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Reflection of the 1930s British Society in a Selected Work of British Fiction

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Studentka se ve své bakalářské práci bude věnovat odrazu britské společnosti 30. let ve vybraných dílech Agathy Christie. Svou práci nejprve uvede analýzou dobové společnosti; jejího kulturně historického vývoje, hodnotového systému, módních trendů, zábavy a jiných typických dobových znaků. Poté bude zvolená autorka zasazena do dobového literárního kontextu, žánru a mezi ostatní autory detektivní literatury. Autorka se poté konkrétně zaměří na charakteristiku detektivního žánru, který bude definovat a zařadí do něj již konkrétní zvolená díla A. Christie. Hlavní literární analýza bude zkoumat odraz dobové společnosti ve vybraných dílech, konfrontovat je s jejich historickým předobrazem a hodnotit překrývání historie a fikce.

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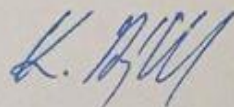
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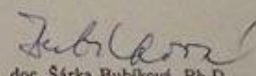
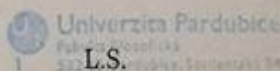
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Prohlašuji:

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Souhlasím s prezenčním zpřístupněním své práce v Univerzitní knihovně.

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Barbora Steklá

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Annotation

This thesis analyses the British society of the 1930s. The acquired historical data are compared against the detective novels written by Agatha Christie in order to find out to what extent the examined works are reliable.

The first chapter outlines a true picture of the British society in the thirties. In particular, there are highlighted the key events that influenced the happenings and developments in the British society. The historical facts are illustrated with examples from Agatha Christie's life. The following chapter covers British literature of that period. It also includes detective prose which experienced its Golden age in the 1930s. This section defines the concept of detective genre, specifies the rules that had to be followed in the course of writing of these stories, and last but not least, also lists the authors engaged in this type of creation. The following part is devoted to Agatha Christie herself. The methods of her creation are uncovered – *i.e.* how she wrote, where she got her ideas, what influenced her creation. Subsequently, typical characters from her books are described, with emphasis on their peculiar appearance and characteristics, but also on possible similarities with real people that could inspire the authoress. The main focus of this thesis, however, are women living in the thirties, that is why the last chapter is devoted exclusively to the position of women in the society of the examined era. These facts are analysed on the novels written by Agatha Christie.

Key words

British society, Agatha Christie, detective prose, women, twentieth century

Název

Odras britské společnosti 30. let ve vybraném britském románu

Anotace

Tato práce se zabývá analýzou britské společnosti 30. let minulého století. Zjištěná historická fakta jsou porovnávána s detektivními romány spisovatelky Agathy Christie, a to za účelem zjištění, do jaké míry jsou zkoumaná díla věrohodná.

První kapitola popisuje skutečný obraz britské společnosti ve třicátých letech. Jsou zde zdůrazněny zejména klíčové události, které ovlivnily dění a vývoj britské společnosti této doby. Tato historická fakta jsou podkládána příklady ze života Agathy Christie. Následující kapitola se zabývá britskou literaturou tohoto období. Zahrnuje také detektivní prózu, která ve třicátých letech minulého století zažila svůj „zlatý věk“. V této části je definován pojem detektivní žánr, dále jsou zde předložena pravidla, která se musela při psaní těchto příběhů dodržovat a v neposlední řadě jsou tu uvedena i jména autorů, kteří se touto tvorbou zabývali. Další část je pak věnována samotné Agathě Christie. Objevují se zde metody její práce – tj. jakým způsobem psala, odkud čerpala své nápady nebo co ovlivňovalo její tvorbu. Následně jsou zde popisovány typické postavy z knih této spisovatelky, a to s důrazem na jejich osobitý vzhled, charakteristické vlastnosti, ale i případné podobnosti se skutečnými lidmi, kterými se autorka mohla inspirovat. Největší zaměření v této práci je věnováno ženám 30. let minulého století, proto se poslední kapitola věnuje výhradně ženskému postavení ve společnosti zkoumané doby. Tato fakta jsou analyzována na románech Agathy Christie.

Klíčová slova

britská společnost, Agatha Christie, detektivní próza, ženy, dvacáté století

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Introduction

Writer Agatha Christie is a world-class phenomenon, not only for the literary field of the detective genre, but also for the whole of Britain. The proof of this is the Dame of the British Empire honorary title awarded to her by the Queen Elizabeth II, and the fact that her books were outsold only by Shakespeare and the Bible, as is mentioned in *Talking about Detective Fiction*.¹ This “Queen of Crime Fiction” experienced her most productive period in the 1930s, when the genre of crime fiction reached its best level and experienced the “Golden Age”. That is why this bachelor thesis is focused on the interwar period, which is otherwise viewed rather negatively. Due to the fact that the aim of the work was to find out to what extent Mrs Christie in her novels portrayed the British society of women of given era, the works selected for analysis were published in the thirties or later, but their story takes place in this examined period. When reading carefully and focusing on details contextualized to the reader by their knowledge of the respective era, novels can be linked to the period they describe. Anne Hart confirms the existence of such works that take place in the thirties, although their dates of publishing fall into another period.² As a primary source, eight novels are used, specifically: *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930), *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* (1934), *Cards on the Table* (1936), *Death on the Nile* (1937), *Hercule Poirot's Christmas* (1938), *And Then There Were None* (1939), *The Moving Finger* (1943) and *Dead Man's Folly* (1956). Women are the main theme for the analysis of these novels, especially because of the assumption that a female author is able to depict these characters with the sentiments and knowledge of women's point of view, and with focus on describing their lives, than what could be expected from a male author.

The first part of the thesis focuses on the capturing of the British society of given period, the course of which was influenced by the political and cultural events happening at that time. The examined areas geographically included the island of Great Britain and happenings directly affecting the lives of inhabitants within the development of the novels. The second chapter offers a brief overview of the 1930s literature, listing authors who reflected in various ways the historical events. Of course, the greatest attention in this section is devoted to the detective genre, which began to develop in the course of the 19th century and reached its peak just in the examined period. Agatha Christie, presented in the following part of this

¹ P. D. James, *Talking about Detective Fiction* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2009), 83.

² Anne Hart, “Třicátá léta,” in *Slečna Marplová: Život a doba*, trans. Alena Faltýsková (Praha: Academia, 2002), 53–61.

chapter, also contributed to this. The background of what influenced her creative writing the most, and thus ranked her among the best writers of crime fiction genre, is presented on the basis of her life experiences in order to outline the creation of this authoress comprehensively. This section is an indispensable part of the thesis, because familiarity with her lifestyle in the thirties provides a reliable picture of the women's segment of the British society, which is the main subject of investigation. The last chapter is devoted to the position of women in society, their involvement, relation to men as well as to women, and their own view of the time. The obtained facts are continuously analysed on the basis of selected novels by Agatha Christie.

British Society in the 1930s

The decade of the thirties of the 20th century left behind years stained by the memory of the First World War and the overwhelming feeling of a “lost generation” – of young men who were, physically or mentally, impaired by the consequences of the war. Although they were promised a vision of a better post-war life during the four years of fighting, most of these former soldiers never fully recovered and were not able to engage themselves in the working process. The reason was the indispositions they had as well as an insufficient number of employment positions in Great Britain at that time. British historian Juliet Gardiner in her publication states that “the sight of a blind or maimed ex-serviceman trying to scrape a living by selling matches or bootlaces in the street, or simply begging, was commonplace throughout the 1920s.”³ Writer Agatha Christie experienced this first-hand too. Although writing was a great pleasure for her, she admitted that during her lifetime she had repeatedly found herself in a situation where her work was the main source of income for the entire family. This was for instance when her first husband Archibald was unable to find a job after the war.⁴ In her autobiography she recalls:

Arriving home may have started with joyous reunions, but reality soon raised its ugly head. We were without any money at all. Archie’s job with Mr Goldstein was a thing of the past and another young man was now installed in his place.⁵

I tried to settle down to do some writing, since I felt that that was the only thing I could do that might bring in a little money.⁶

However, in the course of time, especially middle and higher classes of British society tried to suppress such unpleasant thoughts of the past and began to enjoy recreation and indulge in entertainment in the form of spectacular parties. Increasingly many people tried to achieve the status of the middle class to be able to own a house, a car, as well as the higher mentioned standards of this class. These were perceived as a kind of reassurance that the undesirable disturbance caused by the war was over. As an example, it is possible to mention the experience of Agatha Christie again. As a member of the middle social class she was able to purchase not only car in the interwar period, but even several houses.

Archie’s voice broke into these musings. ‘Why don’t you buy a car?’ he asked. ‘Buy a car?’ I looked at him with amazement. The last thing I dreamed of was a car. Nobody I knew in our circle of friends had a car. I was still imbued with the notion

³ Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties – An Intimate History*, (London: HarperPress, 2011), 13.

⁴ Agatha Christie, *An Autobiography*, (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1993), 320.

⁵ Christie, *An Autobiography*, 319.

⁶ Christie, *An Autobiography*, 320.

that cars were for the rich. [...]
'A car?' I repeated, looking more like a zombie than ever.
'Why not?'
Why not indeed? It was possible. I, Agatha, could have a car, a car of my own."⁷

[...] houses having always been my passion – there was indeed a moment in my life, not long before the outbreak of the second war, when I was the proud owner of eight houses.⁸

But not everyone could afford luxury and fit in the British “cream” of society. For many people, especially in the agricultural countryside and in old industrial parts of England, the twenties was still a period full of desperation and depression. This led to an enormous difference in the level and quality of living of individual social classes and at the same time between existence in the countryside and in the city. These social problems persisted also in the new, upcoming decade. Its beginning was influenced especially by the crash of the US stock exchange in October 1929, which even deepened the abyss between the rich and the poor. For this reason, the thirties is called a period of confusion. The Anglo-American poet W. H. Auden wrote that “the thirties were a low, dishonest decade.”⁹ Nevertheless, this was not a whole picture of what the situation in Britain looked like. In addition to Britain which was characterised by financial crisis and growing unemployment, there were also areas that were to a considerable extent unaffected by the Great economic crisis. This was

the England of arterial and by-pass roads, of filling-stations and factories that look like exhibition buildings, of giant cinemas and dance halls and cafés, bungalows with tiny garages, cocktail bars, Woolworths, motor coaches, wireless, hiking, factory girls looking like actresses, greyhound racing and dirt-tracks, swimming-pools, and everything given away for cigarette coupons.¹⁰

The English novelist John Boynton Priestley called it as a new post-war third England, which was in the opposite position against two old Englands. Specifically, “one byways England, slow, rural and benign, the other harsh, ugly and industrial.”¹¹ Also Agatha Christie belonged to the “third England”, and in her life it can be seen that, like many people in the post-war period, also she experienced upturns and downfalls. The *Murder in the Making* states that when her mother died in 1926 and two years later she had to cope with divorcing her first husband, she went through a very unhappy period of her life. However, this was soon followed by her happiest and most literary prolific phase, which began with her marriage to Max

⁷ Christie, *An Autobiography*, 331.

