The Golden Age of British Detective Fiction: Women Authors

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.INTRODUCTION.....1

2. THE GOLDEN AGE OF DETECTIVE FICTION.....2-3

3. BRITISH WOMEN WRITERS – THE "QUEENS OF CRIME" 4-6

3.1. DOROTHY LEIGH SAYERS.....7-13

3.2. MARGERY LOUISE ALLINGHAM.....14-18

3.2.AGATHA MARY CLARISSA CHRISTIE.....19-26

4. CONCLUSION.....27

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES.....28-30

6. ABSTRACT.....31-32

1. INTRODUCTION

Many people have probably heard about *The Murders in the Rue Morgue (1841)* by Edgar Allan Poe, and its detective C. Auguste Dupin. Edgar Allan Poe and his detective have motivated many other writers. For example, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote his famous book *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (1892)*.This created a new genre of fiction called detective fiction.

Detective fiction is a genre in which people have been interested in for well over a hundred years. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (1989) defines the detective story as "a story in which the main interest is a puzzling crime and the process of solving it." (Hornby, 1989)In the central crime, it is likely to expect a closed circle of suspects that have a motive, a detective, and a solution that the reader should arrive at by logical assumption from clues given in the book. A detective story is like a challenge posed by the author to the reader.

There were several questions that I had while researching about detective fiction. Throught out my years of education, I always heard about male writers and their work. Only sometimes I heard about female writers. I always felt they are not talked enough about. I always questioned why? So, I decided to write about them and their work.

What about female detective fiction writers? What do we know about them and their work? This thesis concentrates on them and their contribution to this genre. The paper is specified by focusing on British women detective fiction writers that made an impact during the Golden Age. Today, they are known as "the queens of crime".

In my thesis I will focus on the period in which they were writting, on their biography, and of course I will write about their detective stories. I will try my best on showing why are they so special to me.

2. THE GOLDEN AGE OF DETECTIVE FICTION

The Golden Age is usually considered to cover the two decades between the First and Second World War. The writers of the Golden Age were as varied as their talents. At times it seemed that everyone who could put together a legible narrative had to write. Many writers who built a reputation by writing detective fiction already had thriving careers in other fields. For example, George Douglas Howard Cole and his wife Margaret were both economists, and Robert Bruce Montgomery was a musician, a composer, and a critic (James, 2010, pp. 48-51).

The Golden Age fiction set out to ease the readers by showing order in society. A set of rules was made in the introduction to *Best Detective Stories* (1928) by Ronald Knox that writers found challenging.The rules were:

- the criminal must be mentioned in the early parts of the narrative, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow;
- all supernatural agencies are ruled out;
- there must not be more than one secret room or passage;
- no hitherto undiscovered poisons should be used or, indeed, any appliance which needs a long scientific explanation;
- no Chinaman must figure in the story;
- no accident must help the detective, nor is he allowed an unaccountable intuition;
- the detective himself must not commit the crime or alight on any clues which are not instantly produced for the reader;
- the stupid friend of the detective should be slightly, but no more than slightly, less intelligent than the average reader and his thoughts should not be concealed;
- twin brothers and doubles generally must not appear unless the reader has been duly prepared for them.

These rules, if accepted as mandatory, reduced the detective story to a puzzle in which the reader would be exercising their intelligence. The rules did not produce original or good literature, and the writers did not strictly follow them. Soon, some writers started breaking the rules. For example, in Agatha Christie's novel *The Murder of Roger*

Ackroyd (1926), the narrator proved to be the murderer. Some readers have never forgiven her that (James, 2010, pp. 52-54).

The majority of the Golden Age novels are out of print at present, but the names of the most popular still echo. Those writers who are still being read have provided something more than an exciting and original plot. They have shown excellency in writing, and have provided a striking sense of place, a memorable and convincing hero, and, most importantly, the ability to draw the reader into their highly individual world (James, 2010, p. 56).

One reason for the popularity of detective fiction during the Golden Age was the rising middle-class readership. The middle class had the leisure time and disposable income to indulge in literary pursuits, and detective fiction novels provided an affordable and exciting form of entertainment that could be enjoyed in the comfort of their homes. The detective characters of this era were clever, methodical, and highly intelligent, which appealed to readers who enjoyed solving puzzles and challenging their minds.This period was also characterized by the "whodunit" mystery that challenged readers to solve the crime alongside the detective protagonist (James, 2010, pp. 47-81).

In addition to the genre's popularity, the Golden Age of Detective Fiction also saw significant innovation and experimentation within the genre. Writers like Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, and Margery Allingham developed their unique styles and approaches to detective fiction, such as "cozy mysteries," where the crimes are committed in enclosed, intimate settings, and the detective is typically an amateur with no official ties to the police (James, 2010, pp. 47-81).

The Golden Age of Detective Fiction was also marked by the introduction of socially aware and politically charged detective novels, which explored themes of class, gender, and race. This period was a time of great creativity and literary excellence in the genre of detective fiction.In this period it is possible to see significant innovation and experimentation in the genre, leading to some of the most iconic and enduring works of detective fiction in literary history. (James, 2010, pp. 47-81)

3. BRITISH WOMEN WRITERS – THE "QUEENS OF CRIME"

The term "queens of crime" refers to a group of female crime writers who climbed to dominance in the early 20th century. These writers were pioneers in a genre that was previously dominated by male writers. The queens of crime not only entertained readers but also challenged traditional gender roles and paved the way for future generations of female writers. At a time when women were often relegated to writing romances or biographies, these writers were able to break into the male-dominated world of crime fiction and achieve outstanding success. In doing so, they paved the way for future generations of female writers and proved that women could be just as talented and successful as their male companions.

Four women are considered the "queens of crime": Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham, Dorothy Sayers, and Ngaio Marsh. Apart from Ngaio Marsh, who was a New Zealander, the other three women were British. Ngaio Marsh wrote books like: *Opening Night* (1951), *Death at the Dolphin* (1966), *Vintage Murder* (1937), *Died in the Wool (*1945)... She created her detective, Roderick Alleyn. In this final thesis, my main focus is only on the three British writers.

