

1984

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Ashley, Leonard R.N. (1984) "The Sausage Machine: Names in the Detective Fiction of Dame Agatha Christie," *Literary Onomastics Studies*: Vol. 11 , Article 4.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/los/vol11/iss1/4>

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"THE SAUSAGE MACHINE": NAMES IN
THE DETECTIVE FICTION OF DAME AGATHA CHRISTIE

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"Only a detective story" is now an
apologetic and deprecatory phrase
which has taken the place of that
"only a novel" which once moved Jane
Austen to unaccustomed indignation.

--Joseph Wood Krutch, The Nation 25 Nov. 1944

What do these titles mean to you: The Seven Dials Mystery,
Partners in Crime, Peril at End House, The Hound of Death, Un-
finished Portrait, Appointment with Death, The Regatta Mystery,
The Hollow, Destination Unknown, A Caribbean Mystery, Endless
Night, Elephants Can Remember, Sleeping Murder? Detective stories,
but whose? How about plays: Spider's Web, Verdict, The Unexpected
Guest, Go Back for Murder, Fiddlers Three, Akhnaton, or the radio
play Personal Call or the series Behind the Screen and Scoop?

I have tricked you by citing perhaps the least known of the
94 novels and story collections and the 20 or so plays by the wo-
man G. C. Ramsey in 1967 called Mistress of Mystery: Agatha Christie.

D.Litt. (Hon.), FRSL, CBE, DBE. Perhaps you would have guessed immediately had I cited The Murder of Roger Ackroyd (1926, one of the most controversial and popular of all detective stories) or The Mousetrap (a radio play developed from one of her short stories, transferred to the stage in 1952 and still running, the most successful play in the history of the English commercial theatre).

Undoubtedly in so large a corpus there is a tremendous amount of onomastic material for literary examination. Here in LOS, we usually find a single novel (more infrequently a play) from high culture anatomized in terms of significant names. I thought that this once, in a keynote address prepared for printing in this journal, we might survey a great number of works, and those from popular culture and a somewhat neglected genre as far as literary critics of all sorts are concerned, examining how and to what extent names are used in Christie's work and, when we conclude that she makes less of onomastic devices than one might suppose she ought, why names may be said to be less manipulated or meaningful in this branch of fiction than in some others with which LOS readers are familiar.

It is not that Christie's works have fewer names in them than other fiction. In some 20 films based on her writing even non-readers have become familiar with the numerous names she created. Take The Mirror Crack'd, for instance, the latest of those films to achieve great popularity. Published in London as The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side in 1962, in New York as The Mirror Crack'd in 1963, it was made into a film as The Mirror Crack'd in 1980. In the film (which involves making a film) mention is

made of numerous movies (The Rainbow's End, Tomorrow's Dawn, Summer Rain, Terror in Trinidad, Ghost Ship, Colonel Bogey, Danger in the Dark, Two Girls from Idaho) and we begin by seeing part of Murder at Midnight (with Inspector Gates, Barnsby the butler, the mysterious financier Da Silva, the upperclass Ridgeleys and their friends gathered in the inevitable drawing room, etc.), while in The Murder Crack'd proper what one character calls "a minor matter of murder" embroils film director Jason "Jinks" Rudd, his wife the movie queen Marina Gregg, her rival Lola Brewster, Marty N. ["for Nothing," he says] Fenn, the brash producer--these are all Americans--and, among what Rudd calls "the tea-guzzling Limey sons of bitches," the whole village of St. Mary Mead, with Miss Marple putting together what she regards as the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. The script is typically careless. For instance, the story is set in the Coronation Year (1953) and the costumes and cars are authentic, but the English vicar is made to say "hopefully" instead of "I hope" and Miss Gregg (Mrs. Rudd) says "check it out" and then checks herself, apologizing for post-Fifties (black) English as a Fifties "Americanism." But we must watch with such care, if we are to solve the murder, that all the details, including the names, are noted by us. Here is plenty of grist for our onomastic mill: not just spoofing of detective story film dialogue in Murder at Midnight ("Inspector, this ridiculous cat and mouse game has gone on long enough...." "Very well, then, Lord Fenley's murderer...." And the film projector breaks down--but Miss Marple can provide the rest) but movie titles, film star names, American names, British names--the lot.

