CHAPTER V
FORMALIST APPROACH: APPLICATION (CONTINUED)
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In this chapter the practical application of the formalist approach will be continued. Therefore a study will be made of the many other elements of a narrative like Paradox and Irony, Metaphor and Simile, Ambiguity, Tension, Defamiliarization, Points of View, Symbolism, Imagery, Atmosphere, Setting, Allusion, Unusual Juxtapositions and Binary Opposites, Motif, Themes, Universal Aspects of Human Experience, Tone, Diction, Hyperbole, Repetition, and Verisimilitude, as can be witnessed in the works of Christie.

Paradox and Irony:

Paradox:

In his famous work *The Well-Wrought Urn*, Cleanth Brooks states emphatically that the language of poetry differs greatly from the language of science. Scientific language is empirical and factual whereas poetic language is based upon irony and paradox and he assigns equal importance to the connotations and the denotations therein. “I have said that even the apparently simple and straightforward poet is forced into paradoxes by the nature of his instrument” (qtd. in Rice and Waugh 57).

“A paradox is a self – contradictory statement or a statement which brings together opposite ideas, which however convey some essential truth.” (Tilak 123). Irony “is the use of language opposite in meaning to the one really intended by the writer…. (It) is the instrument of sarcasm and satire.” (Tilak 123). “...the character of paradox with its twin concomitants of irony and wonder...” (Rice and Waugh 61). We can thus conclude that paradox is comprised of irony and wonder. Romanticism is
said to be based on paradox. The Romantic poets used paradox to create wonder whereas the Neo-Classicists used paradox to create irony. Thus Brooks surmises that “paradox is the language appropriate and inevitable to poetry” in his influential essay *The Language of Paradox* (qtd. in Das 287).

The greatest paradox conceivable in the whole corpus of Christie’s work, or rather in the whole genre of detective fiction, is the fact that the brutal termination of existence on this planet or to put it more crudely ‘murder’, is enclosed within a framework that is termed as escapist literature. Escapist literature is understood as light-hearted reading, which provides oblivion from the gross realities of one’s life for the duration of a few hours and does not require much absorption or perception on the reader’s part. Now what clearly emerges as a paradox here is the fact that to escape from one’s own existential hardship, we are entertained by reading about the end of someone else’s existence.

Further, the sanctity placed on life on humanitarian grounds worldwide, is shown as a mere event in the succession of events in the game of murder, which becomes a riddle to be solved by the detective. With the stepping of the detective into the scene we can say that the first murder committed by the murderer becomes “…merely the occasion for the second, in which he is the victim of the pure and unpunishable murderer, the detective” as stated by Todorov (qtd. in Lodge 157). It incorporates a *paradox* that avenging the life of a human being, by society, is achieved by extinguishing the life of the other. Though this is justified on moral grounds and acts as a ‘punishment’ to deter others from committing the same crime, nevertheless it remains a veritable paradox in the working of a society.
The detective, through his investigation tries to unveil the murderer and to present him before the law, so that he may reap the reward of his sins and also to prevent him from taking up another human life, as the murderer Jacqueline de Bellefort confesses, “I might do it again....I’m not a safe person any longer. I can feel that myself....It’s so dreadfully easy – killing people. And you begin to feel that it doesn’t matter...that it’s only you that matters! It’s dangerous – that.” (Death on the Nile 244).

To descend from the general to the particular, the paradox most visible in Christie’s work is the blossoming of love between two likely or sometimes even unlikely people, amidst the grim atmosphere of murder. On the one hand, life has ended and on the other, a new life starts for the two lovers. Thus the initiation of a new life together even in the face of death (a life coming to an end) is paradoxical. However, it gives faith and hope to the reader that no matter what befalls one, life goes on unabated.

For consideration, in Ordeal by Innocence, Dr Calgary, who is the alibi in the murder case, is a man in his late thirties whose love is reciprocated by Hester Argyle, a young girl in her twenties, the adopted sister of the accused Jacko Argyle. In Dr Calgary, she finds the faith and belief in her innocence, which is missing in her own fiancé.

In Murder is Easy Luke Fitzwilliam, a policeman from Mayang Straits, comes to Wychwood-under-Ashe to enquire into a succession of deaths that had recently taken place in this out of the way spot. Under the guise of an author writing on folklore, he goes as a cousin of a friend’s cousin, Bridget Conway, who resides there.
and in the course of detection both manage to promptly fall in love while together solving, what appears to be a case of wholesale murders.

In *Three Act Tragedy*, the young impressionable girl, Hermione Lytton Gore, falls under the spell of the famous actor, Sir Charles Cartwright. Though outwardly he shows hesitation in reciprocating her sentiments due to the great disparity in their age, he does not hesitate to commit murders in order to marry her. It is only when he is exposed as the murderer, does Hermione come out from the shadow of hero-worship, to find solace in the unacknowledged love of her childhood friend Oliver Manders.

Poirot also admits, “I have the heart very susceptible to lovers” (*Three Act Tragedy* 53). He further makes a profound observation “Murder I have often noticed...is a great matchmaker” (qtd. in Hart 31). Right from his very first appearance in print, we see Poirot manifesting this belief. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, Hastings remarks about Poirot, “Who on earth but Poirot would have thought of a trial for murder as a restorer of conjugal happiness!” to which Poirot agrees unabashedly, “No one but Hercule Poirot would have attempted such a thing! And you are wrong in condemning it. The happiness of one man and woman is the greatest thing in all the world” (296). Frequently, he himself does not refrain from playing the matchmaker as in novels like *Sad Cypress*, wherein Elinor Carlisle has just been acquitted of the grave charge of murder, and is in a broken-down condition after having gone through so much suffering in the past few days. He encourages Peter Lord to start a new life with Elinor, even though in the past she had been in love with Roderick Welman. “She never needed Roderick Welman. She loved him, yes, unhappily – even desperately...But she needs you, my friend, because it is only with
you that she can begin the world again….Can you not accept facts? She loved Roderick Welman. What of it? With you, she can be happy….” (230).

Another apparent paradox is the fact that Hercule Poirot, the famous Belgian detective, towards the end of his life finds himself in a dilemma, whereby he is forced to murder a person, so as to save further human lives from meeting the same fate. This he confesses to his dear friend Hastings in a letter, to be received by him only after Poirot’s death:

Yes, my friend – it is odd – and laughable – and terrible! I, who do not approve of murder – I who value human life – have ended my career by committing murder. Perhaps it is because I have been too self-righteous, too conscious of rectitude, that this terrible dilemma has to come to me. For you see, Hastings, there are two sides to it. It is my work in life to save the innocent – to prevent murder – this is the only way I can do it! (Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case 261-262)

In *Ordeal by Innocence*, Dr Calgary tries his best to clear the name of Jacko Argyle. Even after he has been convicted as the murderer by the law, Dr Calgary manages to get ‘a free pardon’ issued for him, albeit posthumously. As it turns out Jacko is the real murderer morally, who incited Kirsten Lindstrom to do the deed, even though he had Dr Calgary as an alibi, because though his was not the hand but certainly the brain behind the attack on his mother Rachel Argyle.

A gentle natured person may also become ruthless when the need arises and may not hesitate to take the life of a person. Ann Meredith (*Cards on the Table*) and Simon Doyle (*Death on the Nile*) are two such characters. Ann Meredith kills when her guilt is about to be exposed and Simon Doyle, to fulfil his materialistic needs.
This apparent paradox of gentleness and ruthlessness existing simultaneously within one person can be seen in Christie’s works.

Irrony:

“Irony always involves contrast, a discrepancy between the expected and the actual, between the apparent and the real. Such contrast may appear in many forms. A speaker uses irony, for example, when he deliberately says something which he does not mean, but indicates by his tone what he does mean.” (Brooks and Warren, *Understanding Fiction* 512-513). Apart from ‘irony of statement’, there is ‘irony of situation’ which “involves a discrepancy between what we expect the outcome of an action to be, or what would seem to be the fitting outcome, and the actual outcome” (Brooks and Warren, *Understanding Fiction* 513).

Verbal Irony:

“‘And so you see, Mr Rowdy, I couldn’t help hearing what was going on. Really, you could have knocked me over with a feather’. A pretty substantial feather thought Rowdy, would be needed.” (*Taken at the Flood* 87). This is a case of verbal irony because the speaker Beatrice is a woman of substantial proportions.

In *The ABC Murders*, during an official conference at Scotland Yard, Poirot displays verbal irony when he thinks Inspector Crome is viewing the murder victims (where the murders appear to based on an alphabetical complex of the murderer) as just some more letters of the alphabets that needed to be crossed off before he could get at the murderer and not as innocent human beings being deprived of their life. And so Poirot cannot resist questioning him when he would consider it likely to catch the
murderer, “‘Which letter of the alphabet do you place it at, Inspector?’ asked Poirot” (83).

Captain Hastings goes to meet Poirot at Styles, which had been converted to a guest house and where Poirot was staying for a short while. When asked whether he was liking his stay there, Poirot responds by enumerating its various discomforts. “‘I do not complain,” said Poirot, and proceeded to do so” (Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case 19).

**Situational Irony:**

In *Endless Night*, it is only after Mike has carried out his plan of killing his young wife Ellie, who is an heiress, without any suspicion falling upon him and his accomplice Greta, that things take on an ironic turn. “When I arrived back on top of the world, having got all I’d longed for in spite of the risks, in spite of the dangers, in spite of having done a pretty good murder, though I say it myself ” (201). “We’d get all we’d played for! We’d won – won hands down!” (203).

It is only after the deed had been done, did the consequences sink in, bothering his conscience. He regrets his action of killing Ellie and tries to atone for the sin by killing Greta also. It is then that he realizes that with Ellie he had found happiness, which he himself had destroyed. “We were very happy together. Yes, very happy. I wish I’d know then that we were happy….I had my chance….I turned my back on it” (215).

An ironic situation is developed further in many novels like *Murder is Easy* where Luke Fitzwilliam entrusts his ladylove Bridget Conway, into the care of Miss Honoria Waynflete, to keep her safe whereas the real danger to her is from Miss
Wayflete itself, as is revealed towards the end when the latter is exposed as the murderess.

Similarly, in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Ackroyd consults Dr Sheppard as his trustworthy and faithful friend. He asks the latter advice, as to what he should do about the unknown person who was blackmailing Mrs Ferrars (the woman Ackroyd had loved) and who was thus responsible for her suicide. However, as events turn out, it was Dr Sheppard himself who was the blackmailer who, to hide his crime, kills off Ackroyd too. Therefore, this again is an instance of irony, where unknowingly the murderer is the one being sought out to provide help and refuge.

Another irony is seen in *A Murder is Announced* and *Peril at End House* where the central character, Miss Letitia Blacklock and Nick Buckley respectively, portray themselves as the victim whose life is under threat under repeated attacks from the murderer. Whereas in the denouement they themselves turn out to be the murderer, and not the innocent, intended victim. This apparent irony sets the reader on the wrong track right from the beginning.

In *Mirror Cracke’d from Side to Side*, the secretary Ella Zelinsky is happy to have tumbled upon the identity of the murderer, so that she could effectively blackmail him to increase her bank balance. But contrary to her expectations she is murdered herself before any increase in her wealth is achieved.

In *The Moving Finger* all people in the village of Lymstock, have been receiving anonymous letters suggestive of some obscene relationship in their lives. It is only Miss Elsie Holland who had not received such a letter because the person responsible for writing and circulating the anonymous letters, Mr Symmington, secretly harbours tender feelings towards her, and thus could not bring himself to
make any accusation against her in any way. And this weakness on his part then becomes the real pointer for Miss Marple to solve the mystery, which he had never even imagined, could cause his downfall.

In *Peril at End House*, Nick expresses her desire of producing a play at her residence, End House, because she feels it has a lot of atmosphere. When Poirot finally acts out a play in End House, gathering all the people involved in the case, her role seems to have been ironically reversed, as not that of a producer but that of a murderess.

Thus, paradox and irony greatly enhance the drama and excitement of the story.

**Metaphor and Simile:**

I. A. Richards in his essay on metaphor, starts with Aristotle’s statement as written down in the *Poetics*, “The greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor...this alone cannot be imparted to another: it is the mark of genius for to make good metaphor implies an eye for resemblances” (*Anthology* 10).

Richards quotes Shelley’s remark that:

> Language is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension, until words, which represent them, become, through time, signs for portions or classes of thought instead of pictures of integral thoughts: and then, if no new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganised, language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse. (*Anthology* 11)
According to Dr Johnson, “As to metaphorical expression that is a great excellence in style, when it is used with propriety, for it gives you two ideas for one.” (Anthology 11). Richard himself presents the view that, “Metaphor is the omnipresent principle of language can be shown by mere observation. We cannot get through three sentences of ordinary fluid discourse without it” (Anthology 11).

Aristotle called a simile “a metaphor with a preface” (Anthology 17). I. A. Richards has formulated his own theory of metaphor wherein he aligns the two part of a metaphor – tenor (subject) and vehicle (idea) because he bemoans the lack of proper terminology when talking about the two ideas contained in a metaphor. “At present we have only some clumsy descriptive phrases with which to separate them. ‘The original idea’ and ‘the borrowed one’...‘the idea’ and ‘its image’” (Das 262). Richards believes that the relationship between tenor and vehicle should be analysed to find out the essence of the metaphor.

G.N. Leech has made one more qualification to Richards’s theory, “Every metaphor is implicit of the form X is like Y in respect of Z, where X is the tenor, Y the vehicle, and Z the ground” (Das 264), whereby he allocates that a third element of metaphor is Z which is a common ground of comparison of tenor and vehicle.

In Agatha Christie’s works, we can see a metaphor demonstrated in the form of characters of a nursery rhyme. In her famous work, And Then There Were None (also published as Ten Little Indians), in the initial pages, we come across a character, Vera Claythorne, who reads aloud a poem written on a parchment and hung over the mantel and recalls that it is a very old nursery rhyme from her childhood days:

Ten little Indian boys went out to dine;
One choked his little self and then there were nine.

Nine little Indian boys sat up very late;
One overslept himself and then there were eight.

Eight little Indian boys travelling in Devon;
One said he’d stay there and then there were seven.

Seven little Indian boys chopping up sticks;
One chopped himself in halves and then there were six.

Five little Indian boys going in for law;
One got in Chancery and then there were four.

