CHAPTER IV

FORMALIST APPROACH: THEORY AND APPLICATION
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At the very outset, it becomes imperative to specify that the term ‘Formalism’ has been used interchangeably with the critical approach popularly known as ‘New Criticism’, as stated in the synopsis too. In *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, it has been lucidly articulated, “The word formalist needs some small qualification as well, for here it will be used more or less synonymously with the methodology of the New Critics, and it is not directly concerned with the Russian formalists, though the methodologies share some principles” (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, and Willingham 96). This precept has also been adhered to in the present thesis.

English, as a new subject of study, was introduced in Cambridge as late as 1911. Thus unrestrained by tradition, experimentation in the field of study could be undertaken. The change manifested itself in the form of *The Principles of Literary Criticism* published in 1924 by Ivor Armstrong Richards (1893-1979), a Cambridge Professor of English. This ground breaking work stated the premise that criticism should be as precise and objective a study as science. David Daiches says, “Richards conducts this investigation in order to come to some clear conclusions about what imaginative literature is, how it employs language, how its use of language differs from the scientific use of language and what is its special function and value” (Deep’ak).

Richards made a clear demarcation between the ‘emotive’ language of poetry and the ‘referential’ language of science. “A statement may be used for the sake of reference, true or false, which it causes. This is the scientific use of language. But it may also be used for the sake of the effects in emotion and attitude produced by the
reference to occasions. This is the emotive use of language” (qtd. in Mundra and Agarwal). “Scientific use of words refers to the denotative meaning and the emotive use refers to the connotative meaning….Whereas in the scientific use references are left intact, in the emotive use they are distorted. It is because of this distortion, that Richards calls poetic statement “Pseudo-Statement”” (Das 10).

Important works of Richards like *Principles of Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929) exerted a considerable influence on the development of New Criticism. In *Practical Criticism* he has marked out four different kinds of meanings or functions which the language performs. They can be identified as Sense, Feeling, Tone and Intention. Sense means the reference to something that is put across by the plain literal meaning of the word i.e. basically what the writer says. Feeling is the emotional attitude of the writer or the speaker with reference to that “something” which is expressed through language and which also incorporates his personal prejudice. Tone reflects the writer’s attitude towards his readers, his attachment or detachment, and his awareness of the kind of readers likely to peruse his work and for whom he accordingly picks and chooses his words with care. Lastly, Intention, conscious or unconscious, manifests the writer’s aim, the effect he wants to produce upon his readers/listeners. Only if we understand the writer’s intention, can we understand his implication.

For scientific purposes, Sense is the most important where versification becomes possible. In exceptional cases, like Mathematics, the writer has no feelings involved. In poetry, Richards says that statements about poetry “translate themselves into feeling, tone and intention” (Paul). “These four kinds of meanings constitute the total meaning of any text. In poetry, the 4 meanings are interconnected” (“Practical
Criticism”). The most apparent conclusion is that a scientific treatise is monopolized by sense while a poetic one by feeling.

*Practical Criticism* is a record of a series of experiments conducted by Richards on his undergraduate students, whereby he attempted to evaluate their perceptibility in discerning the worth of a poem, by handing them out unidentified poems on which they were asked to pass judgement without any preliminary knowledge of the poet or any preconceived notions regarding the text. Here Richards initiated a totally empirical and pragmatic approach towards the study of literature which has now firmly been incorporated in the process of testing the evaluative ability of students of literature at almost all levels of study.

Thus I. A. Richards is regarded as the pioneer in English studies of initiating the practice of the ‘close reading of the text’ which is a revolt against the subjective and impressionistic criticism prevalent in critical studies. A similar tradition of interpreting the text was propagated by Gustave Lansom in the field of French literary study termed as “explication de texte” ("close-reading").

Richards believed that this form of analyzing the text would procure psychological advantages to the students. It would lead to an ‘organised response’ which would “clarify the various currents of thought in the poem and achieve a corresponding clarification of their own emotions” (“Introduction to Practical Criticism”). This can also be regarded in the light of the “Aristotelian concept of Catharsis” (Kapelos-Peters).

Though the psychological approach preached by Richards was discarded by the later critics associated with New Criticism, yet they were influenced by his insistence on the autonomy of the text, his practice of close reading and
his insistence on regarding the text as a living organism functioning through its constituent parts.

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965), along with I.A. Richards, is regarded as an initiator of an objective, impersonal and scientific approach of criticism. His work is considered to be of path breaking importance towards the development of New Criticism. His theory of impersonality as propounded in his celebrated essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1920) emphasizes the demarcation between ‘the man who suffers’ and ‘the mind which creates’.

According to him, “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality”. In another essay, “Hamlet and His Problems”, he elucidated the concept of Objective Correlative, which though not a new one, was phrased lucidly as “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula (for the poet’s emotion so that) when the external facts are given the emotion is at once evoked”. This can be regarded as “perhaps little more than the ancient distinction (first made by Plato) between mimesis and diegesis” (Barry 27). Eliot describes Hamlet as an artistic failure because the audience was unable to “feel as Prince Hamlet did through images, actions, and characters, and instead only inadequately described his emotional state through the play’s dialogue”.

“The Metaphysical Poets” 1924, introduced unification of sensibility which stands for “a fusion of thought and feeling” or a “direct sensuous apprehension of thought” as Eliot proclaims regarding the works of the metaphysical poets of the sixteenth and the early seventeenth century while at the same time he bemoans the
“dissociation of sensibility” that seems to him to have set on from “between the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning”, but he holds Milton and Dryden as the main miscreants (“Eliot, The Metaphysical Poets”).

Thus we can conclude that Eliot made significant contribution towards the development of New Criticism by focusing on the text and the problems emerging thereupon and not on the historical or biographical aspects of a poet. However, Eliot was far from pleased with this ascribing of the school of New Criticism to his prevalent theorizing and disparagingly termed it as “the lemon squeezer school of criticism” and refused “to see any school of criticism which can be said to derive from myself” (Kenneth).

Another important contributor to the field was Frank Raymond Leavis (1895-1978) who as a student at Cambridge, shifted from history to the newly introduced subject of English in his second year. He soon thereafter started teaching at Cambridge. He can be distinguished by his moral approach towards the study of literature. His ingrained belief was, “Literature matters more than life matters” (Raina 27). He regarded the study of literature as a counteractive tool against a ‘Technologico-Benthamite’ society. Like Matthew Arnold he believed that education is the panacea for all ills of society.

Along with his wife, Queenie Dorothy Leavis nee Roth (1906-1981), F. R. Leavis undertook the publication of the literary quarterly Scrutiny, from 1932 till 1953, which had a wide impact in literary circles in Britain. As suggested by its name it “stressed the centrality of rigorous critical-analysis, a disciplined attention to the ‘words on the page’” (Eagleton 27). He can be aligned with the
Formalists by his assertion “(the critic) is concerned with the work in front of him as something that should contain within itself the reason why it is so and not otherwise” (Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker 34). What alienates him from them is his argument that “literary criticism must go well beyond looking at “the words on the page”: the study of literature, he said, is “an intimate study of the complexities, potentialities, and essential conditions of human nature” (Habib 206).

The most distinctive contribution of Leavis in the development of literary criticism (or more specifically New Criticism) is emphasizing the need of studying passages from fiction with as much detailed attention as devoted to poetry, as laid out in “The Play as a Dramatic Poem” and “The Novel as a Poem”. Also, in his work *The Great Tradition* he asserts, “A novel, like a poem, is made of words; there is nothing else one can point to” (Raina 28). His important works are *The Common Pursuit* which discusses the function of a critic, *Revaluation* discusses the ‘true’ tradition in English poetry, as well as *The Great Tradition* in which he claims that the four great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad.

The impact of Leavis on the study of English can be judged from the fact that “English students in England today are ‘Leavisites’ whether they know it or not, irremediably altered by that historic intervention” (Eagleton 27). Leavisite criticism was successful in answering the perpetual mystery of why a study of literature should be undertaken by asserting that “it made you a better person” (Eagleton 36).
William Empson (1906-1984) was another important name associated with New Criticism in England. He shifted from Mathematics to English, in his undergraduate years at Cambridge and came under the influence of I. A. Richards which resulted in his coming up with his own original version of verbal analysis in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* in 1930, at the young age of twenty-four. The work focuses on “any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language” (Eagleton 11) wherein he was trying to recognize the double and usually contradictory meanings found in literary works from the sixteenth century to the modern times. Ambiguity involves that “alternative views might be taken without sheer misreading”. It is believed that “Empson reads poetry as an exploration of conflicts within the author” (“Seven types of ambiguity”). Empson is generally not regarded in the fold of New Criticism apart from this initial work.

Though these four critics i.e. Richards, Eliot, Leavis and Empson, are regarded as the propagators of New Criticism in England, yet its gradual emergence over the years can be visible in the works of other critics and writers beginning from the great Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 B.C.). “According to Abrams, Aristotle was the first of the contributors to literary criticism that introduced structural criterion as an element for understanding poetry” (Kapelos-Peters). He placed more importance on structure than on the moral message contained therein. The New Critics also followed the precept laid down by him in studying the structural aspects. Aristotle, further, does not limit himself and identifies the content and the compliance of a poem with the principles of language, diction, structure, formalism among other things.
According to Peter Barry, the practical criticism approach towards the study of English literature was initiated by Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) in his *Lives of the Poets* (1779) and *Prefaces to the Plays of William Shakespeare* (1765) wherein he offered an analysis of the work of a single author.

In *Critique of Judgement*, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a German philosopher, insisted that “aesthetic pleasure is purely disinterested: as a “free approval”, it is indifferent to the real existence of the contemplated thing” (Surdulescu). Another critical notion advanced by Kant was of “purposeless finality” which is of interest to the New Critics as it stated that beautiful things appear to be satisfying our requirement and wishes, however it cannot be concluded that they have been produced by a “purposeful intelligence” (Surdulescu). Further Kant insisted on organizing the “previous haphazard attempts towards expressing literary autonomy” (Habib 18). This influence can be seen reflected in the attitude of the New Critics with their emphasis on isolating the text from the sphere of politics, education and morality.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), in his famous critical work, *Biographia Literaria*, distinguishes between primary and secondary imagination. The former is possessed by all whereas the latter is more developed in the artist, and which makes possible the creation of art. “It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to re-create” (qtd. in Rajnath 53). The New Critics also put a lot of emphasis on the language of a literary work and focus attention on the balance of contradictory meanings therein. They divide meaning into denotation and connotation, aligning it with Coleridge’s concept of primary and secondary
imagination. “The relation between primary and secondary imagination is the same as between denotative and connotative meaning” (Rajnath 56).

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) seems to carry the germ of the idea which later was enunciated as ‘defamiliarization’ by the Russian Formalists when he says poetry “strips the veil of familiarity from the world…it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity…It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know” (Barry 23).

John Keats (1795-1821) with his concept of Negative Capability can also be regarded as one of the forerunners of the doctrine of New Criticism by de-stressing the importance of the poet and his personality reflected in the poem.

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), whose influence is strongly evident on F. R. Leavis, advocates the importance of poetry “as a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the law of poetic truth and poetic beauty” (qtd. in Mundra and Agarwal 378). A critic has to make “a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas” (qtd. in Mundra and Agarwal 380). In his Touchstone Method, Arnold suggests a practical approach of criticism by abandoning any historic or personal appraisals, and to compare the work under study with the lines and expressions of the great masters, as a touchstone to judge the former’s literary merit.