In the first instance, to better understand these writers, it is important to describe woman's position at that time. Following the First World War, the lines marked between the domestic and public spheres became increasingly blurred as many women found themselves working outside their homes. Not only did women begin to take a more noticeable role in the male-dominated public sphere, but they also earned access to jobs that had earlier been forbidden to them based on gender. By the end of the First World War, advocates of women's rights were optimistic that women would not only be able to hold the ground they had gained in the fight for equality between the sexes, but would also go further. Women were still faced with severe pressure to marry, have children, and dedicate their lives to housekeeping, even though an increasing number of women remained unmarried and those who did marry, had fewer children than before. These significant changes in sexual practices were also due to increased use of birth control.

Considering the influence of the cult of domesticity on popular expectations of a woman's role, the increasing numbers of single women, or so-called "spinsters", were the cause of significant anxiety in society both before and particularly after the First

World War. Single women had been especially visible in the earlier, more active feminist campaigns focused on political issues including suffrage. Even before the enormous loss of young men in the First World War, there was a discrepancy in the proportion of women to men in the population; after 1871, the census showed that there were slightly more women than men in the population. This imbalance increased between 1871 and 1911 and was made still larger by the loss of male lives in the First World War. One result of the growing number of single women was the greater acceptance of women in the workplace; in many cases, it was not financially feasible for a woman to depend on male relatives for her entire life, so it was up to these women to earn a living on their own. Obviously, the excess of single women who were also often members of the workforce was the cause of some unease in a society that put a high value on marriage and motherhood for women, particularly in the middle and upper classes (Hoffman, 2012, pp. 39-41).

Significant advances were made in women's education because of educational reforms that had begun in the nineteenth century. While women had been allowed to attend university, and, had been able to graduate with degrees from universities in Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Scotland, and Wales since the late nineteenth century, it was not until 1920 that they were granted the right to receive degrees from Oxford and Cambridge. Educated women were a danger not only to the long-established male traditions of such universities but also to a society in which they were under pressure to conform to a domestic ideal. They confronted considerable prejudices (Hoffman, 2012, pp. 20-23).

As the number of single women grew, the "threat" of lesbianism became a major cause of paranoia. Homophobia spread immensely during the first half of the twentieth century, and close friendships between women that had been easily accepted in the nineteenth century were no longer considered appropriate. In 1921, an effort by the government to regulate women's sexuality was made when the criminalization of lesbianism was debated in Parliament. The legislation was ultimately dismissed in an attempt to keep such shocking subject matter out of the public eye. Behind the homophobia that rooted itself in the British culture in the first half of the twentieth century, there was the anxiety that women would reject marriage, motherhood, and domesticity as desirable ways of femininity (Hoffman, 2012, pp. 41-44).

If we look at pictures of Christie and Sayers today, we usually see the women in their later years: respectable, well-upholstered, grandmotherly. Yet in private, they led extraordinary lives and endured disastrous marriages. Their novels are often sneered at as 'cosy', and the claim that their characters were made from cardboard has become a lazy critical cliché. The very idea that detective fiction between the wars represented a 'Golden Age' seems like the misty-eyed nostalgia of an aged romantic hankering after a past that never existed. The best detective novels of the Thirties were exhilarating, innovative and unforgettable. They explored miscarriages of justice, forensic pathology and serial killings long before these topics became fashionable (and before the term 'serial killer was invented). Many of the finest books defied stereotypes. The received wisdom is that Golden Age fiction set out to reassure readers by showing order restored to society, and plenty of orthodox novels did just that. But many of the finest bucked the trend, and ended on a note of uncertainty or paradox. In some, people were executed for crimes they did not commit; in others, murderers escaped unpunished. These women came to detective fiction young in their late twenties and early thirties. All were full of energy and imagination, fizzing with fresh ideas. Each was an obsessive risk-taker. The First World War changed them, as it changed Britain. After the bloodshed of the trenches, writers craved escapism just as much as their readers. Though their stories often seem as artificial as they are ingenious, they were intent on transforming the genre. Along the way, they fought against personal catastrophes, and suffered spells of deep despair. The lonely nature of their work - no publicity tours, no fan conventions, no glitzy awards ceremonies-contributed to their torments. Thanks to Detection Club meetings, writers found new friends who shared their literary enthusiasms (Edwards, 2015, pp. 8-9).

3.1. DOROTHY LEIGH SAYERS

Dorothy was born in Oxford in 1893 as a single child. She was homeschooled, and loved writing poetry, primarily tricky rhyming schemes. When she was only six, her father began to teach her Latin. Her childhood was active with plenty of space and possibility for self-expression. She started writing plays in which her family members also had to partake. Her parents loved the theater and they took her with them to see at least one production a year. When she started boarding school, she remained a passionate actress and writer, performing in Shakespeare plays, but also writing her own. She was taking violin and piano lessons. Dorothy also focused more on her bitterness against religion. She found out about the book called *Orthodoxy* (1908) where she found glimpses of other Christianity that she found beautiful, adventurous, and queerly full of honor. In the spring of 1911, Sayers graduated, scoring the highest in all of England in the Cambridge Higher Local Examination, earning credits in French and spoken German. She even got a prize for photography, which was one of her hobbies. Joining Somerville college in Oxford, she spent her time singing in the Bach choir. With the start of WWI, she started a club called the Mutual Admiration Society, in which she and her women friends wrote essays, poetry, fiction, and plays. She finished college with honors in 1915, though it was not until 1920 that she received her master's degree. Then, she published a book of poetry, started working on a translation of *The Song of Roland (1957)*, and spent some time working as a publisher in Oxford. When she moved to France, she started working on a translation of *Tristan (1929)*, as well as her first detective novel. She worked as a freelance translator of French. Later she moved to London where she read up on criminology at the British Library and started working as a copywriter for an advertising agency (Reynolds, 1997, pp. 1-153).

In 1923, she published the book *Whose Body?*, her first crime novel, introducing readers to detective Lord Peter Wimsey. In this book, Lord Peter is examining a murder case that involves a dismembered body that has been found in the bathtub of a London architect. One of the elements of the book is the complex plot, with clues to the crime being told slowly throughout the story. The plot is full of twists, and the solution to the mystery is not directly apparent. Jealousy is the main theme in the story. It is possible to see it in a love triangle between Freke, Levy, and Christine. The book is written in the third person, mostly from the point of view of Lord Peter Wimsey. The tone is dry-cynical. One interesting element that caught my eye that shows the period that the

book was written in was the victim being found naked only having a pair of pince-nez. The character development is also well-crafted. Wimsey is seen throughout the book as an aristocratic person, very offending, and wealthy, he is not forced to work, as this is more of a hobby for him. If the reader looks more in-depth at the book, it is possible to see him suffering from shellshock caused by the war. Particular moments are silly and hard to imagine. For example, the way the body was delivered to the place where it was left. The storytelling in this book is dominated by the use of dialogue. It has a colored dialect, which can be difficult to understand, but it allows for the personalities of the characters to shine through easily. Scientific prowess and police procedurals are significantly less highlighted, though crime scene analysis still happens frequently. The characters are the most interesting and favorable parts of the novel, and the humor in the story highlights this potency additionally. After this book, Dorothy was hired to write one Lord Peter novel a year. She wrote herself into her books in the character of Harriet Vane. With the arrival of Harriet Vane in the novels, came a slight rewriting of Lord Peter too, transferring him to be a more worthy mate.

