CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
Estelar
CONCLUSION

As stated in the synopsis, as a prelude to embarking on this thesis, it was an endeavour in finding the solution for the timeless popularity of Christie which is evinced in the fact that while most of her contemporaries are long, lost forgotten, she continues to be read even today, and generation after generation vouch their unwavering allegiance to her books even now. This assumes remarkable proportions in the light that this year i.e. 2015 is being celebrated with aplomb as the 125th birth year of the ‘Queen of Crime’.

Employing the two opposite points of view (the historical-biographical and the formalist approach), a few popular and relevant works of Christie from the vast collection of her detective novels, were subjected to a close scrutiny to arrive at the eventual inference. Was it her persona, her very essence or the changing face of English society that she portrays, that make her such an interesting read even today? Or was it some particular technique of writing, the use of certain literary devices that she consciously employed, to create an unforgettable impact? These are some of the questions that have been dealt with in this thesis.

When being interviewed on “Close-Up”, a BBC radio programme, in February 1955, Christie confessed that “the disappointing truth is that I haven’t much method . . . . The real work is done in thinking out the development of your story and worrying about it until it comes right. That may take quite a while” (Curran, Agatha Christie’s Secret Notebooks 67). John Curran has made a thorough study of her seventy-three handwritten volumes of note books which were lying abandoned in a room in Greenway House, Christie’s ‘house of dreams’, which has been taken over by the National Trust and been reopened to the public. He is of the opinion that her
notebooks confirm her words stated above, as they show that she did not stick to one single idea when devising a plot rather “she devised and developed; she selected and rejected; she sharpened and polished; she revisited and recycled” (Curran, *Agatha Christie’s Secret Notebooks* 101).

Thus, we can see a lot of hard work and thinking has gone into the development of the plot. A thorough study of the plots, in this thesis, has revealed how intricately they have been planned and executed, how cleverly she has laid out a trail of clues, which sometimes are the red herrings and sometimes the buried clues, but nonetheless have their own ontological significance and contribute to making her plots an organic whole. Even though the main plot contains various embedded stories, their purpose is simply to widen the field of suspicion by making each character appear important.

Even though she may have an idea of the theme she wanted to portray, yet she considered all possibilities in plot development regarding not only the selection of the victim but also of the murderer. “Even a cursory glance at Notebook 14 shows that Christie considered Sophia, Clemency and Edith as well as Josephine, when it came to potential murderers” (Curran, *Agatha Christie’s Secret Notebooks* 99) which refers to the plot of *Crooked House* which Christie herself has described as “This book is one of my own special favourites. I saved it up for years, thinking about it, working it out, saying to myself: ‘One day, when I’ve plenty of time, and want to really enjoy myself – I’ll begin it!...Crooked House was pure pleasure” (Christie, *Crooked House* Forward). Similarly, *A Murder is Announced* notes show that the murderer, Letitia Blacklock, was being at one time considered as a victim by Christie.
Christie uses certain ingenious ploys in the course of her work, to mystify the reader at every juncture, though there is no deception involved in laying out the clues. Even though there was a hue and cry of outrage and foul play against her, when she made the ‘Narrator-Watson’, the murderer in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* she nevertheless appears fully justified in doing so.

What could be more subtle and ambiguous than the narrator, Dr Sheppard, saying just after committing the murder, “The letter had been brought in at twenty minutes 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” (41). It is left to the reader’s imagination to deduce what would have happened in those unaccounted for ‘ten minutes’.

Then, when Sheppard himself discovers the body, after sending the butler to ring up the police, he says, “I did what little had to be done. I was careful not to disturb the position of the body, and not to handle the dagger at all. No object was to be attained by moving it” (45). Again, the reader can well question that if he did not handle the body and the dagger then what exactly did he do? Dr Sheppard is thus not being false, only partially–truthful, for which a just reader will not blame him entirely. As Dorothy L. Sayers defended Christie, “It is the reader’s business to suspect everybody” (Curran, *Agatha Christie’s Murder in the Making* 47).

Christie did not hesitate in using this ploy again, many years later in *Endless Night* and once more got away with it, by befuddling the reader who does not suspect the narrator, Mike Rogers who this time is a low class working young man, despite the adroitly dropt clues throughout. Thus, Christie did not hesitate in using the same
ploy a number of times, changing the atmosphere, imagery, setting, characters, and theme, as and when required.

