. Nonetheless, historians and critics find this concept extremely valuable anyway since "it is a response to reality, whether by reflection or reaction" (Pasco 374).

Whenever we encounter something new and unfamiliar in our lives, we try to categorize it and define ourselves against it. It is the reaction of the West and its gradual demarcation against the reality of the East over several centuries that has contributed in no small part to the creation of the phenomenon called Orient and Orientalism. Exploring the Orient was the focus of Edward W. Said in *Orientalism*, which best expounds and explains the whole issue, and therefore, the first chapter will be based on it. The Orient, as a geographical-social construction, first helped to build and maintain the Western superiority. The society was thus presented with a fact that appeared to aid the underdeveloped East. If, however, a particular position is presented within a single field, here a political one, it is bound to affect other fields. Gradually, Orientalism came into the cultural, academic, and, of course, literary field as well.

The difference is that scientists deal with the issue itself and they have a distorted view of it, however, writers deal with it many times unintentionally and on the background of their works. They do not see it, but they perceive it. If one lives in a great bubble with no personal experience, it is not simple to have own opinion, or at least not to have the accepted one subconsciously stored in memory. For a lot of writers, therefore, we find traces of this influence, which, as mentioned, can be a reaction, or a reflection.

A great author for analysis of how is the East portrayed, and which general features of stereotypical images occur in Western literature, is Agatha Christie. As an author of the Western world in the early 20th century, she grew up in the light of the

aforementioned superiority of Britain and the colonialism, and she experienced many archaeological expeditions in the Middle East. As one of the few Westerners, she had the opportunity to experience the East and form an opinion of her own. Her strength was a careful observation of everyday life and her ability to create a certain social atmosphere make her a valuable source of information. (Arnold 275) The second chapter will thus focus on Agatha Christie's life, her path to writing, as well as her travels in the Middle East.

Christie wrote to entertain, not to explore deep psychological topics. The East stayed in her heart throughout her life, and whether it was a reflection or a reaction, it can be seen in many of her works. This link between personal experience and colonial literature gives us an insight into the English upper middle class of the first half of the 20th century and their thinking. She may not have intended to belittle anyone, however, she, as many other writers, often inadvertently promoted imperialistic ideologies and perpetuated stereotypes and this will be the subject of my analysis.

Therefore, the last chapter will be an analysis of two selected detective novels by Agatha Christie. The aim of it is to show the Western perception of the East portrayed in the work of Agatha Christie as of a British author influenced by the imperialism. Specifically, the novels analysed are *Appointment with Death* and *Murder in Mesopotamia*, chosen based on the most obvious presence of tracks of her passion, meaning the archaeology and travelling, and on their similarities and contrasts, which will give us an idea of the contrast perception of the Orient by Christie herself, but also by the entire West. Answering this question will allow us to uncover how the Orientalist discourse as a Western construction inherent in Christie's works has created an unequal relationship between the West and the East as the Orient.

# 1 THE WESTERN CONSTRUCTION OF ORIENTALISM

The literary theorist and English literature professor Edward Wadie Said published in 1978 his revolutionary work *Orientalism*, which contributed significantly to the construction of the postcolonial theory and the change in the way the Orient was perceived. In this work, he describes Orientalism from several angles, but in all of them he concludes that it is a constructing and reproducing discourse established on power relations which influenced the thinking of the entire Western society. This chapter therefore focuses on clarifying the rise of the phenomenon of the Orient as an academic discipline from the initially purely economic-political intent of Britain and France. This development is crucial to understanding Orientalism as the Western style for dealing with the East.

## 1.1 Oriental Discourse as a Power Tool of Colonialism and Imperialism

Cultural-geographic entities such as the West and the East are not existing on their own as "an inert fact of nature" ("Orientalism" 4) and this distinction between the Orient (representing the Other or the East) and the Occident (referring to the West, primarily Britain and France due to their extensive colonial empires) was mostly pronounced at the time of the greatest colonization, from the early nineteenth century to the World War II. ("Orientalism" 4) These two units are the creation of human thought, imagination and partly of knowledge and experience gained by voyages for trade, or wars. ("Orientalism" 39) This formation of geographic knowledge was intimately associated with the heroic tales of adventure, discovery, and dissuaded, assisted colonization. Indeed, the Royal Geographic Society's early 19th-century roots can be found in its support of explorers such as David Livingstone or Richard Francis Burton, as well as its connections to other organizations strongly associated with the Imperial government, like the Admiralty, the Foreign Office, or the Hydrographer's Office. (Jazeel 6) However, the representations of the Orient were done by only established Orientalists or Occidental experts in the field – scholars, historians, anthropologists, writers, artists, and travellers – or explorers, discoverers, "conquerors". Burney states, that from her point of view, these people were seen and celebrated as European or Western heroes. It is not a mere coincidence that most

of them were white male. ("Chapter one: Orientalism: The Making of the Other" 30) As an example, Burney writes about the expedition to reach the peak of Mount Everest for the first time. Nepalese "sherpa", or servant, Tenzing Norga was the first one to reach the top, nonetheless, it was Sir Edmund Hilary who was declared the first one; the conqueror who reached the top of the highest mountain in the world. Over time, they were considered the first together. The perspectives of indigenous communities are still inadequately represented in history, literature, media, and politics. Throughout the 19th century and the Gold Rush, numerous young Chinese individuals embarked on perilous journeys across the ocean to unfamiliar lands in America and Canada. Yet, unlike their Western counterparts, they are not celebrated as adventurers. Instead, such recognition is reserved solely for Europeans and the West. ("Chapter one: Orientalism: The Making of the Other" 31)

The collision of cultures and civilisations led to attempts to categorize these "others" in the overall picture of the world and to deal with them. "Geography and place are important concepts related not only to culture but also to the notion of identity formation" ("Chapter two: Edward Said and Postcolonial Theory: Disjunctured Identities and the Subaltern Voice" 43), and moreover, the geography and culture become the main themes of the dominating empire for conquering. According to Northrop Frye, cognition of ourselves and our identity is an integral part of cognition of our surroundings. ("Chapter two: Edward Said and Postcolonial Theory: Disjunctured Identities and the Subaltern Voice" 44)

Throughout the history, the occupied countries were obligated to speak the language of the conqueror, to valorise it, thus detract from the importance of their mother tongue, their own culture. Therefore, colonialism does not act exclusively through political and militaristic dominance, but above all through language, meaning the culture. ("Chapter two: Edward Said and Postcolonial Theory: Disjunctured Identities and the Subaltern Voice" 51) In this context, language simply cannot be taken purely as a means of communication, but as an essence of culture. It is the way natives communicate with each other, name things around them and express their feelings and opinions. By forcing them to speak another language, it is not only taking away their privilege to represent themselves, their country, but also their culture. ("Chapter two: Edward Said and Postcolonial Theory: Disjunctured Identities and the Subaltern Voice" 52) Bhabha speaks of "unhomeliness" as of "a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition" which can

be found in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. The feeling of loneliness, the atmosphere of blankness in the physical and mental environment in which Sethe finds herself is exactly what we can see beyond this term. (Bhabha 14)

The increasing and spreading knowledge of the world allowed Europeans to compare themselves with others, and it was the Orient, as an area of cultural and linguistic heritage, the phenomenon of the Orient and its characteristics, which helped define the West, creating its contrasting image. ("Orientalism" 42) We can observe the demarcation towards the East as far as back at the time of antiquity when the Orient became an exotic and magical place for Europe. ("Orientalism" 1) However, we cannot understand their relationship without clarifying the "configuration of power" and the complex hegemony. ("Orientalism" 5)

By "dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it ... " ("Orientalism" 3) the West has gained strength since the late eighteenth century and, above all, has acquired its own identity: "in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. ("Orientalism" 3) Said argues it is a constructed and false discourse that serves primarily as a tool of a political power allowing a better domination of imperialism over the colonies. Indeed, colonialism plays a crucial role in influencing Orientalist discourse as a means of exerting power. ("Orientalism" 6) Orientalism was not simply a justification for colonialism, it was its reason. ("Orientalism" 39) Knowledge is an instrument of power, and therefore, "knowledge gives power" ("Orientalism" 36).

Said provides an illustration of the early 20th century political view of superiority and its reflection in ways of interpreting and creating a mental image of the East. From Arthur James Balfour's speech to the House of Commons on June 13, 1910, this approach is clearly apparent. His view of the relationship between England and countries of the Middle East is based first and foremost on the knowledge England possesses and that purely signifies England's dominance. ("Orientalism" 32) According to Balfour, supremacy is not associated with military or economic power, but it is the knowledge of the West that indicates the superiority and the inferiority. Balfour goes on to claim that the countries of the East have never had a self-government, and the fact "that they had got under it far better government of England ... is a benefit to them ... a benefit to the

whole of the civilised West ..." ("Orientalism" 33). Interestingly, he spoke not only for himself, but for England as a whole, for the West, for colonial officials, and it is clear from his speech that for him these civilizations are a subject race requiring this domination. Racial discrimination and portrayals of extremism presented in historical literature and travel accounts were endorsed by colonial officials such as Evelyn Baring, known as the Lord Cromer (1841-1917). He was England's representative in Egypt between 1882 – 1907, and according to Balfour, he "created" Egypt, and his view of Orientals was not much different from his own. ("Orientalism" 34-35) Cromer spoke about Orientals from the position of a ruler and came up with the claim that there is no danger of the disintegration of England's colonial empire as long as England's militarism and the opposite institutions of the colonised country are kept under control. ("Orientalism" 36) He referred to the Orientals as "subordinate races" and in his work *Modern Egypt*, he insists that their reasoning is simple, and they have no logical thinking. Ignoring the fact that they are the only ones he has ever governed, and which impression will his claims give, he clearly does not conjecture his statements. Cromer's intention was simply to portray the Orientals as naive, incapable of governing and making their own decisions, and therefore requiring the England's assistance, dominance. ("Orientalism" 38-39) Orientalism is a study of Orientals as an exception of mankind clearly polarizing both sides of the world. It is not about the distinction and the perception of the West and the East as independent units, but instead about the comparability of these units, of one with the other, of "ours" with "theirs." ("Orientalism" 45)

Although the Western interest was at first purely political, it influenced the culture which as a matter of fact stands behind the portrayal of the Orient and its orientalising. Said in his work *Culture and Imperialism* even states that his aim was to explore the occurrences of imperialism beyond merely economic and political factors, specifically, how it was shaped not only by established cultural influences but also by ongoing developments in education, literature, and the arts. These manifestations occurred notably at the level of national culture; a domain often idealized as a static realm of intellectual monuments detached from worldly connections. ("Culture and Imperialism" 12-13) These elements, historically utilized by colonialism and empires, served as tools for the conquest and domination of other cultures. Dealing with the Orient by perspectives of different individuals, primarily authors and influential writers, Orientalism simply cannot be seen solely as a political, but as a multidisciplinary issue. It is:

A distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction ... but also of a whole series of "interests" which by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates, but also maintains ... ("Orientalism" 12)

## 1.2 Orientalism as an Academic Discipline

Orientalism, as one of the disciplines, differs from conventional scientific fields that have a clear object of investigation, as well as methods and angles of examination. In this discipline, it is impossible to take a firm stand entirely and confidently against "a wide variety of social, linguistic, political and historical realities" ("Orientalism" 50). It is an almost ungovernable discipline, into which falls more or less everything that deals with traditionally oriental things, and rather than being narrowed down, it became increasingly large.