Dorothy was a Christian. Later in her profession, she fell into writing religious plays for the stage and BBC radio. Instead of dry dogma, she wanted to highlight the weird and the extraordinary, the shocking twists and profound mysteries. She created quite a stir when she had Biblical characters speak in everyday English. The results were wildly popular, at times even overpowering her other work. For her final work, she was first motivated in 1944, when during an air raid she fled to a shelter, grabbing the first book she could get her hands on, which happened to be Dante's *Divina Commedia (1950)*. She translated it for Penguin Classics, which at that point was brand new (Reynolds, 1997, pp. 353-367).

In her detective novels, she also distrusted intuition, as became clear from the oath she helped write for the Detection Club, a group of crime writers of which she was the president from 1947 until her death. Detection Clubses gatherings, which were known for their lively discussions and debates, helped to shape the direction of detective fiction for decades to come. The members were some of the most intelligent and insightful crime writers of their time. One of the key elements of the Detection Club was their commitment to intricate and complex plotting. The authors prided themselves on their ability to create puzzles that would engage and challenge their readers. They were also acutely aware of the importance of fair play, and worked hard to ensure that

readers had all the necessary information to solve the crime alongside the detective. Despite their focus on intricate plotting, the members of the Detection Club were also great character writers. They worked to create fully realized individuals who would stick in the readers' minds long after the mystery was solved. This focus on character development helped to differentiate their work from the more formulaic and plot-driven crime fiction of the time. Agatha Christie took over the presidency of the Detection Club after Dorothy had died of a heart attack in 1957 at the age of sixty-four. She did not finish translating the third book of *Divina Commedia*, *Paradise*, but she did leave behind eleven Lord Peter novels, plus countless short stories, essays, and letters, and over 350 reviews of crime novels (Edwards).

Dorothy was known for always thinking critically and pushing further. She was specific in mixing languages in her books thanks to her childhood. In her books, she was putting Latin epigrams and French phrases. Because of that to understand some of her books people need to look at footnotes and use dictionaries. Also, she was putting a lot of attention on characterization. Detective writers have always desired to put their stories in a closed society. This has clear benefits. People usually spend more time with coworkers than they do with their families. The anger that can come from such unasked intimacy can kindle hatred, jealousy, and resentment. If these emotions are powerful, they can eventually explode into the deadly finality of violence. For a writer, this is the biggest interest of the closed collective setting, mostly as the characters are being watched under the trauma of being questioned for the murder. The suspects should be permitted to deliver the puzzle; something that affirms the sanctity of life. In a society where dead bodies are increasingly taken for granted, a traditional mystery is consoling. Solving the unique crime of murder - the crime for which one can pay no appropriate reparation - is an affirmation that we live in a rational universe. The characters should have motives that the reader will find thrilling. Dorothy on the other hand made sure to give social context and to open the closed circle. Her books are populated by a diverse and colorful cast of characters, each of whom is brought to life with a unique voice and personality. She explores the internal conflicts, desires, and motivations of her characters to create psychological depth and realism. Dorothy writes with a keen eye for social class and its implications for her characterʹs lives. Her depictions of the English upper class are not only entertaining but also critical, as she exposes the privileges, flaws, and hypocrisy of this social group.

Detectives can be described as investigators who look for clues and evidence to unravel a crime. They use critical thinking, and a keen eye to collect information and make links that others may not see. Detectives are highly intelligent individuals who are skilled in reading people and distinguishing the truth from lies. They are often faced with complex and difficult cases, which require them to think outside of the box and be willing to take risks to find the truth. A key skill that all detectives have is attention to detail. They must be able to closely analyze evidence and pick up on subtle clues that others may overlook. Detectives are also skilled communicators, as they need to be able to effectively interview witnesses and suspects. They must have a gift for asking the right questions and be able to pull information from even the most secretive individuals. Picking a detective in a story is very important. Detectives in this genre should be uncommon and fascinating so that readers easily remember and like them, as well as become attached to them, feel the joy of recognition when they face the detective's bizarre habits in the next novel, but also identify with them. They are like old friends. They create a feeling of security from all the negative things happening within a civilized society. With these detectives, the reader's identification and loyalty are certain. Lord Peter Wimsey belongs to the group of the amateur detectives like Miss Marple, and C. Auguste Dupin (Edwards). Lord Peter Wimsey is a complicated character haunted by his experience in World War One. He deals with his traumas by solving cases. He has an aristocratic background but has a lot of compassion for people. He is known for his exceptional intelligence and comprehension. He is a well-educated man with extensive knowledge in various fields, including literature, fine arts, and history. Lord Peter often uses his expertise in psychology to understand the behavior of suspects, making him a tough opponent to criminals. Lord Peter is a highly perceptive and observant individual. He is known for his sharp attention to detail, which allows him to notice things that others overlook. His sharp senses of sight, sound, taste, and smell provide him with a unique perspective that he uses to solve mysteries. Lord Peter's superintuition and rational thinking help him make hypotheses that assist him in solving even the toughest of cases. As a detective, he has a reputation for being eccentric and unconventional, often using science and technology to assist him in his investigations. For instance, he was one of the first detectives to use forensic science, long before it was widely accepted as a legitimate tool for solving crimes.