Throughout Christie has laid stress on the obvious and the common place. Her murders are ‘sensible and credible’ murders with a great degree of verisimilitude, committed for reasons like “Most frequent – money. That is to say, gain in its various ramifications. Then there is revenge – and love, and fear, and pure hate, and beneficence –” (Christie, *Death on the Nile* 69) and that covers nearly all potentialities as Mrs Allerton says, “After this conversation, Monsieur Poirot, I shall wonder that there is anyone left alive!” (Christie, *Death on the Nile* 70). Only seldom do we come across motives like ‘natural justice’ in *And Then There Were None* and murder as ‘a dress rehearsal’ in *Three Act Tragedy*. Again and again Poirot emphasizes “his long-held belief that you should never believe anything anyone said without first checking it. *Suspect everybody*, had been for many years, if not his whole life, one of his first axioms” (Christie, *Third Girl* 179). Miss Marple also firmly states, now and again “The truth is, you see, that most people – and I don’t exclude policemen – are far too trusting for this wicked world. They believe what is told them. I never do. I’m afraid I always like to prove a thing for myself....certain things were (are) taken for granted from the first – instead of just confining oneself to the facts” (Christie, *The Body in the Library* 209). Also, Poirot reiterates frequently, that the most obvious suspect is the husband or the wife and the most obvious, trite solution is more often the correct one. Christie thus is able to achieve the ‘wilful suspension of disbelief’ readily on the part of the readers.

Co-incidences do occur in her works but are kept to a minimum. Like what puts Poirot on the right track in *Lord Edgware Dies* is a chance remark of a passerby
“If they’d just had the sense to ask Ellis right away....” (202) where co-incidentally Ellis happens to be the name of the murderess Jane Wilkinson’s maid. Such co-incidences do sometimes occur in real life also, and if they do not advance the solutions on a regular basis, they can be accepted with a grain of salt. Confession is also used, but usually only in the denouement scene, where the murderer has already been unmasked. Only in And Then There Were None, is the solution revealed in a confessional letter, when all the inhabitants of the island are found dead by the police.

Repetition and motifs are also used by Christie, when certain seemingly inconspicuous actions or objects, find mention repeatedly. The tilting of “the head on one side with a bird-like movement” and “the green malachite table with the wax flowers on it” are mentioned casually a number of times which are the real pointers to solving the mystery in the After the Funeral. Similarly, the constant refrain of all Cloade family members (Taken at the Flood), on Poirot’s returning to London, clearly show that there is more to it than meets the eye.

Christie masterfully exploits the apparent paradox inherent in detective fiction of labelling a murder mystery as escapist literature but as P. D. James explains that for Christie, indulging in writing a detective story also provided an escape from the realities of her life “And, therefore, she took pleasure in doing books in which although there is a complete upsetting of normality, in the end order is restored. It was a psychological need to bring order out of disorder, which may have mirrored her own life. I think every one of them is a catharsis” (L.Thompson 257).

She introduces the paradoxical element of love interest in her plot of murder, thus making the plots much more humane and removes the sting of brutality contained therein as most of us have a sneaky fondness for lovers. Some of her novels
like *Five Little Pigs*, *The Hollow* and *Nemesis* function on “the emotional entanglements that set the plot in motion and provide the motivation; in each case it is thwarted love that motivates the killer” (Curran, *Agatha Christie’s Murder in the Making* 63).

Further, verbal and situational irony, which form an inevitable part of human life, are also glimpsed in her novels which show that all human beings are infallible, even the murderers, who thinks he has the right to take up the life of another human being, and thus contribute greatly to heightening the drama and suspense.

The unexpected solution is what Christie is a master of. Sometimes she manipulates the plot in such a way that a trail of misleading clues is laid down by the murderer as in *The A.B.C. Murders*, *Towards Zero*, *Murder is Easy* and *After the Funeral*, indicting someone else for the murder. It requires all of the detective’s ingenuity, in identifying the red herrings. Sometimes he comes up against unusual clarifications like the involvement of each and every suspect in the murder as in *Murder on the Orient Express*, where the hateful character Ratchett, who was the kidnapper and murderer of the little girl Daisy Armstrong, is killed by each of the fifteen persons, closely associated with Daisy and her family, in collaboration, each stabbing the unconscious man individually. Another ploy used by Christie since her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, has been to throw suspicion on the obvious person, who is then shown to be cleared of all suspicion and then, ultimately in the end, is discovered to have been the murderer all along. As Christie states in her autobiography, “The whole point of a good detective story is that it must be somebody obvious but at the same time, for some reason, you would find that it was
not obvious, that he could not possibly have done it. Though really of course, he had
done it” (qtd. in Curran, Agatha Christie’s Murder in the Making 41).

The technique of murder is usually simple and straightforward, and does not
involve tedious scientific explanations. Being a dispenser in the hospital, in both the
World Wars, helped Christie acquire a knowledge of poisons, which she put to good
use, though using mostly the commonly obtained poison and not what Mrs Oliver
laughingly talks about ‘the untraceable poison from the arrows of the South American
tribes’. Unlike her contemporary writers, she does not revel in using the ‘locked
room’ mechanism wherein the dead body is discovered in a locked room from which
entry and exit seem impossible.

Christie’s murders are not usually brutal murders and she glosses over the
actual description involving violence, understating the repulsiveness of crime, and
adding to the element of coziness, which is a strong feature of her books. However,
she enlivens her novel with lots of action, which takes the form of usually more than
one murder, and two, three or four is also not unknown. As her mouthpiece, Mrs
Oliver says in Cards on the Table, “What really matters is plenty of bodies! If the
thing’s getting a little dull, some more blood cheers it up. Somebody is going to tell
something – and then they’re killed first. That always goes down well” (Christie,
Cards on the Table 66-67). However the ingenuity of Christie can be seen not only in
killing off a person who “is going to tell something” but also in killing off a person
who “cannot tell something”, but who is being portrayed by the murderer as
possessing some vital information regarding the crime, as demonstrated with the
murder of Mrs De Rushbridger in Three Act Tragedy. Also when a character doesn’t
know the significance of what he knows, he is again killed off to keep him perpetually
silent, as with the murder of Sir Bartholomew Strange, who alone was aware of the fact that Sir Charles Cartwright’s first wife was in a mental asylum, and from whom he could not get a divorce, in order to marry the unsuspecting young girl Egg Lytton Gore. We can thus see the variations on one single ploy that are employed by Christie.

The supernaturalism is a ploy that Christie uses unhesitatingly to help us to arrive at the inference, though she then advances a scientific explanation for the above. Her supposed snobbishness in not remembering the faces of mere companions and servants, also forms the central clue in works like *After the Funeral*, where the companion Miss Gilchrist, for a short while, portrays herself as her mistress Mrs Cora Lansquenet. This is reversed in *Appointment with Death* where Lady Westholme, dresses as an Arab boy, to approach Lady Boynton, in order to kill her. We can hence conclude that Christie skilfully engineers all pros and cons of each ploy, in order to present it in the best possible way to suit her purpose.

Regarding her art of characterization, it is clear that Christie is very objective in her approach. For her, the main significance of the character is as an actant, and thus we see they are not limited to stereotypes. She does not hesitate in choosing her murderer or the victim which could turn out to be the least likely person- “the investigating policeman, the child, the likeable hero, the supposed victim; she had everyone guilty and everyone victim” (Curran, *Agatha Christie’s Murder in the Making* 214). Audaciously, she even does not hesitate in making Poirot the murderer in *Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case*, thus breaking a very serious rule laid down by Van Dine and Knox, but so convincingly and for a worthy cause that she not only gets away with it completely, but also wins accolades for this daring attempt. As seen earlier she makes use of the various techniques of characterization like direct
statement by the author, direct statement by the person himself, direct statement by other people, dramatization, and direct statement with oblique further reference, to effectively bring out the character of the dead woman Caroline Crale in Five Little Pigs. Even the physical description of characters makes them not only unique but also makes them come alive. “This was what Agatha could do, above all, a writer: understand people. That was her innate gift” (L.Thompson 69). The limited number of suspects in each work makes it interesting to guess the identity of the murderer.

Her creations, Hercule Poirot and Miss Jane Marple, feature in most of her works and each of them is unparalled in their own special ways, living in their own spheres which are not unaffected by the changing times. Besides them, Christie had also created a host of other detectives that sometimes may appear in just one work like Mark Easterbrook in The Pale Horse, Arthur Calgary in Ordeal by Innocence and Inspector Narracott in The Sittaford Mystery, which allows her freedom to explore more possibilities, in the sphere of crime.

In her essay, “Detective Writers in England” in 1946 Christie writes, “I have become more interested as the years go on in the preliminaries of crime. The interplay of character upon character, the deep smouldering resentments and dissatisfaction that do not always come to the surface but which may certainly explode into violence” (qtd. in Curran, Agatha Christie’s Murder in the Making 19). In the course of her work, she introduces many psychological characters, as mentioned earlier, and Poirot is forever discussing the psychology of the crime. “You are right – psychology is very important. We know the kind of murder that has been committed, the way it was committed. If we have a person who from the psychological point of view could not have committed that particular type of murder, then we can dismiss that person from
our calculations” (Christie, *Cards on the Table* 61). Poirot employs psychology in studying not only the murderer but also the victim as in *Murder in Mesopotamia*. It was his psychological methods of deduction that assisted Poirot in solving cases without visiting the scene of crime and in solving murders committed even as far back as sixteen years ago as in *Five Little Pigs* and also in *Elephants Can Remember*.

Ambiguity is effectively used by Christie as a device wherein Poirot’s and Miss Marple’s ambiguous remarks should not only be interpreted as the buried clues that help in solving the mystery, but also serve the purpose of thoroughly bewildering the reader. As shown, the victim’s supposed last words penned down on a scrap of paper ‘I can’t go on’ in *The Moving Finger* are ambiguous and lead to the murder being portrayed as suicide. Also, the last name uttered by the victim like ‘Henrietta’ by the dying John Christow in *The Hollow* and ‘Alfred’ by the dying Mrs Emily Inglethorp in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* are again ambiguous. Is it “an accusation, an invocation, a plea, a farewell; or is it entirely meaningless?” (Curran, *Agatha Christie’s Murder in the Making* 93). This again heightens the dramatic interest.

Defamiliarization not only accentuates the pleasure of reading, by making the familiar appear unfamiliar, but also functions as a ploy to increase the suspense, by Christie. As earlier discussed, the peek we are afforded by Christie into the mind of “a lady in wispy mourning” in *After the Funeral* causes us to mistake her as Cora, who had just come back from attending her brother’s funeral at Enderby, and was happy because she had been made a beneficiary in his will. This trick of defamiliarization prevents us from identifying her as the murderess Miss Gilchrist.
The simplicity perceived in all aspects of her novels, can be seen in the use of the uncomplicated language employed by her. She utilizes the idioms and similes that are commonly used and understood, though as Poirot confesses he sometimes exploits their use, to exaggerate his foreignness, when he feels the need to do so. The metaphor, most often used in connection with Poirot is that of a dog, a bloodhound, because Christie consciously conveys the idea that the whole essence of the novel depends on the hunt for the murderer. For Christie, metaphor is not just a language component but also a tool to understanding and forwarding the plot as in *And Then There Were None* where the murders are taking place according to the nursery rhyme ‘Ten Little Indians’. In a similar vein, Poirot simplifies a seemingly difficult case, which involves a murder that had taken place sixteen years earlier, by taking the characters of the nursery rhyme *Five Little Pigs* as denoting the five people involved in the case, whose circumstances seem to justify this comparison. Also, Miss Marple’s whole talent of detection has been shown to be based on her clever use of similes, where the characteristics and behaviour of one person remind her of the other, and thus drawing this ‘village parallel’ seems to have become a second nature to her.

Various dictions are handled by Christie to establish the authenticity of the various classes and backgrounds of the characters, like the smattering of French phrases employed by the Belgian Poirot. He also uses hyperbole when describing himself and his unique talent of detection, as he feels fully justified in doing so. The different tones used by Poirot also help us in grasping the plot development, and in understanding Poirot’s own personal emotional state.

Christie also practices economy of words in laying down the setting, imagery, atmosphere, the unusual juxtapositions, and binary opposites, and paints them with a
few bold strokes, to heighten the dramatic effect. She is not one to indulge in tedious long winding descriptions, which may cause a reader to lose interest in the main plot. Regarding the setting of her novels, for which she has been accused of snobbishness in setting them in country houses or villages, the charge seems unfair because “Statistically, this is inaccurate. Less than 30 (i.e. little over a third) of her titles are set in such surroundings” (Curran, Agatha Christie’s Murder in the Making 93). The wide range of her settings have been discussed earlier.

Characters, objects, situations all are used as symbols by Christie, to effectively underline their deeper significance. ‘Different points of view’ like that of one person, that of an omniscient third person narrator or that of several persons have been employed according to the dictates of the plot. The first person narrative helps to lend more credibility to the unfolding events, and leads to direct involvement on the part of the reader. Thus, Christie employed first person narrative in novels like The Moving Finger whereby the first person narrator, Jerry Barton, makes us experience first-hand, the havoc caused by the anonymous letter writer in the village of Lymstock, and also makes us empathize with his present condition of recuperating from a flying accident. The haphazard thoughts passing through his mind, which then form the basis of the revelation of the solution by Miss Marple, is utterly convincing. In a twist, Christie uses the same ploy to deaden our suspicious and exploit our credulousness, so that we do not suspect the first person narrator Dr Sheppard in The Murder of Roger Ackroyd to be the murderer.

The first person narratives of Captain Hastings seem to make the mystery more complicated, and Poirot’s enlightening remarks more confusing, as we start
judging the situation from Hastings point of view, who has been shown to be a
credulous, prejudiced, and partial observer.

The third person omniscient narration in Sad Cypress, allows Christie to adopt
an objective attitude in viewing the love relationship between Elinor and Roddy from
a distance, where it becomes obvious that Elinor is fully justified in hiding her deep,
passionate love for Roddy and maintaining a cool facade, which is what Roddy
appreciates about her. If we were not given such glimpses into the minds of both
characters, such a love would appear inconceivable to us and thus lack verisimilitude.
It is important that we accept this contrary state of affairs, which then forms the basis
of the rest of the story.

The multiple points of view in Sparkling Cyanide helps Christie to widen the
field of suspicion as each character’s thoughts about Rosemary, who had been
murdered a year earlier, are presented in such an ambiguous way, that each seems to
have had a motive for killing her. Thus not giving too much importance to only one
character and delving into the thoughts of all, keeps us guessing the identity of the
murderer until the last minute.

The allusions in her works range from the trite, conventional nursery rhymes
to the great master Shakespeare and incorporate several well known poets like
Tennyson, Omar Khayyam and Browning and also some lesser known poets like Tom
Brown and Harry Graham. Biblical allusions and allusions from Greek mythology all
add to making the novels interesting and stimulating, besides evincing Christie’s own
claim “I read enormous quantities of books...” (Christie, Autobiography 122).

The themes and universal aspects of human experience discussed in Christie’s
works, show Christie’s own in-depth understanding of human nature and her
sensitivity in perceiving human frailties, visible under the various circumstances that life manifests. Along with this, the ‘Tension’ reflected in her books between the society and the criminal, and the various connotations of murder discussed earlier can be seen as a manifestation of the rigid views held by her on ‘crime and criminals’, again laid out in the preceding chapters.

In justifying Christie’s work through the New Critical approach, it is also essential to show the ‘organic unity of form and content’ therein. “To see the object as in itself it really is” is the ritual aim of criticism according to Mathew Arnold (qtd. in Barry 17). J.C. Ransom also emphasized the value of an ontological discussion of a work. Thus the essential precept of New Criticism can be said to be based on a ‘close reading’ of the text which is self contained, in order to understand and interpret it fully. We need not go beyond the text. The influence of the author or the effect on the reader was judged to be beyond its scope. “The validity of the New Criticism lies in the fact that it takes the poem as a work of art, a structure having an independent existence. Biographical and sociological approaches to the poem are not favoured by the New Critics. A poem is not meant to be paraphrased” (Das 31).

So a close reading of the text employs recognizing the form as well as the content of the text. The Russian Formalists dwell upon the ‘form’ and segregate it from the ‘content’. “Form stands on its own and is what makes literature ‘literary’….Form thus has no ‘correlation’ with content” (Ryan 1). However, New Critics believe that form and content are inseparable and must be studied as a whole. “Literary form should not be like a decoration which is applied externally to a completed structure. Imagery, for instance, or any other poetic form which is detachable from the substance of the work in this way, rather than being integrated
with it, is merely ‘fanciful’ and not truly ‘imaginative’ (the distinction made by Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*)” (Barry 18). Henry James also accentuated the unity of form and content in a novel and criticized Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* and Arnold Bennett’s *Old Wives’ Tale* for their formlessness. Here the term ‘Formalists’ has been interchangeably used with the term ‘New Critics’, however it is imperative to state that it is not synonymous with the ‘Russian Formalists.

What is form? Form is the shape or the arrangement of parts. “The form does more than ‘contain’ the poetic stuff: it organizes it; it shapes it; it defines its meaning” (Brooks and Warren, *Understanding Poetry* 24). “The best form is that which makes the most of its subject” (Lubbock 40).

Mark Schorer opines, “Modern criticism has shown that to speak of content as such is not to speak of art at all, but of experience; and that it is only when we speak of the achieved content, the form, the work of art as a work of art, that we speak as critics. The difference between content, or experience, and achieved content, or art, is technique” (67).

Aristotle talked about an “orderly arrangement of parts” to form an “organism”. Horace also laid emphasis on the subject matter being “simple and unified” (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, and Willingham 98). Coleridge from his in-depth study and knowledge of German philosophers like Kant, Hegel, and Schellings underscored the arrangement of all individual parts supporting each other and culminating towards a unified whole text. Thus, what is said (content) and how it is said (form) are inevitably integral components of a text.

We have analyzed all the elements of form like character, plot, setting, atmosphere, paradox, irony, metaphor, simile, etc. and thus having done a close
textual analysis of some of Christie’s works and discovering the wide range of these literary devices used therein, we can conclude that the indivisibility of form and content is visible in her work. She continually changes and adapts her ways of portraying a murder mystery depending on the kind of murder that she is portraying. It is the reason for committing the crime, as well as the message (theme) she wants to convey, that determine her style. As has been remarked, at each different approach employed by her, the content justifies the form.

Allowing for the difference in opinion and for the fact there is always room for improvement, nevertheless, I shall be bold enough to presume that the New Critical approach employed by me towards Christie’s novels, fully vindicate her as the mistress in the art of creating murder mysteries that are credible and probable on the one hand and suspenseful and baffling on the other. The credit goes to Christie’s mastery in displaying organic unity of form and content in her work.

Also, being a staunch realist and not one to shy away from the grossness of life, led Christie to faithfully reveal the changing phase of English life and society from the complacent, languid indolent Victorian and Edwardian era, to be totally transformed and degenerate into a carpe diem, amoral and coercive society after the upheaval caused by the two world wars. Though her novels do not deal with politics, or economics, they give an authentic account of how the changing political and economic scenario affected the life of the English people, through her plots and characters, especially in her later works and she was able to capture this metamorphosis with a humane touch. This leads the reader to not only imagine but also to feel, how difficult life became in the aftermath of the world wars. Without indulging in the actual description of the wars, she makes the wars come alive and
makes them appear much more real to us by showing the bitter consequences reaped by the people in the aftermath of the wars, so that it proved impossible to revert to their former way of living, to ever come out of the perpetual shadows cast by the two world wars.

So great was Christie’s imaginative capacity and empathy that allowed her to ‘get under the skin’ of her characters and led her to:

See the truth about human nature. She had always known the wretchedness of which people are capable. She knew that the selfishness of apparently decent men and women knew no bounds, that the desire to be safe or rich or happy can override all but the strongest moral sense. She knew that murderers sometimes deserve compassion, but that it is the effect of this compassion that has to be considered. She understood – none better - that adultery may cause incalculable distress, but that it is committed by nice people as well as by rats. She understood that although the children may appear sweet and innocent, they are capable of evil, and adults are capable of evil towards them. This was the kind of thing, that she wrote, without comment and without the need for comment. It was her subject matter. (L.Thompson 471)

Comparing her with the other crime writers of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, shows that:

Not only did Christie refine the template of the ‘whodunit’, in many ways she invented it. Her work is qualitatively different from her
predecessors because she was one of the first to present the reader with
a group of characters and an array of clues, followed by the unmasking
of an unexpected murderer...There is rarely any doubt as to the
identity of the villain in a Sherlock Holmes case, and the number of
suspects in both the Green (Anna Katherine) and Leroux novel is very
limited. (Curran, Agatha Christie’s Murder in the Making 419)

L. Thompson also juxtaposes Christie and the other crime writers. “Among the
writers of ‘classic’ detective novels – Sayers, Margery Allingham, Ngaio Marsh –
Agatha Christie was the only one who did not allow herself to intrude upon her
books” (374). She says that Marsh’s interest was more in theatre, which showed in her
books and Sayers approach was more pedantic and thus could lead to boredom. “Nor
did she (Christie) invent a detective who was anything other than a function of the
genre. Hercule Poirot has a mysterious artistic reality but he is also, and only, a
detective...Miss Marple too...is essentially an observer....The other detectives of the
classic murder mystery are not so much detached from the world as from the genre
they inhabit. They are all surprising people for the job; unlike Poirot, who is a
natural” (L. Thompson 374). Margery Allingham’s detective Campion and Marsh’s
Alleyn are ‘gentlemen’. Lord Peter Wimsey was not only a gentleman but also a
“Balliol scholar, war hero, glass of fashion, advocate of equal rights for women and
highly accomplished lover” (L. Thompson 375). Except Poirot, none of the other
detectives seem well suited to the genre. “Wimsey is far too deep and sensitive....P.D.
James’s Adam Dagleish, a highly romantic figure with a tragic past and a poetic gift;
so too Ruth Rendell’s Wexford, a broad-minded liberal with a complex family life
and a deep love of English literature” (L. Thompson 375). This clearly brings out the
superiority of Christie in not only creating a perfect detective figure but also in
refining and developing the genre and the ‘Whodunit’ by not falling into digression but concentrating and exploiting all possibilities therein, which led her to achieve heights of success and fame, unparalleled by any other writer except Shakespeare, till date. “She is the most widely published author of all time and in any language, outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare” (Harper Collins).

“Good literature is of timeless significance; it somehow transcends the limitations and peculiarities of the age it was written in, and thereby speaks to what is constant in human nature. Such writing is ‘not for an age, but for all time’ (as Ben Johnson said of Shakespeare): it is ‘news’ which stays news’ (Ezra Pound’s definition of literature)” (Barry 17). Christie was very much aware of herself as a ‘low-brow writer’ as she confessed in her autobiography, on being awarded the CBE in 1956, “…it’s one up to the Low Brows!” (Thompson 382). So, even though, she herself was modest enough not to think so, and she may never be regarded as a part of the literary canon, yet her unabated fame and popularity, and based on the above definition of good literature, one can tentatively presume that Christie should be regarded as a good writer.

To conclude, Curran attributes five reasons for Christie’s success – readability, plotting, fairness, simplicity, and productivity. Whereas I would like to incorporate the following also to explain the enigma that became “Agatha Christie” - Her imagination, audaciousness, sensitivity, empathy, understanding, clear-sightedness, morality, inventiveness, authenticity, realism, courage, fortitude, knowledge, passion, analytical ability and joy of living – all of which gets reflected in her work. Thus both formalistic and historical – biographical approach show, that it was not only her literary abilities alone, which are inconceivably amazing given her lack of any formal
schooling, her inborn knack for building up a masterly plot based on a simple idea, her insight into the deep mysteries of human nature and her ability to simplify not only life but also such distortions in life like murder, but also the kind of person she was, a definite product of hereditary and environment, the understanding developed due to her own suffering, the chances and risks she was always willing to take that reflected her abiding faith in the almighty, her contentment and serenity, her definite conviction in what was morally right and morally wrong, her love of literature, her joy in the simple pleasures of life and her modesty despite her growing success, all of which affected her literary sensibility to a great degree, to establish her as the undisputed ‘Queen of Crime’.

Through the ups and downs of life, she always maintained a positive, cheerful outlook. She was not immune to the trials and tribulations of life and at one point of her life may even have contemplated suicide, but she held firm to life and to hope. “I like living. I have sometimes been wildly despairing, acutely miserable, racked with sorrow, but through it all I still know quite certainly that just to be alive is a grand thing” (Christie, Autobiography 11).

The moral world that she created for us, where albeit temporarily, we seek and find consolation and refuge, where we know that no matter what, evil shall not go unpunished and truth and righteousness shall prevail, and thus rekindle our own dwindling courage and faith in humanity, will forever offer solace to generations of readers in the future as it has done in the past In reading her books we ourselves get infected, to a greater or lesser degree, by her buoyant zest for life. Her creed, her religion are mirrored in her thoughts as penned down in her autobiography:
Always when I woke up, I had the feeling which I am sure must be natural to all of us, a joy in being alive. I don’t say you feel it consciously – you don’t – but there you are, you are alive, and you open your eyes, and here is another day; another step, as it were, on your journey to an unknown place. That very exciting journey which is your life. Not that it is necessarily going to be as exciting as a life, but it will be exciting to you because it is your life. That is one of the great secrets of existence, enjoying the gift of life that has been given to you.

(133)

She was one of the few people who could honestly be thankful for who they are and what they have. As early as 1965, much before she was awarded the damehood and her later day successes, which were still to follow, she confessed, “I am satisfied. I have done what I wanted to do” (Christie, Autobiography 7).