Four little Indian boys going out to sea;
A red herring swallowed one and then there were three.

Three little Indian boys walking in the Zoo;
A big bear hugged one and then there were two.

Two little Indian boys sitting in the sun;
One got frizzled up and then there was one.

One little Indian boy left all alone;
He went and hanged himself and then there were none. (31)
Here the nursery rhyme is actually acted out. The eight characters find themselves stranded on an island, off the coast of Devon, on the invitation of a host/hostess who seems to have disappeared. Even the two hired help, temporarily engaged to do the housework and welcome the guests, and the secretary, have never set eyes on their employer. They have received instructions through correspondence, in a similar vein to the invitation received by the seven guests. One by one all the ten characters appear to be killed off in the same way as laid down in the nursery rhyme. Thus, the ten characters in the novel become the tenor of the metaphor, the ten Indians of the rhyme become the vehicle, the common ground being the process of their elimination.

Anthony Marston, dies of asphyxiation, on gulping his drink in one go (One choked his little self). Mrs Rogers seems to have died in her sleep (One overslept himself). General Macarthur is killed by something hard and sharp hitting on the back of his head but he had already resigned himself to death as the inevitable end on seeing the previous two murders. He had sat on a cliff looking out to the sea and was heard saying, “It’s pleasant. It’s a good place, I think, to wait....The end....We’re all waiting for the end....None of us are going to leave the Island....The blessed relief when you know that you’ve done with it all – that you haven’t got to carry the burden any longer.” (116-117) (One said he’d stay there). Rogers had been killed by being hit on the back of his head with a chopper while he was chopping wood for the kitchen fire (One chopped himself in halves). Emily Brent had died due to a poison being injected by a hypodermic syringe into the right side of her neck and to confuse the situation, a bumblebee was found buzzing in the room (A bumblebee stung one). Mr Justice Wargrave appeared to have been shot in the middle of his forehead. He was dressed in a scarlet robe wearing a judge’s wig on his head (One got in Chancery.) Dr
Armstrong disappears and his body is found the next day, drowned, and disfigured (A red herring swallowed one). Blore dies by having his head crushed by a big block of white marble shaped like a bear (A big bear hugged one). Philip Lombard is shot through the heart, which was a slight break from the nursery rhyme; though his body was left lying in the sun, (One got frizzled up). The last survivor Vera Claythorne finds a rope with a noose hanging in her room, with a chair underneath, which could be kicked away if one so desired. And in this atmosphere of death she goes and hangs herself by adjusting the noose around her neck (He went and hanged himself).

In a similar vein, *Five Little Pigs* also corresponds to a nursery rhyme.

This little piggy went to

Market,

This little piggy stayed

Home,

This little piggy had roast

Beef,

This little piggy had none,

And this little piggy cried,

“Wee! Wee! Wee!”

All the way home. (“Five Little Pigs”)

When Poirot meets the five characters, who are the witnesses, in the murder of the famous painter Amyas Crail by his wife Caroline Crail, he thinks of them in terms of the characters of the rhyme. ‘This little Pig went to Market’ relates to Philip Blake who was a “prosperous, shrewd, jovial- looking man – slightly running to fat”
(87) about whom Hercule Poirot forms the opinion as that of “A man, it would seem, without cares. Prosperous, contented. No remorseful thoughts, no uneasy twinges of conscience from the past, no haunting memories here. No, a well–fed pig who had gone to market – and fetched the full market price...” (89) as he had become a successful stockbroker.

‘This little pig stayed at home’ refers to Meredith Blake who was an impoverished gentleman living in his ancestral home, Handcross Manor, in the country. He has been described as a man wearing “a shabby old coat of Harris tweed, a weather- beaten, pleasant, middle–aged face with somewhat faded blue eyes, a weak mouth, half hidden by a rather straggly moustache” (107). He was akin to the “country squire – stay at home sort of chap” (33).

‘This little pig ate Roast Beef’ – “They’ve fed her meat all right. She’s been a go - getter. She’s had three husbands since then. In and out of the divorce court as easy as you please. And every time she makes a change, it’s for the better. Lady Dittisham - that’s who she is now” (33-34). Here is the description of Elsa Greer, the other woman in the case, for whom Amyas Crake is ready to get a divorce from his wife, in order to marry her. On entering her house and facing the dazzling array of wealth everywhere, Poirot reflects to himself, “Money, money everywhere....But here, in the house, there was only a solid lavishness. The best Not necessarily the showiest, or the most startling. Merely ‘expense no object’ allied to a lack of imagination. Roast beef? Yes, roast beef!” (150).

‘This little Pig had none’ is an appropriate description of Cecilia Williams, the governess of Caroline Crale’s half-sister Angela. She existed, “in a room that was bedroom, sitting-room, dining-room, and, by judicious use of the gas ring, kitchen – a
kind of cubby hole attached to it continued a quarter-length bath and the usual offices” (163). The dreary circumstances in which she lived qualified her for the above title. “It was clear to Hercule Poirot that Cecilia Williams lived very near the bone. There was no roast beef here. This was the little pig that had none” (164).

‘This little pig cried ‘Wee Wee Wee’’ describes Angela Warren who had been disfigured at a young age, on being injured by her elder half-sister Caroline, in a fit of jealous rage. She might have been a young, handsome woman but “on the right cheek, disfiguring and puckering the skin, was that healed scar. The right eye was slightly distorted, the corner pulled downwards by it but no one would have realized that the sight of that eye was destroyed” (184). And so “she’s had something to cry Wee-Wee about in her life” (34). But Hercule Poirot sees no sign of regret or reproach in her as she was a highly proficient archaeologist and her success and confidence had made her “a vital and forceful woman, a woman of considerable mental power and gifted with abundant energy to accomplish ambitious purposes….Her life was full and vivid and eminently enjoyable.” (185).

Herein the characters in the novel are the tenor, the five pigs of the nursery rhyme are the vehicle, and the common ground is their respective circumstances.

Use of metaphorical language:

Sometimes even the great Hercule Poirot is shown to make a slip in English language usage because he is a Belgian by nationality who had come to England as a refugee. This can be seen in the following conversation. “‘I have indeed been foolish to take the matter so seriously,” said Poirot. “It is the nest of the horse that I put my nose into there”. “You’re mixing up mares and wasps,” said Japp...“Just a couple of
proverbs”” (The ABC Murders 18) (Mare’s nest – something that does not exist; put his hand into a wasp’s nest – stirs up trouble)

“For somewhere,” said Poirot to himself, indulging in an absolute riot of mixed metaphors, “there is in the hay a needle, and among the sleeping dogs there is one on whom I shall put my foot, and by shooting the arrows into the air, one will come down and hit a glass house!” (Mrs McGinty’s Dead 127). This shows Christie’s own playfulness in the use of metaphorical language.

In Three Act Tragedy, Poirot elucidates his supposed weakness in speaking the English language:

It is true that I can speak the exact, the idiomatic English. But, my friend, to speak the broken English is an enormous asset. It leads people to despise you. They say – a foreigner – he can’t even speak English properly. It is not my policy to terrify people – instead I invite their gentle ridicule. Also I boast! An Englishman he says often, ‘A fellow who thinks as much of himself as that cannot be worth much.’ That is the English point of view. It is not at all true. And so, you see, I put people off guard. Besides, he added ‘it has become a habit’. (223)

Sometimes he gets irritated at the conventional use of a proverb. When Hastings tries to console him when Poirot is not able to reach the solution of the mystery. “Always darkest before dawn,”...He groaned...“No, no. Not another proverb. I cannot bear it” (Peril at End House 177).
His most famous idiom of all times being, “You and I, Hastings, are going hunting once again.” *(Curain: Poirot's Last Case* 23). About himself, he sometimes makes the analogy, “Hercule Poirot is a good dog. The good dog follows the scent, and if, regrettably, there is no scent to follow he noses around – seeking always something that is not very nice. So also, obeys Hercule Poirot” *(Peril at End House* 165).

Miss Marple also uses a metaphor to describe herself when she proclaims towards the end of *A Caribbean Mystery*. “‘It’s me,” said Miss Marple, for once ungrammatical, “though I should put it a little more strongly than that. The Greeks, I believe, had a word for it. Nemesis, if I am not wrong’” *(141)*.

A few metaphors, which we come across in some of her books, can be seen as:

“An Ophelia devoid of physical attraction – a girl with ‘long wet-looking hair and rather plain’” *(Third Girl* 22-25).

“Yawning cavern” has been used for a lift *(Third Girl* 38).

“Me, I am an old Belgian police dog” *(Third Girl* 50).

“The peacock. A proud peacock. In his velvets, his tight, elegant black trouser…” *(Third Girl* 135).

“He struts”...“that’s why I nicknamed him a peacock. Shows off, you know. Vain, I should think. Proud of his looks” *(Third Girl* 189).

“Old frozen fish”; “Her acidity” *(Mrs McGinty's Dead* 182).

“It is a wolf with ideas. . . .” *(One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* 99).

Some **similes** that can be glimpsed in her work:
“She turned abruptly and blundered out of the room, rather like a desperate moth in lamplight” (*Third Girl* 13).

“Like a frightened rabbit” (*Third Girl* 38).

“Hard as nails” (*Third Girl* 71).

“Strong as a horse” (*Third Girl* 71).

“Like an ardent bloodhound” (*Third Girl* 104).

“Large tall buildings – just like anthills” (*Third Girl* 104).

“Enormous skyscrapers, most of which Mrs Oliver thought very hideous, mounted to the sky with a square matchbox–like air” (*Third Girl* 107).

“The large-woman, metaphorically speaking, rolled over him like a large steam roller” (*Appointment with Death* 67).

Miss Marple compares her analytical and suspicious mind to a sink as attributed by her nephew Raymond. “My nephew Raymond tells me (in fun, of course, and quite affectionately) that I have a mind like a *sink*. He says that most Victorians have. All I can say is that the Victorians knew a good deal about human nature” (*The Body in the Library* 210).

“Hercule Poirot’s head was poised interrogatively. Outside the window a bird was carrying a thing to build its nest. Hercule Poirot looked rather like a bird as he sat there with his egg-shaped head cocked to one side” (*One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* 82).

“They were a little like dogs, manoeuvring for position – circling round each other, backs stiff, hackles up, ready to be friendly or ready to snap and snap” (*Taken at the Flood* 76).
Apart from these minor similes, the use of simile in a prominent way that finds its place in the works of Christie, is visible in the Miss Marple series. As has been stated earlier, Miss Marple draws village parallels relying vastly on her knowledge of human nature. “People are very alike everywhere” (A Murder is Announced 123). Her own prowess at solving mysteries is very lucidly accounted for, by herself:

You see…living alone, as I do, in a rather out – of the – way part of the world, one has to have a hobby. There is, of course, woolwork, and Guides, and Welfare, and sketching, but my hobby is – and always has been – Human Nature – so varied – and so very fascinating. And, of course in a small village, with nothing to distract one, one has such ample opportunity for becoming what I might call proficient in one’s study. One begins to class people, quite definitely, just as though they were birds or flowers, group so-and-so, genus this, species that. Sometimes, of course, one makes mistakes, but less as time goes on. And then, too, one tests oneself. One takes a little problem…a quite unimportant mystery but absolutely incomprehensible unless one solves it right….It is so fascinating, you know, to apply one’s judgement and find that one is right. (The Murder at the Vicarage 667)

In The Body in the Library Sir Henry Clithering, the retired Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, discusses the case of Mr Conway Jefferson with her. A young girl, Ruby Keene, who was a dance hostess at the Majestic Hotel, Danemouth had been found strangled in Gossington Hall, St Mary Mead. Her murder had been a shock to Jefferson, who had become very fond of the girl during his stay at the same hotel. He was a broken down old man who had become a cripple in an accident in
which he had lost his wife, son, and daughter. Miss Marple explains this unreasonable liking of Jefferson for a common, silly girl like Ruby Keene, to Sir Henry by drawing village parallels:

What I was trying to say was – very badly, I know – that he was looking for a nice bright girl to take his daughter’s place – and then this girl saw her opportunity and played it for all she was worth! That sounds rather uncharitable, I know, but I have seen so many cases of the kind. The young maid-servant at Mr Harbottle’s, for instance. A very ordinary girl, but quiet with nice manners. His sister was called away to nurse a dying relative and when she got back she found the girl completely above herself….

Such a scandal as it created in the village….People said things, of course, but I believe there was no familiarity of any kind – it was simply that the old man found it much pleasanter to have a young, cheerful girl telling him how clever and amusing he was….

And there was Mr Badger who had the chemist’s shop. Made a lot of fuss over the young lady who worked in the toilet section. Told his wife they must look on her as a daughter and have her live in the house. Mrs Badger didn’t see it that way at all. (104-105)

When Sir Henry laughingly remarks that Mr Harbottle and Mr Badger seemed remarkably similar to ‘poor Conway’ and though he says that “I dislike the way you reduce us all to a General Common Denominator” (108), nevertheless it is clear how making use of such a simile, Conway’s excessive behaviour starts appearing reasonable when viewed alongside the similar behaviour displayed by the other two
men. Thus, Miss Marple making use of such similes solves many cases, as many new people she comes across remind her of her acquaintances. She can then study and understand them in a better light.

In *A Pocket Full of Rye*, Miss Marple is able to solve the murder mystery and names Lance Fortescue as the murderer to the Inspector. She describes Lance as:

Sane, brilliant and quite unscrupulous….he’s always been *bad*. Bad all through, although with it he’s always been *attractive*. Especially attractive to *women*….He’s always taken risks and because of his charm people have always believed the best and not the worst about him….He was very much in love with Pat (who is a dear, sweet girl) and he wanted a respectable, settled life with her – nothing shifty. And that, from his point of view, meant having a lot of money. (307-308)

The Inspector teases her about her guess at the murderer’s identity and asks her, “Because of your knowledge of criminals” to which she replies gravely, “Oh no – of course not. Because of Pat – a dear girl – and the kind that always marries a bad lot – that’s really what drew my attention to him at the start-” (311). Thus, here we see that Miss Marple solves the case by drawing a simile not with the murderer but his wife, who was the kind of woman not possessing a proper sense of judgement where men were concerned, and thus irrevocably marrying a wrong type of person.