Across the Atlantic, a revolt was brewing up in the field of literary criticism, by a group of scholars gathered together for an informal discussion of literature, under the leadership of John Crowe Ransom (1888-1974), a Vanderbilt University teacher, and his students Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren
and Cleanth Brooks. Ransom is also considered as a founding member of the ‘Fugitives’ which was a Southern literary group of writers that acted as a kind of poetry workshop. He also edited a highly effective and far-reaching magazine *The Fugitive* (1922-1935). In 1930 their critical approach came to be identified as Southern Agrarianism which advocated that “modern industrial capitalism was a dehumanizing force that the South should reject in favour of an agrarian economy model” (“John Crowe Ransom”) though later Ransom distanced himself from it. Other journals closely allied with New Criticism can be identified as *The Southern Review* (1933-42), *The Kenyon Review* (1939-till date) and *The Sewanee Review* (1892-till date). Even though the magazine, *The Fugitive*, soon went out of circulation, it did the groundwork of analyzing critical works with a new approach - The New Criticism. The term ‘New Criticism’ was initially appropriated by Joel E. Spingarn in a lecture delivered at Columbia University in 1910, which is considered to be the manifesto of New Criticism. However the term gained currency after the publication of J. C. Ransom’s work *The New Criticism* in 1941.

The New Critics appeared to be inspired by the works of Eliot, Richards and Empson in Britain. Ransom and Tate worked on evolving some theoretical rules. Brooks and Warren went ahead with works like *Understanding Poetry* (1938) and *Understanding Fiction* (1943) which established the method of close reading of the text at the university level:

From 1939, when Ransom founded the *Kenyon Review* and Brooks published his *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, the New Criticism made important headway in the universities; notably at
Yale, where a second wave of New Critical theory was represented by Rene Wellek and Austen Warren’s *Theory of Literature* (1949) and by W.K. Wimsatt’s *The Verbal Icon* (1954), containing essays written with M. C. Beardsley. The most celebrated work of ‘applied’ New Criticism was Brooks’s *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947). (“New Criticism”)

In his celebrated essay “Criticism Inc.” published in 1937 Ransom asks for criticism to be more exact and scientific and highlights the fact that literary criticism should be a specialized discipline. He then lays down six things which should be divorced from the study of literary criticism – personal registration, synopsis and paraphrase, historical studies, linguistic studies, moral studies and other specialized studies.

In “Poetry: A Note on Ontology” in the *World’s Body* (1938) Ransom pleads for an ontological criticism “to discuss a work of art as a thing in itself” (qtd. in Das 27). He divides a poem into two parts – structure and texture, where structure, also called the paraphrasable core, is the logical meaning of a poem which can be illustrated by considering it as the walls, the floor and the ceiling of a room (where the room is analogous to a poem) and texture is the local details represented by the paint, paper and tapestry on the walls as well as the furniture contained therein.

Ransom is motivated by the desire to make literary criticism “more scientific, or precise and systematic; it must become a serious business” (qtd. in Habib 27). Ransom also vigorously attacks the moralistic approach which
discusses “the ideology or theme or paraphrase of the poem and not the poem itself” (qtd. in Rajnath 94).

Cleanth Brooks (1906-1994), a notable New Critic was a student of Ransom at Vanderbilt University, who went on to become an important member of the Fugitives and later on the Southern Agrarians. He co-edited The Southern Review from 1932 to 1942 with Robert Penn Warren and Charles W. Pipkin, which further advanced the doctrine of New Criticism.

Brooks’s authoritative college texts are Understanding Poetry (1938) and Understanding Fiction (1943) in collaboration with Robert Penn Warren, which went on to be regarded as the standard textbooks of New Criticism in many American Universities, whereby generations of students were initiated into the art of close reading of the text. His other important critical works are Modern Poetry and the Tradition (1939) and The Well Wrought Urn (1947). In Understanding Poetry, he has enunciated that the poem should first be accepted as a literary object, before considering it from any other point of view. He demolishes the most generally accepted beliefs about poetry that it can be understood in terms of message hunting or emotion catching. A poem is made up of a number of elements like words, rhyme, metre, imagery to name a few, which come together to create a unified poem, an organic whole. If they are in harmony with each other then only a beautiful poem will be created.

In Modern Poetry and the Tradition and in The Well-Wrought Urn, the literary theory propounded by Brooks causes Pritchard to comment that “Metaphor, intellect, and ironic wit are major forces in Brooks’s concept of poetry” (qtd. in Tilak 81). Brooks lays out that irony and paradox constitute the
very essence of poetic language and hence connotations assume as much importance as denotations. “The tendency of science is necessarily to stabilize terms, to freeze them into strict denotations; the poet’s tendency is by contrast disruptive. The terms are continually modifying each other and thus violating their dictionary meanings….the language of a poet is a language in which the connotations play as great a part as the denotations” (qtd. in Rajnath 95).

In his essay “Ironic as Principle” (1949), Brooks directs attention to the use of metaphor, with the help of which new combinations can be created and thus paradox and irony are attained in the poem. “The poet reaches the universal through the particular” (qtd. in Tilak 83). For this purpose he applies the technique of close verbal analysis to a number of poems from medieval to modern times. In “The Heresy of Paraphrase” he asserts that the real meaning of a poem cannot be understood by its paraphrase alone. Form and content of a poem are thus inseparable from each other.

Closely associated with Cleanth Brooks is Robert Penn Warren (1905-1989) who was an American poet, novelist, and literary critic. He was the co-founder of The Southern Review along with Cleanth Brooks in 1935. He also co-authored Understanding Poetry and Understanding Fiction with Brooks. On joining the Vanderbilt University in 1921, he had become associated with the Fugitive Group which advocated the rural Southern agrarian tradition. On 26th February, 1986 he was named the first U. S. Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry.

William Kurtz Wimsatt, Jr. (1907-1975), Professor of English at Yale, and Monroe Curtis Beardsley (1915-1985), who has taught at Yale, Mount Holyoke College, Swarthmore College and Temple University, are well known for their
phenomenal essays “The Intentional Fallacy” and “The Affective Fallacy” printed in The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry in 1954 which are considered as the key doctrines of New Criticism.

Wimsatt and Beardsley advocate that the very essence of a poem is in its existence which by itself is self-sufficient. We should not try to locate what was the intention of the poet behind his artistic attempt and how successful has he been at it. If the poet has been able to state his intention clearly, then it becomes self-evident by a reading of the text. If not, then the critic has to go outside the text to gauge his intention which is regarded as a wrong practice. “The poem is not the critic’s own and not the author’s (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge” (Anthology 29). This is the ‘intentional fallacy’ which states “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art” (Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker 31).

Similarly, ‘affective fallacy’ represents “a confusion between the poem and its results” caused when “trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem…ends in impressionism and relativism” (Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker 31). They argue against both fallacies which cause the poem to lose its significance as “an object of specifically critical judgement” (Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker 31).

Much earlier in the year 1935, Richard Palmer Blackmur (1904-1965), came up with the first volume of his essays, The Double Agent, which signified
the beginnings of what was later recognized as the school of New Criticism. It encouraged the reader to pursue a close analysis of the text. He tried to focus attention on how “literary language shapes understanding of form and technique” (“R. P. Blackmur”, Poetry Foundation). “Form is a way of thinking” were his famous words. In 1935 in an essay “A Critic’s Job of Work”, he stated that his approach was primarily through the “technique on the plane of words and even…linguistics…but also technique on the plane of intellectual and emotional patterns…and technique, too, in that there is a technique of securing and arranging and representing a fundamental view of life” (“R. P. Blackmur”, universitypublishing.org). “Poetry is a game we play with reality; and it is the game and the play – the game by history and training, the play by instinct and need – which make it possible to catch hold of the reality at all” (qtd. in Davis 286).

Allen Tate (1899-1979), while attending Vanderbilt University in 1918, came across R. P. Warren and under Ransom’s leadership became a part of the Fugitive group. Later, he also became a part of the Southern Agrarians.

Tate believed that a poem should not be conforming to any theory as it is not essential for a poem to have moral or social objectives. Like T. S. Eliot, Tate had a firm faith in the importance of tradition. A poet’s work should reflect both tradition and innovation. Thus great poetry contains a ‘tension’ between tradition and experiment which is resolved in the end.

In his book Tension and Poetry, 1938, Tate stated that examining a poem as a combination of texture and structure was required of a critic. The meaning of a poem can be divided into two – denotative (indicated by a sign)
and connotative (emotional). ‘Extension’ reflects the denotative aspect whereas the connotative aspects are reflected by the term ‘intension’. The balance and harmony between extension and intension is what confers meaning to poetry.

Yvor Winters (1900-1968) is another eminent American New Critic. His three works, *Primitivism and Decadence* (1937), *Maule’s Curse* (1938) and *The Anatomy of Nonsense* (1943) spell out his philosophy. He analyses ‘Pseudo-Reference’ as “the kind of statement which merely masquerades as ‘rational coherence’ by its vocabulary and syntax….When this practice is intensified by abandonment of any pretence of rational progression, and image succeeds to image simply on the basis of mood, so that what coherence remains is purely emotional, then Winters labels this practice ‘Qualitative Progression’” (Blamires 357). In his approach, he differs from Ransom and Brooks. Unlike Ransom, he gives equal importance to both the structure and the texture of a poem. Likewise, in a significant departure from Brooks, he regards prose paraphrase as important to understanding the complete meaning of a poem. Further, he thinks that a poem is to be appreciated both for its aesthetic as well as its moral value. Therefore it is desirable for a poem to achieve a harmony “between form and content, between texture and structure” (qtd. in Tilak 42).

Winters is in agreement with the other New Critics in favouring both verbal and structural analysis but simultaneously he concedes that the content of a work is responsible for bestowing meaning or beauty to a poem. In his *The Anatomy of Nonsense* (1943), he criticizes the romantic literary tradition as he designates poetry to be for the intelligentsia, so a critic should be possessing adequate scholarly training to be able to pass judgement on poetry.
Kenneth Duva Burke (1897-1993), an important New Critic, was much influenced by T. S. Eliot and Freudian psychology. He agreed with the other New Critics in stating that “in art, form and content, structure and meaning, are inseparable, and that the artist must concentrate on the ‘form’, for it is the form which carries his meaning” (qtd. in Tilak 37). He differed from them in emphasizing the psychology of the readers and thus violated the principle of ‘affective fallacy’. “If I am questioned; if anyone wonders….what I “wanted to say” in a certain poem, I reply that I did not want to say but wanted to make, and that it was the intention of making which wanted what I said….‐” (qtd. in Davis 272). Here Burke quotes Paul Valery’s account of developing a poem and appears to concur with it wholeheartedly.

Thus, to summarize, New Criticism that flourished in England and in America, between the 1930s and the 1950s, was a major breakthrough in the development of literary critical studies in English. Beginning from Aristotle, Johnson, Kant, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Arnold, and Eliot the seeds were sown along the way. Even Wordsworth wrote, “Our business is with their books, - to understand and to enjoy them. And, of poets more especially, it is true – that, if their works be good, they contain within themselves all that is necessary to their being comprehended and relished” (qtd. in Brooks and Warren, Understanding Poetry 515). New Criticism reached fruition with the works of I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, William Empson in England and J. C. Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, W. K. Wimsatt, M. C. Beardsley, Robert Penn Warren, R. P. Blackmur, Allen Tate, Yvor Winters and Kenneth Burke in America.
New Criticism with its emphasis on ‘close reading’ of the text, concentrating on the ‘words on the page’, regarding the text as “autonomous (possessing its own laws) and autolectic (having its aims internal to itself)” (Habib 18), was a deliberate demarcation from its historical, social and biographical contexts. It was an attempt at ignoring or nullifying the existence of the author (man behind the text) as well as the reader (man in front of the text), what Wimsatt and Beardsley term as ‘intentional fallacy’ and ‘affective fallacy’ respectively.

Rescuing the text from author and reader went hand in hand with disentangling it from any social or historical context. One needed, to be sure, to know what the poem’s words would have meant to their original readers, but this fairly technical sort of historic knowledge was the only kind permitted. Literature was a solution to social problems, not part of them; the poem must be plucked free of the wreckage of history and hoisted into a sublime space above it. (Eagleton 42)

As has been mentioned earlier also, I would like to reiterate that in this thesis Formalism stands for New Criticism alone and not for Russian Formalism, even though New Criticism is sometimes aligned with Russian Formalism. Yet the major difference persists, that whereas the former insisted on the organic unity of ‘form’ and ‘content’, the latter concentrated solely on the form disregarding the content as being of no importance. As Jakobson states, “The subject of literary science is not literature, but literariness, i.e. that which makes a given work a literary work” (Das 81). The Russian Formalists were “uninterested
therefore, in the representational or expressive aspects of literary texts; they focussed on those elements of texts which they considered to be uniquely literary in character” (Das 81). They emphasized upon “the general nature of literature and literary devices, as well as the historic evolution of literary techniques” (Habib 19) whereas the New Critics were engaged with the practical aspect of close reading of the text with importance attributed to both form and content. Further, the Russian Formalists were more interested in studying the entire genres and literary devices and not the individual texts.

It must be remembered that New Criticism sprang up in England and the United States of America simultaneously as “there were important interactions and a great deal of sharing of ‘ideas’” (Waugh 169) on both sides of the Atlantic, more so, after Richards settled in the States. New Criticism quickly gained currency because it provided a solution to tackling English studies at various school and college levels without unnecessarily burdening the students with the ‘Great Man theory of literature’. The increasing student population could also be dealt with economically. Also it was an apolitical method of studying, greatly comforting in the upheaval caused by the World Wars and in their aftermath (Eagleton 43).

There is no agreement on the principles of New Criticism even between its most influential propagates. Each placed a different interpretation on studying ‘literariness’ or ‘the language of literature’. “Empson focused on ‘ambiguity’, Tate on what he called ‘tension’, Ransom on the ‘concrete universal’ and Brooks on ‘paradox’ ” (Waugh 170). Even the pioneers of New Criticism, notably the English Critics, cannot be said to be united in their
perusal. While Richards employed a psychological approach, Leavis focused on moralistic criticism whereas Empson is more importantly remembered for opposing the major principles of New Criticism. He insisted on “treating poetry as a species of ‘ordinary’ language capable of being rationally paraphrased. He is an unabashed intentionalist reckoning into account what the author probably meant” (Eagleton 45). One universally accepted ground was the reaction against ‘paraphrasing’ what Brooks termed as the ‘heresy of paraphrase’. But Ransom acknowledged its importance when he divided a text into Texture and Structure where the latter was also termed as the ‘paraphrasable core’. Winters also declared that the complete meaning of a poem also depends on the prose paraphrase. Archibald MacLeish in *Ars Poetica* states “A poem should not mean but be” (Gill 162). Thus we see that the New Critics were divided in their aims as well as their approach. According to Wimsatt and Beardsley, “A poem can be only through its meaning – since its medium is words - yet it is, simply is, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant….“ (Habib 28). Ransom also states that “the critic must study literature, not about literature” (Habib 27-28). New Criticism thus traces “how the parts of the text relate, how it achieves its ‘order’ and ‘harmony’, how it contains and resolves ‘irony’, ‘paradox’, ‘tension’, ‘ambivalence’ and ‘ambiguity’; and it is concerned essentially with articulating the very ‘poem-ness’ – the formal quintessence - of the poem itself” (Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker 29). Though New Criticism focused primarily on poetry yet its application to study prose fiction has been undertaken by Leavis in *The Great Tradition* and also by Mark Schorer in *Technique as Discovery* (1948) and *Fiction and the Analogical Matrix* (1949) to state a few. Wayne C.
Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) also attempted to study fiction by viewing it as an ‘autonomous text’ but he simultaneously developed the concept of the ‘implied author’ or the ‘authorial voice’ which the reader can make out by deducing the intent from the text.

For their focus on language the New Critics were criticized by the Chicago Critics, or the New Aristotelians as they were called, under the leadership of R. S. Crane who argued that language was the least important component of a poem. Elder Olson complained that Empson interpreted all poems as “one reducing all poetic considerations to considerations of poetic diction, and one reducing all discussion of diction even to problems of ambiguity” (Rajnath 97). The main difference was that whereas the New Critics are “preoccupied with their single formulas and are found looking for them in the poems they examine” the Chicago Critics “seek to evolve the formula from within the work itself and so are free from critical preoccupations” (Rajnath 97).

The decline of New Criticism was due to various factors. New Criticism discouraged searching the meaning of the text outside the text and thus placed the text in complete isolation which proved to be unrealistic in the long run. It hindered practices like intertextual criticism, the reader-response theories and historicization of the text. They also negated the moralistic concern of literature thus alienating it totally from life. The subjective interpretation also cannot be wholly ignored. They failed to realize that this approach may not be proper for the study of genres other than poetry and also did not account for the difference in the types of poetry. The social, historical and biographical
considerations cannot be altogether done away with if we are to undertake an all embracing approach towards the analysis of a literary text. Thus its importance started declining from the 1950s and 1960s. Its major defect can be summed up as “ideologically problematic, theoretically unformulated, and unsystematic” (Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker 25). However its objective approach still makes it a feasible option to be employed at the secondary and college levels of English studies even today.

**Practical Application of New Criticism:**

The technique of New Criticism is to focus entirely and essentially on the text. A survey through the works of writers like Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren (*Understanding Poetry* and *Understanding Fiction*), Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, and Willingham (*A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*), Michael Ryan (*Literary Theory : A Practical Introduction*), John Peck and Martin Coyle (*Practical Criticism*) and Lindy Miller (*Mastering : Practical Criticism*), has brought to light an exhaustive list of the following elements of a narrative that need to be focused upon (not necessarily in the order of importance) : Imagery, Symbolism, Points of View, Tension, Irony, Paradox, Theme, Ambiguity, Motif, Repetition, Setting, Characters, Characterization, Plot, Diction, Atmosphere, Metaphor, Simile, Defamiliarization, Denotations and Connotations, Universal Aspects of Human Experience, Hyperbole, Understatement, Allusions, Unusual Juxtapositions and Binary Opposites. One more element added by me is Verisimilitude, which is an essential requirement of any literary work, and assumes further importance if we are considering a genre like detective fiction. All these aspects have been considered
individually in evaluating the works of Christie, to form a judgement of her literary worth, in the following pages.

**Plot:**

According to Paul Ricouer plot is the “intelligible whole that governs a succession of events in any story” (Nayar 12). A plot tells us about the cause and effect sequence in story as well as about the temporal and spatial settings. This is what keeps us interested in our perusal of a text. “A plot contains motives, consequences, relationships” (Boulton 45).

Plot in a detective story needs to be very carefully organized as no vital clue must be left out and the reader should not feel deceived on the unveiling of the culprit. Based on the differentiation suggested by Marc Gabriel Alexander, we need to distinguish between the **red herrings** and the **buried clues** existing in the work. The red herrings are the clues that lead nowhere and are simply put forward to confuse the reader by sometimes appearing superficially important whereas the buried clues are the real pointers to solve the mystery but are mentioned only in passing. “Hints and items of fact were to be off-handedly slipped in so that crucial information came as casually to the reader as it might in real life” (Blamires 315-316). They are scattered throughout the novel. Further the various stories of the different characters are “embedded within the main plot” as advocated by Ryan (22) with the aim of not only introducing a number of characters but also establishing their identities firmly and presenting them all as major characters, so that the likelihood of confusing the reader increases as he suspects each character in turn as the probable murderer.
To demonstrate the above, the story-line of one of Christie’s novels, *After the Funeral*, is hereby laid down. In *After the Funeral*, there are various stories embedded within the main plot of who killed Richard Abernethie and then later on Cora Lansquenet. Richard Abernethie was the eldest among all his siblings. He had assumed responsibility of the family business and also of the family, on the death of his father, at the young age of twenty-four. His own son, Mortimer, had died an untimely death due to infantile paralysis, without having married, which broke the old man’s will to live. Cora Lansquenet is his youngest sister, who is slightly mentally deficient and had run away and got married to an undesirable French artist, Pierre Lansquenet. She had severed all relations with her family for the past twenty years when they expressed their disapproval on the unsuitability of the match. Timothy Abernethie is Richard’s and Cora’s hypochondriac brother, whose most absorbing hobby is the fascinating subject of his own precarious health. He is overindulged by his childless, maternally starved wife Maude. He harbours a secret jealousy of Richard all his life. Helen Abernethie is the widow of Richard’s deceased brother Leo Abernethie. She is a sensible, discerning, and judicious woman well liked by everybody. But she has her own secret to guard. She is the mother of an illegitimate son by an American soldier whom she had nursed in the war, after her husband died leaving her childless.

Then come the children of the deceased siblings of Richard Abernethie. Susan has both character and brains but she is unfortunately enamoured with her husband, Gregory Banks, a weak-spirited, poor specimen of a man who is a definite psychological case, and is unable to accept any responsibility for his own actions. Rosamund is a beautiful but not so talented stage actress, whose husband Michael Shane is a good-looking, successful actor but at the same
time, he is unfaithful to his wife. This causes Rosamund some anxiety as to whether or not to give birth to their child. George Crossfield is a lawyer fond of “Horses, gambling, Monte Carlo, foreign casinos” (286) and who finds himself saved from the brink of financial disaster due to Richard Abernethie’s legacy.

Lanscombe is the old, faithful butler who has been devoted to the Abernethie family and who now finds himself at a loose end after the death of his master, Mr Richard. Mr Entwhistle is the old, family solicitor, “senior partner of the old and respected firm of Bollard, Entwhistle, Entwhistle and Bollard” (14). He had also been a friend of Richard and at age seventy-two, the death of Richard at only sixty-eight, appeared as “definitely that of a man dead before his time” (15). He lives with his sister, who also keeps house for him, and is very solicitous about his health and reproaches him for taking so much trouble about the Abernethie case. His uneasiness about the death of Richard and then about Cora’s murder, causes him to rope in Hercule Poirot, the famous Belgian detective, to solve the mystery.

And finally Miss Gilchrist, who had been happily running her own tea shop, ‘The Willow Tree’, but which had gone out of business in the war. She had then been forced by circumstances to live a dreary, servile life as a paid companion to Cora Lansquenet.

In After the Funeral, the death of Richard Abernethie causes the entire family to be present together on the sad occasion of his funeral. However, a ripple is caused in the smooth proceedings, when Cora Lansquenet amidst the assembled company, naively observes, “It’s been hushed up very nicely, hasn’t
...But he was murdered, wasn’t he?” (25). The fact that she is meeting her estranged family after a gap of nearly twenty years, doesn’t stop them from being shocked at this disquieting statement. Though they all try to dismiss it as a figment of Cora’s imagination, she is justified when the next day she is discovered to have been murdered in her small cottage, in the remote village of Lytchett St Mary.

The plot thus moves from the initial point of speculation about Richard’s death aroused by Cora’s remark, through a haze of confusion and consternation, to the ultimate point of enlightenment by Poirot, where it becomes quite clear that Richard had died a natural death. But Miss Gilchrist, in the guise of her employer Cora Lansquenet, had uttered her misguiding remark when she herself attended the funeral of Richard masquerading as Cora, so as to divert all suspicion away from her and fix it instead on the members of the Abernethie family when Cora would be found murdered at a later date. Her murder would then be considered as the next sequence in the chain of cause and effect. It would appear that as Cora had suggested Richard’s death to be a murder, so she herself is murdered in order to be silenced forever. In the end, Poirot exposes Miss Gilchrist’s clever plan of making the two deaths look interconnected and she kills off Cora, for the sake of about five thousand pounds, as she had recognized one of the pictures bought by Cora at a sale, to be a ‘Vermeer’. Later, she meekly asks Mr Entwhistle and Susan, for one of Cora’s paintings as a keepsake. The ‘Vermeer’ had already been camouflaged by her by painting the scene of Poleflaxen harbour on top of it. For the sake of reviving the old grandeur of owning a tea shop, she commits a brutal and senseless murder.
We need to distinguish between the red herrings and the buried clues existing in the novel in order to manoeuvre through Christie’s intricate plot designing.

The red herrings maybe identified as –

- Poirot, based on his long experience of murderers, tries to sum up the entire family from the viewpoint of possible murderers:

  George might kill – as the cornered rat kills. Susan calmly – efficiently – to further a plan. Gregory because he had the queer morbid streak which discounts and invites, almost craves, punishment. Michael because he was ambitious and had a murderer’s cocksure vanity. Rosamund because she was frighteningly simple in outlook. Timothy because he had hated and resented his brother and had craved the power his brother’s money would give. Maude because Timothy was her child and where her child was concerned she would be ruthless. (267)

Thus it makes it even more difficult for the reader to guess the identity of the murderer as all are shown to possess not only the temperament but also the opportunity to kill both Richard and then Cora.

- Further the making out of Richard’s death as something other than the natural death it was and thus putting forward the impression, that Cora’s death is the consequence of Richard’s death, when in fact the two are unrelated.

- Reference is made again and again by Helen, Maude, Mr Entwhistle, Miss Gilchrist and Mr Guthrie that Cora though a simpleton, had the knack of hitting
the nail on the head by her astute though untimely “unwelcome truths” (28). Thus giving wrong importance to Miss Gilchrist’s remark (in the guise of Cora) about Richard having been murdered.

-Gregory Banks blusters and boasts proudly to Poirot that he was the one responsible for Richard’s death as being a chemist’s assistant, it was easy for him to obtain poison and administer it because, “…he thought I was no good – he despised me!” (333) thus trying to satisfy his punishment complex.

- Miss Gilchrist becomes a victim of arsenic poisoning from partaking the slice of wedding cake that appears to have arrived by post for her but is taken to a hospital on time due to Susan’s efforts and is thus saved. She was trying to divert suspicion from herself by poisoning herself though not fatally.

- Miss Gilchrist admits to Poirot that she had overheard Richard’s conversation to Cora when he had last visited her. She had heard him mention the word police and then declare that, “I can’t do that. Not when it’s a question of my own niece” (330) thus pointing her accusing finger at Susan having poisoned off her uncle Richard.

The buried clues are:

- The smell of oil paint is felt by Mr Entwhistle when he visits Miss Gilchrist in Cora’s cottage after the latter is murdered. This points to the recent painting of Poleflaxen harbor done by Gilchrist on top of the Vermeer as a camouflage. The smell of paint is again referred to when Timothy complains of it when having his house painted and jumps at the proposition of spending some days at his old family home, Enderby Hall.
- Miss Gilchrist mentions to Mr Entwhistle that her father was a painter and she herself had some knowledge of art so she was in a position to identify the Vermeer for what it was.

- Miss Gilchrist requests Mr Entwhistle and then Susan, if she could have the sketch of Poleflaxen Harbour painted by Cora, as a memento.

- Mr Guthrie, the art critic, also visits Susan and Miss Gilchrist in Cora’s cottage where Susan is staying for some days, on the occasion of the inquest held on Cora’s murder. He talks about Cora’s habit of asking his professional advice on her hobby of collecting pictures cheaply at the local sales, to see if something worthwhile had turned up.

- Miss Gilchrist produces a delicious tea which is enjoyed tremendously by both Susan and Mr Guthrie. She then indulges in fond memories of her erstwhile tea shop ‘The Willow Tree’, which went out of business due to shortage of supplies in the war. “But how I loved my dear, dear little tea-shop” (57).

- Christie diverts the reader’s suspicion from Miss Gilchrist by making Poirot clearly and explicitly state that, “Even Miss Gilchrist...might have contemplated murder if it could have restored to her the Willow Tree in its lady-like glory” (267).

- Cora had been estranged from her family since the past twenty years and none of those seeing her at the funeral of Richard, knew very well what she looked like now.
Thus it is evident that Christie fully exploits the red herrings and adroitly drops the buried clues all throughout the plot to keep the reader guessing.

Detective stories often begin in *medias res*. The discovery of the dead body initiates a chain of events starting with the calling in of the police or the detective who then gets busy in identifying the victim, delving into his past life, sifting through the evidence, trying to separate the buried clues from the red herrings, to triumphantly arrive at the resolution of the mystery.

*The Body in the Library* is a perfect example of this where in the first page itself Mrs Bantry’s early morning dream is rudely interrupted by her usually calm, sober maid Mary’s voice “breathless, hysterical: ‘Oh ma’am, oh; ma’am, there’s a body in the library’” (10) to which Mrs Bantry’s justifiable response is, “Impossible,…..I must have been dreaming” (10). Once the identity of the unknown corpse is established as that of Ruby Keene, a young woman of eighteen years, who had been a dance hostess at a nearby hotel, Mrs Bantry invites her crony Miss Jane Marple to go for a short stint to that hotel, to try their hands at a little amateur sleuthing.

Then a technique called *analepsis* comes into effect during the cross questioning of the hotel staff as well the guests, regarding the personal history of Ruby Keene, their own movements on the fatal night as well as their connections, if any, with the victim. This then gives the reader a glimpse of all that has happened in the past till the opening scene of the novel which introduces the murder and then we are brought back to the present, with the ongoing investigation.
The **temporal setting** tells us about the discovery of the dead body, the investigation being carried on, the digging up of the past and then the inevitable conclusion arrived at in the present with the unveiling of the murderer. The **spatial setting** takes us from Gossington Hall, the Bantry Residence, where the dead body is discovered till Hotel Majestic, Danemouth where Ruby Keene had lived and worked. The **causal setting** leads us to the step by step discovery of the murderers by Miss Marple.

**Prolepsis** is a technique which prepares us for events that have not yet materialized. *Towards Zero* is a reversal of the usual practice of detective stories beginning with the discovery of the dead body. This approach as seen in the novel mentioned above, can be stated lucidly in the words of one of its characters, the lawyer Mr Treves, right at the commencement of the novel, “I like a good detective story….But, you know, they begin in the wrong place! They begin with the murder. But murder is the end. The story begins long before that – years before sometimes - with all the causes and events that bring certain people to a certain place at a certain time on a certain day….All converging towards a given spot….And then, when the time comes - over the top! Zero Hour. Yes, all of them converging towards zero….” (11-12).

According to the **proairetic code**, which defines the “temporal sequence of events” (Nayar 20) organization of the plot in *Towards Zero* can be recognized along the following lines:

1. Mr Treves comments on how murder is the end of a chain of events.

2. January 11. Angus Mac Whirter makes an unsuccessful attempt at suicide by throwing himself off the cliffs at Stark Head near Salt Creek.
3. February 14. We are shown an unnamed person meticulously planning murder, in writing, to the last minutest detail.

4. March 8. Superintendent Battle of Scotland Yard, due to his long experience of dealing with the criminal type, is able to perceive the innocence of his daughter Sylvia, who had been wrongly accused by her Principal, of committing a series of petty thefts at her boarding school.

5. April 19. Nevile Strange, an all round athlete, confesses to his second wife Kay, that he has fixed up a plan with his first wife Audrey, to go on their annual visit to Lady Tressilian at Salt Creek, in the month of September, so that Kay and Audrey could forge some kind of an understanding between themselves.

6. May 5. On being questioned by Lady Tressilian, Audrey gives her consent to let Nevile and Kay come to Salt Creek in the month of September, at the same time as her own intended visit.

7. May 29. Thomas Royde makes preparations to come to England for six months from the Malaysian plantation he had been living in for some years.

8. On the same day, Mr Treves, in London, decides upon visiting Saltcreek for his holidays.

9. July 28. Ted Latimer, a friend of Kay Strange, plans to be near her at the Easterhead Bay Hotel, in September.
10. August 19. Superintendent Battle’s long holiday is cancelled for official purposes but he decides to go to his nephew at Saltcreek later for a week or so.

11. Comes September, and the following are assembled as guests in the household of Lady Tressilian, and her companion Mary Aldin, at Saltcreek – Nevile Strange, Kay Strange, Audrey Strange and Thomas Royde and in the vicinity are established Mr Treves, Ted Latimer, Angus Mac Whirter and Superintendent Battle.

12. Mr Treves is invited to Lady Tressilian’s house for dinner, being an old acquaintance.

13. The next day Mr Treves is found dead in his hotel room.

14. Brutal murder of Lady Tressilian in her home.

15. Superintendent Battle starts the investigation.

16. Audrey Strange arrested for the murder of Lady Tressilian as all circumstantial evidence against her.

17. Angus Mac Whirter comes forward with his testimony of having seen Nevile Strange climb up the window of Lady Tressilian’s house from the outside, after pretentiously declaring himself not to have been present in the house on the night of the murder.

18. Superintendent Battle accepts the testimony even though he realizes that the night in question was a rainy night with a low visibility and Mac Whirter could not have possibly seen Nevile climb up the window.
19. To take no chances, Battle taunts Nevile that his plan was not so clever after all and he is a failure all around, which causes the latter to unwittingly admit his guilt boastfully, in order to prove the ingenuity of his plan.

The hermeneutic code studies the cause effect sequence. This gives us the gist of the mystery that Lady Tressilian was murdered in her own house by Nevile Strange. He planned and planted a lot of circumstantial evidence framing his first wife Audrey for the crime. However Mac Whirter’s testimony proves who the real murderer is. Nevile wanted to take revenge from Audrey for deserting him for another man because she had come to realize that Nevile was a little queer mentally. He had played the part of a sportsman to perfection, taking up the blame for the split in their marriage as his own fault, on having fallen in love with Kay, but all the time he had been brooding on a plan of revenge for punishing Audrey.

Mr Treves had recognized Nevile as the child murderer who had turned up in court before him for having murdered another child. At the time he had been given the benefit of the doubt due to his tender years, but later on fresh evidence proved that though acquitted, he had indeed been guilty of the crime. Though Mr Treves discusses the incident without naming any names in Lady Tressilian’s house, Nevile is immediately alerted. For the successful carrying out of his plan to kill Lady Tressilian it was necessary to first silence Mr Treves, so that no suspicion falls upon him, which Nevile does effectively.

Angus Mac Whirter, now in better circumstances, visits the scene of his unsuccessful attempt at suicide and there comes across and saves Audrey from following the same course to end her life. Seeing her desperation, he promises
to help her because Audrey had unconsciously started realizing that she was the intended victim of Nevile’s plan of revenge and was helpless to do anything about it. He believes in the innocence of Audrey and after having put two and two together, arrives at the inference that it was Nevile who was the real culprit and does not even hesitate in fabricating the story of being an eye witness to Nevile’s attempt at stealthily entering the house from the outside.

Superintendent Battle also believes Audrey to be innocent when he sees her reaction on being arrested and charged for the murder of Lady Tressilian. It immediately reminds him of his daughter’s reaction on being unjustly accused. So he accepts Mac Whirter’s testimony without casting any doubt on it as at the time it was the only evidence available against Nevile. He later on springs a trap upon Nevile. His goading pushes Nevile beyond the brink of sanity and makes him loudly assert that he had made a clever plan to frame Audrey which had only been ruined by the inquisitiveness of Mac Whirter, leading him to accept responsibility for the crime and thus unwittingly making the case against himself foolproof in court.

Applying both the proairetic code and hermeneutic code for analysing the novel, Towards Zero, it becomes evident that Christie has worked out a detailed, convincing and probable set of events in a closely knit organic plot with no loose ends, which at the same time keeps the reader in suspense till the very end, with a strong urge to kick himself for not having guessed correctly the solution of the mystery. All action and all events lead up to the culmination of the murder and the resolution thereafter within a persuasive and credible structure of cause and effect.
In *Ordeal by Innocence*, analepsis is employed perfectly where nearly two years later the key witness, Dr Calgary, turns up to provide an alibi that would prove the innocence of the accused, Jacko Argyle, who had been charged with the murder of his adopted mother, Mrs Rachel Argyle. He could not be present earlier to offer his testimony because he had met with a small accident causing him to have a short term memory loss. On recovering, he had been flown directly to Australia to join the Antarctic expedition. He had only just arrived in England after a period of two years and had read up about the murder trial just recently. Though Jacko is already dead, having died in prison after contracting pneumonia, this leads to fresh developments in the case. The question that now arises is, if not Jacko then who had killed Mrs Argyle? This then causes the events of two years back to be raked up afresh.

We can conclude that Christie adeptly handles each story, framing it within the confines of analepsis, prolepsis and in medias res, making the temporal and causal setting also credible, according to each story’s own individual need and suitability.

“Diegesis refers to the self-contained world of the plot. The world of the story, of the reality of events within the ‘telling’, is technically called ‘diegesis’.

It includes:

- The spaces and settings of the plot
- The time sequence of the plot” (Nayar 21).

Using the tool of Diegesis we shall explore St Mary Mead, the tiny village which is inhabited by Miss Jane Marple, one of the Christie sleuth. It is situated in Radfordshire near London. It is indeed a self-contained imaginary
world picturised in a number of Miss Marple mysteries. It boasts of a few shops, some small houses, the church, the inn Blue Boar, the railway station and then in close proximity the houses of some of its principal residents like Dr Haydock, the vicar Mr Clement and his wife Griselda, Mrs Price Ridley, Miss Marple, Miss Hartnell, Miss Wetherby to name a few.

It is a typical old English village where life moves on at a leisurely pace and where each one’s life is everyone’s concern. It was so much the hub of old inquisitive spinsterish ladies that even a small discrepancy in the day to day affairs aroused great interest, conjecture and talk. One can well imagine what would be the outcome if they would find a murder committed in their midst as happens in *The Murder at the Vicarage*. The village and its residents were all agog with curiosity and all were eager to try their hands at a little amateur sleuthing though the honours rest with Miss Marple alone.

To make it more convincing, Christie shows St Mary Mead also undergoing some changes with the changing times, in later novels:

St Mary Mead, the old world core of it, was still there, and the church and the vicarage and the little nest of Queen Anne and Georgian houses, of which hers (Miss Marple’s) was one. Miss Hartnell’s house was still there, also Miss Hartnell, fighting progress to the last gasp. Miss Wetherby had passed on and her house was now inhabited by the bank manager and his family, having been given a face lift by the painting of doors and windows a bright royal blue….But though the houses looked much as before, the same could hardly be said of the village street. When shops changed hands there, it was with a view to
intemperate modernization…. (Mirror Crack’d from Side to Side 324-325)

Not only physical changes are introduced but new characters also keep making an appearance from time to time in St Mary Mead. Thus diegesis makes the self contained world of St Mary Mead appear very ‘real’ to the reader as Christie must have intended.

To make a further study of the plot construction of Christie, we can follow the precept laid down by Aristotle in dividing a plot into two - simple (aploi) and complex (peplegmenoi). Christie’s plots can be recognized as complex as they contain the elements of peripetia and anagnorisis.

Peripetia is “a change by which action veers to its opposite, subject always to the rule of probability or necessity” (Raina 14). In Christie’s plots peripetia occurs when the murderer, who seems to be riding on a wave of good luck because his crime has escaped detection so far, experiences a reversal in his fortune. The detective collects evidence against him and on being convinced of his guilt, forces public exposure of his crime. In this way, he brings about the murderer’s downfall.

Anagnorisis is “change from ignorance to knowledge” (Raina 14). The detective undergoes anagnorisis when he moves from a position of not knowing who the murderer is, to a point of illumination and awareness of the identity of the murderer and the reason and technique of the murder as well.

Thus following the precepts laid down by Aristotle, Christie’s plots can be classified as complex plots.
Character:

Aristotle defines character as made up of two parts – ethos and dianoia where ethos represents morality whereas dianoia represents the intellect. The importance of character is relatively less than action because character itself is “a product of action, is influenced by action, and reveals itself through action” (qtd. in Mundra and Agarwal 65).

Margolin states “‘Character’ designates any entity, individual or collective – normally human or human-like – introduced in a work of narrative fiction. Characters thus exist within storyworlds, and play a role, no matter how minor, in one or more of the states of affairs or events told about in the narrative. Character can be succinctly defined as storyworld participant” (qtd. in Nayar 34).

Each Christie novel has a spectrum of characters - major as well as minor. Christie can effectively create great suspense by casting suspicion on as few as four characters who are busy playing bridge in the same room with the would be victim as in Cards on the Table to as many as thirteen characters who are travelling on the same coach on the Simplon Orient Express, in which one of their co-passengers is found stabbed to death as in Murder on the Orient Express.

The major characters in the whole corpus of her work are the detectives involved in the cases, the most famous being Hercule Poirot and Miss Jane Marple who keep cropping up again and again in the various novels.
Her first novel The Mysterious Affair at Styles, 1920, marked the beginning of the existence of the world famous, know-all detective Hercule Poirot. His unparalleled powers of deduction gradually brought him fame and phenomenal success over the course of years. His clientele included the very low (like the murdered charwoman in Mrs McGinty's Dead) and also the high official circles and had even gained him admittance to Buckingham Palace once. His physical appearance was comical with a short stature, a slightly protruding belly (due to his inordinate love for food), egg-shaped head, and cat–like green eyes and luxuriant moustaches (of which he took great care). His mania for neatness, finds him ensconced towards his later years, in Whitehaven Mansions “A splendid symmetrical building....where he had a large luxury flat with impeccable chromium fittings, square armchairs, and severely rectangular ornaments. There could truly be said not to be a curve in the place.” (Mrs McGinty's Dead 11) His complaint quite often was that the hens did not lay square eggs!

He was suspicious of the English weather and wrapped himself up in scarves and overcoats at the hint of a chill. The inside of his house was always kept uncomfortably warm and the windows kept firmly shut. “Hercule Poirot had been brought up to believe that all outside air was best left outside, and that night air was especially dangerous to the health.” (qtd. in Hart 190). Far removed from the British Custom of availing hard drinks and tea, Poirot was passionately fond of his hot chocolate and fancy Sirops like Genadire, Crème de Menthe, Benedictine, and Crème de Cacao, which the English even shuddered to look at.

His fixation upon neatness and orderliness extended even to his attire. He, at all times, “preferred his own standards of urban smartness. He was not an English
country gentleman and he would not dress like an English country gentleman.” (The Hollow 139). He always wore patent leather shoes, even in the country, no matter how tight and pinched his feet became. Lavish care and attention was devoted to his moustaches of which he was unreasonably proud. Not a speck of dirt or grime was to be found on his person. “Dandified” was the adjective scornfully applied to his appearance by many a staunch Englishmen who committed the grave error of rejecting his as “the damned foreigner” and “mountebank”.

We get a glimpse of the aged Poirot, in a broken down condition, in Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case:

Crippled with arthritis, he propelled himself about in a wheeled chair. His once plump frame had fallen in. He was a thin little man now. His face was lined and wrinkled. His moustache and hair, it is true, was still of a jet black colour, but candidly, though I would not for the world have hurt his feelings by saying so to him, this was a mistake….But now the theatricality was apparent and merely created the impression that he wore a wig and had adorned his upper lip to amuse the children! Only his eyes were the same as ever, shrewd and twinkling, and now – yes, undoubtedly – softened with emotion. (18)

But mentally he is as fit as ever as he himself says unhesitatingly, “My brain, it still functions magnificently” (19).

Poirot himself recounts his history in Three Act Tragedy. He had been born in a poor family with lots of siblings and had to struggle hard for his existence. After entering the Belgian Police Force, his powers of deduction bought him so much fame that he acquired an international repute. Nearing his retirement, he was injured in the
First World War and had to seek asylum in England. But as fate would have it, his benefactress Mrs Inglethorp, was murdered (The Mysterious Affair at Styles) and by solving the case, Poirot emerged on a new career, of that of a private enquiry agent, which is what we get a glimpse of, in his cases.

Captain Hastings is the narrator who first acquaints us with himself in Christie’s very first book, The Mysterious Affair at Styles, on his being discharged from the army on being wounded in early 1916 in the battle of Somme. On the invitation of his friend John Cavendish, he visits his home Styles St Mary where unexpectedly, and to his great delight, he comes across his former acquaintance Hercule Poirot after a long break of years, on the historic day of July 17, 1916.

From the very next day with the murder of the mistress of Styles St Mary, Mrs Inglethorp, was to commence the adventurous and enthralling odyssey of Poirot and Hastings, spanning many years to come. In the course of this journey, Hastings also found his lady love – Dulcie Duveen in The Murder on the Links with whom he got married and was initiated into a new life altogether in the distant land of Argentina.

Time and again Hastings makes a casual appearance in England and thus in the novels, involved once more in the exploits of Poirot till finally in Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case where Hastings is a widower, and we are introduced to his brilliant youngest daughter, Judith, working as an assistant to Dr John Franklin, the scientist. Hasting is heart–broken at the loss of his dearest friend even though throughout their friendship Poirot had a history of frequently hurling jeers and derisions at Hastings, sometimes outrightly and sometimes surreptitiously. Beginning from the very first case, Poirot says to him, “....I am pleased with you. You have a good memory, and you have given me the facts faithfully. Of the order in which you present them, I say
nothing – truly, it is deplorable!” (The Mysterious Affair at Styles 58). These insults gain familiarity and momentum slowly with the passage of time. “You have an extraordinary effect on me, Hastings. You have so strongly the flair in the wrong direction that I am almost tempted to go by it! You are that wholly admissible type of man, honest, credulous, honourable, who is invariably taken in by any scoundrel” (qtd. in Hart 160).

Sometimes Hastings takes these blows lying low but at times he tries to give back as good as he gets. “It’s all very well… but you’ve made a perfect fool of me! From beginning to end! No, It’s all very well to try to explain it away afterwards. There really is a limit’’ (qtd. in Hart 160).

Hastings, an alumnus of Eton, is British in his approach to life – very reserved, hating any display of emotion and following the rules of the game. He criticizes Poirot for suspecting young, helpless women and the bluff, hearty, sportsmen type. He tries his best to cure Poirot’s habit of snooping, eavesdropping, listening at keyholes and reading other people’s letters. He keeps remonstrating with Poirot that “It isn’t playing the game.” Poirot always reminds him, “I am not playing a game. I am hunting down a murderer” (Peril at End House 131).

He is always up and about and is forever rousing Poirot to do the same, to be active instead of lying in his armchair ostensibly doing nothing but “thinking”, admonishing him at the same time, that ‘Japp’ the inspector of Scotland Yard, or whichever ‘official’ maybe concerned, will solve the case and emerge victorious while Poirot will be left doing nothing, to which Poirot’s rejoinder is:

I have noticed that, when we work on a case together, you are always urging me on to physical action, Hastings. You wish me to
measure footprints, to analyse cigarette ash, to prostrate myself on my stomach for the examination of detail. You never realize that by lying back in an armchair, with the eyes closed, one can come nearer to the solution of any problem. One sees then with the eyes of the mind.

....At such a moment the brain should be working feverishly, not sinking into sluggish repose. The mental activity – it is so interesting, so stimulating! The employment of the little grey cells is a mental pleasure. They and they only can be trusted to lead one through fog to the truth. (Lord Edgware Dies 7)

Though Poirot sometimes finds Hastings a bit irritating, yet his fondness for the latter is unmistakable, when in his absence, Poirot confesses, “I had a friend – a friend who for many years never left my side. Occasionally of an imbecility to make one afraid, nevertheless he was very dear to me. Figure to yourself that I miss even his stupidity, his naïveté, his honest outlook, the pleasure of delighting and surprising him by my superior gifts – all these I miss more than I can tell you” (The Murder of Roger Ackroyd 22).

Sometimes in an emotional moment, Poirot lets down the guard and says to Hastings, “My good friend….I depend upon you more than you know” (qtd. in Hart 169). What Hastings actually comes to mean to Poirot is revealed in the musings of the latter in Mrs McGinty’s Dead:

My first friend in this country – and still to me the dearest friend I have. True, often and often did he enrage me. But do I remember that now? No, I remember only his incredulous wonder, his open-mouthed appreciation of my talents....It is my weakness, it has always been my
weakness, to desire to show off. That weakness, Hastings could never understand....I cannot, truly I cannot, sit in a chair all day reflecting have truly admirable I am. One needs the human touch. One needs – as they say nowadays – the stooge. (9)

And Hastings proved a valuable stooge to Poirot time and again. Even in his old age, Hastings has “the straight back, the broad shoulders, the grey of the hair – tres distingue. You know, my friend, you have worn well” (Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case 18).

Miss Jane Marple, who makes her first appearance in the short story collection The Tuesday Night Club and then in the The Murder at the Vicarage, is introduced in the very first pages as “....that terrible Miss Marple….the worst cat in the village .......And she always knows every single thing that happens – and draws the worst inference from it” (50). Living a sheltered life in the small village of St Mary Mead which appears as “....the kind of village where nothing ever happens, exactly like a stagnant pond” (Sleeping Murder 26), has led Miss Marple to take a natural interest in ‘human nature’. She is full of curiosity about her neighbours’ affairs and adroitly solves baffling mysteries that happen to come her way, by drawing village parallels and relying vastly on her knowledge of human nature. “People are really very alike, everywhere” (A Murder is Announced 123).Under the pretext of her hobbies, gardening and bird watching, she indulges in her favourite hobby of what some people rudely label as snooping. “But I’m afraid....that we old women always do snoop. It would be very odd and much more noticeable if I didn’t” (A Murder is Announced 96).
She manifests as a “…perfect period piece. Victorian to the core…. (she) was an attractive old lady, tall and thin, with pink cheeks and blue eyes and a gentle, rather fussy manner. Her blue eyes often had a little twinkle in them” (Sleeping Murder 26). Christie describes her as ‘dithery’ and Miss Marple herself confesses that her musings sometimes become incoherent and difficult to understand, as she indulged in so many deviations while stating a plain fact. She was always enmeshed in wool, and seemed to be forever knitting baby clothes.

Her famous nephew, the author, Raymond West mockingly comments that his ‘Aunt Jane’ was adept in solving “Any kind of problem. Why the grocer’s wife took the umbrella to the church social on a fine evening? Why a gill of pickled shrimps was found where it was? What happened to the Vicar’s surplice? All grist to my Aunt Jane’s mill. So if you’ve any problem in your life put it to her….she’ll tell you the answer” (Sleeping Murder 26). Despite the irony employed, so often was she proved right that her reputation for solving mysteries had gained prominence. Even Sir Henry Clithering, the retired Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, called her ‘just the finest detective God ever made’. Even his godson, Inspector Dermot Craddock, who first dismissed her as ‘completely ga–ga’ later developed a sneaky, grudging admiration for her habit of hitting the nail on its head.

Miss Marple did possess ‘a suspicious mind’ and had a ‘low opinion of human conduct’. She is often heard to say, “The great thing to avoid is having in any way a trustful mind….Oh yes, I always believe the worst. What is so sad is that one is usually justified is doing so” (A Pocket Full of Rye 146).

Despite his scathing remarks about his Aunt Jane and this can be inconclusively proved by his kind gesture – of often inviting his Aunt to stay with him
and his wife, a famous painter in London, that he was very fond of her. He even
arranged for her to go to the Caribbean to aid her quick recovery from a bout of
pneumonia. It was he who arranged for a nurse cum companion, Miss Knight, to go
and live with Miss Marple who was becoming quite old and feeble due to an attack of
bronchitis. “So kind of dear Raymond – she was thinking gratefully, so really and
truly kind….Why he should take so much trouble about his old Aunt, she really did
not know. Conscience, perhaps, family feeling? Or possibly he was truly fond of
her…. (A Caribbean Mystery 9).

With the advancing years she had developed rheumatism in her back. “Miss
Marple, reflected with some nostalgia on how good her eyesight had been a few (well,
not perhaps a few) years ago….And with the help of her bird glasses – (an interest in
birds was so useful!) – she had been able to see….From the vantage–point of her
garden, so admirably placed to see all that was going on in St Mary Mead, how little
had escaped her noticing eye” (Mirror Crack’d from Side to Side 325).

Though a kindly, helpful, prim and proper spinster Miss Marple could become
‘ruthless’ when the need arises. In A Caribbean Mystery, Miss Marple in the
denouement declares herself to be Nemesis. “It’s me….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).

Miss Marple was indeed Christie’s favourite character “As various
interviewers with Christie record, she was fonder of Miss Marple than she was of
Hercule Poirot. Jane Marple does not have the bravura of Poirot, but her insistent
pursuit of justice, in her own modest way, does entwine her in our heartstrings”
(Fitzgibbon 62).
Thus we see the development of the Christie sleuths, Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot, as well the sidekick Hastings, has been done thoroughly. Each has been sketched out in detail, with their own particular characteristics, and their own ups and downs in life which further adds verisimilitude to the story. The characters are dynamic and not at all stagnant as one would suppose, given the frequency of their appearance in her work, which all falls within the corpus of detective fiction. Her art of characterization is so convincing that when Poirot dies in *Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case*, a sensitive reader cannot refrain from shedding a tear or two. How moving was the exit of this great man from the scene of crime can be gauged from the fact that a front-page obituary was published in the New York Times of Hercule Poirot.

The minor characters portrayed by Christie have all been given their own separate identities and names. It is rare for a minor character or its namesake to appear again in any of the novels. As far as possible even the minor characters are far from being ‘flat’ characters. For facilitating study, I have studied some of the minor characters by shelving them into distinct categories based on their professions and also as actants according to the function they perform in the novel.

To begin with, we have the retired Army officer (Major/Colonel) who can be stereotyped as bluff, hearty, punctual. But the chief characteristic being that he “always had long histories to relate, mostly about people whom nobody knew” (*Taken at the Flood* 1). This was evidently true in the case of Major Porter, late Indian Army, in *Taken at the Flood*, Major Palgrave in *A Caribbean Mystery*, and Colonel Carter in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. About them, Christie pens down in *A Caribbean Mystery*: 
In the past, it had been predominantly India. Majors, Colonels, Lieutenant-Generals—and a familiar series of words: Simla. Bearers. Tigers. Chota Hazari. Tiffin. Khitmatgaras. And so on....the terms were slightly different (now). Safari. Kikuyu. Elephants. Swahili. But the pattern was essentially the same. An elderly man who needed a listener so that he could, in memory, relive days in which he had been happy, days when his back had been straight, his eyesight keen, his hearing acute. (9)

However Major Burnaby in The Sittaford Mystery is athletically fit, punctilious, keen on exercise, but shying away from any discussion of his accomplishments and who was “naturally a silent man….oblivious to any need for small talk” (5). Thus a little removed from the stereotyped Army Major.

Further, as actants, “to classify them according to the function they perform in the plot” (qtd. in Nayar 29) both Major Porter and Major Palgrave are the murder victims whereas Major Burnaby turns out to be the murderer. Colonel Carter’s role is negligible and is limited to being a fourth participant in a game of Mah Jong.

There are different types of maids cropping up in the various novels who are further classified as lady’s maid, upper house maid, kitchen maid, under-house maid and so on. Some of them are efficient in their work like Ursula Bourne (The Murder of Roger Ackroyd) and Ellis (Lord Edgware Dies). While Mrs Ackroyd says of Ursula, “She’s a good servant, and she says Ma’am, and doesn’t object to wearing caps and aprons (which I declare to you a lot of them do nowadays), and she can say “Not at home” without scruples if she has to answer the door…and she doesn’t have those peculiar gurgling noises inside which so many parlourmaids seem to have when
they wait at table….There’s something different about her from the others. Too well educated, that’s my opinion” (*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* 137).

In *Lord Edgware Dies*, Ellis is shown to preach to her lady, Jane Wilkinson, “It doesn’t do to break engagements, m’lady. You’re much too fond of doing it. People don’t always forgive it. They turn nasty” (153).

Maids are also shown as highly strung and excitable like Mary in *The Body in the Library* who conveys the news of a dead body being found in their library, to her sleeping mistress Dolly Bantry, “out of the dim green light Mary’s voice came – breathless, hysterical ‘Oh ma’am, oh, ma’am, there’s a body in the library.’ And then with a hysterical burst of sobs she rushed out of the room again” (10).

Gladys Martin is the parlourmaid in the house of Rex Fortescue, Yewtree Lodge, in *A Pocket Full of Rye*. “Quite a decent sort of girl but very nearly half-witted. The adenoidal type” (182). Inspector Neele describes her as a “frightened rabbit” (184).

The maids vary in their efficiency levels and as actants too. While Ursula Bourne is revealed to be the wife of Ralph Paton (the adopted son of the victim – Roger Ackroyd) she herself comes under suspicion for the murder. Ellis unknowingly to her becomes the key to solving the puzzle of the murder of Lord Edgware under the manipulations of Poirot. Mary simply acts as a deliverer of information of the murder. Gladys is yet another murder victim.

Another important member of the domestic staff was the butler. In *The Hollow*, the very correct, faithful butler Gudgeon declares “I see to it that everything possible is done to spare her ladyship annoyance or worry” (18). Lady Lucy Angkatell echoes
this sentiment also, when she declares, “Gudgeon is wonderful: I don’t know what I should do without Gudgeon. He always knows the right thing to do” (157).

Parker, the butler in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* confesses to having blackmailed his late master, Major Ellerby and admits that he had been on the lookout again for something similar with Ackroyd also. “I thought that if Mr Ackroyd was being blackmailed, why shouldn’t I have a share of the pickings?” (161).

The missing butler turns out to be of interest in *Three Act Tragedy*, who disappears soon after the death of his employer, Sir Bartholomew and whose references are then revealed to be forged. One remarkable thing noticed by Alice, the maid, was that on the day of his death Sir Bartholomew Strange had “seemed particularly cheerful, sir smiled to himself, he did, as though he had some joke on. I even heard him make a joke with Mr Ellis, a thing he’d never done….He was usually a bit brusque with the servants, kind always but not speaking to them much….And the doctor he laughed and said, “You’re a good fellow, Ellis, a first–class butler” (80).

As for the actants, Gudgeon, in his absolute devotion to his masters, tries to meddle with the evidence making it harder for the mystery to be solved. Parker is a suspicious character but is not involved in the murder. Whereas Ellis, was the disguise assumed by Sir Charles Cartwright, the famous actor, pretending to pass off himself as a butler as a bet he had on with his friend, Sir Bartholomew Strange, in order to murder the unsuspecting Sir Bartholomew.

The Doctors also serve different purposes. In *Cards on the Table*, Dr Roberts is “a cheerful, highly–coloured individual of middle age. Small twinkling eyes, a touch of baldness, a tendency to *embonpoint* and a general air of well scrubbed and
disinfected medical practitioners. His manner is cheerful and confident” (17). It is he who turns out to be the murderer.

Dr Quimper, “a tall genial man, with a casual off-hand cynical manner that his patients found very stimulating” (4.50 from Paddington 56) is again revealed as the murderer. In The Hollow, the sympathetic artificial manner adopted by Dr John Christow hides his passion for his serious research work. He is the murder victim in the novel.

So Christie never limited herself to stereotypes, as such, in the art of characterization and exhibited variation in choosing characters as actants.

E.M. Forster divides character into two types – flat and round. “The ‘flat’ characters are those which can be summed up in a sentence. The ‘round’ ones are more highly organized, they ‘function all round’, and seem capable of an extended life beyond the bounds of the book in which they appear” (Blamires 319).

One illustration of a character being presented as a complex character is that of Gerda Christow, wife of Dr John Christow, in The Hollow. Sitting in his clinic John Christow makes a silent confession to himself:

Poor Gerda, he thought, she has a lot to put up with. If only she was not so submissive – so ready to admit herself in the wrong when, half the time, it was he who was to blame! There were days when everything that Gerda said or did conspired to irritate him, and mainly, he thought ruefully, it was her virtues that irritated him. It was her patience, her unselfishness, her subordination of her wishes to his that aroused his ill-humour. And she never resented, his quick bursts of
temper, never stuck to her own opinion in preference to his, never attempted to strike out a line of her own. (36)

Gerda thus comes across as a simple-minded rather stupid woman, who is ready to carry out her husband’s bidding. She worships her husband to such an extent that this attitude is reflected in her whole posture and outer form so much so that Henrietta Savernake, the sculptress, cannot resist from carving an image of her as ‘The Worshipper’. “Yes, It’s the neck and shoulders I wanted – and that heavy forward slant – the submission – that bowed look. It’s wonderful . . . . A strange submissive figure, a figure offering up worship to an unseen deity – the face raised – blind, dumb, devoted – terribly strong, terribly fanatical….” (58-59).