T. J. Winnifrith (University of Warwick) in Great Writers of the English Language: Novelists and Prose Writers (1979) gives a considered view of Christie's enormous production (Dame Agatha herself said she turned out products like a sausage factory, but speed was not the principal factor):

Agatha Christie is almost without rival as a writer of detective stories...[her fame] should be sufficient to ensure her a mention in any encyclopedia of literature. As a novelist, however, Agatha Christie has far less claim to fame. Unlike her contemporary, Simenon, Christie seems to have little interest in the world in which she lived. All her novels have a curiously period air, and some early works, such as The Seven Dials Mystery [1929], with its bright young things, beautiful Balkan spies, and sinister anarchists, are almost embarrassing to read. Even the later novels, in their dated village setting, are hardly a reflection of post-war Britain, though there are occasional disquieting hints that the old order is changing. Her two main detectives, the Belgian Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, are almost entirely featureless, apart from a few irritating personal eccentricities, and Christie does not seem interested in character development, the other people in her novels, guilty and innocent alike, being stereotypes, dancing like puppets in the

hands of both detective writer and detective alike.

One can make no extravagant claims for Christie. Her lack of emphasis on character achieves none of the power of Thomas Burke's "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole." She does not concern herself with moral matters as does Gilbert Keith Chesterton's Father Brown. Her style was never notable and never influenced great writers (as Dashiell Hammett did Hemingway) or even other competent detective writers (as Hammett did Ross Macdonald). Of her vast output, less may survive the ravages of time than the many popular works of the Belgian master, Georges Simenon, renowned for his facility. She knows little or nothing of the inner workings of espionage or police departments, as aficionados of the genre realize when they compare her with "John Le Carré" or Ed Bain. Buchan (Lord Tweedsmuir), Innes (Stewart), Iles (Cox), Blake (Day Lewis), Heard, Postgate, Milne, Lustgarten, Chandler, Garboriau, Stout... my own list of far more talented writers in this genre is long, and she does not rank (in my estimation) as high as any of these in terms of single books. So why am I not saying (as our best American literary critic, Edmund Wilson, once asked in an acerbic attack on the whole genre) "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?"

Because I am not here to defend her way with characters or style, not even with plot (which most people admit is ingenious), but to look at her work as a large and rich sample of onomastic material in the popular vein, a mass of onomastic matter which has influenced for better or worse many millions of readers for the best part of this century, and reached untold millions who can't read but have seen adaptations of her writings on screens everywhere.

In the international commerce of the movies, many American film titles have had to be altered for Britain and many British film titles have been changed for American release. Thus The Annapolis Story became The Blue and the Gold, The Bank Dick became The Bank Detective, Buck Privates became Rookies, and so on, while Brighton Rock was seen as Young Scarface here, Cosh Boy as The Slasher, Fanny by Gaslight as Man of Evil, and I Live in Grosvenor Square as A Yank in London. Similarly, And Then there Were None was known as Ten Little Niggers in London, which never would have done for America.

Christie's work was first adapted for the screen in 1928 when some of her Mr. Quin stories were made into the film The Passing of Mr. Quin in England. Her stage play Black Coffee (produced in London 1930, published 1934) brought Poirot (played by Austin Trevor--real name A. Schilsky) to the screen in 1931 under the same title, but when Trevor played the detective in the film based on The Murder of Roger Ackroyd the same year (1931) so as not to tip the hand too much the title was simply Alibi. Trevor starred in Lord Edgware Dies (novel 1931, film 1934) though in America the novel was published by Dodd, Mead as 13 at Dinner. The short story "Philomel Cottage" from the Listerdale Mystery collection (1934) reached the screen twice in Britain (1937 with Basil Rathbone, 1947 with John Hodiak) with the more provocative title of Love from a Stranger. Ten Little Niggers was the stage play title of her 1943 hit. Samuel French published the play in America as Ten Little Indians (1946) but on screen we saw it as And Then there Were None