Christie has thus exploited the use of simile in such a way that it becomes an invaluable tool in the hands of her detective, Miss Marple, and which proves an important factor in the course of her detection.
**Ambiguity:**

“It is precisely because the expression is inexact that we can interpret it in more than one way” (Miller 16). Empson says, that ambiguity is, “a thing which the more interesting and valuable situations are more likely to justify...not to fear it but to welcome it as our best opportunity for growth in understanding” (Rajnath 100).

“Multiplicity of meaning....An ambiguous statement is one which is doubtful or obscure” (Brooks and Warren, *Understanding Poetry* 552). Miller defines ambiguity as “Language with uncertain meaning or the possibility of multiple meaning” (264).

An essential feature of detective fiction is ambiguity. The detective or the person solving the crime leaves his statements unfinished or makes ambiguous statements with the sole purpose of teasing or throwing hints to the reader, who is given an equal chance to solve the mystery. However, when the latter fails to do so, he very nearly kicks himself when the solution is revealed in the denouement. The ambiguous statements and ambiguously portrayed situations hold the key to forming the puzzle in the murder mystery.

Christie fully exploits this tool of ambiguity, which is visible in different forms in her works.

After having a long conversation with Dinah Lee, Miss Marple says, “I’ve an idea that something you said – just now – may help. It gave me an idea – the connection I’d been trying to find – now what was it?” (*Body in the Library* 197). The earlier conversation between them consisted of Miss Marple’s making a succession of guesses about Dinah Lee’s and Basil Blake’s secret marriage, Basil’s having found a dead body on his hearthrug when he returned home late one night, and his imminent arrest. This is followed closely by the arrival of Inspector Slack, with the arrest
warrant, and carting off Blake to the prison. Before leaving, Blake tells Dinah to break the news of their marriage to his mother, and to consult the family solicitor. After all her guesses prove correct, Miss Marple makes the above quoted ambiguous statement. We, as enthusiastic readers, may go over the entire conversation and also the sequel of events again, in the main hope of searching what exactly had Dinah said that enabled Miss Marple to see the “connection” and what “connection” is she talking about anyway? The connection between the two bodies discovered or the connection that linked the crime to the same murderer or the connection between the murdered and murderer or the connection between may be two or more murderers? If we are able to bypass correctly this ambiguity, then we would, like Miss Marple, arrive at the solution.

In *The ABC Murders*, Poirot makes the ambiguous statement, “This is the beginning” (22). We can take the statement to mean that this is the beginning of the case when an old woman is found murdered in her shop in Andover or this is the beginning of a succession of murders committed by the anonymous letter writer, challenging Poirot to solve the murder or whether this was the beginning of Poirot’s attempt to track down the murderer?

In *Dumb Witness* when Bella Tanios is found dead due to an overdose of a sleeping medicine, Poirot asserts, “It was not an accident” (234). This ambiguity leads us to assume that Bella had been murdered so as to keep her from divulging the identity of the murderer. However, Poirot was pointing to the fact that Bella committed suicide because she herself was the murderer of her aunt Emily and no option was left to her when Poirot brought home her guilt to her.
In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Poirot says to Dr Sheppard, after reading the latter’s manuscript that recorded the events prior to and succeeding the murder of Roger Ackroyd. “I congratulate you – on your modesty!...And on your reticence” (210). On the face of it, we assume that Poirot means what he says next in explanation, of his earlier remark, “But you – you have kept your personality in the background” (210) but the ambiguity here lies in the fact that Poirot has realized that Sheppard being the murderer, is not talking about how cleverly he committed the crime, so as to fool everyone, and he has kept that particular facet of his personality (that of a murderer), very much in the background, not letting it intrude into his account of the murder, in which all other events have been otherwise, faithfully recorded.

“The letter had been brought in at twenty minute to nine. It was just on ten minutes to nine when I left him, the letter still unread. I hesitated with my hand on the door handle, looking back and wondering if there was anything I had left undone. I could think of nothing. With a shake of the head I passed out and closed the door behind me” (*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* 41).

These lines are being narrated by Dr Sheppard. It appears to us, the innocent, unsuspecting readers, that in that interval of ten minutes, he had tried to convince Ackroyd to read the last letter that had just arrived by post, of the dead woman Mrs Ferrars. He had perhaps done everything in his power to be of help to Ackroyd. Finally, after ten minutes, he had given up all hope of making Ackroyd see some sense. Even with his hand on the door handle he cast a last, lingering look backwards to see if there was something more he could do. Finally on seeing Ackroyd’s obstinacy, he had gone out, leaving his friend to read the letter in privacy.
This ambiguity misleads the reader and prevents him from seeing the bold statement of truth contained therein. What Sheppard is actually omitting is that, in the interval of those crucial ten minutes, he had stabbed Ackroyd, placed the chair in such a position that the dictaphone on the table would not be seen immediately when Ackroyd’s death would be discovered. The dictaphone was to give alibi to Dr Sheppard, as it was timed to go off later, so that Ackroyd’s recorded voice would be heard by the others even after his murder.

“Now that’s very interesting. That’s the most interesting thing I’ve heard yet” (The Moving Finger 229). Miss Marple makes the remark, when she hears that Elsie Holland, though young and pretty, was one of the few people in the village of Lymstock, who had not received even one of the anonymous letters that were in circulation. We can interpret this remark to mean that Elsie is a suspicious character and may herself be the anonymous letter writer.

However, what Miss Marple means, is that the responsible person may have tender feelings towards her and so was unable to bring himself to write foul things against her, as turns out to be the case.

In The Moving Finger “I can’t go on” written on a scrap of paper, found near the dead body of Mrs Symington, is taken to be her suicide note and accepted as such by one and all, the reason being clear that Mrs Symmington was driven to suicide by the anonymous letter writer hinting about her extramarital affairs.

The murder portrayed as suicide becomes apparent when Burton reads a message from his sister saying, “I can’t go on Friday” which he relates to Miss Marple. She immediately realizes that the “I can’t go on” of the previous scrap of paper is just a scrap that has been torn off from just such a message. It does not, as
was taken at the time, means that the writer cannot “go on” or “continue” with her life as was initially presumed.

Thus it becomes apparent that ambiguity not only in the statement of the detective, but also in that of a murderer or in a note of a victim (Mrs Symmington) can successfully cause misdirection by diverting the reader onto a wrong track. As Miss Marple states, “You’ve got to make people look at the wrong thing and in the wrong place – misdirection, they call it, I believe” (The Moving Finger 228), which very succinctly sums up Christie’s own art of ambiguity.

**Tension:**

“The formalist critic deals with irony and paradox, with ambiguity, with the tensions that result from multiple interactions within the organic form of the literary piece” (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, and Willingham 137). “A poem has at once literal meaning (extension) and metaphorical meaning (intension). The perception simultaneously of both these meaning is what Tate Calls ‘tension’” (Nimavat 17). Tate illustrates that “the equilibrium of the two forces caused by the denotative and connotative aspects of language kept in a state of tension gives the poem its meaning” (Nimavat 20). He derives the “tension” by “lopping the prefixes off the logical terms, extension and intension” (Rajnath 96).

In A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature is stated, “...the opposition of two attitudes toward human experience that must achieve resolution or synthesis before the...end” (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, and Willingham 135). Peck and Coyle talk about practical criticism as an exercise to “look for a tension, particularly in terms of a conflict between the individual and society.....Our duty as
critics is to see the general in the particular.....we need to see the large issues embodied in the particular characters” (143-145).

As Brooks and Warren state:

The beginning of an action always presents us with a situation in which there is some element of instability, some conflict or contrast ...The middle of an action exhibits the development of conflict and the readjustment of forces as they struggle to settle into a new kind of stability. The end of an action shows that some point of stability has been reached (however temporarily); the conflict among forces that have been brought into play have been resolved. (Understanding Fiction 34)

In all of Christie's works, the tension between individual and society is manifested as the upheaval in the natural state of affairs caused by the forcibly ending of the life of one human being through the agency of another, with a brutal disregard for the sanctity of human life, to serve his own selfish ends.

Thus, we can identify the tension or conflict created by the murder, which unsettles the natural order of things in society, as the death is not a natural death. The 'readjustment of forces' is visible in the detective’s efforts to locate the murderer by an in-depth study of the situation. Finally, some point of stability is reached, when the detective triumphantly arrives at the solution of the murder mystery and unmasks the murderer. The latter is then handed over to the society for 'justice and retribution'.

Keeping in view Tate’s point of view, we shall study the denotative and connotative aspects of murder, which creates the ‘tension’ in the novel. Denotatively
murder is “intentional unlawful killing of human being by another” (“Murder”). But murder can have different connotations. The death of a person may have different significance for different people involved as can be seen in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

For Hercule Poirot, the detective, it has the allure of one more puzzle to be solved, one more challenge to be faced and one more chance to relieve him of the ennui of a monotonous rural existence. He had earlier declared that he had firmly retired and had now devoted himself to the growing of vegetable marrows, ensconced in the tiny village of King’s Abbot.

For the murderer, Dr Sheppard, it means safety and immunity from being exposed as the blackmailer who was responsible for Mrs Ferrars’s suicide. Mrs Ferrars had poisoned her husband and was being blackmailed by Dr Sheppard for guarding her secret. But when she commits suicide, driven beyond endurance, she confesses to her admirer Roger Ackroyd, in a suicide note, that it was Dr Sheppard who should be held responsible for her death. So it became imperative for Dr Sheppard to kill off Roger Ackroyd.

For Flora Ackroyd, the niece of Roger Ackroyd, it means no more scrimping and saving and lying and deceiving in order to get her hands on some money so as to fulfil her luxurious wants. Her uncle did not practice, nor encouraged extravagance.

For Ralph Paton, the adopted son of Ackroyd, it meant being suspected of the crime as he had gone against his father’s wishes and secretly got married. His father had realized the true state of affairs and had threatened to cut him off from his will as a beneficiary.
To Geoffrey Raymond, it meant the loss of employment. To Major Blunt it meant the loss of a friend. To Caroline Sheppard, Miss Gannet and the other residents of King’s Abbot who were not very close to Ackroyd, it simply meant an interesting topic of discussion and speculation, as to why and who was responsible for the murder.

To Ursula Bourne, it meant fear and anxiety on behalf of her husband Ralph Paton who had disappeared from King’s Abbot and had not been seen since the murder.

Thus it is only when connotation and denotation of murder are united in one person, do we discover the murderer. Further, the murder seems a risk worth taking for the murderer because of what it connotes to him and he actually carries it out in action i.e. denotes it physically and this is what leads to the ‘tension’ – ‘the murder’ in the work.

Defamiliarization:

Viktor Shklovsky, in Art as Technique, explains the concept of defamiliarization, which, in Russian, is called ostranenie i.e. making strange. “And Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life, it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’….Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important” (Rice & Waugh 49-50).

About the technique of defamiliarization adopted by Tolstoy, “….in describing something he avoids the accepted names of its parts and instead names
corresponding parts of other objects” (Rice & Waugh 50). “This technique of delaying and protracting actions makes us attend to them, so that familiar sights and movements cease to be perceived automatically and are thus ‘defamiliarized’” (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker 43). “….how often defamiliarization affects not a perception as such but merely the presentation of a perception” (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker 43).

Defamiliarization has been used by Christie, consciously or unconsciously, in The Hollow, which is regarded as one of her mature works and is full of instances of defamiliarization. The process of sleeping has been described as, “….the essential rhythm that could bring oblivion at call. You took thoughts, choosing them out of your store, and then, not dwelling on them, you let them slip through the fingers of your mind, never clutching at them, never dwelling on them, no concentration…. just letting them drift gently past” (29).

The process of getting artistic inspiration comes alive as, “It was nice, she thought, to be a human being again….and not that other thing. Nice to have stopped feeling restless and miserable and driven. Nice to be able to stop walking about the streets unhappily, looking for something, and feeling irritable and impatient because, really, you didn’t know what you were looking for! Now thank goodness, there would be only hard work – and who minded hard work?” (26)

“It’s a thing that gets at you, that nags at you – and haunts you – so that you’ve got, sooner or later, to make terms with it. And then, for a bit, you get some peace – until the whole thing starts over again” (90).
On driving cars – “Isn’t he a beauty….Doesn’t he just purr along?...He’ll do Bale Hill in third – not striking at all – quite effortlessly. Listen to the even way he ticks over” (*The Hollow* 55).

“Defamiliarization is used as a technique to create a false world that seems to be real on the surface. It “defers knowledge so that one assumes false positions initially that are later revealed as such” (Ryan 26).

Hercule Poirot’s peculiar egg shaped head, catlike green eyes, small stature and large mustachios portray him as a man of rather comic appearance and cause everybody to be prejudiced against him and regard him as a ‘damned little mountebank’. But his ‘little grey cells’ were responsible for having famously unscrambled many a murder mystery.

Similarly, Miss Marple as an old, frail looking lady, with her slightly vague and scatty way of conversing, comes across as a harmless old woman but her deadly ‘interest in human nature” leads to the resolution of many a crime. Thus, Christie has very ingeniously created her detectives with a very ‘un-detective like air’ and defamiliarized them thoroughly so that initially no one takes them seriously, thereby heightening the drama and irony.

One more variation of this ploy is visible in *After the Funeral*, when we are given a peep into the thoughts of “a lady in wispy mourning and festoons of jet ...eating bath buns, drinking tea, and looking forward to the future. She had no premonitions of disaster. She was happy” (39). We, as readers, take this woman to be Cora Lansquenet, returning from the funeral of her brother, Richard Abernethie, at Enderby Hall even though she has not been named here specifically. This belief is
further strengthened when her thoughts run along these lines, “Extraordinary how hungry a funeral made you feel. The soup at Enderby had been delicious....All those faces—when she’d said that about murder! Well, it had been the right thing to say....For a moment or two she sat dreaming. Dreaming of the future unfolding before her...She smiled like a happy child” (40).

We see nothing sinister in these thoughts but later on, the true significance of them becomes apparent when we realize that it is Miss Gilchrist, dressed as Cora, who is thinking these thoughts and planning to put her plan of murdering Cora into action.

**Points Of View:**

It is important to take note of who is narrating the story so that we are aware of the fact that through whose view point are we getting a perspective. We can then form our judgements about the unfolding events and do not have to rely on the implied author. As Wayne C. Booth states, that the author, “creates not simply an ideal, impersonal “man in general” but an implied version of himself” (qtd. in Nayar 69).

