CHAPTER II
HISTORICAL-BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH
HISTORICAL-BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH

Historical Criticism in its earliest form was used to investigate “The origins of ancient text in order to understand ‘the world behind the text’. The primary goal of historical criticism is to ascertain the text’s primitive or original meaning in its original historical context and its literal sense.…The secondary goal seeks to establish a reconstruction of the historical situation of the author and recipients of the text” (“Historical criticism”). It is generally believed that Historical criticism, then known as ‘higher criticism’, dates back to the seventeenth century when it was applied in the interpretation of the Bible, and gained currency in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It has been applied to the ancient writings of other religions as well like Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Islam.

Biographical Criticism is “a form of Literary criticism which analyses a writer’s biography to show the relationship between the author’s life and their works of literature” (“Biographical criticism”). This too is a method that has long been in use and can be traced back to the period of the Renaissance (Period in Modern Europe extending from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century). George A. Kennedy in The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Classical Criticism observes that in the Hellenistic age (323 BC-31BC), “The works of authors were read as sources of information about their lives, personalities, and interests. Some of this material was then used by other commentators and critics to explain passages in their works” (“Biographical criticism”).

Samuel Johnson employed the biographical approach in his famous work Lives of the Poets (1779-81). Even in the twentieth century it was used to study writers like
Charles Dickens and F. Scott Fitzgerald and later, in the study of other authors, which include John Steinbeck, Walt Whitman and Shakespeare.

The historical approach is usually allied with biographical approach and together they constitute the historical-biographical approach. The historical-biographical approach “sees a literary work chiefly, if not exclusively, as a reflection of its author’s life and times or the life and times of the characters in the work” (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, and Willingham 51).

The historical-biographical approach helps us in understanding a work in a better light because if we know the historical circumstances, as well as the real life incidents of the author, then we can analyse and take out interpretations from the work which may have seeped in knowingly or unknowingly. What a person is, is definitely an outcome of the times he lives in or of his own life experiences. Moreover, what a person is, his beliefs, his convictions, his thoughts and his philosophy, does get reflected in his work through the characters or situations portrayed therein. Complete alienation between ‘the man who suffers’ and ‘the mind which creates’ though desirable may not always be possible.

This is the belief which formed the basis of the historical-biographical approach used in literary criticism for so many ages. Even Eliot concurs that “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone” in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”. Richard D. Altick states “Almost every literary work is attended by a host of outside circumstances which, once we expose and explore them, suffuse it with additional meaning” (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, and Willingham 53-54). I shall also apply the historical-biographical approach to infer how and what
effects of Christie’s life and times are mirrored in her work for the better understanding of it.

**Historical Approach:**

“Sometimes novels that present the social realities that shape the nation’s life are called ‘condition of England’ novels. These novels seek to show what the nation is like. When we become aware of the attitudes and assumptions that colours the character’s conduct, we are in touch with outlooks and values that shape social and political behaviour” (Gill 63-65).

Grayzel states “Because the war destroyed so many lives and reshaped the international political order, it is understandable to view it as the catalyst for enormous changes in all aspects of life.” The effect of the wars was thus felt on all spheres of life in the British society. “It swept away much of the old Victorian and Edwardian order and established many of the features that we associate with ‘modern’ 20th century Britain….These changes did not take place overnight…” (“How did the First World War”, nationalarchives).

Christie gives us a glimpse into the old world of English manners and customs through her works. We get a glimpse of the old world charm in *Dumb Witness*:

The drawing-room conjured up memories of the past. A faint fragrance of potpourri hung about it. The chintzes were worn, their pattern faded garlands of roses. On the walls were prints and water - colour drawings. There was a good deal of china – fragile shepherds and shepherdesses. There were cushions worked in crewel stitch. There were faded photographs in handsome silver frames. There were mainly
inlaid work boxes and tea-caddies. Most fascinating of all to me were two exquisitely cut tissue-paper ladies under glass stands. One with a spinning wheel, one with a cat on her knee.

The atmosphere of a bygone day, the day of leisure, of refinement, of ‘ladies and gentlemen’ closed around me. This was indeed a withdrawing-room. There ladies sat and did their fancy work, and if a cigarette was ever smoked by a favoured of the male sex, what a shaking out of curtains and general airing of the room there would be afterwards. (58)

Even the dentist’s waiting room leads us far back in time in One, Two, Buckle My Shoe:

It was a room furnished in quiet good taste…On the polished (reproduction) Sheraton tables were carefully arranged papers and periodicals. The (reproduction) Hepplewhite sideboard held two Sheffield plated candlesticks and an epergne. The mantelpiece held a bronze clock and two bronze vases. The windows were shrouded by curtains of blue velvet. The chairs were upholstered in a Jacobean design of red birds and flowers. (16-17)

This marks a sharp contrast to the modern buildings of flats that had mushroomed all over London in the post war period catering to the ever-growing city population. “It was a recent block, occupying a space left by the havoc of a land mine in the last war….It looked extremely functional and whoever had built it had obviously scorned any ornamental additions” (Christie, Third Girl 37). The interior of the building has been described as “All the rooms of the flats were papered the same
with artificial raw wood pattern….There was a foundation of modern built-in furniture, cupboard, bookshelves and so on, a large settee and a pull-out type of table” (Christie, *Third Girl* 40).

