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The Role of Settings in the Selected Works of Golden-Age Detective 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 :

Diplomová práce se věnuje charakteristice různých typů prostředí, v nichž se typicky odehrávají vybraná díla klasické anglické detektivní školy. Detektivní próza bude nejprve charakterizována v kontextu populární literatury a vývoje teoretických přístupů k populárním žánrům. Dále autorka zařadí do kontextu detektivní prózy klasickou anglickou detektivní školu, tj. Golden Age Detective Fiction, jejíž typické rysy především typická prostředí a jejich role bude dále konfrontovat např. s americkou hard-boiled fiction. Různé role typických prostředí pak do značné míry určují další pod-žánry detektivky, kterým se autorka také bude věnovat, ale mají i řadu dalších významů a vypovídají o soudobém přístupu např. k anglickému venkovu, k exotickým lokalitám, k různým sociálně odlišným prostředím apod. S pomocí relevantního kulturně historického kontextu bude autorka tyto přístupy charakterizovat s odkazem na příslušnou teorii a konfrontovat je s vlastní literární analýzou zvolených děl Agathy Christie a Margery Allingham.

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Annotation

This diploma thesis focuses on the setting in selected detective novels by two authors belonging to the so-called Golden Age of British crime fiction. First two chapters of the theoretical part summarize the history and definitions of detective novels, then the Golden Age and writers Agatha Christie and Margery Allingham are discussed. The third chapter is devoted solely to the setting in detective novels, its definitions and the theory connected to it. The last chapter of the theoretical part discusses the differences between the rural and urban setting. Subsequently, the country-house setting and the urban setting are analysed in five selected detective novels and their differences and similarities are compared based on the knowledge obtained in the theoretical part of the work.

Key words

Detective novel, Golden Age, Christie, Allingham, setting, country house, city

Anotace

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá prostředím ve vybraných detektivních románech dvou autorek z takzvaného zlatého věku britské detektivní prózy. První dvě kapitoly teoretické části stručně shrnují historii detektivních románů a jejich definice, poté je popsán i zlatý věk a autorky Agatha Christie a Margery Allingham. Třetí kapitola se věnuje výhradně prostředí v detektivních románech, jeho definicím a teorii s ním spojené. Poslední kapitola teoretické části se zaměřuje na rozdíly mezi venkovským a městským prostředím. Následně je prostředí venkovského domu a městské prostředí analyzováno v pěti vybraných detektivních románech a jejich rozdíly a podobnosti jsou porovnány na základě poznatků získaných v teoretické části práci.

Klíčová slova

Detektivní román, zlatý věk, Christie, Allingham, prostředí, venkovský dům, město

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Introduction

This paper focuses on the way the setting is described and used in selected works by Agatha Christie and Margery Allingham. These two women belong to the most significant authors of the Golden Age of British crime fiction and their books have been popular with readers since the 1920s. They follow the format typical for this era of British crime writing in which there is a murder committed at the beginning, a detective outside the official police forces becomes involved, solves the crime, and catches the criminal at the end. Due to the fact that probably most of the reader's attention is paid to the intricate puzzle contained in the story, the setting may not be fully acknowledged and appreciated by the reader.

The theoretical part of this work consists of four chapters. The first chapter focuses solely on compiling a brief history of detective novels, lists and evaluates various definitions of crime fiction by different writers and critics. Then the second chapter defines the Golden Age of British crime fiction, briefly mentions Christie and Allingham and states what might have influenced their writing and their choice of settings. The third chapter provides an explanation of what a setting is, discusses the theory connected to the setting, and provides a few different subgenres. In the last chapter of the theoretical part, the differences between the rural and urban setting are discussed, together with the possible reason why there is a tendency to perceive the urban setting so negatively and to feel so positively about the rural setting.

The analytical part includes two chapters. The fifth one discusses and compares the country-house setting from Christie's detective novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, which is sometimes even considered to mark the beginning of the Golden Age, and *The Crime at Black Dudley* by Allingham. Both of these detective novels start the series featuring the authors' most famous detectives, Hercule Poirot and Albert Campion. The last chapter deals with the urban setting, specifically the London setting, in two detective novels by Christie, *Third Girl* and *The Big Four*, and one by Allingham, *The Tiger in the Smoke*. The aim of the analytical part is to make a literary analysis on the poetics of place. The country-house and urban settings in these selected detective novels are described using short extracts from the novels, and the differences and similarities discussed.

1 History and Definition of Detective Novels

It is indisputable that people all over the world have always enjoyed reading detective stories. In such tales, there is a plot involving crime, a character of a more or less professional detective or a sleuth, several suspects, and a specially designed setting. The end of the story mostly provides a resolution as to who committed the crime and the person is punished or escapes the punishment. Despite this repeated and basic pattern, books about murders, robberies and mysterious acts of crime have been popular with readers for more than one hundred and fifty years.

To define these detective stories may prove to be more difficult than one would actually expect. Scaggs claims that the vast majority of studies concerning this literary genre employs the term *crime fiction*; however, over the course of history, other terms such as *tales of ratiocination*, *detective fiction*, or *the whodunit* have been coined to denote the subgenres.¹

Sussex argues that crime has been present in oral and written storytelling since the beginnings of narrative² and describes the development of the genre as a not straightforward one; it lacked a specific definition and even did not have a name. Although the beginning of the genre is popularly assigned to Edgar Allan Poe, it is not an achievement of a single writer.³ The writers were geographically widespread and worked in isolation. There was a certain synchronicity, but the authors could influence each other because some works such as Poe's were relatively quickly reprinted, translated, or even pirated.⁴

Franks provides a taxonomy of crime fiction in which she divides the subgenres into three eras of the genre's historical development: the 18th, the 19th, and the 20th century.⁵ However, the beginnings of crime fiction are sometimes dated back to the Bible.⁶ According to Scaggs, the Book of Daniel emphasizes punishment and focuses on right conduct which is reinforced by using severe punishments. The act of punishing the criminal is a characteristic feature of most crime narratives until the mid-19th century. From this point of view, the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis contains elements of crime fiction as well; God tries to “control crime”

¹ John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 1.

² Lucy Sussex, *Women Writers and Detectives in Nineteenth-Century Crime Fiction: The Mothers of the Mystery Genre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 7.

³ Sussex, *Women Writers*, 6.

⁴ Sussex, *Women Writers*, 7.

⁵ Rachel Franks, ““May I Suggest Murder? An Overview of Crime Fiction for Readers’ Advisory Services Staff,” *The Australian Library Journal* 60, no. 2 (2011): 135.

⁶ Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1980), 8.

by creating an outcast out of the murderer, Cain, and gives him the Mark of Cain, thus identifies him as a criminal not belonging to the society.⁷

Knight describes that, in the 18th century, a publicly acclaimed collection of crime stories, *The Newgate Calendar*, was published. It first appeared in 1773; a small amount of the material was taken from the official records, but most of the stories were quickly written according to the contemporary events, right before or after the criminal was executed. Although not all the criminals had been imprisoned in famous Newgate, the prison provided an attractive title for the collection which was expanded and reprinted many times.⁸ Nevertheless, there is no detective work in these stories yet because it was usually not difficult to apprehend the offender.⁹ Moreover, *The Newgate Calendar* contains the presence of the supernatural; the victims sometimes make ghostly appearances and testify or supernatural trials by ordeal are used to terrify the felon and make him confess.¹⁰

As the effects of the Enlightenment began to be felt at the end of the 18th century, the emphasis was placed on rationalism rather than on divine so the law and the supernatural were gradually separated. From that time on, “human agents of justice” started uncovering criminals.¹¹ One of the first characters to investigate and use deductive reasoning is William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* who comes to the conclusion that his employer murdered another squire.¹² Godwin also uses a special technique; “he worked backwards to bring his narrative to that climactic point (a technique crime fiction was to make its own)”.¹³ The final confrontation kills the squire but Caleb feels that it is wrong to attempt to restore the social order through a one-to-one conflict, which is essential to most of detective fiction.¹⁴ And, indeed, the order should be restored by somebody who was given the authority to do so.

Dorothy Sayers expresses her belief that the detective story, in order to be fully developed, needed to wait for the establishment of an effective police organisation.¹⁵ The Industrial Revolution with its population shift from rural to urban areas resulted in large-scale unemployment which led to an increase in crime. Consequently, a professional criminal class

⁷ Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 9.

⁸ Knight, *Form and Ideology*, 9.

⁹ Knight, *Form and Ideology*, 11.

¹⁰ Sussex, *Women Writers*, 9.

¹¹ Sussex, *Women Writers*, 10.

¹² Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 14.

¹³ Knight, *Form and Ideology*, 22.

¹⁴ Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 14-15.

¹⁵ Dorothy Sayers, *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1974), 75, quoted in Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 17.

emerged and created a need for a professional, modern policeman. The invention of photography in 1839, fingerprint identification and other techniques contributed to a more efficient crime-solving.¹⁶

In this period when science finally entered the matter of solving crimes, detective stories providing a detective's logical explanation and revealing the culprit were introduced by Edgar Allan Poe who wrote "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", a locked-room mystery, starring detective Auguste Dupin.¹⁷ Dupin uses cool ratiocination and is able to collect and organize clues and facts, which has become essential to every crime-solving character in the future.¹⁸ The world's most famous consulting detective, Sherlock Holmes, is one of Dupin's successors, together with Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot and Margery Allingham's Albert Campion who are further discussed in the following chapters.

According to Grella, in spite of having significant individual differences, all the other detectives were derived from the Dupin-Holmes tradition. Like the Great Detective, Holmes, they have a distinctive physical appearance – either they are tall or short, obese or thin, or their appearance is unusual in another way. The typical detective usually has undeniable observation skills, extraordinary logical powers, extensive knowledge in specialized fields, and a brilliant imagination.¹⁹

Quite surprisingly, detective novels have a few aspects in common with comedies. The plot of a detective novel containing lies, red herrings, real and fake clues parallels the plot of a comedy which involves confusion, deception, mistaken motives; similarly to the detective novel, it also often introduces a romantic subplot. Furthermore, the upper-class characters and the upper-class setting make detective novels resemble the comedy of manners with its stable society and moral code. Both in the comedy of manners and the detective novel, it is vital to observe the characters' behaviour and determine what can be marked as a violation of the accepted ethical system, let it be a wrong accent or any flaw in behaviour, which can provide clues. The amateur detective has the ability to recognize these flaws which usually go unnoticed by the police, thus he triumphs over the official forces.²⁰ In the same way as the comedy, the detective novel re-establishes order and harmony with punishment of the character

¹⁶ Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 17-19.

¹⁷ Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 20.

¹⁸ Barry Forshaw, *The Rough Guide to Crime Fiction* (London: Rough Guides, 2007), 2.

¹⁹ Grella, "Murder and Manners," 35-36.

²⁰ Grella, "Murder and Manners," 33-34.

who caused the disorder. Crime fiction also features an oversimplified world view typical for comedies.²¹

Short stories starring a talented and distinctive detective prepared the ground for novels which had a considerably higher number of pages. Grella states that the book which transformed the short detective story into the detective novel is E. C. Bentley's *Trent's Last Case* published in 1913 which critics consider to be an almost perfect example of a novel of detection.²² P.D. James, a famous author of detective novels, agrees with the importance of E. C. Bentley who is the author of the first full-length classic detective story, together with Wilkie Collins and *The Moonstone*. The critics argued about the literary merit of these books, whether they were or were not an inferior form of fiction and whether they would meet the public demand.²³

Crime fiction was back then perceived as something addictive, not beneficial to the reader. People nowadays perhaps do not feel so strongly about crime fiction; they consider reading detective books to be their hobby or a form of relaxation. However, Auden in his essay "The Guilty Vicarage" published in 1948 compares the genre to tobacco or alcohol and describes the "symptoms": the intensity of craving (once one starts reading, he or she cannot stop until the end of the story), its specificity (the story must follow certain formulas), and its immediacy (once one finishes the story, he or she forgets it).²⁴ Chandler believes that production of detective stories on such a large scale could not have been possible if the writing process required any talent.²⁵ The critics' attitude towards crime fiction was therefore largely negative. Auden even declares that "detective stories have nothing to do with works of art".²⁶

Nevertheless, some of the definitions are not as disapproving as Auden's. Grella describes the formal detective novel as "a rigidly uniform, virtually changeless combination of characters, setting, and events familiar to every reader in the English-speaking world".²⁷

²¹ William W. Stowe, "Critical Investigations: Convention and Ideology in Detective Fiction," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 574.

²² George Grella, "Murder and Manners: The Formal Detective Novel," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 4, no. 1 (Autumn 1970): 36.

²³ P. D. James, *Talking about Detective Fiction* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 20-21.

²⁴ W.H. Auden, "Guilty Vicarage: Notes on the Detective Story, by an Addict," *Harper's Magazine* (May 1948): 406.

²⁵ Raymond Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder* (Canada: Alex White & The Online Distributed Proofreaders Canada, 2014), chap. 1, Kindle.

²⁶ Auden, "Guilty Vicarage," 406.

²⁷ Grella, "Murder and Manners," 30.

James states a detective novel always contains:

[...] a central mysterious crime, usually a murder; a close circle of suspects each with motive, means, and opportunity for the crime; a detective, either amateur or professional, who comes in like an avenging deity to solve it; and, by the end of the book, a solution which the reader should be able to arrive at by logical deduction from clues inserted in the novel with deceptive cunning but essential fairness.²⁸

However, such a restrictive and limiting definition may be more appropriate to the Golden Age than to the contemporary crime writing. It is therefore claimed that a book, in order to belong to detective fiction, must be centred around a mystery which is solved “satisfactorily and logically” by the end of the book using intelligent deduction based on the clues which were presented during the course of the story.²⁹

Chandler in his essay “The Simple Art of Murder” also agrees that every detective story writer uses the same pattern. In his words: “The classic detective story has learned nothing and forgotten nothing.”³⁰ Auden states that every detective story requires the human and natural milieu (discussed in detail in Chapter 3), the victim, the murderer, the suspects, and the detective.³¹ If classic detective novels should be defined in only a few words, it can be said that they are centred around a crime in a closed society in which all people are suspects; the situation needs a professional or amateur detective who is willing to solve the crime and shed light on what happened to the victim and who did it. Once the murderer is identified, the society can return to its original state and the reader is satisfied with the solution, whether or not he or she was expecting this particular explanation provided by the detective.

Even in the early days, the detective story was immensely attractive to women writers. Cawelti states that crime fiction was more open to them than so-called “serious“ literature; not only was it perceived merely as a form of entertainment which they could produce but the classic detective story also required the portrayal of “manners” which was not such a difficult task for them because women were at that time raised to be alert to social cues and details. It is claimed that female writers enormously influenced the development of detective stories and their contribution is more significant than in any other literary genre apart from the romance. One of the first detective female authors was Anna Katharine Green, born in America in the

²⁸ James, *Talking about Detective Fiction*, 15.

²⁹ James, *Talking about Detective Fiction*, 16.

³⁰ Chandler, *Simple Art*, chap. 1, Kindle.

³¹ Auden, “Guilty Vicarage,” 407-409.

19th century, who was later followed by Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham, Dorothy Sayers, Josephine Tey, and others.³²

Crime fiction, with its wide variety of different subgenres, occupies many shelves in every bookshop in the world and people still take delight in reading detective novels which were created in the first half of the 20th century. In fact, writing detective novels reached its peak in the inter-war period called the Golden Age and a few of the authors belonging to this era are incredibly popular to this day.

2 The Golden Age of British Crime Fiction

Despite the fact that a few Victorian critics predicted that the business of writing detective stories would soon come to an end, the new century brought many talented writers producing works of detective fiction. Even though there were still short stories being produced, after the Great War they gradually gave way to the detective novel and a new kind of detective writer emerged.³³

The novels of this so-called Golden Age were published approximately between 1920 and 1945 by authors such as Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham, Dorothy L. Sayers, Freeman Wills Crofts, Josephine Tey and many more.³⁴ The time frame is perceived a bit differently by each author or critic; Bernthal suggests 1918-1939³⁵ while Routledge simply marks the 1920s and 1930s as the Golden Age³⁶, Cuddon states it begins in the late 1920s and lasts until 1939³⁷, and Forshaw believes it ends in 1945.³⁸

Golden Age detective fiction is puzzle-based and highly artificial.³⁹ The story written during this period is also known as *clue-puzzle* or *cosy* and has certain characteristics: it is usually set in a country house somewhere in England, on a train or a cruise liner; there is always a male or

³² John G. Cawelti, "Canonization, Modern Literature, and the Detective Story," in *Theory and Practice of Classic Detective Fiction*, ed. Jerome H. Delamater and Ruth Prigozy (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 6.

³³ James, *Talking about Detective Fiction*, 47.

³⁴ Forshaw, *British Crime Writing*, 315.

³⁵ J.C. Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie: Revisiting the Golden Age of Detective Fiction* (Basingstoke: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2016), 4.

³⁶ Christopher Routledge, "Crime and Detective Literature for Young Readers," in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Charles Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Singapore: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 327.

³⁷ J.A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 193.

³⁸ Barry Forshaw, *British Crime Writing: An Encyclopedia Volume 1: A-H* (New York: Greenwood Publishing, 2008), 315.