Dorothy has also put herself in her books as a character of Harriet Vane, who ended up being Lord Peterʹs lover. Harriet was introduced in the book *Strong Poison* (1930). The book follows Lord Peter Wimsey as he investigates the alleged murder of Robin Harwell and the poisoning of Harwell's former lover, the mystery novelist Harriet Vane. The judge reacts negatively to the unmarried lifestyle in which Philip and Harriet decide to live as lovers and his reaction and prejudice seal Harriet's fate right from the start. I would love to say that in today's society, we are more open about people living together while not being married, but unfortunately, there are still people judging other people's lifestyles. Some couples are living more traditionally where they start living together after the marriage, and there are that choose not to live like that. I feel the judge's own opinion here affected the life of the accused Harriet. There's a certain narrative set up that indicates that Harriet will swoon gratefully at Peter's feet, taking his embrace, but then she does not. She rejects his offer of marriage and the book ends with them separated. One of the most outstanding elements is the intelligence of its characters. Except for Lord Peter Wimsey, Harriet Vane is also highly intelligent, particularly in her writing. Her poetry and novels are involved throughout the novel with moments that speak to her character and add a layer to the mystery. The narrative continuously moves, making it hard to indicate the result. While some elements of the story may be predictable, such as the romantic subplot, the outcome of the mystery is both satisfying and unexpected. Dorothy addresses social issues such as sexism and classism. Harriet Vane's role as a woman writer in a male-dominated industry is highlighted throughout the book. She also explores the class struggle between the upper and lower classes with conversations between Lord Peter and his valet Bunter, touching on the topic. Dorothy paints a vivid image of people and scenes in a few sentences and a diffusion of dialogue. There's a sense both of deep understanding and a quick sketch. The way Jewish characters in this book are talked about is vile. Because of this, she got a lot of judgment from the readers. She was seen as anti-Semitic. There is a sense of alteration, of the world unmade and remade. For example, when an old friend asks Peter not to change, he feels dull and angry. On the one hand, he is being transformed into something better; leaving past foolishnesses behind. *Strong Poison* does not end in lovers meeting–not yet. With this, she was able to continue her books as a series with Harriet and Lord Peter growing their relationship.

The book that I also want to mention is *Gaudy Night* (1935) in which Dorothy made Harriet Vane the main character. I want to use it as an example of Dorothyˈs settings. Settings (predominantly landscapes) are oftentimes described in more detail when the writer uses a place with which he is intimately familiar. One example of a famous setting would be Oxford. Oxford is the setting of many detective stories written by authors who lived or were educated there. Even Dorothy used it in this book. Setting in a narrower sense, especially architecture and houses, is important for characterization. When an author defines a room in the victim's house, the description can tell a lot about the victim's character and interests. In this book, Dorothy gives her view on Oxford's society and academic culture during the early 1930s. This story highlights the regulations of gender unity in academic institutions, and how this can prevent women from pursuing their intellectual passions. She addresses the problem of female freedom and the battles that come along with it. One of the main themes of the story is tension, which is to be expected in a whodunit mystery novel. The tension starts to hold the reader right at the beginning during the Gaudy when Harriet finds the drawing on the Quad.

Something that also gets mentioned multiple times are red herrings. *Webster's New World College Dictionary* (2010) defines red herring as something used to divert attention from the basic issue from the practice of drawing a herring across the trace in hunting, to distract the hounds (Mifflin, 2014). A lot of detective fiction writers use them to confuse the reader to make it harder to find the murderer and not to make real clues obvious. Dorothy mentions red herrings in her book *The Five Red Herrings* (1931). The story is centered around the murder of a Scottish artist named Sandy Campbell and the investigation that follows. In the story, Dorothy writes a beautifully visualized portrayal of the tranquil countryside, engaging the reader in the atmosphere of the story. The novel is successful in its character development, with each character being well-defined and multi-dimensional. Dorothy's description of the characters in the novel is realistic giving readers a sense that they are individuals with their struggles. The narrative is amusing and excellently written, with several red herrings leading the reader down a path that is ultimately misleading. The use of red herrings makes this mystery all the more enjoyable, with the reader constantly trying to piece together clues, and Dorothy keeps the tension high throughout the novel. The number five

usually represents curiosity and change so it is not surprising that she decided to use that number.

3.2. MARGERY LOUISE ALLINGHAM

Margery was born in Ealing in 1904. She was the first child of two cousins, Herbert and Emily Jane, whom she described as “second generation London Irish”. Both of her parents were writers, taking on a strong tradition that succeeded in their family for four generations. Their Georgian rectory became an open house to a circle of writers and journalists. At this place Margery began writing, earning her first payment at the age of eight for a story published in one of her aunt’s journals (Society, nd).

Margery wrote steadily through her school days, at first in Colchester and later as a resident at the Perse School for Girls in Cambridge, where she wrote, produced, and performed in a costume play. She enlisted at the Regent Street Polytechnic, where she studied drama and speech training in a successful attempt to overcome a childhood stammer. She met her husband Philip Youngman Carter working on the play. The Allinghams possessed a house on Mersea Island, and here Margery found the material for her first novel *Blackkerchief Dick* (1923) which was published when she was nineteen. She was advised by her father to write a serious novel about the promising young people of the 1920s, but she found herself frustrated by the tension between her natural joy and the genuine intensity of her theme. As a result of this books failure, she decided to escape into the mystery which she felt was “at once a prison and a refuge” to a writer unsure of her aims but confident of her powers. *The White Cottage Mystery* was her first essay in detection, written as a serial for the Daily Express in 1927 and published as a book by Jarrolds a year later (Society, nd).

In 1929, Albert Campion, her detective, made his debut as a minor character while being a suspect in *The Crime at Black Dudley*. During the 1920s and 1930s, she found it crucial to write in other fields to make her living. She had “right-hand writing,” which she did for pleasure and creative satisfaction, and her “left-hand writing,” which was commissioned and subject to editorial supervision. Later the left-hand work became more pleasant and less of a task. During this period, she wrote magazine fiction for Lord Northcliffe’s Answers and produced a series of Campion stories for the Strand Magazine. From 1937 to 1944 she wrote for Time and Tide in an attempt to broaden her spectrum (Society, nd).

In her book *Fashion in Shrouds* (1938), her special concern was to strengthen the traditional view that the sexes are interdependent and the only right “human entity is a

man and a woman", demonstrated by Campion's sister, a dress designer, and Georgia Wells, an actress. She became involved in Air Raid Precautions work, served as First Aid Commandant for her district, and organized the billeting and care of evacuees from London. She was also set to function as the local agent of a British Resistance, should such a movement have become a reality. D'Arcy House became a temporary military base for eight officers and two hundred men of the Cameronians. The war provoked deep feelings in her, and she expressed them in her writing. In 1941 she published *The Oaken Heart*, based on letters written to American friends. Under a light camouflage of fiction, it records the life of D'Arcy House and its neighborhood as they adjusted to war and the danger of invasion. The book was intended to prompt America to join in the fight against German (Society, nd).