What the English desired and meant by the country life, which was idealized by them as an epitome of the perfect life, has been depicted by Christie in the following words, “A big shabby house - horses, dogs - walks in the rain - wood fires - apples in the orchard - lack of money - old tweeds - evening dresses that went on from year to year - a neglected garden - with Michaelmas daisies coming out like great banners in the Autumn…..” (qtd. in Hart 145). Another aspect of the English life is summed up by Luke Fitzwilliam, “Besides, there was something very cosy and English about old ladies…They could be classed with plum pudding on Christmas Day and village cricket and open fireplaces with wood fires. The sort of things you appreciated a good deal when you hadn’t got them and were on the other side of the world” (Christie, *Murder is Easy* 14-15).

The abundance of domestic staff needed for the upkeep of large mansions is something to be marvelled at. The usual retina consisted of a very eminent butler, a housekeeper, parlour maid, a cook, kitchenmaid, upper-house maid, under-housemaid and a between-maid. Further there was a strict hierarchy maintained with each servant knowing his or her place. When a valuable clue is given by a kitchenmaid, the inspector comments, “There’s always hope where there’s a kitchenmaid. Heaven help us when domestic staff are so reduced that nobody keeps a kitchenmaid any more. Kitchenmaids talk, kitchenmaids babble. They’re so kept down and in their place by the cook and the upper servants that it’s only human nature to talk about what they know to someone who wants to hear it” (Christie, *The Hollow* 269). At this bold step
taken by the kitchenmaid in talking to the police, she is sternly reprimanded by the butler, the cook and her other seniors, “Putting yourself forward and jumping to conclusions in a way only an inexperienced girl would do…It’s common to be mixed up with the police, and don’t you forget it” (Christie, *The Hollow* 286-287).

However the standard of the maids seems to have deteriorated and their service not up to the mark due to changing times. “…with the young ones you can’t expect the training - their mothers don’t give it to them nowadays” (Christie, *Three Act Tragedy* 74).

The qualifications of a good parlourmaid has been elaborated as “She’s a good servant, and she says Ma’am, and doesn’t object to wearing caps and aprons (which I declare to you a lot of them do nowadays), and she can say “Not at home” without scruples if she has to answer the door….and she doesn’t have those peculiar gurgling noises inside which so many parlourmaids seem to have when they wait at table-…” (Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* 137).

The very admirable butler Gudgeon is described as “….the magnificent Gudgeon, of whom Poirot approved” (Christie, *The Hollow* 141). However when confronted by murder even the perfect butler, seems for a moment to be human enough to react to the unexpected. “He (Gudgeon) was moving to one side, deferentially, to allow Poirot to pass and at the same time clearing his throat preparatory to murmuring, ‘M. Poirot, my lady’ in the proper subdued and respectful tones when his suppleness became suddenly rigid. He gasped. It was an unbutlerlike noise” (Christie, *The Hollow* 143).

The loyalty of Gudgeon is unerring as he remarks, “But in this house….I see to it that everything possible is done to spare her ladyship annoyance or worry”
(Christie, *The Hollow* 18). Even Lady Angkatell acknowledges his efficiency and loyalty wholeheartedly. “Gudgeon is wonderful: I don’t know what I should do without Gudgeon. He always knows the right thing to do” (Christie, *The Hollow* 157). When Gudgeon tries to fool the police to prevent any suspicion from falling upon Lady Angkatell, she says, “You know, I really do think that was very charming of Gudgeon. Quite feudal, if you know what I mean” (Christie, *The Hollow* 274).

The gradually dwindling domestic staff, and changes in social hierarchy with the changing times, is reflected in *After the Funeral*:

Looking into the kitchen with a word of admonition, Lanscombe (the old butler) was snapped at by Marjorie, the cook. Marjorie was young, only twenty-seven and was a constant irritation to Lanscombe as being so far removed from what his conception of a proper cook should be. She had no dignity and no proper appreciation of his, Lanscombe’s, position. She frequently called the house ‘a proper old mausoleum’ and complained of the immense area of the kitchen, scullery and larder, saying that it was a ‘day’s work to get round them all.’ She had been at Enderby two years….Janet, was an elderly housemaid who, although enjoying frequent acid disputes with Lanscombe, was nevertheless usually in alliance with him against the younger generation as represented by Marjorie. The fourth person in the kitchen was Mrs Jacks, who ‘came in’ to lend assistance where it was wanted….  