³⁹ Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie*, 4.

female detective, and a highly complex puzzle plot which is rather intellectual than realistic (as opposed to the *hardboiled* style from the United States which is discussed in the next chapter).⁴⁰ The law is always essential to the plot of a Golden Age narrative and the story requires a solution.⁴¹ The solution may sometimes be “outlandish”; however, the reader should be given access to a sufficient number of clues to solve it in the same way as the fictional detective.⁴²

In the 1920s, the Detection Club, a club for writers of detective stories, was established. Only writers of the classic detective fiction were allowed to join, and one could become a member by invitation. By the early 1930s, all of the most influential authors belonged to this dining club, including Agatha Christie who later became the President.⁴³ The candidates had to promise, besides other things, that they would “honour the King's English”, “never conceal a vital clue from the reader”, or “never steal or disclose the plots of other members”.⁴⁴

Later there were other sets of rules invented for the Golden Age authors; perhaps the most famous British one was created by Ronald Knox, “Ten Commandments”, stating, e.g., “the criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow”, “no more than one secret room or passage is allowable”, “no Chinaman must figure in the story”, or “twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them”. These rules quite jokingly acknowledged some of the clichés from the previous works of detective fiction.⁴⁵

The influence of the wars on English classic crime is evident. Hercule Poirot, a Belgian refugee during the First World War, Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey afflicted by war neurosis, or a dead body seen by Albert Campion in a bombed house during the Blitz show how devastating impact the wars have on the society.⁴⁶ According to Horsley, Poirot and Campion are feminized and their non-violence, intuition and empathy may be perceived “as a reaction against the heroic male model of wartime endeavour”.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Forshaw, *British Crime Writing*, 316.

⁴¹ Megan Hoffman, *Gender and Representation in British 'Golden Age' Crime Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1.

⁴² Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie*, 4.

⁴³ John Curran, *Agatha Christie's Secret Notebooks: Fifty Years of Mysteries in the Making* (London: HarperCollins, 2010), 60.

⁴⁴ Curran, *Secret Notebooks*, 61.

⁴⁵ Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie*, 4.

⁴⁶ Forshaw, *British Crime Writing*, 316-317.

⁴⁷ Lee Horsley, “From Sherlock Holmes to the Present,” in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Charles Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Singapore: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 32.

Although crime fiction of this period mostly focuses on individual murders, Forshaw claims the dead body featured in the detective story may represent the war casualties.⁴⁸ The appeal of Golden Age detective novels may be partly attributed to their containment of violence; reading such exciting and complex stories could have served as a distraction from what was really happening in the world. It was a period of alarmingly increasing unemployment rates, the General Strike, the Great Depression, and the start of dictatorships in Europe.⁴⁹ Similarly to Horsley, Chandler also believes that the novels were “too little aware of what goes on in the world”.⁵⁰

To a certain extent, the war years were truly emancipatory for women because the death of such a large number of men in World War I had created a gap in the society that had to be filled by women. They were given job positions which were originally meant for men and started working in factories and hospitals. It was clear that the old order was irretrievably damaged and could not be restored.⁵¹ Had it not been for the Great War, British women perhaps would not have been so successful in producing detective fiction in the 1920s.

The Golden Age in Britain was defined by four authors and all of them were women who created series featuring male detectives.⁵² Agatha Christie, whose novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* is sometimes considered to mark the beginning of the Golden Age, is probably the best-known author of detective novels of the 20th century. Dorothy L. Sayers invented Lord Peter Wimsey who later became one of the most imitated detectives of the Golden Age. Margery Allingham with her Albert Campion, who initially seems to be almost a parody of the typical Golden Age detective, is the third member of the so-called British quartet. The last one, Ngaio Marsh, was born in New Zealand, but finished her first novel featuring her detective, Roderick Alleyn of Scotland Yard, in London and spent most of the next seventeen years in England.⁵³

It could be beneficial to briefly compare Christie's and Allingham's lives and have a look at what might have influenced their choice of settings. The “Queen of the Crime”, Agatha Christie, travelled quite a lot. Together with her mother, she spent winter months of 1910

⁴⁸ Forshaw, *British Crime Writing*, 317.

⁴⁹ Horsley, “From Sherlock,” 38.

⁵⁰ Chandler, *Simple Art*, chap. 1, Kindle.

⁵¹ Mary Anne Ackershoek, “The Daughters of His Manhood”: Christie and the Golden Age of Detective Fiction,” in *Theory and Practice of Classic Detective Fiction*, ed. Jerome H. Delamater and Ruth Prigozy (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 119.

⁵² Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 26.

⁵³ Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 27.

in Egypt, a memory which she would never forget and which would influence the setting in some of her detective novels.⁵⁴ At the time when Christie was working in a local hospital and gaining extensive knowledge of poisons, Belgian refugees were escaping from the First World War to Torquay, her home town. These two experiences gave her the idea on which the first Hercule Poirot story, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, was based. Hercule Poirot, a London-based detective with his typical egg-shaped head and an immense moustache, became one of the most popular detectives in the world. Her divorce pushed her into a solo trip around the world starting on the Orient Express which inspired her to write famous novel *Murder on the Orient Express*. During her second marriage, to archaeologist Sir Max Mallowan, she travelled to places such as Egypt or Mesopotamia which provided the setting for *Murder in Mesopotamia*, *Death on the Nile*, and *Death Comes as the End*.

Christie is said to typify the Golden Age due to her extraordinary sales figures and the way she strictly followed the puzzle format.⁵⁵ Her influence on the genre is considered to be immense; she contributed with her development of the country-house murder and her ability to violate and innovate the pattern which she created.⁵⁶ It is claimed that people enjoy reading Christie's books because of "those wonderfully engineered plots [...] which still remain as diverting as ever".⁵⁷ For this reason, it might be truly interesting to study the setting in her novels because most of the attention seems to be put on the surprising solutions of her murders.

The narrative written by her is inclusive; it invites the reader to participate by presenting all the clues and prodding him or her to try to solve the case. However, her style, setting, characterization, subject matter, and socio-political views have been frequently criticized for being too conservative.⁵⁸ According to Ackershoek, the country house which is depicted in a considerable number of Christie's novels is "a hazardous world in which no one is what he or she seems".⁵⁹ The setting is in her opinion flat, generalized and even unreal; the houses resemble rather theatrical sets than real estates. The characters who occupy these so-called theatrical sets play roles to deceive the others and have secret offstage activities which they try to conceal

⁵⁴ Forshaw, *British Crime Writing*, 128.

⁵⁵ Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie*, 3.

⁵⁶ Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 26.

⁵⁷ Forshaw, *Rough Guide*, 16.

⁵⁸ Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, 39.

⁵⁹ Ackershoek, "Daughters," 123.

from each other.⁶⁰ And, indeed, the inhabitants of the setting usually hide their feelings and ulterior motives from others.

On the other hand, Margery Allingham did not travel like Christie, settled in an Essex village and led quite an unadventurous life. Due to her poor health and overweight, she was confined to her house, never actually went abroad and knew only few people.⁶¹ Towards the end of the 1920s, stories of detection were in vogue and the genre was diversifying; tales of detection were becoming more distinguishable from adventure stories. Although Margery Allingham was attracted to creating stories of adventure, her *White Cottage Mystery* written in instalments included the puzzle element and readers were offered prizes for the correct solution.⁶²

Two months after her marriage, she started working on *The Crime at Black Dudley*, with the help of her husband. *Black Dudley* was the first book which featured the character with whom Margery Allingham has been associated ever since: Albert Campion, a silly, lunatic, thin sleuth wearing spectacles and living at Number 17A, Bottle Street, London. In 1928, she exchanged houses with her parents to have a chance to concentrate in the countryside. The village of Letheringham was a remote and little cluster of houses and the Old Vicarage, her parents' house, gave the impression of a welcoming, yet shabby and draughty, old-fashioned place with an unkept garden. From the windows upstairs, it was possible to see across the valley to Glevering Hall which, according to her biographer Julia Jones, gave her the idea of what Black Dudley should look like.⁶³

Her writing is characterized by her original sense of humour, social observation, willingness to experiment, and appreciation of the human eccentricity.⁶⁴ She imagined the detective story as a box inside which she could place anything she wanted and that led to a parting with her publisher who demanded that she should create mechanical detective puzzles.⁶⁵

These two authors have been, together with Dorothy Sayers and Ngaio Marsh, regarded as the Queens of crime fiction in this inter-war period and the works of both have proven durable and timeless. Now, when the Golden Age of British crime fiction has been introduced, the next chapter shall discuss the setting in detective novels and the theory connected to the setting.

⁶⁰ Ackershoek, "Daughters," 124.

⁶¹ Julia Jones, *Adventures of Margery Allingham* (Pleshey: Cambridge University Press, 2009): xx.

⁶² Jones, *Adventures of Margery Allingham*, 125.

⁶³ Jones, *Adventures of Margery Allingham*, 129-130.

⁶⁴ Forshaw, *British Crime Writing*, 12.

⁶⁵ Forshaw, *British Crime Writing*, 14.

3 Setting in British Golden Age Detective Fiction

Ronald Knox, an author and a reader of classic detective fiction, commented on the alleged sameness of detective novel settings and said: “If I walked into the detective-story house, I believe I should be able to find my way about it perfectly; it is always more or less the same design.”⁶⁶ This chapter shall discuss the features of the settings in British detective novels written during the Golden Age and what the role of the setting is.

Cuddon's *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* defines setting as “the where and when of a story or play; the locale”.⁶⁷ According to McManis, “a plot needs to have a setting as introductory background for a story and [...] the setting for a plot should be a fictionalized version of the real world milieus which characters would ordinarily frequent on the basis of their socioeconomic status”.⁶⁸

Therefore, the geography of the genre was based on ordinary places which people would commonly stay in or visit. Agatha Christie herself said in one of her prologues that the writer does not need to invent his or her own settings; all he or she has to do is to look around and choose a specific place which exists somewhere. That was for her the only unbreakable and inviolable condition: the place must be definite and ordinary (e.g., a train, a hotel, a country house, or a party), and must exist in time and space, it cannot be abstract or unusual.⁶⁹

The setting usually limits the number of suspects to a few individuals. The English country house can separate a small and elite group from the rest of the world. Auden says that the story must feature a closed society so that the murderer is hidden inside the group (with the murderer included, the society is not innocent). The possibilities to meet this condition are: to employ a group of relatives (e.g., a family gathering in a country house); to place the story inside a closely knit geographical group (e.g., a small old village); to have an occupational group as the suspects (e.g., a theatrical company); or to have the group isolated in a neutral place (e.g., an island).⁷⁰

Still concerning the human milieu, Auden states that it is advisable to choose a society with an intricate ritual which is described in detail so the murderer may use his knowledge of the ritual

⁶⁶ Ian Ousby, *The Crime and Mystery Book: A Reader's Companion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 77, quoted in Lee Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 37.

⁶⁷ Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary*, 812.

⁶⁸ Douglas R. McManis, “Places for Mysteries,” *Geographical Review* 68, no. 3 (July 1978): 320.

⁶⁹ Agatha Christie, *Passenger to Frankfurt* (Pocket Books: New York, 1974), viii, quoted in McManis, “Places for Mysteries,” 320.

⁷⁰ Auden, “Guilty Vicarage,” 407-408.

to successfully commit the crime. "A ritual is a sign of harmony between the aesthetic and the ethical in which body and mind, individual will and general laws, are not in conflict."⁷¹

Auden further advises that the setting should reflect its inhabitants who are, at least supposedly, honourable and innocent people. The more paradise-like the place is, the greater contrast the murder creates. A corpse found in a well-to-do neighbourhood is going to shock the reader significantly more than a dead body in a slum.⁷²

The society and the setting are therefore interconnected. A story must feature a closed set of characters who fit into the setting; furthermore, their appearance is as immaculate as the surroundings so the reader may experience the striking contradiction between the atrocious crime and the peaceful setting. It is also crucial to again stress the fact that the place must be real and believable in the role of the characters' natural habitat. Based on their behaviour, social class and history, it is possible for them to find themselves in the described place where later a violent murder occurs. These pieces of knowledge may perhaps be applied to most Golden Age detective novels, however, there is one significant difference in American and British crime fiction of the inter-war period.

American Golden Age fiction had its so-called hard-boiled mode; in the crime novels, there was a tough private eye and the focus was put on social and economic corruption of American cities, indivisible violence, and how the institutionalized law was incapable of bringing the guilty to justice at the time.⁷³ The probably best-known hard-boiled character is Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe who often worked on the margins of legality when trying to locate the sources of contamination.⁷⁴ The hard-boiled novels written in the United States of America were mostly set in a modern city as opposed to the rural or semi-rural setting in British Golden Age works of fiction.⁷⁵

Doyle's early stories about Sherlock Holmes alternate between urban and rural setting and, according to Porter, this urban/rural division can be compared with the pastoral vision in English literature starting as early as the Renaissance.⁷⁶ In revenge tragedy, there was an urban court setting which served to explore sexual and moral contamination. British Golden

⁷¹ Auden, "Guilty Vicarage," 407.

⁷² Auden, "Guilty Vicarage," 408.

⁷³ Charles J. Rzepka, "Introduction: What is Crime Fiction?," in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Charles Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Singapore: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 6.

⁷⁴ Horsley, "From Sherlock," 33.

⁷⁵ Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 50.

⁷⁶ Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 50.

Age rural setting is not “contaminated” before it becomes the scene of the crime, so the ending of the story should restore the tranquillity of the pastoral setting which was presented to the reader at the beginning. Grella states that when the murderer is revealed and leaves, the world inside the story may finally come back to its original peacefulness and the group of suspects without the murderer and victim now represents the society as it should be. They are “cleansed of guilt”, have no obstacles placed in front of them and may return to living a normal life.⁷⁷

Scaggs also claims that the setting may have significant stylistic effects because the incongruity of a murder committed in a pastoral setting is perceived as ironical and creates a shocking contrast between the peaceful setting and the atrocious crime.⁷⁸ Tuan talks about “the juxtaposition of violence with rose gardens and cow pastures” which is perceived as incongruous, as opposed to the city where violence is expected.⁷⁹ Whereas American Golden Age setting is already rotten, filled with organized crime inside a large chaotic city, the British rural one contains no flaw until the crime suddenly appears on the scene.

As for the terms describing the British and American detective-fiction writing, Knight advises others to use terms *clue-puzzle* for the Christie approach and *private-eye story* for the American variation because he feels that terms *Golden Age* or *hard-boiled* are highly emotive and imposing certain attitudes.⁸⁰ However, he is probably the only one perceiving them as truly biased.

No matter whether the crime is committed in the city or in the countryside, it is, as has been noted, vital to “anchor” the setting in space. According to Scaggs, the importance of realist spatial setting is evident in the presence of maps in Golden Age fiction.⁸¹ One of the books which are discussed in the analytical part of this work, Christie's first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* includes two maps depicting the places where the crime happened and the other author discussed in the analytical part, Margery Allingham, used maps in several of her books as well. The fact that the maps may not be of any help to the reader plays no role; they should fix a specific event in spatial terms, together with the use of titles referring to places.⁸²

⁷⁷ Grella, “Murder and Manners,” 44.

⁷⁸ Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 50.

⁷⁹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 131.

⁸⁰ Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction, 1800-2000: Detection, Death, Diversity* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), xii.

⁸¹ Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 51.

⁸² Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 51.

The history of enclosing maps to detective novels is quite interesting. Professor Demko in his on-line essays on landscapes of crime claims that a lot of early writers of mystery stories felt it was necessary to include even very simplified maps of the scene. In 1878, Anna Katharine Green, one of the first female writers of this genre, put two primitive maps into *The Leavenworth Case* which showed the bedroom and the study room and were supposed to give the reader basic spatial information about the crime scene. During the Golden Age in Britain, maps became quite popular and were used by Dorothy L. Sayers, Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham, American writers S. S. Van Dine, Phoebe Atwood Taylor and others. Maps of the crime scene reached their heyday between 1943 and 1951 when a publisher called Dell started publishing colourful Dell Mapback series in which the books had beautiful, detailed maps on their back covers. Maps have been seldom used in modern crime fiction; Demko ascribes it to the higher publishing cost and the influence of the post-modern style.⁸³ Nevertheless, maps still may help the reader understand the setting a bit more and enhance the story.

McManis, like Scaggs and Demko, stresses the importance of sketches and maps and the fact that they belong to the inherited format.⁸⁴ He also states that the role of the geographical setting in the works of Christie and Sayers is “threefold”.⁸⁵ The setting was supposed to provide the place or a number of places for the action of the plot. Having a locale where the crime would be committed was a necessary condition for the format; the mystery must have occurred not only under certain circumstances but also must have occurred somewhere. The story therefore must contain one place or a number of places where the murder is firstly committed, then discovered, and solved at the end of the novel.

The relationship between the setting and the story development is sometimes *passive* and sometimes *active*. A passive relationship means that the setting serves as a story background only, a stage which is rarely described or mentioned. On the other hand, when there is an active relationship, the setting has two additional roles. The specific features of the place may be essential to the commission of the crime and then to the solution. For instance, if there is foul weather playing a role in the tragedy, the setting must be a place where this type of weather can occur. If a person is crushed by a bulldozer, the setting must contain an environment where

⁸³ “Mapping the Mystery,” G. J. Demko's Landscapes of Crime, accessed March 15th, 2018, http://www.dartmouth.edu/~gjdemko/maps_mysteries.htm.

⁸⁴ McManis, “Places for Mysteries,” 320.

⁸⁵ McManis, “Places for Mysteries,” 320.

people typically operate bulldozers and the plot naturally must explain why that person was in that particular location at the time given.