According to Marjorie Boulton, there can be many points of view but she recognizes three main methods. Firstly, from the point of view of one person either in the first person ‘I’ narrative or the third person ‘he/she’ narrative. Secondly, there can be an omniscient narrator who is able to penetrate each character’s life and mind in a somewhat God like manner with a wonderful grasp of their motives and thought processes. Thirdly, a story can be told from the point of view of several persons, though equal importance may not be bestowed upon each.
In Christie’s work, we witness all three methods discussed above being employed. In the **first person narrative**, the narrator is a character within the story. He can also be called a homodiegetic narrator and we get a glimpse of the story through his point of view, as he narrates the story under the influence of his own emotions and understanding. “All that we know about other characters, and all we know about incidents, comes from the narrator” (Gill 30). First person narrator can be of two types – hero narrator and the witness narrator. Another differentiation that can be made is between a reliable and an unreliable narrator as made by Wayne C. Booth.

In her famous work *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, the story, right from the first page, is being told by Dr Sheppard, the local G.P. of King’s Abbot, a small village near Cranchester. The book opens with the death of Mrs Ferrars, followed by the murder of Mr Roger Ackroyd, the owner of Fernly Park. We are taken on a voyage of discovery by Dr Sheppard who relates how he gets acquainted with his new neighbour, who happens to be none other than the famous Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, and how he assists Poirot in solving the crime. We get a picture of King’s Abbot, its various residents, Sheppard’s own domestic life with his sister Caroline, the regular village life disturbed by the gruesome murder and the eventual disentangling of the various threads surrounding the murder mystery – all through the eyes of Dr Sheppard. But here the stumbling block is that Dr Sheppard turns out to be an unreliable narrator because in the denouement, he is unmasked as the murderer himself and by partially omitting the truth, he had led us up the garden path. As Poirot, on reading Dr Sheppard’s personal diary, remarks ironically, “I congratulate you – on your modesty! And on your reticence….But you – you have kept your personality in the background” (210).
Another instance of first person narrative is found in *The Moving Finger* where Jeremy Burton, an invalidated air-force pilot, is asked to go to the country for a rest cure and accompanied by his pretty sister Joanna, he lands up in Lymstock. Much to their surprise, the rest cure is transformed into a wearisome experience when they find themselves embroiled in the epidemic of anonymous letters, that had broken out in the quiet village of Lymstock, and which finally culminates in a murder. Here Jeremy Burton is a reliable narrator who gives a faithful account not only of himself but also, of the other characters and the succeeding events. He is the ‘hero-narrator’ who finds his ladylove in Megan and settles down happily with her.

First person narratives are seen in many works where the events are narrated by Captain Arthur Hastings, the friend and the official scribe of Hercule Poirot. Here Hastings maybe regarded as the ‘witness narrator’ whose main role is accompanying Poirot in his adventures, and though being a witness to all that befalls Poirot, yet he is unable to deduce the solution as Poirot does, time and again. Sometimes Hastings relates the facts objectively and lucidly, but at times, he becomes personal in his observation when he refuses to believe the worst of some damsel in distress or some Englishman of the old school tie variety. Poirot says, “(the) hearty good fellow manner. It has deceived Hastings – but it does not deceive me...I told you so, mon ami. Your instincts are always wrong” (*Peril at End House* 220). If we go by Hastings’s value judgements we are opt to go wrong but the reader can read between the lines and realize that such a pitfall must be avoided.

**Third person narratives** are also employed in various works of Christie. “Third person narrators disclose the inner lives of the characters….some narrators are
omniscient in that they know all, whereas others choose to have privileged access
only to the mind of a single character” (Gill 37).

In *Sad Cypress*, we get a glimpse into the minds of various characters, through
the third person omniscient narrative:

As always when she saw Roddy, Elinor was conscious of a slightly
giddy feeling, a throb of sudden pleasure, a feeling that it was
incumbent upon her to be very matter-of-fact and unemotional.
Because it was so very obvious that Roddy, although he loved her,
didn’t feel about her the way she felt about him. The first sight of him
did something to her, twisted her heart round so that it almost hurt.
Absurd that a man – an ordinary, yes, a perfectly ordinary young man
– should be able to do that to one! That the mere look of him should set
the world spinning, that his voice should make you want – just a little –
to cry….Love surely should be a pleasurable emotion – not something
that hurt you by its intensity. (7-8)

And she is proved right in her assumptions when:

Roddy mimicked her, “You’re adorable. That little air of yours – aloof
– untouchable – *la princesses Fontaine*. It’s that quality of yours that
made me love you, I believe….Some women are so – oh, I don’t know
– so damned possessive – so – so dog-like and devoted – their
emotions slopping all over the place! I’d hate that. With you I never
know – I’m never sure – any minute you might turn around in that
cool, detached way of yours and say you’d changed your mind – quite
coolly, like that – without batting an eyelash! You’re a fascinating creature, Elinor. You’re like a work of art, so – so finished! (12)

Likewise, the story can be told from the point of view of several persons. An insight into each person’s mind helps the story progress. In Sparkling Cyanide we are made acquainted with the five main characters, each of whose mind is delving on the death of Rosemary Barton, who had been murdered nearly a year ago.

Iris Marle, Rosemary’s younger sister:

For nearly a year she had deliberately tried to put the thought of Rosemary away from her. She hadn’t wanted to remember. It was too painful – too horrible!

The blue cyanosed face, the convulsed clutching fingers….

Rosemary – her sister….With a shock Iris realized suddenly that it was the first time in her life she had ever thought about Rosemary. Thought about her, that is, objectively, as a person.

Unfair? She was startled as the word leaped to her thoughts. Had she been thinking that it was unfair for Rosemary to get all of Uncle Paul’s money? She supposed that, deep down, she must have been feeling just that. It was unfair….Rosemary had always had everything! Parties and frocks, and young men in love with her, and an adoring husband. The only unpleasant thing that had ever happened to Rosemary was having an attack of “flu!” And even that hadn’t lasted longer than a week! (3-10)
George Barton, Rosemary’s husband:

Rosemary….What a lovely girl she had been. He’d always been crazy about her. She knew it, but he’d always supposed she’d only laugh at him.

….For she was fond of him. Her affection for him was constant and unvarying. It existed quite apart from her flirtations and her love affairs. ...but when he got an inkling of a serious affair—....His blood had sung in his ears. He understood in that moment what Othello had felt....He’d like to choke the life out of her! He’d like to murder the fellow in cold blood.

.....With an effort he pushed remembrance away. Mustn’t go over that again. It was past-done with. He wouldn’t ever suffer like that again. Rosemary was dead. Dead and at peace. And he was at peace too. No more suffering. Funny to think that that was what her death had meant to him. Peace.... (86-87)

Ruth Lessing, George Barton’s Secretary:

She had disliked Rosemary Barton a good deal. She had never known how much until that November morning...Hated her for being rich and beautiful and careless and brainless. No routine hard work in an office for Rosemary-everything handed to her on a golden platter. Love affairs, a doting husband-no need to work or plan-Hateful, condescending, stuck-up, frivolous beauty....
“I wish you were dead,” said Ruth Lessing in a low voice to the silent telephone. Her own words startled her. They were so unlike her. ...She had hated Rosemary Barton that afternoon. She still hated Rosemary Barton on this day a year later. (42-46)

Anthony Browne, Rosemary’s friend, “A damned fool he had been ever to get mixed up with her. Though a man might be excused for that! Certainly she was easy upon the eyes...Still he’d fallen for her rather badly...quite unforgivable really when he ought to have been attending strictly to business....” (49). When Rosemary had discovered him to be an ex-jailbird, Tony Morelli, he threatens her to keep her mouth shut but could not help thinking, “Would she take the warning? Did she realize that he was in deadly earnest? Silly little fool. No sense in that lovely empty head. You couldn’t rely on her to keep her mouth shut....In that moment he hated himself for having fallen a victim, in however small a degree, to Rosemary’s facile charm” (52-53).

Stephen Farraday, a politician and married man, who thought it wise to end his temporary affair with Rosemary:

*It was all over*-he must make her understand that. But that was just what she refused to understand....The little fool. The silly clinging fool! She’d go and blab the whole thing to George Barton and then George would divorce her and cite him as correspondent. And Sandra would perforce divorce him, too....And then he would be done, finished....It would be the kind of scandal that he would not be able to live down....Good-bye to his dreams, his ambitions. Everything wrecked, broken-all because of a crazy infatuation for a silly
woman....He’d lose everything he’d staked. Failure! Ignominy! He’d lose Sandra....He must think of something—some way of keeping Rosemary quiet.....A glass of poisoned champagne was about the only thing that would keep Rosemary quiet. Yes, he had actually thought that. (72-75)

Thus, it is apparent that Christie employs different points of view according to the need of the situation.

**Symbolism:**

Some simple examples of symbolism in the works of Christie can be seen as follows,

“I enrage myself with an imbecile, I say ‘I would like to kick him.’ Instead I kick the table. I say, ‘This table, it is the imbecile, I kick him so.’ (*Evil under the Sun* 47) where the table is a symbol for the idiot.

“Hercule Poirot sat in a big arm-chair. The wall lights had been turned out. Only a rose-shaded lamp shed its glow on the figure in the arm-chair. There seemed something symbolic about it – he alone in the light....” (*Three Act Tragedy* 207).

Hercule Poirot’s mania for neatness and orderliness symbolises how everything goes on in the world. All affairs act out on a cause and effect basis. He follows a logical chain of thought and tries to arrange facts accordingly. When disturbed, he soothes his nerves and arranges his mental processes by building card houses. “One needs the precision. One card on another – so – in exactly the right place and that support the weight of the card on top and so on, up and up” (*Peril at End House* 178).
In *And Then There Were None* the little china figures symbolise each of the ten victims, and the destruction of each, synchronises with the destruction of each of the ten people stranded on the island. Also when justice Wargrave is found shot through the head, he is “robed in scarlet with a judge’s wig upon his head” (201) which, on closer scrutiny, turns out to be the missing grey wool and the scarlet curtain from the bathroom. The attire symbolises justice, as the garment of the judge, but it is also ambiguous as whether the judge has been punished for pronouncing a harsh sentence an Edward Seton or he is still very much the judge, pronouncing judgement on them all?

For Alistair Blunt, the views held by Howard Raikes are, “He’s got to go – he and everything he stands for! There’s got to be a new deal – this cursed net of bankers all over the world like a spider’s web... but he’s the type of man I hate....He’s an obstruction in the way of progress and he’s got to be moved” (One, Two, Buckle My Shoe 103-104). Here Blunt is a symbol of the old order of economic affairs in Britain regarded as an enemy by the younger generation of revolutionary young men.

The autumn season has been portrayed in *The Hollow* as, “All around and below her were trees, trees whose leaves were turning from gold to brown. It was a world incredibly golden and splendid in the strong autumn sunlight. ‘Henrietta thought: ‘I love autumn, It’s so much richer then spring’...She thought: ‘I shall never be as happy again as I am now - never’” (83).

Here autumn symbolises “maturity before decline, sadness, mellowness, nearing the end” (Miller 254) as proves to be the case because soon after this Henrietta’s lover, John Christow, is murdered and she is left bereft without him.
“The sun was getting low, there was no red in the sky, but a rather unnatural
glow of light. A still evening with a breathless feel about it. There would be, she
thought, a storm later.” (Taken at the Flood 213). The hush before the storm
symbolises the approaching maelstrom of emotions, that would break loose over all
Lynn’s family members and her fiancé Rowley Cloade, once she confessed to him
that she would not be marrying him but another man.

“….the house….was the best thing I had in the world. The thing that mattered
most to me. Funny that a house could mean that. I suppose there was a sort of
symbolism about it. Something you want. Something you want so much that you
don’t quite know what it is” (Endless Night 193). This shows Mike’s feelings for
Gypsy’s Acre, which becomes a symbol of the concretization of his abstract ambition.

Ainswick is the ancestral home of the Angkatell family in The Hollow, which
is a symbol of peace, contentment, and solace.

“Heaven on a plate…so you feel like that about Ainswick” (318).

“Do you think it makes it any easier after I’ve had the hell of a morning to be
reminded that there are places like Ainswick?” (314).

“You could be peaceful at Ainswick. I think you could be happy there” (90).

“We’ve been happy together, talking about Ainswick, thinking about Ainswick” (91).

“You’ve always cared too much about Ainswick Lucy. Sometimes I think it’s the only
thing you do care for” (285).

“Ainswick is the loveliest place in the world” (87).
Characters as Symbols:

Midge Hardcastle - “...they were all divided from her by an impassable gulf – the gulf that separates the leisured from the working. They had no conception of the difficulties of getting a job, and once you had got it, of keeping it!” (The Hollow 191-192).

Midge is a symbol of the working class. She is an independent young woman who does not want to sponge on her rich relations and is thus compelled to earn her livelihood.

David Angkatell has leftist tendencies and is a symbol of the modern intellectual young man who is dissatisfied with the present. “David, who preferred the contemplation of an academic past or the earnest discussion of a left wing future, had no aptitude for dealing with a violent and realistic present” (The Hollow 197).

Gudgeon, the butler, is a symbol of the loyal and efficient domestic, devoted to the welfare of his masters. “Gudgeon is wonderful: I don’t know what I should do without Gudgeon. He always knows the right thing to do” (The Hollow 157).

John Christow is a symbol of the self-engrossed, insensitive risk taker who is aware of only his point of view. “You see what you’re looking at, yes. You’re – you’re like a searchlight. A powerful beam turned on to the one spot where your interest is, and behind it and each side of it, darkness!” (The Hollow 109). “All his life he had been a man who took a justifiable number of risks. Risks with patients, risks with treatment, risks with investments. Never a fantastic risk – only the kind of risk that was just beyond the margin of safety” (The Hollow 122).
Lady Lucy Angkatell symbolises another kind of selfishness, which can also be termed as ruthlessness, which is ready to risk everything. “But I never think one ought to attach too much importance to anybody. And gently, with a smiling face, lady Angkatell clipped remorselessly….“ (The Hollow 230). “I think one always has to take some risk,’ she said gently, ‘and one should do it quickly and not think too much about it” (The Hollow 104).