(Christie 13)

The housekeeper Miss Dove in *A Pocket Full of Rye*, is a modern day housekeeper, who has been described as “…small trim figure…the soft dove coloured
tones of her dress, the white collar and cuffs, the neat waves of hair, the faint Mona Lisa smile….This young woman of under thirty…”(Christie 176). Her matter of fact attitude is summed up in her following words:

I’ve no feeling of loyalty to my employers. I work for them because it’s a job that pays well and I insist that it should pay well….this is the perfect racket. People will pay anything – anything - to be spared domestic worries. To find and engage a staff is a thoroughly tedious job. Writing to agencies, putting in advertisements, interviewing people, making arrangements for interviews, and finally keeping the whole thing running smoothly—it takes a certain capacity which most of these people haven’t got… I work only for the extremely rich who will pay anything to be comfortable. (179-180)

In a similar strain, is described another young woman who had made the most of domestic labour shortage:

Lucy Eyelesbarrow, was thirty two. She had taken a first in Mathematics at Oxford, was acknowledged to have a brilliant mind and was confidently expected to take up a distinguished academic career.

But Lucy Eyelesbarrow, in addition to scholarly brilliance, had a core of good sound common sense. She could not fail to observe that a life of academic distinction was singularly ill rewarded. She has no idea whatever to teach and she took pleasure in contacts with minds much less brilliant than her own…she also, quite frankly liked money. To gain money one must exploit shortage.
Lucy Eyelesbarrow hit at once upon a very serious shortage – the shortage of any kind of skilled domestic labour. To the amazement of her friends and fellow scholars, Lucy Eyelesbarrow entered the field of domestic labour. Her success was immediate and assured. (Christie, 4.50 from Paddington 28-29)

After the war domestic help became extremely difficult to obtain. In A Murder is Announced, Miss Blacklock describes her domestic help as comprising of:

A Mrs Huggins from the village comes up five mornings a week and I have a foreign refugee with a most unpronounceable name as a kind of lady cook help… I think a lot of these displaced persons feel, perhaps justly, that their claim to our notice and sympathy lies in their atrocity value and so they exaggerate and invent… Quite frankly, Mitzi is a maddening person. She exasperates and infuriates us all, she is suspicious and sulky, is perpetually having ‘feelings’ and thinking herself insulted. (45)

Mitzi was what was commonly termed as an au pair girl “a foreign girl serving as an au pair. A young foreigner who lives with a family in return for doing light housework” (“au pair”).

The Mysterious Affair at Styles also shows the same picture. “Five (gardeners) we had, before the war, when it was kept as a gentleman’s place should be. I wish you could have seen it then, sir. A fair sight it was. But now there’s only old Manning, and young William, and a new-fashioned woman gardener in breeches and suchlike. Ah, these are dreadful times!” (qtd. in L.Thompson 40). This adequately sums up the situation of labour shortage in post-war England.
The shortage of domestic staff, the difficulty of meeting expenses incurred in maintaining large houses and the increased taxation, caused people to sell off their large country estates which changed the face of English society.

During the war some houses became temporary hospitals for injured people and there were no jobs for servants. After the war, the old families had not enough money to keep their mansions and that’s why they rented or sold them to museums, galleries or to people who became rich after the war. Old aristocracy could not take care of their castles and parks anymore and that’s why many of them became the property of the National Trust. Of course the upper class still kept the tradition but the large number of servants was not common anymore….Also, many landholders had to sell their properties - 25% of land holdings in England were sold between 1917 and 1921. (“How did the first world war”, studymode)

Mrs Folliat recounts her hardships suffered during and after war, to Poirot:

I was going through a difficult time. My husband had died just before the outbreak of the war. My elder son who was in the navy went down with his ship, my younger son, who had been out in Kenya, came back, joined the commandos and was killed in Italy. That meant three lots of death duties and this land had to be put up for sale….It (Nasse House) was built by my husband’s great grandfather in 1790. There was an Elizabethan house previously. It fell into disrepair and burned down in about 1700. Our family has lived here since 1598…It was requisitioned during the war by the army and afterwards it might have
been bought and made into a guest house or a school, the rooms cut up and partitioned, distorted out of their natural beauty. Our neighbours the Fletchers, at Hoodown, had to sell their place and it is now a youth hostel. (Christie, *Dead Man’s Folly* 23-47)

Mrs Bantry’s story, though not as poignant as Mrs Folliat’s, also reflects the same experience of financial difficulty involved in the upkeep of her former house, Gossington Hall, which had also to be sold off:

When her husband, Colonel Bantry, had died some years ago, Mrs Bantry had sold Gossington Hall and the considerable amount of land attached to it. Retaining for herself what had been the East Lodge…where even a gardener had refused to live. Mrs Bantry had added to it the essentials of modern life, a built on kitchen of the latest type, a new water supply from the main, electricity, and a bathroom. This had all cost her a great deal, but not nearly so much as an attempt to live at Gossington Hall would have done…Gossington Hall itself had changed hands once or twice. It had been run as a guest house, failed, and been bought by four people who had shared it as four roughly divided plots… finally the Ministry of Health had bought it for some obscure purpose… (Christie, *The Mirror Crack’d from Side to Side* 336-337)

“Britain imposed heavy fresh burdens of taxation. When depression set in during 1921 Britain suffered. In 1925, the United Kingdom, which had tried to meet the immense burden of her national debt by heavy taxation, economies in expenditure
and expansion of her export trade, returned to the gold standard and established sterling at its prewar parity” (D.Thompson 507-508).

