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The “Whydunit” in Agatha Christie’s *A Pocket Full of Rye*

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Abstract

Crime fiction is a very popular genre that is worthy of exploration and analysis. It dates as far back as the earliest crime fiction of Thomas Skinner Sturr’s anonymous *Richmond* in 1827, up to the present. In fact, twenty-first century statistics show that the most sold novels are detective fiction. Accordingly, the present study proposes to examine a novel by the queen of crime fiction, Agatha Christie (1890-1976). Her influence on the golden age of the crime mystery is highly considered due to her innovative creativity and improvement of the classic whodunit stories. Christie has developed the whodunit genre through her stunning plots in which she had made it possible for anyone to commit a crime; a sweet son or daughter, a dear husband, and even a gentle-looking grandmother. Christie breached the conventional rules of the genre by introducing puzzle-like plots. Her intricate plots deserve serious recognition. One of her most famous whodunit novels is *A Pocket Full of Rye* (1953). This mystery fiction is saliently known for its nursery rhyme crime in which a murderer follows in his crime a popular and traditional song. Henceforth, the psychological consciousness of the culprit and the hidden motives behind his serial crimes need to be deeply analyzed. On that account, this non-thesis proposes to look at the “Whydunit” rather than the by now exhausted “Whodunit.” Consequently, using the psychological approach to literature, this study investigates the “why” of the murders committed rather than the “who.” The intention of this study is to mark a revival of interest in this now-forgotten writer.

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**“The Truth May Well Turn Out To Be More Stranger Than we Think”:
The “Whydunit” in Agatha Christie’s *A Pocket Full of Rye***

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A Non-Thesis Paper Submitted to the Department of English Language and Literature of
the College of Languages and Translation in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Master of Arts Degree in English Literature

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Dedication

All praise is due to Allah. Then, I am especially thankful to my mother who gave me the confidence to write this non-thesis paper.

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Abstract

Crime fiction is a very popular genre that is worthy of exploration and analysis. It dates as far back as the earliest crime fiction of Thomas Skinner Sturr's anonymous *Richmond* in 1827, up to the present. In fact, twenty-first century statistics show that the most sold novels are detective fiction.

Accordingly, the present study proposes to examine a novel by the queen of crime fiction, Agatha Christie (1890-1976). Her influence on the golden age of the crime mystery is highly considered due to her her innovative creativity and improvement of the classic whodunit stories. Christie has developed the whodunit genre through her stunning plots in which she had made it possible for anyone to commit a crime; a sweet son or daughter, a dear husband, and even a gentle-looking grandmother. Christie breached the conventional rules of the genre by introducing puzzle-like plots. Her intricate plots deserve serious recognition. One of her most famous whodunit novels is *A Pocket Full of Rye* (1953). This mystery fiction is saliently known for its nursery rhyme crime in which a murderer follows in his crime a popular and traditional song. Henceforth, the psychological consciousness of the culprit and the hidden motives behind his serial crimes need to be deeply analyzed. On that account, this non-thesis proposes to look at the

“Whydunit” rather than the by now exhausted "Whodunit." Consequently, using the psychological approach to literature, this study investigates the "why" of the murders committed rather than the "who." The intention of this study is to mark a revival of interest in this now-forgotten writer.

Keywords: Christie, Whydunit, *A Pocket Full of Rye*, human Psyche, nursery rhyme, Striple murder

ملخص

أدب الجريمة هو نوع أدبي ذو شعبية واسعة وهو جدير بالاكشاف و التحليل. و يرجع هذا النوع من القصص الإجرامية إلى أوائل قصص توماس سكينر ستر المجهول ريشموند(١٨٢٧)، و حتى الوقت الحاضر . في الواقع، تشير إحصاءات القرن الواحد والعشرين إلى أن الروايات الأكثر مبيعاً هي القصص البوليسية لذلك، تقترح الدراسة الحالية دراسة رواية للكاتبة أجاثا كريستي (١٨٩٠-١٩٧٦) ، ملكة الروايات الإجرامية. و لأجاثا كريستي تأثير كبير على العصر الذهبي للقصص الغامضة و ذلك من خلال إبداعها الإبتكاري و تطويرها لقصص البحث عن القاتل(Whodunit) . فطورت أجاثا كريستي هذا النوع الأدبي من قصص البحث عن المجرم من خلال الحبكة المذهلة لقصصها حيث أنها جعلت من الممكن لأي شخص أن يرتكب الجريمة، كالإبن الحبيب أو الإبنة، والزوج العزيز وحتى الجدة ذات المظهر الطيب. اخترقت كريستي القواعد التقليدية لهذا النوع الأدبي من خلال ابتكارها لحبكات قصصية شبيهة بآلهة. لذلك فإن الحبكة القصصية المعقدة لرواياتها تستحق التقدير. و أحد قصصها الغامضة الأكثر شيوعاً و التي يبحث فيها عن القاتل هي الجيب الممتلئ بالحبوب (١٩٥٣). تعرف هذه الرواية الغامضة بشكل واسع بأغنية الأطفال التقليدية التي يرتكب القاتل جرائمه من خلالها. لذلك فإن الوعي النفسي و الدوافع الخفية خلف ارتكاب الجاني لسلسلة الجرائم تحتاج للتحليل العميق. على هذا الحساب، تقترح هذه الأطروحة دراسة لماذا يقتل المجرم كنوع أدبي أكثر من قصص البحث عن القاتل التي استنفدت حتى وقتنا الحاضر. نتيجة لتلك الدراسة، من خلال استخدام النهج النفسي للأدب، فإن هذه الدراسة تستقصي لماذا ارتكبت الجرائم بدلاً من البحث عن هوية القاتل. و القصد من هذه الدراسة هو إبراز الإهتمام المتجدد لهذه الكاتبة المنسية.

**“The Truth May Will Turn Out To Be More Stranger Than we Think”:
The “Whydunit” in Agatha Christie’s *A Pocket Full of Rye***

Sing a song of sixpence, a pocket full of rye,
Four and twenty blackbirds baked in pie.
When the pie was opened the birds began to sing.
Wasn’t a dainty dish to set before the king?

The king was in his counting house, counting his money,
The queen was in the parlour eating bread and honey,
The maid was in the garden hanging out the clothes,
When there came a little dickey bird and nipped off her nose.
(Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 113)

Nursery rhyme is the essence of Agatha Christie’s *A Pocket Full of Rye* (1953). Her rhymed detective novel reflected her fascination for the musical harmony of poetic crime; “Agatha Christie also acquired a reputation as the team’s chronicler of events in verses which became known as ‘Agatha’s Odes’” (Osborne, 1982, p. 262). The captivating combination of crime fiction and poetic rhythm compelled Christie to compose an enthralling nursery rhyme novel compounding the innocent and childish song with morbid and vicious crimes – a sort of work no one had ever written before. “The attraction is obvious-the juxtaposition of the childlike and the chilling, the twisting of the mundane into the macabre. But it was Agatha Christie who made it her own and exploited it more comprehensively than any other

writer.” (Curran *Secret Notebooks*, 2009, p.p. 105-6)

Moreover, because Christie is interested in bringing traditional aspects of English customs to her fictional works, *A Pocket Full of Rye*'s a storyline with the cadence of the English nursery rhyme “Sing a song of sixpence,” “dedicated” to her editor “Bruce Ingram” (Curran *Murder in the Making*, 2011, p. 68). Although intricate and convoluted in its plot, her crime mystery poem is considered a passionate whodunit short story of the 1950s, where the murderer follows the patterns of nursery rhymes in his crimes. “*A Pocket Full of Rye* is one of Christie’s best novels, with all classic ingredients of a Miss Marple murder.” (Wagstaff and Stephen, 2004, p. 204)