⁸ Christie, *An Autobiography*, 440.

⁹ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, xiii.

¹⁰ J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (Leipzig: Barnhard Tauchnitz, 1935), 407.

¹¹ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, xiii.

Mallowan at the very beginning of the thirties.¹² This writer is thus an example of how people of the middle and higher social class experienced interwar period – not as full of sorrows and hopelessness, but on the contrary as one of the most successful. Nevertheless, people from lower social classes were not as lucky.

British government headed by the Labour Party of Ramsay McDonald tried to reduce this difference between the two sides arising in consequence of the economic crisis. However, their ideas did not match reality, which is why the prime minister resigned in August 1931, but his demission was not accepted. As Keneth O. Morgan states in his historic work, after refusing the demission, King George V entrusted McDonald to put together a national government which would not be unilateral, but consisting of the coalition of Conservatives and Labourists. McDonald held the chair for the following 4 years when he was replaced by the member of the Conservative Party Stanley Baldwin in 1935.¹³ The improvement of the British economy in period 1931 – 1935 can be considered as a success of this party. This success was achieved especially thanks to Neville Chamberlain who was the minister of finance in the first half of this decade. According to André Maurois, the methods used for this improvement were simple:

- a/ England gave up the gold standard of its pound.
- b/ Free trade was abandoned and at the same time great effort was invested to enliven agriculture and cattle breeding.
- c/ Budget was in balance thanks to bravely enforced saving measures and new taxes.¹⁴

Ellis Wasson points out that the effect of these methods was seen, among others, in decreasing unemployment in a prevalent part of England. Only the already mentioned old industrial areas remained problematic until the end of the thirties.¹⁵ The problems of Great Britain were not only economical. Popular monarch George V died in 1936. He was replaced by his older son Edward VIII. Maurois states that he was on the throne for mere ten months, due to the negative reaction to his decision to marry a divorced American, Wallis Simpson. It can be assumed that his affection would not be a fundamental problem because of Edward's popularity, however, before the coronation, the prime minister pointed out that the English law does not permit the monarch to marry a twice divorced woman. These facts were considered to be unacceptable for a leader of the kingdom. Consequently, Edward VIII was forced to make

¹² John Curran, *Agatha Christie's Murder in the Making. Stories and Secrets from her Archive Includes an Unseen Miss Marple Story* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2012), 139.

¹³ Kenneth O. Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 610.

¹⁴ André Maurois, *Dějiny Anglie – doplněné o novější období Michelelem Mohrtem*, trans. Martin Machovec (Praha: Lidové noviny, 1993), 431.

¹⁵ Ellis Wasson, *Dějiny moderní Británie: od roku 1714 po dnešek*, trans. Tomáš Znamenáček (Praha: Grada Publishing, 2010), 300.

a choice between a wedding and a crown at the cost of setting a virtuous example to his subjects. He decided to resign and his position was assumed by his brother George VI. Although he was not prepared for the royal duties and at the beginning was not trusted, eventually he gained prestige and respect for the British monarchy, like his father before him.¹⁶ According to the book by Judita Freundlichová, he ruled until his death in 1952, when his daughter, Queen Elizabeth II replaced him on the throne.¹⁷ However, there were also other events whose character was not national, and yet they had an effect on the development in England. Eliss Wasson suggests that these included the growing strength of other powerful countries that tried to threaten world peace. These countries included Japan, China, Italy and particularly Germany, where Nazis got to power under the leadership of Adolf Hitler.¹⁸ There were many members in the ranks of British right-wing Conservative Party, who were sympathetic to Hitler's anti-communist practices. They claimed that "there was a common ground between Great Britain and Hitler's Germany, bound together by Teutonic racial origins and anti-Communism."¹⁹ *The Oxford History of Britain* points out that the socialist left wing on the contrary wanted to form an alliance with the Soviet Union and to fight together in case of a future war. The attitude of the general public towards this development abroad remained passive.²⁰ The British coalition government therefore made a decision to implement the appeasement policy. This was influenced especially by Neville Chamberlain who in 1937 became the prime minister, together with the foreign minister Lord Halifax. They did not want to allow another world war at any cost, because they were horrified by the prospects of further fighting. "Chamberlain wanted money for hospitals and schools, not for the defence of the state."²¹ In spite of increasing pressure and escalating threats of aggressive nations against non-aggressive countries, such as Austria, Spain as well as Czechoslovakia, Great Britain firmly held to the set policy and its inhabitants did not admit any imminent danger. Also Agatha Christie evidences this fact in her autobiography, where she writes: "Those years between 1930 and 1938, were particularly satisfying because they were so free of outside shadows."²²

¹⁶ Maurois, *Dějiny Anglie*, 433–434.

¹⁷ Judita Freundlichová, *Anglické dějiny, realie a literatura, díl I.* (Ostrava: Vysoká škola báňská v Ostravě, 1981), 137.

¹⁸ Wasson, *Dějiny moderní Británie*, 307.

¹⁹ Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain*, 617.

²⁰ Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain*, 616.

²¹ Wasson, *Dějiny moderní Británie*, 307, my translation.

²² Christie, *An Autobiography*, 483.

In September 1938, representatives of Britain in Munich signed an agreement with Hitler on the submission of peripheral parts of Czechoslovakia to Germany. But when the Nazis did not keep their promise and the German forces began to occupy other parts of Czechoslovakia, it was clear to the British that war was inevitable. According to the publication by Kenneth O. Morgan, this ended the period of British non-interference in matters of continental Europe. The British started preparations for war. Regardless of the financial side, they started to manufacture weapons in mass scale, with a particular focus on aircraft and warships. When on 1st September 1939 Hitler attacked Poland, two days later Britain and France declared war on Germany.²³ Although Britain did not wish to enter the fight, there were also many positive outcomes. Like at the beginning of the First World War, on the threshold of another global conflict in 1939, the unified opinions on the support of Britain's entry to war unified all social classes. The involvement in the Second World War at the same time solved the economic crisis, thanks to the new massive growth of the arms industry. This solved both the problem of unemployment and the growth of the economy.

As this chapter showed, the thirties generally was not an easy period for Britain in many ways, and yet this period made it possible for many artists to excel and inspire them.

²³ Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain*, 620–621.

British Literature of the 1930s

The thirties of the previous century was “in many ways a remarkably flourishing and creative period”²⁴ for art in Britain. These artistic fields included literature in which, according to a publication devoted to the history of the area, modernism began to lose its popularity. The reason why newly coming writers were attracted by left-wing Marxism was that they found answers in it to the topical questions of the time.²⁵ Their works reflected the reality of the post-war period. Therefore, literature was rather pessimistic, and the authors most often shared their feelings of frustration. In poetry, these writers leaning towards left-wing opinions included the group of poets composed of Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, Wystan Hugh Auden and Cecil Day Lewis, often referred to in the acronym: MacSpAunDay. These poets were particularly distinguished by their disagreement with the situation in society at that time. They shared especially the resistance to the conservative world from which they had come, as Eva Oliveriusová states.²⁶ On the other side, of people holding conservative views, there was the famous poet Thomas Stearns Eliot. Although he was originally from America, he influenced English poetry to such an extent that he is considered to be one of the most important poets in England of the 20th century. His best works from the 1930s include “*Four Quartets*” which deals with the relationship of man to life, as is written in *The Oxford History of Britain*.²⁷ In additions to poets of the thirties, due to the character of this work, it is necessary to mention especially the prose writers. According to *Panorama of English Literature*, the most renowned authors were: satirist George Orwell, who projected to his works his personal experience from the poorest class of society, where he voluntarily decided to live for several years. “In the 1930s, Orwell wrote over 200 essays on literature and several novels including *A Clergyman’s Daughter* (1935), *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) and *The Road to Wigan Pier*.”²⁸ Another satirist of the time was Evelyn Waugh. He is a representative of the rich young generation which, paradoxically, he criticized himself. Also John Boynton Priestley became an important prose writer. He wrote short feuilletons as well as extensive critical essays and devoted himself to dramatic creation. *English Journey*, based on his trips in England, is his most important travel memoir. It captures the true picture of all social layers of the 1930s. Last but not least in this list, the prominent prose writer, novelist, playwright

²⁴ Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain*, 614.

²⁵ Eva Oliveriusová, *Dějiny anglické literatury* (Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1988), 230.

²⁶ Oliveriusová, *Dějiny anglické literatury*, 231.

²⁷ Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain*, 614.

²⁸ Eva Peck, *Panorama of English Literature* (Dubicko: INFOA, 2002), 190.

and essayist Graham Greene focused not only on social criticism, but also wrote stories from the world of criminals.²⁹

All of the above-mentioned authors can be in some way regarded as critics of the society at that time, because by their creation they pointed out at the problems in the interwar Britain and at the same time disagreed with the way these problems were solved. However, also other genres emerged, that rather tried to ignore the problems of the era. These were written mainly for the middle and upper classes of society and they were able to provide to the contemporaries an escape from reality and served especially for entertainment. These included written literature dealing with crime, its investigation and the culprit's conviction. It is known as crime fiction in Anglo-American literary theory.

Detective Genre at That Time

Although an intentional killing of one person by another is as old as humanity, indeed, murder and subsequent punishment have been dealt with since antiquity, the historical roots of the written form of crime fiction do not go back very far. This genre began to develop only at the beginning of the 19th century, when there was an increase in crime and, therefore, police forces were introduced. Phyllis Dorothy James mentions in her work that the first department of Metropolitan Police was established in England in 1842.³⁰ Therefore, it can be said that detective genre emerged together with the establishment of the police organisation. This is confirmed by the fact that the first fictitious detective showed up in this period beyond the Atlantic Ocean. It was C. Auguste Dupin in Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, which is considered to be the very first detective prose. In this story it is possible to find the key tools that became the foundation and inspiration for other authors of crime fiction. One of these tools is the rational reasoning – or the deductive method – which is based on logical thinking. It means that the proceeding investigation is based on initially insignificant details that will eventually convict the murderer. Mr Dupin was the first detective deploying this method when solving his criminal cases, however, only his English successor from the pen of Arthur Conan Doyle – Sherlock Holmes – made this investigative method famous. As is stated in John Curran's book, another unwritten rule set by Edgar Allan Poe in his short stories is the appearance of the character of a less savvy friend – the narrator.³¹ However, this practice was mastered again by the English writer Arthur Conan Doyle, who

²⁹ Peck, *Panorama of English Literature*, 190–204.

³⁰ James, *Talking about Detective Fiction*, 26.

³¹ Curran, *Agatha Christie's Murder in the Making*, 35.

created the character of Dr. John Watson. This type of character has been used by subsequent generations of authors of this genre till today. John Curran also states that rules of crime fiction were drafted for the first time only at the beginning of the 20th century. The first, who formulated these rules, was the American writer Willard Huntington Wright, who performed under the pseudonym of S. S. Van Dine. In September 1928, the rules he determined were first published in the *American Magazine*. On the European continent, English scholar Ronald Knox had merit in writing the “Decalogue of Detective Fiction”. He set out ten essential elements of a detective story.³² These were clearer and less restrictive in comparison to the rules created by S. S. Van Dine. However, these rules have not become a completely inviolable law for authors, but rather a reference, a guideline for disclosing an offender for lovers of the detective genre. One of the first authors and a master in violating these principles was the English prose writer Agatha Christie. “With Mrs Christie, as with real life, the only certainty is death.”³³ This fact, that a reader can expect in her stories any mystery which goes beyond the established rules, became her advantage. She has distinguished herself from other authors, which appealed to a wide range of admirers. At the same time, she became one of the best authors of interwar detective creation. The fact that at that time she often travelled to her husband Max, helped her in this achievement. The book *Murder in the Making* mentions that he worked as an archaeologist, so he could not spend most of his time in London.³⁴ Agatha used this opportunity and knowledge of the foreign countries in her work. She was inspired by the people she met during her travels as well as by the exotic settings. Among the most famous novels written at this time are probably *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) and *Death on the Nile* (1937), in which her passion for traveling is clearly reflected. However, Agatha Christie did not write just detective stories. During the 1930s, she also began to write non-detective, romantic novels under the pen name of Mary Westmacott. She wrote six such novels between the years of 1930 and 1956.³⁵ It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the second decade of her authorship excels not only in fecundity, but also in a variety of her work. The previously mentioned book also states that in addition to her classic detective novels, she continued to write short stories, theatrical plays and also created her first radio play called *The Yellow Iris*. It was at this time that the first film adaptations of her works got into cinema distribution too. At the end of this decade, her work penetrated the television

³² Curran, *Agatha Christie's Murder in the Making*, 41–44.

³³ James, *Talking about Detective Fiction*, 84.

³⁴ Curran, *Agatha Christie's Murder in the Making*, 148.

³⁵ Curran, *Agatha Christie's Murder in the Making*, 137.

screens as well when the *Wasp's Nest* was aired.³⁶ According to the summary in John Curran's publication, Agatha Christie wrote a total of 17 novels and 6 collections of short stories during the thirties. None of her titles from this time period dropped below the standard of its genre.³⁷ This period was exceptional not only for Agatha Christie, but it is generally rightfully referred to as the Golden Era of crime fiction in British literature, as is written in *Britské detektivky*.³⁸ The reason why this genre earned such a designation in the 1930s is the resourceful writing of detective stories that did not necessarily mean blood. Blood and horror are symbols of thrillers. Moreover, the period following the First World War demanded a completely different theme. Therefore, the Golden Era of crime fiction should not frighten the readers by a detailed description of the murder, but present a sophisticated plot and a clever investigation using the previously mentioned deduction. An author presents clues by which the reader can solve the mysteries together with the investigator. As it is written in *Talking about Detective Fiction* a fair play rule should be honoured³⁹; it means that everything the detective finds out must be available to the reader too. It is a clever reading which was not taken lightly by the authors, their publishers as well as the readers. P.D. James presumes that British detective literature was also characterised by other elements, such as country environment, a closed circle of suspects, a higher social class, and a serial ingenious detective who usually solves the crime according to the principles, and in this way re-establishes the peace and order that preceded the crime. All of this aroused interest of readers in this creation. Many authors of this genre wrote not only because of great demand and to please the audience, but also for their own pleasure, not for profit. Many of them already had a career in other areas.⁴⁰ These include the following writers.

The main topic of this thesis are female characters, that is why the following paragraph is focused only on successful authoresses of crime fiction of the 1930s. In this period, women began to penetrate into areas that had been exclusively a domain of men until then. English detective fiction was no exception. As was already suggested, Agatha Christie, who is rightly called the “Queen of Crime Fiction”, was particularly famous in this segment. None of the other authoresses have achieved a similar fame and recognition as she, that is why they

³⁶ Curran, *Agatha Christie's Murder in the Making*, 146–7.

³⁷ John Curran, “Appendix 1 – Agatha Christie Chronology,” in *Agatha Christie's Murder in the Making*, 458–460.

³⁸ Michal Sýkora, *Britské detektivky: od románu k televizní sérii* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2012), 17.

³⁹ James, *Talking about Detective Fiction*, 19.

⁴⁰ James, *Talking about Detective Fiction*, 50.

are only referred to as “Ladies-In-Waiting” in the book *Sherlock Holmes a ti druží*.⁴¹ According to P. D. James, this category includes the following female writers: Dorothy L. Sayers, who differs from Ms Christie by focusing her writing skills on a detailed realistic description of the found victim. She was ahead of her time in this respect, because such style of writing became popular only later. This English authoress is also known for a lengthy description of the environment and the relationships existing between the characters. Thus, she takes away the reader from the main purpose of a detective story: find the victim and convict the culprit. Because she does not meet the principles of a classic detective crossword puzzle, Dorothy L. Sayers can rather be considered an authoress of social detective novels. Margery Allingham is another “Lady-In-Waiting”. She revelled in the description of old London’s peculiarities, therefore her works can be characterised rather as ghost stories that lack logical reasoning aimed at solving the riddle. Last but not least, there is Ngaio Marsh, a writer originally coming from New Zealand. She spent part of her life in England where most of her stories take place. However, as she was not a native Englishwoman, she could not describe the local environment precisely but rather more idealistically, for which she is often reproached.⁴² It can be assumed that it was for that reason that she did not achieve the title of Queen as Agatha Christie, who deliberately violated the rules related to the development of a detective story. However, she never changed the background of the 1930s which was reflected in her prose. She also remained faithful to the established features of British crime fiction. “She was both the mould creator, and mould breaker”, of detective prose.⁴³ In contrast to her colleagues, she captured precisely what readers demanded in the Golden Era. As is mentioned in the book *Talking about Detective Fiction*, her stories do not reflect the horrifying reality of the interwar period, such as fear of unemployment and poverty, personal tragedies from the First World War, and Fascism emerging in Europe. She described a peaceful nostalgic world where a murder was committed, but the reader is not terrified by it.⁴⁴ She tried to keep her audiences captivated and entertained. The “Queen of Crime Fiction” wrote stories that became timeless and permanently appealing thanks to the moments of surprise deviating from the stereotypical rules of the detective genre, while the interest of the readers in the works written by the “Ladies-In-Waiting” is slowly fading in the course of time.

⁴¹ Pavel Grym, *Sherlock Holmes a ti druží* (Prague: Vyšehrad, 1988), 169.

⁴² P. D. James, “Four Formidable Women,” in *Talking about Detective Fiction*, 83–106.

⁴³ Curran, *Agatha Christie’s Murder in the Making*, 34.

⁴⁴ James, *Talking about Detective Fiction*, 66.

Agatha Christie's Sources of Success

Agatha Christie herself was just a reader of detective stories at first. It was only shortly after the war, when she was almost thirty, that she began to publish them as well. The book *Sherlock Holmes a ti druzi* mentions that she discovered her important skills for making detective stories, such as the ability of combination, logical deduction and literary expression, when she was working in a hospital during the First World War.⁴⁵ In her own biography, she states that the actual idea of writing a detective story come up to her for the first time when she was working in a dispensary.⁴⁶ Her talent and ambition for writing, however, went much deeper and come out of her family circles. Both her mother and sister had been trying to write. Agatha describes that when she was young, her mother repeatedly encouraged her to try to write some story in her spare time. The result of this instigation was a story named *The House of Beauty*, but its genre was not detective yet.⁴⁷ It was her sister Madge who showed Agatha the world of detective literature and introduced her to Sherlock Holmes. According to the book *Murder in the Making*, she later provoked her to write her first detective novel when she said, "I bet you can't write a good detective story".⁴⁸ So, after a while, the first novel called *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* came into the world, with her most famous detective Hercule Poirot appearing in it already. Although at first it seemed that there was no interest in her manuscript, as several publishers rejected her, John Curran states that on 1st January 1920, Agatha Christie finally signed a contract with an English publisher, The Bodley Head. Financially, this first contract was quite unfavourable for her, as the publisher had exploited her lack of experience in this regard. She also made a commitment to write five more novels for them, which caused her troubles that were inconceivable at first. The owners of the publishing house did not consider her produced works to be the detective novels that she had agreed to write, and refused to publish them. This was one of the reasons why Agatha hired her literary agent Edmund Cork in 1923, who negotiated the publication of her upcoming works in England and other countries on her behalf. He arranged the termination of the first unfavourable contract and secured a cooperation with a new publishing house, Collins, with which she joined her professional path until the end of her career.⁴⁹ Her writing has gradually improved so much that she was able to write at least one book a year until her death. This

⁴⁵ Grym, *Sherlock Holmes a ti druzi*, 170.

⁴⁶ Christie, *An Autobiography*, 261.

⁴⁷ Christie, *An Autobiography*, 198.

⁴⁸ Curran, *Agatha Christie's Murder in the Making*, 71.

⁴⁹ Curran, *Agatha Christie's Murder in the Making*, 69–72.

would suggest that works with this level of success must have been created using a time-proven method or a well-refined system. However, the opposite is true. An expert on Agatha Christie's work said that Christie herself had admitted in her interview for BBC radio that she did not have any method. She followed only one proven rule, and it was to write about things that the author is familiar with. During her entire life, however, she kept the above-mentioned diaries, in which she used to enter her notes, thoughts and ideas. Therefore, it is possible, in a way, to consider them to be her main creative process. There is a total of 73 of these notebooks and they are not publicly accessible. They form a part of a private inheritance of Agatha Christie's descendants and most of them are stored in Greenway House, her former residence in Devon, England. Only two of them are displayed in Torquay Museum and in Paignton Library and Information Centre in Devon, however, no member of the public can leaf through them.⁵⁰ The only person who could read them has already been mentioned here several times – it was the author and life-long admirer of Agatha Christie, John Curran. He was allowed to cooperate with the writer's grandson Mathew Prichard and to study her notebooks. He created two publications based on his studies, namely *Agatha Christie's Secret Notebooks* and *Agatha Christie's Murder in the Making*. Later, by combining both of these books, a complete and supplemented work named *Agatha Christie's Complete Secret Notebooks* has been created.

Agatha Christie's Creative Practices

It has already been suggested in the previous section that her creation rather benefited from chaos than order, which is reflected in the form of her notebooks. The vast majority of them is not dated or written chronologically. An exception are only records from the last ten years of her literary work. Notes from this period are fully dated, with an exact day, month as well as a year. However, it is still a spontaneous recording of the ideas that occurred to her at a given moment. In addition to literary intentions, her notebooks contain sketches and drawings for the correct development of her plots, which is important especially in crime fiction novels. John Curran writes that it is clear from her notebooks how hard she worked on the plots, remaking and adjusting them repeatedly before they reached the form that is known from her published books. His book presents an example of her drawing of the village of St. Mary Mead with all locations taking part in the novel *The Murder at the Vicarage*. Also noteworthy is the elaboration of detailed sketches of the sitting order on an aircraft as she

⁵⁰ Curran, *Agatha Christie's Murder in the Making*, 21–29.

devised the plot in *Death in the Clouds*. Among records and ideas for new detective stories, it is possible to find even personal notes of an appointment at the hairdresser, housekeeping notes, or a French homework. She used some of the ideas even several years later. And, there are also many ideas that she did not manage to use and that have remained recorded only in her diaries. Agatha wrote in her notebooks by a fountain pen, ballpoint pen, or a pencil, simply by anything she had at hand at the moment. Her handwriting is almost illegible, especially in the period of her greatest creativity. She did not care much about the correctness of her private writing; there are even grammatical errors in her diaries. Perhaps that is why the probability of her possible dyslexia was discussed for some time. However, her fans believe that this is rather a testimony that she had plenty of ideas and made notes any time, under any circumstances, perhaps not to forget anything in the continuous influx of thoughts. Therefore, it can be suggested that she valued content over form. In addition to diaries, she used a dictaphone and a typewriter as a means of her creation, which was useful especially when writing short stories and theatre plays.⁵¹ Probably because they did not require such sophisticated elaboration and plots as detective novels.

Agatha Christie's Inspirations

Thanks to her excellent observational talent, her sources of inspiration included everyday insights and experiences. John Curran states that she could be inspired by all sorts of random things, like headlines in daily newspapers. Also murders committed in the real world provided creative inspiration. She never described the case, though, but only extracted a certain person of a motive of the crime and redesigned it as she liked. Another stimulus to creation were the means of transport serving as the scene of the crimes. In consequence, her narration is not limited to rural settlements but takes place on a ship, in a train, or an airplane. She was also inspired by children's rhymes, as is the case in *And Then There Were None*, where the storyline progresses perfectly in line with the verses.⁵² The biggest inspiration for her stories, of course, was brought by the real people, whom she transformed into literary characters. The term "literary character" is defined in the book called *Lexikon teorie literatury a kultury* as a "figure, whether human or at least humanlike, appearing in fictional texts".⁵³

⁵¹ John Curran, "Zápisníky jako důkaz" and "Druhé desetiletí 1930–1939," in *Kompletní utajené zápisníky Agathy Christie – Zákulisí promyšlených vražd*, trans. Jan Čermák (Praha: Euromedia Group, 2017), 31–48, 193–196, 202–212, 248–255.

⁵² John Curran, *Agatha Christie's Secret Notebooks. Fifty Years of Mysteries in the Making* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 105–106, 191–195.

⁵³ Ansgar Nünning, *Lexikon teorie literatury a kultury: koncepce – osobnosti – základní pojmy*, trans. Aleš Urválek and Zuzana Adamová (Brno: Host, 2006), 616, my translation.

As for the creation of the characters of this writer, she was designing them either on the basis of random persons that appealed to her by their appearance or behaviour, or according to her close relatives. *Agatha Christie's Murder in the Making* mentions that the authoress's younger brother Monty became the prototype for one such character in her novels. The description of the character includes behaviour and psychic problems that emerged as a result of the trauma of war in Africa, where he worked in the King's African Rifles. Just as the fictitious hero, also his model had problems with inclusion back into society; both needed a helper at their side and suffered from a mental illness which manifested itself by the urge to shoot at living beings.⁵⁴ The citation illustrates the above-mentioned similarities.

‘Shooting had been the thing Richard liked doing best. So, when we came to live in this house, every night after everyone else had gone to bed, he’d sit here’ – she gestured towards the wheelchair – ‘and Angell, his – well, valet and general factotum I suppose you’d call him – Angell would bring the brandy and one of Richard’s guns, and put them beside him. Then he’d have the French windows wide open, and he’d sit in here looking out, watching for the gleam of a cat’s eyes, or a stray rabbit, or a dog for that matter.’⁵⁵

Reputedly, Agatha was not afraid to project even her colleagues to her literary creations. In one of her novels she described an association inspired especially by the members of the Detection Club. In his book, John Curran writes that only the authors of classic detective literature were allowed to enter the club and their membership depended solely on the recommendation of the existing members. Agatha became a member in the early thirties. Her first title that was published under the patronage of the Detection Club was *The Murder at the Vicarage*, with the first appearance of Miss Marple in a novel. Mrs Christie would later become the president of the club. She accepted this position only on condition that no public speeches would be required of her.⁵⁶ According to Curran, there are characters inspired by the members of this club, such as playwright Dorothy L. Sayers, but also the American author S. S. Van Dine who did not belong to the Club.⁵⁷ The question remains, however, how she created her two legendary detectives, Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. The writer herself admitted that at the beginning she had little idea of Poirot’s physical appearance. Perhaps because Germany invaded Belgium at the beginning of the First World War and England was full of Belgian refugees, she dreamt up an officer of Belgian nationality. He was given his first name after the hero and strongman of Greek mythology, Hercules.

⁵⁴ Curran, *Agatha Christie's Murder in the Making*, 301.

⁵⁵ Agatha Christie, *The Unexpected Guest* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2000), 18.

⁵⁶ Curran, *Kompletní utajené zápisníky Agathy Christie*, 86, 120.

⁵⁷ Curran, *Agatha Christie's Secret Notebooks*, 62–63.

However, when Agatha clarified for herself the image of an elderly, serious man of small figure and round shapes, whose strength was in personality and not in physique, she found this combination ridiculous. To secure respect necessary for the profession of a detective, she changed his name to Hercule, read with French pronunciation according to its origin.⁵⁸ Based on her imagination, she made Poirot a dandyish and tidy inspector who prides himself with a mighty moustache and considers it his advantage. He is also distinguished by an ovate head and black hair. Many readers consider him bumptious for his dominant characteristic – self-importance. On the other hand, he is kind and understands human weaknesses. In compliance with principles of crime fiction, as a proper detective he shows all signs of deductive and combinatorial abilities that are manifested by the excessive functioning of his famous grey brain cells. He also excels in the knowledge of psychology and human natures, which he uses many times during his investigation. As recommended by Ronald Knox's Ten Commandments for Detective Fiction, Agatha did not deny him a less spirited friend in the character of captain Arthur Hastings, who describes Hercule Poirot in the first novel for readers in the following words:

‘Poirot was an extraordinary looking man. He was hardly more than five feet, four inches, but carried himself with great dignity. His head was exactly the shape of an egg, and he always perched it a little on one side. His moustache was very stiff and military. The neatness of his attire was almost incredible, I believe a speck of dust would have caused him more pain than a bullet wound. Yet this quaint dandyfied little man who, I was sorry to see, now limped badly, had been in his time one of the most celebrated members of the Belgian police.’⁵⁹

On the basis of the examined notebooks, John Curran reports that madam Christie met in her life two men who fulfilled her realistic ideas of the appearance of Hercule Poirot. However, due to her shy nature, she never got acquainted with them personally so she never introduced an ideal embodiment of the popular detective. The appearance of this fictitious character therefore remains to the imagination of each reader only on the basis of the verbal description. The writer also confessed that from the very beginning she wanted to create a female detective. However, in the period of the First World War, when she thought about her first investigator, it was not common for women to work actively in the police forces. So her Miss Marple came to the world only several years later, as an amateur investigating elderly spinster. Jane Marple is undoubtedly one of the most known female literary detectives, nevertheless, she is not the very first, as some might believe. According to some literary experts, her model is

⁵⁸ Christie, *An Autobiography*, 263–254.

⁵⁹ Agatha Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), 15.

the fictitious character of Amelia Butterworth created by the American author Anna Katharine Green already in 1897.⁶⁰ However, in Mrs Christie's own words, she herself did not remember the exact initial stimulus to create this character. She only states that the female detective was to be similar to contemporaries of her grandmother.⁶¹ In *Slečna Marplová*, the detective is characterised in the following words:

Her face was pink and crinkled, her teeth ladylike. She was tall and thin and had very pretty china-blue eyes which could look innocent or shrewd depending on one's point of view. Her general expression was usually described as sweet, with her head a little on one side, looking like an amiable cockatoo, but this could change when she was on the trail of someone evil.⁶²

The two most famous investigators created by the Queen of Crime Fiction entered the world of detective literature at an older age. Although they gave a reliable and experienced impression, if both characters aged equally with their readers, both would be over a hundred years old when they were solving their last cases. Agatha Christie herself was aware of this fact and when their admirers kept urging her to continue writing stories with these heroes, she decided that her two characters would not age. Perhaps for this reason she also introduced new characters to her books. These were, for example, the couple of young spies Tommy and Tuppence Beresford who were getting older and enriched by new discoveries with each new story. Nevertheless, they have never achieved such fame as Hercule Poirot or Miss Marple, who, despite their age, survived even her creator. In her novels, Christie was able to portray the lives of ordinary people, too. Through them she enabled forming ideas of the society of their era even many years later. She paid great attention to her female heroes. The following part of the thesis therefore discusses female characters in order to analyze the extent to which these literary persons match the historical picture.

⁶⁰ Curran, *Agatha Christie's Murder in the Making*, 149.

⁶¹ Christie, *An Autobiography*, 447–449.

⁶² Hart, *Slečna Marplová*, 78.

Women in Agatha Christie's Novels

As has been outlined in some of the previous sections, Agatha Christie represents an example of a typical woman of the middle class in the 1930s. Although most women of the time were not fortunate enough to preserve their legacy up to the present day, this writer was able, through her short stories and novels, to intermedicate the lives of women across all social strata. She did not try to be a chronicler of the time, but because she was inspired by where she lived, what she saw and knew, she projected the period into her works and it is reflected in her literary characters.

Women Before the 1930s

The period of the First World War, when all the population had to engage in the operation of society, added more duties to the roles of women as wives and mothers. When actively working part of the male society was forced to fight in the frontline, the turn came to the gentle sex to assume their roles. According to an article written by T. J. Hatton and R. E. Bailey, women got to the work positions previously occupied by men. Although it required a considerable effort at first, it proved that women are able and willing to work in a wide range of industrial jobs.⁶³ “Between 1914 and 1918 an estimated two million women replaced men in the labour force.”⁶⁴ Juliet Gardiner reports that in 1915 women filled ammunition factories.⁶⁵ “During the First World War, more than 700,000 women worked in the arms industry.”⁶⁶ But they also held, among others, voluntary roles of nurses. Agatha Christie in her younger years also performed this work. She described her experience in her autobiography:

For strictly nursing duties those chosen first had been mostly the middle-aged, and those considered to have some experience of looking after men in illness. Young girls had not been felt suitable. Then there was a further consignment known as ward-maids, who did the housework and cleaning of the Town Halls: brasses, floors, and such things; and finally there was the kitchen staff. Several people who did not want to nurse had applied for kitchen work; the ward-maids, on the other hand, were actually a reserve force, waiting eagerly to step up into nursing as soon as a vacancy should occur. There was a staff of about eight trained hospital nurses; all the rest were V.A.D.s.⁶⁷

⁶³ T. J. Hatton and R. E. Bailey, “Female Labour Force Participation in Interwar Britain,” *Oxford Economic Papers, New Series* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 166.

⁶⁴ Hatton and Bailey, “Female Labour Force Participation in Interwar Britain,” 166.

⁶⁵ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 39.

⁶⁶ Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain*, 588.

⁶⁷ Christie, *An Autobiography*, 233.

In the above-mentioned example it is possible to see in what other positions women could be engaged in the period of war. Due to this situation, which was brought by the beginning of the First World War, women were increasingly aware of their importance and longed for liberation from their subordinate function. In the time of the subsequent peace, they were not willing to give up these achieved positions and return to their pre-war subordination. Their desire for emancipation was also supported by the 1918 Representation of the People Act, introducing universal voting rights for all men and women over thirty years of age, as is stated in the book called *Dějiny Anglie*.⁶⁸ Besides, “women over twenty-one had been allowed to stand for Parliament since 1918, and were granted the vote on equal terms with men ten years later”.⁶⁹ P. D. James writes that another important change, which was warmly welcomed by the female part of society, was the possibility of obtaining an academic degree.⁷⁰ According to Kenneth O. Morgan, although women had the opportunity to attend universities and take exams, they could not get an academic degree before.⁷¹ Despite the fact that the number of women with a degree was still minimal compared to men, it was a great progress. However, many people still could not accept this fact and could not imagine women at the same professional level as men. This can also be seen in the story from *The Moving Finger*, where Miss Aimée Griffith recalls the time when her parents gave priority to her brother Owen in studying. He became a doctor while she still felt bitterness for not getting the same opportunity even years later.

‘You dislike the idea of women working. And you are just like my parents. I wanted to study to be a doctor. But they refused to pay for me to do that, although they paid happily for Owen to become a doctor.’⁷²

Despite these reactions of society, many women did not want to reconcile to these negative attitudes and their endeavours persisted until the next period, when the effects of the First World War were still experienced at a mass scale.

War Impacts on Life of Women in the 1930s

Women were no longer totally dependent on men in all directions, whether because of their eagerness for independence or due to inevitable reasons caused by war bloodshed, where “over three quarters of a million of British men were killed on active service.”⁷³ Which meant

⁶⁸ Maurois, *Dějiny Anglie*, 428.

⁶⁹ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 552.

⁷⁰ James, *Talking about Detective Fiction*, 98.

⁷¹ Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain*, 546.

⁷² Agatha Christie, *The Moving Finger* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers 2012), 34.

⁷³ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 551.

that in the post-war period there were 1,720,802 more women than men in Britain, as evidenced by historian Gardiner.⁷⁴ This fact can also be seen in a novel *Death on the Nile*, where one of the suspects, Ferguson, comments on the murder of a woman in the following way, which shows the surplus of women at that time.

Ferguson was difficult. He sprawled insolently in a chair. ‘Grand to-do about this business!’ he sneered. ‘What’s it really matter? Lot of superfluous women in the world!’⁷⁵

On the basis of how individual women reacted to this situation, three groups of women emerged across the post-war society. The first were women whose lives were affected by the so-called “lost generation” of potential husbands, as Juliet Gardiner states in her book.⁷⁶ The most famous women from the works by Agatha Christie, who were often referred to as “spinsters”, as their lovers died in the war, are found, for example in *The Murder at the Vicarage*. These characters include “Misses Marple, Hartnell and Wetherby”⁷⁷, who are neighbours in the St. Mary Mead village. Each of them owned her own small house with a garden and thanks to their social status also enough financial means for her needs. The common use of their designation is evidenced by the following quotation:

Miss Marple arranged her lace fichu, pushed back the fleecy shawl that draped her shoulders, and began to deliver a gentle old-maidish lecture comprising the most astounding statements in the most natural way in the world.⁷⁸

Another example of a character of this type of woman is Emily Barton in *The Moving Finger*, who is still an unmarried lady in her advanced age. Miss Emily Brent in *And Then There Were None* has a similar name and social standing in the group of spinsters. One of the ten visitors to the fictional Indian Island who, on the basis of a mysterious invitation from Mr and Mrs Owen also agreed to stay on this island, described her during mutual accusations in the following words:

’But the other! So neat and prim – wrapped up in that apron – Mrs Rogers’ apron, I suppose – saying: “Breakfast will be ready in half an hour or so.” If you ask me that woman’s as mad as a hatter! Lots of elderly spinsters go that way – I don’t mean go in for homicide on the grand scale, but go queer in their heads.’⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 551.

⁷⁵ Agatha Christie, *Death on the Nile* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2014), 225.

⁷⁶ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 551.

⁷⁷ Hartová, *Slečna Marplová*, 14, my translation.

⁷⁸ Agatha Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2017), chap. 30, Kindle.

⁷⁹ Agatha Christie, *And Then There Were None* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2015), 155.

In addition to spinsters described above, there were also widows who lost also sons in the war and had to face the gloomy reality. A representative of this group is Mrs Amy Folliat, appearing in *Dead Man's Folly*. She owned a manor which she was forced to sell after losing her husband and two sons in the war. Such an estate was too large to handle for a lonely woman, and she did not have enough money to pay the operation of such a property.

‘It’s sad, the toll taken by the war. Young men killed in battle – death duties and all that. Then whoever comes into a place can’t afford to keep it up and has to sell –’⁸⁰

All these types of women appearing in selected novels come from the middle and upper class. Thanks to this position, their existential problems were solvable. Thus, they represent a happier group of single ladies of the interwar period. However, the tragedy of the lost generation also affected lower social classes, whose life was filled not only by the feeling of their own redundancy, but who were often without their own home and coped with problems related to low incomes. Historian Juliet Gardiner states that Miss Florence White established National Spinsters’ Pension Association just for such women, and through it she drew attention to the problems of single women of the lower class.⁸¹ In particular, she tried to decrease the age limit when women were entitled to retirement benefits.

The last group consisted of “redundant” young women who lost no one in the war, and yet it influenced their future, particularly in two directions. There was the type of a young woman who believed that she did not need men by their side and chose independence and freedom on her own. It was “the so called ‘bachelor girl’, that semi-glamorous figure who later in the century would involve into the well-paid ‘singleton’ with her (short-term) elected independence and sociable community of like-minded others.”⁸² Despite this original plan, many of these girls eventually fell in love and had a serious relationship. These include Miss Rhoda Dawes from *Cards on the Table*, who is a typical independent woman. She belonged to the middle class, and yet she was able to get her own house without anyone’s help. It could be expected that she would want to share the purchased house with a man, but Rhoda did not think about getting married, and instead offered a place to stay to her friend Anne. Together they enjoy life without commitments, as is illustrated by the following excerpts.

‘I was looking about for a cottage,’ said Rhoda, ‘and wanting some one to share it with me. [...] I asked Anne to come here with me, and she’s been here ever since.’⁸³

⁸⁰ Agatha Christie, *Dead Man's Folly* (New York: Pocket Books, 1961), 151.

⁸¹ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 559.

⁸² Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 549.

⁸³ Agatha Christie, *Cards on the Table*, (London: HarperCollinsPublishers: 1993), 111–112.

'These young ladies aren't what you'd call rich, but they have a very pleasant life. It's Miss Dawes has got the money, of course. Miss Anne's her companion, in a manner of speaking, I suppose you might say. The cottage belongs to Miss Dawes.'⁸⁴

Linnet Riddgeway, who appears in *Death on the Nile*, is another example of an independent single woman. With money inherited from her mother, she bought a house in the country, which she furnished according to her ideas. She does not think about marriage either.

'You know, Linnet, I really do envy you. You've simply got everything. Here you are at twenty, your own mistress, with any amount of money, looks, superb health. You've even got brains' When are you twenty-one?'

'Next June. I shall have a grand coming-of-age party in London.'

'And then are you going to marry Charles Windlesham? All the dreadful little gossip writers are getting so excited about it. And he really is frightfully devoted.'

Linnet shrugged her shoulders.

'I don't know. I don't really want to marry anyone yet.'⁸⁵

On the other hand, there were women who saw marriage as the only possible objective, although there were not enough men at that time. Many of them began to work in hope to get married and ideally improve her social status. For example, Vera Claythorn from *And Then There Were None*, who worked as a governess of little Cyril born after death of his father. Manly model and the role of the head of the household was provided by Cyril's unmarried uncle Hugo, to whom Vera fell in love. Until Cyril's birth, Hugo was the sole heir of his family assets. If it were not for Cyril, a possible marriage would ensure her rise in the social ladder.

And then, Hugo's arms around her. 'I love you. I love you. You know I love you, Vera?'

Yes, she knew. [...]

'I can't ask you to marry me. I've not got a penny. It's all I can do to keep myself. Queer, you know, once, for three months I had the chance of being a rich man to look forward to. Cyril wasn't born until three months after Maurice died. If he'd been a girl...'⁸⁶

Another type of this woman is Miss Elsie Holland. Elsie appears in a novel titled *The Moving Finger*. Just like the previous representative, also this miss works as a governess. She works in the family of lawyer Symmington who fell in love with her. After the death of his wife, Elsie herself believes that she could assume her position.

'And the very first thing I hear is that there is a very attractive young governess in the house. So clear, isn't it? I'm afraid that when older gentlemen fall in love, they

⁸⁴ Christie, *Cards on the Table*, 108.

⁸⁵ Christie, *Death on the Nile*, 7.

⁸⁶ Agatha Christie, *And Then There Were None*, 71.

get the disease very badly. It's a madness. And for Mr Symmington, only his wife's death would solve his problem, because he wanted to marry Elsie.'⁸⁷

Of course, married women cannot be omitted. Married women in the 1930s got to know how demanding it is to be a mother who in addition to the household must also manage her work to earn money, as Neumann mentions.⁸⁸

Life of Married Women in the 1930s

As it is written in *The Thirties*, the average age when people were getting married in 1930s was 27 years for men, and 25 years for women. However, in principle, couples coming from lower classes entered into marriage sooner than those in higher classes.⁸⁹ The society largely believed that "happiness was only obtainable via a husband, a cosy home and kiddies."⁹⁰ Nevertheless, marriage had certain pitfalls. Unpleasant difficulties a married woman could face included adultery, desertion, cruelty, habitual drunkenness and more. Since 1st January 1938, according to Juliet Gardiner, it has been made possible to get divorced for these reasons, because Matrimonial Causes Act entered into force and people were allowed to ask for a divorce after three years of marriage because of adultery or other reasons.⁹¹ Although many women considered a divorce, they changed their mind in many cases to keep their position, or because of children. An example of such women can be found in the wife of Simeon Lee in *Hercule Poirot's Christmas*, who endured the rudeness and frequent infidelities of her wealthy husband.

'When I think of it – of all that she suffered – my mother...'

'She was so sweet, Hilda, and so patient. Lying there, often in pain, but bearing it – enduring everything. And when I think of my father' – his face darkened – 'bringing all that misery into her life – humiliating her – boasting of his love affairs – constantly unfaithful to her and never troubling to conceal it.' [...]

'She thought it was her duty to remain. Besides, it was her home – where else should she go?' [...]

'She had us to consider. Even if she divorced my father, what would have happened? He would probably have married again. There might have been a second family. Our interests might have gone to the wall. She had to think of all those considerations.'⁹²

Women were well aware that by divorcing they would lose many of the benefits brought with the position of a married woman. One of them was for example a housekeeper – servant

⁸⁷ Christie, *The Moving Finger*, 93.

⁸⁸ Stanislav K. Neumann, *Dějiny ženy: populárně sociologické, etnologické a kulturně historické kapitoly* (Praha: Otakar II., 1999), 1035.

⁸⁹ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 554.

⁹⁰ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 549.

⁹¹ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 547.

⁹² Agatha Christie, *Hercule Poirot's Christmas* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1993), 25.

helping the lady with everyday activities such as cooking and cleaning. She was a common part of families of middle and higher class. Thus, women from lower segments of society were employed and through work could fulfil their desire to take care of others. Subsequently, courses were organized to prepare for such type of work. Juliet Gardiner states that during the interwar period, the Central Commission on Women Training and Employment taught 4000 to 5000 women in Home Craft and Home Maker courses.⁹³ According to the Ministry of Employment, these courses were designed “to accustom trainees to live and sleep away from home and to observe the routine which resident domestic service entails.”⁹⁴ A maid working in the house of a richer family can be found in almost every selected novel. For example, in *The Murder at the Vicarage*, where there are several maids. One of them is servant Mary, who works at the local vicarage. Also Rosa is in the town. She serves at the Old Chateau for Anna Protheroe and is described in the following way: “Rose's demeanour was still that of the perfect servant, polite, anxious to assist, and completely uninterested.”⁹⁵ Servants can be found also in *Cards on the Table*: “The door was opened by an elderly parlourmaid with an immaculate white cap and apron.”⁹⁶ This is a description of a woman who serves in the house of Mrs Lorrimer. This excerpt reveals clothes typical of the servants at this time. Not only Agatha Christie had servants in her works, but she employed quite a few of them herself, as she writes in her autobiography.⁹⁷ Although some women began to work in higher-positioned families, many of advancements of the 1930s were still unavailable to them, such as the provision of contraceptive counselling for married women, which was approved in 1930 by the British Medical Association, as was reported in *The Thirties*.⁹⁸ Because most women, who were lower in the social ranking, did not have sufficient financial means for medical care, women from the working class had to use other methods of interrupting unwanted pregnancies. These methods to cause abortion at an early stage included, among others, “bumping down stairs, drinking copious quantities of gin [or] getting pills from the chemist.”⁹⁹ Moreover, at that time it was impermissible for an unmarried woman to be expecting a baby. As Eileen Whiteing mentioned: “our sex-life was expected to be (and generally was) non-existent before marriage.”¹⁰⁰ Among characters from Agatha

⁹³ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 41.

⁹⁴ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 41.

⁹⁵ Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, chap. 19.

⁹⁶ Christie, *Cards on the Table*, 85.

⁹⁷ Christie, *An Autobiography*, 275–324.

⁹⁸ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 214.

⁹⁹ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 567.

¹⁰⁰ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 565.

Christie's books dealing with such unwanted pregnancy can be found Beatrice Taylor mentioned in *And Then There Were None* – a single young woman who worked as a maidservant for Miss Brent. Beatrice got pregnant and her employer dismissed her for this reason. Because her parents were ashamed of her pregnancy too, the young woman found herself in a difficult situation that resulted in suicide.

'Beatrice Taylor was in service with me. Not a nice girl – as I found out too late. I was very much deceived in her. She had nice manners and was very clean and willing. I was very pleased with her. Of course, all that was the sheerest hypocrisy! She was a loose girl with no morals. Disgusting! It was some time before I found out that she was what they call "in trouble".' [...] 'It was a great shock to me. Her parents were decent folk, too, who had brought her up very strictly. I'm glad to say they did not condone her behaviour.'

Vera said, staring at Miss Brent: "What happened?"

'Naturally I did not keep her an hour under my roof. No one shall ever say that I condoned immortality.'¹⁰¹

In view of the above mentioned facts, it was no surprise that lower class couples who had to rely only on unreliable methods, had more children than couples from middle and higher class. A higher number of members of the working class aroused the fear that "the stupid" would dominate the country. This category is portrayed in *Dead Man's Folly* by the family of Mrs Trucker who came from a large family and had with her husband many children. It is repeated several times in this novel, that these descendants were not very intelligent. One of them was a girl named Marlene, who in her slow-wittedness was happy to play the lead role, despite the fact that she would be murdered in the course of the play.

'You knew the Truckers? The family and the girl?'

'Oh yes, of course, they've always been tenants on the estate. Mrs Trucker was the youngest of a large family. Her eldest brother was our head gardener. She married Alfred Trucker, who is a farm labourer – a stupid man but very nice. Mrs Trucker is a bit of a shew. [...] She nags the children rather. Most of them have married and gone into jobs now. There was just this poor child, Marlene, left and three younger children.'¹⁰²

'[...] Her people are tenants on the estate, and her mother, Mrs Trucker, sometimes comes to help in the kitchen. [...] We asked her and she seemed quite pleased to do it.'

'She definitely wanted to do it?'

'Oh, yes, I think she was flattered. She was a very moronic kind of girl,' continued Miss Brewis. 'She couldn't have acted a part or anything like that. But this was all very simple, and she felt she'd been singled out from the others and was pleased about it.'¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Agatha Christie, *And Then There Were None*, 90.

¹⁰² Christie, *Dead Man's Folly*, 133.

¹⁰³ Christie, *Dead Man's Folly*, 91.

Such types of people as the character of Marlene and her family were not desirable for the society. Therefore, in 1930, Dr. E. W. MacBride, who managed to prove the inherited inferiority of lower-class children, suggested that “in the last resort compulsory sterilisation will have to be inflicted as a penalty for the economic sin of producing more children than the parents can support.”¹⁰⁴ These worries of growing number of weak-minded people are reflected further in *Dead Man's Folly*, where a member of the middle class, Alec Legg, speaks to Poirot.

‘I should like to see every feeble-minded person put out – right out! Don’t let them breed. It, for one generation, only the intelligent were allowed to breed, think what the result would be!’¹⁰⁵

Even though in 1932 the Ministry of Health created a committee to publish recommendations on the sterilisation of weak-minded people, as is mentioned in *The Thirties*; eventually this method was rejected.¹⁰⁶ The reason was many protesters, especially from the ranks of the Roman Catholic Church, because they believed that “sterilisation violated the God-given right to reproduce.”¹⁰⁷ Juliet Gardiner states that another reason which disgusted the idea of sterilisation, was the commencement of the mandatory program of sterilisation and euthanasia in Nazi Germany in the summer of 1934.¹⁰⁸ So, this immoral proposal fortunately was not implemented in British society in the end.

As has been already mentioned before in this thesis, especially people from the middle and upper classes tried to distract themselves from the unpleasant events of the interwar period. Such leisure activities of women included mainly going to cinemas, parties, or gardening, among others.

Leisure Activities of Women in the 1930s

Women of the 1930s were well aware of the ongoing era of emancipation and the opportunities it brought to them. Most of the young women had similar characteristics – they were brave, spirited, lively as well as belligerent. All these characteristics were reflected in their behaviour, which is why it was not exceptional when ladies visited pubs and bars where they

¹⁰⁴ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 214.

¹⁰⁵ Christie, *Dead Man's Folly*, 43.

¹⁰⁶ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 214.

¹⁰⁷ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 215.

¹⁰⁸ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 215.

drank alcohol. The fact that women enjoyed parties can be seen again in an excerpt from *Dead Man's Folly*.

‘You like night clubs?’

‘Oh yes,’ said Lady Stubbs fervently.

‘And why do you like night clubs so much?’

‘There is music and you dance. And I wear my nicest clothes and bracelets and rings. And all the other women have nice clothes and jewels, but not as nice as mine.’¹⁰⁹

Although women spent less time in such way than men, of course, historian Gardiner writes that in some facilities, probably in less developed areas where social relationships between men and women were not so relaxed, a room was reserved only for women to separate them from the male part of society. And this applied also to cases when the woman came together with her husband.¹¹⁰ Cigarette became another symbol of freedom and the effort of women to be equal to the opposite sex. Although smoking was a rather vice of men till the time, the post-war period made cigarettes trendy. In Christie’s writing can be found evidence confirming that a cigarette was a frequent accessory of women. This is the case, for example, in novel *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?*, where the following sentence is found.

It was a first-class carriage and in the corner facing the engine sat a dark girl smoking a cigarette. She had on a red skirt, a short green jacket and a brilliant blue beret.¹¹¹

Women adopted this new hobby especially because of the film industry, because one of the most popular leisure activities in the 1930s was going to the cinema. In addition to the luxury cinemas, there were cinemas rebuilt from concert halls without much comfort and cleanliness. It was used by the lower class. Even though cinemas were visited by representatives across all social classes, it became one of the indicators differentiating them. It is possible to read in *The Thirties* that women preferred historical documents and musicals, while men rather crime fiction stories.¹¹² It is no wonder that war themes were not popular at that time. A very simple conversation between the servants in *Hercule Poirot's Christmas* proves that this activity was used for leisure entertainment by all social groups.

’ [...] Well, I’ll be off now.’

‘Going to the pictures?’

‘I expect so. [...]’¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Christie, *Dead Man's Folly*, 35.

¹¹⁰ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 621.

¹¹¹ Agatha Christie, *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* (London: Pan Books Ltd, 1968), 13.

¹¹² Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 666.

¹¹³ Christie, *Hercule Poirot's Christmas*, 59.