The Labour Government of 1945…extended universally the provision of free medical and dental services and unified into a national scheme of social security the previous systems of insurance against sickness, disability, unemployment, and old age…By 1950 it was widely accepted throughout Europe, that extremes of poverty and wealth should be avoided, and that they could best be avoided on one hand by taxation graded according to capacity to pay, and on the other by provision of social services according to need and designed to maintain a minimum standard of living for all. (D.Thompson 828)

Many economists hold the view that “Britain met only a quarter of its costs by raising taxes” (Stevenson). However the increasing taxation in the war and inter war period, placed a huge burden on the British population whose fixed incomes had already dwindled. The adult population of entire Britain was affected by the Great War. “On average, 6 million men served in Britain’s armed forces during the course of the war” (“How did the First World War”, studymode).

The standard of living of both the upper and middle classes saw a steep decline. The landed classes not only suffered emotionally by the death of the young male members of their family but also had to pay more in taxes (as death duties) as nearly all of them had been called up to serve their country by the army in the war, “out of the 6 million men serving, 750,00 were killed” (“How did the First World
War”, *studymode*). The fixed income generated from shares and bonds was also greatly reduced.

The plight of middle class is reflected in *Taken at the Flood*, when Lynn Marchmont returns home after having served abroad in the war and is overcome by pity for her mother:

Except for a rather unreliable woman who came four mornings a week, Mrs Marchmont was alone in the house, struggling with cooking and cleaning. Also Lynn realized with some dismay how their financial position had changed. The small but adequate fixed income which had kept them going comfortably before the war was now almost halved by taxation. Rates, expenses, wages had all gone up. (Christie 14)

Lynn’s concern seems justified as her mother also confesses her predicament to her:

What am I to do? What on earth am I to do, Lynn? The bank manager wrote me only this morning that I’m overdrawn. I don’t see how I can be. I’ve been so careful. But it seems my investments just aren’t producing what they used to. Increased taxation, he says. And all these yellow things, war damage insurance or something—one has to pay them whether one wants to or not. (20)

Ironically, war provided an opportunity of getting employment for the working class, mostly in the army, which not only gave them access to more money but also a raise in their standard of living, as the government was enforcing rationing and
controlling the supply and distribution of essential commodities for all people. This led to a decline in extreme poverty by the time the war ended.

Government policies exacerbated the situation. Fiscal policies stroked inflation, while selective price controls distorted output...whereas imports were drastically restricted. Consumers were exhorted to be frugal, and rationing came to Britain only in the last 12 months of the war, but in most Continental European countries, it was adopted in some form by 1916. Rationing worked best as a means of redistribution when the absolute shortage was small (as in Britain). But if there was simply too little food available, official supplies were liable, to be eclipsed by the black market…. (Stevenson)

In Christie’s *A Murder is Announced*, in anticipation of some guests arriving at her house, Miss Blacklock has the central heating lit in order to get rid of the damp and mustiness pervading the house. Her cousin, Patrick, mocks her for thus misappropriating “The precious, precious coke” (18) to which Miss Blacklock’s just reprimand is, “As you say, the precious coke, but otherwise there would have been the even more precious coal. You know the fuel office won’t even let us have the little bit that’s due to us each week—not unless we can say definitely that we haven’t any other means of cooking” (18-19).

When this light hearted conversation is then carried on between another young cousin Julia and Miss Blacklock, we see the gravity of the situation imposed by rationing, through a casual banter in a frivolous exchange of words:

“I suppose once there were heaps of coke and coal for everybody?” said Julia with the interest of one hearing about an unknown country.
“Yes, and cheap too.”

“And anyone could go and buy as much as they wanted, without filling in anything, and there wasn’t any shortage? There was lots of it then?”

“All kinds and qualities—and not all stones and slates like what we get nowadays.”

“It must have been a wonderful world,” said Julia with awe in her voice. (19)

The irony and wit in Julia’s concluding remark sharply brings out the contrast in the pre and post war English social conditions, where basic utilities like coke and coal had become scarce, and had thus assumed ‘venerated proportions.’

On the off side, people had developed ways to circumvent the laws and restrictions by indulging in practices like barter and trading of coupons allotted for clothing as well as for other necessities. In A Murder is Announced Inspector Craddock’s suspicions are immediately aroused against Miss Hinchliffe who is unwilling to explain her surreptitious activities to him. However the friendly vicar’s wife explains the true state of affairs to him:

Thursday is the day one of the farms round here makes butter. They let anybody they like have a bit. It’s usually Miss Hinchliffe who collects it. She’s very much in with all the farmers…But it’s all a bit hush-hush, you know; a kind of local scheme of barter. One person gets butter and sends along cucumbers, or something like that—and a little something when a pig’s killed. And now and then an animal has an
‘accident’ and has to be destroyed. Oh, you know the sort of thing. Only one can’t very well say it right out to the police. Because I suppose quite a lot of this barter is illegal—only nobody really knows because it’s all so complicated… there are clothing coupons, too… Not usually bought—that’s not considered honest. No money passes but people like Mrs Butt or Mrs Finch or Mrs Huggins (the domestic help) like a nice woollen dress or a winter coat that hasn’t seen too much wear and they pay for it with coupons instead of money. (167-168)

Most of the male population was engrossed in fighting the war but those unfit for it, due to age or health, were expected to contribute in their own limited ways. It was also essential to maintain an uninterrupted supply of effective basic commodities for the functioning of all concerned. So some men operating in the key sectors were compelled to stay back home, to ensure the same. In *Taken at the Flood*, Rowley Cloade had to stay back and farm whereas his partner Johnnie Vavasour had been enlisted for the war, and had almost immediately been killed in action in Norway.

War not only changed the political and economic outlook but also bought about significant changes in gender perception. Initially, women who were already working in sectors like textile and domestic service, merely transposed their services as “nurses, female military auxiliaries, ambulance drivers, farm workers and factory labourers, as well is in many other occupations,” (Grayzel). But the ever growing shortage in the labour market finally led to the employment of women in industry on a large scale. “From 1 June, 1915….to the end of the war (First), at least one million women were added to the British workforce” (“How did the First World War”, *nationalarchives*). “Jobs in the civil service, factories, docklands and arsenals,
tramways, post office and farms were feminized. In July 1914, 3.2 million women were employed in industry; this had jumped to 4.8 million by April 1918” (Bourke).

Though there was demarcation in the wages earned by the women, and the men retuning from the war displaced the women from their present jobs, yet it resulted in drastic changes in the society and the country:

The war had the effect of accelerating the emancipation of women wherever it had begun to happen before 1914. In Great Britain women over thirty were given the parliamentary vote in 1918 with hardly any opposition…

They took the place of men alongside men, and their claim to equality of status and rights won spontaneous recognition. After so many had acquired and experienced independence, both social and economic, it was impossible that they should be denied it. It became everywhere easier for women to find employment in industry and business, for old conventional barriers against them were down. (D.Thompson 575)

The women, able to break the traditional barriers, were now filled with a new zeal and sense of purpose. Naomi Laughton, who appears as the self-constituted spokesperson for all British women, in 1917, confessed, “she was “sick of frivolling” and “wanted to do something big and hard, because of our boys and of England” (Bourke). Mrs Marchmont is one such woman character, come to life in Taken at the Flood. “She was over sixty. She had never been a strong woman. During the war she had taken in evacuees from London, had cooked and cleaned for them, had worked with the W.V.S. (Women’s Voluntary Service), made jam, helped with school meals.
She had worked fourteen hours a day in contrast to a pleasant easy life before the war” (Christie 20).

Mrs Rachel Argyle, given in to philanthropic activities, in *Ordeal by Innocence*, also contributed greatly in salvaging some of the atrocities of the war:

On the outbreak of the war in 1939, Mrs Argyle’s activities were immediately redoubled. Once she had the idea of opening a war nursery for children from the London slums, she was in touch with many influential people in London. The Ministry of Health was quite willing to co-operate…she could accommodate up to eighteen children between the ages of two and seven. The children came not only from poor homes but also from unfortunate ones. There were orphans or illegitimate children whose mothers had no intention of being evacuated with them…. (Christie 87)

With the change in social position, women found work more conducive in factories where not only the working conditions were better but more lucrative and flexible than what was offered to them in domestic services. Also the significant number of war casualties now added a new burden onto the shoulders of women, by compelling them to adopt and adapt themselves to the role of the bread winner of the family. At the same time some women glorified in their new roles and had no desire whatsoever to go back to their traditional, male subservient roles. “New forms of social interaction between the sexes and across class lines became possible….Certain norms of western middle-class feminity all but disappeared, and women’s visible appearance before 1914 and after 1918 was markedly differed—with many women having shorter hair and wearing shorter skirts or even trousers” (Grayzel).
This cultural change, when viewed through the eyes of an old woman, Mrs Leadbetter, appears not only drastic and undesirable but also as a degradation of moral and social values:

Girls, indeed! I don’t know what their mothers are thinking of nowadays letting them gad about as they do. I blame the government. Sending the mothers to work in factories. Only let ’em off if they’ve got young children. Young children, stuff and nonsense! Anyone can look after a baby! A baby doesn’t go running round after soldiers. Girls from fourteen to eighteen, they’re the ones that need looking after! Need their mother. It takes a mother to know just what a girl is up to….Man mad, that’s what they are! Look at the way they dress. Trousers! Some poor fools wear shorts….what do they wear on their heads? Proper hats? No, a twisted up bit of stuff, and faces covered with paint and powder. (Christie, *Taken at the Flood* 169-170)

There are insurmountable differences between the pre war and post war generations. The generations who have undergone the gruesomeness and brutality of war, and have yet survived all the horrors of war, cannot be compared at par to the next generation, who are indifferent to the war experienced by their elders. They tend to take life on an easier plane and believe in the principle of ‘carpe diem’ or ‘seize the day’.

To make the world a better place for their children then it had so far been for them, the older generation also allowed certain liberties and indulgences to them. “The 40s had their “spiv” and with the early 50s came “the first nationally recognized figure….”the Teddy boy. It represented the attitude of young people towards the rest of
the society and the fact that for the first time working class youth could take the initiative” (“How Did the Second World War”).

The fashion appropriated by the younger generation also has an element of rebellion against the standard norms of society. Christie has described one such specimen as:

A girl of perhaps twenty-odd. Long straggly hair of indeterminate colour strayed over her shoulders…she wore what were presumably the chosen clothes of her generation. Black high leather boots, white open-work woollen stockings of doubtful cleanliness, a skimpy skirt, and a long and sloppy pullover of heavy wool. Anyone of Poirot’s age would have had only one desire. To drop the girl into a bath as soon as possible. He had often had this reaction walking along the streets. There were hundreds of girls looking exactly the same. They all looked dirty…such girls, Poirot reflected, were not perhaps really dirty. They merely took enormous care and pains to look so. (Third Girl 11)

Christie voices the question of the older generation, “Why is England absolutely full of these people nowadays?” (Third Girl 56).

Even the young male members had started going all out to adopt a totally unconventional attitude towards dressing:

He was a figure familiar enough to Poirot in different conditions, a figure often met in the streets of London or even at parties. A representative of the youth of today. He wore a black coat, an elaborate velvet waist coat, skin tight pants, and rich curls of chestnut hair hung
down on his neck. He looked exotic and rather beautiful, and it needed a few moments to be certain of his sex. (Christie, *Third Girl* 55)

He was the live example of the ‘Teddy boy’- “the 1950s youth with Edwardian-style clothing, hair, etc” (“Teddy boy”). On the other extreme, were boys whom Christie labelled as “much worse ones even. The kind that don’t wash, completely unshaven faces and funny sprouting beards and greasy clothes” (*Third Girl* 57).

Mrs Ariadne Oliver rightfully sums up the preference of modern girls for “beautiful young men. I don’t mean good-looking young men or smart-looking young men or well-dressed or well-washed looking young men. I mean they either like young men looking as though they were just going on in a restoration comedy, or else very dirty young men looking as though they were just going to take some awful tramp’s job” (Christie, *Third Girl* 77). Mrs Oliver also mentions their low standards of educational awareness. “But they are all so badly educated nowadays…really, the only people whose names they know are pop singers, or groups, or disc jockeys - that sort of thing” (Christie, *Third Girl* 24).

The independent attitude of young girls is reflected in Christie’s observation, “The young girls, they all do jobs nowadays” (*Third Girl* 52) and their self-alienation and self-exile from their parents or family or from the conventional ways of living had materialized in the form of renting furnished flats and sharing it with other girls. “It’s the way girls like living now. Better than PGs or a hostel. The main girl takes a furnished flat, and then shares out the rest. Second girl is usually a friend. Then they find a third girl by advertising if they don’t know one. And, as you see, very often they manage to squeeze in a fourth girl” (Christie, *Third Girl* 29).
This clearly shows the vast change in the social position of women in England, while there is also a mention of the drug-taking culture of the younger generation.

“The girl’s full of drugs. I’d say she’d been taking purple hearts, and dream bombs, and probably LSD…There are dozens of these things going about all producing slightly different effects” (Christie, Third Girl 161-162).

The psychological effects of war cannot be disregarded either. “Some men found meaning in their military service and sacrifices; others found themselves traumatized by the courage of modern weaponry” (Grayzel). Though war was not something alien to Europe but “this was the first general conflict between the highly organized states of the twentieth century, able to command the energies of all their citizens to mobilize the productive capacity of modern industries and to call upon the resources of modern technology to find new methods of destruction and of defence” (D.Thompson 547). The romance of war, bravery, courage, audaciousness quickly receded to the background after the war and people sometimes found it difficult to come back and adapt themselves again to the normal humdrum of everyday life, the monotony of tame existence:

“Oh! Brave new world,” though Lynn grimly. Her eyes rested lightly on the columns of the daily paper. “Ex W.A.A.F. (Women’s Auxiliary Air Force) seeks post where initiative and drive will be appreciated.” “Former WREN (Women’s Royal Navy Service) seeks post where organizing ability and authority are needed.”

Enterprise, initiative, command, those were the commodities offered. But what was wanted? People who could cook and clean, or
write decent shorthand. Plodding people who knew a routine and could
give good service. (Christie, *Taken at the Flood* 14)

When her fiancé Rowley Cloade questions Lynn, who had been recently
demobbed from the WRENS in 1946, about their forthcoming marriage and says “But
of course you service girls will find it hard to settle down at home” (Christie, *Taken at
the Flood* 35), she quickly counteracts him but her future prospects appear bleak when
she candidly surveys them herself:

They would get married in June…and she would never go away again.
Go away, that is to say, in the sense that the words now held for her.
The excitement of gang planks being pulled up, the racing of a ship’s
crew, the thrill as an airplane became airborne and soared up and over
the earth beneath watching a strange coastline take form and shape.
The smell of hot dust, and paraffin, and garlic - the clatter and gabble
of foreign tongues. Strange flowers, red poinsettias rising proudly from
a dusty garden….Packing, unpacking - where next? All that was over.
The war was over. Lynn Marchmont had come home….But I’m not
the same Lynn who went away, she thought. (Christie, *Taken at the
Flood* 36)

Another character, confronted with the same dilemma of rootlessness is Bryan
Eastley, who had been a fighter pilot and had also been commended for his bravery,
but who now found it difficult to face life in peace times. Lucy Eyelesbarrow surveys
Bryan, and concludes:

He reminded her of innumerable young pilots she had known during the
war when she had been at the impressionable age of fourteen. She had
gone on and grown up into a post-war world but she felt as though Bryan had not gone on, but had been passed by in the passage of years…. “It’s a difficult sort of world,” he said, “Isn’t it? To get your bearings in, I mean. You see, one hasn’t been trained for it…. That’s the sort of thing that puts you wrong.” (Christie, 4.50 from Paddington 87-88)

Inspector Bacon sums up Bryan Eastley when he says, “I’ve run into one or two of his type. They’re what you might call adrift in the world - had danger and death and excitement too early in life. Now they find life tame, tame and satisfactory. In a way, we’ve given them a raw deal, though I don’t really know what we could do about it. But there they are, all past and no future, so to speak” (Christie, 4.50 from Paddington 87-88).

Lynn rightfully concludes that war made one postpone looking beyond the reality of today, as it drove home the fact of the uncertainty of life. She herself, a clear headed decisive person had become an irresolute, uncertain one content with:

Drifting along! an aimless formless method of living. Ever since she had come out of the service. A wave of nostalgia swept over her for those war days. Days when duties were clearly defined, when life was planned and orderly - when the weight of individual decision had been lifted from her. But even as she formulated the idea, she was horrified at herself. Was that really and truly what people were secretly feeling everywhere? Was that what, ultimately, war did to you? It was not the physical dangers—the mines at sea, the bombs from the air, the crisp bing of a rifle bullet as you drove over a desert track. No, it was the
spiritual danger of learning how much easier life was if you ceased to think… (Christie, *Taken at the Flood* 93-94)

Christie also tried her hand at writing spy stories like *N or M*? which involve her detective couple ‘Tommy and Tuppence Beresford’ who hunt down German spies, but it never achieved the success of her detective novels. Nonetheless it is said to be outstandingly accurate in its depiction of the “world of espionage and covert intelligence” (Warren).

Occasionally ‘socialist’ characters do crop up in Christie’s works but they are made to appear ridiculous as half-baked impractical idealists with no apparent sense of realism. This reflected the general mood prevailing in England against the socialist and communist forces which materialized in the form of Mussolini’s Fascists (who were dissident Socialists) and Hitler’s Nazis (who were self-professed communists) as Hitler himself declared “There is more than binds us to Bolshevism than separates us from it” (“Were Hitler and Mussolini Socialists?”).

One such character is David Angkatell in *The Hollow*, “who preferred the contemplation of an academic past or the earnest discussion of a left wing future, but had no aptitude for dealing with a violent and realistic present” (Christie 197). In *Death on the Nile* we come across a socialist character who expresses his contempt for all historical buildings and sites:

Take the Pyramids. Great blocks of useless masonry, put up to minister to the egotism of a despotic bloated king. Think of the sweatéd masses who toiled to build them and died doing it. It makes me sick to think of the suffering and torture they represent….I think human beings matter
more than stones…I’d rather see a well fed worker than any so-called work of art. What matters is the future - not the past. (Christie 71)

One, Two, Buckle My Shoe gives a glimpse of the ideals of these so called socialist young men, one of whom wants to exterminate Mr Alistair Blunt, a well known banker and man of finance, and the conservatism he stands for:

He’s got to go - he and everything he stands for! There’s got to be a new deal—the old corrupt system of finance has got to go - this cursed net of bankers all over the world like a spider’s web. They’ve got to be swept away….“You can’t disrupt the foundations of civilization.”

Can’t you, though? Let him wait and see! He’s an obstruction in the way of progress and he’s got to be removed….You’ve got a lot of them here in England crusted old diehards—useless, worn-out symbols of a decayed era…There’s got to be a new world. (Christie 104)

Alistair Blunt is perceptive enough to realize the meaninglessness and futility in these socialist preoccupations. “Everybody’s talking this sort of stuff! And it doesn’t mean anything! It’s all hot air! I find myself up against it the whole time—a new heaven and a new earth. What does it mean? They can’t tell you yourselves! They’re just drunk on words” (Christie, One, Two, Buckle My Shoe 203).

The changing composition of English society due to the upheaval caused by the great Wars, has also been shown by Christie in A Murder is Announced through her spokesperson Miss Marple:

And that’s really the particular way the world has changed since the war. Fifteen year ago one knew who everybody was…there were
people whose fathers and mothers and grandfathers and grandmothers, or whose aunts and uncles, had lived there before them. If somebody new came to live there, they brought letters of introduction, or they’d been in the same regiment or served on the same ship as someone already there. If anybody new - really new - really a stranger - came, well, they stuck out - everybody wondered about them and didn’t rest till they found out…

But it’s not like that anymore. Every village and small country place is full of people who’re just come and settled there without any ties to bring them. The big houses have been sold, and the cottages have been converted and changed. And people just come—and all you know about them is what they say of themselves. People from India and Hong Kong and China, and people who used to live in France and Italy in little cheap places and odd islands. And people who’ve made a little money and can afford to retire. But nobody knows any more who anyone is…people take you at your own valuation. They don’t wait to call until they’ve had a letter from a friend saying that so-and-so’s are delightful people and she’s known them all their lives. (96-97)

A very comprehensive and exhaustive survey of the metamorphosis of the English society in the aftermath of the World Wars, has been very lucidly and succinctly been represented by Christie. In Mirror Crack’d from Side to Side, Miss Marple’s musings regarding the manifestations apparent in her own village, and what implications they hold for an old lady like her, who had witnessed not only the pre but also the post war England, are clearly revealed:
St Mary Mead was not the place it had been... you could blame the war (both the wars) or the younger generations, or women going out to work, or the atom bomb, or just the Government....

St Mary Mead, the old world core of it, was still there... There were new people in most of the other old houses but the houses themselves were little changed in appearance since the people who had bought them had done so because they liked what the house agent called ‘old world charm’. They just added another bathroom, and spent a good deal of money on plumbing, electric cookers, and dish washers.

But though the houses looked much as before, the same could hardly be said of the village street. When shops changed hands there, it was with a view to immediate and intemperate modernization....At the end of the street, however,...stood a glittering new supermarket— anathema to the elderly ladies of St Mary Mead.

Packets of things one’s never even heard of...all these great packets of breakfast cereal instead of cooking a child a proper breakfast of bacon and eggs. And you’re expected to take a basket yourself and go round looking for things—it takes a quarter of an hour sometimes to find all one wants—and usually made up in inconvenient sizes, too much or too little. And then a long queue waiting to pay as you go out. Most tiring. (329-325)

Miss Marple picks out the contrasts between the domestic help, then and now. In the past Miss Marple had simple girls from Faith’s orphanage, whom she trained, under her watchful eyes, in proper ways of washing up and making a bed. They were
all rather simple girls, not adept in handling a telephone or doing arithmetic, but they had “had skills rather than education” (Christie, Mirror Crack’d from Side to Side 327). But “devoted maidservants had gone out of fashion” (Christie, Mirror Crack’d from Side to Side 327).

In the after war years what was ironic was that it was the “educated girls who went in for domestic chores. Students from abroad, girls au pair, university students in the vacation, young married women….” (Christie, Mirror Crack’d from Side to Side 327). Miss Marple had a daily help who was a young woman named Cherry Baker who was:

One of the detachment of young wives who shopped at the supermarket and wheeled prams about the quiet streets of St Mary Mead. They were all smart and well turned out. Their hair was crisp and curled…they were like a happy flock of birds. Owing to the insidious snares of hire purchase, they were always in need of ready money, though their husbands all earned good wages; and so they came and did housework or cooking. (Christie, Mirror Crack’d from Side to Side 326)

When, one day, Miss Marple decides to investigate the development, that had taken place in St Mary Mead, she comes across “rows of neat well-built houses, with their television masts and their blue and pink and yellow and green painted doors and windows….The trousered young women, the rather sinister looking young men and boys, the exuberant bosoms of the fifteen-year-old girls.” This was a world totally alien to her own, “It hardly seemed real to Miss Marple….It all looked terribly depraved” (Christie, Mirror Crack’d from Side to Side 331).
However, on a closer inspection of the residents of the development and hearing their conversations, Miss Marple’s common sense exerted itself to convince her that “the new world was the same as the old. The houses were different, the streets were called closes, the clothes were different, the voices were different, but the human beings were the same as they always had been. And though using slightly different phraseology, the subjects of conversation were the same” (Christie, *Mirror Crack’d from Side to Side* 332).