We can think of language scholars of Renaissance who focused on the provinces mentioned in the Bible as of Orientalists. For instance, Thomas van Erpe, called Erpenius, wrote a book *Grammatica Arabica*. The first edition was published in 1613. (Ansorge) However, it was the first translation of several famous pre-Islamic Arabic odes by linguist and British Orientalist Sir William Jones and the first translation of *Avesta* into a modern language by French linguist A.-H. Anquetil-Duperron at the end of the 18th century which led to an increase of the interest in cultural fortune of the Orient even in broad society. ("Sir William Jones", "A.-H. Anquetil-Duperron", "Orientalism" 51). Even Napoleon's expedition between 1798-1801, which essentially initiated the field of ancient Egyptology, contributed to this. (McGetchin 567)

## 1.2.1 The Expansion of the Scientific Discipline of the Orient

At the turn of the 19th century, Orientalism began to flourish, primarily through the growing interest in discovered texts written in Sanskrit or Arabic. Dealing with such a subject meant prestige and recognition in society. There were also institutions that spread awareness through research, studies, and articles, and there was even a journal, called *Fundgraben des Orients*, founded in 1809. However, just a few of these materials existed freely and without the intervention of political power with effort to widen the distinction between the West, "us", and the East, "them". (Orientalism 43) The Orient was established as a contrasting counterpart to the Occident through the interpretation of hidden structures and knowledge embedded in texts and discourse. These elements, historically utilized by colonialism and empires, as already mentioned, served as tools for the conquest and domination of other cultures. ("Chapter one: Orientalism: The Making of the Other" 24)

With the expansion of European colonialism between 1815 and 1914, European colonial power rose from 35 percent to 85 percent of the controlled earth's surface. As is commonly known, it was Britain and France who had the most colonies which often overlapped in the Orient. ("Orientalism" 41) However, it was France, and particularly Paris, which dominated Oriental studies. Paris was not only the capital of Orientalism, nonetheless, in words of Walter Benjamin, also of the entire 19th century. ("Orientalism" 51) Scholars of Oriental languages from all over the Europe gathered here because the French government fully supported researchers and was buying Sanskrit letters and manuscripts. Jules Mohl or Friedrich Schlegel, for instance, were taught there. (McGetchin 567)

The Société Asiatique, the first European Orientalist Society, was founded in Paris in 1822. One year later, the English Royal Asiatic Society and, in 1845, the German Orientalist Society were formed. Outside Europe, the Royal Asiatic Society was founded already in 1784 in Calcutta. (McGetchin 566) Three years after the founding of Société Asiatique, German scholar F. E. Schultz wrote two incredibly important articles in the *Journal Asiatique* which brought a completely new approach in methods of French Oriental studies.

In the first article, Schultz criticized the aforementioned Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperro who translated *Oupnek'ha* from Persian translation into Latin, and not from the original version written in Sanskrit. Schultz argued that it is necessary to learn thoroughly Asian languages to translate works directly to be able to understand them correctly. He also argued that there is no possibility of accepting and working with only a few elements, such as the poetical approach, and completely ignoring other elements, therefore, he "advocated the scientific focus on history" (McGetchin 570). In his second article, he cited Khaldun and addressed the need for critical thinking and debates among Orientalists. (McGetchin 570) These two articles and Schulze himself brought a whole new perspective and a methodical shift into Orientalism. According to a specialist in the modern history of international connections between Europe and South Asia, Dr Douglas McGetchin:

The Schultz's reference to Khaldun's work invites us, in the early 21st century, to consider aspects of Oriental scholarship not criticized by Said. Much of what Said has to say is valid but in emphasizing the sinister, domination-oriented motive for oriental studies, Said and other critics have deemphasized the genuine debt some European orientalists have paid to non-European culture and to learning. (McGetchin 572)

However, by making such statements and criticizing these methods, Schultz clearly expressed his position regarding the Florist scholarship, which took purely aesthetic interest in Orientalism and focused only on the exotic and romantic with a daydream setting. This has created a dispute between Florists and Orientalists and their approaches. Schultz advocated for the reliance on strict approach, literal accuracy, and direct translations. The conflict escalated when Silvestre de Sacy, the first president of Société Asiatique, sided with the Florists. However, he retired in 1829 and was replaced by anti-Florist Rémusat. Schultz was murdered the same year, but we can only speculate, whether the killer was a Florist. (McGetchin 574) Yet his ideas were developed and deepened and "as in the resolution of a paradigm shift in science, there was a gradual change, not an abrupt revolution" (McGetchin 575), so the Florists proceeded with their methods, nonetheless, within academic institutions, their methods were discredited and this conflict provided "an important shift in linguistic science" (McGetchin 580). After

the conflict with the Florists, Société Asiatique not only gained the support of intellectuals, but also government members. Later, however, due to the problematic assimilation in terms of French tendencies and an effort to adapt, it did not lead to anything but to "its stagnation" (McGetchin 580).

During the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Orientalism was in fact "a treasure-house of learning" ("Orientalism" 51). It was an object of interest for scholars, as well as for amateur enthusiasts. Orientalist Jules Mohl even wrote the chronicle *Vingt-sept Ans d'histoire des études orientales* concerning "everything of note that took place in Orientalism between 1840-1867" ("Orientalism" 51). Mohl, as a secretary, played a key role in the Paris Société Asiatique. He published uncountable philological material and his translation of Firdaws's *Shāhnāma* was even subsidised by the French government and published in luxuriously printed volumes. (Irwin 327)

In 1852, Mohl's student, and at the same time his friend, Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau, joined the Société Asiatique. His *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* asserted the primacy of the white race, arguing that the fate of civilization lies in the hands of its racial classification. He was interested in Persians, their culture; he admired them while hating them. He was an anti-imperialist and he wished to be thought of as an Orientalist, however, he was a racist. ("Orientalism" 99, Irwin 332). Some of his ideas and works were incorporated into Ernest Renan's who was a highly influential author of his time. Under the auspices of philology, he reduced the language to its roots and connected it to race. "Renan came to Orientalism from philology, and it is the extraordinarily rich and celebrated cultural position of that discipline that endowed Orientalism with its most important technical characteristics." ("Orientalism" 131). On one hand, it was philology as a science connecting humanity, cultures, and races, and on the other, a factor dividing races into inferior and superior ones. Renan's generation educated from the mid-1830s to the late 1840s embraced the intellectual significance of the Orient for Western scholars of languages and cultures.

The profound implications of this relationship were extensively examined by Raymond Schwab in his major scholarly work, *La Renaissance orientale* published in 1950 which was dealing with the Western experience of the Orient based on a desire to absorb "foreign and different" ("Raymond Schwab and the Romance of Ideas" 152, "Orientalism" 137) This book presented all the findings of Orientalism between 1765 and

1850, and Schwab argued that the notion of Oriental describes an enthusiasm for exploring everything Asian, which is "exotic and mysterious" ("Orientalism" 51). Nevertheless, Schwab claims that the Orient is "a complement to the Occident, and vice versa" ("Raymond Schwab and the Romance of Ideas" 152).

Société Asiatique operates to this day and continues to develop knowledge regarding the vast area from Maghreb all the way to the far East. They host conferences, publish books as well as the aforementioned two-year journal, *Journal Asiatique*. It is worth mentioning its former member and Orientalist Alfred Foucher. All his life, he kept all of his and others' scientific papers, travel diaries, such as from his trip to India between 1895 and 1897, numerous reports concerning his missions, or Orientalism. These documents were stored after his death at Société Asiatique in Paris, of which he was a part. The correspondence also accounted for a significant proportion. During expeditions to India, Nepal, Persia, Afghanistan between 1919 and 1926, his wife, Eugénie Foucher, who accompanied her husband, corresponded with Agatha Christie. In the letters, she reportedly discussed private matters, however, she described scientific and diplomatic expeditions in Asia, uncovering the background of official reports and uncovering how they experienced the travels as Europeans in Asia in the 1920s as well. (Fenet) Unlike Alfred Foucher, Agatha Christie is not mentioned in the list of former members, which, nonetheless, has been abbreviated to only those who would correspond to what currently prevails in the definition of foreign members and associates. ("Académiciens depuis 1663") We can only assume how she felt about Société Asiatique, nevertheless, Christie was not a linguist, and she had no desire to explore the cultures of the East in the name of a Parisian institute.

### **1.3 Reshaping of the Western Attitude towards the East after World Wars**

The pre-war view of the West, as mentioned earlier, was based on the knowledge of the Orient. The extent to which the West knew the Orient and the knowledge they had gained through discoveries was sufficient for them to state their cultural dominance over East. It was not until the World War I when problems and emerging questions about colonies arose.