In *A Pocket Full of Rye* (1953) , the story opens with the murder of “the king” Mr. Fortescue, found dead in his office with his full pocket of rye. The second death regards “the queen” Mrs. Adele Fortescue in her home “eating bread and honey”. The last and most distressing serial murder is that of Miss Marple’s parlour maid, found strangled with clothes pegs clipped over her nose to follow the theme of “there came a little dickey bird and nipped off her nose” (Sanders and Len, 1982, p. 279). The act of murdering Miss Marple’s parlour maid through an undignified death leads Miss Marple to pursue solving the rhythmic puzzle of the triple crimes of Yewtree Lodge. Sanders and Len (1982) made this clear when they asserted that “It is at that

point that Miss Marple angered by the death of the innocent maid, and sensing that the murderer has chosen the nursery rhyme as a theme” vows to seek justice (279). Marple wants to avenge Gladys’ murder and solve the mystery of the triple crime following the nursery rhyme of sixpence.

Agatha Christie wrote *A Pocket Full of Rye* (1953) cleverly in that the readers’ perception of the identity of the murderer develops through the discernment and intuition of Marple. It is also Miss Marple’s furtive investigation that untangles the tricky crimes of the culprit, who seems to have an alibi. “It is a trick [Christie] uses repeatedly, initially concentrating the suspicions so firmly on one character that the reader discounts them. The murderer is not at the scene of the crime or appears to be the intended victim.” (Cawthorne, 2014, p. 9) In addition, the real identity of the killer is at the core of whodunit stories, and in Christie’s nursery rhyme murder tends to logically reveal the motives of the killer and why he committed his crimes as a part of natural human behaviour: “The key, she decided, was not to have an unusual murder for an unusual motive--‘that did not appeal to me artistically,’ she said-but rather to construct a riddle” (Cawthorne, 2014, p. 8).

Moreover, the queen of crime fiction, Agatha Christie, was interested in observing the hidden psychology of real life human beings. Despite Christie’s introversion and self-absorbed reticence (Thompson, 1988, p. 138),

she created successful and natural images of her fictional characters.

According to the historian Wedgwood, “[She] always plays fair; her puzzles work out with near plausibility and no loose ends; her social settings her characters and her dialogue are always accurately observed. There is no better all-around craftsman in the field” (qtd. in Osborne, 1982, p. 264). Real crime cases that she has been familiar with through her reading of the local press influenced her work, which became obvious when she was taking care of her Great-aunt Margret wherein a duty of hers was to read her aunt newspaper reports regarding recent murder trials (Cawthorne, 2014, p.8).

She revealed that within every criminal mind there are real life motives that would oblige her culprits to commit their crimes without staining their hands in ruthless, sadistic and cold-blooded murders. Indeed, her “inter-fiction is characterized by its absence of violence, and by its curiously sanitized and bloodless corpses” (Scaggs, 2005, p. 54). In consideration of Christie’s reality in the depiction of her sentimental characters, the verisimilitude of her characters is gripping. Cawthorne (2014) claims that “Neither did [Christie] believe in giving characters exotic motivations. Her characters are all driven by normal human emotions” (9).

By and large, her bloody-minded culprits administer poisons to their unsuspecting victims. It was Christie’s experience of dispensary that inspired

her to write her extraordinary murder mystery and storylines full of poisonous schemes to let her killers wriggle out of their crimes.

Gill (1990) states that:

What is important for the history of detective fiction is that part-time work in the boring but sociable dispensary left Agatha Christie with time on her hands. It also gave her a working knowledge of poisons. In the anxiety and austerity of wartime Britain, Christie's mind was eager for pleasurable relief and occupation, and she came up with the project of writing a mystery novel, based upon a particularly ingenious way to administer poison. (p.p. 31-32)

Also, Christie read Alexander Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844-5) early on, which includes within its storyline the administration of poison and toxicology as a means of vengeance. That story inspired her to insert the deceptive maneuver of poisoning victims in her murder mystery (Cawthorne, 2014, p. 3). As an example of Christie's exploitation of poison in her detective story, in *A Pocket Full of Rye* the murderer kills two of his victims by poisoning their food. The first instance is Mr. Fortescue who the murderer poisons with taxine at breakfast. The second is Mrs. Fortescue, who the murderer kills with cyanide during teatime (Sova, 1996, p. 269).

Although Christie is considered the queen of murder mystery, some critics turn a blind eye to her other endeavours, causing much of her work some neglect. Nevertheless, “she is very famous” (Gill, 1990, p. 10). Despite her fame, Gill (1990) asserts that “It is Christie’s relentless productivity over almost sixty years, her accelerating sales and ever- increasing fame, her personal inviolability to misfortune and disaster, that have made her so unrewarding a biographical subject” (10).

Many have described Christie as the most prolific detective author of all time. According to Edwards (2015):

Today Agatha Christie remains, almost half a century after her death, a household name. More than that, she has become a global brand. Big business. Two billion (or is it four billion?- estimate vary, and at such a stratospheric level, it scarcely seems to matter) copies of her books have been sold, and she has been translated more often than any other author. (57)

However, Christie has been criticized for her racial stereotypes in her writings. Osborne (1982) proclaims that:

In 1939, the *Ten Little Niggers* gave little or no offence, at least in Great Britain. In today’s violent world, it appears to

be thought by many to be more reprehensible to refer to niggers, yids, wops, wogs, poms, proofs, dagos, japs, dykes and so on, than to murder representatives of such categories of people, “Nigger,” an English or Irish dialect pronunciation of “negro” is no longer acceptable. (169)

On the other hand, Cawthorne (2014) disputes the charge of Christie’s racism by claiming that:

Readers should be warned of the casual racism of the era. The books abound with slighting remarks about Jews, “dagos,” “Chinks,” black people and foreigners ... so we should now view these racial slights in a post-modernist light and grow up about the N word. Yes, she called a book *Ten Little Niggers*. The word comes up in other books too. It was offensive then and remain so. But we cannot white-wash the past, if you will excuse the pun. And it was not as if Christie was particularly racist herself. (2)

Cawthorne (2014) continues to state that some have reprimanded Christie in both her anti-Semitism and in her hostility for Catholics: “Christie was also pilloried, by the Anti-Defamation League among others, for anti-Semitism in her novels, sadly not uncommon in the works of that time. She was also

criticized for disparaging remarks about Catholics, also there didn't seem to be any" (34). Even so, Christie's ardent readers around the world aesthetically appreciate her artistry, regardless of the casual racism found in much of her work.

Notwithstanding such casual racism, Christie's works outsold all of the most famous detective authors' bestsellers, and no one ever surpassed Christie's productivity. It seems that "only Shakespeare and the Bible have outsold her" (Sova, 1996, p. 8). She is a prominent figure in the crime fiction genre for all ages. Nothing in Christie's life obstructed her from writing her innovative novels, which attained astonishing publicity for decades. Edwards (2015) declares that "Neither travel nor romance slowed Christie's productivity as a writer. Like so many of her colleagues in the Detection Club, she was a workaholic. The quality of her writing was mixed – an inevitable consequence of being prolific – but she tried new methods on a frequent basis" (154).