The other additional role is that the elements of the place may together form a *puzzle* which needs to be solved so the criminal could be uncovered. Such puzzling elements in the setting could create diversions and misclues and hence make the process of crime-solving more perplexing.⁸⁶ Does the hardly accessible cave hide any clues and should the investigator make any effort to get there? Was the person's death an accident caused by incautiousness on the edge of the rock or was it a murder? Did the deceased not know that there is a dangerous swamp in which one could drown? The story may sometimes challenge the reader to determine whether the death was just an accident which had happened for instance due to terrible weather conditions, slippery mud, or poor visibility on the road. In other words, in some cases the setting itself may be the cause of the character's death and thus no murder is committed and, consequently, there is no need to search for the murderer.

Ackerman and Puglisi claim that the setting may be used as a vehicle for essential story elements such as a story conflict which they define as “a struggle or difficulty that impedes a character from achieving his goal”.⁸⁷ Conflict is most evident in the form of a *physical roadblock*, e.g., having to cross a mountain in *The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien. Ackerman and Puglisi also state that a conflict caused by the setting can arise when a character revisits an old place from his or her past which brings back terrible memories from the past.

In order to paint a clear picture of the physical world and the conflict which is about to be provoked, it is effective to have conflicts take place in settings which are thoroughly described and may thus convey information about the characters (e.g., a cold, impersonal living room with no family photos can suggest dysfunctional family relationships).⁸⁸ However, as has been noted, it is important that these people fit the setting; a ragged street person causing a large conflict inside a posh boutique with security guards would be hard to believe. Hodrova supports this claim and states that the nature of a place is inseparably connected to the type of a character who stays in or travels through the place.⁸⁹ She also claims there is a certain interconnection between places and genres. When the hero in a fairy tale enters a forest, he is expected to meet

⁸⁶ McManis, “Places for Mysteries,” 321.

⁸⁷ Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi, *The Rural Setting Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Personal and Natural Places* (N.p.: JADD Publishing, 2016), 16.

⁸⁸ Ackerman and Puglisi, *Rural Setting Thesaurus*, 20-21.

⁸⁹ Daniela Hodrová, “Paměť a proměny míst,” in *Poetika míst*, ed. Daniela Hodrová (Prague: H & H, 1997), 18. (my translation – see Appendix II)

there a dragon, a giant or another magical character with whom he will have an interaction. Such places are destined to be the setting for a story event.⁹⁰

Demko claims that there are two broad types of the setting, *physical* and *cultural*. The physical environments are further divided into *human created* environments (rooms, buildings, cities, etc.) and *natural* environments (deserts, islands, weather and other natural phenomena). The cultural environments concern the socio-economic characteristics of places, e.g., a rich English drawing room may create a unique texture for the story. He also says that the setting in which the story takes place may be either *dynamic* or *static*. The dynamicity is an essential feature of story settings because places are often changing and these changes concern many aspects. Regarding the physical setting, the weather and the climate may change and thus create a specific mood or convey a certain message to the reader. To give an example concerning the cultural setting, it can be marked as dynamic when the detective goes from a posh and upper-class house to a terrible dark alley; the features of the characters are conveyed more effectively and subtly by the setting than by their explicit description.⁹¹

Hodrova divides the places in literary works into two groups which are also termed *static* and *dynamic*. However, according to her, a static place is understood as a house, and a dynamic place means a journey, together with moving vehicles as a ship or a train. A journey is a series of places connected by a character or a traveller. Static and dynamic places usually occur in the works of fiction together. Dante's *Divine Comedy* takes place in hell, purgatory, and heaven. These are static places, but the pilgrim's journey creates a series out of them.⁹²

Ackerman and Puglisi share the same opinion as Demko concerning the dynamicity; although the setting can be thought of as a fixed element, it may change significantly when a few variables are altered by the author. London cannot change its location, but the time of day, the season, and the weather in London may make the city look considerably different. The factor having the most influence on the setting is *the mood* defined as “the emotional atmosphere that a piece of writing creates”. The mood of a scene will prepare the reader for the upcoming events in the story.

This factor, the mood, may be quite easily set by using a specific kind of weather. Rain signifies a gloomy mood, sunshine can make the mood cheerful, fog feels oppressive, breeze on a day

⁹⁰ Hodrová, “Pamět a proměny míst,” 15.

⁹¹ “Defining Place in Crime Fiction,” G. J. Demko's *Landscapes of Crime*, accessed March 16th, 2018, http://www.dartmouth.edu/~gjdemko/defining_place.htm.

⁹² Hodrová, “Pamět a proměny míst,” 18.

filled with a lot of sunlight gives the impression of comfort and thunder may mean an approaching danger. Seasons of the year are also associated with certain feelings and impressions: spring symbolizes rebirth, new beginnings and second changes, summer with its long hot days is typical for stories about youth and innocence, while autumn may represent a coming change or preparedness and winter is usually connected to despair, death and endings.⁹³ Siddall also discusses the symbols which nature can carry. For instance, the river, moving water, symbolizes the passing of time, the sun is usually associated with life and power, red roses with love, and dew is connected to youthful beauty. These symbols in nature can be loaded with allusions which were gathered from their previous use, they carry cultural references which may change and, interestingly, even their quite broad accepted meanings may shift over time.⁹⁴

Apart from using various natural elements to symbolize something positive or negative, the writer can adjust the mood by changing the amount of light. When people turn down their lights at home, they create a calm, relaxing, or even romantic atmosphere. Whether the scene takes place in the daylight or during the night makes a significant difference as familiar places become unknown and threatening at night.⁹⁵ The effect of such mood-setting devices as the particular location, weather, season of the year or the lighting of the place depends largely on the narrator of the story. The author may even create contrast by providing somebody else's viewpoint because the setting will be perceived differently through another character's eyes.

The created emotional atmosphere may suggest not only what is currently happening in a scene but also what is about to happen; *foreshadowing* is a literary technique using which the author hints at what is going to come. It may prove to be very effective when it is connected with emotions such as unease or fear. Due to the fact that emotions may be easily associated with certain locations, the setting can be a great instrument for hinting at the events in the immediate future.⁹⁶

Horsley offers a particularly interesting explanation of the detective novel setting's function:

Its settings function to remove the story from a wider socio-political sphere, and this isolated context reinforces the formal closure of the narrative and symbolizes what many later writers and critics have felt to be a constricting intellectual and emotional retreat from uncomfortable realities, the diversion of

⁹³ Ackerman and Puglisi, *Rural Setting Thesaurus*, 22-24.

⁹⁴ Stephen Siddall, *Landscape and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 24-25.

⁹⁵ Ackerman and Puglisi, *Rural Setting Thesaurus*, 25-26.

⁹⁶ Ackerman and Puglisi, *Rural Setting Thesaurus*, 29.

an insular community turning its back on much that was of importance in inter-war society.⁹⁷

The specified setting makes the story more believable and helps the reader to forget reality, to retreat. Were it not for the setting, the characters would simply “float” somewhere in abstract space and the reading process would not trigger the reader's imagination as much as when there is a well-depicted scenery or a thoroughly described house.

To summarize the theory concerning the setting discussed so far, the setting is the “when” and “where” of the story and is based on real ordinary places which people commonly come to or stay in. The classic detective story should contain a closed society with the murderer hidden inside who must be revealed so the setting can be restored to its original state. The setting should also reflect its inhabitants and, according to McManis, can be either passive or active, meaning that it either plays no role and serves only as a background or that it may be vital to the commission or solution of the murder and may create a puzzle to be solved by the investigator and the reader. It can also be used as a vehicle for delivering a story conflict, may shed light on a character's backstory, and can create a physical roadblock, making it difficult for the characters to continue in their investigation.

It has been suggested that the setting can be either dynamic or static; according to Demko, a setting is static when there is no change and dynamic when it changes during the course of the story. As a part of the physical environment, the season, weather, atmosphere, or lighting of the setting may be altered; such modifications in the setting can foreshadow the upcoming events in the story or create a desired atmosphere. The dynamicity in the cultural environment, the shift from one location to a completely different one, may provide the reader with information about the various characters occupying the setting. In Hodrova's opinion, a dynamic place is a series of places connected by the character who visits them and a static place is only one location “anchored” in space. Last but not least, the mood, which is a term used to denote the emotional atmosphere of the setting, can be modified by employing various mood-setting devices and may also depend on a character's perception of his or her surroundings.

As Franks jokingly puts it, there is “a dead body to suit every reader's taste”.⁹⁸ The miscellaneous settings and locations of mysteries led to diverse sub-genres. According to Scaggs, together with the country house, the locked-room mystery was also quite

⁹⁷ Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, 38.

⁹⁸ Franks, “May I Suggest Murder,” 133.

popular with the reading public in the Golden Age; the stories contained various methods of murdering somebody in “a hermetically sealed environment” and reduced the world to manageable and self-contained proportions. Back then, the popularity of these restricted settings inspired the authors to create variations on such a place, one which contains a closed group of people. The so-called deserted haunted house in the USA might be an example of the country-house and locked-room variations.⁹⁹

The other variations include a snow-bound mystery or a “murder afloat”, taking place on a boat or on a ship. The boat or ship murder may attract a wider audience because of its romantic potential. Scaggs claims that if the setting is cramped and claustrophobic, it could resemble a Gothic locale. Moreover, such confined space can provide an opportunity for an accident to happen and consequently complicate the plot, so the choice of an appropriate setting is essential to the story.¹⁰⁰ A country house, a boat, a ship or a plane are a few from the settings which a crime fiction author can use for his or her detective novel. Agatha Christie and Margery Allingham, the two significant authors of the British Golden Age, employed various settings for their detective novels too, nonetheless, the analytical part of this thesis focuses solely on the country-house setting and the urban setting in the selected works of Christie and Allingham.

To conclude this chapter on the role of the setting, Demko claims that “settings or the geography in a novel can make the difference between a dull piece of work and one that literally captures the mind of the reader and transports that person to a new place and environment”.¹⁰¹ However, the importance of settings in crime fiction is often forgotten as critics and authors rather discuss the form of the puzzle involved, the detective's personality or the investigation process. The setting is “critical because it is the milieu or context thrown into disorder”. There must be a specific place in time and space in which the crime occurs. The place is always located in a specific country with its legal system defining how to proceed and how to punish the criminal. Furthermore, the particular place usually tells the reader that a certain corresponding type of people is going to be found there (e.g., a country house is expected to contain a group of respectable, well-situated people). The physical setting, the accessibility of the place where the crime is committed, and other characteristics are essential to the story and their knowledge is necessary to understand what is happening in the story. Other features of the given place such as climate, type of government, or culture should be explicitly said or be implicit in the story,

⁹⁹ Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 51-52.

¹⁰⁰ Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 53.

¹⁰¹ Demko, “Defining Place.”

so the reader is able to identify what is transpiring and to have an idea of how the system works.¹⁰²

All these pieces of information suggest that the setting is an indispensable component of the detective novel. In this chapter, the difference between the American hard-boiled detective novels featuring a corrupted city and the British Golden Age detective novels containing an innocent countryside has been mentioned and thus the next and last chapter of the theoretical part focuses more on the comparison of the rural and urban setting and tries to explain why the city and the country are perceived so differently.

4 Rural and Urban Setting in Literary Works

To be able to discuss the difference between the urban setting of London and the rural setting of a country house in the analytical part of this thesis, it is essential to distinguish these two types of literary environment.

There is one important term which should be mentioned in the connection with what people think of the urban and the rural setting and that term is *topos*. According to Hodrova, one of the definitions of the word is a certain stylization of a character and especially a recurrent stylization of a setting. For instance, the place of an ideal landscape resembling Garden of Eden originally appeared in the Medieval literature and then it gradually became common and appears even in contemporary works of fiction.¹⁰³ The *topoi* are included in writings of any period and change over the course of time; certain *topoi* have been used many times and thus meanings developed in other literary works and at a different period of time are implicitly, to a certain extent, present in the *topos*.¹⁰⁴ *Topos*, in the context of this work, is a recurring way to stylize a setting and two examples of these stylized, cultural attitudes are the country and the city.

There are certain positive and negative feelings associated with the country and the city. Firstly, it should be explained what these terms mean: the country may be either a nation or a part of a land; sometimes it may denote the whole society or its rural area. The city is usually a large town, an administrative centre with many facilities. When uttering the word *country*, the image of a natural way of life, innocence, peace, and solitude usually comes to one's mind. A few hostile associations connected to the country are ignorance, backwardness, and limitation. On the other hand, cities are often centres of higher education, cultural life, and full of shining

¹⁰² Demko, "Defining Place."

¹⁰³ Hodrová, "Pamět a proměny míst," 8.

¹⁰⁴ Hodrová, "Pamět a proměny míst," 20.

lights at night. They are, undoubtedly, also inseparable from associations such as traffic, noise, pollution, or stress.¹⁰⁵

The city used in hard-boiled crime fiction is a polluted wasteland full of violence, garbage and decaying infrastructure. Such an image stresses the general corruption in modern society which may corrupt even the private detective. In the connection with the industrial city setting, Scaggs mentions T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* from 1922 in which the modern city is described as a hell whose inhabitants died not physically, but emotionally and spiritually. The dark and shadowy atmosphere of the rotten urban environment in hard-boiled fiction is evident in the works by American authors Hammett, Chandler, or Ross Macdonald.¹⁰⁶ The city in hard-boiled mode of crime fiction seems to be synonymous with chaos, fakery, and demoralization. The works containing urban settings by Christie and Allingham which are discussed in the analytical part also provide the reader with quite unappealing descriptions of the city. What makes the city so distasteful and the country so alluring?

In 1901, G. K. Chesterton wrote an essay called “A Defence of Detective Stories” in which he argues that the first essential value of the detective story is “that it is the earliest and only form of popular literature in which is expressed some sense of the poetry of modern life”. Moreover, he expresses the belief that one day people might idealize chimney pots and lamp posts in the same way as towering mountains or forests. According to Chesterton, every brick or stone in the street is a deliberate symbol from a man who made it or put it there and thus a city is even more poetic than a countryside; “while Nature is a chaos of unconscious forces, a city is a chaos of conscious ones”.

In Chesterton's opinion, although there is a constant tendency to rebel against civilization, the romance of police activity shows that civilization is the most romantic of rebellions because it is leading a war with the chaotic world and the detective is the original and poetic figure.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, others do not share such an idealistic view of the city and try to explain why the rural environment is so attractive to people.

Williams claims that there is a certain crisis of perspective. The earlier rural England is often thought of as “happier” and this backward reference has its own logic. The English country life had significantly transformed over a long period of time, but the change cannot be easily

¹⁰⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1.

¹⁰⁶ Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 70-72.

¹⁰⁷ G. K. Chesterton, *The Defendant* (Chelmsford: Dover Publications, 2012), 74-77.

described as it was very complex. This backward reference is thus not possible to be perceived as a matter of historical analysis.¹⁰⁸

In the pastoral poems from the 17th century, there is no historical reference, but there is, however, an idealisation of feudal and post-feudal values stressing obligation, charity and helping the neighbours. These works have been perceived as a critique of capitalism which reduced social relationships to a moneyed order. The social values defending order, social hierarchy and moral stability can be understood as “rural” virtues and also influenced twentieth-century intellectual movements. In Britain, there is a tendency to be hostile against industrialism and capitalism and to feel positive about country ways.¹⁰⁹ Siddall also agrees with Williams and states that the traditional pastoral idyll which claims that peasants live happy and self-sufficient lives is a fiction trying to cover the truth that the city and the country, in fact, depend on each other and also claims that capitalism was rooted as agrarian capitalism in England from the 18th century.¹¹⁰

In some contexts, Marx used to speak about the progressive character of capitalism and within the topic also about urbanism. Exhausting jobs in factories and towns which were often described as “progressive”, “productive”, and “efficient” led to a damnation and at the same time idealisation of capitalism, specifically of urban and industrial development. As a consequence, in contrast to ruthless new capitalism, a “natural” or “moral” economy, agriculture not affected by a market economy, was idealised, however there was little moral about it. Thousands of people growing crops, taking care of cattle and working hard were being exploited just as the people in the city or perhaps even more.¹¹¹

There was never a happier and more natural past. It is truly important to note that a lot of historians and writers producing works about rural England have identified with the lords and the landowners. This fact might help to explain this myth concerning a happier past in the countryside. Although there have always been people telling the tale of the intermediate classes, most of the books until the 18th century provided the position of the exploiting and powerful ones, not the exploited and powerless. The estate had no apparent origin and it seemed as if nobody worked there.¹¹² But this Golden Age, a term which Williams uses for this myth of a happier rural past, meant not only a magically self-cultivating and beautiful piece of land but

¹⁰⁸ Williams, *Country and City*, 35.

¹⁰⁹ Williams, *Country and City*, 35-36.

¹¹⁰ Siddall, *Landscape and Literature*, 103.

¹¹¹ Williams, *Country and City*, 35-37.

¹¹² Williams, *Country and City*, 40.

also a primitive community of property and purpose. Something which like Thomas More's Utopia is appealing and ideal but does not really exist.