### 1.3.1 The World War I and the Post-war Period

The World War I did not have any major influence on the reduction of the Western powers in the colonies, they were in fact more needed during the wars because of their human resources. (Culture and Imperialism 197) However, the mobilization in the colonies was not as simple as it may seem. According to J. A. Hobson, the deployment of non-white soldiers in an European war would result in the "degradation of Western States and a possible debacle of Western civilization" (Hobson 145). The deep-seated concerns of colonial powers and the degree to which breaking from established racial hierarchies is viewed as a threat is demonstrated by the "degradation" of Western governments and the potential collapse of Western civilization. If people of colour were taught to fight and murder white enemies or opponents, was there any guarantee that they would not turn on their own colonial masters eventually? This issue highlights how colonialism is inherently contradictory, depending on non-white communities to provide military support while also spreading racist ideologies. (Gerwarth and Manela 789)

Such disunity of the Western thinking was not sudden and temporary. The contemporary perception was a result of the centuries-long evolution of the relationship between Occident and Orient. The West was never certain that the East would not defy it, but when the West "gifted" them with weapons and motivation to fight, the West also reinforced that fear of rebellion itself.

Behind the entrance to war was in numerous colonies also a strategy. They saw a potential in having a contribution in the war and envisioned it as a pathway to a greater political autonomy and, ideally, national sovereignty. This perspective was not unique; even Mahatma Gandhi, upon his return to India in 1915 after his influential years in South Africa, embarked on a well-known campaign urging Indians to join the imperial forces. The apparent contradiction between Gandhi's advocacy for nonviolence and his support for enlistment has puzzled many. Nonetheless, Gandhi and others believed that Indian participation in the war would leverage their position within the imperial framework and pave the way for self-governance. (Gerwarth and Manela 789)

This optimism was fuelled by promises made by the Western countries during the wartime period. Despite these promises, the aftermath of the war proved to be a profound disappointment for many who had hoped for progress in their claims to self-rule. Instead of realizing substantial gains, the post-war landscape was marked by continued struggle

and conflict, laying the groundwork for enduring tensions and disputes in the years to follow. Thus, the wartime era served as a pivotal moment wherein aspirations for self-determination collided with the complexities and contradictions of imperial governance, setting the stage for prolonged discord and unrest. One of the profound ironies stemming from the war was its unintended consequence of dissolution of empires, when, indeed, it was meant to protect and bolster the empire. The immediate casualties were the sprawling, multiethnic domains of Austria-Hungary, Russia, and the Ottomans, as well as the burgeoning German empire. (Gerwarth and Manela 789)

After the World War I, "European suzerainty over the Orient had not passed; but it had evolved ... into a more and more contested political issue compounded by fractious native demands for independence." ("Orientalism" 257) As mentioned before, the war did not weaken the Western control over colonial territories, however, the movements to achieve freedom that occurred after World War II had already begun right there.

The timing of resistance to imperialism in these territories is important for both sides' perspectives on imperialism. Nationalist parties that successfully fought against European powers view their legitimacy and cultural importance as stemming from a continuous struggle dating back to the earliest resisters against colonialism. For example, the Algerian National Liberation Front, which began its uprising against France in 1954, traced its roots to Emir Abdel Kader, who resisted French occupation in the 1830s and 1840s.

Nevertheless, colonial authors often overlooked the significance of these resistance movements, preferring to offer excuses like portraying natives as content until agitators stirred trouble, rather than acknowledging the natives' desire to be free from European power in their own countries. ("Culture and Imperialism" 197) This can be observed in *Death on the Nile*, for instance. Simon Doyle and Jackie de Bellefort imitate the cries of indigenous children to express their own misery, thus deflecting attention and partly mocking, even though it is not colonial resistance, from the fact that these children themselves show some discontent. (Rowland 73) However, Christie herself may not have known about this effort to get out of British rule, as it was a tactical move that was not openly and publicly presented by the colonies. In addition, Christie in her autobiography described the celebrations of the women dancing and cheering in the streets when the war

ended as almost frightening which proves that she may have perceived some situations with less empathy than others. (Autobiography 264)

Christie found out about the end of the war during a lecture at a business school, when one day all of a sudden, a teacher told them the war was over. It was hard for her to believe. The women danced and cheered in the streets, which was not customary for English women and Christie herself describes that this look was almost frightening for her, which in my personal opinion proves that she was not a completely empathetic person. ("Autobiography" 264)

Between the years 1919 and 1922, the British Empire was going through a major crisis. It all began with riots in Punjab and Egypt, British involvement in the Third Afghan War and, last but not least, unrest in Ireland. (Gerwarth and Manela 791) During the period between the two World Wars, Pan-African and Pan-Asian militant groups did not entirely oppose the West. Some thought that ending colonialism could be achieved through collaboration with Christianity, while others believed that adopting Western habits was the answer.

Said even comments the differing approach after the World War I towards the Orient as follows:

If the Orient appears more a partner in this new rising dialect of cultural self-consciousness, it is, first, because the Orient is more of a challenge now than it was before, and second, because the West is entering a relatively new phase of cultural crisis, caused in part by the diminishment of Western suzerainty over the rest of the world. ("Orientalism" 257)

In Africa, figures like Herbert Macaula, or Samuel Ahuma represented these efforts, according to Basil Davidson. ("Culture and Imperialism" 196) In the Arab world, individuals like Saad Zaghloul, Nuri as-Said, and Bishara al-Khoury were counterparts during this period. Even later revolutionary leaders initially believed that certain aspects of Western culture could help end colonial rule. ("Culture and Imperialism" 196) Nowadays, this thinking may seem unrealistic and romantic, but we must realize that

these actions hugely influenced the environment that underpinned the countries' economic and political development, for instance the Pan-Arabism.

### **1.3.2 The End of Imperialism after the World War II**

Both the West and the East share the feeling that classical imperialism formally ended at the time of the collapse of colonial structures after World War II, when most of the world became independent from the colonial rule. ("Culture and Imperialism" 198) Britain and France gave up their colonies, however, shared awareness and misconception about the East remained, and it even continues to influence societies during the present age which are trying to understand the past. ("Culture and Imperialism" 7) Frantz Fanon stated that these colonised countries should defend themselves against the light the West has cast upon them, oppose the way the West has treated them, and not even somehow compensate them. ("Culture and Imperialism" 12)

Henri Grimal's research showcases a map of the British empire at its peak, highlighting the vastness of its territories and how rapidly it lost them in the years following the end of the World War II in 1945. British influence extended over Australia, much of Asia, the Middle East, New Zealand, Hong Kong, New Guinea, Ceylon, Malaya East Africa, parts of Central and West Africa, Guiana, some Caribbean islands, Ireland, and Canada. ("Culture and Imperialism" 198)

It is commonly known these colonies were both economic and strategic benefit for the West. No wonder, then, that they were taken after 1945 as an inherent part of the postwar imperial system. (White 546) It is important to note here that, in Britain, "the thinking of imperial business was generally at odds with many principles of postwar imperial politics" (White 549).

The British companies, of course, were extremely important for colonial development, especially in terms of currencies and maintaining the balance of payments. (White 550) However, the most fundamental aspect of British official policy after 1945 was political change in the colonies. The main concern was that independent governments would use their powers to nationalize businesses that had previously been dominated by foreign companies. Nationalization proved a real possibility in many of Britain's decolonised territories, as many anti-colonial movements supported socialism. (White 551) Furthermore, it was evident to business leaders across the globe that British

government was struggling to safeguard British commercial interests in the face of determined economic nationalists after World War II.

Similar tensions arose in Egypt, where disagreements between British authorities and economic interests eventually led to another unfortunate nationalization. In the early 1950s, some progressive Anglo-Egyptian business interests argued for the withdrawal of British forces from the Suez base, fearing that Egyptian hostility was jeopardizing their long-term position. However, due to Cold War concerns about Soviet expansion, the British Cabinet and Chiefs of Staff refused to consider evacuation. Eventually, Britain agreed with Egypt to withdraw all forces by 1956. Despite initial cooperation between Egypt's Nasser regime and foreign investors, the Anglo-French-Israeli military intervention in 1956 disrupted this progress. After the failed invasion, Nasser further nationalized British, French, and Jewish assets, including the Suez Canal Company. (White 555)

Clearly, economic ties bound the region, especially Egypt to the West. Furthermore, former colonial powers maintained the ability to intervene militarily in the region and had agreements with many Arab states allowing them to do so. (Hinnebusch 22) British and French interests in maintaining military bases persisted throughout many years and the formation of state borders by empires in the Middle East led to significant contradictions between territory and identity. This incoherence caused irredentism within the system and in numerous countries, this cross-border affiliations of sub-state factions, coupled with discontent over territorial boundaries, led to prolonged conflicts which spilled over into wars involving states and sub-state entities. (Hinnebusch 5)

## **2 THE QUEEN OF CRIME IN THE ORIENT**

Means of communication enabling sharing ideas and opinions about someone, or something have been a crucial factor influencing and shaping people's perception and thinking. While the means of communication sometimes tend to prioritize sensationalism over nuanced understanding, the deeper issues lie in imperialist simplifying and essentializing tendencies which lead to misconceptions. Throughout the history and especially during the first half of the twentieth century, the Western portrayals of the East had often been simplistic, racially biased, and they focused on negative stereotypes. The countries of the East were lumped together, as were their inhabitants. They were something the West had constructed for centuries, and thus allowed them to have the kind of history that suited the West's interests.