Margery's biggest success came with *The Tiger in the Smoke* (1952). In this book, detective Albert tries to solve a crime that involves a mysterious figure known only as "The Tiger". This novel combines outstanding writing and a fascinating plot to create a critically praised work that has stood the test of time. One of the major powers is in its portrayal of the characters. Margery creates well-rounded and complex characters that are both reasonable and interesting. Albert is an imperfect hero who develops throughout the novel, trying and failing until he finally manages to solve the crime. The villain, "The Tiger," is complicated, as the reader can see both the good and bad sides of his character. Margery's story about a serial killer is set in post-war London, a city she knew well. There is the threatening fog of 1950s London, an almost supernatural existence in the story that makes it so much easier for the killer to escape the police. In the Tiger in the Smoke, Margery uses different Campion. Instead of a single crime to be solved, this is an early example of the serial killer story. The pre-war Campion novels were elegant golden age tales featuring the slightly comical amateur detective. In the 50s, Campion is married with a young son and more serious about life as well as crime and detection. The world has changed since the war. Aristocrats no longer dabble in crime with such a sense of entitlement. The plot of the book is both complex and exciting, with numerous subplots that are seamlessly woven together. The author's writing style is vivid and illustrative, bringing to life the characters and the setting of post-war London. The book delves into the idea of morality, as the reader is able to see characters struggle with their moral values and the choices they have to make.

The reader can also see how society, as described in the novel, had been changed by the war.

The Mind Readers (1965) is the last of Allingham's completed novels. It was comparatively ill accepted, but it has many saving graces: critical intelligence, contagious zest, lavish invention, and intense commitment to its unusual theme. The narrative looks confidently to the future, while also looking back to early adventure novels. For Campion, there were to be two more adventures, written by her husband, but for Margery, this was the end. Besides her novels, she wrote four novellas, and sixty-four stories, published in a wide range of journals and anthologies. Margery died at the age of sixty-two after a long period of poor health punctuated by episodes of depression. Her final Campion novel, *Cargo of Eagles*, was completed by her husband at her request and was published in 1968 (Society, nd).

Margery was making her books intricately plotted. She was artfully planting clues. At first, it is hard to guess the murderer, but later on, when it is revealed it is obvious. The atmosphere in her books is unsettling, the reality of evil affects a kind of frisson. She was putting a lot of attention on imagination. Her books are an example of extravaganza. A lot of her books are not realistic. She was trying to tune up everything a notch or two. Something she was specific for is using extraordinary names. For example Chloe Pye, Guffy Randall, Stanislaus Oates... She explored various themes such as greed, betrayal, corruption, and redemption. She infused humor and wit into her stories setting her apart from her contemporaries. Margery's writing is notable due to her mastery of the setting. Her narratives are often set in the English countryside, with detailed descriptions of the landscape and the environment that add to the atmosphere of the story. Margery's works are also notable for their sharp critiques of society. She was known for exposing the dark underworld of society that was often hidden from plain view. Her novels explored the political, social, and psychological issues that society faced in the interwar period. Margery's novels often showed characters who were motivated purely by greed and power, and who would stop at nothing to achieve their ambitions. Her novels are sending a message of warning against the dangers of uncontrolled ambition and self-interest. She opened up a world of literary possibilities that explored dark motives, hidden secrets, and unusual plot twists that have left readers hooked on her works for decades.

Her detective, Albert Campion, is described as a modest and intelligent man of a vacant look. He is described to have blond hair, a pale face, spectacles and to be tall. He was born in 1878 in France and proved himself from a young age as someone with extraordinary intelligence and awareness. His sharp mind led him to pursue a career in the police force. He was one of the youngest officers in the French police force, but his talent was exceptional. He quickly advanced through the ranks and became a superintendent of police in Paris. As a detective, he was known for his particular attention to detail and his unrivaled intuition. He was able to see things that others couldn't and connect the dots in a case that would have otherwise remained unsolved. He was also well known for his extraordinary memory and incredible ability to analyze situations and react quickly. Albert's also contributed to the detective world by using forensic science. He was one of the first detectives to use fingerprints, ballistics, and handwriting analysis in solving cases. He also introduced the use of polygraphs and other modern-day crime-solving tools. He was instrumental in the development of modern-day criminology and was responsible for several advancements in this field.

Allingham was well in touch with the middlebrow. Nicola Humble defines middlebrow fiction less by content but in terms of its middle-class (particularly lower-middle-class) readership and its effective widespread marketing. If the English middle classes anxiously and competitively carved out their cultural position, middlebrow reading practices in Humble's analysis seem less subordinated to the highbrow than in Bourdieu's formulation of 'allodoxia' (the misrecognition of cultural 'distinction'). For Humble, the middlebrow novel was 'a powerful force in establishing and consolidating, but also in resisting, new class and gender identities' following the First World War. Although she sees its readership as feminine, it indicates both the domestic context of much middle-class reading and also that it might be better to see this readership as feminized rather than feminine. Middle-class men could, it seems, also be guilty of middlebrow reading practices. Allingham's novels contain strategic moments in which 'the law' authorizes a normative class and gender order and a (sentimentalized) evocation of England and its history. In Allingham's crime fiction and sensational trial reporting, representations of the criminal played between depictions of implacable wickedness and 'tragic' weakness, and seem at first sight discontinuous with other contemporary descriptions of the criminal personality. The sensational murderer was a representation mapped against constructions of criminality in professional and

criminological writings whose focus was the inadequate or defective offender. The penal-welfare complex had learned the Victorian lesson and generally saw criminality as working-class behaviour. Nevertheless, when it addressed itself to a middle-class readership in professional memoirs or popular criminology, its arguments were also peppered with tales of once-respectable identities shattered and not entirely disingenuous protestations that offenders came from ‘all walks of life’. Masculinities in Allingham’s novels are multiple and relational. Plotting and strong characterization keep a range of masculinities (and of course femininities) in play; nevertheless, a dynamic, dialogic structuration is detectable. Certain models are privileged; class position, (hetero)sexual potency and moral integrity tend to imply and reinforce each other, though some of these characteristics may, in early or mid-plot, be mirrored by what later emerge as flawed, criminal masculinities. In Allingham’s novels, sexuality and its passions are invariably risky territory and jeopardize emotional and psychological stability, for both women and men. Allingham, both in her fiction and her private correspondence, contrasted the staple, sustaining ‘bread and butter love’ that she associated with her marriage to the overwhelming, debilitating and unmanning ‘cake love’ of sexual attraction (D'Cruze, 2004, pp. 256–279).

