AGATHA CHRISTIE, THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD

JAMIE BERNTHAL

Week 4
Bodies in the Library, part 1
AGATHA CHRISTIE (1890–1976) & ‘CHRISTIE’ANITY

‘During her long life, she killed hundreds of people, endearing herself to an international audience and earning the title “the Queen of Crime.”’ (Pate, 1990)

‘I may lay claim [...] to being an industrious craftsman. [...] An American paper has dubbed me the Duchess of Death.’ (Christie, 1946/2008, p. 5)

First novel published, 1920
“why did I ever invent this detestable, bombastic, tiresome little creature?” (Christie, 1938/1990, p. 32)
‘If I walked into the detective-story house, I believe I should be able to find my way about it perfectly; it is always more or less the same design’ (Ronald Knox, quoted by Horsley, 2005, p. 37)

“It is impossible to keep track of all the detective stories produced to-day. Book upon book, magazine upon magazine pour out from the Press […] until it seems that half the world must be engaged in setting riddles for the other half to solve.” (Sayers, 1928/1981, p. 71)
“[This novel was] a departure from conventions that aroused considerable controversy” (Grella, 1981, p. 100).

“The author does not devote her talents to the creation of thrills and shocks, but to the orderly solution of a single murder, conventional at that, instead. Miss Christie is not only an expert technician and a remarkably good story-teller, but she knows [the] number of hints to offer” (New York Times review, 18 July 1926).

“The civilised outrage that followed the publication of The Murder of Roger Ackroyd in 1926 showed what a serious breach of the rules its solution was considered. [...] Agatha Christie [...] constantly challenged those ‘rules’.” (Curran, 2011, p. 34)
“I was [... ] tied to two people: Hercule Poirot and his Watson, Captain Hastings[, ... ] a stereotyped creation, but [... ] I was still writing in the Sherlock Holmes tradition [... ] Murder on the Links was slightly less in the Sherlock Holmes tradition” (Christie, 1977/2011, p. 282).

“My mind boggled at the idea of Hastings murdering anybody” (Christie, 1977/2011, p. 342)

“The Murder of Roger Ackroyd neatly summarises the central fear articulated in Golden Age fiction: that the threat of social disruption comes from within.” (Scaggs, 2005/2010, p. 46).
“Poirot focuses on why a chair has been moved, and he knows that a scrap of starched cambric must come not from a handkerchief but a maidservant’s apron. Before Miss Marple is invented Poirot already represents a heightened version of domestic knowledge as a weapon against fictional disorder.” (Knight, 2005, p. 91)

‘“It is completely unimportant,” said Poirot. “That is why it is so interesting,” he added softly.’ (Roger Ackroyd, ch. 8)
“Let us take a man - a very ordinary man. A man with no idea of murder in his heart. There is in him somewhere a strain of weakness - deep down. It has so far never been called into play. [...] His moral fibre is blunted. He is desperate. He is fighting a losing battle, and he is prepared to take any means that come to his hand, for exposure means ruin to him. And so - the dagger strikes!” (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, ch. 17)
‘Our hobbies and recreations can be summed up in the one word, “gossip”.’ (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, chapter 2)

‘“I am a gossip,” said Poirot. “I like to know all about people.”’ (Christie, *Dead Man’s Folly*, chapter 13)
Christie domesticates Doyle’s model

Golden Age detective novels are primarily puzzles

They are also documents of social change

But don’t take the rules too seriously, mon ami.

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