This approach of course applies to the literature which serves as a communication tool as well. Moreover, imperialism played a crucial role in shaping the European novel as we know it. The narrative style and themes of authority in novels are closely linked to imperialist ideologies. The genre emerged alongside the rise of the conquering bourgeoisie. ("Culture and Imperialism" 70) Novels, as products of bourgeois society, and imperialism are intertwined. Among all major literary forms, the novel is the most recent and predominantly Western. Both imperialism and the novel mutually reinforced each other, making it hard to understand one without considering the other. ("Culture and Imperialism" 71)

### **2.1 British Imperialism and the Rise of the Novel**

Apart from the imperial dominance, Britain also became a home of a thriving novel-writing tradition unmatched in Europe. While France boasted more sophisticated intellectual institutions till the 1850s, it was Britain that saw the rise of the novel as a powerful cultural and intellectual force. During the 1840s, the British novel had firmly established itself as a key form of expressing and a significant voice in the society. ("Culture and Imperialism" 71) British influence remained strong and consistently reinforced over time. Within the cultural realm, particularly in the novel, this influence was extensively explored and expressed in a unique manner not replicated elsewhere. Novels are not merely reflections of societal currents; they hold aesthetic, cultural, and

political significance beyond being products of individual creativity or sociological forces. ("Culture and Imperialism" 73)

Therefore, the novel shaped the idea of Britain itself as well. It was a depiction of its identity and values. This portrayal of Britain also extended to its relationship with the wider world, with "home" receiving detailed attention while "abroad" was often relegated to mere references or fleeting depictions. ("Culture and Imperialism" 72) This unique function of the novel in Britain had profound implications, not just domestically, but also in its overseas empire. The concept of "abroad" held by British writers was characterized by a vague sense of ownership, often tinged with exoticism or the belief in the right to exert authority over distant territories and their novels often contributed to a cohesive worldview centred on the British dominance and its overseas territories. ("Culture and Imperialism" 72 – 74)

Being a British author carried distinct connotations compared to authors from other countries as France or Portugal. ("Culture and Imperialism" 74) Agatha Christie of course ranks among these authors with dozens of her detective novels. Furthermore, thanks to her husband, she also had the opportunity to explore new places, especially in the Middle East. Her experience of travel spawned in her books; the stories take place in the Orient, or the Orientals often appear as side characters. Even though Christie wrote for entertainment and not for the purpose of any analysis, her works reveal both historical and political backgrounds in the period during and after the wars. Therefore, her books may give us an insight into the mindset of a Westerner from the upper class of the first half of the twentieth century, and thus bring us closer to the West's perception of the East in this period. However, we must take into account the fact that it is still a fiction that can be only partially based on truth, and the rest might be simply misrepresentations and distortion created by the West, as mentioned. In order to be able to discuss how Christie saw the East through her eyes, or at least how she portrayed it in her stories, it is important to focus on her life and the factors that influenced it first. Engaging with a novel through the biographical context can enhance our understanding of it and uncover layers of meaning that might otherwise remain elusive.

## 2.2 Agatha Christie

This chapter briefly summarises Agatha's life and its milestones as described in her autobiography. Christie states there: "This is no travel book – only a dwelling back on those memories that stand out in my mind; times that have mattered to me..." ("Autobiography" 292)

On her first trip around the world, she went with her first husband, however, she got to know much more about the cultures and foreign countries even more thanks to her second husband. She had a relationship with travelling since childhood and her journey to literature began at a very young age as well. Therefore, the information discussed in the sub-chapters will shed light on certain connections and bring us closer to Agatha Christie not only as a writer, but as an ordinary person influenced by contemporary views and ideas which will be analysed in the last chapter.

### 2.2.1 Childhood and her Journey to Writing

Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller was born on 15 September 1890 in Torquay, Devon, in the south of England. She considered her lifelong home to be a house called Ashfield, for which she even continued writing since she needed money to avoid selling it. ("Autobiography" 20)

During her childhood, her nanny, whom she called "Nursie," told her all sorts of stories, and Agatha loved it. Her mother did not want her to start learning how to read until she was eight. When Agatha was four, however, her curiosity led her to study the books she liked, and she soon began to understand how the signs worked and, at the age of five, she was able to read *The Angel of Love* aloud. From now on, she wished to receive books to read on every occasion. It is evident that she has had an aptitude for literature since childhood. ("Autobiography" 26) Her family had high standards, which she understood only later, but she always knew she was "slower" than her sister, or her mother. It was difficult for her to put her thoughts into words immediately, and that may be also the reason she became a writer, although she had problems with spelling. ("Autobiography" 47, 55). She was educated at home, and when they were forced to move to France due to economic reasons, she learned French. ("Autobiography" 67) She loved to travel: "I remember it as one of the happiest summers I have ever known... Expeditions

on mules. Exploring steep paths.... The exotic excitement of a foreign place."  
("Autobiography" 80)

In 1910, she made her first visit to Egypt, where she was with her mother and wrote her first novel, which was not published. It took place in Cairo and was entitled *Snow Upon the Desert*.

During dance events in the neighbourhood some two years before the World War I, Christie met her first husband. The two fell in love, and Archie proposed to her soon after, despite her being engaged. ("Autobiography" 213-215) No one believed at that time that something like war could come, because there had been none for fifty years. ("Autobiography" 225-26) Archie was in the Flying Corps, and they were mobilised among the first. The German Air Force was considered the strongest, therefore, they both thought they would never meet again. Agatha began to consider marriage, even though thinking about the future, when people were dying, was against her beliefs. However, they were engaged for a year and a half, and it was the only certainty in their lives. ("Autobiography" 234) Archie was against the wedding, but suddenly changed his mind and he and Agatha married at Christmas. ("Autobiography" 237)

During the World War I, she worked at the hospital as a ward-maid, then she was promoted to ward. She considered nursing to be one of the most rewarding professions and if she did not marry her husband, she would become a real nurse. ("Autobiography" 230) Because of her position, she often did not have anything to do, and therefore started writing. "It was while I was working in the dispensary that I first conceived the idea of writing a detective story." ("Autobiography" 254) Since she was surrounded by "poison", it was natural for her that death by poisoning was the kind of mystery she would write. She got her inspirations in her surroundings, which only reinforces the aforementioned literary theory. When she created her first characters, Christie says that she was first inspired by acquaintances who lived nearby. A husband with the black beard, that her killer was supposed to have as a symbol of evil, and an older, wealthy wife who would be killed for her fortune. We can find a partially similar couple, for instance, in *Appointment with Death* which will be discussed later, or in *Death on the Nile*. There is the wealthy and murdered Linnet Doyle and Simon Doyle, who came up with the idea of killing her. She simply created the characters by watching strangers she met. Christie always adjusted them a little as she needed to. ("Autobiography" 255-256) Interestingly,

Christie created Hercule Poirot based on Belgian refugees. He was supposed to be very smart, precise, and orderly man with an experience in investigations. ("Autobiography" 256)

Christie wrote her first detective novel during the World War I, however the publishers rejected her. After the end of the war and the birth of Rosalind, her daughter, she was approached after about two years by John Lane, the Bodley Head, because of her detective novel called *The Mysterious Affairs at Styles*. ("Autobiography" 276) He offered Christie a contract which obliged her with some duties in case of further production etc. She was not supposed to get the money until the selling of the first 2,000 copies. She did not care; she was grateful and delighted that her book would be published. She did not think she would write more books, become a writer, make a living doing it, and yet that is how her long career began. ("Autobiography" 277) Her serial rights were even bought out by *The Weekly Times*. When her grandmother died, it was difficult to take care of her home Ashfield, and Archie suggested she could write another book that would bring in more money. Agatha trusted Archie's financial knowledge and agreed with writing more books. ("Autobiography" 280)

### **2.2.2 Going round the World**

Archibald was skilful with finances, therefore, his friend, Major Belcher, offered him on a dinner to be his financial adviser during the British Empire Exhibition Mission around the world. At that time, it was a wife's duty to go with her husband everywhere, consequently, Agatha went with him. ("Autobiography" 286)

She says: "Going round the world was one of the most exciting things that ever happened to me. It was so exciting that I could not believe it was true. I kept repeating to myself, 'I am going round the world....'" ("Autobiography" 289) Obviously she was grateful to have the opportunity to experience all of this and even with her beloved husband.

First, they visited Madeira, then Cape Town, which Agatha had come to love since mooring. "It was all new and strange." ("Autobiography" 291) Australia and New Zealand followed and Hawaiian Islands, including the city of Honolulu, as well. She learned there to surf, which she described as a heavenly feeling. Of the Hawaiians, though, she wrote:

The Hawaiians themselves were also slightly disappointing. I had imagined them as exquisite creatures of beauty. I was slightly put off to begin with by the strong smell of coconut oil with which all the girls smeared themselves and a good many of them were not good-looking at all. ("Autobiography" 301)

Of course, it is normal to create images of something we have never seen before, however, it is more than obvious, that the Western influence on the formation of the ideas of "others" had been already present in her thinking while her first more distant travel. Their journey continued to Canada, America and back to England. After their return, the relationship between Agatha and Archie began to deteriorate until Archie finally confessed to falling in love with Belcher's assistant from their trip. Christie put it this way: "I suppose, with those words, that part of my life, my happy, successful confident life - ended." ("Autobiography" 351)

With her daughter Rosalind and a friend Carlo she went to the Canary Islands where she focused on writing another detective novel. The important thing to mention is that she did not want to write, she did not have an elan and she did not like what she wrote, but she wrote well, and that was the moment she realized she was a professional and not an amateur anymore. ("Autobiography" 358) When Agatha found a school for Rosalind, since Archibald did not intend to take care of her, Agatha decided to go to West Indies and Jamaica for holiday. Nonetheless, it was fate that two days before she was supposed to leave, she met a couple who had just returned from Baghdad. She was enchanted and the fact that she could take the Orient Express to get there was for her only a cherry on top, since it had been her dream. ("Autobiography" 361)

### **2.2.3 Expeditions in the Middle East**

Christie first went to Iraq before Christmas in 1928. Along the way, she met several Western passengers who had, in a certain way, already influenced her views of the East. They told her she could not stay at the hotel in Baghdad or not to trust anyone. ("Autobiography" 363, 365) The places she passes through are often described as magical and romantic, like a dream, however, she talks less nicely about people. She states that she can ask nothing of life but the sight of the beauties. ("Autobiography" 377-378) From

Damascus she went by a car and while crossing a desert, they stopped to rest. The place was guarded by the Guards of the Camel Corps, whom Christie described as follows: "Their wild dark faces were rather frightening." ("Autobiography" 372) We can only assume how she meant it. After all, they were there to instil fear and deter the bandits, however, it gives the impression of a racist attitude. On the other hand, upon arrival in Baghdad, she begins by saying: "They were so nice to me in Baghdad. Everyone was kind and pleasant ..." ("Autobiography" 372) Later she even admits that all Arabs are polite. ("Autobiography" 397) After a while in Baghdad, Christie admits that not everything is as it seems, and people need to first understand their way of life, behaviour etc. to make conclusions. ("Autobiography" 374)

At the beginning of her travel to Baghdad she met a British woman who lived there and who took care of Agatha when she arrived, since they travelled a little differently. She was part of a British community who lived a classic English life in a part of Baghdad called Alwiyah. Christie, however, wanted to experience the real Baghdad without being looked after all the time and she felt as if she was still in England. "Baghdad, in spite of the English life of Alwiyah, was the first really oriental city I had ever seen - and it was oriental." ("Autobiography" 378) During her trip to Ur she met the Woolleys. Thanks to them she returned to Iraq again in 1930 and met her future husband and an archaeologist Max Mallowan. We can only speculate whether the reason for inviting her to Iraq again was simply because Katharine Woolley, the wife, knew and enjoyed reading Christie's books. ("Autobiography" 376, 384, 391) Agatha was sent by Katharine to Nejef and Kerbala and Max went with her as a guide. ("Autobiography" 393) On the way back to England they visited Crusader's Castle at Kalaat Siman. Max became so close to Agatha that he proposed to her, and they got married. ("Autobiography" 422) Max had to leave for the last time without Agatha for one of Woolleys' expeditions and Agatha continued to devote herself to writing. Later in their life, during the late autumn till spring, she used to go on expeditions with Max, and she even helped him by drawing the excavations and taking pictures of them. ("Autobiography" 463)

The period between 1930-1938 was enormously successful, both in archaeology and in writing. They went on many expeditions and had many significant digs. Agatha was so influenced by the Middle East that she wrote several works which are set in Eastern

countries. The most famous novels are *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), *Murder in Mesopotamia* (1935), *Death on the Nile* (1937), and *Appointment with Death* (1937).