Veronica Cray incorporates another aspect of selfishness. She wants her happiness at all costs but without jeopardizing herself in any way. “Veronica would have swallowed him body and soul. She was the complete egoist and she had made no bones about admitting it” (The Hollow 39). “Never to forget – to go on waiting – planning – hoping. To determine with all one’s heart and mind to get what one wants in the end” (The Hollow 292). “But behind that vindictive anger was something cold and shrewd, something that appraised chances, a cool, calculating intelligence. However much Veronica Cray wished to kill John Christow, he doubted whether she would have taken the risk” (The Hollow 294).

Henrietta Savernake is a symbol of the artistic temperament to whom it was always art that came first and whose whole existence was monopolized by art. “Sculpture isn’t a thing you set out to do, and succeed in. It’s a thing that gets at you, that nags at you – and haunts you – so that you’ve got, sooner or later, to make terms with its. And then, for a bit, you get some peace – until the whole thing starts over again” (The Hollow 90).

Gerda symbolises the self-sacrifice that one makes in devoting oneself to a higher cause or person. “…the humility, the strength in the neck muscles, the bowed shoulders, the slightly upraised face – a featureless face, since worship drives out
personality. Yes, submission, adoration – and that final devotion that is beyond, not this side, idolatry...” (The Hollow 28).

Edward Angkatell symbolises the escapist attitude towards life whose only recourse is in the past, “The past is sometimes a very good place to live” (The Hollow 91).

Mrs Crabtree is a fighter, ready to take on life on its own terms. “Mrs Crabtree was his prize patient...See, she’s got guts, she wants to live – and she was fond of John. She and he were fighting on the same side” (The Hollow 258). “You carry on, Doctor! Someone’s got to be first, that’s it, ain’t it?...I wants ter get well” (The Hollow 50).

Christie indulges in symbolism to bestow a deeper meaning to objects, characters and situations.

**Imagery:**

Miller defines imagery as referring to “the ‘pictures’ or ‘images’” (33). We can see how Christie manoeuvres imagery to create a deeper impact of the situation, on the understanding of the reader. Imagery can be –

**Visual** - “What we see” (Miller 33) – Visual imagery is related to sight. “But there was no house visible, only the boldly silhouetted rock with its faint resemblance to a giant Indian’s head. There was something sinister about it” (And Then There Were None 22). “On the northwest side, towards the coast, the cliffs fell sheer to the sea below, their surface unbroken. On the rest of the island there were no trees and very little cover” (And Then There Were None 111).
This highlights the isolation of the scene and points out that no escape was possible from the forthcoming events, which would culminate in murder.

**Aural** – Aural imagery is related to sound. “It was very peaceful here with the lap of the waves breaking over the rocks” (*And Then There Were None* 111). This shows that General Macarthur is troubled by guilt and as a penance is willing to accept death.

“Downstairs the gong pealed a solemn call to lunch” (*And Then There Were None* 129) which reflects the strained atmosphere following murder.

“The wind had somewhat abated but was still blowing. He could hear no sound of rain ...” (*And Then There Were None* 164). The inmates of the house were now aware of the danger but doubtful of their ability and luck in facing it.

“There was somebody in the room...somebody all wet and dripping...she heard footsteps – soft dragging footsteps coming up behind her. The stumbling footsteps of the drowned girl....” (*And Then There Were None* 180). This symbolises approaching death as a revenge of the girl, Beatrice Taylor, who drowned herself on account of Emily Brent’s heartlessness. This is Emily Brent’s sub-conscious coming into play.

**Tactile** imagery is “What we feel or touch” (Miller 33). “And then she felt the prick. The bee sting on the side of her neck ....” (*And Then There Were None* 180). When Emily Brent is killed by the hypodermic needle injecting poison into her, it felt to her as if a bee had stung her.

“A cold, clammy hand touched her throat – a wet hand, smelling of the sea....” (*And Then There Were None* 197). This was the wet seaweed hanging from the
ceiling, which in the dark had felt like a clammy hand to kill her. This signifies fear, overactive imagination, and guilt.

“It’s lovely- to feel the sun again...” (And Then There Were None 227). It’s a lulling of the senses into a false sense of security.

**Olfactory** imagery is the imagery related to smell. “But that smell – that smell of the beach at St Tredennick.... (And Then There Were None 197). Again, an indicator of the sense of guilt as St Tredennick was the beach where Vera Claythorne had incited the little boy in her charge, to swim beyond help and get drowned.

**Gustorial imagery** gives the sensation of flavour and texture in the mouth.

“Mr Justice Wargrave, mellowed by the excellent port, was being amusing in a caustic fashion” (39). This reflects enjoyment induced by drink.

“Vera drank a little of the spirit. The colour came back to her face” (200). This shows the medicinal use of drink and an attempt at trying to get back courage.

“His eyes held a reflective sleepy pleasure. The *Escargots de la Vieille Grand’mere* had been delicious...Meditatively, like a well fed dog, Hercule Poirot curled his tongue round his lips... “Alas”, murmured Poirot to his moustaches, “that one can only eat three times a day ...” (Mrs McGinty’s Dead 7-8). This points to Poirot’s fondness for food as well his ennui with life that now forces him to seek pleasure only in eating and not in solving cases.
Atmosphere:

“Anticipates the action. Enhances the effect/quality of the actions” (Nayar 21).

“A literary technique, atmosphere is the type of feelings that readers get from a narrative based on details such as settings, background, objects and foreshadowing, etc... In literary works, atmosphere refers to emotions or feelings an author conveys to his readers through description of objects and settings....The purpose of establishing atmosphere is to create emotional effects....It appeals to the readers senses by making the description more real so as to comprehend the idea easily” (“atmosphere”).

Sarah King, in Appointment with Death, is travelling in and around Jerusalem. She and her fellow travellers are heading towards Petra, where a murder will shortly be committed. Though at the present juncture she is oblivious of the imminent catastrophe, which will come across her way, yet her thoughts during the journey slowly build up an atmosphere of impending doom:

Sarah was very tired with the long, hot journey in the car. Her senses felt dazed. The ride was like a dream. It seemed to her afterwards that it was like the pit of Hell opening at one’s feet. The way wound down – down into the ground. The shapes of rocks rose up round them – down, down into the bowels of the earth, through a labyrinth of red cliffs. They towered now on either side. Sarah felt stifled – menaced by the ever – narrowing gorge.

She thought confusedly to herself: ‘Down into the valley of death – down into the valley of death...’
On and on. It grew dark – the vivid red of the walls faded – and still on, winding in and out, imprisoned, lost in the bowels of the earth.

She thought: “It’s fantastic and unbelievable ... a dead city.’

And again like a refrain came the words: ‘The valley of death....’

(Appointment with Death 75-76)

Setting:

“Settings can bring out the significance of actions. They can match character’s moods and indicate a new stage in the moment of the plot. Settings also indicate the characters situations and enact authors outlooks” (Gill 58).

According to P.K. Nayar, “Setting can describe the landscape as a metaphor for the unfolding events or past events, or it can also be an indicator of a characters emotional or physical behaviour” (90). Setting is composed of place and time.

As soon as Ordeal by Innocence opens, it establishes its theme. Arthur Calgary arrives at the Ferry because he wishes to make up for the past wrongs, to atone for the sin unknowingly committed. He is a little hesitant and apprehensive about his reception at Sunny Point, the Argyle residence. It later emerges that he has come to make a confession to the Argyle household that, he failed to provide an alibi to their son Jacko, as a result of which he was sentenced to life imprisonment, for bludgeoning his adopted mother, Rachel Argyle, to death with a poker. During the time, the murder was estimated to have been committed; Jacko Argyle had been given a lift by Dr Arthur Calgary driving from Redmyn to Drymouth. So it was physically impossible for Jacko to have committed the murder.
However, Dr Arthur Calgary, who was a geophysicist and had formed part of the Antarctic expedition, had only landed in England same time ago after a gap of about two years. On the fateful day, after dropping off Jacko at Drymouth, he himself had met with an accident. He was found to be suffering from concussion and a short-term memory loss and immediately admitted to a hospital where he was kept under observation, isolating him from the outside world. When he was found physically fit, he was discharged and immediately left for Australia to join the expedition. He was thus unaware of the ongoing murder trial and of his crucial role in it. Therefore, he failed to turn up in time to provide an alibi to Jacko. Meanwhile Jacko had been convicted of the crime and had died in prison due to pneumonia.

It was only after coming back to England that he had come across an old newspaper about the trial and discovered how unwillingly he had become responsible for a fellow human being’s life. Believing in Kipling’s maxim “Nothing is ever settled until it is settled right” (19), he had come to make apologies to the Argyle family.

The physical setting when Dr Arthur Calgary reaches the Ferry to take him to Sunny Point has been described as:

It was dusk when he came to the Ferry...But at last the time had come when he knew that he could put things off no longer. The car he had hired was waiting. He said goodbye and left to drive the seven miles along the crowded coast road and then inland down the wooded lane that ended at the little stone quay on the river....Arthur Calgary was left alone waiting on the quayside. Alone with his thoughts and his apprehension of what was in front of him. How wild the scenery was here, he thought. One could fancy oneself on a Scottish loch, far from
anywhere. He reflected, not for the first time, on the extraordinary contrasts of the English landscape ……A little cold wind came rustling up from the sea as they pushed off. (9-10)

This seems a mysterious beginning altogether and the gloomy, forbidding landscape, the isolation seems to echo the trepidation and forbidding being felt by Calgary on this unwelcome self-torturous task. Until now, we are unaware of the purpose of his journey and this raises our expectation about the events yet to unfold.

Social setting gives us the details of how Calgary had spent the day, so that it became evening when he started on his unsavoury mission.

“First his luncheon with friends in Redquay, the light desultory conversation, the interchange of gossip about mutual friends – all that had meant only that he was inwardly shrinking form what he had to do” (9). The isolation of the quay–side is contrasted with the teeming life he has just left behind. “And yet, only a few miles away, were the hotels, the shops, the cocktail bars and the crowds of Redquay” (9).

The description of the locality and that of the house shows how such a commonplace surrounding was considered to be far removed from the idea of something as gross as a murder. “Nice new road, with the nice new houses on either side of it, each with its eight of an acre of garden, rock plants, chrysanthemums roses, salvias, geraniums, each owner displaying his or her individual garden taste” (11).

The house, Sunny Point, itself seems to be nothing outstanding but a disappointment. “A well-built, characterless modern house, gabled and porched. It might have stood on any good-class suburban site, or a new development anywhere. It was unworthy, in Calgary’s opinion of its view. For the view was magnificent. The
river here curved sharply round the point almost turning back on itself. Wooded hills rose opposite, up-stream to the left was further bend of the river with meadows and orchards in the distance” (12-13).

Contrasting the beautiful view with the mundane house Calgary feels, “One should have built a castle here...an impossible, ridiculous, fairy tale castle! The sort of castle that might be made of gingerbread or of frosted sugar. Instead there was good taste, restraint, moderation, plenty of money and absolutely no imagination” (13).

The beautiful view and the fairy tale castle produced by Calgary’s unbridled imagination can be read as the fulfilment and bliss that could have been achieved by Rachel and her husband Leo Argyle in their married life, but which they failed to receive.

Instead, the actual house can be taken as symbolising their life – where money was not a consideration, their ideology and principles were in perfect harmony but the inability of Rachel to produce any child of her own marred her life. She adopted a lot of unwanted children and tried to seek affection and consolation in mothering them as her own. As a result, her husband Leo receded into the background of her affections. Thus, their marriage became conventional and stereotyped lacking any rapture or ecstasy.

**Cultural setting** can be identified in the “local context” (Nayar 92).

The ferryman, rowing Dr Calgary across to Sunny Point, talks about Mrs Rachel Argyle and her house. “It was her called the house that – in the war. It were a new house, of course, only just been built – hadn’t got a name. But the ground 'tis
built on – that wooded spit – Viper’s Point, that is! But Viper’s Point wouldn’t do for her – not for the name of her home. Called it Sunny Point, she did. But Viper’s Point’s what we allus call it” (12).

This again hints at the failure met my Mrs Argyle in quenching her mother love by adoption. Changing the name of the house could not change the sinister implications the locals associated with it. And they were proved right when Mrs Argyle meets her tragic end in that very house as a result of her showering love on the undeserving, the adopted children, neglecting the deserving, her husband Leo, because heredity cannot be overcome by environment totally. “Viper’s Point. What a humble apposite name that must have seemed….For sharper than a serpent’s tooth….” (12).

The setting has two components – time and place. Usually the setting of Christie’s books is against familiar backgrounds of the upper middle class families. “She was a ‘family- type murderers’” (Fitzgibbon 33). Many murders were committed in English country houses like Gossington Hall, the scene of The Body in the library and Gossington Hall, now renovated, in The Mirror Crack’d from Side to Side and also in many other country houses, like in her very first book The Mysterious Affair at Styles, After the Funeral, The Hollow, The Murder of Roger Ackroyd to name a few.

Some murders take place in London, it’s suburbs or nearby cities like in The ABC Murders, Cards on the Table, The Clocks, Crooked House, A Pocket Full of Rye, Third Girl and Murder in the Mews. Some murders take place in villages usually where Miss Marple finds herself involved, as in her very first book The Murder at the Vicarage, and then in A Murder is Announced, 4:50 from Paddington, Nemesis, and also The Moving Finger.
But it is futile to argue that Christie limited herself in selecting a setting. Her only requirement was a large number of suspects and thus the setting ranges from a girl’s school Meadowbanks (Cat Among the Pigeons), A youth hostel (Hickory Dickory Dock), an aeroplane (Death in the Clouds), on a train (Murder on the Orient Express), on a ship (Death on the Nile), A reform house (They Do It With Mirrors), on a remote island off the coast of Devon (And Then There Were None), a Hotel (At Bertram’s Hotel), in the West Indies (A Caribbean Mystery), English seaside resort (Peril at End House), in the Middle East (Appointment with Death, Murder in Mesopotamia), a dentist’s clinic (One, Two, Buckle My shoe), and in a village inn (The Pale Horse).

A book, which is set in Egypt in 2000 BC, is Death Comes as the End. Hercule Poirot is also adept in solving murders having been committed many years ago like Five Little Pigs and Elephants can Remember. Miss Marple is no less behind as she proves in Sleeping Murder and Nemesis.