3.3. AGATHA MARY CLARISSA CHRISTIE

Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller was the last of three children, born in 1890. Agatha was one of those auto-didacts who go on learning and reading all their lives and whose minds, therefore, develop in the way most suitable to them. She began writing as a young girl. Her earliest surviving poem is carefully inscribed in an exercise book dated April 1901. She also had a poem published in an Ealing newspaper and that was her first appearance in print. When Agatha was fifteen, she moved to Paris. There, Agatha chased her desultory education. When leaving Paris, she said in her autobiography "One dream of mine faded before I left Paris". That was her dream of music. Agatha began to write much more consistently in her late teen years. Her mother motivated her to make stories (Thompson, 2007, pp. 1-39).

In 1912 Agatha met her first husband, Archie Christie. When World War I started, Archie was a soldier. She worked at the dispensary. She was fascinated by poison. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), Hercule Poirot, her detective, was born. Although she is seen as a British writer, her most known creation is foreign, a Belgian. He was recognizable for his mustache, little grey cells, and his mania for order. She made one mistake by making him a retired member of the police force. Because of that in later books he was supossed to be much older. Poirot belongs to group of private detectives (like Holmes) whose wisecracking cynicism, besides providing an outlet for vernacular dialogue, often hides an inner compassion and sentimentalism quite at odds with his tough, taciturn exterior. The word 'private' is an indicator of the PI's most obvious trait: his private nature. This private nature is further indicated in the first-person 'I' of the term 'PI'. These detectives are loners, alienated individuals who exist outside or beyond the socioeconomic order of family, friends, work, and home. Agatha uses in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* the symbol of the house of cards. This symbol represents Poirot's unconventional, eccentric methods which ultimately help him focus and contribute to his mastery of deduction and precise observation. Poirot came as a refugee settling in England near the home of Emily Inglethorp, who helped him to his new life. When Mrs. Inglethorp got murdered, Poirot decided to start solving the case. There are physical symbols like the maps of the house, the murder scene, and a drawing of a fragment of a will. Here Agatha wanted to show nostalgia for a fading system of landed gentry and feudal pastoral life. Styles is not just a building. It represents identity. It is a symbol of the hegemony from which characters benefit. She

also used irony in this book. The mood is often humorous in tense moments of confusion. In this book, she showed an example of a puzzle mystery. She is upfront with clues and is using side plots to remove attention from the main plot. For example John and Maryʹs marriage. It is possible to see her use double bluff. At first, the reader thinks that there is an obvious suspect, but then it changes to believe it is someone else. In the end, she reveals that it was that character that the reader thought first of. There was obviously an inherent gift and a facility with written word. Although she began writing the novel in 1916, she did not published it for another four years. The struggle was real. She was to get 10 per cent only after 2,000 copies were sold in the UK and she was contracted to produce five more titles. This clause led to much correspondence over the following years.

Agatha said that she did not have a specific method of writing. She typed her drafts on a typewriter. Sometimes she found a dictaphone useful in short stories. She said her real work was done in thinking. Agatha believed going too much into the psychology of characters can ruin the puzzle. There was a fear of having too shallow characters too. She tried to maintain balance. She believed that she will do a book series in the future with the same characters, so the reader can learn more about the characters later. In her writing, she was using dread and horror tones with humor. Big themes Agatha used in her books were guilt and a impending disaster. In her books no one is safe and the detective tries to find the guilty one. The comforting thing is that evil can be found, and the world can be good again.

After having her daughter and her mother dying in 1926 caused Agatha to have a period of depression. Agatha had hard time finding her passion for writting. Money changed her attitude towards work. She was no longer writing out of love. She was professional. With Collins she signed a three-book contract. Her books streamed onwards: seventeen full-length novels between 1930 and 1939, shaped with geometrical perfection. One system of creation that she used in her most prolific period was listing of a series of scenes, sketching what she wanted each of them to include and allocating to each individual scene a number or a letter. That is possible to see in her book *The ABC Murders* (1936). She had a new contract with Collins for her next six books. She also had an American contract with Dodd Mead (Thompson, 2007, pp.110-147).

The Secret Adversary became the first of her books to be filmed. A theatrical version of *The Murder of Roger Aykroyd* inspired her to write her own plays. The years around the war, between 1937 and 1949 were the most fruitful period of Agatha's writing career. She immortalized her detective in *Dumb Witness* (1937). She spent several days each week at the University College Hospital, she cleared Greenway for Admiralty, dealt with the bombing of Sheffield Terrace... While trying to survive the 1940 blitz and 1944 flying bombs, she still managed to write a good portion of her opus (Thompson, 2007, pp. 147-356). In this period, she wrote *Ten Little Niggers* (1939). This is her greatest technical accomplishment and one of her best-selling crime novels. In this book, eight people are invited to the island. They are met by the butler and cook who explain that the owner, Mr Owen has been delayed but has left instructions for their reception. In each of their rooms is a rimmed copy of the rhyme about the ten little nigger boys who all met their death. On their first evening, they sit down to dinner in good moods until, without any warning, they hear a voice blaming each of them (including the butler and housekeeper) for having caused the deaths or murdered several people. From that point forward, one by one they are found dead, resembling the deaths in the rhyme and one by one a china figurine on the dining room table mysteriously vanishes. Even in 1939, the title of the book was considered too offensive for American publication. Agatha's work is not known for its racial sensitivity, and by modern standards, her corpus is rampant with casual Orientalism. In the *And Then There Were None* version, the readers are merely faced with fantastic amounts of violence, and a rhyme so macabre and distressing one doesn't hear it now outside of the Agatha Christie context. Agatha is extremely skilled in descriptions of the situation. The crime scene gets scary, and the reader's reading pace grows. A person's life is the most precious thing that should be not treated cruelly, it should be defended, and it should be protected. Agatha considers killing murderers also a hard fault. It's peculiar for a person to make mistakes, even if they did unforgivable acts, their murder is also should condemned to exceptional punishment. The judge is a completely fair, honest man. The author wants to show him as a model to the rest of the world. Agatha's books not only urge the reader to be attentive, and thoughtful but also humanitarian. She teaches not only to rely on readers' strong cognitive skills but also to sympathize with any being with readers' hearts as if they are their parts.