In addition to visiting the cinema, leisure activities of British women included also gardening. With great zeal, they made sure the area around their house was neat and pretty. The garden served them not only as a place where the family could relax, but also as a place where they grew different kinds of vegetables and kept rabbits and hens. Investigator Miss Marple in *The Murder at the Vicarage* uses her garden when solving her cases. However, some neighbours often make fun of her because of this habit.

Miss Marple always sees everything. Gardening is as good as a smoke screen, and the habit of observing birds through powerful glasses can always be turned to account.¹¹⁴

‘I want an excuse for calling on your neighbour, Miss Marple, and I have been told there is nothing she likes so much as a nice bit of rock or stone for the Japanese gardens she makes.’¹¹⁵

Women liked to share their activities, like the above-mentioned gardening, but not only, with others. That is why they founded clubs and associations of various kinds, especially for sports. This includes the establishment of Women’s League Health and Beauty, whose motto was: ‘Movement is Life’, as can be found in the work of Juliet Gardiner.¹¹⁶ Entry to this association was enabled to women of any age and of any social class. Because its members wore the same clothing, it meant that social differences or property were not noticeable. Their meetings were a “combination of dance, callisthenics and rhythmic exercises to music both because they wanted to get fit and to enjoy the companionship of other women.”¹¹⁷ Other sport activities of women in the 1930s included football, hockey, tennis and cricket, for which, according to Ellis Wasson, the interwar era was a golden age.¹¹⁸ It applies here again that women tried to compare to the opposite sex. It is possible to read in *The Thirties* that there were more than one thousand women’s hockey clubs in Britain, and approximately 6,000 women played for cricket clubs. The fact that women in the thirties liked sports and used events of this type to establish relationships with men is proven by the following quote from *The Murder at the Vicarage*. Here young Miss Lettice Protheroe decides to organise a tennis party, to which she invited also the vicar’s son Denis.

‘What about Lettice?’

‘She was out playing tennis somewhere. She hadn’t got home yet.’¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, chap. 2.

¹¹⁵ Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, chap. 16.

¹¹⁶ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 522.

¹¹⁷ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 523.

¹¹⁸ Wasson, *Dějiny moderní Británie*, 298.

¹¹⁹ Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, chap. 6.

‘Is Dennis anywhere about?’
‘I haven’t seen him since lunch. I understood he was going to play tennis at your place.’
‘Oh!’ said Lettice. ‘I hope he isn’t. He won’t find anybody there’
‘He said you ask him.’
‘I believe I did. Only that was Friday. And today’s Tuesday.’¹²⁰

In addition to the ways of entertainment mentioned above, women could enjoy yet another form of relaxation. The thirties brought about the adoption of the law on paid vacation, which meant, as Juliet Gardiner states, that over 11 million office and factory workers were entitled to a paid holiday. Because the British believed that money should be spent on their weak economy, and also because the devaluation of the British pound made travelling abroad extremely financially demanding so only the richest members of society could afford it. Therefore, British seaside resorts such as Bognor Regis, Torquay and Eastbourne became popular vacation destinations.¹²¹ Vacations at the sea were socially celebrated together with other activities. People stayed at a hotel or a guest house, women relaxed by reading books on the beach, or by promenading along the colonnade where pleasant music played. Often it also involved more relaxed clothes, which was another area where women desired to compare to men.

Women’s Fashion in the 1930s

While in the 1920s a fashionable woman was short-haired, boyish, flat-chested and waistless, with legs seen as her main advantage, this view of fashion changed in the thirties. Madge Garland working as a journalist for Vogue fashion magazine wrote: “the torso was of paramount importance, but the legs of little account.” The fact that female legs were not shown for admiration in the thirties as much as in the previous period, was perhaps due to the situation that women were penetrating into “male positions”. All of these jobs required more practical clothes that enable active movement. The symbol of this change was the acceptance of the male garment – trousers – into the female wardrobe. According to Katina Bill, this became one of the most fundamental changes in women’s fashion of the thirties. As she comments, safety and comfort can be considered as the main reasons why women adopted this type of clothes, especially in the field of work, but also of leisure.¹²² An example

¹²⁰ Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, chap. 2.

¹²¹ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 585–586.

¹²² Katina Bill, “Attitudes Towards Women's Trousers: Britain in the 1930s,” *Journal of Design History* 6, no. 1 (1993): 45.

is Peggy Legge in *Dead Man's Folly*, who dressed herself in this comfortable outfit for the preparation of the garden party.

‘[...] Here are the Legges.’

Peggy Legge, dressed in slacks and a yellow pullover, said brightly: ‘We’ve come to help.’¹²³

It is further explained in an article titled *Attitudes Towards Women's Trousers* that it did not mean that trousers became a common part of women’s wardrobe and that they were immediately accepted by the general public. To provide an illustration, the following example mentions two young girls who were despised on the basis of their clothing even at the end of the decade, in 1939.

‘The counter clerk refused to serve us saying we must have the correct change for some stamps we wished to buy. I was 17 and my sister 21! We didn't argue in those days but we both heard the remark that we were improperly dressed. We returned later and were served by the same clerk. This time we were wearing skirts.’¹²⁴

Especially men often believed that a lady should be dressed in a skirt or suit. However, these reasons were completely anti-emancipative, not because trousers highlighted the female silhouette. On the contrary, the silhouette was often emphasised, because especially ladies of the upper class who could afford to pay a lot of money for clothes, preferred skin-tight materials. Among the most popular, but also the most expensive, was satin which covered chest and thus emphasised décolleté. The evidence that white colour was especially popular for evening gowns and that “white satins were to be found in the wardrobe of every well-dressed woman”¹²⁵ is found in *Death on the Nile*. Linnet Doyle, who represents a fashion icon and a symbol of femininity and elegance in the novel, wore a dress of this type.

Hercule Poirot, rising quickly, looked into the commanding eyes of Linnet Doyle. She wore a wrap of rich purple velvet over her white satin gown and she looked more lovely and more regal than Poirot had imagined possible.¹²⁶

Every wardrobe of a stylish woman also contained one or more fur wraps, also short silver jackets were worn, mostly from fox fur. As is seen in the citation above, long scarves that covered bare arms were fashionable at parties. On the contrary, typical rural clothes were made of tweed and tartan. As an example, Mrs Oliver from *Dead Man's Folly* dressed for the countryside in the following fashion:

¹²³ Christie, *Dead Man's Folly*, 68.

¹²⁴ Bill, “Attitudes Towards Women's Trousers,” 49.

¹²⁵ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 527.

¹²⁶ Christie, *Death on the Nile*. 61.

[...] the rest of her could have been definitely labelled “country practical,” consisting of a violent yolk-of-egg rough tweed coat and skirt and a rather bilious-looking mustard coloured jumper.¹²⁷

Hats were another fashionable accessory; there were countless kinds of hats fitting for any situation. “They varied from plate-sized models to toques, [...] berets, turbans, fezzes, boaters, pillboxes, snoods, tall pointed cones trimmed with spiky feathers, [...] and tiny wisps of chiffon, [...], oddments of flowers and ribbons.”¹²⁸ This trend can be seen across many novels by Christie, so it is possible to agree with the statement that her books provide a surprisingly accurate picture of the lives of women of the twentieth century, as M. Vipond writes.¹²⁹ The following excerpts demonstrate the variety of headgear.

He smiled politely at Mrs Otterbourne. What draperies of black ninon and that ridiculous turban effect!¹³⁰

We found Mrs Price Ridley talking at a high rate of speed to a somewhat bewildered-looking police constable. That she was extremely indignant I knew from the way the bow in her hat was trembling.¹³¹

She gave a deep sigh, pushed back her country hat to an unfashionable angle, looked down with approval at the tweeds she had remembered to put on, frowned a little when she saw that she had absent-mindedly retained her London high-heeled patent leather shoes. [...]¹³²

Not only hats, but also other already mentioned types of clothing were commonly available and could be purchased in stores, in which the process of shopping itself was changed. As a publication describing the history of the thirties informs, shopping in the 1930s considerably differed from what women knew before the war. Assistants as intermediaries between customers and goods disappeared. Since then, women have been able to walk freely around the store and compare the quality and price of the goods alone. In this connection, retail chains such as Marks and Spencer, Boots, and Woolworths were spreading. Most women shopped just in these stores as they were commonly available in larger cities. Repayment sale was introduced, thanks to which families from the lower strata could afford more expensive items. However, women were in a relatively restrained position, because they were not allowed to conclude loan contracts for purchase without the consent of their husbands.¹³³ An example of the fact that women often went shopping especially to London is

¹²⁷ Christie, *Dead Man's Folly*, 18.

¹²⁸ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 527.

¹²⁹ M. Vipond, “Agatha Christie’s Women,” *The International Fiction Review* 8, no. 2 (1981): 123.

¹³⁰ Christie, *Death on the Nile*, 55.

¹³¹ Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, chap. 13.

¹³² Christie, *Cards on the Table*, 91.

¹³³ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 530–532.

in *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?*, where Dr. Nicholson says that his wife went to London to have some fun.

'You don't know where she has gone?' said Frankie.
'London, I imagine. Shops and theatres. You know the sort of thing.'¹³⁴

In case the purchased clothes did not fit and needed to be adjusted, there was a needlewoman in the town who could do it, or women were dexterous and able to adjust the clothes alone, also this information can be obtained from the above-mentioned publication.¹³⁵ Both of these examples can be encountered in Agatha Christie's writings. In *The Moving Finger*, there is a country girl Megan who is of low birth, but Jerry sees natural beauty in her and wants her to have nice clothes, so he takes her to his sister Joanna's seamstress. Then, when they show her how beautiful she can be, she wants to feel good in her old clothes too, so she adjusts it herself.

So we took a taxi straight to Joanna's dressmakes, Mary Grey, who is a clever and very pleasant woman.¹³⁶

Rose put me in the little morning room and when the door opened Megan was in her old clothes again but she managed to make them look completely different.'¹³⁷

On the basis of these facts it is possible to say that women at that era were very careful about their appearance and were not afraid to be even outlandish. However, the make-up of ordinary women in the interwar period was quite modest. Most often they only used face powder to avoid having a shiny nose. Eileen Lawrence states that "make-up was quite limited: being mostly a vanishing cream and a dusting of loose powder, with a discreet touch of lipstick – but certainly nothing like eye shadow, mascara, bright nail varnish, hair-spray or deodorant."¹³⁸ The description of the above-mentioned girl Megan confirms using not very distinctive make-up. Jerry says about her: 'She did not wear make-up, or if she did it was so light that it did not show.'¹³⁹ Another example can be observed in *Cards on the Table* on one of the main suspects.

A girl in the early twenties entered. She was of medium height and pretty. Brown curls clustered in her neck, her grey eyes were large and wide apart. Her face was powdered but not made up.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Agatha Christie, *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?*, 129.

¹³⁵ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 529.

¹³⁶ Christie, *The Moving Finger*, 75.

¹³⁷ Christie, *The Moving Finger*, 79.

¹³⁸ Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 528.

¹³⁹ Christie, *The Moving Finger*, 77.

¹⁴⁰ Christie, *Cards on the Table*, 18.

Not only cosmetic adjustments of the face were objected; there were many people, especially men and representatives of the older generation, who stood up against female emancipation and other newly emerging trends in the female part of society. All these studied characteristic features of interwar time, presented in this chapter, show that role of women in this period was not easy in many aspects, as they had to fight for their position – whether in a family, work or society in general.

Based on the above-mentioned analysis of Agatha Christie's eight novels, it can be generally concluded that this British writer provides an accurate picture of the society of the 1930s. She portrayed female characters in her books in a plausible and detailed manner, so on the basis of novels by this Queen of Crime, an attentive reader can imagine the ways of life in the interwar period. However, it should be noted that the analysis of the examined novels revealed that the authoress focused especially on the middle and higher social circles, from which she herself came and to which she had access. This does not mean that she ignored women from lower strata. Nevertheless, such women appear in her books only in the position of a servant or a housekeeper, who is staying in the house of a socially higher-ranking family.

Conclusion

The main literary analysis of this bachelor thesis was focused on exploring the society of women living in the thirties and how this period was reflected in the selected works by Agatha Christie. On the basis of the presented comparison, it is possible to say that the authoress did not try to describe in detail the investigated period. Nevertheless, through her characters she captured in her works the picture of women in reliable details. It can be assumed that the reason was that she lived in that period herself and was already an experienced writer with a refined observational talent.

Immediately after the outbreak of the First World War, also she got engaged in the necessary war process, in which she as a woman could participate as an assistant nurse. Not only she discovered in herself the necessary talents for writing prose there, but at the same time she had the opportunity to learn valuable insights from the lives of other volunteer nurses. Work opportunities and the family environment contributed to her completion of a comprehensive picture of the social life of women at that time. The reason was that Agatha grew up in a family where her attitudes and experiences in life were mainly influenced by women. They were especially her mother, older sister and grandmother. On the basis of her grandmother's contemporaries, the roles of spinsters, or widows who lost husbands in the war, were reflected in the books by this Queen of Crime Fiction. Because of the social circle in which the writer moved, most of the heroines in her detective stories come from the middle or upper classes. Thanks to her maids she was able to gather reliable information about women with a lower social status. Agatha Christie got to know the role of women in marriage first hand, because she was married twice. From this experience she could draw knowledge about the divorce process, as well as of benefits that marriage provided at that time. She married her second husband at the very beginning of the examined decade. Therefore, the findings from family life projected into her works can be considered as giving a true picture of the time. Thanks to the second happy marriage, she experienced the most favourable period of her personal life in the thirties. However, her creation did not stay behind and reached its peak at this period too. Therefore, she had enough financial means and could, like most women in the same social class, indulge in all available leisure activities and keep pace with fashion trends.

All the above-mentioned experiences have contributed to the set objective of this thesis – to find out whether British writer Agatha Christie managed to take advantage of her rich life experience and project it into her literary creation. However, her novels, used as the primary source for this analysis, prove that the authoress grounded her writing rather

on historical details that are reflected through the literary characters inhabiting her stories. The overall overlapping of history and fiction therefore does not include the entire historical context of the 1930s.

Resumé

Předmětem této bakalářské práce je rozbor britské společnosti 30. let 20. století, který je prováděn na vybraných románech spisovatelky detektivek Agathy Christie. Jelikož hlavním námětem této analýzy jsou ženy, bude cílem práce zjistit, zda je spisovatelka ve svých dílech promítla věrohodně, případně do jaké míry.

První část se zaměřuje na zachycení skutečného obrazu britské společnosti ve třicátých letech minulého století. Toto období bylo ovlivněno důsledky z první světové války, proto je s kulturně-historickým pozadím pracováno od této události. Měla totiž vliv na životy většiny Britů napříč všemi společenskými třídami, ačkoli tyto jednotlivé třídy měly odlišné prostředky a následně možnosti, jak se s nastalou situací vypořádat. Poté je pozornost věnována klíčovému dění na území Velké Británie, a to až do konce třicátých let, kdy už se blížila druhá světová válka. Jsou zde zdůrazněny zejména důležité události, které ovlivnily dění a vývoj v britské společnosti a měly dopad na její podobu. Patří mezi ně zejména krach na americké burze v říjnu roku 1929, který měl za následek nárůst rozdílů mezi chudými a bohatými. A tak tu kromě oblastí vyznačujících se finanční krizí a stále se zvětšující nezaměstnaností byly i části, které se velmi dobře potýkaly s následky největšího burzovního krachu v dějinách. Dalším důležitým činitelem v britské historii třicátých let bylo politické dění ve státě. Vznikla takzvaná národní vláda, které se podařilo zmírnit negativní důsledky výše zmiňovaného krachu. Když o pár let později došlo k úmrtí krále Jiřího V., musela se Británie potýkat s dalšími problémy. Ty se týkaly nástupce trůnu Edwarda VIII., který se kvůli sňatku s Američankou Wallis Simpsonovou svého nástupnického nároku vzdal, a tak se panovníkem stal jeho bratr Jiří VI. Avšak ani vnější vzrůstající potíže se britské společnosti nevyhnuly. Tuto hrozbu představoval zejména Adolf Hitler, který se v roce 1934 dostal v Německu k moci a postupně začal ohrožovat světový mír. Británie vůči těmto vznikajícím taktikám nejprve nastolila politiku ustupování, známou jako politika appeasementu, jelikož doufala, že tak zvládne odvrátit další hrozící válku světových rozměrů. Naděje se však nenaplnily a na konci dekády nakonec Británie vstoupila do druhé světové války. Z důvodu podložení těchto historických faktů jsou zde uváděny příklady ze života Agathy Christie, která v této době prožila své nejlepší období.

Následující kapitola je zaměřena na literaturu třicátých let. Jelikož je tato doba většinou označována negativně zabarvenými přídavnými jmény, byly vzniklé skutečnosti pro řadu umělců inspirací, a proto byla tato literatura spíše pesimisticky laděná. Z oblasti poezie mezi tyto umělce patří skupina básníků, kteří byli označováni akronymem MacSpAunDay. V próze

se objevili autoři zvučných jmen jako například George Orwell nebo John Boynton Priestley, jehož cestopis je věrohodným obrazem napříč všemi společenskými vrstvami v období 30. let. Vzhledem k tématu práce je největší pozornost v této části věnována detektivní literatuře. Tento žánr lze považovat za poměrně nový, jelikož se začal vyvíjet až v 19. století. První detektivní próza však nevznikla na území Velké Británie, ale za oceánem, kde se o to postaral básník Edgar Allan Poe. Jeho detektiv Dupin jako první používal takzvanou dedukční metodu, která se stala typickou spíše pro detektiva vytvořeného anglickým spisovatelem – Sherlocka Holmese. Lze říci, že jeho jméno se stalo světově více známým než jméno jeho samotného stvořitele Arthura Conana Doylea. Oba tyto autoři crime fiction dali tomuto žánru určitou podobu. Později došlo k oficiálnímu sepsání pravidel při psaní těchto příběhů s napínavou zápletkou. O porušování těchto zásad se zasloužila spisovatelka Agatha Christie, která si díky tomu získala oblibu u čtenářů, a stala se tak nejlepší ženskou spisovatelkou detektivních příběhů. Za její vrcholné období je považována doba třicátých let minulého století, kdy i tento žánr procházel svou „zlatou érou“. Právem jí náleží označení „královna detektivek“, kterého nedosáhly ani její kolegyně Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham nebo Ngaio Marsh. Jak již bylo zmíněno, největší zaměření v rámci tohoto literárního tématu je na ženy 30. let minulého století. A jelikož Agatha Christie se v této době stala nejčtenější spisovatelkou detektivních příběhů, a tedy i jednou z nejúspěšnějších žen dané doby, je jí věnována následující část této kapitoly. V té se objevují informace o tom, co ovlivnilo její tvorbu nebo čím se dokázala inspirovat. Mezi její osvědčené metody, které používala, patřilo především psaní deníků, kde si poznamenávala veškeré své nápady a návrhy na tvorbu detektivních zápletek. V době po první světové válce vyšel její první román *Záhada na zámku Styles*, kde se objevil detektiv Hercule Poirot. Vedle stvoření postavy Poirota se tato část práce zabývá i vznikem a typickými rysy další z Agathiných hlavních postav – slečny Marplové. Nejen že sama autorka zastupuje společnost žen žijících ve třicátých letech, které jsou hlavním předmětem práce, ale prostřednictvím svých románových postav dala nahlédnout i do způsobu života dalších představitelk této dekády. Z toho důvodu se poslední kapitola věnuje ženskému postavení ve společnosti, kde je prováděno vzájemné srovnání reality a knih. Pro správné nastínění situace je úvod této části zaměřen na ženy v době první světové války. Tehdy nahradily muže v jejich rolích, zatímco bojovali ve frontové linii. Ženy zastávaly pozice v továrnách na výrobu munic, ale pracovaly i jako zdravotní sestry v potřebných oblastech, kam byli svázeni ranění vojáci. Vzniklá ženská emancipace s sebou přinesla zavedení stejného hlasovacího práva pro ženy, jako měli muži, nebo například možnost získání akademického titulu. V ženské části společnosti se v poválečné době vytvořily skupiny žen, a to podle toho,

jaký dopad na jejich život měl vojenský konflikt. První tvořily nešťastné ženy, jejichž potencionální manželé tragicky zahynuli v boji. Ve společnosti si získaly označení jako „staré panny“. Další skupinu představovaly vdovy, které ve válce kromě manžela často přišly i o potomky. A posledními byly mladé ženy, které kvůli svému počtu byly „přebytečné“. Často se svým osudem bojovaly jako svobodné a nezávislé, na druhé straně jako chůvy a hospodyně hledající lásku a vzestup na společenském žebříčku prostřednictvím muže z bohaté rodiny. Cílem práce bylo proto zjistit, jakým konkrétním společenským prostředím žen se autorka věnovala, zda ve svých pracích případně něco opomenula a do jaké míry došlo k promítnutí historie do jejich děl.

Na základě prozkoumání osmi románů od výše zmiňované autorky došlo ke zjištění, že se zaměřuje zejména na osudy žen ze střední a vyšší společenské třídy. Neznamená to však, že se nižším třídám ve svých dílech vyhýbala. Nicméně nelze pominout fakt, že výše společensky postavených žen se v jejich románech objevuje více a jejich příběhy jsou hlouběji propracovány.

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