Allusions:

“Allusion is a reference, often oblique, to another poet’ (Gill 168). We can also term it as ‘Art about art’ or ‘literature about literature’ (Gill 168). However, we have to be content with tracing the sources of the various allusions or the literary references that Christie’s works abound in, without committing the ‘intentional fallacy’ and enquiring into the author’s intention behind the use of such a reference.

Christie’s allusions are straightforward, suitable to the occasion, often with the sources mentioned alongside the quotation. She does not hesitate or discriminate between as simple a rhyme as a nursery rhyme, lines from the great dramatist
Shakespeare, as well as most quotations from the poems of Tennyson along with other lesser known poets, and also biblical allusions and allusions from the inexhaustible well of Greek mythology.

Agatha Christie makes use of allusions quite frequently. Most allusions are to the works and characters therein of the greatest master of drama of all times, William Shakespeare. In the novel *Third Girl*, he describes the protagonist Norma Restarick as “An Ophelia devoid of physical attraction” (22). In the same novel Norma confesses that she had to wash her hands when she picked up the knife stained with blood, and realized that she also had blood on her hands, literally, but philosophizes that one couldn’t get rid of blood so easily. Then Dr. Stillingfleet, the psychiatrist, comments “‘out, dammed spot’ infact” (328) quoting Lady Macbeth.

In *The Moving Finger*, Megan talks to Jerry about Goneril & Regan and says that they had become the way they were because of “such a lot of sucking up....it would make you go a bit rotten and queer inside, and you’d just long to be able to be beastly for a change” (101).

In *Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case*, Poirot talks about Iago and says that the technique demonstrated by him was the perfect technique of murder. “The perfection of the art of murder. Not even a word of direct suggestion” (260). Poirot also mentions John Fergusson whose character Clutie John “induces others to kill the man he himself hates” (*Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case* 260).

In the same work he compares himself to Hamlet “eternally putting off the evil day” (256) of taking action to put an end to the life of a fellow human being who incited others to murder.
Her book *Sad Cypress* takes its name from Shakespeare’s lines from *Twelfth Night*, Act II, Scene iv, from the Fool’s song, “Come away, come away, death / And in Sad Cypress let me be laid;”

The title *Taken at the Flood* has been taken from the speech of Brutus in Julius Caesar Act IV, Scene iii, 218-224, “There is a tide in the affairs of men. / which, taken at the flood, leads on to / fortune;”

*The Halloween Party* mentions these lines, “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned” (171).

In *Macbeth* Act IV, Scene i, 44-49 the second witch states, “By the pricking of my thumbs, / Something wicked this way / Comes.” which suggests another title to Christie, *By the Pricking of my Thumbs*

Yet do I

fear thy nature,

It is too full o’ th’ milk of human

kindness

(*Macbeth* Act I, Scene v, 15-18)

A character, Greg, in *A Caribbean Mystery* says, “Not like me,...full of the milk of human kindness” (16).

In *Murder on the Orient Express*, Princess Dragomiroff is described as “she was certainly ugly, and yet like the toad, she had eyes like jewels, dark and imperious....” (153) which is reminiscent of:

Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which, like the toad, ugly and

Venomous,

Wears yet a precious jewels in his

head;

(As You Like It Act II, scene i, 12-17)

There is also a quote from Romeo & Juliet in Five Little Pigs, and a character, Elsa Greer, has been described as “A predatory Juliet” (61):

“If that thy bent of love be honourable,
The purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow
By one that I’ll procure to come to thee,
Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite,
And all my fortunes at thy foot I’ll lay,
And follow thee my lord throughout the world.”” (qtd. in Five Little Pigs 60)

Biblical illusions are also found in some of her works. She talks about the ‘Mark of Cain’ in Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case.

In Appointment with Death, we find the allusion from The Bible, from Ecclesiastes 4:1-3, “So I returned and did consider all the oppressions done beneath the sun. And there was weeping and wailing from those...ever on earth...” (85).

“Down into the valley of death - ...” (75) from Psalm 23:4.

In Halloween Party, there is a character Judith and a mention of Judith and Holofernes. “Judith who cut off her lover’s head as a sign of patriotism” (156).
*Crooked House* carries a mention of the story of Jael and Sisera. “Hammering nails...into someone’s head when they were asleep” (158). Also the story of Jezebel “And they ate her all but the palms of her hands” (70).

Allusions to Nursery Rhymes can be found in the following works. *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* where the chapters are titled on each line of the nursery rhyme. *Five Little Pigs* and *Ten Little Indians* where the characters in the book correspond to the characters of the nursery rhymes. In *Hickory Dickory Dock* Poirot investigates a number of crude, unexplainable incidences in a youth hostel on Hickory Road. A *Pocket Full of Rye* – where the murderer Lance Fortescue tries to act out the nursery rhyme:

Sing a song of sixpence,

A Pocket Full of Rye.

Four and twenty blackbirds,

Baked in a pie....

The king was in his counting house,

Counting out his money;

The queen was in the parlour,

Eating bread and honey.

The maid was in the garden,

Hanging out the clothes,

When down came a blackbird

And pecked off her nose. (“Sing a song of sixpence”)
Lance wants to murder his father, Rex Fortescue. The whole grotesque plan of action is suggested to him by his father’s name ‘Rex’ meaning king. He has a handful of rye put inside Mr Rex Fortescue’s coat pocket. He安排s for the blackbirds to have made an appearance in the house some time earlier. Adele Fortescue, Rex Fortescue’s wife, was killed while she was eating scones and honey. He even goes to the extent of putting a clothes peg on the nose of the murdered servant Gladys Martin to indicate that her nose had been pecked off by a blackbird.

Crooked House mentions the following nursery rhyme, where the murdered man, Aristide Leonides, is called a crooked man because he set up business ventures that tried to cleverly circumvent the law, and his house was a crooked house because it was a monstrosity of architecture with “a strange air of being distorted....It was like looking at a country cottage through a gigantic magnifying-glass....it was a little crooked house that had grown like a mushroom in the night!” (25).

There was a crooked man, and
He walked a crooked mile,
He found a crooked sixpence against a crooked stile;
He bought a crooked cat which caught a crooked mouse,
And they all lived together in a
Little crooked house. (“There was a crooked man”)
The moving finger writes; and,

having writ,

Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit

Shall lure it back to Cancel half a

Line,

Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word

of it. (“The moving finger writes”)

These lines by Omar Khayyam become the source of the title of the book *The Moving Finger.*

Every night and every Morn

Some to Misery are Born.

Every Morn and every Night

Some are Born to sweet delight,

Some are born to Endless

Night. (“Every night and every Morn”)

These lines from William Blake’s, *Songs of Experience,* gives the title of the book *Endless Night.*

Several quotes from the work of Tennyson are also scattered in the novels. *While the light lasts* has been taken from “while the light lasts I shall remember, and in the darkness I shall not forget”. (“While the light lasts”)
Tennyson’s *The Lady of Shallot*, contains the lines, “The mirror crack’d from side to side / “The curse has come upon me,” cried / The Lady of Shallot” (qtd. in *The Mirror Crack’d from Side to Side* 367) which gives the title to *The Mirror Crack’d from Side to Side*.

Enoch Arden finds a mention in *Taken at the Flood* as the name assumed by a character, who comes back after having being presumed dead by his wife Rosaleen, who had married Gordon Cloade as the widow of Robert Underhayes. Here reference is to Tennyson’s narrative poem *Enoch Arden* where the protagonist also meets the same fate as that of Robert Underhayes outlined above.

*Three Act Tragedy* carries a quotation from Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*:

> Of more than twice her years,
> Seam’d with an ancient swordcut on the cheek,
> And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes
> And loved him, with that love which was her doom. (35)

where the young Egg Lytton Gore is being compared to the lily maid of Astolat who had fallen in love with an older man.

*The Hollow* has a quote by Tennyson, “I hate the dreadful hollow behind the little wood; / Its lips in the field above are dabbled with / Blood-red heath,” (244)

In the *Sleeping Murder*, the crime committed very many years ago, revives in the memory of a young woman Gwenda, who had been a witness to it in her childhood years, when she goes to see Webster’s play *The Duchess of Malfi* and hears the famous line being spoken, “Cover her face. Mine eyes dazzle, she died young….\)”
(27). To this she reacts hysterically by screaming and running away from the theatre, as she is unconsciously transported to that grim tragedy of her childhood.

Nemesis, in Greek mythology, was a goddess who represented “divine retribution” against the proud and arrogant who opposed the will of the gods. Miss Marple proclaims herself as ‘Nemesis’ when she tries to stop a murder being committed and to punish the guilty in *A Caribbean Mystery*.

*The Labours of Hercules* has been derived from Greek mythology wherein the great Greek hero, Heracles later “Romanised as Hercules” (“Hercules”) accomplishes twelve impossible sounding tasks (which was formatted into an epic poem) to be rewarded immortality, on the suggestion of the Oracle of Delphi. In the novel, Hercule Poirot tries to imitate his namesake, in performing the said twelve tasks but in the modern day scenario, using his brain rather than the brawn used by Hercules the Great. All tasks are headed under the same names under which Hercules’ labour were classified though Poirot realized that “here symbolism must be involved ...He did not intent to follow his prototype too closely” (14).

In *Five Little Pigs*, Meredith Blake reads out a passage from *Phaedo*, which describes the death of Socrates due to administering of poison (124).

*Ordeal by Innocence* carries the lines “To no man will we refuse justice” (69) from the *Magna Carta*.

*Murder is Easy* quotes the poem written by Tom Brown, “I do not like thee, Dr Fell, / the reason why I cannot tell” (119)

Another poem mentioned in *The Hollow* is Harry Graham’s:
The days passed slowly one by one.

I fed the ducks, reproved my wife, played

Handel’s Largo on the fife and took the

Dog a run. (231)

In *Mrs McGinty’s Dead*, a character carries the name of Robert Browning’s poem Evelyn Hope who is the son of the murder accomplice, Eva Kane, who had assumed a new identity after leaving England, to begin life anew.

Christie’s use of allusions from the well-known Shakespeare, Tennyson, Browning, The Bible and the Greek mythology, as well as the nursery rhymes and lesser-known poets like Graham and Brown, add a distinct flavour to her novels enlarging their scope from just being a murder mystery.

**Unusual Juxtapositions and Binary Opposites:**

“Juxtaposing the two images by placing them so close together creates a dramatic effect on the reader” (Miller 61). Some instances of this can be seen here:

“Tonight–nothing seems real to me, nobody is real – but John!’….I can’t help resenting that John, who was so alive, is dead. ‘And that I who am half–dead am alive.’ ” (The Hollow 179).

“It was only the aggressive, dominant personality of John Christow that had come in the way. He had made Edward look so–so pale by comparison” (The Hollow 187).
“As it is, John Christow had always the most unfortunate effect on Edward. John, if you know what I mean, became so much more so and Edward became so much less so” (The Hollow 15).

“The afternoon sun lighted up the gold of John’s hair and the blue of his eyes….His voice, warm and resonant, charmed the ear, and the magnetism of his whole personality took charge of the scene. It was Edward who seemed, suddenly, by contrast with the other man, bloodless – a shadowy figure, stooping a little” (The Hollow 100).

Contrasting the ‘alive’ John Christow to the ‘pale, half-dead’ Edward, Christie dramatizes the situation and thus creates poignancy when soon thereafter, life is sucked out of him as the murder victim.

Another instance appears in Five Little Pigs:

“She died young…."

That was his thought as he looked at Elsa Dittisham who had been Elsa Greer.

He would never have recognized her from the picture Meredith Blake had shown him. That had been, above all, a picture of youth, a picture of vitality. Here there was no youth – there might never have been youth. (150)

This brings out the tragedy and the suffering of Elsa, by comparing her present self as a thirty six year old woman to her painting, which had been painted when she
was just twenty. Though outwardly she had moved on in life, after the death of her lover Amyas Crale, but inwardly a small part of her had died forever.

**Motif:**

“A motif is much smaller than a theme. It is an image or event that occurs frequently in a text” (Miller 28). It adds meaning and focuses attention on what the writer is attempting to bring to notice. It is a pointer towards the solving of the murder mystery.

In *Taken at the Flood*, we see the same insistence on Poirot’s returning to London that is being made by the members of the Cloade family-

Rowley Cloade - “I expect M. Poirot wants to get back to town” (160).

Mrs Lionel Cloade - “You’re on your way back to London, of course?” (162)

Lionel Cloade - “How do you do, M. Poirot, on your way back to town?” (164)

“Bon Dieu, another who packs me back to London!” thought Poirot (164).

Jeremy Cloade - “You – you’ll be going back to London, at once, then?” (178)

Poirot - “Going back to London...Did they all want him out of the way?” (178)

Francis Cloade - “You are going up to London?” (179)

What Christie is hinting to the reader is the fact that Major Porter, who identified the dead body as that of Robert Underhayes, was not a reliable witness. He was perhaps lying either out of greed or to avenge his friend’s (Robert Underhayes’s) supposed death because of the betrayal by his wife Rosaleen Cloade, so that suspicion should fall on Rosaleen and her brother David thereafter, in the present circumstances.
It was important for the Cloade family that the murdered man should be recognized as Underhayes because then only the deceased Gordon Cloade’s marriage to Rosaleen, would prove to be illegal since then it would mean that she married Cloade while her first husband Underhayes had been very much alive and had been found dead, only now, after her second marriage. This would then prove a boon to the entire Cloade family who would be able to inherit Gordon’s wealth, which, in the absence of any will, had all gone to Rosaleen as his next of kin. When Poirot had been able to produce Major Porter, as a witness who had been acquainted with Underhayes, and Porter had identified the dead man as Underhayes, everything had been settled to the satisfaction of the Cloade family and now they did not want Poirot to probe any deeper and to return to London, without jeopardizing their future prospects.

In *The ABC Murders*, as the title suggests, the mastermind behind the crime portrays a series of murders as committed by a homicidal maniac. Further at the scene of each crime is found an ABC railway guide. This is the motif that reoccurs strengthening the belief that indeed the murderer is obsessed with an alphabetical complex as is also shown by his selection of victims – Alice Ascher in Andover, Betty Barnard in Bexhill, and Sir Carmichael Clarke in Churston.