As a result of Christie's intrepid writings and virtuosity, her name is ubiquitous, especially when speaking of the whodunit genre: "Agatha Christie is, of course, the Queen of Crime, the Duchess of Death. Her books are largely whodunits" (Cawthorne, 2014, p. 3). Overall, Agatha Christie is exceptionally gifted in portraying brilliant whodunit plots and genuinely

unobvious culprits. Her vivid imagination and creative power for constructing riddles is unsurpassed. Her bestsellers have been performed as TV movies and manipulated as film screenplay. *A Pocket Full of Rye* was performed as an episode of one of Miss Marple's series and considered as Christie's unique whodunit Nursery Rhyme. The work's polyphonic combination of labyrinth whodunit and psychological howdunit conciliates Christie's contribution to the evolution of crime fiction during the Golden Age.

Christie's fascination with real life human motives and inner thoughts of criminal minds influenced her works of crime fiction. This non-thesis explores this fact about the author through employing both the biographical approach as well as the psychological approach to literature. The paper will discuss in the upcoming chapter Christie's biographical accounts of her inner life and how they were involved in her contributions to the development of the crime fiction genre. Also, the chapter deliberates Christie's penchant for composing lyrical poems and writing murder mystery stories. This means exploring the biographical and historical aspects of her forgotten life, while chapter two will emphasize the hidden motives of Christie's murderers and why they commit their crimes by casting particular light on Christie's novel *A Pocket Full of Rye*. Furthermore, this study will apply Freudian theories of

the human psyche in order to better understand Christie's culprits.

Consequently, a new perspective combines the psychological approach and biographical/historical through examining Christie's *A Pocket Full of Rye*. The conclusion will urge future researchers to explore other aspects in the author's fiction and to view Christie as a twentieth century writer with twenty-first century ideas.

Chapter I: Agatha Christie as Crime Fiction Aficionado

The book's a symbol now, a token
Like an eagle, or a thistle,
Gleaming and bright, intact, unbroken
My jewel! My Agatha Crystal! (Siebenheller, 1986, p. 348)

This quote reveals critics' opinions of Agatha Christie. Siebenheller (1986) believes that Christie's artistry in inaugurating her harmonized clue-puzzle narrative reflects her vivacity, deserving an entire poem. It is indeed Christie's gift of writing labyrinthine crime fiction that challenges one's mind to solve the tricky riddles of her storylines.

Furthermore, the queen of crime fiction, Christie, is one of the Golden Age detective authors who proliferated crime mystery novels. Her prolificacy is not only representative in her books but also in the adaptations of her novels into films, whereby her works became internationally popular.

Thompson (1988) states that:

A Further paradox is that the leap into fame did not really come about the books. It was the adaptations that did the trick; particularly the stage and film versions of *And Then*

There Were None... This was Agatha's first big cinema release, a much larger-scale affair than, for instance, the 1937 British film of *Love From a Stranger*. Agatha later called it "bad"- although it was far better than the two subsequent films of the book- and it did good at the box office. (357)

Due to her pre-existing fame, the cinematic production of her literary works boosted box office revenues. Also, her own earnings and popularity increased, helping her to achieve international success. Because Christie's crime fiction fascinated a plethora of admirers around the world she tends to sustain her fame through adaptations of her writings in "films" and "television" (Gill, 1990, p. 205). Among her dramatized works are Miss Marple's stories, performed as television series on TV in the 1960s. They were rather poorly made British films starring "the popular English comedy actress Rutherford as Jane Marple" (Osborne, 1982, p. 251). However, *A Pocket Full of Rye* is one of Miss Marple's remarkable episodes, as it is derived from a work considered one of Christie's unique Nursery Rhyme novels. According to Wagstaff and Stephen (2004), the novel popularized due to "the perfect Joan Hickson," an actress who performed the role of Miss Marple (204).

In regard to the date of dramatizing this crime novel Sova (1996) states “The novel was adapted for television in 1986 by the BBC in England, and was also shown on the public Broadcasting Service in the U.S.” (286). *A Pocket Full of Rye* transcended English culture to reach Russia through a Russian adaptation of this novel, but with the alternative title *The Secret of Blackbirds*. Indeed, this version actually preceded the British version that later came about “in their Miss Marple series in 1985. It also appeared in Marple TV series in 2009” (Cawthorne, 2014, p. 177). Regarding the faithfulness to the novel, many scenes and actions were altered to suit the medium, particularly in the Marple TV (2009) version of Miss Marple’s series *A Pocket Full of Rye*.

The Marple TV (2009) screenplay of this dramatized novel is not identical to Christie’s original version due to modification of some scenes and characters. The first modified element is where the book opens with the typewriters and Mr. Fortescue’s death in his office, whereas the adaptation opens with the scene of Miss Marple’s maid, Gladys Martin, packing her luggage to leave the quiet atmosphere of St. Mary Mead village. She means instead to occupy the gothic Yewtree Lodge of Fortescue’s family. Also, the adaptation excludes Miss Ramsbottom, Mr. Fortescue’s sister-in-law, instead filling her role with Mrs. Crump who hints at Gladys’ “guilty conscious” (A

Pocket Full of Rye Marple TV series, 2009).

However, the Marple TV episode is faithfully based on Christie's novel in terms of the representation of the mysterious triple crime sequence in Yewtree Lodge and how it "fits" the Nursery Rhyme "Sing a Song of Sixpence". Also, it ends faithfully with the revelation of the murderer through Gladys' letter to Miss Marple. Of course, the title of the novel remains the same as well. On the whole, *A Pocket Full of Rye* is one of Christie's most successful and intellectual clue-puzzle stories.

Such success comes from Christie's passion for detective stories and intimate details that make her stories feel like accounts of real cases. In this regard, Edwards (2015) claims that:

[Christie] lived in her imagination, and loved writing stories and poems. Her instinct was to watch and listen to others than take centre stage herself. A keen eavesdropper, she gathered plot ideas from stray phrases in overheard conversation between strangers. She was as curious about people as she was reluctant to reveal her own thoughts. (59)

Another's inspiring spur of Christie's delightful interest in writing lucrative detective novels is interest in the works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), a nineteenth-century detective author known best for his

character Sherlock Holmes (Christie *An Autobiography*, 1977, p. 256). While this had influence, she decided to make her own distinctive whodunit without incorporating too many elements of previous works (Edwards, 2015, p. 60). Instead of the classic armchair detective of the Sherlock Holmes who investigates criminal cases while reading a newspaper sitting on his armchair in Baker Street, going out disguised or accompanied by his friend Dr. Watson (Knight, 1980, p. 76), Christie created her own sleuths who are audaciously capable of detecting domestic crimes in every house; whether it is in the suburb or countryside. Thus, her noteworthy whodunit is full of genuine characters. Among her successful works and characters, it is specifically detective Poirot and Miss Marple who are most famous and perhaps most complex, as they act as labyrinth guides to lead the readers to find out how each novel's crimes are committed. These two characters also regularly experience epiphanies as to the identity of murderers through discovering the key to solving the puzzle of each whodunit.

Regarding Poirot, Cawthorne (2014) claims that "Then [Christie] needed a memorable detective, a singular character of a type that had not been used before. At the time, Torquay was awash with Belgian refugees so Christie came up with Hercule Poirot, a retired Belgian police officer" (9). It is through Christie's scrutiny of her surrounding cultural and social aspects

that she formulated Poirot. Christie became inspired by her own sentimental nostalgia for her early childhood with her grandmother's friends, "old ladies" she had "met in so many villages" – through this inspiration came Miss Marple (Christie *An Autobiography*, 1977, p. 435). It is indeed the intelligent English maid Miss Marple who solves most of the mysterious crimes in Christie's later novels, but most memorably the triple murder in *A Pocket Full of Rye*. In this novel, Miss Marple appears to be an expert on English traditions and human conduct that lead her to decipher the morbid sequences of the serial crimes that rhyme with the English nursery rhyme of "Sing a Song."