Siddall states that there are three types of approaching literature including landscape. Williams's approach discussed above belongs among the political ones, stressing that nostalgia has created a Golden Age in which land got somehow cultivated and there were no exploited peasants. Apart from the political approaches, there are also feminist and ecological ones. Nature has often been visualised as female wearing a robe with animals, plants, and trees, and a few modern movements wish to “restore a greater respect for 'mother' nature which was damaged by male greed and aggression”.¹¹³ Science and technology have done ruinous damage to the earth's resources so the praise of nature and the condemnation of man is understandable. Ecological approaches focus on pastoral and Romantic writing, wild places, nature and its beauty, and denounce industrialization.¹¹⁴

Moreover, if one should compare the city and the country, there are on one side growing plants, animals, fields, and woods, which are naturally appealing to the eye of an observer, and mines, mills, factories and such industrial structures on the other side. In the city, people may find all the noise, traffic, and crime aggravating so a retreat to the quiet and peaceful country is a welcomed vision.¹¹⁵

Williams argues that in London, a great big city with millions of people, the common feeling or collective consciousness are paradoxically absent. Indifference, isolation, and minding only one-self are ironically more apparent in the city than anywhere else. Hardy felt that London was “a monster” with four million heads. The conditions of people in the urban and industrial capitalism seemed not particularly ideal and especially the vision of crowded careless individuals and social danger was not appealing.¹¹⁶

When the urban setting is perceived as so unpleasant, it is not surprising that old great country houses attract many tourists with their cameras and guidebooks and are still “the essence of honest Old England”, even though their construction was accompanied with exploiting the land and the people working on the land.¹¹⁷ Although these country houses were originally feudal, regional centres, most of them could offer a solution to the man's existential struggle

¹¹³ Siddall, *Landscape and Literature*, 103-105.

¹¹⁴ Siddall, *Landscape and Literature*, 106.

¹¹⁵ Williams, *Country and City*, 46.

¹¹⁶ Williams, *Country and City*, 215-216.

¹¹⁷ Siddall, *Landscape and Literature*, 103.

between isolation and being a part of the society, nature and technology, and also the country and the city. This conception casts light on why country houses were so popular with aristocracy and why capitalists in the 19th century bought them or built their own versions of such residences.¹¹⁸ Interestingly, Williams claims that “the fate of the country-house novel was its evolution into the middle-class detective story”. He ascribes its ability to isolate a group of people to its “quality of abstraction, and yet of superficially impressive survival”.¹¹⁹

The study of the house offers three essential perspectives: architectural, philosophical, and literary. In the 20th century, the interconnectedness of these three was acknowledged. “The emphasis which philosophy, architecture and literature put on the dependence and mutual conditioning of houses and humans reflect the essentiality of this connection.”¹²⁰ The literary perspective focuses on respect for houses and their role in people's lives. Topolovska states that one of the qualities of a house is the ability to integrate, it shelters and conditions one's existence and provides the notion of stability. Houses also allow for daydreaming and may represent a microcosm of the world; they are conditioning and conditioned by human existence. A house with no people inside has no dimensions and it is merely an empty box. However, a house which has been experienced, inhabited, transcends geometrical space. The way people are involved in and dependent on the house makes the ties between the abstract, the poetic and the material stronger.¹²¹

Hodrova agrees with this suggestion of people making bonds with the setting. However, people do not have to be dependent only on houses which have been discussed in the previous paragraph. She suggests that even every city has its own aura created from feelings, thoughts, and destinies of its inhabitants. In the same manner, rooms inside houses and flats can contain these pieces of information. It depends on whether it is the character's room (then it is usually an ideal place, at least at the beginning) or whether it is a room which the character has never entered before (in that case, it may be threatening or even dangerous). Hodrova claims that a room which belongs to somebody is, in fact, an “extended body” of its inhabitant and is simultaneously a niche of the “body” of the city where the room is situated. The person who lives in the room consists of all the places in which he or she has ever dwelled. People incorporate in themselves each of these locations which thus become a part of their body and

¹¹⁸ Tereza Topolovska, *The Country House Revisited: Variations on a Theme from Forster to Hollinghurst* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2017), 9.

¹¹⁹ Williams, *Country and City*, 249.

¹²⁰ Topolovska, *Country House*, 16.

¹²¹ Topolovska, *Country House*, 16-17.

soul. An empty room can also be important in life and in literature, but this issue concerns especially furnished rooms filled with objects. The things which surround a person enter and imprint into his or her aura and, similarly, objects have imprints left by the people who used them. According to Hodrova, people “pollinate” objects and the other way around; there are connections and relationships between the things and inhabitants of the furnished rooms which create indescribable information systems.¹²²

Defined by four walls, rooms represent the interiors, as opposed to the outdoors. They are incorporated into another bordered area, e.g., a house or a flat. Due to the openness of the room, provided that the room has windows and at least one door, the inhabitant can communicate with the world outside, enter the room and leave it.¹²³ At the end of the 18th century, there are three essential objects: the bed, the place of birth and death; the armchair, a place for meditation; and the mirror, an object for reflection.¹²⁴

At the same time, a new type of room was developed in Gothic novels. These rooms held a secret; a ghost of a dead person, evidence of murder, or a concealed crime.¹²⁵ Gothic novels usually included elements such as horrifying, even supernatural events, images of ruin and decay, and an atmosphere of evil and oppression.¹²⁶ According to Hodrova, furniture and objects in the rooms played no role at that time.

During the Romantic period, descriptions of interiors became a significant part of literary texts. Three of the characteristic features of a Romantic room are its closedness, hiddenness, and blariness. Time is also incorporated into the interior as there are usually elements suggesting antiquity and dilapidation. Romantic rooms thus do not differ much from a Romantic landscape; they are a space referring to another space and leading “somewhere”, often to the beyond.¹²⁷

Interiors, rooms and bedrooms especially, are vital in the detective novels from the Golden Age because they are the place where the private investigators observe the objects and study the way the inhabitants of the rooms used them. To employ Hodrova's term, the detective examines how

¹²² Daniela Hodrová, “Smysl pokoje,” in *Poetika míst*, ed. Daniela Hodrová (Prague: H & H, 1997), 217-218. (my translation – see Appendix II)

¹²³ Hodrová, “Smysl pokoje,” 219.

¹²⁴ Hodrová, “Smysl pokoje,” 221.

¹²⁵ Hodrová, “Smysl pokoje,” 222.

¹²⁶ Linda Kraus Worley, “The Horror! Gothic Horror Literature and Fairy Tales: The Case of Der Räuberbräutigam,” *Colloquia Germanica* 42, no. 1 (2009): 69.

¹²⁷ Hodrová, “Smysl pokoje,” 222-223.

the victim or the suspects “pollinated” the objects in the rooms to obtain as much information as possible so furniture and objects have a truly important role in the detective novels.

To summarize, houses shelter people who are an essential part of the house itself. The country house with its rooms is perceived as a place of retreat, a place where one can admire nature and enjoy the peaceful atmosphere. Nevertheless, people make bonds not only with this idealised setting of a manor in the countryside, but also with the city, as has been discussed above. Their imprints can be seen anywhere and it does not matter whether it is their bedroom in which they feel safe and comfortable or another place. This could be marked as vital for crime fiction; it is difficult to imagine that the way people use objects and the places would not be significant in the genre which is based on the deductive process; establishing where each character was and what they were doing (the way they were using the setting).

All the ideas and approaches mentioned earlier in this chapter suggest that nature (the country) is seemingly preferred over the city and, in order to fully answer the question asked at the beginning of this chapter, why the English country is so enticing and the city almost abhorrent, one must travel in time, into English Romanticism and then even further to the past. It is appropriate to commence the journey back in time with a definition; Burgum claims that Romanticism reflects the discovery of the ego, the return to medievalism, and, most importantly, the discovery of nature. Chateaubriand and Wordsworth were absorbed by descriptions of beautiful sceneries. Aspiration, a hope for a better world and an escape from reality are common themes of Romantic literature. In England, the central stream was Wordsworth's naturism.¹²⁸ In order to explain why the interest in nature and country life was the main tendency of English Romanticism, one must go to the time before that. During the Glorious Revolution in 1688, there was a minimum of bloodshed and disorder. Since the days of Elizabeth, English literature contains “a stabilization of the more robust impetuosity of the Renaissance under the smooth and rapid evolution of her commercial ascendancy”.¹²⁹ The mercantile class, which was already controlling the high seas, simply bought off the aristocracy whose actual authority after that was only in cultural affairs; they did not have either political authority or the power anymore. The only thing which they retained was glory but with the industrial revolution they lost it as well. According to Burgum, the history of this loss is the rise of English Romanticism. As the French Revolution began, the dominant English middle class reacted by embracing Methodism and emphasizing sacrifice and

¹²⁸ Edwin Berry Burgum, “Romanticism,” *The Kenyon Review* 3, no. 4 (Autumn 1941): 479-481.

¹²⁹ Burgum, “Romanticism,” 483.

hard labour. The consequence of these reactions in more ordinary spheres meant the transformation of pre-Romanticism into Wordsworth and Shelley's Romanticism which became a movement for the stabilization of English society.

While English pre-Romantic poetry is gloomy and expresses worries about the coming change, an optimistic view is then adopted after the French Revolution, probably to escape from the reality. The literature does not focus on the class differences and the troubles of the poor. Rather, it sees a general improvement. The industrial class in England did not want to read about the progress which their own machines were making so there was a literature celebrating nature.¹³⁰ Tuan in his book *Landscapes of Fear* supports this claim by stating that since the Romantic era all the factionalism and violence in country places has been forgotten and they are seen as safe and also inherently good, quite the opposite of the urban turmoil.¹³¹

As has been suggested, to study the different perception of the country and the city, one may go to the time even before the Romantic period. In fact, according to Tuan, there has always been a yearning for the natural and the wild. For instance, in the epic of Gilgamesh, there is a tale of a man who got seduced by civilization and regrets the natural way of life he had left behind. People tend to escape “back to nature”, away from humanized landscape, but the large cities seldom lose their inhabitants. Tuan argues that what people desire to escape to is, actually, not nature but “an alluring conception of it, and this conception is necessarily a product of a people's experience and history – their culture”. It may seem paradoxical, but the fact is that this so-called escape to nature is a cultural undertaking. Nature is understood as a “layer of the earth's surface and the air above it that have been unaffected, or minimally affected, by humans” so the farther back one reaches in time, the greater is the extent of nature.¹³² This journey back in time thus takes one from the present day to the beginning of humankind, to the time when there were no humans who could affect nature.

Here perhaps lies the answer to the question why the country feels almost heaven-like and the city almost repulsive. There is a tendency to refer to a Golden Age, a more natural past with a simpler way of life, and celebrate it even though it never actually existed. It is understandable that people got used to idealizing nature and imagining it as a place of retreat because they wish to escape from the reality of a busy city life. The Romantic period in England brought naturism,

¹³⁰ Burgum, “Romanticism,” 485-487.

¹³¹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear*, 131.

¹³² Yi-Fu Tuan, *Escapism* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 17-20.

worshipping nature and the natural way of life, which has its share in the nearly ideal depiction of the rural setting and the quite stressful depiction of the urban setting.

One can therefore find that many depictions of the country contain the aforementioned tranquillity, solitude, innocence and being in harmony with nature while the depictions of the city may often include violence, hurriedness of the urban life, traffic, or noise. The question is whether the urban and the rural setting in the detective novels by Christie and Allingham are in accordance with these two collective, cultural attitudes, the innocent country and the flawed city.

5 Country-house Setting in the Selected Works by Agatha Christie and Margery Allingham

For the purpose of the country-house setting analysis, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* and *The Crime at Black Dudley* were chosen as they both feature the country-house setting and both introduce the authors' most famous detectives, Christie's Hercule Poirot and Allingham's Albert Campion. The analysis should compare the settings described in both detective novels and discuss their characteristics with respect to the theory from the previous chapters.

At first sight, both places seem to play a significant role due to the fact that they are included in the books' titles. Both titles were created in the same way and sound similar to each other (*The Mysterious Affair / Crime at Styles / Black Dudley*); they tell the reader that the narrative will concern a puzzling event at a specific place.

On the very first page of the novel, Christie places Styles, the setting of the crime, into a county in the East of England: “As a boy, though, I have often stayed at Styles, his mother's place in Essex.”¹³³ Most readers would probably imagine a beautiful, romantic landscape with large fields, isolated country manors, or a calm sandy beach below green pastures. As one can see, Agatha Christie is quite terse; she lets the reader create the place in his or her mind when providing this short, one-sentence description.

On the other hand, Allingham starts her novel with a truly detailed description of the place. In three paragraphs, she states that “the view from the narrow window was dreary and inexpressibly lonely”¹³⁴, that there were “miles of neglected park-land stretched in an unbroken

¹³³ Agatha Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (London: HarperCollins, 2013), 1.

¹³⁴ Margery Allingham, *The Crime at Black Dudley* (London: Vintage, 2015), 11.

plain to the horizon and the sea beyond”.¹³⁵ To add to this unwelcoming atmosphere, the reader learns that the grey lawns are mowed only once a year and cropped by “the herd of heavy-shouldered black cattle who wandered about them, their huge forms immense and grotesque in the fast-thickening twilight”.¹³⁶ The third paragraph is then devoted to the house itself:

In the centre of this desolation, standing in a thousand acres of its own land, was the mansion, Black Dudley; a great grey building, bare and ugly as a fortress. No creepers hid its nakedness, and the long narrow windows were dark-curtained and uninviting.

Allingham uses a lot of words with negative connotations: *dreary, lonely, neglected, grotesque, desolation, grey, bare, ugly, and uninviting*. Moreover, a character remarks that Black Dudley is a “gloomy old place”¹³⁷ and explicitly says: “Thank God it's not mine.”¹³⁸ It may remind the reader of typical Gothic novels; a horror-like, decrepit setting hiding its secrets. Allingham provides all this information, the apprehensive description of the place and the character's unpleasant feeling about the house, on the very first page of the novel while Christie gives the audience only the one remark about Styles being located in Essex.

Styles Court is then referred to as a “country-place”.¹³⁹ When Hastings, the narrator, arrives to the train station, he simply describes it as “an absurd little station, with no apparent reason for existence, perched up in the midst of green fields and country lanes”.¹⁴⁰ The absurdness of its existence suggests that it is hardly used and few people travel to this quiet place. Then there is a brief description of the village and the countryside:

The village of Styles St Mary was situated about two miles from the little station, and Styles Court lay a mile the other side of it. It was a still, warm day in early July. As one looked out over the flat Essex country, lying so green and peaceful under the afternoon sun, it seemed almost impossible to believe that, not so very far away, a great war was running its appointed course. I felt I had suddenly strayed into another world.¹⁴¹

By saying this, the narrator elaborates on the reader's probable mental image of Essex. The reader learns how far the train station, the village and the mansion are from each other as if it is necessary to put these three locations on a map. When one thinks about it, the train station is

¹³⁵ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 11.

¹³⁶ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 11.

¹³⁷ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 11.

¹³⁸ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 11.

¹³⁹ Christie, *Styles*, 2.

¹⁴⁰ Christie, *Styles*, 4.

¹⁴¹ Christie, *Styles*, 4.

the only thing connecting the country to the city; Christie thus adopts a view similar to the one of Romantic writers. Mesmerizing, flawless nature is here admired by someone who lives in London and feels grateful to be able to spend a little time away from the city and the war, to escape from the harsh reality. While Christie probably uses distance from the train station to express that Styles is separated from the civilization by fields and forests and hence provides a retreat from the busy urban way of life, in Allingham's detective novel the isolation of the country house causes that the characters can be quite easily imprisoned inside the setting by a group of criminals. They tell the guests that the house is two miles from the public road, there is no telephone, that two women servants belong to them and, on top of that, they also have six men and a gate-keeper. Having thought of everything, they drained the guests' cars of petrol, so there is no means of escape.¹⁴² The country house is thus used as a prison for the people who played the roles of guests at the beginning. They try to think of ways to escape but are unsuccessful in their attempts as the house is in a remote place and no deliveries or people coming up there from the village are expected in the following days. Only one cleaning lady is going to be missed by her son, but no sooner than in the middle of the following week because most of the people present are guests.¹⁴³ The isolation may thus be a positive aspect, and create a place which can serve as a retreat from the city, but it can be also a negative aspect when the house functions as a prison.

According to Topolovska, the country house fiction usually includes the arrival of guests who play the role of “a grateful alien”, somebody who observes and admires the house and unlocks its secrets. There are more invited than uninvited guests and they mingle together. When they do so, the unfinished business can be finally uncovered and settled.¹⁴⁴ At the beginning, this role is played by the first-person narrator, Hastings, who is later joined by the detective, Hercule Poirot, and they solve the crime at Styles together. Hastings constantly admires the country-house setting throughout the novel.

In Christie's novel, it also seems that the fewer people, the better the atmosphere of the place, which also corresponds with the Romantic view of the world, especially with the English stream admiring nature and the natural way of life. The country loses its peaceful atmosphere for a while when it is said that Styles is “constantly besieged by reporters [...] who continued to haunt the village and the grounds”.¹⁴⁵ The usually quite abandoned place is suddenly

¹⁴² Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 60.

¹⁴³ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 115.

¹⁴⁴ Topolovska, *Country House*, 110.

¹⁴⁵ Christie, *Styles*, 139.

swarming with policemen from Scotland Yard and it is clear that the original order needs to be restored.

The month during which the story takes place, the weather, and the part of the day are mentioned in the extract above and the narrator gives the impression of a soothing, pleasant atmosphere by using expressions such as *a still, warm day in early July* or *lying so green and peaceful under the afternoon sun*. Although the reader is acquainted with how calm and pleasantly empty the place is opposed to the World War I battlefields, he or she has no idea what the mansion or the village look like.

Christie continues in evoking the calming atmosphere by saying that Hastings will find it “very quiet down here” and talking about “the idle life”¹⁴⁶ full of milking cows, working on the land and farming. When Hastings is standing in front of Styles, he describes it only as a “fine old house”¹⁴⁷ which again says nothing about its actual appearance.

Allingham implies that the setting of crime is located in Suffolk by saying that one of the characters did “not come down to Black Dudley solely for the sake of recuperating in the Suffolk air”.¹⁴⁸ She then gives the details of the house interiors as her character goes down the stairs to dinner. There is a “low-stepped Tudor staircase”; the rooms seem to be in contrast with the gloomy exterior and are called “magnificent”. Although the omniscient narrator admits there are certain signs of neglect just as outside the house, there is “a certain dusty majesty”, “dark-panelled walls with the oil-paintings hanging in their fast-blackening frames”, “heavy, dark-oak furniture, elaborately carved and utterly devoid of polish, that was very impressive and pleasing”.

The mansion seems to be playing the main role in the story as most of the first few pages are devoted to its description. It is said that the place has not been modernized and there are still “candles in the iron sconces in the hall, and the soft light sent great shadows, like enormous ghostly hands, creeping up to the oak-beamed ceiling”. This comparison of candle lights to ghostly hands demonstrates the author's descriptive language skills and the way she tries to create a spooky emotional atmosphere. So far, it seems that the setting plays an immense role in the Allingham's novel:

¹⁴⁶ Christie, *Styles*, 4.

¹⁴⁷ Christie, *Styles*, 5.

¹⁴⁸ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 12.

All down one side of the long, low room was a row of stained-glass windows. In a great open fireplace a couple of faggots blazed whole, and on the long refectory table, which ran nearly the entire length of the flagged floor, eight seven-branched candlesticks held the only light. There were portraits on the walls, strangely differing in style, as the artists of the varying period followed the fashions set by the masters of their time [...].¹⁴⁹

The author also refers to the mansion using the expression “great tomb of a house with its faintly musty air” and states it has a “curiously archaic atmosphere”.¹⁵⁰ The reader, still on the third page of the novel, has obtained a lot of information about the setting and has been introduced to only one character. The introduction of the place and the creation of a creepy, haunted-house-like mood feels to be crucial to Allingham.

If Allingham's and Christie's descriptions of the setting should be compared, one can look, for instance, at staircases in both country houses. Above, it has been mentioned that at Black Dudley there is an old low-stepped staircase from the Tudor period, loads of dust, candles and heavy, wooden furniture; the reader is given a lot of details about the hall under the staircase. At Styles, there is a “broad staircase, which forked right and left half way to different wings of the building”. Christie seems to talk about the settings only to place the objects in space and to create a map inside the reader's head. The only thing which is mentioned about Hastings's room is that it “was in the left wing, and looked out over the park”.¹⁵¹ The reader can therefore imagine Hastings walking up the broad staircase, turning left, going to the left wing to his room and watching the park from the window and has only a faint idea of what the place is like. Nevertheless, the actual appearance is not important because what really matters is the way the characters use the setting and the way it is needed for the story. Interestingly, Auden said that he found it very difficult to read a detective story which was not set in rural England.¹⁵² The contrast between the peaceful country setting and the deplorable murder contributes to the effect which the setting creates, however vague its actual description is.

On the other hand, in Allingham's novel, everything is described in thorough detail. To provide more evidence, “the door into the hall was a wide one”¹⁵³ at Styles, which tells the reader only about the size of the door. When the characters travel to a dispensary, Hastings reacts

¹⁴⁹ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 13.

¹⁵⁰ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 13.

¹⁵¹ Christie, *Styles*, 12.

¹⁵² Auden, “Guilty Vicarage,” 406.

¹⁵³ Christie, *Styles*, 28.

with exclaiming: “What a lot of bottles!” and says that it is a “small room”.¹⁵⁴ Being provided with mostly vague expressions of size such as *broad*, *wide*, or *small*, the reader can imagine the places in almost any way he or she wishes to.

When an Allingham's character enters the drawing-room, one learns a number of details from the floor, “old oak and highly polished”, with “two or three beautiful Shiraz rugs” to the ceiling with a “huge iron candle-ring which held some twenty or thirty thick wax candles” creating “heavy shadows round the panelled walls and in the deep corners behind the great fire-places”. It would take up too much space to list all the expressions which Allingham uses to describe the interiors of the house, however, it is interesting to see how the murder weapon is incorporated into the setting. When talking about one of the fireplaces, the omniscient narrator states: “Yet it was the actual centre-piece which commanded immediate interest. Mounted on a crimson plaque, at the point where the lance-heads made a narrow circle, was a long, fifteenth-century Italian dagger.”¹⁵⁵

After talking about the details of the dagger, the reader is told that “it seemed to shine out of the dark background like a living and malignant thing. No one entering the rooms for the first time could fail to remark upon it; in spite of its comparatively insignificant size it dominated the whole room like an idol in a temple.”¹⁵⁶ This effect perhaps could not have been created had it not been for the meticulously depicted setting. There is a vast drawing-room covered in wood panels, full of old oak furniture, heavy curtains, candles casting scary shadows, marvellous fireplaces and a “faint atmosphere of mystery and dankness, with which the whole house was redolent.”¹⁵⁷ The inspiration drawn from Gothic novels is evident here in the dark room with its old furniture, candles, high windows, and heavy curtains because of which the light cannot enter the drawing room.

If one considers Christie's terse descriptions of the setting in comparison to the ones by Allingham which are slowly building up the threatening atmosphere, a question arises: Does the setting in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* contribute to the story or is it there merely to state where everyone and everything is located? Distances and giving directions seem to play an important role in Christie's world. For instance, “the house which the Belgians occupied in the village was quite close to the park gates. One could save time by taking a narrow path through

¹⁵⁴ Christie, *Styles*, 20.

¹⁵⁵ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 20.

¹⁵⁶ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 21.

¹⁵⁷ Christie, *Styles*, 20.

the long grass, which cut off the detours of the winding drive.”¹⁵⁸ On another occasion, the characters “took the path through the plantation, and [...] walked down to the village through the woods which bordered one side of the estate.”¹⁵⁹ Christie believes it is important to tell the reader that the characters should “return by Tadminster, which was barely a mile out of the way”.¹⁶⁰

Although the reader might get the impression that everything at and around Styles seems to only exist in relation to other places and things and plays no actual role in the story, an obstruction given by the setting is presented when other characters cannot come into the room to help the victim due to heavy and bolted old doors in the country house.¹⁶¹ Moreover, Christie is still subtly trying to create the contrast between the peaceful, heaven-like countryside and the atrocious murder. For instance, after starting the investigation when “Poirot stopped for a moment, and gazed sorrowfully over the beautiful expanse of park, still glittering with morning dew”¹⁶², the reader is told how innocent and “so beautiful, so beautiful”¹⁶³ nature is.

With her idealized descriptions of the country-house setting, Christie seems to have been influenced by the traditional country-house poems of the 17th and 18th century which idealized the relationship between the house on one side and its master and the tenants on the other side. These poems were usually situated in summer, “a typically pastoral setting partly reviving the idyll, with its eternal days of summer”.¹⁶⁴ *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* takes place during the summer, as the reader is reminded several times, and the countryside resembles an earthly paradise:

The woods round Styles were very beautiful. After the walk across the open park, it was pleasant to saunter lazily through the cool glades. There was hardly a breath of wind, the very chirp of the birds was faint and subdued. I strolled on a little way, and finally flung myself down at the foot of a grand old beech-tree. My thoughts of mankind were kindly and charitable. [...] I was at peace with the world.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁸ Christie, *Styles*, 38.

¹⁵⁹ Christie, *Styles*, 15.

¹⁶⁰ Christie, *Styles*, 20.

¹⁶¹ Christie, *Styles*, 30.

¹⁶² Christie, *Styles*, 41.

¹⁶³ Christie, *Styles*, 42.

¹⁶⁴ Topolovska, *Country House*, 11.

¹⁶⁵ Christie, *Styles*, 154.

Other instances of idealizing nature include the moment when Poirot stops and admires the beauty of the park around Styles¹⁶⁶ or when he almost forgets about the crime, places two chairs outside and enjoys the view of the village street. Hastings also states: “The fresh air blew in warm and pleasant. It was going to be a hot day.”¹⁶⁷

To further demonstrate how the atmospheres which the authors try to achieve differ significantly, one can look at the referring expressions. While Black Dudley is “a marvellous house”, “wonderful”, “very old”¹⁶⁸, “a ghostly old show”¹⁶⁹, “the gloomy old mansion”¹⁷⁰, or “that ghostly house”¹⁷¹, Styles is always described as “a really glorious old place”¹⁷² or “a fine property”. Black Dudley is an example of a decaying, Gothic-like setting with a romance being set in the creepy mansion. In the same way as in Gothic novels, there is a beautiful girl, a damsel in distress, who is kidnapped by the criminals and whom one of the main characters trying to be a hero, George Abbershaw, saves and eventually marries. To provide more evidence of Gothic literature being a possible source of inspiration for this novel, the Black Dudley Dagger is connected to a mysterious, terrifying legend (which proves to be fabricated at the end and was created by the murderer only for the purpose of the murder); the dagger will allegedly glow with red when it is held by anyone who has killed a person, which could be also marked as another similarity with the Gothic novels.

When Poirot is investigating the murder, the objects at the crime scene provide much evidence and Poirot keeps their significance secret until the end of the novel. The setting provides a puzzle which must be solved in order to reveal the criminal. Why is the coffee cup on the floor smashed to powder? Is the small piece of a charred document inside the fireplace the victim's new will? Whose dark green fabric got stuck inside the door bolt? How would anyone be able to enter the locked room? At Black Dudley, there are questions such as: Whose blood was it on the dagger? Who does the wallet belong to? These and other questions must be answered; such a mystery presented to the reader invites him or her to ponder on the possible explanations and become more involved and interested in the story. To use Hodrova's term discussed

¹⁶⁶ Christie, *Styles*, 41.

¹⁶⁷ Christie, *Styles*, 94.

¹⁶⁸ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 16.

¹⁶⁹ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 44.

¹⁷⁰ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 15.

¹⁷¹ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 79.

¹⁷² Christie, *Styles*, 16.

in Chapter 4, Poirot with Hastings and Campion with Abbershaw examine the way the suspects “pollinated”, used, the objects and furniture inside their bedrooms and other interiors.

At Black Dudley, an obstruction is created when the party decides to try the Black Dudley Ritual in complete darkness, to play a game during which people run to each other and pass the dagger over as fast as they can. Nobody can see anything; an old man is murdered and it is impossible to turn on the lights for a while after the crime is committed. If it had not been for the old scary house with its aged relics, weapons and old-fashioned lights, the murder would not have ever happened.

During the Golden Age of the British crime writing, it was believed that including maps would give the reader useful information on the setting and, indeed, Christie presents not only a simplified map of one floor of Styles which is relevant to the murder (See Picture 1 in Appendix I), but also a small map of the room in which the person dies, including the individual pieces of furniture and their placement.

The only information belonging to the first map is: “The servants' room are reached through the door B. They have no communication with the right wing, where the Inglethorps' rooms were situated.”¹⁷³ Hastings also states that he appends the following plan of the first floor of Styles to make the first part of the story clear.¹⁷⁴ Whether or not the map enhances the story is the question. When Poirot is asking the maid about the connecting doors, whether they were or were not bolted¹⁷⁵, the reader may return to the page containing the map and study which room is connected to which, whose room is located at the end of the hall or learn another piece of information about the positions of rooms in which the suspects are staying at Styles.

The other map used in the detective novel by Christie shows the crime scene (See Picture 2 in Appendix I). The information which Hastings provides is: “We went up together to the room of the tragedy. For convenience I append a plan of the room and the principal articles of furniture in it.”¹⁷⁶ This one could perhaps be perceived as less useful than the first one because there is no need to know the distance of individual objects which Poirot finds interesting. The objects are referred to as “the round table by the window”, “a small, dispatch

¹⁷³ Christie, *Styles*, 29.

¹⁷⁴ Christie, *Styles*, 29.

¹⁷⁵ Christie, *Styles*, 60.

¹⁷⁶ Christie, *Styles*, 44.

case, with a key in the lock, on the writing table”¹⁷⁷ and it is questionable if such a map could be of any use to the reader when all the objects are described quite sufficiently in the text itself.

On the other hand, Allingham provides no maps here (although she does so in a few of her other books) and suggests that Black Dudley is so vast that nobody is sure how many rooms and passages there are: “Even Wyatt could not help them with the geography of Black Dudley. The old house had been first monastery, then farmstead, and finally a dwelling-house, and in each period different alternations had been made.”¹⁷⁸ Because of its rich and long history, nobody knows the exact ground plan of Black Dudley. Even the young owner of the mansion is not familiar with “numberless rooms, galleries, passages, and staircases of which the place was composed”.¹⁷⁹

The complex building consists of many secret passages and surprising architectural elements. At one moment in the story, all the characters are gathered in the large drawing-room and the detective is talking to one of the guests when he disappears out of nowhere. The setting creates a puzzle to be solved; the other characters have no idea what happened to the eccentric character, Albert Campion. He was, in fact, leaning against a panel on the fireplace and “it gave way” and then he found himself in another room.¹⁸⁰ Then the detective is imprisoned by the criminals; he examines an ancient chest inside the box-room into which the men have just locked him. He finds nothing useful and starts jumping angrily on a piece of iron. When he retells the story, he says that “immediately the whole show gave way”¹⁸¹ and he discovered a staircase inside the large chest. It is quite interesting to note that Allingham in both these situations in the book uses a truly vague expression “it gave way” to explain how it was possible that there were such unusual passages between the parts of the country house. Having crawled through a tunnel full of rats, Campion opens a door and finds himself inside a cupboard in one of the guests' rooms. Allingham then again tries to suggest that Black Dudley is an age-old mansion full of hiding places: “The air in it was insufferably hot, and it dawned upon him that he was in one of those hiding-places that are so often to be found in the sides of ancient fireplaces.”¹⁸² It can be demonstrated here why this ancient country house as the setting is an essential element of the story; all the hiding places and secret passages make the story more

¹⁷⁷ Christie, *Styles*, 45.

¹⁷⁸ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 77.

¹⁷⁹ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 78.

¹⁸⁰ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 81.

¹⁸¹ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 81-82.

¹⁸² Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 96.

adventurous and attractive and provide puzzles. Because of its isolation which makes it impossible to call the police forces, the criminals also easily gain access to the guests' rooms and are able to rummage through their things to find the map of the bank which they want to rob. Due to the fact that the rooms in this old country house have fireplaces, one of the main characters can irreversibly destroy the sought object by lighting a fire and throwing it into the fireplace, which causes him a lot of trouble in the course of the story.

Poirot and Hastings in the story by Christie are also provided a puzzle inside the country house, however, it is not as exciting as going through revolving fireplaces and secret passages inside large chests. They find an old chest in the attic with a piece of evidence: "We entered the house by one of the windows. There was no one in the hall, and we went straight up to the attic. Sure enough, there was the chest, a fine old piece, all studded with brass nails, and full to overflowing with every imaginable type of garment."¹⁸³ Again, here can be demonstrated Christie's need to navigate the reader and show him or her the way through the setting as if he or she is travelling together with the characters.

It has been claimed that is necessary for the characters to fit in the setting so the story is believable; the setting must contain characters who are likely to occur at such a place. According to Topolovska, most of the characters in Agatha Christie's country-house detective novels do not work and live on their accumulated capital.¹⁸⁴ As has been noted, the middle-class detective story was, according to Williams, the only plausible future which can be imagined for the country house setting, because country houses tend to be occupied by rather a heterogeneous group of people; such a group of more or less same people is always found in the plot of a classic detective story. These members of upper and upper-middle classes completely rely on the past and try to maintain the fading gloriousness of their country manors like the characters in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*.¹⁸⁵ The impact of war is evident in a smaller number of employed gardeners due to which the country house is no longer "a gentleman's place"¹⁸⁶ as it should be and not one piece of paper is wasted here, which later leads to an important clue. One of the staff even believes that these are "dreadful times".¹⁸⁷

The mystery at Styles takes place during the First World War in 1916 while the murder at Black Dudley occurs between the two World Wars. Both these settings are anchored in time and space

¹⁸³ Christie, *Styles*, 140.

¹⁸⁴ Topolovska, *Country House*, 13.

¹⁸⁵ Ackershoek, "Daughters," 124.

¹⁸⁶ Christie, *Styles*, 56.

¹⁸⁷ Christie, *Styles*, 11.

(Styles in Essex and Black Dudley in Suffolk), which is vital according to the definitions in Chapter 3.

The group at Black Dudley consists of a few individuals who come from the city and whose jobs are not quite specified except for the character of George Abbershaw, a pathologist, another doctor, one scholar, and a rugby player at Cambridge. Black Dudley therefore also features an elite group of upper-middle class people; the only character who does not fit into the setting and was actually not invited is the eccentric sleuth, Albert Campion, who becomes a serious detective in the later detective novels.

What is interesting about the “human milieu” at Black Dudley is that, after the murder, the characters get separated into two groups, innocent people and criminals. Later the guests learn that the criminals did not commit the old man's murder and the murderer is, in fact, hidden inside this seemingly innocent group and there is subsequently a murderer to be found (as there should be in any classic detective novel).

It is fascinating to observe how the weather changes in both books when there is something crucial about to happen. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, the heaven-like weather is replaced with a sharp, sighing wind which is meant to foreshadow that an innocent character is going to get arrested soon:

The weather had broken, and the sharp wind was almost autumnal in its shrewishness. Mary shivered a little, and buttoned her black sports coat closer. The wind through the trees made a mournful noise, like some great giant sighing. We walked up to the great door of Styles, and at once the knowledge came to us that something was wrong.¹⁸⁸

On the other hand, in *The Crime at Black Dudley*, the weather changes for the better and signals that the characters are perhaps going to get freed from their country-house prison; it expresses hope when two characters who create the romantic subplot become closer:

Gradually the room grew lighter and lighter, and the sun, pale at first, and then brilliant, poured in through the high window with that war serenity that is somehow peculiar to a Sunday morning. Outside he heard the faraway lowing of the cattle and the lively bickering of the birds.¹⁸⁹

The setting here in these two novels is undoubtedly dynamic. The weather, one of the mood-setting devices, changes over the course of the detective novel and the change depends

¹⁸⁸ Christie, *Styles*, 185.

¹⁸⁹ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 111.

on the way the story is evolving. At Styles, the investigators must suddenly face a conflict and exonerate the innocent, hence the fierce wind is used. In contrast to that, the shining sun, light, and singing birds appear at Black Dudley to set a more optimistic mood when George realizes that Meggie, his love interest, definitely has feelings for him.

The criminals must pay for their sins at the end of the novel because the story is set in a country with a legal system considering murder a crime to be punished. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, the murderer and his accomplice are proven guilty when Poirot finds a piece of their compromising letter and it is clear they will face justice and go to prison. The murderer in *The Crime of Black Dudley* killed his uncle because he learned that the old man was designing detailed plans of buildings for the gangsters, therefore the murderer tried to “cleanse” the society from sin and is now both a criminal and a martyr.¹⁹⁰ However, it is forbidden to take justice into one's own hands in England, so, when confronted by George Abbershaw, the murderer says he will spend the rest of his life in a monastery. The crimes are thus solved, the criminals uncovered and punished; the setting is at the end restored to its state at the beginning of the novel; one may even say it has been bettered. Styles regains its peaceful atmosphere, family relationships are improved, Poirot expresses his hope that one day even Hasting may find someone; the story ends on an optimistic note.¹⁹¹ Black Dudley was initially not introduced as a welcoming place and, at the end, George Abbershaw thinks about his upcoming marriage to the girl who fell in love with him at Black Dudley, so there is also an improvement.

As has been mentioned, *The Crime at Black Dudley* and *The Affair at Styles* are both the first cases of the authors' most famous detectives. Although these two authors chose to use the country-house setting for Poirot's and Campion's debut performances, they both depicted it in their own original way. Margery Allingham seems to draw inspiration from Gothic novels because her country house is gloomy, run-down and containing secrets. The secrets lie in its hiding spots, secret passages and rotating fireplaces. When a group of criminals with their employees, the staff of the house, imprisons the invited guests, the setting becomes a prison and at the same time a place to hide from the criminals because of its countless rooms and surprising passageways. Interestingly, Allingham here seems to break one of the rules of the Detection Club which stated that no more than one secret passageway is allowed.

¹⁹⁰ Allingham, *Black Dudley*, 228.

¹⁹¹ Christie, *Styles*, 239-240.

Agatha Christie's setting resembles Romantic writing; the investigators from London are grateful for having the possibility to spend time in nature and admire it, even though an atrocious crime has been committed there. The country house is therefore not a prison, but a place where one can enjoy the beautiful countryside and escape from the city for a while. With the closed and isolated group of people staying there, it is clear that the murderer is hidden inside the society and it is needed to find him or her in order to restore the original and almost paradise-like state.

What these two settings have in common is that both these country houses are isolated, age-old, magnificent, surrounded by nature, and separating the guests from the outside world. The groups of non-working people who probably belong to the upper-middle class fit the setting perfectly in both novels.

The setting is an essential element in detective novels. Not only does it provide the necessary background, it also creates a puzzle which needs to be solved, obstructions to be overcome, and may foreshadow the future course of the story.

6 Urban Setting in the Selected Works by Agatha Christie and Margery Allingham

In 1952, Margery Allingham published the novel which is generally considered to be her very best achievement. *The Tiger in the Smoke*, a dark depiction of urban criminal underworld in post-war London where a serial killer is roaming free, was chosen for the analytical part of this work, together with Agatha Christie's *Third Girl* (1966) and *The Big Four* (1927) as they both use the London setting in a different way. Although two of these three books were not written during the Golden Age, they follow the typical Golden Age format. To be accurate, they also violate the typical pattern a bit as Allingham and Christie were creative and liked to write in their own original way.

Allingham starts her description by setting the mood with thick fog which covers the whole city:

The fog was like a saffron blanket soaked in ice-water. It had hung over London all day and at last was beginning to descend. The sky was yellow as a duster and the rest was a granular black, overprinted in grey and lightened by occasional slivers of bright fish colour as a policeman turned in his wet cape.¹⁹²

¹⁹² Margery Allingham, *The Tiger in the Smoke* (London: Vintage, 2015), 17.

Low visibility, wetness, and colours of yellow, grey, black and “fish” evoke a truly unpleasant atmosphere due to which the reader is probably glad to be warm at home. A colourless day and harsh weather make London a great setting for a dark and mysterious detective story. Allingham also provides an image of heavy London traffic which is at an irritable crawl and will be stationary by the dusk, urban noises coming from the railway station (“the great railway terminus slammed and banged and exploded hollowly about its affairs”) and dirty streets.¹⁹³

At the beginning of *The Tiger in the Smoke*, a woman is supposed to meet with her husband whom she has not seen in years because it was presumed he had died in the war. The setting of a crowded railway station filled with smoke and fog makes it very difficult to recognize and identify the husband. Moreover, it is interesting to observe how the ever-present fog is used to foreshadow that she and her new fiancée might be parted; the fog touches them with its “fingers” and the reader subsequently learns the information that the woman's former husband might still be alive and that this new relationship may end if the husband truly appears at the railway station:

The fog had crept into the taxi where it crouched panting in a traffic jam. It oozed in ungenially, to smear sooty fingers over the two elegant young people who sat inside. They were keeping apart self-consciously, each stealing occasional glances in the same kind of fear at their clasped hands resting between them on the shabby leather seat.¹⁹⁴

Agatha Christie, on the other hand, begins her description of London quite less emotionally. In *Third Girl*, Ariadne Oliver's seemingly unimpressed point of view is shown when she observes a recently-built block of flats “occupying a space left by the havoc of a land mine in the last war”, which seems not in the least as ideal as Styles discussed in the previous chapter. “It might, Mrs Oliver thought, have been lifted *en bloc* from the Great West Road and, first deprived of some such legend as SKYLARK'S FEATHER RAZOR BLADES, have been deposited as a block of flats *in situ*.” The reader is provided with the image of an impersonal building which perhaps used to be a factory and is likely to be found by a highway connecting one city to another. The character of woman writer Ariadne Oliver, Christie's self-portrait¹⁹⁵, feels the block of flats is “extremely functional” and “whoever had built it had obviously scorned any ornamental additions”.¹⁹⁶ Shortly after arriving in the block of flats, the reader is

¹⁹³ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 17.

¹⁹⁴ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 17.

¹⁹⁵ Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie*, 28.

¹⁹⁶ Agatha Christie, *Third Girl* (London: HarperCollins, 2015), 25.

told about Mrs Oliver's fear of new technology because she is supposed to get inside a lift and is reluctant to do so. The lift is compared to “a yawning mouth with a menacing clash” and a “yawning cavern”.¹⁹⁷ In addition, she believes that such technology is too advanced: “I shouldn't have thought *that* lift would dare to go out of order. It's so-so-robot-like.”¹⁹⁸ It has been suggested by many that the character of Mrs Oliver, a large woman creating detective novels featuring a foreign detective, is the revelation of Christie's true feelings.¹⁹⁹ It is definitely interesting to realize that the reader learns the author's opinion on the London setting through this self-portraying character.

The plot of this story requires a large city full of people; the girl who thinks she has committed a murder but is not sure needs a crowded setting where it will be a challenge to discover if somebody has been murdered (as opposed to the countryside where there are only few people who usually know each other). The characters are mostly young working people who are accustomed to the city life consisting of being busy, enjoying themselves and living in characterless apartments. The use of urban setting is evident in passages such as this one:

They were mostly girls, and looked deceptively alike. How extraordinary human beings were when you considered them like this, emerging purposefully from these large tall buildings – just like anthills, thought Mrs Oliver. One had never considered an anthill properly, she decided. It always looked so aimless, as one disturbed it with the toe of a shoe. All those little things rushing about with bits of grass in their mouths, streaming along industriously, worried, anxious, looking as though they were running to and fro and going nowhere, but presumably they were just as well organized as these human beings here.²⁰⁰

Uniformity seems to be an essential aspect of this London setting used by Christie. All the young people minding only themselves look very similar to each other. Inside this setting, they lose their individuality and become a mass of bodies, all alike. They are compared to ants, animals, which are outwardly all the same and are not thinking individually. Moreover, it is difficult to distinguish a person's gender because all the young people in London seem to look feminine:

He was a figure familiar enough to Poirot in different conditions, a figure often met in the streets of London or even at parties. A representative of the youth of today. He wore a black coat, an elaborate velvet waistcoat, skin tight pants, and

¹⁹⁷ Christie, *Third Girl*, 26.

¹⁹⁸ Christie, *Third Girl*, 28.

¹⁹⁹ Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie*, 55.

²⁰⁰ Christie, *Third Girl*, 78.

rich curls of chestnut hair hung down on his neck. He looked exotic and rather beautiful, and it needed a few moments to be certain of his sex.²⁰¹

There is no beauty in the city, only functionality and comfort, as is evident from these two comments on the appearance of the building: 'Really, Frances, it's like living in a prison block, that building. Wormwood Scrubs or something.' 'Nonsense, Eileen. I tell you, they're frightfully comfortable, these flats.'²⁰² All the rooms in the flats are decorated with the same wallpaper and the same built-in furniture, which could be perceived as another sign of uniformity in this urban setting. The tenants may personalize these flats by putting their own pictures on the walls or choosing small decorations and placing them somewhere inside the rented flat.²⁰³ It is modern to share a flat with at least one or two other girls who seemingly do not perceive it as their home, merely as a place to quickly refresh themselves after they finish work for the day. When these girls change their clothes to "to tight exotic pants or whatever their particular addiction"²⁰⁴ is, they immediately go out to experience the city life again. Paradoxically, even though there are lots of people around, one can suddenly find himself or herself completely abandoned: "As is the precarious fashion of London, one moment you are amongst people all round you and the next moment there is nobody in sight."²⁰⁵ Loneliness may be then marked as another feature; one can get lost among so many people.

Christie's London setting in *Third Girl* is thus characterized by comfortable living, great job and other opportunities, but also by uniformity, a large number of inhabitants, loneliness, and losing one's individuality. In *The Big Four*, Poirot's investigation requires a lot of travelling and that is quite easy because of all the transportation possibilities which London offers. At the beginning, Hastings, the narrator, is traveling from South America through France to surprise Poirot in London²⁰⁶ who is about to begin his journey to South America. Then, on the way, Poirot decides he is needed in London and gets off the train: "A short walk brought us to a garage where we were able to obtain a car, and half an hour later we were spinning rapidly back to London."²⁰⁷

This novel, *The Big Four*, puts stress on how mobile the people are in this urban setting; Poirot can comfortably travel by bus, train or taxi to any place in London. The investigators are also

²⁰¹ Christie, *Third Girl*, 38.

²⁰² Christie, *Third Girl*, 247.

²⁰³ Christie, *Third Girl*, 27.

²⁰⁴ Christie, *Third Girl*, 25-26.

²⁰⁵ Christie, *Third Girl*, 104.

²⁰⁶ Agatha Christie, *The Big Four* (London: HarperCollins, 2016), 2.

²⁰⁷ Christie, *The Big Four*, 12.

required to go to “a squalid block of Mansions in an unsavoury neighbourhood”²⁰⁸ and other less desired locations: “In this instance, having taken successively a bus and two trains, and arrived in the neighbourhood of one of London's most depressing southern suburbs, he consented at last to explain matters.”²⁰⁹ It is quite interesting that the narrator even mentions the means of transport being used, perhaps to add credibility to the story. When Hastings is being blackmailed and taken into Chinatown, he does not forget to tell the reader he has to go there by bus and by tram. Taxis and their speed are often mentioned (“A taxi soon took us to our destination...”²¹⁰, “A taxi took us to the hospital in less than ten minutes.”²¹¹ or “We tore off in a taxi.”²¹²). Interestingly, McManis states that Christie never described the entire gigantic city, only details or specific elements and that its main role was a “transportation hub”.²¹³ Her characters would go to London to do shopping and then return to the countryside or they would travel from London to escape it for one weekend. Mobility can therefore be added to the above-mentioned features of Christie's London in these two books.

Returning to *The Tiger in the Smoke*, the previously mentioned oppressive fog accompanies the reader throughout the whole novel. It has stylistic effects when it “remakes” locations, e.g., when there is a dark archway of an entrance, “festooned like a very old theatre proscenium with swathes of fog”²¹⁴, or when there is a dark train resembling “a black caterpillar of blackness striped with dull silver” and the “overhead lamp shining on the fog makes it look as though the scene was taking place under muddy water”.²¹⁵ As the story continues and the killer is still free and keeps roaming London, the amount of fog continually increases; the greater the number of victims, the thicker the fog. When the police are searching for the killer and still cannot find him after two days of the manhunt, it becomes “the father of fogs, thicker and dirtier and more exasperating than any in living memory”.²¹⁶ Moreover, the fog can also create a flashback to remind the reader of the past war years:

It was as though the war years had peeped out at them suddenly and the coloured clothes all round them in the fog had been washed over briefly with khaki. To add to the illusion, the dreary thumping of a street band away out in Crumb Street behind them reached them faintly through the station noises. It was only

²⁰⁸ Christie, *The Big Four*, 168.

²⁰⁹ Christie, *The Big Four*, 21.

²¹⁰ Christie, *The Big Four*, 160.

²¹¹ Christie, *The Big Four*, 167.

²¹² Christie, *The Big Four*, 127.

²¹³ McManis, “Places for Mysteries,” 324.

²¹⁴ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 23.

²¹⁵ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 31.

²¹⁶ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 204.

the ghost of a tune, not recognizable yet evocative and faintly alarming, like a half-remembered threat.²¹⁷

Concerning the characters occupying this setting by Margery Allingham, if one does not consider the several main characters who belong to upper-middle or upper class (Albert Campion, his friends, and the police), the city is filled with people who either work and struggle or do not work at all and only beg for money. The group of people who are essential to the story and appear quite a few times belong to the street band, they are ragged war veterans unwilling to work, marching through the city, stealing, even kidnapping one character and wishing to find the treasure which is also sought by the killer. The street band, as opposed to the group around Campion, apparently feels as if they were almost at home “in the thick air, an almighty affront of a noise, importunate and vigorous”.²¹⁸

It has been mentioned that the setting in *Third Girl* contains a large number of young working people and artists who are used to the modern city way of life. The people wear and follow what is considered to be up-to-date and fashionable (“It is all a question of fashion. There have always been fashions. You see less in the country, but in London you meet plenty of them.”²¹⁹) Except for these young people whose style Poirot and Oliver do not understand much, there is also, for instance, a gang of young thugs²²⁰ causing troubles in front of the block of flats. The characters in *The Big Four* are more varied; Poirot tries to uncover a group of four criminal masterminds, each one based in a different country and in order to that, he and Hastings in London encounter a “typical London urchin, grimy of face and ragged of apparel”²²¹, a man from an asylum, or a scientist. While there is always a closed group of suspects in the country-house setting, the urban setting enables the writer to have an open group of suspects. In *Third Girl*, the group is quite closed, it consists of the girl's family members, flatmates, and her boyfriend, but until the last moment there is a possibility of an outsider committing the crime because the setting contains millions of people. Nevertheless, that would break one of the basic “rules” set by the Golden Age authors saying that the killer must be introduced during the course of the story. *The Big Four* features London-based Poirot searching for the four criminals all over the world, the only fact he is certain of is that the four people must have a lot of resources and influence, which does not really limit the number of suspects to only few names. The killer

²¹⁷ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 27.

²¹⁸ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 36.

²¹⁹ Christie, *Third Girl*, 39.

²²⁰ Christie, *Third Girl*, 62.

²²¹ Christie, *The Big Four*, 147.

in *The Tiger in the Smoke* is roaming London and killing people in the fog, which means the group of suspects is basically the entire population of London because the criminal is hidden inside it.

It has been suggested that the view on the setting depends largely on the narrator or the character's thoughts which the reader is being exposed to. The omniscient narrator is used in *The Tiger in the Smoke* and *Third Girl* while *The Big Four* is narrated by Hastings. When there is the character of Ariadne Oliver present in *Third Girl*, her negative view on modern architecture and technology is again offered: "This part of London seemed to have suffered or profited from a large amount of building in the recent years. Enormous skyscrapers, most of which Mrs Oliver thought very hideous, mounted to the sky with a square matchbox-like air."²²² Hercule Poirot is perhaps not so opinionated on the subject of city life because he is a Londoner who got used to living in a comfortable and expensive way. However, when he leaves his "natural environment", London, the reader is once again reminded that progress is not something which should be welcomed (due to the word *encroach* suggesting that building new houses and providing new services have gone beyond acceptable limits):

Hercule Poirot looked up at the façade of the dignified Georgian house in what had been until recently a quiet street in an old-fashioned market town. Progress was rapidly overtaking it, but the new supermarket, the Gifte Shoppe, Margery's Boutique, Peg's Café, and a palatial new bank, had all chosen sites in Croft Road and not encroached on the narrow High Street.²²³

Here can once again be seen Christie's disapproving attitude towards the city and the progressive development in the country. To further support this claim, McManis states that Agatha Christie's St. Mary's Mead, the village where Miss Marple lives, is initially a small village with a few streets, connecting roads and lanes surrounded by fields and woods. Twenty five years later, the village contains more houses, modernized shops, has a problem with car parking and Miss Marple herself complains about all the innovations in the village in a similar way to Ariadne Oliver in this urban setting.²²⁴

Christie's London is busy, filled with cars and people²²⁵, attractive to rich ones²²⁶, and a city of dust and smoke²²⁷. Allingham's city in *The Tiger in the Smoke* is too described as busy,

²²² Christie, *Third Girl*, 80.

²²³ Christie, *Third Girl*, 220.

²²⁴ McManis, "Places for Mysteries," 322-323.

²²⁵ Christie, *Third Girl*, 25.

²²⁶ Christie, *Third Girl*, 218.

²²⁷ Christie, *The Big Four*, 93.

chaotic²²⁸, as a bedevilled old town²²⁹ with crowds on pavements crushing individual people²³⁰, merchants selling their goods, and hurrying travellers during rush hours²³¹. Blinded by the fog and rain, one can hear “the scream of brakes, the abuse of drivers, the fierce hiss of tyres on the wet road”²³² and the people wonder why their ancestors had built a city in a marsh.²³³ Deterioration is apparent in some parts of London and it concerns not only the locations but also their inhabitants (“You know the sort of district this is. A lot of very good houses going down, and a very good lot of people going down too.”²³⁴) These inhabitants are penniless and there is a smell attributed to their impecuniosity, “a particular stink of city poverty which is uncompromisingly cat”.²³⁵ Although Allingham's London may be more unappealing than Christie's, *The Tiger in the Smoke* does not seem to condemn progress as Christie does. There is also a “great solid mass of apathetic gazers who spring out of the very stones of a city the moment there is anything to look at”.²³⁶ This impassable crowd makes it even more difficult to catch an escaping person. The main characters around Campion are not comfortable in this urban setting and can feel violence approaching and following them:

[...] but from behind them there had flashed out for an instant the reality of the thing which had been chasing them all the afternoon. He was aware of it in the street now, stark under the blanket of the gloom.²³⁷

Campion himself is exposed to “the ancient smell of evil, acrid and potent as the stench of fever”.²³⁸ Ariadne Oliver, Poirot's companion, also felt something evil around before she was attacked and yet she believes that a city full of people should be safer than an abandoned place in the country: “I mean, it was London. Right in the middle of London. People all about. I mean – how *could* I be frightened? It wasn't like a lonely wood or anything!”²³⁹ These urban settings are filled with many characters, there are more of them than in the closed country-house settings, but, just as at the country house, the people in London feel uneasy because the criminal

²²⁸ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 21.

²²⁹ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 78.

²³⁰ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 23.

²³¹ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 29.

²³² Allingham, *The Tiger*, 36.

²³³ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 199.

²³⁴ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 125.

²³⁵ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 98.

²³⁶ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 31.

²³⁷ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 38.

²³⁸ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 211.

²³⁹ Christie, *Third Girl*, 169.

is somewhere among them. They need to learn his or her identity and bring the criminal to justice in order to feel safe.

Due to the presence of the fog in *The Tiger in the Smoke*, the distances are deceptive and the colours untrue.²⁴⁰ The characters cannot see properly, therefore it also functions as an obstruction because, for instance, "everyone looks alike in the fog"²⁴¹ and it is more difficult for people to be recognized and for the killer to be caught; he literally disappears in the "smoke". The thick fog also delays the investigators considerably.²⁴² Not only does the fog cause low visibility; there is also a certain evil smell attributed to it by Albert Campion, he describes the smell of the fog as a "a smell of ashes grown cold under hoses"²⁴³, then, on the second morning of the man-hunt, it is said that "twenty-four hours of city vapours had given it body and bouquet, and its chill was spiteful"²⁴⁴. The fog is also described as "bone-chilling and menacing"²⁴⁵ and helps the beggars from the street band to easily dispose of anybody unwanted. To stress that the police truly is at loose ends, it even penetrates the inspector's office.²⁴⁶

One of few moments when the fog does not serve as a non-transparent substance hiding violence and criminality in the city is when a rectory with priest Canon Avril is introduced. There the fog is "cosy, hardly cold, gentle, almost protective"²⁴⁷ and houses are quiet, perhaps because of the priest character. The other instance is when the mist intensifies "suppressed excitement which is peculiar to all great railway stations".²⁴⁸ On the other hand, Christie does not use the London weather to foreshadow coming events, it is mentioned only in this instance: "It was mid-January – a typical English winter day in London, damp and dirty."²⁴⁹ Here is a clear difference between the sunny and optimistic sky at Styles in Essex during the summer and this forlorn type of winter weather. The seasons of the year are different and so is the mood, bleak and desolate. The mood-setting weather element appearing in *The Tiger in the Smoke*, the fog, is used in this novel to set the dark and gloomy atmosphere of the story, to foreshadow coming events, to create obstructions, and to hide the escaping killer. He even says at one point

²⁴⁰ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 23.

²⁴¹ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 38.

²⁴² Allingham, *The Tiger*, 139.

²⁴³ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 36.

²⁴⁴ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 190.

²⁴⁵ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 38.

²⁴⁶ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 67-68.

²⁴⁷ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 39.

²⁴⁸ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 29.

²⁴⁹ Christie, *The Big Four*, 131.

in the novel, “I thought I had plenty of time with the fog so thick...”²⁵⁰ The killer therefore explicitly relies on the presence of the fog and its ability to cover people; it helps him to continue in his killing spree.

A few people get murdered while Poirot is investigating the criminal organization. For instance, a London girl who is about to give Poirot a photo showing one of the criminals is run over when crossing the street.²⁵¹ The setting of the hurried city makes it possible and even makes it look like an accident during the rush hour. It is also necessary to determine whether a woman's fall out of a window at the block of flats in *Third Girl* was an accident or a murder, which is one of puzzle elements provided by the setting in detective novels. The tenants at the block of flats do not care much about others and Poirot learns about this event only by coincidence. This is again possible only in this urban setting where there are too many people who do not know and do not talk to each other. A physical “roadblock”, or rather a possible murder weapon, provided by the setting in *The Big Four* appears when Poirot and Hastings are nearly killed by a falling tree in France, which is one of the Big Four attempts to dispose of Poirot.²⁵² Although the criminal organization operates around the whole world, Poirot always returns to London to continue in his investigations.

There are specific streets and locations mentioned, which can be expected, as the setting is the well-known city of London and it is necessary for the detective novels to be located somewhere in time and space. Crumb Street in *The Tiger in the Smoke* appears as the setting several times and one of the murders is committed in its proximity, a disgusting place to which the characters react with “What a place to die in!” and “Or to live in, of course.”²⁵³ Most of the locations are unappealing, filled with dirt, vapours, smoke, noises, surrounded by darkness or naphtha flare lamps²⁵⁴ and typical London telephone boxes can be seen there as well. Christie's novels contain specific famous places such as the Embankment, St Paul's, Charing Cross, Sloane Square, World's End, or King's Road.²⁵⁵ It is mentioned that Poirot and Hastings's investigation is usually interrupted by dining in small and luxurious restaurants in Soho.²⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, they do not walk there, but rather take a taxi to these London's most expensive restaurants, thus

²⁵⁰ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 187.

²⁵¹ Christie, *Third Girl*, 114.

²⁵² Christie, *The Big Four*, 56.

²⁵³ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 62.

²⁵⁴ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 62.

²⁵⁵ Christie, *Third Girl*, 103.

²⁵⁶ Christie, *The Big Four*, 112.

they are living the comfortable city life and enjoying its advantages.²⁵⁷ London also provides a large variety of locations, even exotic ones, for instance, when the narrator has to enter Chinatown and go inside a “strange underground nest of luxury”²⁵⁸ belonging to a Chinese man. Due to the fact that London is such a cosmopolitan city full of various neighbourhoods, many different places can be used during the course of the story, from luxurious to poverty-stricken ones. According to one of terms used by professor Demko in his essays on landscapes of crime, one can talk here about a cultural dynamic environment because the socio-economic characteristics of the “human milieu” change with each London location.

As the story comes to its end, the fog gradually disappears and the priest can, at first, feel the fog lifting and see a bit of the sky²⁵⁹ and then, a few pages later, even a piece of nature when “the fog was clearing rapidly and he could just discern the tulip tree in the square.”²⁶⁰ Due to the fog lifting, the killer is able to reach the island with the sought treasure earlier than he would have been with it still in the air.²⁶¹ Finally, the inspector working with Albert Campion can even experience the sun “shining through the newly-cleaned windows of his office as blandly as if no such thing as a London fog had ever existed”²⁶², which suggests that the setting is now in an even better state than at the beginning of the novel because there was initially no peaceful atmosphere. *Third Girl* ends with not one, but two marriages of the suspects. Hastings at the end of *The Big Four* learns that Poirot only pretended to be dead; the narrator can now happily return to his wife and Poirot says he may retire and perhaps even marry a woman.

As has been said in the previous chapter on the country-house setting, the country in which the story is set has its own legal system requiring to punish the criminals. In *The Tiger in the Smoke*, the murderer kills himself after he finds the treasure which is worthless to him. The murderer and his accomplice in *Third Girl* are exposed by Poirot and are about to face justice. Three of the four criminal masterminds in *The Big Four* die in an explosion after Poirot gets into their secret base and the fourth one commits suicide. The society therefore does not contain the criminals anymore and all the novels end on an optimistic note.

To summarize, although these detective novels do not take place in the same time frame (*The Tiger in the Smoke* in the post-war London, *The Big Four* in the 1920s and *Third Girl*

²⁵⁷ Christie, *The Big Four*, 162.

²⁵⁸ Christie, *The Big Four*, 146.

²⁵⁹ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 236.

²⁶⁰ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 240.

²⁶¹ Allingham, *The Tiger*, 247.

²⁶² Allingham, *The Tiger*, 249.

presumably in the 1960s), both authors used the same location, the city of London, and a few similarities can be observed. London in all three works is a city full of smoke and dust, luxury and poverty, a place of endless possibilities with various characters who are not a homogenous group. There are violence and chaos in the streets, people are leading busy lives and minding only themselves. There are masses either helplessly looking on or only following their specific goals as ants or robots.

The city may seem unappealing, but there are, too, advantages to the city life: Poirot goes everywhere by taxi and eats in luxurious restaurants; the group around Campion leads a comfortable life as well. The need to have enough money in order to enjoy one's life is more apparent here than in the country because without it one might end up on the street as the beggars in Allingham's London. If people have money, they can enjoy the great number of things which the city has to offer, but, on the other hand, not being financially secured means struggle in this urban setting. And, indeed, money and power are the criminal motives in these detective novels.

There are also a few differences; Christie states through her characters who are observing the setting that progress and change are bad while Allingham does no such thing. She employs the fog, which guides the reader through the whole novel, to set the dark atmosphere, to foreshadow, to stylize the setting, to create obstructions and to hide the murderer. Christie does not use the weather on such a scale, however, her London seems to be also cold and grey.

It is difficult to imagine that these plots which need such a wide range of characters and locations could take place anywhere else but in the city. Moreover, the urban setting containing a large number of characters makes it possible for more than one murder to occur; in the country-house setting, committing more than one murder is unlikely because there is a small and limited number of suspects.

Containing the busy city life with its advantages and disadvantages, the urban setting thus provides the writer with the possibility to use many different locations and to employ various characters.

7 Conclusion

The importance of the setting in detective novels may perhaps not be fully acknowledged by the reader, but it is not only a specific location in space and time. The setting in detective novels is always active; it provides evidence to the investigators (a piece of a burnt will at Styles or a leather case containing a map of a bank at Black Dudley), creates a puzzle to be solved (e.g., the need to determine whether a person's fall out of a window at the block of flats was an accident or a murder in *Third Girl*), functions as an obstruction (e.g., the fog in Allingham's London, bolted doors at Styles). The setting is the place and time in which the murder was committed, investigated, and solved. The reader must learn the same amount of information from the setting as the detective: where and when exactly each character was, what they were doing inside the setting, or whether the murderer accidentally left any clues to be discovered.

The setting in these novels is always a series of places; the story never takes place only in one room. Even though Black Dudley becomes a prison for the guests, they can still explore the endless rooms of the country house. It is necessary for the investigators to talk to the suspects, to examine the crime scenes and the surroundings and to collect evidence. The story in detective novels is therefore never limited to only one room.

It can be also claimed that the setting in detective novels is always dynamic; it changes during the course of the story, especially by using the weather to foreshadow that something important is about to happen. In three of the five books discussed in the analytical part, the weather gets better or worse according to the events in the story. Moreover, there is always a gloomy atmosphere when the murder is committed and when the investigator struggles to find the murderer and then, at the end after exposing the criminal, the atmosphere lightens.

An essential aspect connected to the setting is the group of characters occupying it. They must fit the setting, whether it is a group of upper-middle class people and their servants staying at Styles and Black Dudley or a ragged street band in the streets of London. The country-house setting provides a closed group of people; no new character is able to enter the story because the country house is isolated. On the other hand, the urban setting provides quite an unlimited number of characters to interview, thus the group of characters present in the urban setting is open, and there is a wide range of different locations to visit.

There is another significant difference between the urban and rural setting apart from the closed and open group of characters. The country-house setting in these two authors' novels features an isolated house somewhere in the countryside surrounded by nature. The investigators

at Styles can enjoy the tranquility and peacefulness of the impressive country house and its surroundings and are relieved that they can escape from the city for a while, even though a murder has to be investigated there. The people at Black Dudley also admire the magnificence of the age-old country house. While the country house may be perceived as a place where one would wish to be and may create a striking contrast between the horrific murder and the astonishing nature, London is a bleak, rainy city which offers luxurious as well as unappealing locations, large transport possibilities, or modernity. There are masses of Londoners who seemingly lose their individuality in the crowds and look alike. If they work, their lives are hurried and stressful and if they do not have money, they yearn for it. Violence is also ever-present in these authors' works containing London until the culprit is exposed and punished.

In the country-house setting, one can find nature, tranquility, solitude and isolation, magnificence, and the initial innocence and, on the other side, one can experience hurriedness, violence, losing one's individuality, uniformity, mobility, loneliness, and the amusing city life in the urban setting. The topoi, the recurrent stylizations of a place, here specifically of the flawed city and of the innocent country, thus can be to a certain extent recognized in the selected works of these two detective novel writers of the 20th century. While Agatha Christie seems to draw inspiration from the Romantic movement celebrating nature and its beauty and condemns change and progress, Margery Allingham's writing resembles Gothic writing with its gloomy London and especially with its country house which may remind the reader of a haunted castle at the beginning of the novel.

In spite of the fact there are a few differences when the settings created by these two authors are compared, it is clear that the setting in detective novels plays an immense role and it is impossible to imagine a detective novel without it. The choice of the appropriate setting is vital in order to make the story believable, attract the reader's attention and pull him or her inside the story.

Resume

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá tematikou prostředí ve vybraných dílech dvou autorek, Agathy Christie a Margery Allingham, z takzvaného zlatého věku britské detektivní prózy. Cílem práce je pomocí literární analýzy porovnat prostředí venkovského domu a města u obou spisovatelek. Nejdříve je v práci popsána historie detektivní prózy a jsou probrány její definice od různých autorů a kritiků jako je Auden, Chandler, Scaggs a Forshaw. Další kapitola se zabývá samotným zlatým věkem, tedy 20. a 30. léty minulého století v Británii a autorkami, které v tomto období psaly detektivní romány. Pozornost je věnována právě Agathě Christie a Margery Allingham; kapitola v závěru stručně probírá jejich styl psaní a možný zdroj inspirace pro prostředí, která použily ve svých detektivních románech.

V pořadí třetí kapitola se věnuje prostředí jako takovému, jeho definicím a tvrzením, co vše musí v detektivních románech obsahovat. Je zmíněno, že toto prostředí musí být vždy založena na reálných místech, ve kterých se běžně ocitají nebo přebývají lidé – postavy. Právě postavy jsou s prostředím neoddelitelně spjaty a je nutné, aby do něj zapadaly a aby tak skutečnost, že se v daném prostředí nalézají, byla pro čtenáře uvěřitelná. Prostředí venkovského domu by vždy mělo izolovat danou skupinu lidí, často elitu (zástupce vyšší třídy), od okolního světa a zdůraznit tak fakt, že vrah se ukrývá právě mezi nimi. Venkovský dům je zpravidla uprostřed „ničeho“, obklopen nádhernou přírodou, která vytváří kontrast s odpudivou vraždou, která se v prostředí domu odehrála. Aby se prostředí mohlo navrátit do svého původního poklidného a mírumilovného stavu, je nutné najít viníka a „očistit“ tak společnost, která se v domě nachází. Toto venkovské prostředí je také porovnáno s tzv. hard-boiled mode, americkou detektivní prózou s městským prostředím, v níž je prostředí už od počátku zkorumpované, plné násilí a na rozdíl od venkova nepůsobí nijak lákavě. Důležitost realistického prostředí se projevuje i používáním map, které jsou součástí mnoha detektivních románů a slouží k tomu, aby zdůraznily, že příběh se odehrává v reálném prostoru, protože právě to je pro detektivní žánr důležité; prostředí potřebuje pro ukotvení specifické místo a čas. V rámci této kapitoly je pak také probrána teorie spojená s prostředím – například pojmy dynamické a statické prostředí, aktivní a pasivní, nebo tzv. foreshadowing, technika, pomocí které se jemně poukazuje na budoucí události v příběhu.

Poslední kapitola teoretické části se soustředí na rozdíl mezi městským a venkovským prostředím a zejména hledá důvod, proč je venkov tak idealizován a město zobrazováno tak nelichotivě. Jsou popsány rozdíly mezi uspěchaným městským životem a zdánlivě poklidným

životem na venkově, v jehož literárním zobrazení bylo většinou opomíjeno utrpení lidí, kteří tvrdě pracovali na polích. Kapitola jde postupně stále dále a dále do minulosti, protože se snaží zjistit, jestli je tvrzení „dříve bylo lépe“ pravdivé a pokud ano, kdy tato doba probíhala. Okrajově je probrán i romantismus, během kterého se v anglické literatuře příroda začala ještě více idealizovat a postupně se čtenář této práce dostane až do doby před člověkem, kdy jím ještě příroda byla neposkvřněná a neponičená. Žádný takzvaný „zlatý věk“, kdy se lidé měli dobře a žili v souladu s přírodou, tak nikdy neexistoval a je pouze mýtem. Lidé, kteří chtějí utéct z města do přírody jsou zpravidla ti, kteří nikdy nepoznali útrapy života na venkově a proto jej idealizují. Právě to by mohlo být důvodem k již zmiňované idealizované představě – klamně přesvědčení, že dříve lidé žili ve větší harmonii s přírodou a měli se lépe, a tendence idealizovat si přírodu, která v porovnání s rušným městem působí na první pohled nádherně.

Pátou kapitolou začíná analytická část, která nejdříve rozebírá prostředí venkovského domu v detektivních románech „The Mysterious Affair at Styles“ (Vražda na zámku Styles) a „The Crime at Black Dudley“ (Vražda v Black Dudley). Pomocí citací a úryvků z knihy je poukazováno na to, jak odlišné atmosféry se autorky snaží vytvořit. Zatímco Agatha Christie popisuje nádhernou a klidnou přírodu a Hastings, vypravěč, je vděčný za možnost strávit v ní čas a později ji obdivuje i detektiv Hercule Poirot, Margery Allingham naproti tomu popisuje Black Dudley jako téměř hororové sídlo, sice zanedbané a trochu děsivé, ale majestátní. Zdá se tak, že Christie nejspíš přejímá názor spisovatelů z období anglického romantismu, kteří idealizovali venkov a přírodu, a u Allingham je patrná podobnost s gotickými díly, ve kterých strašidelné hrady a pevnosti s vysokými okny a těžkými závěsy ukrývaly svá tajemství a izolovaly obyvatele od okolního světa.

Analytická část tedy porovnává, v čem se oba venkovské domy liší a v čem jsou stejné nebo podobné. Oba izolují podobné skupiny hostů, uvnitř nichž je skrytý vrah, od okolního světa, jsou to velice staré a úctyhodné budovy s dlouhou historií a obklopuje je příroda. V obou příbězích se navíc změni počasí podle toho, jak se v daném okamžiku vyvíjí příběh. Atmosféry obou domů se však liší; během příběhu na sídle zvaném Styles je vše zdánlivě idylické, zatímco příběh v Black Dudley se odehrává v lehce strašidelném domě.

Poté je ještě zkoumáno prostředí Londýna v dílech obou autorek, v knize „Tiger in the Smoke“ (Tygr v mlze) z roku 1952, která je považována za vrcholné dílo Margery Allingham, a v knihách „Third Girl“ (Třetí dívka) a „The Big Four“ (Velká čtyřka). Tento městský román Margery Allingham nabízí pohled na poválečný Londýn plný chudých válečných veteránů, špíny, násilí a mlhy skrývající nebezpečného vraha, která v příběhu hraje takřka hlavní roli;

vytváří překážky, dokresluje nebo mění lokace, a postupně houstne v souladu s tím, jak neúspěšní jsou vyšetřovatelé v hledání vraha. V prvně jmenovaném díle Christie z roku 1966 je Londýn zobrazen jako město panelových domů a mladých, ambiciózních a pracujících lidí, kteří vypadají všichni velmi podobně a dokonce je těžké i rozeznat jejich pohlaví. Londýn se tady vyznačuje ztrátou individuality, uniformitou, velkým počtem obyvatel, ale zároveň osamělostí uvnitř tohoto davu. V knize „Third Girl“ Christie navíc kritizuje pomocí názorů Ariadne Oliver a dokonce i skrz Hercula Poirota pokrok. Román „The Big Four“ z roku 1927 ještě zdůrazňuje jiný aspekt městského prostředí a to mobilitu, protože Poirot neustále přejíždí taxíkem a jinými dopravními prostředky z místa na místo. Ve všech zobrazeních je Londýn místem, kde postavy tuší přítomnost násilí a necítí se příliš dobře, není v něm na počátku žádná příliš idylická atmosféra.

Závěrem práce shrnuje poznatky ohledně prostředí v detektivních románech, které se zdá být vždy aktivní, protože poskytuje detektivovi a čtenáři důkazy a hádanky k rozluštění, může vytvářet překážky, nebo například pomocí počasí poukazovat na budoucí události. Také je dynamické, mění se v průběhu příběhu, opět třeba za použití počasí, a nikdy to není pouze jedna lokace, jeden pokoj, detektiv vždy musí navštívit několik míst, kde sbírá důkazy, mluví s podezřelými, apod. Zatímco venkovský dům vždy obsahuje uzavřenou a nepříliš početnou skupinu podezřelých, Londýn nabízí velké množství postav a v podstatě otevřenou skupinu. Ačkoliv je prostředí v detektivních románech nejspíš nedocenené, hraje v nich zásadní roli.

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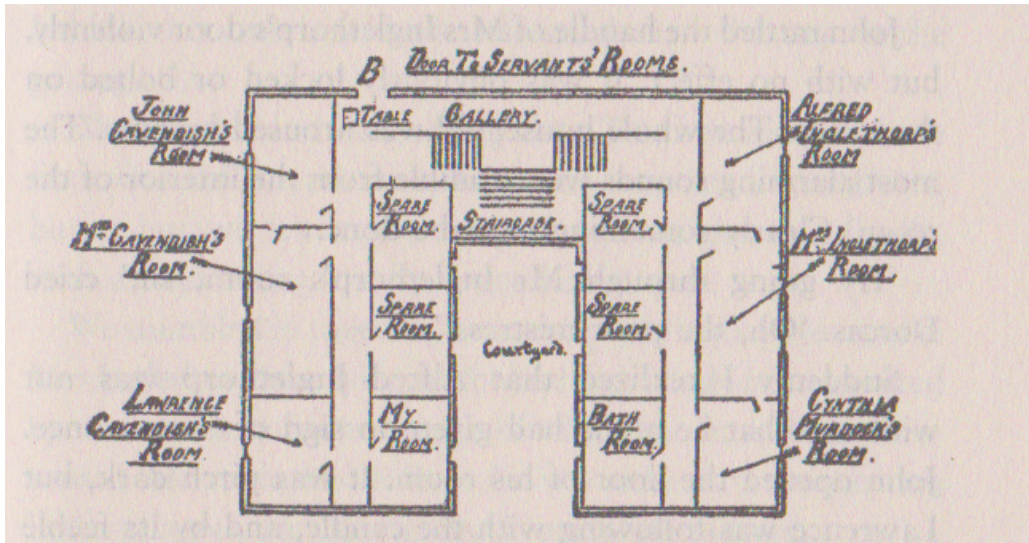
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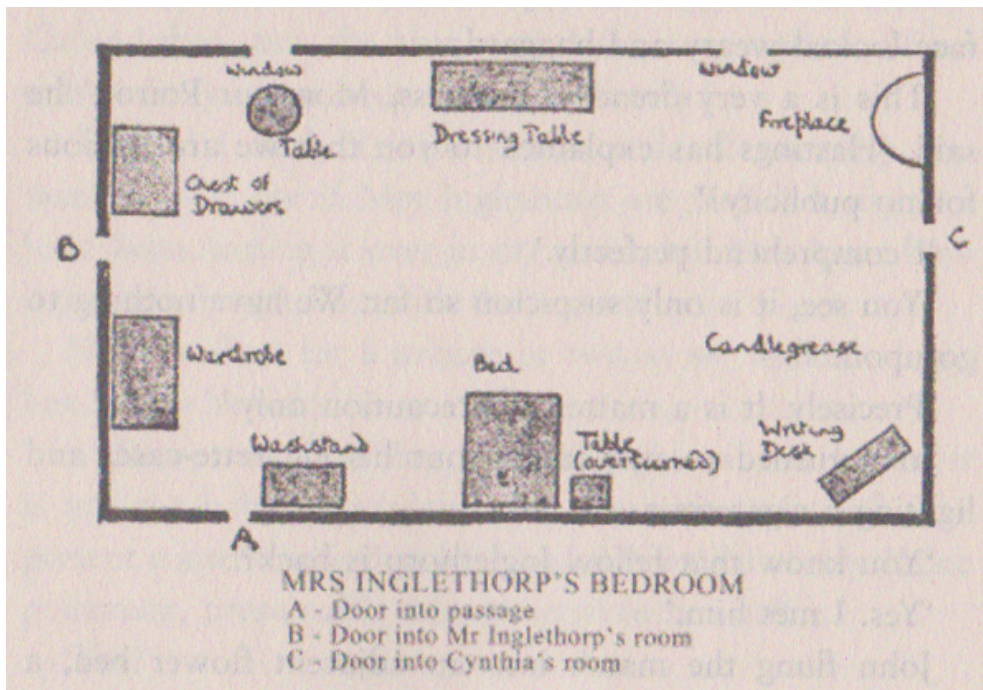
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Appendix I

Maps included in the book *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*:



Picture 1 - Agatha Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (London: HarperCollins, 2013), 29.



Picture 2 - Agatha Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (London: HarperCollins, 2013), 44.

Appendix II

Extracts from *Poetika míst* in Czech which were paraphrased or cited in this work:

Footnote no. 89: Povaha místa bývá spjata s typem postavy, která se na něm zdržuje, nebo se jím pohybuje, místo do značné míry determinuje postavu a postava místo.

Footnote no. 90: Nejen mezi místy a syžetem, ale i mezi místy a žánry existuje těsná provázanost. Ta je ovšem zřetelnější například v pohádce či bylině, tedy ve folklorních žánrech, a v pokleslých podobách literárních žánrů, například v takzvaném lidovém románu, než jinde. Vstoupí-li pohádkový hrdina do lesa či hrdina byliny vyjede na „širé pole“, není pochyb o tom, že ho tam čeká zápas s drakem, d'áblem, obrem, nepřitelem jako takovým, - tato místa jsou totiž žánrem předurčena k určitému ději, určité události, „nesou“ si tuto událost tak říkajíc v sobě, a hrdina se tu proto zákonitě dostává do situace vlastní tomuto místu.

Footnote no. 92: Na místa v literárním díle se můžeme podívat ještě jiným způsobem, zaměřit se na vztah různých míst z hlediska protikladu statický x dynamický. Pak se na jedné straně ocitne například dům jako *místo statické* a na druhé straně cesta (spolu s ní třeba také loď, vlak) jako *místo dynamické*. Cesta je v literárním díle vlastně tvořena sérií míst, propojených postavou poutník či cestovatele (případně také dopravním prostředkem). Statická a dynamická místa se v dílech vyskytují zpravidla současně. V Dantově Božské komedii figurují tři základní toposy – peklo, očistec a nebe (v prologu je jim předřazen „temný les“ jako metafora světa). Tato místa jsou sice toposy statickými, ale poutníková cesta (sestup a vzestup) je propojuje do série, trojčlenného sledu charakteristického pro syžet alegorického putování, a činí z nich tedy de facto součástí dynamického toposu cesty.

Footnote no. 103: Curtius řadí k topoi i určité stylizace postav typu bohyně Přírody či Jedermanna a konečně i *určité vracející se stylizace místa* – například ideální krajinu (tzv. locus amoenus); tato krajina-zahrada, do níž se vtělil obraz pozemského ráje, se stala básnickou rekvizitou středověké literatury, odkud pak přešla i do literatury novodobé (její rysy můžeme shledat i třeba v Máchově krajině z počátku Máje a dokonce i v české hymně).

Footnote no. 104: A to samé platí podle našeho názoru, a snad dokonce dvojnásob, o tématu či toposu. Každé téma už bylo ne jednou, ale mnohokrát tematizováno, *rozvinuto*, určitý topos (místo) vystupoval v prostoru nesčetných děl, ale tyto jindy a jinde rozvinuté významy a příběhy jsou v něm implicitně přítomny, v různé míře jím při každém jeho užití *prosvítají* a v něm *ožívají*.

Footnote no. 122: Stejně jako město má každý pokoj svou vlastní auru, jež představuje jakousi duchovní „informaci“ tvořenou z pocitů, myšlenek, osudů jeho obyvatel. [...] Z tohoto hlediska je pak důležité, jedná-li se o známý pokoj, který subjekt-obyvatel má plně ve své moci, anebo o pokoj neznámý, jehož významy subjektu unikají – subjekt-host touží na toto místo proniknout, poznat jeho tajemství, „zabydlet je“ (zakletá komnata). Zatímco známý, vlastní pokoj je obvykle povahy idylické (ve fantastické a v literatuře od dob romantismu takový bývá alespoň v počáteční fázi děje), neznámý, cizí pokoj se zpravidla jeví jako nebezpečný či přímo fatální. Můžeme-li říci, že známý pokoj je de facto *prodlouženým tělem* svého obyvatele a zároveň *výklenkem – nikou* „těla“ města, neznámý pokoj, který má často znaky „pokoje hrůzy“, host vnímá jako *cizí tělo*, takřka jako tělo šelmy, jako místo související nějakým způsobem se smrtí. Jestliže na jedné straně je pokoj prodlouženým tělem subjektu, který jej obývá, na druhé straně tento subjekt, který je tak říkajíc mimo jiné „složen“ ze všech míst, na kterých se kdy nacházel, pokoj stejně jako jiná místa do sebe pojímá, pokoj se stává součástí jeho těla i duše. Nemáme tu ovšem na mysli pokoj jen jako holou místnost, i když ani tato podoba není v životě i literatuře nedůležitá, ale pokoj zařízený, vybavený nábytkem, který právě tak jako místo navazuje s obyvatelem bytostný vztah. Věci, které nás v pokoji obklopují, se vtiskují do naší aury a právě tak my vstupujeme do věcí, zanecháváme na nich svůj „pel“ – navzájem se s věcmi „opyluje“. Mezi námi a věcmi se navazuje jemné předitivo vztahů a spojením míst, věcí a lidí vznikají neobyčejně složité, racionálně sotva poznatelné a popsitelné informační systémy.

Footnote no. 123: K základní charakteristice pokoje patří, že je to místo ohraničené čtyřmi stěnami (v kukátkovém divadelním prostoru pouze třemi), obsažené v jiném ohraničeném místě (domě, zámku apod.), že je uzavřené a představuje vnitřek, interiér vzhledem ke krajině, ale otevřené ve srovnání s takovými místy, jako je vězení (toposu vězení se podobá tzv. local clos či místnost bez dveří). Otevřenost pokoje je zajištěna okny a dveřmi (pokud jdou otevřít), jimiž může subjekt komunikovat s vnějším světem, vycházet a vcházet.

Footnote no. 124: Zvláštní pozornost se zde udílí třem kouskům mobiliáře – křeslu jako ideálnímu místu pro meditujícího člověka, lůžku jako místu zrození a smrti, divadlu, na kterém lidský rod hraje směšné frašky i hrůzné tragédie, a zrcadlu, jež „usedlému cestovateli“ skýtá množství reflexí.

Footnote no. 125: Na konci 18. století se vytvářela ještě jiná podoba pokoje, která navázala na středověkou tradici dobrodružného pokoje, ale i ona už měla některé rysy pokoje romantického. Měla podobu zakleté hradní komnaty, ústředního místa hradu v gotickém románu. Tajemstvím této komnaty, v níž se zjevují duchové mrtvých nebo se tu nalézají indicie

vraždy, bývá utajený zločin a skrytý původ hosta této komnaty, který se zpravidla ukazuje být netušeným posledním potomkem rodu.

Footnote no. 127: Zařízení pokoje – s výjimkou symbolických předmětů, které k němu vlastně nenáleží (krvácející brnění), - nehraje v zakleté komnatě gotického románu prakticky žádnou roli. Popis interiéru začíná tvořit podstatnou část literárního textu teprve od romantismu. [...] Charakteristickým rysem romantického pokoje, jehož esenci nám Poe předkládá, je jeho uzavřenost: v Usherově pokoji (*Zánik domu Usherů*, 1839) jsou dlouhá, úzká, lomená okna umístěna tak vysoko, že jsou z místnosti nepřístupná. Velkého významu nabývají *závěsy a záclony* všeho druhu (lože v Medailónu je obklopeno závěsy, tmavé drapérie visí po stěnách Usherova pokoje) jako nástroj *zastřenosti a skrytosti*, které jsou vedle uzavřenosti hlavními principy romantického pokoje. Ty se uplatňují také v motivu *výklenků*, jimiž jako by se tajemný pokoj, který se v poeovské variantě mění v *pokoj hrůzy* (je dějištěm mučení a hrůzné smrti), snaží prolomit do *jiného* prostoru, vytvořit a umocnit iluzi *hloubky* (podobný smysl mají rozličné skříňky a truhly). Romantický pokoj se tak vyznačuje rysy charakteristickými pro romantický prostor jako takový a ve své podstatě se například příliš neliší od romantické krajiny nebo města; je to prostor, který odkazuje k nějakému dalšímu, jinému prostoru, prostor, který „někam vede“, přičemž toto „někam“ znamená v romantické literatuře vesměs cestu do hloubky, často do zásvětí. [...] Romantický pokoj a zčásti už i pokoj z gotického románu představují místo, v němž je základním způsobem zaklet prostor (uzavřenost, zastřenost, členitost do hloubky) a čas (zchátralost, staromódnost).