In *After the Funeral* the green malachite table and the vase of wax flowers, is one of the important recurring images in the novel. Early on in the novel when the family comes back to Enderby Hall after attending Richard’s funeral service, we find Rosamund looking at those wax flowers on the green malachite table. After some days when Helen lifts the glass shade on top of the wax flowers, in an effort to arrange some fresh flowers, it slips from her hand and breaks. In London, Susan Banks also talks about having the green malachite table and maybe the wax flowers
along with it, for her new business establishment. When the family meets again at Enderby, an argument ensues between Susan and Rosamund for the possession of the green malachite table. The next day finds Rosamund still harping on the wax flowers to be used as a prop for her next theatrical performance.

This forms an important clue in solving the mystery. Miss Gilchrist’s kindly meant gesture, to smoothen a terse situation between Susan and Rosamund, over the possession of the green malachite table and the wax flowers cause her to remark that the wax flowers “…look so right on that table….Really artistic. Sweetly pretty” (289). It becomes apparent to Poirot that this professed first visit of Miss Gilchrist is not her first visit at Enderby Hall, because before her arrival Helen had broken the glass shade over the wax flowers and since then they had been put away in storage. So her well-meant attempt lands her in further trouble and makes Poirot suspicious of her.

Cora’s peculiar mannerisms also find mention at frequent intervals. When Cora makes her outrageous remark after Richard’s funeral it is described as, “Cora Lansquenet looked at the family in wide-eyed surprise. She tilted her head on one side with a bird-like movement. ‘But he was murdered, wasn’t he?’” (25). When later Helen recalls the above-mentioned scene, she realizes that something was amiss. “And suddenly, seeing the picture clearly in her mind, Helen frowned…There was something wrong with that picture …. Something…? Somebody…?” (39). She communicates her uneasiness to Mr Entwhistle and later onto Poirot as well.

When one day, the younger members of the family have a conversation about mirror images being reversed, Helen starts getting a tentative idea about what seemed wrong to her. After retiring to her bedroom for the night, she herself sits in front of her dressing table mirror and her thoughts run along these lines, “To see ourselves as
others see us…Cora – the picture came quite clearly…Cora on the day of the funeral, her head tilted sideways – asking her question – looking at Helen… ‘It doesn’t make sense…it can’t make sense…’” (304).

Although she tries to call up Mr Entwhistle and talk about her discovery, she is unable to do so, as she is hit on the head and taken to hospital in a state of unconsciousness. Yet, Poirot is able to guess correctly that what had been bothering Helen all along, was that the habit of Cora’s, of tilting her head on one side, seemed to be in the opposite direction to the one that she remembered. Poirot explains this by explicitly stating that Cora then, had not been Cora but rather Miss Gilchrist in the guise of Cora. As Poirot points out Miss Gilchrist’s mistake, “You forgot that a mirror image is reversed. When you saw in the glass the perfect reproduction of Cora’s birdlike sidewise tilt of the head, you didn’t realize that it was actually the wrong way round” (36).

The motif in Christie’s work can thus be a dialogue, an object, or an action. In all the above mentioned instances, they are important pointers that eventually lead to the solution. They are placed in strategic positions that appear natural to the reader and in such a way that their importance is camouflaged. Nevertheless, they are the buried clues and play a significant role in the denouement.

Themes:

“This is the central idea which emerges from the text” (Miller 31). To put it crudely, theme is what the work is all about. Though Christie’s works are murder mysteries, yet the theme that emerge from her work, are highly varied and colourful.
Like in *A Murder is Announced* the theme of the novel that materializes is that no matter how much suffering one has undergone in one’s life, any course of action that is unlawful and unethical, is not justified under any circumstances, and will create a trail of events, that may involve the taking up of a fellow human being's life and will certainly culminate into a catastrophe. “People with a grudge against the world are always dangerous. They seem to think life owes them something ... It’s what’s in yourself that makes you happy or unhappy” (223).

In *The A.B.C. Murders*, Hercule Poirot saves Mr Alexander Bonaparte Cust, from being charged as a homicidal murderer having an ‘alphabet complex’ and for committing four murders. Poirot realizes that there were two people involved. One – the very clever murderer, Mr Franklin Clarke, who wanted to get his brother, the rich Sir Carmichael Clarke, out of the way, so as to inherit his immense wealth. At the same time, he wanted to make a scapegoat of Mr A.B. Cust, (who suffered from mental delusions), whom he happened to have come across one day, and struck by the peculiarity of his initials (A.B.C.) he devised the whole plan of making the murder of his brother, appear like one in a series of alphabet-complex murders – Mrs Ascher in Andover, Ms. Betty Barnard in Bexhill, and Sir Carmichael Clarke in Churston, and so on. On being found out by Poirot, he is admonished by the latter who feels that making another man pay for your deeds, or rather misdeeds, is the ultimate sin. “I consider your crime not an English crime at all – not above-board – not sporting- ...It was abominable – not so much the murder of his brother – but the cruelty that condemned an unfortunate man to a living death. *To catch a fox and put him in a box and never let him go!* That is not le sport!” (221-222).
In *Sad Cypress*, Poirot comes across a woman, a lady in the right sense of the term, Miss Elinor Carlisle, who has been charged with murder. Though she pleads ‘not guilty’ to the charge in court, yet her whole attitude speaks just the reverse. It takes great ingenuity on the part of Poirot to realize that though she has not physically murdered the victim, yet the hatred in her heart towards the latter was so strong that she often wished her dead. And being a scrupulous woman, she considers herself morally guilty. “And she herself with her sensitive and fastidious conscience did nothing to dispel that assumption. Accusing herself of the will, if not the deed, she came very near to abandoning a distasteful and sordid fight, and pleading guilty in court to a crime she had not committed.....She condemned herself – because she judged herself by a more exacting standing than ordinary humanity applies!” (223).

In *Hickory Dickory Dock*, we are made acquainted with a murderer who although belonged to a good family, yet could not make good in life and was cut out to be a murderer because:

He has all the hallmarks of the killer, the overweening vanity, the spitefulness, the growing recklessness that led him to draw attention to himself in every conceivable way....They are like that, these murderer, carried away by their own egotism, by their admission of their own cleverness, relying on their charm....he has all the charm of a spoiled child who has never grown up, who never will grow up - who sees only one thing, himself, and what he wants ! (283-284)

*Endless night* shows us the dangers of wanting everything in life without putting in the required effort, and taking a short cut to materialize your dreams. “We wanted the World, nothing less! We wanted to be on top of the World. We wanted to
fulfil every ambition. We wanted to have everything, deny ourselves nothing...I’d have to work for years. I don’t want to wait. I don’t want to be middle aged...Old. One foot in the grave. I want it now when I’m young and strong” (197). And this overweening ambition does not even deter them from committing a heinous crime like murder.

A woman who has everything going against her and has never been able to fulfil her wishes, can also become ruthless, at what she perceives as the injustice of fate:

Not a self-indulgent woman – but a thwarted one. A plain girl, leading a dull existence, unable to attract the men she would like to attract, finally accepting a man she did not care for rather than be left an old maid....Then the birth of her children and her passionate attachment to them....There was only one thing that illuminated her drab life, the expectation of her Aunt Emily’s death. Then she would have money, independence, the means to educate her children as she wished....

(Dumb Witness 244-245).

Christie elucidates times wherein even a well-respected man of society may turn into a murderer, if he happens to get a chance to put his integrity to test and fails therein, when somewhat tempting circumstances present themselves to him:

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. Perhaps it never will be – and if so, he will go to his grave honoured and respected by everyone. But let us suppose something occurs...And then the strain of
weakness tells….He becomes greedy. And in his greed he overreaches himself...His moral fibre is blunted. (*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* 168-169)

Reflecting on a murder victim, Heather Badcock, Miss Marple remarks how people, who are self-absorbed, do not consider how their thoughtless actions may cause harm to others, sometimes irredeemably, despite their good intentions. “She never did mean harm but there is no doubt that people like Heather Badcock.....are capable of doing a lot of harm because they lack – not kindness, they have kindness – but any real consideration for the way their actions may affect other people. She thought always of what an action meant to her, never sparing a thought to what it might mean to somebody else” (*Mirror Crack’d from Side to Side* 502).

The hazards of love that turns possessive and that can ultimately lead to the taking of the life of the loved one, is clearly demonstrated in *Nemesis*:

Clotilde was not going to lose the person she loved. She was not going to let her escape, she was not going to let her go to the young man whom she herself hated and loathed. She would keep Verity, keep her in her own way.....I don’t suppose there can be any agony so great as what Clotilde has suffered all this time. . .living in eternal sorrow. . .I don’t think she ever suffered from remorse. I don’t think she had even that consolation. She just suffered – and went on suffering year after year. . .Love is a very terrible thing. It is alive to evil, it can be one of the most evil things there can be. (178-179)

Christie has also raised the issue of Natural versus Legal justice in books like *Murder on the Orient Express* and *And Then There Were None* where she does not
hesitate from showing how eminent people like Hercule Poirot and Justice Wargrave also support natural justice over legal justice. In his last book *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case* Poirot does not hesitate, in himself taking the life of a person, who like *Iago*, has perfected the art of murder by playing on the weaknesses of others and inciting them to murder. Since no proof of his guilt could ever be obtained, Poirot considers it his duty, to take the law in his hands if further lives had to be saved. But to atone for this sin, Poirot kills off himself too.

**Universal Aspects of Human Experience:**

Universal aspects of human experience are those ‘truths’ which are applicable everywhere and to everyone irrespective of the spatial and temporal boundaries.

Hercule Poirot talks about women needing to find an expression for themselves and for their deeds as well as misdeeds. “A woman has at heart a great desire to speak the truth. How many husbands who have deceived their wives go comfortably to their graves, carrying their secret with them! How many wives who have deceived their husbands wreck their lives by throwing the fact in those same husband’s teeth!” (*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* 168-169).

In addition to the above, the some of the many universal truths that materialize in Christie’s works can be enumerated as follows:

Isn’t it the Chinese who heed that beneficence is to be accounted a sin rather than a virtue? They’ve got something there, you know, Beneficence does things to people. Ties ’em up in knots. We all know what human nature’s like. Do a chap a good turn and you feel kindly towards him. You like him. But the chap who’s had the good turn done
to him, does he feel so kindly to you? Does he really like you? He ought to, of course, but does he? (*Ordeal by Innocence* 72).

“So much that needed doing, so much that was worth doing! Natural irony made him doubtful whether work worth doing was always as successful as it ought to be” (*Ordeal by Innocence* 84).

“Everything that environment could do was done for them. It could do a great deal, but it could not do everything. There had been those seeds of weakness which had brought them to the nursery in the first place, and under stress those seeds might bear flower” (*Ordeal by Innocence* 189).

“You didn’t think about your mother or your father or your sister or your aunt. They just existed unquestioned, in those relationships. You didn’t think about them as people. You didn’t ask yourself, even, what they were like” (*Sparkling Cyanide* 4).

Describing the black, sheep of a family, Christie describes them as a type who “grew oranges, started chicken farms, went as Jackaroos to Australian stations, got jobs with meat freezing concerns in New Zealand. They never made good, never stayed anywhere long, and invariably got through any money that had been invested on their behalf” (*Sparkling Cyanide* 39).

Talking about dog psychology, “The dog, he argues from reason. He is intelligent, he makes his deductions according to his point of view. There are people who may enter a house and there are people who may not – that a dog soon learns. Then a dog’s duty is clear, to aid in driving this undesirable man away, and to bite him if possible. A most reasonable proceeding” (*Dumb Witness* 57).
How strange that a girl could trouble your inmost soul so long as she kept her mouth shut, and that the moment she spoke the glamour could vanish as though it had never been. I had known the reverse happen, though. I had seen a little sad monkey–faced woman whom no one would turn to look at twice. Then she opened her mouth and suddenly enchantment had lived and bloomed and Cleopatra had cast her spell anew. *(The Moving Finger 42)*

About anonymous letter writers:

Think how desperately, violently unhappy anyone must be to sit down and write these things, (anonymous letters). How lonely, how cut off from human kind. Poisoned through and through, with a dark stream of poison that finds its outlet in this way...But that black inward unhappiness – like a septic arm physically, all black and swollen. If you could cut if and let the poison out it would flow away harmlessly. Yes, poor soul, poor soul. *(The Moving Finger 134)*

Joanna Southwood voices some bitter truths about one’s friends becoming victims of poverty:

If any misfortunes happen to my friends I always drop them *at once*! It sounds heartless, but it saves such a lot of trouble later! They always want to borrow money off you, or else they start a dressmaking business and you have to get the most terrible clothes from them. They paint lampshades, or do batik scarves...I only like successful people. And you’ll find that’s true of nearly everybody – only most people won’t admit it. They just say that really they can’t put up with Mary or
Emily or Pamela any more! “Her troubles have made her so bitter and peculiar, poor dear!” (*Death on the Nile* 9)

Another truth about the loneliness of old people has been stated as:

It’s like King Cophetua and the beggar maid. If you’re really rather a lonely, tired old man, and if, perhaps, your own family have been neglecting you…to befriend someone who will be overwhelmed with your magnificence…well that’s much more interesting. It makes you feel a much greater person – a beneficent monarch! The recipient is more likely to be dazzled, and that, of course, is a pleasant feeling for you. (*The Body in the Library* 106)

Maureen Summerhayes voices the pain of being an adopted child, “My mother parted with me and I had every advantage, as they call it. And it’s always hurt – always – always – to know that you weren’t really wanted, that your mother could let you go….I don’t think that’s ever true (self-sacrifice). It’s the way they put it to themselves. But what it boils down to is that they can, really, get on without you….“ (*Mrs McGinty’s Dead* 182).

On the change, that is inevitable with time, Hori remarks:

I mean there is always change….You cannot go back….It is like my measures here. I take half and add to it a quarter, and then a tenth and then a twenty-fourth – and at the end, you see, it is a different quantity altogether….There is an evil that comes from outside, that attacks so that all the world can see, but there is another kind of rottenness that breeds from within – that shows no outward sign. It grows slowly, day
by day, till at last the whole fruit is rotten – eaten only by disease.

*(Death Comes as the End 18-19)*

This novel is set on the West bank of the Nile, at Thebes in Egypt, about 2000 B.C. It was applicable then and it is very much applicable now and thus constitutes an integral truth, in the universal aspects of human experience.