The self-realization of Gerda has been expressed as, “But even home had not been very good. For they had all, of course, been quicker and cleverer than she was….Hadn’t they seen, all of them, that that was the way to make her slower and stupider still? She’d got worse and worse, much clumsy with her fingers, more slow-witted, more inclined to stare vacantly at what was said to her” (63). So she found solace in marrying John and devoted herself to him whole-heartedly:

Dear John, she thought. John was wonderful. Everyone thought so. Such a clever doctor, so terribly kind to his patients. Wearing himself out – and the interest he took in his hospital patients – all that side of his work that didn’t pay at all. John was so disinterested – so truly noble.

….He had not minded her being slow and rather stupid and not very pretty. ‘I’ll look after you,’ he had said nicely, rather masterfully. ‘Don’t worry about things, Gerda, I’ll take care of you…. (64-65)
However this very worshipper, Gerda, murders her husband, John Christow, because she discovers his infidelity when he comes across his old flame, Veronica Cray. The meek, submissive, enduring wife then extinguishes the very idol she has placed on a pedestal and worshipped all these years. “I’d trusted John. I’d believed in him – as though he were God. I thought he was the noblest man in the world. I thought he was everything that was fine and noble. And it was all a lie. I was left with nothing at all. I –I’d worshipped John” (367). And very cleverly she had set out to murder her husband, in open daylight, by shooting at him with a weapon and then quickly hiding it, and then to be discovered holding an altogether different weapon, when people began arriving at the scene. When she is suspected of murder, she innocently exclaims that she had simply picked up the revolver lying besides John as she was in a totally bewildered state of mind. She knew that the police could identify the revolver from which the bullet had been fired and she would therefore appear blameless.

This transformation of Gerda was frightening. “Here was the Worshipper. Blind devotion thrown back on itself, disillusioned, dangerous” (367).

Study of some of the psychological characters created by Christie show them to be unique and unsurpassed in the impact they leave on the reader.

“What a horror of a woman! Old, swollen, bloated, sitting there immovable in the midst of them – a distorted old Buddha – a gross spider in the centre of a web!” (*Appointment with Death* 14). “…like an arch priestess of some forgotten cult, like a monstrous swollen female Buddha” (*Appointment with Death* 76).

This description is the description of the American lady, Mrs Boynton, in *Appointment with Death* who had formally been a prison wardress and after marriage,
on the death of her husband, she continued to assert her authority on her stepchildren and her own child, revelling in her power over them. For many years, she had not let them have any contact with the outside world and thus they had become captives within their home - mental as well as physical captives. This had led to severe repercussions which manifested itself in various ways in the family. Lennox, the eldest brother, developing a nervous temperament, “exhausted with suffering. That look in the eyes – the look you see in a wounded dog or a sick horse – dumb bestial endurance....” (22-23). The youngest, her own daughter Ginerva, developed an “aloof remote smile – the still body – and the busy destructive hands ....”(24) and the other two, Carol and Raymond, also had been “hypnotized….to believe that they cannot disobey her….she has made them believe that utter dependence on her is inevitable. They have been in prison so long that if the prison door stands open they would no longer notice!....and they would all be afraid of freedom” (42-43).

As a psychological study, she is of interest to Dr Gerard, the famous French psychiatrist. When he meets Mrs Boynton’s glare in the hotel lobby in Jerusalem, he recoils back, recognizing “a power, a definite force, a wave of evil malignancy….In the malignancy of her glare he felt a resemblance to the effect produced by a Cobra” (26). He dispassionately analyses that she had become a tyrant not because she was a prison wardress but in the first place she had become a prison wardress because she loved to feel power over others. “There are such strange things buried down in the unconscious. A lust for power – a lust for cruelty – a savage desire to tear and rend....” (41).

In Crooked House we come across a child murderer, Josephine Leonides, aged around eleven or twelve, who was “a fantastically ugly child....” with a face that “had
its goblin suggestion – it was round with a bulging brow, combed – back hair and small, rather ready, black eyes...attached to a body – a small skinny body” (68). She has a ghoulish curiosity and appears to take a great pleasure in the murders committed in her own family, that were actually committed by herself. First that of her grandfather Aristide Leonides, by putting eserine (eye drops) into a small bottle of insulin, which then was directly but unknowingly inserted into his body by his young wife, Brenda, as a matter of course. The second murder she commits is of her old Nannie by putting poison (her Aunt Edith’s medicine) in her own unfinished glass of cocoa which was then inadvertently drunk by Nannie.

She also very cleverly tried to portray herself as a victim by arranging an attack on herself by placing a block of marble on top of a door in such a way that on opening the door it would fall straight upon herself, leading to concussion.

Much later it is realized that, “Josephine and only Josephine fitted in with all the necessary qualifications (of a murderer). Her vanity, her persistent self importance, her delight in talking, her reiteration how clever she was, and how stupid the police were” (183).

From her diary it becomes clear that all this was a result of “the fury of thwarted egoism”. Her grudge against her grandfather was that he had not allowed her to learn belly dancing while Nannie tried to put on end to her showing off and tried to belittle her by saying she was only a little girl. The narrator on knowing this, feels pity for the unloved child who had been jokingly referred to as “a changeling” (141) by her mother, the actress Magda West “I had liked Josephine….I still felt a fondness for her….you do not like anyone less because they have tuberculosis or some other fatal
disease. Josephine was a little monster, but she was a pathetic little monster. She had been born with a kink – the crooked child of the little Crooked House” (187).

Nevile Strange (Towards Zero) is the perfect sportsman who never loses his temper, not even on losing a match which is perfectly within his grasp to win but changes hands in the last minutes. In fact he seems to carry his sportsman spirit to his personal life also. After having divorced his first wife Audrey, he now seeks a reconciliation with her and considers Audrey’s forthcoming visit to Lady Tressilian’s house, Gull’s Point, in September, as the perfect time for Audrey, Kay (his young beautiful second wife) and himself, to develop a mutually harmonious relationship amongst themselves. He plans their (Nevile and Kay’s) intended visit to Gull’s Point in June to be postponed till September against Kay’s wishes which causes her to comment sarcastically, “What a little sportsman! How to play the game in love and matrimony!” (32). Strangely Audrey also agrees to the plan.

It later comes to light that Nevile wanted to take revenge from Audrey who had left him for another man. To save his face in front of the world, he had decided to divorce her and get married to Kay. However, he cannot forgive Audrey for her desertion and makes a secret plan to murder Lady Tressilian and have Audrey hanged for the murder by faking a lot of evidence against her, thus what he wanted was “the murder of Audrey Strange” (206).

When Superintendent Battle uncovers his plot after the death of Lady Tressilian and, in order to get his confession, tries to goad him by mocking him and his plan. “Flicked you on the raw, didn’t she, when she went off and left you for another man? Hurt your vanity!...But underneath you planned what you’d do to Audrey, you couldn’t think of anything worse than this – to get her hanged. A fine
idea – pity you hadn’t the brain to carry it out better!...Anyone who does you an injury has to be punished – and death doesn’t seem to you an excessive penalty for them to pay” (210).

This elicits the desired admission of guilt from Nevile who seemed to have completely gone over the edge on being confronted with his crime, “It was a clever idea – It was. You’d never have guessed. Never!....I’d thought out every detail – every detail! I can’t help what went wrong….Curse Audrey – she shall hang – you’ve got to hang her – I want her to die afraid – to die – to die….I hate her. I tell you I want her to die ....” (210- 211).

The truth is then admitted by Audrey who says, “I began to be afraid of Nevile soon after we were married. But the awful thing is, you see, that I didn’t know why. I began to think that I was mad….Nevile seemed to me when I married him so particularly sane and normal – always delightfully good – tempered and pleasant” (211-212).

Superintendent Battle correctly surmises that, “He played the part of the good sportsman, you know. That’s why he could keep his temper so well at tennis. His role as a good sportsman was more important to him then winning matches. But it put a strain upon him, of course; playing a part always does. He got worse underneath” (211-212).

In Sleeping Murder we come across a case of possessive love that Dr Kennedy feels for his much younger half–sister, Helen. This was carried to such an extent that he not only prevents her from making friends with the members of the opposite sex, but also does not even allow her to indulge herself by having such harmless pastimes
as a tennis party. He secretly cuts down the tennis net to pieces and being a doctor tries to infect her grazed foot so that she would not be able to attend any dances either.

This obsession later manifests itself in his strangling his sister to death (who had in the meantime secretly got married to Major Halliday). When he comes to know that Helen has begun to realize his undue possessiveness and plans to go away with her husband to a faraway place, he kills her because “he’d definitely passed the borderline between sanity and madness by that time” (216). To cover up the crime he, under the influence of drugs, tries to convince Halliday that he himself had killed his wife Helen and thus causes Halliday to have a nervous breakdown and spend the rest of his life as a patient in a mental asylum. Even after his sister’s death, he continues to taint her reputation by giving out that she had run away with some married man.

His case can be summarized as:

He wasn’t normal. He adored his half-sister and that affection became possessive and unwholesome. That kind of thing happens often that you’d think. Fathers who don’t want their daughters to marry – or even to meet young men….and so, racked with love and frenzy, he quoted those tragic lines that were so apposite….those lines from the Duchess of Malfi. (213-217)

“Cover her face. Mine eyes dazzle, she died young .... (27)

We thus come across some very interesting psychological characters in Christie’s work, who are sane in their madness also. This not only makes it an intriguing read but also arouses our pity for these mentally tortured specimens of humanity.
How Character is revealed: Art of Characterization in Christie

“Character is a product; while characterization is a process.” (Gill 10). “We are unhappy about characters who remain unruffled and smooth in speech despite the most trying of circumstance” (Gill 13). Keeping these precepts in mind and following Marjorie Boulton, who in *The Anatomy of the Novel* reveals some ways in which characterization takes place or some methods by which character can be revealed by the author, we shall study a character, Caroline Crale, created by Christie in her book *Five Little Pigs*.

Caroline Crale was the wife of Amyas Crale the famous painter. She was accused of murdering her husband by administering poison in his beer glass. The motive that seems to be obvious was that Amyas was painting a young girl Elsa Greer, who declares to Caroline that Amyas wanted to marry her. When confronted by Caroline, Amyas tries to avoid the topic altogether. There were five people present in the house on the fatal afternoon who were – Meredith Blake-a neighbour, Philip Blake-his younger brother, Angela Warren-Caroline’s half-sister, Miss Williams–her governess and lastly Elsa Greer. Since all evidence and motive points against her, Caroline Crale is convicted for the crime and dies in jail. Now after sixteen years Poirot reopens the case to question Caroline's guilt or innocence on the insistence of her daughter, Carla, who had at the time, been five years old.

**Direct statement by the author:**

Since when the book opens Caroline Crale has already been dead some fifteen years ago, the author portrays her through other characters forbearing to give any direct statement about her. However, making a little digression, we can see this
technique being employed in many of her other works, in the assertions made by the
writer for his characters, like in the description of Mr Shaitana in *Cards on the Table*:

The whole of Mr Shaitana’s person caught the eye – it was designed to
do so. He deliberately attempted a Mephistophelian effect. He was tall
and thin, his face was long and melancholy, his eyebrows were heavily
accented and jet-black, and he wore a moustache with stiff waxed ends
and a tiny black imperial. His clothes were works of art – of exquisite
cut – but with a suggestion of bizarre….Whether Mr Shaitana was an
Argentine, or a Portuguese, or a Greek, or some nationality rightly
despised by the insular Briton, nobody knew….He was a man of whom
nearly everybody was a little afraid….There was a feeling, perhaps,
that he knew a little too much about everybody. And there was a
feeling, too, that his sense of humour was a curious one. (10-11)

**Direct statement by the person himself:**

Returning to the book *Five Little Pigs*, Caroline’s dead voice is heard through
the letters which she writes to her sister Angela and also to her daughter Carla, to be
handed to her when she would turn twenty-one years of age.

In the first letter she writes, “I have never told you lies and I don’t now when I
say that I am actually happy - that I feel an essential rightness and a peace that I have
never know before. It’s all right darling, it’s all right... Do this one thing for me- be
happy. I’ve told you – I’m happy. One has to pay one’s debts. It’s lovely to feel
peaceful” (193-194). In the second, she simply professes her innocence to her
daughter so that she could be sure that her mother was not a murderer.
Direct statement by other people:

Here we get a sketch of Caroline in other people’s remembrances.

The counsel for the defence, Sir Montague Depleach, recalls, “Caroline Crale didn’t even try to put up a fight….Frankly – as man to man – I don’t think there’s much doubt about it. Oh yes, she did it all right….Mrs Crale wasn’t the meek kind who suffers in silence” (25-27).

Quentin Fogg, K.C., remembers her in the courtroom as:

I shall always see her….funny thing, romance. She had the quality of it. I don’t know if she was really beautiful. She wasn’t very young – tired looking - circles under her eyes. But it all centred round her. The interest – the drama. And yet, half the time, she wasn’t there. She’d gone away somewhere quite far away - just left her body there, quiescent, attentive with the little polite smile on her lips. She was all half tones, you know, lights and shade. And yet, with it all, she was more alive. But I admired Caroline Crale because she didn’t fight, because she retreated into her world of half lights and shadows. She was never defeated because she never gave battle. (44-45)

Edmunds, a managing clerk states, “I admired Mrs Crale. Whatever else she was, she was a lady!...Mrs Crale was quality” (50).

Mr Caleb Jonathan says, “A turbulent unhappy creature. Very alive” (57).

Philip Blake remembers her as:
She wasn’t the injured innocent people thought she was at the time of the trial . . . Caroline was a rotter. She was a rotter through and through. Mind you, she had charm. She had that kind of sweetness of manner that deceives people utterly. She had a frail, helpless look about her that appealed to people’s chivalry….Caroline was like that – a cold, calculating planner. And she had a wicked temper….And there was a cold, egotistical devil in her that was capable of being stirred to murderous lengths. (95-96)

Meredith Blake recalls her memory. “But I shall always see her face as it was that afternoon. White and strained with a kind of desperate gaiety….But her eyes – there was a kind of anguished grief in them that was the most moving thing I have ever known. Such a gentle creature, too….“ (116). “Caroline had a quick tongue – a vehement way of speaking. She might say “I hate you. I wish you were dead.” But it wouldn’t mean – it wouldn’t entail – action” (126). “It would surprise you if you’d seen her in court. Poor, hunted, defenceless creature. Not even struggling” (133).

Elsa Greer is full of bitterness towards her, “That woman was to my mind the lowest kind of woman there is. She knew that Amyas cared for me – that he was going to leave her and she killed him so that I shouldn’t have him” (154). “….Hate oughtn’t to be stronger than love – but her hate was. And my hate for her is – I hate her, I hate her – I hate her….“ (160). “Even hanging was too good for her….“ (258).

Miss Williams expresses her opinion as, “Mrs Crale, for instance, was what is termed an excellent mother, always careful of Carlas’s welfare, of her health – playing with her at the right times and always kind and gay. But for all that, Mrs Crale was really completely wrapped up in her husband. She existed, one might say, only in
him and for him” (169). “I was very fond of Mrs Cræle….very fond of her and very sorry for her” (170).

Angela Warren tries to find an excuse for her sister’s conduct. When Angela had been a small child, she had become permanently disfigured as a result of being hit by her elder sister Caroline in a fit of jealous rage. Alluding to the same incident, she says:

Supposing that you are a person normally affectionate and of kindly disposition – but that you are also liable to intense jealousy. And supposing that during the years of your life when control is most difficult, you do, in a fit of rage, come near to committing what is, in effect, murder. Think of the awful shock, the horror, the remorse that seizes upon you. To a sensitive person, like Caroline, that horror and remorse will never quite leave you. Caro was haunted, continually haunted, by the fact that she had injured me. That knowledge never left her in peace.... The result of that impulse to violence was a life-long abhorrence of any further act of the same kind. (188-189)

Carla Lemarchant has a dim recollection of her mother:

No, mother wasn’t like that! You’re thinking that it might be a lie - a sentimental lie….there are some things that children know quite will.

I can remember my mother – a patchy remembrance, of course, but I remember quite well the sort of person she was. She didn’t tell lies – kind lies. If a thing was going to hurt she always told you so. Dentists, or thorns in your finger – all that sort of thing.
Truth was a – a natural impulse to her. I wasn’t, I don’t think, especially fond of her – but I trusted her. I still trust her! (16-17)

**Dramatization: the Character shows his traits in action:**

Though Caroline Crail is dead when the book opens, yet she lives on in the memory of the key witnesses. Philips Blake recalls that Amyas and Caroline were having an argument in the library, which was overheard, by both him and Elsa Greer. When Amyas went away to paint Elsa, Philip found Caroline standing inside and she was murmuring to herself, “It’s too cruel....” (220). He further describes, “That’s what she said. Then she walked past me and upstairs still without seeming to see me – just like a person intent on some inner vision” (220).

At the time Philip assumed that Caroline was disturbed by Amyas’s treatment of herself but later Poirot sums up rightly that “It was of Elsa she was thinking” (327) because Amyas had no intention of divorcing Caroline and was fooling Elsa and letting her believe that he intended to marry her because being a true artist, he was bent on having the painting finished without any interruption from Elsa’s side.

When Amyas let Caroline know the exact position of affairs later, she remonstrated with her husband on Elsa’s behalf, “What he is doing is shameful! She won’t stand for it! It’s unbelievably cruel and hard on the girl!” (329).

This action of Caroline therefore shows her in a good light and makes her out to be a fair, tender hearted, considerate, gentle woman of principles despite the wrong assumptions about her.

**Direct treatment with oblique further revelation:** Revealed in reaction to other characters –
Philip Blake, “She was then a somewhat neurotic girl, subject to uncontrollable outburst of temper, not without attraction, but unquestionably a difficult person to live with . . . she was, as I say, attractive, and they eventually became engaged. Amyas Crale’s best friends were rather apprehensive about the marriage, as they felt that Caroline was quite unsuited to him. This caused a certain amount of strain in the initial years between Crale’s wife and Crale’s friends….” (204-205).

“– with Caroline everything was oblique, suggested rather than said” (210).

“Of course Caroline liked to have Meredith on a string more or less, the devoted platonic friend who would never, go too far. She was that kind of a woman” (216).

Poirot reads between the lines, and when confronts Philip Blake, the latter admits:

I did entertain a feeling of animosity towards Caroline Crale. At the same time I was strongly attracted by her…I had been in love with her as a boy and she had taken no notice of me. I did not find that easy to forgive….disturbed and disillusioned by Amyas’s present infatuation….she came to my room. And then, with my arms round her, she told me quite coolly that it was no good! After all, she said, she was a one-man woman….She agreed that she had treated me very badly, but said she couldn’t help it. She asked me to forgive her. And she left me. She left me! Do you wonder, M. Poirot, that my hatred of her was heightened a hundredfold. (290-291)
This clearly shows that Caroline’s rejection was the supreme cause of Philip Blake’s antagonism towards her and thus he was inclined to believe that she had murdered her husband, Amyas Crale, in cold blood.

Christie employs the above mentioned techniques to create a vivid sketch of Caroline Crale most effectively. The contradictory views about her further strengthen the fact that all of us are viewed in a different light by different people. The woman, dead a long time back, is brought alive before us as a complicated person with a life-like authenticity and that too most convincingly.

**Character-Portrayal:**

The in-depth description of each character, their vivid portrayal and their verisimilitude, is what makes the characters interesting in nearly all works of Christie.

Like in *Ordeal by Innocence*, the different characters have been described with such a masterful stroke that each assumes a distinct, individual identity of their own:

**Hester Argyle:**

To his already over stimulated imagination, it seemed as though Tragedy herself stood there barring his way. It was a young face; indeed it was in the poignancy of its youth that tragedy has its very essence. The Tragic Mask, he thought, should always be a mask of youth….Helpless, fore-ordained, with doom approaching…from the future….

‘Irish type’. The deep blue of the eyes, the dark shadow round them, the upspringing black hair, the mournful beauty of the bones of the
skull and cheekbones – The girl stood there, young, watchful and hostile. (13)

Kirsten Lindstrom – “A flat homely face. Describing it, he would have called it a face like a pancake, the face of a middle-aged woman, with fizzy yellowish grey hair plastered on top of her head. She seemed to hover, waiting, like a watchful dragon …. Of course, this should have been a nun’s face! It demanded the crisp white coif or whatever you called it, framed tightly round the face, and the black habit and veil” (14 – 15).

Leo Argyle:

Calgary’s first impression of Leo Argyle was that he was so attenuated, so transparent, as hardly to be there at all. A wraith of a man! His voice when he spoke was pleasant, though lacking in resonance….It occurred to Calgary with a faint shock of surprise, that this man confronting him was a happy man. Not buoyantly or zestfully happy, as is the normal way of happiness - but happy in same shadowy but satisfactory retreat of his own. This was a man on whom the outer world did not impinge and who was contented that this should be so. (16)

Gwenda Vaughan – “She was an attractive young woman, he thought, though not so very young – perhaps thirty-seven or eight. A well rounded figure, dark hair and eyes, a general air of vitality and good health. She gave the impression of being both competent and intelligent” (18 – 19).

Mary Durrant:
She was a tall, serene looking young woman of twenty-seven who although her face was unlined yet looked older than her years, probably from a sedate maturity that seemed part of her make-up. She had good looks, without a trace of glamour. Regular features, a good skin, eyes of a vivid blue, and fair hair combed off her face and arranged in a large bun at the back of her neck....She was a woman who always kept to her own style....her appearance was like her house, neat, well kept. Any kind of dust or disorder worried her. (34)

Dr Arthur Calgary - “...the slightly stooped shoulders, the greying hair, the thin sensitive face....(didn’t) look very tough” (40).

Maureen Clegg – “It was a pretty rather vapid little face, plastered with make up, eyebrows plucked, hair hideous and stiff in a cheap perm” (59).

Jacko Argyle – “He was wonderful at getting round women – I don’t know why, really. He wasn’t good looking or anything like that. Monkey face, I used to call him. But all the same, he had got a way with him. You’d find you were doing anything he wanted you to do” (61). “He was the sort of young man who is conscienceless....As a child he often hurled himself on another child....But it was usually a child smaller than himself, and it was usually not so much blind rage as the wish to hurt or get hold of something that he himself wanted” (74).

Rachel Argyle – “A girl of medium height, stocky in build, wearing what he had not appreciated at the time were very expensive clothes, but wearing them with a dowdy air. A round faced girl, serious, warm–hearted, with an eagerness and a naivety which had appealed to him. “So much that needed doing, so much that was worth doing!””(83).
“She had never allowed, he saw now, for human nature. She had seen people always as cases, as problems to be dealt with. She had never seen that each human being was different, would react differently, had its own peculiar idiosyncrasies....She had always expected too much, and so always she had been disappointed” (84).

Tina Argyle – “Neat, small, very quiet and efficient. She was wearing a dark blue dress, with white collar and cuffs. Her blue-black hair was coiled neatly on her neck. Her skin was dark, darker than an English skin could ever be. Her bones, too, were smaller. This was the half – caste child that Mrs Argyle had taken as a daughter into the family” (67).

Such a wide range of characters, each with their individuality, and all in the course of one single novel itself can be seen in Christie’s work, whereas in the whole course of her work she has created about 2357 characters in all as estimated by Fitzgibbon.