Her jump into fame did not come from the books. It was the adaptations that did the trick, such as film and feature on the radio. The more famous she got, the more she withdrew into her private world. Because of her simplicity, she was misunderstood. Agatha was interested in motives like money, passion, fear... Something ordinary that she made extreme. Murder without an ordinary motive meant nothing to her. She was interested in the psychology of fear and suspicion. After being sick multiple times, Agatha died in 1976 and was buried in Devon (Thompson, 2007, pp. 409-458).

One of the most striking characteristics of Agatha Christie's writing is her use of the whodunit plot structure. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (1989) defines whodunit as the detective story or play in which the person who does the crime is only revealed at the end (Hornby, 1989, p.1458). Structure of whodunit includes:

1. Setting

A writer of whodunit stories tries immersing readers in a vivid and atmospheric setting. Setting lays the groundwork for the mystery to unfold. The atmosphere can be eerie, cozy, or gritty, but it always sets the tone for the events to come, evoking a sense of intrigue and curiosity.

2. Crime

Every whodunit hinges on a compelling crime, typically a murder, although other crimes like theft or kidnapping can also drive the narrative. The crime must be intriguing enough to capture the reader's attention and provide a solid foundation for the subsequent investigation. The initial discovery of the crime often introduces the victim, the crime scene, and the first batch of clues, immediately hooking readers into the story.

3. Detective

This character is usually a brilliant, observant, and often eccentric individual who possesses unique skills or insights. The detective captivates readers with their intellect and unwavering determination to solve the case.

4. Suspects

Whodunit stories are defined by a web of suspects, each with their own motives, alibis, and secrets. These characters add depth and complexity to the narrative, creating an

intricate puzzle for readers to unravel. A skilled mystery writer providies these characters with compelling backstories and plausible reasons for being involved in the crime.

5. Clues

Clues are guiding readers and investigators towards the truth. They can take various forms, from physical evidence to witness statements, and are often scattered throughout the story.

6. Investigation and plot twists

The heart of the mystery lies in the investigation itself. The detective, with the help of sidekicks or allies, tirelessly pursues leads, interviews suspects, and uncovers hidden truths. The investigation is often punctuated by unexpected plot twists that upend assumptions and force readers to reconsider their theories.

7. Climax and reveal

The climax of a whodunit is the moment readers find the reveal of the true culprit. The detective gathers all the suspects together, dramatically unveiling the evidence, motives, and means behind the crime. A successful reveal is both surprising and plausible, tying together all the loose ends and offering readers a satisfying conclusion. A great mystery leaves readers marveling at the ingenuity of the solution while reflecting on the clues that were right in front of them all along (Cummins, 2023).

Given the straightforwardness of her murders, people still find it hard to solve the cases? The answer lies in the reader's mistaken presumption that the mystery is complex and that the texts are hermeneutically structured to enable a reader to imitate the detective or alter-ego in sorting through clues to discover a pattern. Agatha Christie's hermeneutic, however, is a negating one, one that takes a relatively simple murder and through the reading process controverts the reader's reason (Singer, 1984, pp. 157-171). An example of this type of story would be *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934). This book is like a game of finding who everyone is. At first, people on the train are strangers, but at the end, the reader can find that they are all connected to the Armstrong family and are there to revenge themselves. Agatha puts into this book suspicious clues connected to characters to reveal their true identities. The victim in the detective stories is the trigger. They die because of who, what, and where they are,

and the damaging power they exercise. The victim can be known or they can stay secret. The victim's voice may not be heard for most of the novel, but their testimony is given in the voices of others. Every story also needs witnesses. Witnesses are those who see the crime happen or know something about it. It is interesting to see the trust characters need knowing that Poirot can solve the crime with his wisdom and experience while they are in the middle of Yugoslavia, surrounded with snow, while the murderer is still on the train. Besides the self-appointed jury of twelve, there is a big twist when Poirot justifies the murder and gives multiple solutions to the murder. Plotting in this book is linear, seen clearly by having a series of interviews.

Agatha was known for her detailed research, both into the police procedure and forensic science of her time and into the countries and cultures that she wrote about. Her novels are often set in exotic locales, and she took great care to accurately portray the people and customs of these places. This attention to detail and authenticity contributed greatly to her popularity and enduring appeal. Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile* (1937) takes the reader on a thrilling journey on the Nile River. The storyline's setting, Egypt, adds to the book's intrigue as Agatha paints an exotic and thrilling picture of the landscape, the history, and the culture of the ancient civilization.

Death is strange in Agatha Christie. The deaths in detective stories are not the deaths of everyday life, the results of accidents, illness, and old age – and if they seem to be, there is something more to find out about them, something that makes them remarkable. They are not even the murders we are all too familiar with from our newspapers (and from a different sort of crime novel), deaths of simple violence or perverse pleasure, the results of uncontrolled anger, brutal desire, revenge or intimidation. They are spectacular, exceptional and fantastic: they engage our imagination not only as extreme acts, but as conspicuously extreme acts, as products of ingenuity and imagination, as challenges to our sense of the rational, the explicable and the normal. And so they bring home to us the limits of what we may take to be rational or normal and they demonstrate that the limits can be exceeded (York, 2007, pp. 9-22).