About child rearing:

Many children, most children, I should say, suffer from over attention on the part of their parents. There is too much love, too much watching over the child. It is uneasily conscious of this brooding, and seeks to free itself, to get away and be unobserved. With an only child that is particularly the case, and of course mothers are the worst offenders. The result on the marriage is often unfortunate. The husband resents coming second, seeks consolation – or rather flattery and attention – elsewhere and a divorce results sooner or later. The best thing for the child, I am convinced, is to have what I should term healthy neglect on the part of both its parents. This happens naturally enough in the case of a large family of children and very little money. They are overlooked because the mother has literally no time to occupy herself with them. They realize quite well that she is fond of them, but they are not worried by too many manifestations of the fact. *(Five Little Pigs 168)*

“It is infinitely easier to speak to strangers of such things than it would be to speak of them to friends or acquaintances” *(Third Girl 173)*.
“You attribute always to others the sentiments that you yourself experience. Hastings was happy – everybody was happy!” (*Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case* 21).

“As one gets on, one tends more and more to revert to the old days. One tries to recapture old emotions” (*Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case* 20).

“The human mind is a very curious piece of mechanism ... You know... how one puts off and avoids a thing that is distasteful – that you don’t want to face?” (*Sad Cypress* 49).

“Old people. They remember, not things that have happened last week or last month or last year, but they remember something that happened, say, nearly twenty years ago” (*Third Girl* 73).

“It was one of the most convenient assumptions, this knowledge of what the dead would wish. The beloved had never any doubt about their dear one’s wishes and those wishes usually squared with their own inclinations” (*Mrs McGinty’s Dead* 278).

**Tone:**

“Tone is the key to discovering the writer’s intention…. changing the tone can entirely change the meaning…. ‘how’ something is said really establishes ‘what’ is being said” (Gill 46). Thus, we can conclude that meaning can be inferred from the tone.

We can witness a range of emotions reflected in the various tones that Poirot adopts while talking to Hastings.

When full of emotion on meeting Hastings after a long gap of time-

When teasing Hastings on his personal charm –

“...You know, my friend, you have worn well. *Les femmes*, they will take an interest in you? Yes?...That is right, twist your moustache, hunch your shoulders – I see it is as I say – you would not look so self-conscious otherwise”  (*Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case* 18).

His appreciative tone –

“For the more active side of the campaign I shall have with me my invaluable Hastings....My loyal friend. How much I appreciate your faith in me”  (*Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case* 23).

His mocking tone –

“...Because, *mon cher*, you are still the same old Hastings. You have still the speaking countenance. I do not wish, you see, that you should sit staring at X with your mouth hanging open, your face saying plainly : “This-this that I am looking at—is a murderer....when you try to dissimulate, it is worse”  (*Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case* 34-35).

His tone of irritation at Hastings’s slow mental process –

“No, no, my friend. I beg that you will not make these clumsy attempts to unravel a secret that I refuse to reveal to you”  (*Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case* 61).
His tone of anger, when Hastings tries to stop him from reading other people’s correspondence in the course of his investigation:

“I am not playing a game, mon ami… I am hunting down a murderer” (Peril at End House 131).

His ironic tone can be witnessed when he listens to a cock and bull story told by the actor Bryan Martin about being shadowed by a man with a “gold tooth”. It is very evident in Poirot’s interjections as Martin tries to lead him down the garden path.

“Ah! A gold tooth”

“I begin to comprehend. Go on.”

Distinctly curious.”

“Most remarkable”.

“Ah! That gold tooth, it was a very fortunate occurrence.

“Yes, that makes the whole story very interesting.” (Lord Edgware Dies 21-22)

The irony is palpable in the fact that Poirot is very much aware that Martin has fabricated the story and he therefore just plays along with the latter.

His tone of anger or warning when warning the murderer –

“Remember what I said – the truth goes to Inspector Raglan in the morning… It would be most unwise on your part to attempt to silence me as you silenced M. Ackroyd. That kind of business does not succeed against Hercule Poirot, you understand” (The Murder of Roger Ackroyd 232).
Different shades of Poirot’s personality are reflected in the different tones that he employs on different occasions and add further meaning to his words.

**Diction:**

Christie wisely manipulated diction “to establish such things as attitude, temperament, social class, and context” (Miller 33). Diction is “the selection and organisation of words” (Miller 33). She helps to establish verisimilitude by adopting the correct diction to be visible in the speech and thoughts of different characters.

Rustic diction is visible in the anonymous letter received by Elinor Carlisle, presumably written by some villager:

> I'm naming no Names but there’s someone sucking up to your Aunt and if you’re not careful you’ll get Cut Out of everything. Girls are very Artful and Old Ladies is soft when young ones suck up to Then and Flatter them. What I say is You’d best come down and see for yourself what’s Going on its not right you and the Young Gentleman should be done out of What’s Yours – and she’s Very Artful and the old lady might Pop off at any time. (*Sad Cypress* 7)

Court proceedings have been shown as-

> “Elinor Katharine Carlisle. You stand charged upon this indictment with the murder of Mary Gerrard upon the 27th of July last Are you guilty or not guilty? . . . It will be my duty to call before you witnesses who can help you to form a true conclusion on these matters. . . .” (*Sad Cypress* 1-2).
American lady, Mrs Hubbard, using some American phrases in Murder on the Orient Express:

“I’ve got some vurry important information, vurry important, indeed…. (129).

“I never looked to see” (132).

“I just don’t know what’s the matter with all you people” (133).

“My daughter always says: “When Momma’s got a hunch, you can bet your bottom dollar it’s O.K.”” (137).

“I guess even you get kinder get muddled now and then” (139).

“That wouldn’t surprise me any” (138).


Poirot, of Belgian origin, speaks English well, with a smattering of French phrases thrown in –

“Sacre’ tonnerre!”

“Ah! Ca c’est bien plus difficile”

“Ma foi”

“mon ami”

“Attendez”
“le gue femme vcat, Dieu vevt”

“le bon Dieu”

“Ecoutez”

“Mon cher”

“C’est curieux”

“Tre’s correct”

“Comment?”

Miss Marple, as a dithery old woman, comes alive in her habitual flustered speech such as, “But really, Sir Henry, how fortunate...how very fortunate. So long since I have seen you ...yes, my rheumatism. Very bad of late. Of course, I couldn’t have afforded this hotel (really fantastic what they charge nowadays), but Raymond – my nephew, Raymond West, you may remember him - …Yes, the dear boy has been so successful.... ” (A Murder is Announced 70).

Hyperbole:

“Spontaneously generated from a dynamo” (Three Act Tragedy 14). Sir Charles is being ironic and comic about Miss Milray, his secretary, when talking about her efficiency and energy. This gives us an insight not only into Miss Milray’s character but also into Sir Charles’s too, who being an actor, is quite given in to exaggeration and hyperbole. Further being of an artistic temperament and hence vague, he really prizes the qualities of Miss Milray, which keep his life “functioning like clockwork” (14).
“Hyperbole is the use of a figure of speech that relies on exaggeration or overstatement to emphasize the importance or conversely the insignificance, of something” (Miller 39).

When Hercule Poirot claims, “I am a detective unique, unsurpassed, the greatest that ever lived!” (Peril at End House 30) he thinks he is being genuine but to the English mind, he appears to be comic, as the English are a mixture of modesty and reticent and apt to be suspicious of someone who indulges in hyperbole and sings his own praises.

“It is the silent dead in whom I am usually interested. Their hates, their loves, their actions. And when you really know the murdered victim, then the victim speaks, and those dead lips utter a name – the name you want to know” (Mrs McGinty’s Dead 36). Poirot’s fanciful descriptions make his English audience uncomfortable, as they are not used to indulging in such excesses.

When the vicar asks the maid Mary what it was that had upset her, she replied, “Tell you that in two words, I can.’ (Here I may say, it was vastly underestimated.) ‘People coming, snooping around when my back’s turned. Poking round. And what business of her is it, how often the study is dusted or turned out? If you and the missus don’t complain, it’s nobody else’s business. If I give satisfaction to you that’s all that matters, I say”’ (625 Murder at the Vicarage).

Christie thus makes use of hyperbole and understatement, to create comic situations like above.
Repetition:

“Repetition is a simple and reasonably straightforward device that occurs when a word or synonym, phrase or line is repeated. The most obvious effect it has on a text is that of emphasis” (Miller 50).

Christie makes use of repetition in *The Hollow*, to show the grief of Henrietta Savernake who tries to let the fact sink in that, her lover John Christow, has been murdered. The repetition accentuates her pain and loss:

So quick – it can happen so quickly. One moment living, breathing, and the next – dead – gone – emptiness – Oh, the emptiness! And here we are, all of us, eating caramel custard and calling ourselves alive – and John, who was more alive than any of us, is dead. I say the word, you know, over and over again to myself. Dead – dead – dead – dead – dead. And soon it hasn’t got any meaning – not any meaning at all. It’s just a funny little word like the breaking off of a rotten branch. Dead – dead- dead – dead. It’s like a tom – tom, isn’t it, beating in the jungle. Dead – dead – dead – dead – dead. (*The Hollow* 178)

Verisimilitude:

Verisimilitude is “the appearance of being true or real” (“Verisimilitude”). The real achievement of a writer lies in how much verisimilitude can be achieved in his work. Only if we can identify or accept the events or characters as probable, can we derive pleasure from reading. On the other hand, if we find the work highly improbable we will lose interest in pursuing it. Christie’s work, thus, can be termed as realistic where realism can be seen as “working through the reader accepting an
implicit invitation to treat the book as being about a world that he or she might be familiar with outside the pages of the book” (Gill 61).

Even the weapons used are common articles and the poisons are usually those contained in weed-killer or other domestic products and not some technical, rare, untraceable poisons, which no one has ever heard of.

Though Christie specializes in murder mysteries, and murder is not an everyday occurrence but thankfully, a somewhat random, sensational phenomenon yet her works are successful in achieving a high degree of verisimilitude. As has been mentioned earlier, her characters have been drawn in such vivid details that they start appearing familiar and probable.

The plots also are quite convincing, as murders are not shown to be committed for some exotic cause but motivated by the basic human emotions. Motives for murder are “Envy, revenge, jealousy, fear, money” (Mrs McGinty’s Dead 24). Her plots are so intricately designed that co-incidences are few and rare, all actions and events are plausibly explained and follow a cause and effect sequence, and all loose ends are tidily disposed off, in the end. The coincidences, which do occur sometimes in her novel, are explained as “Coincidences do occur – the most amazing coincidences. I, Hercule Poirot, have known coincidences that would surprise you…” (Three Act Tragedy 55).

The murderers are shown to be normal people and not some psychopathic characters. “To all seeming he may be exactly like everyone else....But of course a lot of killers are ordinary sane fellows like you and me” (Murder is Easy 79). As Christie
often opines all of us are potential murderers and if driven beyond desperation may seek an outlet by not hesitating in taking the life of the other person. “In everyone there arises from time to time the wish to kill. How often have you not felt or heard others say: “She made me so furious I felt I could have killed her!”....And all those statements are literally true. Your mind at such moments is quite clear. You would like to kill so and so. But you do not do it. Your will has to assent to your desire” (Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case 260). “In real life, nine times out of ten, it is the most likely and the most obvious person who commits the crime” (Peril at End House 100).

The personality of the murderer is also laid out convincingly:

He wasn’t cocky. Not cocky at all. And in my experience they (murderers) usually are. Always so damned pleased with themselves. Always think they’re stringing you along. Always sure they’ve been so clever about the whole thing. And even when they’re in the dock and must know they’re for it, they’re still in a queer sort of way getting a kick out of it all. They’re in the limelight. They’re the central figure. Playing the star part – perhaps for the first time in their lives. They’re – well – you know - cocky! (Mrs McGinty’s Dead 19-20)

What are murderers like? Some of them….have been thoroughly nice chaps….Nice ordinary fellows like you and me….Murder, you see, is an amateur crime. I’m speaking of course of the kind of murder you have in mind – not gangster stuff. One feels, very often, as though
these nice ordinary chaps had been overtaken, as if were, by murder, almost accidentally. They’ve been in a tight place, or they’ve wanted something very badly, money or a woman – and they’ve killed to get it. The brake that operates with most of us doesn’t operate with them….

Some people, I suspect, remain morally immature. They continue to be aware that murder is wrong, but they do not feel it. I don’t think, in my experience that any murderer has really felt remorse…And that, perhaps, is the mark of Cain. Murderers are set apart, they are “different” – murder is wrong – but not for them – for them it is necessary – the victim has “asked for it”, it was “the only way”.

I’ve never met a murderer who wasn’t vain…It’s their vanity that leads to their undoing, nine times out of ten. They may be frightened of being caught, but they can’t help strutting and boasting and usually they’re sure they’ve been far too clever to be caught…And a murderer wants to talk…you see, having committed a murder puts you in a position of great loneliness. You’d like to tell somebody all about it – and you never can. And that makes you want to all the more. And so – if you can’t talk about how you did it, you can at least talk about the murder itself – discuss it, advance theories – go over it” (Crooked House 92-94)

As Hercule Poirot illustrates in Murder in Mesopotamia, even the personality of the victim is of importance. “Now, every case, in my opinion, has a definite shape
and form. The pattern of this case, to my mind, all revolved round the personality of Mrs Leidner (the victim). Until I knew exactly what kind of a woman Mrs Leidner was I should not be able to know why she was murdered and who murdered her” (304).

Further, the background and setting is usually identifiable and imaginable. Even the external details like weather, health, landscapes, society, class relationships etc. are satisfactorily dealt with so as to totally merge within the work. As Bolton states, “The great novelist has both to be sincere – to be genuinely wanting to tell the truth – and to achieve verisimilitude – to enable the reader to believe in his truthfulness” (Anatomy of the Novel 28).

Christie also has an explanation at the ready, to explain why is it that Hercule Poirot or Miss Marple always seems to find himself or herself embroiled in murders, thus putting an effective stop to a reader’s protest of how it may seem vastly inconceivable for them to solve so many mysteries. In Three Act Tragedy, she states:

Well, it’s by way of being a theory of mine...That events come to people - not people to events. Why do some people have exciting lives and other people dull ones? Because of their surroundings? Not at all. One man may travel to the ends of the earth and nothing will happen to him. There will be a massacre a week before he arrives, and an earthquake the day after he leaves, and the boat that he nearly took will be shipwrecked. And another man may live at Balham and travel to the City every day, and things will happen to him. (17)