Agatha immersed herself in archaeology, she loved it, and she enjoyed exploring thousands of years old pottery: "I enjoyed my first experience of living on a dig enormously." ("Autobiography" 460) Even before meeting her second husband, she was interested in archaeology: "I had always been faintly attracted to archaeologists, though knowing nothing about it." ("Autobiography" 361). She was proud to be part of the human race, which had been capable of creating something so beautiful so many years ago. ("Autobiography" 457)

She writes in her autobiography that she remembered nothing as vividly as the places she visited. "When I look back over my life, it seems that the things that have been most vivid, and which remain most clearly in my mind, are the places I have been to. ("Autobiography" 403) Her description of places makes them a paradise on earth as mentioned before. For instance, a journey through the desert would surely be exhausting and monotonous for other Westerners at that time, however, not for Agatha: "...the lovely colours all over the dessert – pale pinks, apricots and blues – with the sharp-toned air, made a wonderful ensemble. I was entranced." ("Autobiography" 373) She described Iranian Shiraz as "a dark emerald-green jewel in a great desert of greys and browns" ("Autobiography" 403), and Isfahan "as the most beautiful city in the world. Never have I seen anything like its glorious colours, of rose, blue and gold – the flowers, birds, arabesque, lovely fairy-tale buildings, and everywhere beautiful coloured tiles – yes, a fairyland city." ("Autobiography" 442)

Yet it is clear from her autobiography and many of her books that she perceived the presence of the societies inhabiting these places as well, even though she said she could not remember faces at all. Their presence, their ubiquitous culture, which was beyond the Western "normal", was something she could not forget. She perceived countries, their nature as well as their cities, buildings, mosques, the daily life including basic activities which were different than which she used to know. People were simply part of the places she visited; therefore, they remained in her memories and overall picture of the Orient as well. "Travelling in Iraq was my introduction to a somewhat strenuous way of living...Nejef...was indeed a wonderful place: a real necropolis, a city of the dead, with the dark figures of the black-veiled Muslim women wailing and moving about it."

("Autobiography" 395) There is no doubt then that there are Oriental characters or other aspects of its societies in Christie's novels as well and not only the places.

Although she wrote extensively during this time, she did not appreciate the way people used her books, the stories. They transformed them into theatre plays. She thought it is not so simple to take a detective story and play it on a stage. She wanted to simplify the process and therefore moved seamlessly into writing the plays herself. In 1939, she wrote a story that completely her redirected her writing journey *And Then There Were None*. ("Autobiography" 471-472) The title was originally different, but currently, like many Christie's detective novels, it is edited.

During World War II, Max was sent to the Middle East, primarily to North Africa, because of his knowledge of Arabic. Christie worked as a dispenser at University College Hospital, however, she did not stop writing. Thanks to it she was able to immerse herself in the stories, the lives she created and therefore pretend that everything is normal. ("Autobiography" 489) Agatha sometimes met with Stephan Glanville, an Egyptologist. One evening, he persuaded her to write another mystery about ancient Egypt. It was a way of combining two things that not only pleased her, but many of her acquaintances with the same pleasures. Throughout, he helped her from that history point of view to match the story to the reality, and they eventually wrote *Death Comes as the End* in 1944. ("Autobiography" 496) Since she was separated from Max, she wrote *Come, Tell Me How You Live*. It was an embodiment of the memory of their travels in Arpachiyah and Syria she loved to commemorate.

In 1948, their return to digging in the Middle East was considered. However, since these countries were no longer colonies, all the finds went to the Baghdad Museum, therefore, most of the archaeological work gradually ended. After a ten-year break, Agatha and Max went there to finish the dig as well, but this time they did not take the Orient Express, they flew. They travelled and visited monuments in the north of Iraq where she also started writing her *Autobiography*. The East, its cities, architecture, people inevitably changed, and the West continued to influence it. Nevertheless, their friends and acquaintances remained and whenever Agatha and Max passed through the places where they used to stay or dig, they were always looked after and heartily welcomed.

How good it is to have these friends. Warm-hearted, simple, full of enjoyment of life, and so well able to laugh at everything. Arabs are

great ones for laughing, great ones for hospitality too. Whenever you happen to pass through a village where one of your workmen lives, he rushes out and insists you should come in and drink sour milk with him...How much I have loved that part of the world. I love it still and always shall. ("Autobiography" 528-529)

In December 1974, she gave an interview to Lord Snowdon for the Toronto Star in which she said she wanted people to remember her as "a good writer of detective and thriller stories". She died a year and two months later.

Agatha Christie was an extremely popular and talented writer who left a huge legacy and many of today's authors learn from her books to be as good and influential writer as she was. Christie belongs among Queens of Crime because her name on the cover of the detective novel is a guarantee of a great plot with an unpredictable ending. Perhaps

it is because she always tried to make a story that could happen. When she wrote *Death Comes as the End*, she made sure to describe everything according to searchable facts by finding the slightest detail through the professional Glanville. She carefully perceived the world around her, the world she lived in, whether it was the West or the East. She perceived her surroundings, their behaviour, opinions, manners, and she was able to reflect everything in her work, thanks to which we have a kind of insight into Britain and its colonies in the first half of the twentieth century. Although Christie, as she herself writes, loved the East, it is impossible to overlook that the period racism and "otherness" of the East were present in her books. They feature in comments on appearance and skin colour, culture, architecture, religion etc. For the most part of her books, these comments do not greatly influence the plot, they are merely the background to the story, however, they subconsciously shape the readers' view of the Middle East and create a false picture of it.

To conclude this chapter dedicated to Christie, not just as a writer and a traveller, but to a woman who loved her work and enjoyed life as well, it is necessary to say that Christie was not someone who intended to deliberately harm or offend anyone. She wrote for pleasure and entertainment and not for social scientific or political purposes. Furthermore, it must be remembered that this is, after all, a fiction that may be in certain

aspects based on facts, as Christie herself states, but may also be fictitious. Thus, it may as well represent the author's personal views, but it may only be an intermediary of the opinions of others that the author seeks to point out. Even so, Agatha Christie portrayed the East and its inhabitants in a certain light, which will be analysed in the subsequent chapter.

### **3 THE ANALYSIS OF APPOINTMENT WITH DEATH AND MURDER IN MESOPOTAMIA**

Agatha Christie belongs to a category that Edward Said calls the "Oriental-style European literature ... based on personal experiences in the Orient" ("Orientalism" 156). Said also states that this style has two subtypes. As already mentioned, both are based on the personal experience, however, one goes into the professionalism, the academic discipline, and another one stays as an ordinary literature. ("Orientalism" 157) This personal experience "always involved being a consciousness set apart from ... its surroundings" ("Orientalism" 157). To live in the East was not to live as a local, to be part of their culture, but to observe it, and to represent in a certain way the West. They came there with their habits, culture, language, and they did not behave as guests but as superior to them, as a salvation of the East. Therefore, the sojourns of authors and scholars in the East, which they later transferred into texts, were not complete. These authors tried to define themselves towards the Orient and tried to keep within the reference with other Oriental texts. Many Western authors have constructed the Orient as a distinct entity from themselves, positioning it as "the Other". Through this construction, they disempower the inhabitants of colonized regions by relegating them to an objectified status, thereby preserving the dominant, authoritative position for themselves, for the West. This is where Western identity is defined by projecting onto a simplified, stereotyped Eastern "other" qualities such as irrationality that the West seeks to disown. (Rowland 62) The texts of all such authors formed an overall picture of the Orient that reflects the discourse, racism, and anti-Semitism of their time. The way they portrayed the East clearly establishes the distancing from it mentally and physically. Thus, although the characters in both analysed Christie's detective novels are located in the East, they mostly remain in their way of Western life. Said comments on the problem as follows:

Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient, translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kind of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text—all of which adds up to deliberate ways

of addressing the reader, containing the Orient and finally representing it or speaking in its behalf. ("Orientalism" 20)

Apart from this portrayal of Western way of living in the East, which bore little resemblance to the real life in the East, and of the "otherness" of the East, there is a noticeable rivalry between the characters of different Western nationalities as well. In fact, one of the key features of English authors of the Golden Age is their deliberate use of Orientalism to shape a psychological sense of Englishness. (Rowland 67) This aspect is present in both analysed novels and since it explains the types of Christie's characters, their personalities, behaviour, and the superiority not only over the East, but over other Western countries, it will be discussed in the first subchapter.

### **3.1 The Englishness and the Superiority of England**

The English identity is not a given but rather a constructed and theatrical concept. Crime narratives of this era typically unfold within domestic settings among archetypal figures such as colonels, spinsters, middle-aged businessmen, and young socialites. Through this self-aware fiction, which continues to challenge stereotypes in later works, the genre simultaneously reinforces and critiques the prevailing notion of upper-middle-class English culture. (Rowland 68) Agatha Christie of course belongs to this category with her portrayals of English travellers who become acutely aware of their own foreignness, highlighting a common theme of anxiety regarding colonial dynamics. (Rowland 71) This is not simply a matter of authors, but of course of ordinary society, of those "better" ones, the ones who are the real-life manifestation of this literary portrayal.

Christie herself came across the Englishness in the Orient during her first travel to Baghdad as mentioned earlier. In the Orient Express, she met Mrs C. who immediately took care of her and showed her the life of English society in Alwiyah. Christie even admitted in her autobiography she felt captured by her, by the social life of the English colony, and she wanted to escape from it immediately, however, she did not want to be rude, and therefore, she stayed with them a while. ("Autobiography" 364) This suburb is also mentioned in *Murder in Mesopotamia* when Mrs Kelsey, who travels with the narrator, Amy Leatheran, goes to her house in Alwiyah to settle there. (Christie 25)

Except Mrs C., "the Duchess of Alwiyah who wants everything upside down and down side up" ("Autobiography" 371), Christie also met Katharina Wolley, the wife of Max Mallowan's employer. She was almost the same persona as Mrs C., and they could be both considered an embodiment of the Englishness. These women are great example of Christie's inspiration from her surroundings for her stories and characters. Women who exploit their appearance, position, or other advantages, willing to do whatever it takes, to achieve their desires, their aims commonly appear in Agatha Christie's detective novels.

This kind of a character is Sarah King in *Appointment with Death*. An Englishwoman who stands for the "typical English" and who confronts her potential for committing murder in an unfamiliar desert setting filled with non-Christian religious symbols. (Rowland 67) Sarah King is a highly intelligent and self-aware young doctor who skilfully uses her attractiveness and influence to achieve her goals. Sarah has a strong need for autonomy and control over her own life. She always had an opinion that she stood for, especially the one on all the members of the Boynton family. Unable to sustain her feelings of injustice and situation without solution, she even confronted Mrs Boynton, who was responding not to this criticism but to her murderer, as Poirot later discovered it. Sarah is the embodiment of justice, not the one to expose and capture the killer, but the moral one. She does not want Hercule Poirot to solve the case at all because she believes that everyone is better without Mrs Boynton, nonetheless, she does not sabotage the investigation and she always tells the truth. Her compassion and empathy drive her to intervene when she sees injustice, as exemplified by her determination to "rescue" Raymond Boynton from his manipulative mother, Mrs Boynton. Her relationship with Raymond evolves from irritation to deep affection, showing her capacity for emotional growth and meaningful connections. Sarah's commitment to the truth is evident in her steadfast professional assessment during the investigation of Mrs. Boynton's death, highlighting her strong moral compass.

Most of the time she talks to a French doctor, Dr Gerard, whom Sarah admired and read all of his work. She discusses everything with him, whether her fears, opinions, or professional diagnoses. He simply gives Sarah a lead even though they sometimes confront each other because of their nationalities as will be discussed later. It could be said that she even yearns for some sort of approval as to whether she is doing the right thing. It was also Sarah who brought his attention to the Boyntons:

‘Those people who have just come in, did you notice them on the train the other night? ...’

‘... Americans?’

‘... Yes. An American family. But – rather an unusual one, I think.’

...

Dr Gerard complied. His keen professional glance flitted swiftly from face to face. ("Appointment with Death" 13 – 14)

The victim in this novel is the mother of the Boynton family, who, after the first sight of Dr Gerard, is described by the words:

What a horror of a woman! Old swollen, bloated, sitting there authorized in the midst of them - a distorted old Buddha - a gross spider in the centre of a web! ("Appointment with Death" 14)

As a manipulator, she directs and influences the lives not only of her children, but also of those around her – like Sarah, who cannot talk to any of them. Mrs Boynton and her family are the centre of attention because of their strange behaviour and manners. She is a woman with "a definite force" ("Appointment with Death" 26) and with a cold and penetrating gaze, like a cobra that is aware of its power. This, however, does not apply to everyone. Later, of course, everyone starts showing their feelings, rebelling, and Sarah herself eventually even marries Raymond Boynton.

Overall, Sarah took the view that Americans were "unusually self-possessed" ("Appointment with Death" 16) and French "were all alike obsessed by sex" ("Appointment with Death" 17). In contrast, Frenchman Dr Gerard later responds to Sarah's behaviour by saying: "That is because you are English! The English have a complex about sex. They think it is 'not quite nice'." ("Appointment with Death" 63)

When we take a closer look at Christie's detective Hercule Poirot, the issues of English identity and ethnicity become prominent. Hercule Poirot stands out as the notable exception among primarily English detectives; as a Belgian, he is distinctly foreign. Poirot's character challenges traditional English masculinity with his fastidiousness, attention to detail, and preference for tidiness. He often critiques English customs and

emotional tendencies. He tries to be impersonal, uses outdated methods with detachment and tracing, and he is pushed aside by all the people involved in the case. Sarah King does not trust him very much, she keeps her distance, she does not talk to him unless it is necessary, but if she does, she always tells the truth and things as they really happened.

Nor does the main character and narrator in *Murder in Mesopotamia*, a nurse Amy Leatheran, at first trust him and doubt his abilities. After some time, though, she becomes so close to him that she sees their relationship as the one between a doctor and a nurse who are facing some kind of a surgery that requires cooperation. She is English like Sarah and described as "a woman of thirty-five, of erect confident bearing" with a "good-humoured face with slightly prominent blue eyes and glossy brown hair" ("*Murder in Mesopotamia*" 14-15). She is a key figure in the second mystery, and she is very similar to Sarah – proud of her nationality, criticising detective Poirot's English pronunciation, despite admitting that she does not speak much French herself: "Why, he couldn't even speak English properly!" ("*Murder in Mesopotamia*" 126) Amy is very purposeful and wants to find out the truth at all costs. She is Hercule Poirot's right-hand woman in the investigation, whom he trusts and with whom he shares every clue. In the end, though, Amy is suspected as well as the others, nevertheless, that is for one reason only – so that she does not suffer the same fate as Miss Johnson, who was poisoned precisely because the killer suspected she knew the whole truth. Her relationship with Poirot is built on trust and the sense of security that his presence gives her.

Amy's relationship with the Americans is different from Sarah's. It is important to mention Mrs. Leidner, the first victim. Contrary to the portrayal of nationality opposition in *Appointment with Death*, was Mrs Leidner in *Murder in Mesopotamia*, according to the Poirot's result of the psychological investigation of her personality, "one of those women ... endowed by Nature not only with beauty but with the kind of calamitous magic..." ("*Murder in Mesopotamia*" 306). On the other hand, in *Appointment with Death* were at first Americans indirectly depicted rather stereotypically, as simple creatures. Although Mrs Leidner is preceded by her reputation, she seems to Amy like a nice, very smart, and very fair person. Blond hair, violet eyes and her charm only add to her other-worldly, angelic appearance. Some she could easily charm, such as nurse Amy Leatheran, who, like some lifelong friend, defended her, others could not stand her, or some even loved her and hated her at the same time as Mr Carey. Although it turned out that all the things she did were not for attention, as the witnesses and suspects thought,

there is no doubt that she knew her own merits and knew how to use them. She always had to be the centre of attention, and she was even able to get that from her husband's loyal friend, however, in this case it was the attention of love, for which she was also murdered.

There is no doubt that a sense of English superiority can be felt in both detective novels. Whether it is language, habits, behaviour, or the main characters, England is the precedent country, representing justice, judicial and moral. As for the relationship between the English characters, those representing France and detective Poirot of Belgium, there is a sense of rivalry in the text, but at the same time of cooperation and friendship linked by the same aim - to solve a murder. For example, the relationship of Sarah King and Dr Gerard, or Amy Leatheran and Hercule Poirot himself. Though, there are reminders of how much something was English, French, foreign. Even in *Modern Egypt*, Lord Cromer compares the influence of the English in Egypt to a not so attractive but clever, self-aware lady with moral values, while the French one he compares to a girl with a passing beauty. ("Orientalism" 212).

The Americans, portrayed by the Boynton family, most notably Mrs Boynton, and in *Murder in Mesopotamia* by Mrs Leidner, are contrasting and yet very similar. In the first novel, we have an old evil manipulator who manages the lives of those around her and attracts unwanted attention, and in the other, a beautiful, smart woman who sometimes uses it, manipulates her husband and her surroundings to get attention, since she has nothing to do when everyone around her is only interested in archaeology. Of course, the reason for Amy's arrival as her nurse is not her pursuit of attention, it is real, nonetheless, it is only when two women die that Hercule Poirot discovers that the killer is her current and at the same time the first and dead American husband Frederick Bosner, with a new identity of a Swedish Dr Leidner. In *Appointment with Death* the killer is an American Lady Westholme, known on the political scene of England for promoting the traditional family, but also a former prisoner, who was recognized years later by the retired wardress from that prison, old Mrs Boynton. The effort to create a new identity of former Americans is evident in both stories – from the American traitor to the Swedish archaeologist and from the American criminal to the English politician.

Alongside these nagging comparisons between the countries of the West, it is important to mention the Englishness and England's overall superiority to the East, which

manifests itself in ridiculing and supporting stereotypical notions. Both analysed novels are among the seven novels called "oriental" because they are set in the Middle East and have side characters who are mostly Oriental.

### 3.2 Racial and Cultural Prejudices against the East

Although Western countries in both novels are rivals with a love-hate relationship, in terms of their position vis-à-vis the East, they stick together as the West. It was still West against the East. Commenting on the ideas of Karl Marx, Edward Said states that many regular people of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century speak of humanity "in large collective terms or in an abstract generality" ("Orientalism" 154), which was true even in the period of Agatha Christie, and is still true to some extent today. In this case, it is a classic division of Europe and Asia based on geographical and cultural differences, which are somewhere larger and elsewhere smaller. The division into West and East, or Occident and Orient, is a generalization of the cultures and diversity of "human pluralism" ("Orientalism" 155). "There are Orientals, Asiatics, Semites, Muslims, Arabs, Jews, races, mentalities, nations ..." ("Orientalism" 155). Many Orientalists, such as Ernest Renan and Silvestre de Sacy, mentioned in the sub-chapter Orientalism as an Academic Discipline, contributed to a "slashing of the human aspect" of the Orient, to its exploration not in depth but only on its surface.

The negative perception of the Arabs passed seamlessly from the same perception of the Jews since they were similar in Western, especially American, eyes. "...Arabs and Jews are Oriental Semites..." ("Orientalism" 286) Jews are in twenty-three novels of Agatha Christie, and she never describes them purely negatively. She sees them as highly intelligent, but sometimes cunning, which falls under a certain stereotype. She observes a religious conflict which is "perhaps indicating Christie's amusement at both the snobbery and the ignorance of her neighbours' views of Jews in the Christian world" (Arnold 278). In *Appointment with Death*, they are portrayed as enemies that all Arabs despise and each time they are spoken of only by Arab employees. For the first time, when the group returns from the expedition and the guide is so exhausted that he does not talk at all on the way back, not even about the Jews "for which everyone was profoundly grateful" ("Appointment with Death" 72) because he was often eloquent and frantic about "their iniquities" ("Appointment with Death" 72). This portrayal is undoubtedly based on her own experience since this view was imposed on her. She mentions it in her biography

when she talks about visiting Dr Jordan in the East. He was not comfortable talking about Jews, and with an unprecedented expression on his face he said: "Our Jews are perhaps different from yours. They are a danger. They should be exterminated. Nothing else will really do but that." ("Autobiography" 465)

According to Said, Arabs were always portrayed as classical stereotypes with sandals and camels, as sheiks, or simply as embodied incompetence and defeat. ("Orientalism" 285) Later they were even pictured "as oversexed degenerates, capable ... of cleverly devious intrigues, but essentially sadistic, treacherous, low." ("Orientalism" 287) Moreover, Said claims that even the way Arabs were depicted through book characters mostly casted them, again as a whole, on the side of the evil. They were shown as a part of the organised crime or of the lowest class. For instance, they were portrayed as slave traders or camel boys. "... their sharply hooked noses, the evil moustachioed leer on their faces, were obvious reminders ... that "Semites" were at the bottom of all "our" troubles..." ("Orientalism" 286) The Arab ownership of the most oil reserves in the second half of the twentieth century was for the West, as for developed countries, humiliating, and embarrassing; they could be kept at bay by undeveloped countries. ("Orientalism" 286) It is also interesting to mention that when Christie was creating her criminal, she saw him as a man with a dark beard, a rather typical appearance for most Arabs. ("Autobiography" 255)

It is not surprising, then, that even in Agatha Christie's mysteries, which take place in the Middle East, Arabs are portrayed as one another, all the same, with no deeper analysis as individuals. They are simple and they will say what is wanted to be said. Jesudason in his article discusses the racism in the *Death on the Nile* and Sam Naidu's arguments. Naidu asserts that Agatha Christie's novels undeniably perpetuate racial biases in two significant ways. Instead of including strong characters of colour, she promotes the dominance of whiteness through the steadfast commitment to maintaining the existing social order, and her works exhibit a generally racist and xenophobic perspective, marginalizing those who are "foreign" to the British white majority. (Jesudason)

Even though Christie was fascinated by the archaeology, history, and culture of the ancient Arab world, she does not admire the present inhabitants, the descendants of those ancestors. Journalist Marcia Lynx Qualey comments as follows: "Indeed, it seems that she put more effort into humanising the ancient Egyptians than the 20th-century

people she met and worked alongside at dig sites." (Lynx Qualey) Natives are side characters in Christie's work, with no specifics, sometimes a name is known to us, but nothing more. Their presence is passive, observed and evaluated by Western travellers, who see the Orient as an entity anchored in space-time that owes all its achievements, whether political or cultural, to the West. ("Orientalism" 108) We do not know who they are, where they came from or what they went through. They do not stand out in the same way as the main characters as individuals, each for himself, but as a whole with general characteristics and qualities. In *Appointment with Death*, Poirot asks Lady Westholme which one of the servants she saw with Mrs Boynton before her death, and she says nothing more than: "One of the Bedouin servants attached to the camp." ("Appointment with Death" 126) He even asked her twice this question and she still continues with her speech about the what was happening. It seems she does not care who the man was, it was simply one of them. It cannot be said that only some Western figures hold this view of them, or that the opinions and descriptions differ. The comments are made by different characters, at different times, continuously, and are more of a general understanding which is gradually portrayed throughout the novel in the background, subtly portraying the stereotypical depiction as real to the reader.

In both novels, an Arab is the first suspect, and it is no coincidence. "Always, always, I am blamed. When anything happens, say always, my fault. Always my fault." ("Appointment with Death" 155) says dragoman Mahmoud. It is almost as a criticism of common attitudes of the Westerners. In fact, it is quite a strange deduction from witnesses and suspects, as indeed every family member had a reason for killing Mrs Boynton, yet they suspect the servants with only one "proof" which is Lady Westholme's statement that she saw him in Mrs Boynton's tent. It is later revealed that it was Lady Westholme who wanted to pass the blame on them. In the second novel, the first suspect is an Arab, specifically an Iraqi, who spoke to Father Lavigny and who was seen looking through Mrs Leidner's window, however, he was only a thief. This deduction is probably logical, since he is seen several times, acting strangely, but then again, he has no motive at all. The travellers talk unkindly about Mrs Leidner, some even envy her, some are jealous of her, nonetheless, in the end it turns out that the killer is the least suspicious person to us.

Stress is, of course, put primarily on the appearance, namely the darkness of the skin colour and the so-called "yellowness." Paul Abbott in his article *Authority* argues that discrimination is allowed to happen because we overlook how differences are created

and presented. He says that we treat these differences as if they are natural and obvious, like recognizing something at first sight. This kind of recognition, which seems immediate and natural, is often linked to stereotypes. In discrimination, visible differences like skin colour are seen as natural indicators. (Abbott 15-16)

Of course, in identifying the suspect, it is imperative to describe the suspect in as much detail as possible, but when it comes to *Murder in Mesopotamia*, Father Lavigne claims that the suspect "was of fair complexion" ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 134) and Amy, in turn, says he was "very dark-complexioned" ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 134). Father Lavigny responds by saying that he meant fair complexion for an Iraqi, as Amy would say, dark. She emphasizes her approval by saying: "Very dark ... A dirty dark-yellow colour." ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 134)

Much as Christie described "wild dark faces" ("Autobiography" 372) on her own trip to Baghdad, she also describes the trip to Petra in *Appointment with Death* as follows: "Strange wild-faced men crowded round the car." ("Appointment with Death" 75) It is evident that some typical features, such as dark eyes or eyebrows, of Arabs terrified Europeans. When trying to figure out why Mrs. Leidner needed help, Amy Leatheran thought she had felt uncomfortable with the presence of "natives and coloured people" ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 24), to which a surprised Dr Leidner replied that it was the opposite, and that she liked Arabs immensely because of their simplicity and sense of humour. ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 24)

Arabs are often depicted as dirty, disordered, both in behaviour and in terms of impurities on clothing, but also neglected monuments and cities. Miss Pierce, who travels with Lady Westholme in *Appointment with Death*, cannot specifically describe the suspected servant when questioned by Hercule Poirot: "All these Arabs look alike to me" ("Appointment with death" 127). Lady Westholme then fills in his description:

He had on a pair of very torn and patched breeches - really disgraceful they were - and his puttees were wound most untidily - all anyhow! These men need discipline! ("Appointment with death" 127)

Subsequently, she repeats Miss Pierce's words: "...really these Arabs look all alike" ("Appointment with death" 127). Sarah King similarly describes the servant who accompanies her into the tent when she sees Mrs Boynton in Petra:

He wore khaki breeches much patched and untidy puttees and a ragged coat very much the worse for wear...Sarah admired the easy swing with which he walked - the careless proud carriage of his head. Only the European part of his costume seemed tawdry and wrong. ("Appointment with death" 77)

From the descriptions it is evident they both are dressed the same and both have dirty puttees. In addition, Sarah adds: "Civilization is all wrong - all wrong!" ("Appointment with death" 77) to underline his otherness in opposition to the European. Lady Westholme, during the interrogation, points out that Arabs never clean dust from things, and the uncleanness in the bazaars is appalling. ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 128) The natives are portrayed as lacking in trustworthiness, prone to dishonesty, exhibiting laziness, and being overly compliant. During the interrogation, the dragoman Mahmoud himself says it is not worth asking other servants because "they are all very stupid Bedouin - understand nothing" ("Appointment with death" 156).

Arabs will not even please the Westerners with their religion and languages which are only made fun of. Sarah tells Dr Gerard, for instance, that she was not allowed into one place, most likely mosque, because her hands were not veiled, which she finds ridiculous when Almighty created them, however, he probably does not like them anyway. ("Appointment with death" 12) Furthermore, these two characters compare their notes about Egypt, poking fun at the "ridiculous language of the donkey boys" ("Appointment with death" 18), and Sarah tells how she poked fun at one of them. She told the servant she was Chinese, and he believed her at first. Then he was confused and subsequently "politely rude" ("Appointment with death" 18). It is no wonder that he was mad at her since she was pointing out how "absurd" of him it was.

Furthermore, servants are very often blamed for their limited knowledge of English spoken by all the travellers in the East. However, even Poirot's pronunciation is criticized by Amy: "Why, he couldn't even speak English properly!" ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 126). Just as Amy is talking to Mrs Leidner about languages and differences, she claims that Arabs do not understand the common English pronunciation, to which Amy replies: "It seems odd there should be such a lot of different ones." ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 54) The contrast between East and West is present in the

continuation of this conversation. When Amy does not really understand why there should be so many languages when everyone speaks English, however, in the Palestinian church, as Mrs Leidner mentions, the Lord's Prayer is read in ninety languages to make it available to everyone. ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 54) Later, in a way, Amy awakens and begins to perceive the beauty of the Orient. It is when Poirot begins his typical performance, or examination of the case, by saying: "Bismillahi ar rahman ar rahim." ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 301), which means in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful, "the Arab phrase used before starting out on a journey" ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 301), as Amy explains. In this case, it is the journey to the past and the human soul as part of the investigation. It is not only a very pertinent phrase, but it has the magic of the Orient in it, and it gives a kind of dreamlike quality.

### 3.3 **Contrasting Ideas of the Dream-like Orient**

"...I never remember a face. But places remain firmly in my mind." ("Autobiography" 403) With these words, Christie assesses her life, her journeys and, above all, the memories. She was enchanted by the beauty of the East, and it influenced her writing. The East, namely Jordan, Petra, Jerusalem, in the other, Iraq, Baghdad, and Tell Yarimjah, where archaeological research takes place, is on the background of both analysed novels. There is a really strong touch of surrealism, of something other-worldly and unrealistic, in both of them, and in her biography as well. Christie was able to portray a great picture of a particular place in a really colourful way, as if she were there at that time, despite having written it many years later, even at the end of her life. Yet she could write about these places, on her own, or perhaps hidden behind the characters of her books, negatively.

Even though Qualey said Christie viewed contemporary and ancient Easterners differently, it was clear that two attitudes toward the East were fighting in Christie. One is imperial, Western, allured, and the other is her own. She loved archaeology, exploration, and literally uncovering such an interesting history of humanity, of all races, of people, of which she was a part, just as the East, not as a geographical place, but as a whole, was a part of herself.

She was fascinated by nature and was a great observer of it like her character, Amy Leatheran. Her relationship with Poirot may even evoke suggestions that Amy, who

helps Poirot in *Murder in Mesopotamia*, is in fact Christie. Although Christie does not speak badly about the places of the East in her biography, on the contrary, her characters, who are often very similar to her, do, and it is mainly about the cities and building of contemporary inhabitants, and not about archaeological finds.

As mentioned before, the Arabs were depicted as dirty, unkempt, neglecting not only themselves, but also their cities and monuments. *Murder in Mesopotamia* even begins with a letter from Amy Leatheran, talking not about sights and landscapes, for instance, but about the mess in Baghdad: "The dirt and the mess in Baghdad you wouldn't believe - and not romantic at all like you'd think from the Arabian Nights!" ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 13). Even from this comparison, there is a rather insinuating and constructed picture of the Orient by the Western countries and a shock or, rather, leap into reality, and more importantly, the negative influence of the other Western travellers.

When Amy is welcomed by the first members of the expedition, they offer her a tour of the city, to which Miss Reilly respond by saying: "There are some picturesque corners ...But I don't know that you'd care for them. They're extremely dirty." ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 35) Amy is somewhat concerned and says she has "never been able to see that picturesqueness excuses dirt." ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 35) On the other hand, she likes nature immensely, when she appreciates the beauty of sunsets along with Poirot, saying that Hassanieh "looked quite fairy-like with the setting sun ...and the River Tigris flowing between its wide banks looked like dream river" ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 57). Poirot's beginning of his discoveries "Bismillahi ar rahman ar rahim." ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 301) raises a "glamour of the East" in Amy that she has not experienced before because of all the mess. Suddenly, as for a European, a completely stereotypical picture of the East appears to her:

"I thought of words like Samarkand and Ispahan – and of merchants with long beards – and kneeling camels ...and women with henna-stained hair and tattooed faces kneeling by the Tigris ..." ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 301)

After solving the murder and leaving the East, her perception changes. She no longer thinks of the East as a contrived and romantic picture of the Orient, nor of a filthy city: "perhaps dirt isn't really so unhealthy as one is brought to believe" ("Murder in

Mesopotamia" 349). She recognizes its existence as a whole. Not as a place from *Arabian Nights*, nor as a disappointment in impurities, but as a part of the Earth that has its traditions and a way of life, which stayed in her heart after all, as it does in Christie's.

The beauty of the nature is also reciprocated primarily by women; men are more likely to care about what is buried in soil. However, Mr Coleman was not thrilled with either, as Miss Reilly pointed out: "Not a lover of the picturesque or the antique, are you, Bill?" ("Murder in Mesopotamia" 39) He does not enjoy the work, he does not care about anything, but he does not mind doing it.

In *Appointment with Death*, Miss Pierce and Lady Westholme also mention the dirt at the bazaars full of flies that they cannot stand and therefore bring, as well as Poirot, a shoe-cleaning outfit and a duster. ("Appointment with Death" 127) However, they like the nature, and it seems to them as romantic.

Sarah, on the other hand, is rather critical, teasing about almost everything human – buildings, religion, language, or people themselves. She discusses religious places and religion with Dr Gerard at their first meeting. Her opinion was that their "religion is very odd" and "the awful things they've built, too!" ("Appointment with death" 12), to which the doctor agreed. This was followed by the aforementioned banter about Sarah's unveiled hands, which brought the two Westerners closer together. She also said that because of all the religious buildings and "the fierce squabbling churches" ("Appointment with Death" 44), the character of Christ was overlooked.

However, nature and ancient structures astonished her in a way. She found it strange that someone once "made this rocky summit into a threshing floor and that David ... made it a Holy Place" ("Appointment with death" 38) and wondered if even Solomon's Palace would be half as beautiful as the mosque covering the shrine. ("Appointment with death" 38) The whole place evoked "oriental atmosphere" ("Appointment with death" 38). Sarah's only resemblance to Amy can be seen when she admits that she had an idea about Rose Red City of Petra that is different than the reality:

I think it's rather wonderful and just a little horrible ... I always thought of it as romantic and dream-like the 'rose-red city'. But it's much more real than that – it's as real as – as raw meat. ("Appointment with death" 81)

The journey to this place seemed to her as to hell. There were red rocks everywhere, they went down and "Sarah felt stifled-menanced by the ever-narrowing gorge" ("Appointment with death" 75) around her. However, she was actually fascinated, and the journey seemed like a dream to her.

Mr Cope, in terms of human relations, but also of the East, is neutral, he tries to have a good relationship with everyone, he sees the good in everything, and tries to really get to know and travel as many places as possible. Specifically, he wanted to visit Bethlem, Nazareth, Tiberias, the Sea of Galilee, Jerash and also Rose Red City of Petra, which he describes as "a most remarkable natural phenomenon" ("Appointment with death" 29). When he asks young Lennox Boynton, who does not seem interested in developing this conversation further, probably because they cannot travel much because of his mother's immobility, how he liked King David's City, Mr Cope says he was slightly disappointed at first as well, but later changed his mind about it and suggests that Lennox has to get used to the city, and then he perhaps reconsiders his opinion, as Mr Cope did himself. This approach is a lot like the mindset of Christie, who also felt the need to get to know the true East first, not the constructed one.

It is evident that the environment in both novels is described rather similarly, and thus in a very contrasting way. The Western characters tend to feel positively about the Oriental nature, they admire old ruins, and conversely define themselves negatively towards the present civilization of the East and all its creations. The description of the environment is never long, there are brief reminders, comments of the characters, or simply outlining the place by Christie. In *Appointment with Death*, she mostly describes the beautiful and fabulous places with "oriental atmosphere" as a narrator, and as Amy in *Murder in Mesopotamia*, who is actually a fictional Christie. Other characters point to the shortcomings of cities built by that underdeveloped civilization. It seems that it is Christie's personal perception, and perhaps also an effort to show her attitude, an effort to go against the tide of colonial views.

After reading both novels without any deeper analysis, the East is clearly depicted as an underdeveloped country with people with no education who can be nothing more than servants or guides. Still, there is a sense of humanity and an effort to go against the tide of colonialism and Englishness.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has connected the theory of Orientalism, as a constructing, reproducing discourse, and the representation of reality manifested in selected novels written by Agatha Christie, an exceptional author exposed to this discourse, with her own experience in the Middle East.

Agatha Christie, as an ordinary person, absorbed the opinions and perceptions of others who had shaped her own view of the world since she was a little girl, and she, as a world-renowned writer, shaped the perceptions of her readers. Yet Christie herself was aware of the need to adapt to the foreign culture to be fully capable of understanding it before judging it. It is very clear she was a person who wanted to enjoy life, discover, and get to know other places, nonetheless, the cultures were not very easy to accept or admire at first for her as well, and it can be seen in her novels. Inescapably, she perceived the influence of the ideology of the superiority of the West, and all those cultures, religions and other aspects were even for her something truly different and unusual. Eventually, she fell in love with the East, not just for the archaeology, but for the people and nature as Christie herself writes in the *Autobiography* (528-29). Unfortunately, it is not portrayed in analysed novels. The only sign of her love for the East is the evolution of Amy.

Thanks to her personal experience, she is in the middle of these two approaches – a society reliant on what an academic institution will publish and state, and the realities of life in the East with the locals, not in Alwiyah, which she herself denounced. Her position is priceless because it gives us a view of both of these sides, she was impartial, but influenced, she had her own opinions, but the subconscious ones as well.

As discussed in the last chapter, the two novels analysed are similar in many ways, however, they are quite different as well, and this is true for the approaches to other nationalities and environments present in them. They offer the psychological tension of engaging plots in the exotic surroundings of the Middle East, which is only interesting to the Western characters in terms of nature, history, but not civilization. The treatment of cultural elements in both novels reflects the prevailing attitudes of the time, which can be considered by contemporary standards as racist. The archaeological environment only highlights the West's dominance and control over Eastern artifacts and history. Western characters rise above servants, presenting the East, laughing at their culture, religion, and

simplicity. It is interesting to mention the phrase that Lady Westholme adds to the challenging climb during the investigation: "Fatigue can be conquered like anything else." ("Appointment with death" 124) An American woman, a former criminal and also the murderer, trying to present herself as a high-ranking English politician who could do anything, conquer fatigue, and even the world. Yet through some of the characters Christie tries to show the bright side of the East, and that all may not be as it first appears. One example is the evolution of Amy, or the confrontation between the characters, such as between Mr Cope and Lennox Boynton. I would liken this contrast of Christie's understanding of the East to the contrast of the entire West to the East. The West depended on the East, it needed it for the archaeological expeditions, merchandise, we owe the East for our languages and much else, nonetheless, the West needed the East as its counterpart to build its position and gain power. It is clear from the aforementioned need for the East as a source of soldiers to strengthen the Allies at the time of World Wars, but the need to maintain ideology and world status.

To conclude, Agatha Christie, whether consciously or unconsciously, portrayed the disunity of the Western approach to the East and perfectly captured its period discourse. She expressed disapproval of the Western and Orientalist ideologies, however at the same time, without this kind of analysis of these two selected novels, she contributed to stereotypical depictions of the East and to distrust of it. The question remains whether her portrayal was her own reaction to the East, which she got to know by confrontation with taught views of the East, a pure reflection of her society and its values, or both.

After all, it does not really matter, since her work leads to history and brushes it up. As Pasco writes:

It does not matter whether the document is primarily aesthetic, cultural, personal, or more purely historical. Because ideas do not exist in a vacuum, history cannot be adequately interpreted outside the society that gave it birth...It is the way individuals think and feel about a society that characterizes them and their times, marking their differences from people that preceded and followed them. (Pasco 389)

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