The majority of detectives in the Golden Age were men. Since they were mostly professional police officers, they had to be male because women at that time had a very limited role in policing. In general, women characters were sidekicks to the dominant male hero, serving either as a friends or a love interests, or both. One

obvious exception is Agatha Christie's Miss Marple. She did not only work entirely alone, without any help, but she was also consistently cleverer than the police detectives she faced. But as time kept going, it was considered vital that even the women who played a subordinate part should have some kind of job in their own right rather than sit at home fulfilling the needs of their partner. Her full name is Jane Marple. She is an elderly woman with sharp intelligence. Her hobby is knitting, beside being the detective in some of Agathaˈs books. Miss Marple is using a unique approach to solving the cases. Not having physical strength or technology does not stop her. Her biggest plus is the knowledge of human behavior. She transcends traditional gender roles and paved the way for others. Miss Marple portrays elderly characters that are an example that the elderly are not always frail and that age does not matter. No matter if Agathaˈs protagonists are amateur detectives or professional investigators, they are always well-drawn and fully realized. They are often flawed individuals, with quirks and idiosyncrasies that make them relatable and interesting. One book that has Miss Marple as a detective is *Motive vs Opportunity*. In this story there is a potential fraud, the will is missing. In this book, Agatha uses characters with Greek names that have different nationalities. Also, she uses descriptions and long backstories. There is an element of supernaturalism. There is the character of a spiritualist who speaks with the dead. Agatha loved using chemistry in her books. For example, the tint disappearing. Distrust is the key to the detective world: Miss Marple is the most explicit voice of distrust, refusing ever to accept people at face value and asserting the unreliability of trust. The implications are profound: we normally assume that at least a considerable measure of trust is the foundation of social intercourse and that society without trust would dissolve into a war of each against each. We make allowances for vanity, bias, tact, and discretion. We do not believe that everyone tells the whole truth all the time. But we do assume that by and large people are what they seem to be and their acts have the aims they appear to have (York, 2007, pp. 22-35).

One of the first decisions any writer also has to make is to choose a viewpoint. The first-person narrative has the benefit of giving the reader identification and sympathy with the one whose voice they “hear”. It can also be an aid to credibility since the reader is more likely to stop doubting the more unbelievable twists in the plot, when hearing the explanation from the person most concerned. There are also disadvantages of a first-person narrative. For example, the reader can only know what the narrator knows,

seeing only through their eyes and participating only in what they experience. The author can also use the first-person narrative in which the story is told in the form of letters or the actual voices of the characters (James, 2010, pp. 109-131). Agatha uses the most the first-person narration, particularly in the cases with her famous detective Poirot, allowing readers to see the case from the investigator's perspective and feel involved in the investigation.

4. CONCLUSION

Even though the period of the Golden Age was between the two wars, it was very productive and rich with amazing works in detective fiction. This period took detective fiction as a genre to the next level. The world of British crime fiction would not have been completed without the contribution that the "queens of crime" gave to British crime world. They transformed this genre. They elevated the genre by introducing complex narratives, intricate plotting, and vivid characters. Their works were characterized by attention to detail, a sense of wit, and a willingness to delve into the darkest aspects of human behavior. As women writing in a male-dominated field, they often explored issues of gender and power. They created iconic characters. These writers talked about the society of that time. Even though this genre is often seen from a negative point of view because of mentionings of violence and crime, and a negative view on law enforcement, this type of books is providing a captivating storyline, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and inspiring a sense of justice. Dorothy L. Sayers has a sharp intelligence that is reflected in her deep understanding and knowledge of contemporary literature. Her writing reflects the maturity and intellectual depth of a seasoned writer. She often used her works to explore intricate social and moral issues, such as gender dynamics and justice. Her works are characterized by a strong sense of realism and societal critique. Margery Allingham showed in her writing an ability to create fully realized characters who are both vivid and complex. She was able to construct intricate and compelling plots. Her mysteries are often convoluted and filled with twists and turns, keeping readers guessing until the very end. Many of her novels also contain elements of social commentary, offering insight into the mores and values of British society. Agatha Christie’s writing is a testament to her skill as a storyteller and her mastery of the mystery genre. Her attention to detail, use of humor and irony, and focus on social issues made her books accessible and enjoyable to a wide audience. Her influence on the mystery genre has endured for over a century and will continue to inspire and captivate readers for generations to come.

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6. ABSTRACT

The detective story is a story in which the main interest is a puzzling crime and the process of solving it. The Golden Age of British crime is usually considered to cover the two decades between the First and Second World Wars. The writers of the Golden Age were as varied as their talents. The majority of detectives in the Golden Age were men. In general, women characters were sidekicks to the dominant male hero, serving either as friends or love interests, or both. One reason for the popularity of detective fiction during the Golden Age was the rising middle-class readership. The term "queens of crime" refers to a group of female crime writers who climbed to dominance in the early 20th century. Four women are considered the "queens of crime": Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham, Dorothy Sayers, and Ngaio Marsh (only the first three were British). Dorothy L. Sayers was the creator of Lord Peter Wimsey. Her written works show understanding of contemporary literature, social and moral ethical issues. Margery Allingham was the creator of Albert Campion. Her characters are both vivid and complex. Her mysteries are filled with twists and turns, keeping readers guessing until the very end. Many of her books give insight into the British society of that time. Agatha Christie, creator of famous detective Poirot, has great skills as a storyteller. Her attention to detail, use of humor and irony, and focus on social issues made her books accessible and enjoyable to a wide audience.

Key words: Agatha Christie, alleged murderer, red herring, Margery Allingham, investigation, Dorothy Sayers

SAŽETAK

Detektivska priča je priča u kojoj je glavni interes zagonetni zločin i proces njegovog rješavanja. Obično se smatra da Zlatno doba britanskih krimića obuhvaća dva desetljeća između Prvog i Drugog svjetskog rata. Pisci zlatnog doba bili su raznoliki kao i njihovi talenti. Većina detektiva u zlatnom dobu bili su muškarci. Općenito, ženski likovi bili su pomoćnici dominantnog muškog heroja, služeći ili kao prijatelji ili ljubavni interesi, ili oboje. Jedan od razloga popularnosti detektivske fikcije tijekom zlatnog doba bio je porast čitateljstva srednje klase. Pojam "kraljice krimića" odnosi se na skupinu spisateljica krimića koje su se popele do dominacije početkom 20. stoljeća. Četiri žene smatraju se "kraljicama zločina": Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham, Dorothy Sayers i Ngaio Marsh (samo su prve tri bile Britanke). Dorothy L. Sayers bila je tvorac Lorda Petera Wimseyja. Njezina pisana djela pokazuju razumijevanje suvremene književnosti, društvenih i moralno-etičkih pitanja. Margery Allingham bila je tvorac Alberta Campiona. Njezini su likovi živopisni i složeni. Njezine su misterije pune obrata i tjeraju čitatelje da pogađaju do samog kraja. Mnoge njezine knjige daju uvid u britansko društvo tog vremena. Agatha Christie, kreatorica slavnog detektiva Poirota, ima izvrsne vještine pripovjedača. Njezina pozornost posvećena detaljima, korištenje humora i ironije te fokus na društvena pitanja učinili su njezine knjige dostupnima i ugodnima širokoj publici.

Ključne riječi: