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**VÝVOJ POSTAVY DETEKTIVA HERCULE
POIROTA A JEHO SPOLEČNÍKŮ V RANÝCH A
POZDNÍCH DÍLECH AGATHY CHRISTIE
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DETECTIVE
HERCULE POIROT AND HIS COMPANIONS IN
AGATHA CHRISTIE'S EARLY AND LATE
NOVELS**

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Cíl práce:

Cílem práce bude sledovat vývoj postavy detektiva Hercule Poirota a jeho společníků v raných a pozdních povídkách Agathy Christie. Bakalářská práce bude srovnávat a klást do protikladu proces pátrání a změny ve vyšetřovacím procesu detektiva vzhledem k působení jeho pomocníků. Práce má také ukázat, že Agátha Christie patří mezi prominentní autory, kteří výrazně zasáhli do vývoje detektivního žánru a posunuli tak jeho pravidla.

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Název práce: Vývoj postavy detektiva Hercule Poirota a jeho společníků
v raných a pozdních povídkách Agathy Christie

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ANOTACE

Bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na vývoj postavy detektiva Hercule Poirota a jeho společníků v raných a pozdních dílech Agathy Christie. Práce bude srovnávat a klást do protikladu proces pátrání a změny ve vyšetřovacím procesu detektiva vzhledem k působení jeho pomocníků. Práce má také ukázat, že Agatha Christie patří mezi prominentní autory, kteří výrazně zasáhli do vývoje detektivního žánru a posunuli tak jeho pravidla.

Klíčová slova

Poirot, detektiv, pomocník, Christie, vyšetřování, detektivní žánr

ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis focuses on the development of Hercule Poirot and his sidekicks in the early and late novels of Agatha Christie. The thesis will compare and contrast the investigation process in the novels and analyze how the detective changes, especially due to his companions. Thus, the thesis will demonstrate that Agatha Christie is a prominent author of the genre who has fundamentally affected the development of detective fiction.

Key words

Poirot, detective, companions, Christie, investigation, detective fiction

Contents

Introduction.....	7
1. Detective Fiction.....	9
1.1. History and the invention of the genre.....	9
1.2. Basic units of the genre.....	13
1.3. Rules for writing detective stories.....	15
2. Agatha Christie's work.....	17
2.1. The crime queen's life.....	17
2.2. The character of Hercule Poirot.....	18
2.3. Poirot's companions.....	23
3. Analysis of the early and late stories.....	29
3.1. Social hierarchy and Old England in <i>The Mysterious Affair at Styles</i> , <i>Murder on the Links</i> , <i>The Murder of Roger Ackroyd</i>	30
3.2. Modern England in <i>Third Girl</i> , <i>Hallowe'en Party</i> , <i>Elephants Can Remember</i> ...	34
4. Conclusion.....	38
5. References.....	40
5.1. Primary sources.....	40
5.2. Secondary sources.....	40

Introduction

The main aim of the bachelor thesis is to give an introduction to detective fiction and pursue the development of the detective Hercule Poirot and his companions in Agatha Christie's early and late novels. The thesis will compare and contrast the investigation process in the novels and analyze how the detective changes, especially due to his companions. Thus, the thesis will demonstrate that Agatha Christie is a prominent author of the genre who has fundamentally affected the development of detective fiction.

The thesis is divided into three main parts. The first part of my thesis deals with the prehistory and history of detective fiction. I briefly mention the major authors, who contributed to the development of this genre. Edgar Allan Poe is usually considered the inventor and I also outline the significance of Arthur Conan Doyle and his Sherlock Holmes in the history of the genre. Detective fiction witnessed a great boom in the interwar period, which is called The Golden Age. Christie's early novels are usually associated with and classified under this group of works. Furthermore, in Chapter 1 I examine the basic units of the genre based on a study by the Czech critic Jan Cigánek in his *Umění detektivky* (1962) and in the last part of the chapter I mention rules for writing detective fiction, which were set by Ronald Knox in 1929. The rules will be examined in part 2.3.

The second chapter is divided into three sections. First I concentrate on Christie's major biographical data. I try to explore how her life experiences and the social situation influenced her early and late novels. I focus on the time when she worked as a volunteer nurse at the hospital dispensary and she learned about poisons and she used this knowledge in her novels. The second and third part of this chapter

is dedicated to Christie's protagonists – Hercule Poirot and his companions, who were involved in investigating cases alongside the famous detective.

The third chapter deals with the analysis of six novels. Three of them – *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), *Murder on the Links* (1923), *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) – represent the early period and the other three – *Third Girl* (1966), *Hallowe'en Party* (1969), *Elephants Can Remember* (1972) – represent the late period of her writing. I omitted the very last published novel, *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*, as it would be highly problematic to classify this text: although it was published in 1975 to finish the Poirot series, the story was written much earlier, in the early 1940s and so it should rather be associated with Christie's early novels.

Crime belongs to our everyday life and the society tries to fight it every day. Crime is also covered with mystery for most of us. Detective fiction is a way to escape from our everyday life, associate with detective and try to solve the crime with them. Fiction is built on a logical system which is brought about by the detective. The detective fiction has hardly ever been considered as a serious piece of literature.

Supposedly the main task of detective fiction is to entertain its reader. Even Cigánek observes, that fiction with a mystery attracts readers the most (1962, 47). Detective fiction is considered a popular entertainment and it has been admired and read all over the world since its beginning. I chose the topic of this genre because it resonates with many people, and especially in Christie's novels, there is the element of surprise: there is always something that the reader cannot expect.

1. Detective Fiction

1.1. History and the invention of the genre

The origins of detective fiction arose out of crime fiction, which can be connected with many aspects of history. Murders, crime and voluntary manslaughter can be found in oriental legends, in literature of the Ancient Greece, in medieval literature and in the Bible. Enough to mention here Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, who murdered his brother Abel or Medea, who killed her two little sons as a cruel revenge on her husband Jason, who has betrayed her for another woman in the ancient Greek myth (Cigánek 1962, 27). Violence and murders can be also found in tales narrated by Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights* from Arabia. It is obvious that the motive of the crime has been used in many literary genres throughout the centuries. But in different periods of history the crime was approached by different criteria. It is also associated with property and money. When there was no legal system every person dealt with the crime on their own. When one killed another, the family of the killed man was obligated to seek revenge by killing someone from his family. It was usually connected with family wealth, marriage or with the revenge for the murder or crime.

Stephen Knight describes the beginnings of criminal stories from the sixteen to the eighteen century. *The Newgate Calendar* could be taken as the archetype of pre-detective crime stories. This popular collection of crimes was written in the eighteen century but the detective not always appeared in the stories (2004, 3). Knight also analyzes William Godwin and his *The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) as well as *Mémoires* (1828) of E. F. Vidoq published in France in 1828-1829. Vidoq was a real detective, but as in the case of every memoir, the narrative occasionally digresses from the actual biographical events. All in all, in these works,

the figure of the modern detective hero is introduced into Western European literature.

There were many attempts to define detective fiction. Cigánek created his own definition in his book *Umění detektivky*: “The detective novel (story) is a literary genre that consistently conceived the narrative nature of the crime with a motif of mystery. All literary resources are compositionally and with expression subordinated to methodological solution of initial epic premise” (1962, 215). Horror stories were written more than half a century before detective fiction. The gothic novel developed in Europe in the late eighteenth century, revolving around individuality, fear and horror. This common theme can be found in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in the early nineteenth century (Knight 2004, 17). In *Sherlock Holmes a ti druzí* (1988) Grym confirms to Knight’s opinion that E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Mademoiselle de Scudéri* (1820) can be identified as a proto-detective story from that period (1988, 41).

Detective fiction might also find its origins in Dickens’s or Collins’s works. Charles Dickens (1812 – 1870) was the most popular author of the Victorian era and we can find the element of mystery in his novels, for example in *David Copperfield* (1850), *Little Dorrit* (1855), and in *Great Expectations* (1860; Cigánek 1962, 78). In Dickens’s novel *Bleak House* (1852) appears the protagonist Inspector Bucket, who might be the first detective hero in British Literature. Dickens’s close friend named Wilkie Collins’s (1824 – 1889) is best known for *The Moonstone* (1868), which is another early detective novel written in English.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809 - 1849) constructed a model of a Great detective whose investigation is based on deduction in his detective stories, for example, in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), *The Mystery of Marie Roget* (1843) and *The Purloined Letter* (1844). Poe is usually considered the inventor of detective fiction:

his detective stories written in 1840's started the era in the history of the genre. Although for most of his contemporaries he was a drunk who occasionally used drugs, he became one of the most respected American poet, author, literary critic and essayist.

Poe devoted his life to the short stories since 1833. He was also a founder of new, so-called analytical stories. It corresponded to the hobby of his clear logical intellect in solving complex charades and cryptograms. He worked with a mystery, motif of death and also with "beautiful dread" in his short stories (Cigánek 1962, 82). Poe considered short stories and short poems as the ideal form of literature. Reading time is only half an hour, at most two hours; as the time is short, there is no interference, the reader's soul is fully in power of the author and there is no chance to escape.

An extraordinary expansion of the popularity of reading detective stories was started by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1869 – 1930), a significant author of detective fiction. Doyle studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh from 1876 to 1881. His professor Dr. Joseph Bell later became an inspiration for Doyle's main detective Sherlock Holmes. Doyle was not very successful and he was not taken seriously after publishing his first book. In 1887 his *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) was published and it featured the first appearance of Sherlock Holmes. Holmes and his companion Dr. Watson had a huge success and they became one of the most famous pair of fictional detectives in the world.

Doyle was probably inspired by his predecessors. In many aspects his stories evoke Poe's detective Dupin. Another author that influenced Doyle was Emile Gaboriau (1835 – 1873) who created a young policeman Lecoq, who is not a private detective but he turns from a young policemen into an experienced inspector who

thinks, as well as Dupin, that police is stupid in many ways. For example, police do not pay attention to the small, but usually the most important evidence (Grym 1988, 57). Lecoq stands between the character of Dupin and Holmes. Pavel Grym in *Sherlock Holmes a ti druží* also claims: “unlike independent Dupin and well situated Holmes, he [Lecoq] is an ordinary paid member of the police” (1988, 58).

Grym also observes that both of Doyle’s predecessors were quoted in his *Study in Scarlet*, where Holmes appears for the first time (1988, 69). Doyle places his detective before the detectives of his predecessors when Holmes describes condescendingly their investigation methods. He says: “Now, in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow” and “Leqoc was a miserable bungler” (*Study in Scarlet*, 38).

Neither Doyle nor anybody else expected the fame of Sherlock Holmes. Even though Doyle’s style is not very subtle and we can find some antithetical information in different novels – he did not care much about the logic in his short stories (Cigánek 1962, 87) – Doyle is still one of the first masters of detective fiction. He had many followers who contributed to the development of the genre. One of them is a French editor Gaston Leroux (1868 – 1927), who with his novel *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* (1908), created a detective called Joseph Rouletabille who was a master of changing clothes and camouflage. In a way similar to Sherlock Holmes French novelists Maurice Leblanc (1864 – 1941) introduced the detective Arsen Lupin in 1906. The main character of his novels is ‘a fictional gentleman thief’ who likes making fun of police but on the other hand he plays the role of detective himself.

Doyle’s generation was followed by the Golden Age of detective fiction where the Detection Club was set. The Detection Club was founded in 1930 by a

group of British detective novelists. It is important to notice that detective fiction did not belong only to a male gender, but there were also female writers in the Golden Age. One of the most famous writers was Agatha Christie (1890 – 1976) and Dorothy L. Sayers (1893 – 1957). Sayers was a Christian who is known for novels of mysteries. One of the most famous novels of hers is *Murder Must Advertise* (1933).

At the same time another British crime writer Agatha Christie reaches fame by writing great detective fiction. She is considered to be the Queen of detective fiction. Christie travelled and studied in Paris in France where she got an inspiration to create her worldwide detective Hercule Poirot.

1.2. Basic units of the genre

Cigánek writes in *Umění detektivky*, that the composition of a detective fiction is conventional in some sense. The composition of a detective fiction diversifies somewhat from classical prose (1962, 253). Detective fiction adopts the kind of convention, that helps to maximize the dramatization of the story which is the author's purpose. One of the main points of the composition of detective fiction is the tension that permeates the story and keeps the reader from the point of finding the right solution to the mystery until the final denouement. The detective suspects very soon who the culprit might be. However, there is time left for the reader to engage his own thoughts and reflections on the decipherment the problem. The entire action remains in some kind of flux due to new evidence, witnesses and other new circumstances. The final denouement is given by the detective himself at the end of the investigation usually with the detailed consecution of his investigation process.

The composition of detective fiction correlates with Gustav Freytag's basic dramatic structure, which divides the narrative actions into five main parts: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution.

- 1 Exposition: an introduction to the main characters, setting, and situations of the plot
- 2 Rising action: the events and complications that lead to an important and dramatic point in the plot
- 3 Climax: the point of greatest interest and emotional involvement in the plot
- 4 Falling action: the events that develop from the climax and lead to the conclusion
- 5 Resolution or denouement: the final outcome which ties up any loose ends left in the story

The exposition is a term that indicates the beginning of the investigation itself. The crime is always introduced and covered with a mystery. We can imagine the environment where the crime is realized in the exposition. Characters that may have something in common with the crime either as witnesses or even might be potential perpetrators (Cigánek 1962, 262).

In the rising action the reader learns more about needful, but often misleading information. The climax, the third part of composition, is the part where details which appeared in the rising action are verified by facts and reasoning, and the juxtaposition of details and evidence becomes the sources of detection. The reader is usually not able to estimate the direction of detective's thinking, although it is generally conjecturable that the detective has already solved the problem and he is just waiting to verify all his doubts. During the falling action of detective fiction the

detective eliminates incorrect solutions and excludes certain details that he considers unnecessary. The last inversion usually appears in this part and its task is to maximize the tension before the final solution. In the resolution, the last part of composition, techniques by which the detective proceeded are interpreted (Cigánek 1962, 318).

The detective tells by which evidences was the perpetrator convicted and what betrayed him. An interesting point of the revelation is that it is still not clear who is the guilty person. After the disclosure of all details and evidences which only the detective knows, the murderer usually pleads guilty and everything is explained logically.

1.3. Rules for writing detective stories

The authors of the Golden Age were very diverse in their work. It was not unusual that some authors who have already had their career in a different genre started to write detective fiction, for example, the children book writer Alan Alexander Milne (1882 – 1956), best known for his books about the teddy bear Winnie-the-Pooh, the poet Cecil Day-Lewis (1904-1972) or Robert Bruce Montgomery (1921-1978) who was a musician, a composer and a critic (James 2009, 18).

Detective fiction was also distinguished from other genres like mystery or thriller. Ronald Knox (1888-1957), an English priest and crime writer, lied down the rules for writing detective fiction in 1929. He belonged to the top group of initiators of detective fiction. He wrote just a few stories and novels and he did not even create a memorable character like Holmes or Poirot. He was rather an analyst or critic than a writer. In his work *Ten Commandments of Detection* he formed the basic rules that a good detective fiction should be follow. There were rules for limiting a detective

fiction. These rigid rules never really worked for other authors and even Ronald Knox was not able to adhere to it himself. It was shown in the experience that narrative, even that of detective fiction cannot be controlled by rigid formulas.

P. D. James mentions all of the commandments in her book *Talking about Detective Fiction*. I briefly introduce them in short points.

1. The criminal must be mentioned in the early part of the story
2. The supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course
3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowed
4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons and appliance may be used
5. No Chinaman must figure in the story
6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he have an uncountable intuition
7. The detective himself must not commit the crime
8. The detective is bound to declare any clues which he might discovered
9. The sidekick of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal from the reader any thoughts which pass through his mind, his intelligence must be slightly below that of the average reader
10. Twin brothers and doubles generally must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them

These rules were accepted by a group of detective writers known as a Detection Club where famous authors like Christie, G. K. Chesterton or Dorothy L. Sayers participated. My analysis will later show that Christie not only follows these rules but how also modifies them.

2. Agatha Christie's work

2.1. The crime queen's life

The English detective fiction had previously been mostly a male genre but it was enriched also by female writers in the 1920s and 1930s. Agatha Mary Clarissa Christie (1890 -1976) was a British writer of crime novels, short stories and plays. Christie, who read firstly detective fiction at her work during the First World War, started to write her own detective stories in her thirties. Christie was encouraged by her sister to write from her early age. In 1914 her first husband Archibald Christie went to France with the Royal Flying Corps to fight in World War I. Agatha worked as a volunteer nurse at the hospital in her home town Torquay. This experience contributed to her knowledge of poisons, drugs and their effects which she used later in her work. She knew which poisons worked slowly and which quickly and she also knew how much to give, and how people died from poisons. This made her novels considerably realistic.

The plot of her early novels is mostly set in romanticized English village or small town, where there is usually a small group of suspect. These novels were written in the actual time of her first marriage and bringing up her daughter in Ashfield in Torquay which is reflected in her early novels. Her other life experiences also appears in her work when she married the archaeologist Max Mallowan and she travelled with him extensively. Their journeys in the Middle East provided the background to certain novels – *Murder in Mesopotamia* (1936), *Death on the Nil* (1937), *Appointment with Death* (1938), *They Came to Baghdad* (1951).

In her late novels, Christie is more detailed in the description of a critical connection between social conditions and mores. She spent part of her life in

London, became a part of society and it inspired her for her late novels. Her novels can be interpreted as tools for a mild satire with which the author turns against the snobbish society (Grym 1988, 179).

Many literary critics tried to understand the success of this writer. Her books are the best selling books of all time and have been translated into more than hundred languages. Such a great success had also her stage play *The Mousetrap* which holds the record for longest initial run since 1952.

Christie was made a Dame of the British Empire, a title given in honor of a person's extraordinary service to the country or for personal merit, by Queen Elizabeth in 1971. Christie died on the 12th of January, 1976 at age of 85.

2.2. The character of Hercule Poirot

Characters in Christie's novels have their settled role: the victim, a small circle of suspects and the main protagonist, the detective. Knight mentions Doyle's influence on Christie and her work (2004, 89). In some ways, Holmes became the initial model of her best known detective. In a way similar to Holmes, the Belgian Hercule Poirot is an extremely bright and clever man. Unlike Holmes, he is not too tall, a bit stout person and the dominating feature of his egg-shaped head and face is the monstrous black mustache. He is described by his friend, the sidekick of the first two novels, Arthur Hastings:

Poirot was an extraordinary-looking little man. He was hardly more than five feet four inches, but carried himself with great dignity. His head was exactly the shape of an egg, and he always perched it a little on one side. His moustache was very stiff and military (Christie 2001c, 35).

The *Mysterious Affair at Styles*, Christie's first detective fiction where Poirot was introduced for the first time, was published in 1920 although it was written four years earlier. It has been questioned several times why the detective became similar to Poirot was, especially concerning his nationality. Christie writes in her book *An Autobiography* (1993): "Why not make my detective a Belgian? Anyway, I settled on a Belgian detective. I allowed him slowly to grow into his part. He should have been an inspector, so that he would have certain knowledge of crime" (1993, 263). It was her original idea that a retired policeman whose name is Hercules in contrast to his small figure should investigate, but later Christie decided to make it Hercule for its softer wording.

Christie created a considerably unique detective figure, but there can be found inconsistency in Poirot's appearance. The first one is the problem of his age. He was described as retired men around sixty, who left the Belgian police in 1904. If we suppose that Poirot solves his last case in 1975 when *Curtain: Poirot's last case* was published, he would be more than 130 years old that time.

Another problem consists in the headwear of the famous detective. This question does not also seem to be as straightforward as the question of Poirot's age. In several novels Christie mentions that he is bald (*Murder in Mesopotamia*). But later she notes in *The ABC Murders* that Poirot there dyes his hair. The puzzling disagreement over Poirot's hair might be explained in the last published Poirot novel *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*, which states that Poirot wears a wig, and even his mustache is fake and artificially bleached as well as his hair (Grym 1988, 172).

In the early novels, protagonists admire Poirot's elegance, his always neat suit and polished patent shoes. In the late novels, however, his appearance in Britain is marked by progress, as he is described less comically. Elegance was always more

important than comfort for him. His friend, Mrs. Oliver reproached Poirot because he was complaining about painful feet in *Hallowe'en Party*:

“Come here”, she said, “and sit down. What’s the matter with you? You look upset.” “My feet are extremely painful,” said Hercule Poirot. “It’s those awful tight patent leather shoes of yours,” said Mrs. Oliver. “Sit down.” Poirot sat down, stretched out his legs and said: “Ah! That is better” (Christie 2001a, 244).

He is a fussy and tidy little man, always arranging things, preferring things square and neat. His perfectionism helps him during the investigation of his cases, for example, when he finds a check stub on the cleaned carpet and it guides him to a potential murderer in *The Murder on the Links* or when he focuses on why a chair has been moved in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

Another feature which is also typical for him is his pride. Poirot considers himself a very well-known person, who he undoubtedly is at least in the early novels. Later, he is not recognized by younger people due to social changes in The United Kingdom.

His best known quotation of the little gray cells is typical for his character. Christie herself introduces her thoughts of creating the detective in her *An Autobiography*: “And he should be very brainy – he should have little grey cells of the mind – that was a good phrase: I must remember that – yes, he would have little grey cells” (263-264). Poirot is particular about this phrase and he mentions it in almost every case. He criticizes his companions for not using these cells properly. In *The Murder on the Links* Hastings writes:

Then he would tap his egg-shaped head with absurd complacency, and remark with great satisfaction: “The true work, it is done from within. The little grey cells – remember always the little gray cells, mon ami” (Christie 2001b, 18).

Poirot’s investigation is done mostly through tense dialogues with suspects. James says that with Christie the dialogue is particularly effective, but it is usually used not merely to reveal character but to contain vital clues, one of which even the most careful reader would probably miss (2009, 32). Poirot’s search for the murderer lies in the statements of suspects, the victim’s family or anyone who would help somehow.

With the help of dialogue, Poirot is capable to recognize if someone is lying, as in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, where he accuses a group of close friends and family of the victim, who all are hiding something from him. Poirot makes people talk: they usually see a small plump foreigner with an understanding in him, which leads to saying what they really have in their minds. Knight writes about Poirot that he is a “supersleuth” with his alleged use of psychology (2004, 90). So as in *Elephants Can Remember*, where Zélie Meauhourat, a governess of Ravenscroft, knows all about the mystery and tells nobody until the day Poirot comes.

For readers, it is not too easy to follow the direction in which Poirot’s thoughts are moving. Poirot combines and compares the various options, which seem at first unreasonable to the readers who might become confused. At this point, not even Poirot’s sidekick knows what the great detective keeps in mind. Poirot always asks questions after a long testimony of a witness. The questions are seemingly too

simple or they have nothing in common with the case at all. Cigánek suggests that Poirot actually formulates his question so that it faces the hidden possibility derived from the speech of a partner (1962, 400). His deduction is surprising and exposes to him the possibility for further investigation.

Solving the case is usually in the spirit of a theatrical performance of Poirot's investigation. He triumphantly presents the result of the search at the very end. A small circle of suspects, which is so typical for Christie's fictions, meets in order to hear the great detective. Poirot explains in what direction his examination tended throughout the case and he provides the detail that led him to the right culprit who is also revealed there.

Poirot hardly ever omits his theatrical revealing. Dr. Sheppard describes this splendidly in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*:

For the first time I was absolutely at sea of Poirot's meaning. For a moment I was inclined to think that the scene I had just witnessed was a gigantic piece of bombast – that he had been what he called 'playing the comedy' with a view to making interesting and important (Christie 2002b, 349).

The overall impression of Poirot may seem a little comical. His English is often supplemented with the French expressions. His character creates almost the exact opposite of a conservative Englishman and its traditional isolation (Grym 1988, 77). Poirot's character, with his appearance, chatty dialogues, and kind of arrogance, does not really fit into the romanticized English village, which is the main scene in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* and in other Christie's early novels, and not even into the Modern English period as it is shown in *Third Girl* and other late novels.

2.3. Poirot's companions

Besides the great detective, one more significant character appears in Christie's novels: the sidekick. A close companion is someone who stands alongside the detective during the investigation. Even in this sense Christie was inspired by her predecessor Doyle when she applies "the Watson model" for Poirot's companions. The typical Watson is different from the clever detective, admiring the detective's skills and intelligence. Someone who remains in the background and in spite of his simple thinking he tries to follow, maybe even compete with, the famous detective.

In the first two novels, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* and *The Murder on the Links*, Captain Hastings, the typically "Watson" sidekick, appears. I consider Dr. Sheppard, who is the narrator in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, the second companion. He is not a typical detective companion in the sense that he is not only the narrator but also the murderer and thanks to this character Christie breaks the rules of *Ten Commandments of Detection*. Finally I present a highly crucial and complex female companion in this thesis, the writer and Poirot's friend Ariadne Oliver. She appears in the late novels that I selected for this analysis: *Third Girl*, *Hallowe'en Party* and *Elephants Can Remember*.

"Mon ami Hastings!" Poirot exclaims repeatedly. Captain Arthur Hastings first appears in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, where he is the narrator of the story. He is invalided home from the Front home so he travels to Styles in Essex, where he soon meets his old friend Hercule Poirot. Hastings is in many ways different from the foreign detective endowed with reason and logic. In a way similar to Doyle's Watson, he records Poirot's investigations. Grym writes that Hastings is an incurably naive romantic and Poirot confidently parades his intelligence before him (1988,

171). Poirot often refers to Hastings's inability to remember the facts and connect details in their investigation.

“Mon Dieu, mon ami, but use your little grey cells. Is it not obvious? Mr. Renauld wrote his letter. Without blotting it, he re-read it carefully. Then, not on impulse, but deliberately, he added those last words, and blotted the sheet” (Christie 2001b, 22).

He blames Hastings's inability of using the little gray cells. Although Poirot admits that Hastings is not so bright, he analyzes his cases with him. He allows Hastings to think on his own and he urges him to look at the case logically and find the smallest details. Sometimes it happens that Hastings's reflections help Poirot to discover a track which leads him to the murderer.

Hastings is an average intelligent common man and he is a kind of connection between the reader and a brilliant detective. It is shown here that Christie followed the genre's rules in many ways and in this case she observes Knox's rule number nine: “The sidekick of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal from the reader any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader” (James 2009, 19). Most of Hastings's judgments are wrong and mostly up to the end Poirot explains him how he should proceed with his investigation.

Poirot works with a variety of details, which sometimes appear unnecessary to Hastings. In *The Murder on the Links* Hastings even begins to doubt Poirot's abilities when a young Parisian detective Giraud works with them on the case. Hastings is excited by his methods and admires how he grovels on his knees in hope

to find even the smallest proof on the ground. That is what Poirot vigorously rejects in his quest and in the end it is again Poirot who solves the mystery.

Hastings represents the traditional English man who is interested in beautiful women. Poirot is well aware of his weakness. In *Murder on the Links*, Hastings impedes Poirot's investigation of the girl, as he falls in love with her and wants to protect her with false testimony. Despite this difficulty Poirot manages to solve the murder, and Hastings marries the girl. Grym states that Hastings's naivety began to obstruct the author so much that the naive simpleton was sent with his new wife to Argentina. He returns as an admired friend in Poirot's declining years when Hastings becomes the only person who finds out Poirot's last tragic secret in *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case* (1988, 171). Poirot feels the lack of his "Watson" and he mentions him in certain cases: "My friend Hastings, he of whom I told you, used to say of me that I was the human oyster. But he was unjust" (Christie 2002b, 308).

Doctor James Sheppard becomes an unofficial assistant of Poirot in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. He replaces the character of Hastings here, who stays in Argentina. Knight claims that *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is the mystery which established Christie at the top of profession (2004, 212).

Sheppard has some common features with Hastings. He is also an English gentleman and even the reliable and respected doctor in King's Abbot where the story takes place. He is not married and he lives with his beloved sister Caroline. Caroline is the opposite of her brother because she is full of curiosity, knowing everything, hearing everything and she is known as a local gossip girl. Christie mentions in *An Autobiography* that she had been her favorite character in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and she became the model for Miss Marple (1993, 448): in the subsequent stories.

Sheppard is an intelligent man which is obvious from his writing and it is also evident that he is in favor with townspeople. They appreciate him and trust him and they go for not only doctoral but also personal advice to his office. Poirot becomes a new neighbor of Sheppard and the murder of their friend Roger Ackroyd brings them together even closer. The doctor appeals to Poirot who even compares him with Hastings: “You must have indeed been sent from the good God to replace my friend Hastings (Christie 2002b, 130).

Sheppard might seem to be somewhat mysterious from the beginning. His description of the investigation is different from Hastings’s. In so far as Hastings was more personal and Sheppard appears to be more restrained in his own judgment. Readers discover the reason of Sheppard’s restraint at the end of the story: the reason of his reserve is in his guilt, as he is the culprit and also the blackmailer.

Even after uncovering some of the evidence it is still hard to believe that the elderly country doctor with a penchant for electronics is capable of murder. In this case, Poirot abandons public revealing of the killer, and the doctor is indicated the only way how to protect his beloved sister from the embarrassment and rumors which would torment her. The only solution is suicide. In the last chapter of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Sheppard confesses to commit the murder and he also describes all his thoughts during the terrible crime: “I have no pity for myself either. So let it be veronal. But I wish Hercule Poirot had never retired from work and come here to grow vegetable marrows” (Christie 2002b, 368).

The last assistants, whom I mention in my thesis is the successful mystery writer Mrs. Ariadne Oliver. She appears alongside Poirot in *Cards on the Table* (1936) for the first time. Oliver does the investigation together with Poirot in six

stories and in *The Pale Horse* she is the main character. I analyze the last three stories in which Oliver appears in Chapter 3.2.

Oliver is a middle-aged woman who is, similar to Poirot, an eccentric person. Her “untidy fashion” style and ruffled gray curly hair, which she loves experimenting with, are in contrast to Poirot’s hairstyle and appearance. Knight captures her description very well in *Crime Fiction*, describing Oliver as a self-mocking erratic novelist (2004, 90).

Oliver is also a very spontaneous lady who is not afraid to hunt for evidence. In the book *Elephants Can Remember* she proves her concealed capability of questioning people where she pretends to have normal conversations with old friends. Despite the differences she and Poirot are friends and they complement each other during investigation. Poirot says about her in *Hallowe’en Party*:

“It a pity,” he murmured to himself, “that she is so scatty. And yet, she has originality of mind. It could be that I am going to enjoy what she is coming to tell me. It could be -” he reflected a minute - “that it may take a great deal of the evening and that it will all be excessively foolish. Eh bien, one must take one's risks in life.” (Christie 2001a, 29)

Thanks to writing mysterious stories, Oliver has a good knowledge of criminal ideas, although she only writes about it. However, it usually happens that her imagination is too wild and therefore Poirot must guide her slightly in the investigation. Mrs. Oliver is again such a link between the reader and the brilliant detective: it is easier for the readers to follow Poirot’s thought processes through her intelligence, common sense and female intuition.

It can be said that Oliver is a sort of connection between Poirot and the modern times. Poirot left the Belgian police long time ago and many things changed and thanks to Oliver he becomes is able to see and understand more the customs of new era as in *Third Girl*, where Oliver explains how nowadays young people live, because Poirot has not heard about the term third girl. It is also obvious that she tries to protect an old friend of knowing that the younger generation does not recognize his name and that he is not as famous as he used to be.

Mrs. Oliver is regarded as a humorous self-caricature of Christie. In *Postmodern Fiction* (2004) Brian McHale writes that mise-en-abyme is determined by three criteria: first is a nested or embedded representation, occupying a narrative level inferior to that of the primary, diegetic narrative world. Secondly, he writes this nested representation *resembles* something at level of the primary, diegetic world and thirdly he says “this “something” that it resembles must constitute some salient and continuous aspect of the primary world, salient and continuous enough that we are willing to say the nested representation *reproduces* or *duplicates* the primary representation as a whole” (McHale 2004, 124).

Oliver is Christie’s mise-en-abyme character, a small copy of herself, and Christie plays jokes with it because Christie and Oliver are similar in several aspects. Both are detective fiction authors and members of the Detection Club. Oliver is known for a series of mysteries featuring her Finnish detective Sven Hjerson, while Christie is known for her Belgian detective Poirot. They both love apples, even though Mrs. Oliver loves them only until she discovers the murder in *Hallowe’en Party* where apples are a part of a children game. Both invented a detective of a foreign country of which they do not know much about and,

interestingly enough, they both started to hate this detective. Analogously, in *Third Girl* Mrs. Oliver says: “And they say how much they love my awful detective Sven Hjerson. If they knew how I hate him! But my publisher always says I’m not to say so” (Christie 2002c, 26).

Similarly Christie dislikes Poirot after a while. She explains in *An Autobiography* that she kept using Poirot in her books because her editors wanted her to write about Poirot (1993, 490). She also admits that she prefers Ms. Marple to Poirot. But, as Grym observes, the audience – and perhaps the author – does not need to love, only to respect the detective, his methods and achievements: “it is not necessary to love Poirot. It is sufficient when you admire, adore and acclaim him for his gray little cells which he reminds very often with his pride” (1988, 124).

3. Analysis of the early and late stories

In the third part of my thesis I compare and contrast the differences between the early and late Christie’s novels. I am going to introduce the main characters and suspects of each story. I also focus on the possibilities of Poirot’s investigation reflected in the early and late novels with regard to social and technological changes. The three early works I selected were published in the years 1920-1926 and they bring attention primarily to the group of suspects and the sidekick’s involvement in the investigation. The three late novels were published between 1966 and 1972 and the difference of forty years is noticeable not only in the social situation and technical achievements, but also in the moral consciousness of society.

The detective Poirot slightly changes his investigation and his methods, but he always abounds in using his little gray cells and he is much more observant than his companions, or other participants. He goes back to old cases and uses psychology

which is one of Poirot's strong points. His specific appearance remains unchanged for years but it has to be noted that Poirot uses conveniences of the time.

The most important change in the novels, in my view, is that although Christie does not attempt to outline the history of Britain or that of Europe, she portrays the habits and morals of the society quite realistically in her novels.

3.1. The Mysterious Affair at Styles, Murder on the Links, The Murder of Roger Ackroyd

Early Christie's works belong to the interwar period. The First World War accelerated the emancipation of women and women in England won the right to vote. The influence of the war, however, is hardly noticeable in her stories. Her slight disappointment with the post-war years may be a reason for this; she asserts in *An Autobiography*: "One is left with the horrible feeling now that war settles nothing; that to win a war is as disastrous as to lose one" (1993, 520). Thus, Christie seems to avoid mentioning the war in her early novels.

All three stories are connected in the setting, which is a romanticized cozy English village. James asserts that the typical Christie's village is rooted in nostalgia, due to its ordered hierarchy: the wealthy squire (often with a new young wife of mysterious antecedence), the retired irascible colonel, the village doctor and the district nurse, the chemist (useful for the purchase of poison), the gossiping spinsters behind their lace curtains, the parson in his vicarage, all moving predictably in their social hierarchy like pieces on a chessboard (2009, 30). This structure of characters is highly noticeable in the first three novels.

Christie's pleasure of small towns and villages is indicated in all the three early novels. *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* is set in England countryside during the First World War in Essex at Styles Court. Poirot appears here for the first time when

he accidentally meets his old friend Hastings, who stays at Styles with the Cavendish. *Murder on the Links* is set in the French countryside beside a small town Merlinville in Villa Geneive. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* takes place in a small town, King's Abbot, where everybody knows each other.

James's emphasis on hierarchy becomes evident in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* – but a crucial difference appears in a gender roles. She says that the victim is usually a wealthy squire, but here it is a wealthy widow Emily Cavendish, who inherited all the property and a life estate in Styles after her first husband Mr. Cavendish. Emily remarried to her second husband Alfred Inglethorp, who is twenty years younger than her. The gender change from the central major male position to a female one signifies Christie's emancipation and even though she writes about the old England, she shows a better position of women in the society.

The motive for murders is the inheriting property or gaining the money in all three novels. The inheritor in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* is either Emily's new husband Alfred, or her stepson John. However the new will, which Mrs. Inglethorp writes before her death, cannot be found. During the detective work, each person living at Styles seems to be suspicious at least once. For example, Cynthia's fingerprints are discovered on the bottle of Emily's evening medicine, Lawrence who contradicts the open door to Cynthia's room to protect her, or Mary Cavendish, who secretly sneaks into the Mrs. Emily's room at the moment when the poison begins to work. But Poirot uses his psychology and analytical methods in his investigation and he is not misled by a false hatred of Alfred to Evelyn, who kills Emily.

The murdered person in *Murder on the Links* is a wealthy man, Paul Renauld. The murderess is Marthe, an expectant wife of Jack, Mr. Renauld's son. Marthe overhears the Renauld's conversation about the planned escape, and she knows that

she would lose all Jack's money. She has to kill before the Renauds realize their plan. Hastings cannot understand how Poirot solves the problem and he requires explanation:

“But what possible motive could Marthe have for murdering Mr. Renaud?” I argued. “What motive! Money! Renaud was a millionaire several times over, and at his death (or so she and Jack believed) half that vast fortune would pass to his son.” (Christie 2001b, 308)

In the third story, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, the reason of killing is money again, even if it is not the heritage. The victim in this case is again a rich country gentleman, who is found killed after dinner in his office. As we can see, all the victims are wealthy and the main point of Poirot's investigation becomes the quest for someone who needs money or inherits the property.

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd differs from other stories in one aspect – it breaks the rules of detective fiction. The narrator of the story, Dr. Sheppard, proves to be the murderer. Usually Christie follows the rules exemplary in her stories, for example the criminal is mentioned at the beginning of the story like Alfred in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* or Martha in *Murder on the Links*. Dr. Sheppard is also mentioned in the first chapter because he narrates the story. The role of a not very clever Watson is filled by Hastings. But as Grym writes, Christie provoked a fierce debate because she gave the murderer the opportunity to tell the story and that means allowing him to conceal important information, keep denying and telling a version of events that is convenient for him (1988, 178).

For readers, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is different from the first two novels regarding sidekicks. Hastings, the narrator and sidekick from previous stories disappears in Argentina and the narrator's place is covered with the local doctor. Poirot cooperates with him as if Hastings was on his place. Poirot progresses in his investigations the same way as in other cases and he uses his companions' help. As Dr. Sheppard lives in the town of the murder, he allows him being more active during the investigation knowing the local people very well. On the other hand Hastings seems to be a mere spectator in Poirot's investigation.

Poirot shows his great analytic ability in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. The murderer is unknown for us until the penultimate chapter, in where Poirot admits that he suspects the doctor from the beginning due to time discrepancies of how long it takes from the house to the gate. But the reader has no chance to read Poirot's thoughts during the reading: Christie breaks here another rule because a rule says that the detective is bound to declare any clues which he might have discover.

Following the crime, the group of family or close friends of murdered person, becomes suspicious. Mostly all of them hide some personal problems such as Elizabeth Russell in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, who is secretly visited by her drug addicted son, or the financial crisis which affected, for example, Madame Daubreuil, in *Murder on the Links*, or some secret love for another member of the group, such as Lawrence Cavendish's love to Miss Cynthia in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. James also emphasizes that with a Christie mystery no suspect can safely be eliminated, even the narrator of the story (2009, 31).

Early Christie's novels are examples of morals in interwar England. English countryside interlaced with gentlemen, ladies behave, speak and dress elegantly. Nevertheless, in this idyllic rural landscape, a motive for murder can be found.

3.2. Third Girl, Hallowe'en Party, Elephants Can Remember

Cultural and social revolt of young people in the sixties began against the conservative life of their parents, social hierarchy, and the moral norms of that time. It contributed to the popularity of drugs, changing family structure or how people live which is observable in Christie's work. The change that society has undergone throughout the twentieth century is visible in her novels. From the smooth gentleman of old England, Christie switched the characters to hippie appearance with long hair and unshaved faces. The model of old England is slowly disappearing.

The setting of the typical countryside is often transferred to London. We meet Poirot in his London apartment where he lives only with his servant. Christie also spent much of her life in London where she gained the inspiration for writing. Poirot's sidekick, a novelist Ariadne Oliver, also lives in London. Even though *Hallowe'en Party* is set in the countryside, the investigations in the other two novels take place in London and its neighborhood.

In the countryside the transformation of Old England becomes obvious also in the social hierarchy. In the *Hallowe'en Party*, Oliver stays with her friend, a single mother Judith and her daughter Miranda - the family structure is not followed as strongly as in the early novels, where the tradition of full family is tangible. The visible correspondence with early novels is in the rural areas and the small group of suspects. All the neighbors know each other and Poirot is able to use his dialogue technique in the investigation. Poirot associates with local people and as he gains more information about them he begins to disentangle the social nets which lead him to the solution.

James states that in Christie's novels the changes in contemporary life are mostly shown by the inconveniences suffered by the characters in obtaining servants,

good service from tradesmen or maintaining their houses (2009, 39). Children are not educated by the best home teachers, and in *Hallowe'en Party*, superintended Spence deplores the way that girls are not longer looked after by their aunts and older sisters and that “more girls nowadays marry wrong ‘uns than they ever used to in my times” (2001a, 51).

The moral consciousness of society changed. Old known poisons were replaced with various kinds of drugs, such as LSD. For example, in *Third Girl*, the girl is highly confused throughout the story, because people pretending to be her parents serve her drugs without her knowledge because they want to gain her inherited money and make her feel that she is an insane person. Moral changes also concern sexuality - one of the first examined questions with murder is mostly whether there is a sexual motive or not. Mrs. Oliver is surprised when she meets a kissing couple in front of the bathroom in *Hallowe'en Party*:

The couple paid no attention to her. They sighed and snuggled. Mrs. Oliver wondered how old they were. The boy was fifteen, perhaps, the girl little more twelve, although the development of her chest seemed certainly on the mature side (Christie 2001a, 16).

Poirot's detective work changes due to progress in the technology and in using conveniences of that time. In the early novels he uses telegraph or newspaper for his work. In *Mysterious Affair at Style* he lets change the headline in a newspaper which helps him reveal the murderer. In the late novels he utilizes the telephone quite often in communication with Mrs. Oliver. He replaces trains with cars or taxi and in *Hallowe'en Party* he equates himself with a computer:

“Yes, yes, I play the part of the computer. One feeds in the information -”
“And supposing you come up with all the wrong answers?” said Mrs. Oliver.
“That would be impossible,” said Hercule Poirot. “Computers do not do that
sort of a thing” (Christie 2001a, 67).

The social revolt of young generation is observable with the characters’ appearance. The way how young people dress is more casual and they are uninterested in the elegance which irritate the older generation. Mrs. Oliver notes in *Third Girl*:

They probably look like mods or rockers or beatniks or whatever they call these chaps nowadays with the long hair and dirty nails. I’ve seen more than one of them prowling about. One doesn’t like to say ‘Who the devil are you?’ You never know which sex they are, which is embarrassing (Christie 2002c, 200).

The change is obvious and the difference between the early novels and the late novels is also manifested in the English society. Christie’s description of each time period is very detailed, rendering her novels highly realistic.

The question of money and heritage is not as much emphasizes in the late novels as in the early ones; nevertheless, money usually plays an important part of the motive. For example, in *Third Girl*, where a couple kill and pretend to be someone else for gaining money or in *Elephants Can Remember* where a mother denies his stepson love and marriage because then she would lose his money. But

money is mentioned only in the background and it usually does not dominate in the investigation.

4. Conclusion

In this bachelor thesis I decided to compare and contrast Christie's early and late periods. I selected the first three Poirot novels – *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), *Murder on the Links* (1923), *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) and the last three Poirot written novels – *Third Girl* (1966), *Hallowe'en Party* (1969), *Elephants Can Remember* (1972).

Firstly I outlined the history and the invention of the genre and introduced basic units of the genre based on a study of the Czech critic Jan Cigánek. It was necessary to mention the rules for writing detective fiction, because on the basis of these rules I proved how Christie modifies them.

In the second part of this thesis I described Poirot, his appearance and methods of investigation. At the beginning of the chapter I briefly described Christie's life and how her life experiences affected her novels. I also introduced Poirot's three companions – Hastings, Dr. Sheppard and Mrs. Oliver - who appear in the selected novels.

The relationship between Hastings and Poirot is largely based on Hasting's admiration of Poirot. The author shows the contrast between the detective and his companion, and so Christie follows the model of Holmes's assistant Watson. The relationship between Sheppard and Poirot is, however, distinctive. The readers think that Poirot considers the doctor his friend – the new Hastings. However, in the last chapter, it turns out that the doctor is guilty. Therefore, the relationship between them cannot be defined as friendship, but Poirot's tactics of being as close as possible to the enemy. Poirot has a completely different relationship with Oliver – he takes her as a close friend.

The third part of this thesis consists of the analysis of the early and the late novels. I tried to prove how Old England changed throughout the century and how the Modern England is portrayed in contrast to the old times. I also described the technical changes and how Poirot can apply technology in the early novels as well as in the late novels.

Last but not least, this thesis should confirm that Agatha Christie is a prominent author, who has fundamentally affected the development of detective fiction.

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