Poirot is also interested in understanding human conduct, but it is Miss Marple who reflects Christie herself in her intellectual disposition. This is because, in the similar fashion of Poirot's interest in people, Miss Marple understands human temperament and how humans are naturally similar despite their dissimilar facade. Thus, that makes Miss Marple resembles her begetter, Christie, especially in her tendency to get to the bottom of human internal ease that seems to be externally complicated in order to "find" "the truth" (Thompson, 1988, p. 398).

Finding the truth is the main theme of all Christie's crime novels. Accordingly, the hidden motives of the murderers and the facts that reveal

the reality of crimes are what Christie's readers look for when searching for the truth. Christie molded her storylines into psychoanalytical prototypes that work toward demystifying criminal minds and hidden motives. In fact, during the Golden Age it was common for detective authors to provide insights into human psychology. Therefore, Christie tends to explore the complexity of criminal minds in her writing. Edwards (2015) asserts that the most ingenious writers are those who tend to investigate "human relationships and the complications of psychology" through the influential "work of Sigmund Freud" (7). Christie's works reveal psychological probing into the criminal mind that preceded Freud. In Christie's crime fiction, the criminal mind is driven by unconscious agents to satisfy inner needs.

In addition to her interest in the intricate psychology of criminal minds, Christie also shows an interest in murder methods, particularly poison. She is especially fascinated in plots involving poison. Through her knowledge of toxicology as a nurse, Christie declares, "I began considering what kind of a detective story I could write. Since I was surrounded by poisons, perhaps it was natural that death by poisoning should be the method I selected" (*An Autobiography*, 1977, p. 254). Christie's life experience ensured she was aware of how poisons could be administered by culprits and added in their victims' food. In *A Pocket Full of Rye* the culprit bullies the

parlour maid Gladys into mixing taxine with marmalade to poison Mr. Fortescue during his breakfast. Christie's second case involves cyanide, which the killer himself slips in Mrs. Adele's cup of tea, causing her instant death. Poison, which is not the readily apparent cause of the deaths, makes Christie's plots more complicated by making the real identity of the killer baffling. This is because of the uncertainty of the cause of death, which may be natural as far as anyone knows.

A Pocket Full of Rye exhibits a murder plot fit to the sequence of the otherwise innocent Nursery Rhyme "Sing a Song of Sixpence". The serial killer plans to poison at first "The king" Mr. Fortescue in his "counting house," but then he shifts to the second victim: the parlour maid who is strangled in the garden instead of "the queen" who is the last victim to be poisoned in the library (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p.p. 113-14). This allusion to a nursery rhyme reveals Christie's penchant for songs derived from her early childhood. Christie reminisces, "The outstanding figure in my life was Nursie. And around myself and Nursie was our special world, The Nursery" (*An Autobiography*, 1977, p. 27). Her musical ear is sharpened in "Nursery," and then echoes in her later poetic career.

Due to her premature fondness of music, Christie was motivated to compose her own poems. She declares in her *An Autobiography* (1977) "I

sent one or two poems to *The Poetry Review*. I was very pleased when I got a guinea prize. After that, I won several prizes and also had poems printed there. I felt very proud of myself when I was successful” (190). When she eventually earned herself the epithet of “Queen of Crime Fiction,” Christie gave up writing poems in favor of writing unpredictable storylines full of clues and riddles, and authentic characters.

Although Christie is modestly successful in balladry, her mastery of mystery fiction is saliently recognized. According to Osborne (1982), “Agatha Christie was an exceptionally good writer of detective and thriller stories” (383). Christie specialized in writing crime fiction, wherein murder is committed by normal characters in a normal “domestic” atmosphere (Thompson, 1988, p. 376), making it very difficult for the readers to predict who actually committed the crime. Thus, Christie attained her stardom in the world of detective writing.

Christie herself was clairvoyant in perceiving her future literary career as a detective writer: “At the back of my mind, where the stories of the books I am going to write take their place long before the germination of the seed occurs, the idea had been planted; Someday I would write a detective story” (*An Autobiography*, 1977, p. 211). Indeed, she wrote many successful detective stories. Her literary aspirations persuaded her sister Madge to

challenge Christie to write a good detective story, and rather than write just one, Christie went on to produce over ninety (Christie *An Autobiography*, 1977, p. 211).

Christie clearly won the challenge and went on to write many successful detective novels. It is interesting to consider that Madge's dare would become such an inspiring spur that pushed Christie toward developing her earlier creative writings of detective stories. Despite her rapid success, Thompson (1988) notes that "It is true that she had no acknowledged thought of being anything other than an amateur who wrote whatever took her fancy: a poem, a little piece of music, a detective story" (112).

Christie's vivid imagination widened through her reading of fairy tales, sowing the seeds for her fanciful spirit and eventually leading toward her writing crime fiction. According to Gill (1990), "It is no accident that Christie never lost her childhood fascination with fairy stories... and that fairy-tale themes ring out so insistently in her work[s]" (207). Her works are unrealistic representations of her social issues and the dilemma of war (Thompson, 1988, p. 383). Being a member of twentieth-century crime authors, who made a new shift in writing mystery, Christie is influenced by the modern value of escapism in rejecting the harsh social issues and embarking on the entertainment of fantasy. Though she was observant, as a

novelist she tried to create reflections of her own personal “world of fantasy” as opposed to “her time and ... social caste” (Gill, 1990, p. 7).

While labeling her fanciful may seem harsh, it is precisely Christie’s escapist values as a novelist that promoted her literary career, and enabled her to create new conventions of crime fiction. She constructed puzzling plots full of confusing clues and unpredictable killers. For Christie, anyone could commit a crime, and no person regardless of socioeconomic status or any other identifier was immune to being a killer (or being murdered) in her books. Thompson (1988) declares that:

With [Christie], the solution was not merely a question of one guilty party among a cast of innocent; it could be everybody, or nobody, or the apparent victim; the surprise was not in ‘who did it’, but in the possibility within the very idea of the solution. (382)

It is the miraculous moment of solving the tangled plot that the conclusion is based on, “but few readers can decipher Christie’s crime riddles; only Christie’s intelligent agents are capable of solving her mysteries” (Thompson, 1988, p. 382).

Consequently, Christie contributed in the progress of crime fiction “stained with values of twentieth century modernism – a genre far-fetched

from reality” (Gill, 1990, p. 7). According to Gill (1990), “Christie’s unique contribution was to create an original fictional world that is both totally convincing and highly unrealistic” (7). However, Christie’s pioneering ability to create genuine and intricate but simply written plots is held in high regard (Gill, 1990, p. 7). She infringed on the territory of Doyle’s armchair detective of Sherlock Holmes and other canonical classic detective novels to create her own remarkable clue-puzzle novels full of innovative techniques for both committing crimes and investigating them, finally invoking the firm hand of the law as rightful punishment.

Eventually, Christie’s crime fiction became recognized to the extent that publishers have translated her works into over fifty languages in seventy countries (Wagstaff and Stephen, 2004, p. 8). Her childhood dream of being aristocratic came true, when she was honored in 1971 as Dame Agatha Christie (Sova, 1996, p. 15). This was due explicitly to her literary achievement as a virtuoso of crime fiction, having never waned in her field. However, Christie was criticized for her “simplicity” in writing (Thompson, 1988, p. 373), but her artistic pursuit in building up her storylines through euphonic puzzles justifies her clever and astute exploit of hiding the fact from readers till the end of the story:

The finished product had to be impregnable. Its geometry

had to be capable of being turned this way and that, like a jewel in the sunlight. It had to be constructed so that it could be satisfyingly dismantled. Then everything had to be hidden from view. (Thompson, 1988, p. 373)

Overall, Christie's mysterious writings of crime fiction crystalized her unsurpassable creativity. She created her own conventions of detective writings that was influenced by the great detective Sherlock Holmes, and then invented her own great detective Hercule Poirot (Gill, 1990, p. 50), and later on her shrewd sleuth Miss Marple. Also, she contributed in the innovation of the passionate twentieth-century clue-puzzle genre of crime fiction that is considered to be "avant-garde; due to its unprecedented tactic of red herring, which is based on both intricate plot and psychodynamic characters" (Gill, 1990, p. 40).

Chapter II: The Mindset of the Criminal Mind

“I myself always found the love interest a terrible bore in detective stories. Love, I felt, belonged to romantic stories. To force a love motif into what should be a scientific process went much against the grain.” (Christie qtd. in Riley and Pam, 1986, p. 201)

While a plethora of authors have centered on love, Agatha Christie’s main concern was murder, evident in her highly popular novels. Thus, as one of the Golden Age crime fiction writers, Christie is more concerned with the psychodynamics of criminals. She declares in her memoir (1977) “As a result of writing crime books one gets interested in the study of criminology. I am particularly interested in reading books by those who have been in contact with criminals” (*An Autobiography* 438). Indeed, Christie wrote her works of crime fiction because of her penchant for real criminal cases; her knowledge of these cases enriched her own mystery writings with genuine plots. In general, her interest of human mental traits reflects some psychological

theory, though it is not fully scientific. Walton (2015) reflects on Christie's psychoanalytical works as a way in which "The advice of 'alienists' - by which Christie refers to analysts - as well as insights inspired by psychoanalysis and insinuations about the subconscious are often employed in her novels to explain human motivation" (59). This is perhaps most evident in her mystery novel *A Pocket Full of Rye*, one of Christie's psychological novels in which the motivation of the killer and the tragic deaths of his victims need to be assiduously foregrounded. The novel emphasizes this as "Motives appeared to be lying thick on the ground" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 38).

The whole idea of this nursery story revolves around the domestic triple murders of the unscrupulous countryman Mr. Fortescue and his late perfidious wife, and their imbecilic parlour maid Miss Gladys. This insane act of serial murder is really an unconscious lust to satisfy one's own desire to gain money. Thompson (1988) states: "Indeed, it is hardly extraordinary passion to kill for money; this alternative in terms of thematic matter is common in most of Christie's novels where the thirst for a prolific crime is a recurrent motive, as opposed to more straightforward reasons" (151).

The novel opens with the mysterious death of Mr. Fortescue in his office after his secretary has prepared his tea. Inspector Neele soon comes to

investigate the cause of death, later diagnosed in the autopsy as poisoning by “toxin.” The Inspector finds late Fortescue’s pocket full of rye, in accordance with the phrase from the popular nursery rhyme at the time. At this point, the case becomes more complicated. When Inspector Neele travels to the Fortescue’s home, the Yewtree Lodge, to interrogate the staff there, he encounters two more crimes having already been committed onsite. The first is Mrs. Adele Fortescue, “poisoned by potassium Cyanide” in the library “after eating half a scone” with honey. The second, is the murder of the parlour maid Gladys Martin, who is one of Miss Marple’s employees. Gladys’ death invites Miss Marple to develop an understanding of the culprit’s tricky plan that “follows the pattern of nursery rhyme” in his serial crimes. Miss Marple sums up the plot of the triple crimes for the Inspector: “There you are,” said Miss Marple, triumphantly, “Rex Fortescue. Rex means King. In his Counting House. And Mrs. Fortescue the Queen in the parlour, eating bread and honey. And so, of course the murderer had to put that clothes-peg on poor Gladys’s nose” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2001, p. 114).

Thereafter, Miss Marple leads the Inspector to ask about blackbirds, a sequence of the nursery rhyme “Four and twenty blackbirds baked in pie” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 113). There appeared an answer to

the question of the blackbirds when Inspector Neele discovers “the joke of the blackbirds’ pie” set on the late Mr. Fortescue’s desk to remind him of Blackbird Mine, “in which Rex Fortescue may have left someone to die” (Sova 296). At the end, Miss Marple once again provides insight by revealing the whole story behind the triple deaths. At first, Gladys was bullied to murder her master Mr. Fortescue by administering the toxin in the marmalade. Then, the schemer strangled the parlour maid and poisoned Mrs. Adele. At this point, the culprit “accomplished his purpose,” whereby the string of death ended (Sova, 1996, p.p. 295-96).

Such a domestic crime mystery foreshadows the insecurity of human unconscious actions within the familial household. This fatal unconscious incentive inevitably obliges anyone to commit crime in order to satisfy personal interest. According to the Freudian theory of the human psyche, the subconscious is mainly divided into “three parts: the id, ego, and superego” (Bressler 146). The id is the innate “principle of pleasure,” the ego is the “reality principle” that “mediates” between id and superego, and the superego is the “morality principle,” which is the social conformity agent (Bressler, 2007, p. 146).

In particular, the Freudian psychic zone of “id” drives most of Yewtree Lodge’s residents, so that they unconsciously move toward the

instinctive forces of pleasure. In general, the id is the pleasure agent that controls human behaviour, leading to “immediate satisfaction” for the repressed unconscious compulsions (Guerin et al. ,2005, p. 205). This pleasure agent is also “The irrational, instinctual, unknown, and unconscious part of the psyche Freud calls the id containing our secret desires, darkest wishes, and most intense tears” (Bressler, 2007, p. 146).

Starting from the Fortescue family members and ending in the servitude circle, they are all unconsciously acting according to the immoral principle of self-gratification. This entire wealthy bourgeois household is cursed by its materialism, causing delusion and deception. First of all, “The king” Mr. Fortescue, or “Rex,” is a dishonest businessman whose wealth is built primarily on illegal or unethical deals. “Oh no. Mr. Fortescue was too much clever for that. He’s had certain connections with the black market and put through one or two deals that are questionable to say the least of it, but they’ve always been just within the law,” declares one of his staff members (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 22). Mr. Fortescue cleverly swindles money out of the black market – a fact that reveals itself only after his death. Rex’s thirst for wealth leads him to run behind the worthless Blackbird Mine in Africa, leaving his friend Mr. Mackenzie to die of fever (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 141). Because Mr. Fortescue cannot understand all that

glitters is not gold, he is attracted to unreliable external appearances.

Therefore, Mr. Fortescue's unconscious desire for self-indulgence pushes him toward marrying a promiscuous young woman whose aesthetic prettiness allures him in a way that blinds him to what actual virtues are in a wife. "Mr. Fortescue had recently married a second wife, both glamorous and expensive, and fully capable of absorbing all his attention" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 2). Due to his fascination with Adele's comeliness, he unconsciously spends much of his budget on her nonessential and wasteful luxury (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 181).

Rex's past immoral actions deteriorate his financial system and cause him to lose his sanity, finally ending in his disgraceful death in the "counting house" where the illegal transactions take place. Ironically, he dies penniless with his "pocket full of rye," which is a punishment for his greediness and worship of money. It is also a punishment for his excessive pride. Miss Ramsbottom's remark after receiving the news of the late Mr. Fortescue's death, her brother-in-law, reveals the inevitability of the doom of such a corrupted and dishonest man: "Struck down at last in his arrogance and his sinful pride. Well, it had to come" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 61).

Second, Mr. Percival, the firstborn son to Mr. Fortescue, is prudent

and thrifty. He is called “Percy Prim ” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 69), because of his stiffness. This rigidity can be perceived in the following account: “Mr. Percival Fortescue was a neat fair man of thirty, with pale hair and eyelashes and a slightly pedantic way of speech” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 66). The narrator’s account of Mr. Percival’s appearance matches his fastidious financial care. His financial dogma means austerity under the restraints of capitalism. Also, Mr. Percival is the “senior partner” in the firm and “residuary legatee” of his father (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 67). In receiving the news of his father’s death, Percival shows no sympathy.

His lack of feeling toward his father’s death comes after his late father’s imprudent wasting of money, a sign of Rex’s illness or “GPI, General Paralysis of the Insane” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 199). He also notes that if the late Mr. Fortescue was still alive it would put the firm under threat of bankruptcy (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 200). Moreover, Mr. Percival’s marriage to Ruby Mackenzie, daughter of the late Mackenzie, who was left to die in Africa by Mr. Fortescue, was a moral punishment for Fortescue’s past sin.

Mr. Percival can never satisfy his yearning for growing affluence. Even at the end, he remains as an incarnation of his father’s

shrewdness in terms of economy. Inspector Neele makes it clear how the father-like influence of Mr. Fortescue affects Mr. Percival's behaviour when he tells Lancelot: "Your brother seems always to have been very much –well, how shall I put it – under your father's thumb" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 196). Mr. Percival's behaviour unconsciously resembles his father's in that he prioritizes money over anything or anyone.

In contrast to Mr. Percival's prudence, Mr. Lancelot, the second son to Mr. Fortescue, is reckless and rebellious, making him the "black sheep" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 15). He is also "the bad boy" in the family (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 22). It later turns out that it is he who committed the serial crimes. His unconscious act of committing the triple murder was a result of the destructive agent of the pleasure principle. The immediate satisfaction of financial need pushes Lancelot toward criminal acts and inevitable self-destruction.

Lancelot plans a triple murder, which "fits" the theme and rhythm of the Nursery Rhyme "Sing a Song." Moreover, the main motive is the inheritance he would receive after the death of his father. The destructive desire for money causes Lancelot to commit patricide by being an accessory in manipulating the parlour maid to poison his father, killing her to keep her quiet, and murdering his stepmother to protect his inheritance, since her

living would mean “a hundred thousand pounds out of the firm” (Christie A *Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 228).

Lancelot “is a serial murderer who tactically planned to commit triple murder by selecting to kill three victims on different occasions” (Bartol, 2014, p.p. 302-3). The first murder was committed while Lancelot was abroad, and the second, while he was on his way to Yewtree Lodge. He cleverly schemes to ensure an alibi for himself, even in the case of the last murder of Mrs. Adele, which was committed while he was at home.

All of these murderous acts happened in Yewtree Lodge, where Lancelot once lived before his exile to “East Africa.” He had been sent there by his father as punishment for forging a check. Mr. Fortescue also disinherits Lancelot and abandons him, forcing his son to live on his own. (Christie A *Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 35). Thus, the need for money and the parental rejection enforce Lancelot to become a criminal. According to criminologist Curt Bartol (2014), “Living in a disadvantaged environment accompanied by physical punishment may also lead to the belief that economic survival and social status depend greatly on being aggressive and violent to others” (32). Lancelot’s thirst for self-satisfaction without regard for dire consequences of the punishable felony causes him to commit murder.

Being a murderer is an evil act. Christie herself proclaims that “What

we can do to those who are tainted with the germs of ruthlessness and hatred, for whom other people's lives go for nothing? They are often the ones with good homes, good opportunities, good teaching, yet they turn out to be, in plain English, wicked" (*An Autobiography*, 1977, p. 439). Accordingly, Lancelot's criminal act is brutally inhumane because he extinguishes the light of three lives; here, murder is a cause of natural "wickedness" and "wickedness has to be destroyed" in order to save others' lives (*Christie A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 91).

From a criminological perspective and according to psychologist Wortely Richard (2011) "It is most productive to think about criminal behavior as being the product of causes, rather than as the expression of evil or of capricious whims. At the same time, this does not preclude the examination of the thought patterns and decision-making processes of offenders, nor does it suggest that offenders ought not to be held accountable for their actions"(14). For that, Lancelot's misbehaviour "is the result of acquired deviant motivation," which is "the product of a biological predisposition" and "environmental experiences" (Wortely, 2011, p. 15). All of these push him unconsciously toward "criminal conduct" to satisfy his immediate need for prolific living. In regard to the biosocial causes for his

criminal acts, Lancelot is the inborn “bad boy of the family.” This is exacerbated by the Fortescues having raised him in an atmosphere of immorality where “A lot of wickedness was going on” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p.p. 154-55).

Accordingly, Bartol (2014):

The Freudian, psychoanalytic, and psychodynamic positions strongly endorse the view that the prime determinant of human behavior lies within the person, and that after the first few years of life, the environment plays a very minor role. Consequently, criminal behavior is believed to spring from within, primarily dictated by the biological urges of the unconscious... biopsychological needs and urges within the individual are the culprits. (13)

Hence, Lancelot is inevitably motivated to commit serial murders because he is acting through his “uncontrolled animalistic, unconscious, or biological urges” (Bartol, 2014, p. 13). His innate impulses lead him to kill out of self-temptation towards financial gain. Therefore, it is Lancelot’s self-interest that urges him to kill in order to satisfy his need for money that his father deprived him of.

At the end of the novel, Lancelot’s motivation for his serial crimes

reveals itself when Uranium is discovered in East Africa where the worthless Blackbirds Mine is located. This is apparent in Lancelot's own words: "You can throw in the old Blackbird Mine concession too, if you like. If we've got the murdering Mackenzie on our trail, I'll draw them off to Africa" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 203). Thus, Miss Marple solves the killer's puzzle: only Lancelot "had come to have knowledge of that, being on the spot, and with uranium deposits there," then Blackbird Mine would be "a fortune to be grasped" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 229).

The last victim of the serial domestic crimes is Mrs. Adele Fortescue, the femme fatal figure. Her love for money forces her to marry an old man, but she continues her love (and now adultery) with a young man, Vivian Dubois. She shows complete disregard for morality and social convention. Miss Dove reveals to Inspector Neele that "Mrs. Fortescue, Adele- was his second wife and about thirty years younger than he was. He came across her at Brighton. She was a manicurist on the prowl for big money. She is very good looking- a real sexy piece, if you know what I mean" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 33).

Mrs. Fortescue's unconscious attraction to the exuberant life of luxury, draws her into an affair with the golf coach who does not love her but seduces her to have her money, as evidenced in the following passage: "Unless, that is –

Inspector Neele considered a new hypothesis-Adele Fortescue had wanted to marry Vivian Dubois and Dubois wanted, not Adele Fortescue, but Adele Fortescue's hundred thousand pounds which would come to her on the death of her husband" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 131).

Although Mrs. Adele left a will bequeathing her money to Mr. Vivian Dubois, Mr. Fortescue, in his ingenuity, had made a will stating that if Adele would endure him a month she would inherit one hundred thousand pounds (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 159). As a result, Adele dies penniless, only "A half-eaten scone spread with honey was beside her and her tea cup was still half full" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 93). Dubois therefore receives nothing in turn. It could be a kind of moral punishment for her dishonorable act of infidelity.

Moreover, Miss Elaine is the youngest daughter of Mr. Fortescue's and "one of those schoolgirls who never grew up" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 34). She is a sympathetic and innocent young girl, and the only person in her family who shows sympathy towards Mr. Fortescue's death. This is clear when she meets Inspector Neele after receiving news of her father's death: "The awful thing is that it makes everything come right. I mean, Gerald and I can get married now. I can do everything that I want to do. But I hate it happening this way. I don't want Father to be dead...Oh I

don't. Oh Daddy-Daddy" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 63).

Elaine is attracted to her teacher and wants to marry him, but her father disliked Gerald Wright for being a communist. This is only natural because Mr. Fortescue is a capitalist with opposing ideals. Despite her father's rejection of Wright, Elaine is unconsciously forced to marry him. Moreover, Wright does not care for Elaine as much as he wants her money – she knows this but she is unconsciously forced to be fond of him. This is emphasized by Mrs. Pat, Elaine's sister in law: "Elaine's been eating her heart out over a young man whom she probably knows in her heart of hearts that he doesn't care for her" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 186).

Finally, she accepts her destiny to marry Mr. Wright and follow his economic policy to spend her money and everything she owns on a school that society will benefit from (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 149). "We thought. Gerald feels that the whole future of this country lies in the right education," she states (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 162). At last, Elaine is obliged unconsciously to satisfy her desire for Gerald's love.

Mrs. Jennifer Fortescue is Mr. Percival's wife. She is the socially rejected member of the Fortescue family due to her profession as a nurse, considered a lower-class job during their time (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 180). She is dedicated to writing letters and going shopping; a kind

of compensation for her social rejection. From the beginning, Mr. Fortescue does not approve of his son's marriage to her.

What is more important is that Mrs. Percival is Ruby Mackenzie whose father died due to Mr. Fortescue's careless act when Ruby was a young child. Mrs. Mackenzie, Mrs. Percival's mother, raised up Ruby and her son to take revenge upon their father's death by murdering Mr. Fortescue. Ruby Mackenzie is unwilling to become an avenger and refuses to do what her mother taught her as a child. That is, to retrieve justice for her father's death – a man Fortescue left to die in the African wilderness.

Although Ruby does not want to murder Mr. Fortescue, she chooses to lure his son and marry him, thereby achieving "sensible revenge" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 232). She considers this to be payback for her father's undignified death in Africa and the loss of his money, which Mr. Fortescue "swindled" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 232). This is evident in her discussion with the Inspector:

"You yourself must have felt revengeful though, Mrs. Fortescue"

"Well, of course I did. Rex Fortescue practically murdered my father! I don't mean he actually shot him, or knifed him or anything like that. But I'm quite certain that he did leave father

to die. That's the same thing, isn't it?"

"It's the same thing morally – Yes." (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 231)

Ruby unwittingly becomes an accessory in the murder of Mr. Fortescue when she spontaneously hints at the nursery rhyme's triple murder theme through her joke regarding the blackbirds. Coincidentally, when Mr. Lancelot was at home asking his father for money that he did not have, Mrs. Percival put blackbirds in a pie on Mr. Fortescue's desk to remind him of his immoral act in Blackbirds Mine. From that moment, Lancelot plotted the criminal scheme that would be appropriate for the theme of "Sing a Song of Sixpence." Ruby unwittingly becomes an accomplice through her trick of blackbirds that gives the killer a hint to the sequence of his rhymed murders.

Also, from the perspective of the pleasure principle, Mrs. Percival indulges herself in the material and aimless life of "shopping and cinema" (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 34). However, at the end she becomes the lady of Yewtree Lodge, since her husband, Mr. Percival, inherits his late father's estate.

Within the servitude circle and below the class of Fortescue's family is the victim Gladys Martin; she is the dim-witted parlour maid. Miss Marple reflects upon Gladys's personality:

“Oh, no,” said Miss Marple, “not at all. Adenoids, and a good many spots. She was rather pathetically stupid, too. I don’t suppose,” went on Miss Marple thoughtfully, “that she ever made many friends anywhere. She was very keen on men, poor girl. But men didn’t take much notice of her and other girls rather made use of her.” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p.

102)

Gladys’ strong desire to attract men and love eventually causes her to commit the murder of Mr. Fortescue. The culprit manipulated her to poison Mr. Fortescue by adding poison to the marmalade, thinking it was “truth drugs” to let Mr. Fortescue speak the truth and “make restitution” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 221), which is a made-up story that Lancelot used to deceive her with his fabricated name “Albert Evans.” This is because “Gladys Martin was a very credulous girl. In fact, there’s hardly anything she wouldn’t believe if a personable young man put it to her the right way” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 221). In addition, Gladys is a scapegoat who was used by the killer “to play in a murderous reenactment of the rhyme ‘Sing a Song of Sixpence’” (Gill, 1990, p. 186). Hence, “Gladys, in *A Pocket Full of Rye*, is a clearer example of domestic servitude. Indeed, it is her status as such that makes her a necessary part of Lance’s murderous

plan. It is her job to poison the breakfast marmalade while Lance demonstrably away, thereby giving him an impeccable alibi” (Curran *Murder in the Making*, 2011, p. 56).

Moreover, after the death of Mr. Fortescue, Gladys quickly experiences inner moral conflict. She is against committing murder and this makes her nervous and agitated to the extent that her tongue slips when Inspector Neele interrogates her: “She said at once, fixing imploring eyes upon him: “ I didn’t do anything. I don’t know anything about it” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 39). Nonetheless, Gladys’ strong desire for self-satisfaction causes her to unwittingly poison her master, as well as her own death when she is found with a clothes pin “tweak[ing]” her nose (Sanders and Len, 1982, p. 279).

In contrast to Gladys’s lack of intelligence, the housekeeper, Miss Dove, is a clever and astute woman. Although Miss Dove seems a respectable and shrewd woman, she is immoral and undignified. Her past record that Inspector Neele brings in reveals her criminal acts of fraudulence in swindling money from every employer she has had. It is evident “that in the last three places” where Miss Dove worked in, there “have happened to be robberies,” and the “thieves have seemed remarkably well-informed as to

where mink coats, jewels, etc., were kept” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 234). Moreover, in Yewtree Lodge, Dove blackmailed Mrs. Jennifer to reveal her real name: “Ruby Mackenzie.” In sum, Miss Mary Dove’s lust for money and material objects pushes her to commit criminal acts to satisfy her desires.

Unlike Miss Dove’s immorality, the cook Mrs. Crump is a conservative woman against the behaviour of Gladys who is “Gallivanting off, wasting her money somewhere in the shops” because “she’s got a young man” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 93). Also, she is opposed to her husband’s excessive drinking and misbehaviour. In this sense, Mrs. Crump stands for morality.

Similarly, Ellen, the housemaid, is a virtuous woman who is morally opposed to the Fortescue family’s misbehaviour. This is evident when she explicitly reveals that she dislikes “the language that’s used in this house,” and she is against “the amount of drink that’s taken,” but she does not feel hostile toward Mrs. Crump, who is a morally respectable woman. However, she is against “Crump and that girl Gladys” because they “don’t know what the proper service is” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 58).

Ellen is a good housemaid who makes it her responsibility to protect society from criminal acts of wickedness. Her own mother’s lessons surface

in her moral values. This is clear when Inspector Neele asks her regarding yew berries “Yew? Nasty poisonous stuff. Never you touch those berries, my mother said to me when I was a child. Was that what was used, sir?” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 59). Thus, she represents the morality principle, which constrains her behaviour to conform to social values learned during childhood.

On the other hand, Miss Marple and Inspector Neele represent the reality principle of the ego. They are both looking for truths to protect individuals from “self-destruction.” At first, Inspector Neele’s egotism as an official detective holds him back from properly investigating the crimes in Yewtree Lodge. He is an “imaginative thinker” who applies “theories of guilt” when inquiring during the investigation process (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 6). The Inspector invites Miss Marple in solving the puzzle of the serial crimes, because her egotism and self-esteem toward her employer, Gladys, helps her find the truth to pursue justice for the undignified death of Gladys who was found strangled with a “clothes-peg clipped onto her nose” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 103). Therefore, Miss Marple moves to Yewtree Lodge “to ensure that the person guilty of killing her former maid, Gladys, in so contemptuous a manner does not get away with it.” (Gill, 1990, p. 186) It is an unbearable act that

underestimates the humanity of the innocent victim and thus Miss Marple implies that “To do a thing like that! It’s very wicked, you know, to affront human dignity. Particularly if you’ve already killed” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 103). The sleuth Miss Marple and Inspector Neele are the agents of the ego zone due to their ability of reality testing in order to find truth and obstruct criminal acts.

In contrast to the immorality of Mr. Fortescue and his family, Miss Ramsbottom embodies the morality principle because she is acting as “the conscience or moral watchdog” (Benson, 1998, p. 52). Also, Miss Ramsbottom is the Victorian prude whose values and religious ideals are ignored at the Yewtree Lodge. She is living in the ethics of the old era. She is the pious judge denouncing the immoral acts it seems the entirety of the Fortescue family is sunken in. She is a religiously devoted woman. Directly following the first appearance of Miss Ramsbottom with Inspector Neele’s inquiry into the murders, her conservative nature as a Victorian old woman reveals itself:

The room he entered was almost fantastically overfurnished.

The Inspector felt rather as though he had taken a step

backward into not merely Edwardian but Victorian times. At a

table drawn up to a gas fire an old lady was sitting laying out a

patience. She wore a maroon-coloured dress and her sparse grey hair was slicked down each side of her face. (Christie A *Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 60)

The depiction of Miss Ramsbottom's room reveals how strictly she holds onto Victorian values. She is rather stuck in the austerity and self-restraints of that bygone era. There is no sign of self-indulgence or pleasure in her room. Ramsbottom is portrayed as the solemnly dignified old lady who is strictly against self-indulgence. This self-restraint principle is evident in her invitation of Miss Marple to stay in the room beside her instead of "spending money in that ridiculous Golf Hotel. A wicked nest of profiteers, that is. Drinking and card playing all the evening. She'd better come and stay in a decent Christian household" (Christie A *Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 140). Moreover, Miss Ramsbottom is fond of Miss Marple because "she knows how to run a charity in a sensible way" (Christie A *Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 142). However, she is against "betting and card playing" and "wouldn't go inside a theatre or cinema" (Christie A *Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 154); these attitudes are direct results of her moral principle against self-gratification.

Although Miss Ramsbottom is abstinent, she indulges in playing cards in short intervals to reflect upon some prominent incidents of the novel's

storyline, such as the death of the King, Mr. Fortescue: “Red seven on black eight. Now I can move up the King” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 61). She is also playing during the revelation of the murderer’s identity, which is the “Knave” Lancelot, “Black Knave, red queen” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 235). Her insinuation regarding the real identity of the killer helps Miss Marple in her investigation. Ramsbottom epitomizes the superego principle in her moral beliefs of “punishment for what society considers to be bad and reward for what society considers good behavior” (Guerin, 2005, p. 205). This is evident in her belief of Mr. Fortescue’s doom resulting from his “sinful act” and that “The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 142). Ramsbottom’s role “function[s] primarily to protect society” from cruelty (Guerin, 2005, p. 205).

It is evident that the Freudian premise of “the human psyches, the id, ego and superego,” is epitomized in Christie’s *A Pocket Full of Rye* (1953). The whole of Fortescue’s family represents the pleasure principle in which they “are depicted as the loci of sexual tension, ambivalence, and unsociable instincts, while repression and complexes are represented as a major way of responding to transgressive acts and accounting for the motivations for crime” (Walton, 2015, p. 47). Because of that, “They’re all very unpleasant

people” (Christie *A Pocket Full of Rye*, 2011, p. 160). Christie portrays people in *A Pocket Full of Rye* with “dark quality” in which “a ruthless City man [lives] with a sexy young wife, the wife’s lounge-lizard lover whom she meets when pretending to play golf” (Thompson, 1988, p. 158).

Christie depicts the reality principle and rationality in the logic of Inspector Neele and Miss Marple who seek the truth in order to gain justice and save individuals from crime and self-destruction. However, the conflict between the satisfying desires and morality agent of social conformity is delineated within the character of Miss Ramsbottom, who is religiously opposed to sin in all its forms.

Conclusion

“We were like obstreperous flowers-often weeds maybe, but nevertheless all of us growing exuberantly... determined to have our fill of life and enjoy ourselves, bursting out into the sunlight, until someone came and trod on us. Even bruised for a time, we would soon lift a head again.” (Christie *An Autobiography* , 1977, p. 128)

The above-mentioned quote refers to Christie’s resolve to persevere despite hardships, a promise she made to herself and proved through the years by becoming the queen of the crime fiction genre. Despite her interest in criminals, she does not feel empathy toward them. This is “Because it is innocence that matters, not guilt” (Christie *An Autobiography*, 1977, p. 438). Henceforth, she wrote her novels to provide a psychological study of the mindset of criminals, evident in her nursery rhyme novel, *A Pocket Full of Rye* (1953).

For Christie, “The detective story was the story of the chase; it was also very much a story with a moral; in fact it was the old Everyman Morality Tale, the hunting down of Evil and the triumph of Good” (Christie *An Autobiography*, 1977, p. 437). Although Christie was not essentially writing “to wallow in psychology” (Christie *An Autobiography*, 1977, p. 437), she implicitly introduces the subconsciousness of human minds. It is unquestionable that Christie’s writings comply with “beliefs about innate

criminality” (Walton, 2015, p. 136), especially in *A Pocket Full of Rye* (1953).

The storyline of this novel centers on the “whydunit,” the question of motivation that often pushes murderers to kill. However, such devilish acts cannot go without “bring[ing] justice.” In the end, “the supreme wrong of taking life” will be reprimanded (Gill, 1990, p.p. 203-4). Thus, humanity will be protected and innocence will prevail. Christie’s concerns with the psychological aspect of the criminal mind is emphasized in order to save human morality by punishing the murderer.

In conclusion, Christie paved the way for a new era of psychological mystery that is controversially considered by other critics as being far fetched from real life criminal acts. This is because it is logically thought “nobody would kill by dropping a quern through a window on to their victim’s heads; they would not give themselves an alibi by having their wife masquerade as a dead body; nor would they plan a murder by running around a ship deck... these things cannot be” (Thompson, 1988, p. 390). However, Christie never “intended these plots to be seen as credible events. They were ‘animated algebra,’ a puzzle to be solved” (Thompson, 1988, p. 390). Accordingly, this paper urges future researchers to look into the psychology of Christie’s other novels to “solve her puzzles.” Novels that should be explored include *And*

Then There Were None, Crooked House, One, Two, Buckle My Shoe, and scores of others. All these novels provide interesting insight into the criminal mind that call for examination.

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