(1947, 1965, and 1974). Witness for the Prosecution was the title of a short story found in three of her collections, made into a play (Nottingham and London, 1953; New York, 1954) and a film. The Spider's Web retained the original play title (Nottingham and London, 1954) when it became a film in 1960, but when Margaret Rutherford burst on the screen as Miss Marple The 4:50 from Paddington (published in America as What Mrs. McGillicuddy Saw) became Murder, She Said (1961) and when Miss Marple appeared (for Poirot) in Blood Will Tell's screen version it was Murder Most Foul (1963) and After the Funeral (also known as Funerals are Fatal) was made in Britain as Murder at the Gallop. Miss Marple stories thrown together (not by Christie herself) became the British film Murder Ahoy (1964). The A.B.C. Murders on screen saw Tony Randall as Poirot in The Alphabet Murders (1966), while well-known novels did not always change their titles to become famous films as Murder on the Orient Express (1974) and Death on the Nile (1978), though the Tennysonian reference in The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side was lost in The Mirror Crack'd (with Elizabeth Taylor).

Movies often attempt to capitalize on a well-known book title and so all that really needed to be done was to make some few titles less aggressively British for the American market. Murder Most Foul actually was more British (being a quotation from Shakespeare), but Shakespeare may be considered international. Murder, She Said put a little emphasis on Miss Marple--and it was better than the US version of the novel. No film needed or could sustain, even in remakes, a string of changes such as a few novels under-

went: Dumb Witness, Murder at Littlegreen House, Mystery at Littlegreen House, Poirot Loses a Client; Murder for Christmas, Hercule Poirot's Christmas, A Holiday for Murder; One, Two, Buckle My Shoe, An Overdose of Death, The Patriotic Murders; The Mousetrap, Three Blind Mice.

Of novel titles changed improvement may be seen in N or M? (The Secret Adventure) and Mr. Parker Pyne, Detective (Parker Pyne Investigates), even Murder in Retrospect (Five Little Pigs) or Come and Be Hanged (Towards Zero). The quotation juggling of There is a Tide and Taken at the Flood seems rather foolish, and I like Why Didn't They Ask Evans? better than The Boomerang Clue.

You will have noted that Christie seems to have been too busy writing to have done much reading (her literary allusions are of the simplest, especially Shakespeare and Mother Goose, overdone), but thereby she seems to have avoided the arch quotations resorted to by some other popular authors (an excellent way to lend a new book title an air of familiarity, to make it more memorable). She did not have the wit to compete in a field where a title like Every Little Crook and Nanny is hardly remarkable. She could perpetrate an awkward title such as The Sittaford Mystery (changed to The Murder at Hazelmoor) and fiddle with Murder is Easy (Easy to Kill) and They do it with Mirrors (Murder with Mirrors) and Death in the Air (Death in the Clouds), but she knew enough to alter (or accept) Murder on the Calais Coach to Murder on the Orient Express--more of an air of mystery, and better understood outside Britain.

From the start (The Mysterious Affair at Styles, 1920) to

the end (Curtain marked the end of Poirot in 1975, the year before her own death), Christie's titles have a somewhat old-fashioned ring to them (as in her titles for her poetry: The Road of Dreams, 1925, Star Over Bethlehem, 1965, etc.) and a pretty obvious exploitation of the cheap alliteration that works in Parker Pyne and Tommy and Tuppence or the assonance of Murder Preferred. Her audience is not a highbrow one: The Moving Finger (1942) alludes to The Rubáiyát only because it is (or was a generation or two ago) one of the most familiar of poems. She permits herself a trifle more fancy footwork in the titles of short stories, where (along with "The Adventure of...", "Affair of...", "Case of...", "Mystery of...", "Problem at...", etc., each used a number of times) we find a few bits of classical cliché ("Arcadian Deer," "Augean Stables," "Capture of Cerberus," "Cretan Bull," "Erymanthian Boar," "Face of Helen," "Girdle of Hippolyta," "Horses of Diomedes," "Nemean Lion," and so on), more nursery rhymes ("Four-and-Twenty Black-birds," etc.), and other things that will not tax her readers. There are references to bridge and other games (one good title is "Blindman's Bluff") and the typical melodrama of "The Rajah's Emerald," "The Strange Case of Sir Andrew Carmichael," "The Unbreakable Alibi," and such. Her titles are seldom or never misleading, tricky, cute, or clever. They seldom had to be changed for American collections of her stories, though British "Wireless" became the smarter American "Where's There's a Will," and for some reason "Mr. Eastwood's Adventure" became here "The Mystery of the Spanish Shawl."

American popular writer Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. has said (in a television "Writer's Workshop" chat format on educational TV) that he thinks "some of the greatest social commentary is in British detective stories." One comment that Christie's titles make is that her class of readers does not have the erudition of Dorothy Sayers' or the subtlety of those who read the detective fiction published by a leading critic under the name "Michael Innes" or a leading poet under the pseudonym "Nicholas Blake"; her readers are from the set of tweedy gents and rather severe old ladies who use phrases such as "too clever by half," and want no literary nonsense but to be "getting on with it." And her US readers seek in her work something of the real or imagined charm of that old England of garden parties, tea at the vicarage, and eccentrics who would never quite have the imagination of the Continental blueblood who for years demanded to be treated with great care because (she said) she had swallowed a glass piano.

It is with something of a shock that we see Christie coming up with a short story title ("Clergyman's Daughter") George Orwell used for a novel, or a bit of St. Paul remembered from some country evensong ("In a Glass Darkly") or Sunday when the local squire read the lesson. Her first collection of short stories was simply Poirot Investigates (1924). Then she had a certain echo of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle ("The Adventure of the Cheap Flat" or "The Tragedy at Marsden Manor") or perhaps a premonition of "Ellery Queen." As she soldiered on to produce the 130 or 140 more stories she was to write, she made plots with care, but seldom great titles.

When it comes to charactonyms, Christie is reliable, organized, and seldom inspired. Her policemen are surnamed Abel, Beddoes, Bond, Briggs, and so on. Her police inspectors or superintendants and such are Col. Anderson, Inspector Bacon, Inspector Badgworthy (an unusual pun for her--but she may have not noticed it), Superintendent Baldwin, Inspector Barnett, the featured Superintendent Battle (in The Secret of Chimneys of 1925 and others up to Towards Zero of 1944), and so on. Her idea of an American name seems to date from the time of Bram Stoker of Dracula: Christie's Americans have names such as Caleb P. Blundell, Cyrus G. Bradburn, for rich men; Burt for a Secret Service man; Hamilton Betts, etc. Certain forenames Christie seems to save for servants. Annette is a maid in a Soho house in The Secret Adversary (1922), while Annie serves for maids in The Mysterious Affair at Styles (1920), The Murder of Roger Ackroyd (1926), Dumb Witness (1937), "The Adventure of the Clapham Cook" (The Under Dog, 1951), etc. Beatrice is the name of a guest at a party in Hallowe'en Party (1969) but is the name of maids in three households and one hotel. Gladys was the name of a former maid to Jane Marple, a maid to Miss Leatheran in "The Lernean Hydra" (Labours of Hercules, a punning title since they are of Hercule Poirot, 1947), a third under-housemaid in "The Under Dog" (The Adventure of the Christmas Pudding, more Poirot stories, 1960), a hairdresser in Death in the Air (1935); Gladdie is the kitchen maid in Murder at the Vicarage (1930). Similarly Florence was a maid, Fred a bartender, Rivers a chauffeur who was discharged, Rogers a butler, Mrs. Ross a cook (all cooks are Mrs.), etc.

Generally, Christie, presumably by mere observation rather than research, is adequate in assigning forenames that fit, always a test of a writer's alertness to fashions in names and a detail which, in that forenames go in and out of style, can seriously date the work of a writer whose career extends over so long a period as did Christie's. So Midge works in a dress shop, Jackie operates coach tours, Betsy is a cook, Betty a parlor maid, Heather a housewife, Calvin an American tourist in Casablanca, Will a ferryman, Emily an old lady, Rupert (nicknamed Pongo) an upperclass private secretary, Elsie a parlor maid, Juliet ("Jolly") an elderly housekeeper, Eustace the uncle of a lord, and Alice Bennett maid to the American former movie star Carlotta Adams, while Alice Bentham is a maid to Lady Tressillian. Emma and Letitia are old, Zara a clairvoyant, Dulcie ("Guggle") a peer's daughter (with a sister named Eileen or "Bundle"), Lola and Lynette movie stars, Honoria a headmistress, Julia a lady (or a Hon.), "Chaddy" Chadwick a mathematics mistress nicknamed by her girls, Gervase an eccentric aristocrat, Coco an actress, Amyas an artist, and Elise (there are three of them) a French maid. Mrs. Ashley Ferrars is the patient of an expensive specialist; Diana Ashley is a notorious beauty. Mrs. Merlina Rival in The Clocks is really one Flossie Gapp. Ruby Keene, a professional dancer in The Body in the Library (1942) whose name seems to have been suggested by that of American star Ruby Keeler, was originally Ruby Legge. Mary Moss was a dancer under the name of Zobeida. Tommy, Colin, Deirdre, etc., are all young, Gwenda a New Zealander, Absalom the husband of Eurydice Spragg, a medium and swindler (both Spraggs are American). High-

priced Harley Street specialists have names such as Sir Bartholomew Strange and Sir Alington West, while the forenames of other physicians are ordinarily not given. A few very odd forenames occur (Selina and Claud are examples) but the forenames of foreigners, whether waiters, ballet dancers, princes, or servants, are just enough to note nationality (Hans, Franz, Katrina, Achmet, etc.)

Just as mystery stories are chock full of policemen with names that are insignificant (Williams, Graves, Evans, etc.), so they often involve characters whose function in the plot is such that we hardly get to know them by first names. Still, if Ada Maria Fanshawe were to be used for a "sweet young thing" at a party instead of an old aunt in a rest home, it would strike a vaguely disturbing note. A writer needs to know that while Fred will do for a bar tender and Charles for a head waiter, a deb's boyfriend is more likely to be a Freddie (as in Shaw's Pygmalion) and a playboy Charles nicknamed "Chubby." Bee will do for barmaid Beatrice Lippincott in Taken at the Flood (1948), but different social sets produce Dodo for Dorothy Little (running a village white elephant sale in Postern of Fate, 1973) and Hank Rider, the wealthy American in "The Crackler," Mother Astwell the cleaning lady (in Cards on the Table, 1936), and Mervyn Bulger Estcourt (in "The Man in the Mist," Partners in Crime, 1929, one of the Tommy and Tuppence Beresford books).

Of course surnames, with their ability to mark relationships and telegraph social status, nationality, and other important facts, are of paramount utility in whodunit onomastics.

Her writing name was her husband's when she started, and she kept it after divorce. She was born Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller in Torquay (Devon) in 1890. Her father was American (Frederick Alvah Miller, late of New York) and her mother an eccentric Englishwoman. She married Archibald Christie in December 1914. For her first published novel she took the name of her detective from the Continent, influenced by the Belgian refugees then resident in Torquay. To Poirot, which itself has a sense of the diminutive, she slyly added for her five-foot-four dapper little sleuth the somewhat mocking forename of Hercule. (Later, when in one of the stories he sacrifices his famous little moustache in order to pretend to be a fictitious brother he gives that brother the name Achille.) For her equally famous (and personally preferred) Miss Marple, described in "The Blue Geranium" (in Thirteen Problems, 1932) by her friend Mrs. Dolly Bantry, the magistrate's wife, as "the typical old maid of fiction," Christie chose an old-fashioned name: Jane Marple. It does sound sufficiently Victorian, but perhaps not "dithery" enough (Christie's frequent word for her) for a woman who described herself as "a scatterbrained old tabby" (Nemesis, 1971). The husband and wife team of detectives of Tommy and Tuppence were called Beresford, giving them a certain touch of class which Parker Pyne (the name of a detective in a number of her short stories) lacks. Harley Quin ("The Coming of Mr. Quin" is in The Mysterious Mr. Quin, 1930) is an unsettling pun, and Sergeant Battle (first seen in The Secret of Chimneys, 1925, "Chimneys" being a country house) battles crime, while Inspector Narracott (The Sittaford Mystery/ Murder at Hazelmoor) has "caught"

in it. In The Man in the Brown Suit (1924) and Sparkling Cyanide (1945, published in the US under the slightly improved title Remembered Death) the detective goes by the name Colonel John Race. A Canadian placename suggested Arthur Calgary (Ordeal by Innocence, 1958), a typically Christean fiddling with a fairly ordinary English surname Mark Easterbrook (The Pale Horse, 1961). In some Parker Pyne stories and seven Poirot novels Christie may be kidding herself as a somewhat imaginative but at the same time rather ditzzy author of detective fiction under the name Mrs. Ariadne Oliver (a new twist?). There is humor also in the name of Poirot's faithful secretary, Felicity Lemon (as in the Fleming stories of James Bond, where we encounter Miss Money Penny). Poirot's assistant named Goby may have been a "go-between" private investigator, but it is difficult to see much in Captain Arthur Hastings, Dr. Watson to Poirot's Holmes, unless Hastings is supposed to be quintessentially English to his cher ami's unconquerable Belgian-ness (which survived 55 years of British residence)--and a defeat, of course, of the English (1066 "and all that").

Christie herself published Star over Bethlehem as Agatha Christie Mallowan (she divorced Christie in 1928, married in 1930 the archeologist Max Edgar Lucien Mallowan, becoming Lady Mallowan when he later was knighted) and some inferior novels under the pseudonym Mary Westmacott: Unfinished Portrait (1934), Absent in the Spring (1944), The Rose and the Yew Tree (1947), A Daughter's a Daughter (1952), The Burden (1956), and the book in which she first used that name, Giant's Bread (1930). West is a surname

she found useful for an actress (Chloe Elizabeth West in Sparkling Cyanide), a typist (Maureen West in The Clocks), a psychiatrist and his nephew (Sir Alington West and Dermot West in "The Red Signal"), a girl attending the opera (Gillian West in "The Face of Helen"), and a private secretary (Basil West is secretary to Sir George Grayle who, with his wife Lady Ariadne, may just be Sir Max and Lady Mallowan in a trip on the Nile in "Death on the Nile," a short story not related to the novel of the same name published decades later). The clue to why West forms part of her pseudonym, however, I suspect lies in the fact that Miss Marple has a nephew who is a successful novelist (he turns up several times--his wife is named Joan) and a great nephew who works for British Rail (The 4:50 from Paddington). These two Marple relatives are Raymond West and David West, perhaps a nod at her West Country relatives by the author. Christie has three different policemen named Weston, but that's not it, nor is Lady Westholme, MP (Appointment with Death, 1937, a title I believe suggested by the tale of the "Appointment in Samara," mentioned by W. Somerset Maugham, picked up as a novel title by John O'Hara). I tentatively advance the theory that Westmacott and West suggest "writing" and "a relative" to Christie. The novels signed Westmacott were simply not up to the standard of those signed Christie (a name she continued to use even after her divorce, for she had established her career with it).

Some of the surnames are supposed to be funny. Try Crump (a butler to the Fortescues in A Pocket Full of Rye, 1953), Mrs. Alec Legge (Peggy in Dead Man's Folly, 1956), Sir William Ossington

(Assistant Commissioner at Scotland Yard, "Billy Bones"), or allusive (one of many I feel pretty sure about is Lady Nancy Astwell, a former actress in "The Under Dog," for Lady Nancy Astor, the former American), or tricky (one good example is Ulrich Norman Owen, owner of Indian Island, on which the victims of Ten Little Indians are assembled--he is U. N. Owen, "unknown"). And those adopted as aliases, pseudonyms, etc., in Christie's world are also pretty ordinary, not exactly ingenious: Pyne's aide Dr. Antrobus uses Dr. Claudius Constantine, Charles Trenton in Taken at the Flood uses Enoch Arden (from a Tennyson poem of 1864 in which a stranger does not reveal his identity), Anthony Astor is the pen name of playwright Muriel Wills in Murder in Three Acts (UK title the following year, 1935, Three-Act Tragedy), Arthur Badcock in The Mirror Crack'd (from Tennyson's "The Lady of the Lake") is really Alfred Beadle, the Duke of Blairgowrie is a disguised kidnapper in "Blindman's Bluff," Tuppence Beresford uses Mrs. Blenkinson in By the Pricking of My Thumbs (in defiance of theatre superstition against quoting "Shakespeare's Scottish Play," Christie alludes to Macbeth), Carl Bauer operates as a physician in Hampstead under Dr. Charles Bower in "The Adventure of the Sinister Stranger," the evil genius behind the plot in The Secret Adversary is simply Brown (an alias), Anthony Browne in Sparkling Cyanide was in jail as Tony Morelli, Henry Carmichael in They Came to Baghdad is a secret agent under Walter Williams, Lady Esther Carr in "The House at Shiraz" turns out to be one Muriel King, Carter (a government official in Pyne stories)

is really Lord Easthampton, Clement Edward Alistair Brent is ninth Marquis of Caterham, Albert Chapman (salesman for an armaments firm) is QX 912 in One, Two, Buckle My Shoe (alias The Patriotic Murders and An Overdose of Death), M. Chelles in The Secret of Chimneys is revealed as M. Lemoine of the Sûreté, Rev. Edward Chichester in The Man in the Brown Suit is none other than Arthur Minks, Rosaleen (Mrs. Gordon) Cloade is really Eileen Corrigan in Taken at the Flood, a bungalow in "The Affair at the Bungalow" belongs to a fictional Sir Herman Cohen, Mildred Jean (Milly) Cortman uses the alias Juanita (she's the wife of an American ambassador in Passenger to Frankfurt), Angus Crispin is really one Horsham (who applies for a gardener's job at Tommy and Tuppen's in Postern of Fate), Mrs. Bert Croft is really Millie Merton in Peril at End House), Mme. Daubreuil's real name in Murder on the Links is Jeanne Beroldy, Davis from South Africa is a red herring in Ten Little Indians, a drug kingpin in Passenger to Frankfurt works as Demetrios, the Russian wife (Anna Mikalovna) of John Denman in "Harlequin's Lane" is really Mme. Kharsanova, Mary Gerard's aunt Mrs. Mary Draper (née Riley) is Jessie Hopkins in Sad Cypress, Bella Duveen's sister Dulcie is Cinderella in Murder on the Links, Frau Bertha Ebenthal is a German spy as Mrs. Everard in "The Kidnapped Prime Minister," George Alfred St. Vincent Marsh is the strong-willed Lord Edgware in Lord Edgware Dies (though the use of a title cannot really be said to be an alias), and the "grand-daughter" of Simeon Lee in Hercule Poirot's Christmas (a/k/a Murder for Christmas and A Holiday Murder) Pilar Estra-

vadez turns out to be a Conchita Lopez.

And that covers only the first five letters of the alphabet, for the nature of detective fiction often involves false identities and names. For instance, the "secretary" of Sir Eustace Pedler, MP in The Man in the Brown Suit goes by Parker and by Harry Rayburn, neither of which is his real name, while the "fiancée" of the Duke of Southshire in "The Disappearance of Mr. Davenheim" is one Gertie passed off as Lady Millicent Vaughan, people are always renting houses to hide out (or for more nefarious purposes) under false names, and so on.

Taking a break from organizing all these aliases and substitute names (I need not get involved with the maiden names of married ladies, many of which Christie seems to provide unnecessarily) for you, I pick up John Simon on a trashy new play, The Golden Age ("Brass at Best," New York, 23 April 1984, p. 93), and my eye immediately falls on: "Everything here is slippery, reversible, double-bottomed--even the tone keeps changing--and the game is not witty enough for the candle." Ditto in spades for Christie: seldom does the necessity for an alias serve as occasion to score a point of some kind, nor does our author seem to know much about criminal psychology. (For instance, aliases often retain the criminal's real initials, people being rather unwilling even in deviousness or in danger to divest themselves completely of the identity represented in a name). But, for the record, here is the rest of Christie's list of aliases and pseudonyms, and you can skip the next paragraph if you have already had enough examples of her at work thus. (It is tiring, but there is nothing else as complete as my list.)

Ebenezer Farr's "son" is really Grant in Hercule Poirot's Christmas. The playwright Leslie Faulkener's name ("The Affair at the Bungalow") may be an adopted one, to sound more impressive, while Ferguson is Lord Dawlish's way of appearing less conspicuous in Death on the Nile's ship's list. Franz Joseph in Passenger to Frankfurt is just the countess' protégé, Karl Aquileros. Norman Gale in Death in the Air is a dentist named James Richards. Flossie Gapp we have already seen to be the less glamorous real name of Mrs. Merlina Rival. Mme. Giselle, the French moneylender, has Marie Angélique Morisot in her passport (Death in the Air), and that for an obviously different reason than Aspasia Glen was used on stage by Monica Ford. Randall Goedler is really Dmitri Stamfordis (A Murder is Announced). Adam Goodman is the alias of the gardener at "Meadowbank" in Cat among the Pigeons (and his employer is a secret agent, Col. Ephraim Pikeaway). Whalley's servant Robert Grant is really Abraham Biggs (elsewhere Christie uses Biggs for a cleaning woman and a page boy) in The Big Four. Sheila Grant's real name is Kelly in "The Horses of Diomedes." Lady Dittisham used to be Elsa Greer (Murder in Retrospect or Five Little Pigs). Gustave the waiter in "The Erymantian Boar" has the "real" name of Drouet. Nurse Jessie Hopkins (we have noted) is Mary (Riley) Draper. Boris Ivanovitch, spy, works as M. Krassnine in The Mystery of the Blue Train. Victoria Jones (one of more than a dozen persons of this surname in Christie's works) posed as Venetia Savile in They Came to Baghdad. Kitty Kidd may not be the real name of the male impersonator in The Mystery of the Blue

Train. Father Lavigny on the Leidner expedition in Murder in Mesopotamia is actually one Raoul Menier. Claud Leason is one of the actors described by Jean Helier in "The Affair at the Bungalow." Magda (Mrs. Philip) Leonides is an actress under the name Magda West in Crooked House. Samuel Long appears as Squadron Leader Loftus in "The Gate of Baghdad." Lucas was the real name of that Harry Rayburn in The Man in the Brown Suit, his forename (as with many characters, from butlers to revolutionaries) not being given.

Mrs. Maureen Lyon in "Three Blind Mice" has the real name of Gregg, while Lily Margrave (Lady Nancy Astwell's companion)'s is Naylor. The Marquis is a master criminal in The Mystery of the Blue Train. One Massacaud is a notorious villain as Robert in "The Erymanthian Boar." Sister Mary Ursula was Kate Casey before she became a nun ("The Apples of the Hesperides"). The Kidd sisters, Gracie and Kitty, are maids to Mrs. Carrington and Ruth Kettering respectively under the surname of Mason in "The Cornish Mystery" and The Mystery of the Blue Train. (Why should Kidd be changed to Mason in two instances? What is Dame Agatha up to?). Sir Charles McLaughlin is Lord Mayfield in Murder in the Mews (US Dead Man's Mirror). Merrilees is a police inspector named Jones in "The Rajah's Emerald," while Major Metcalf of Monkwood Manor is really Inspector Tanner in "Three Blind Mice." Anna Michaelovna in "Jane in Search of a Job" is the Princess Poporensky. The real names of actress Mirabelle ("The Soul of the Croupier") and dancer Mirelle (The Mystery of the Blue Train) are not known but Zobeida the dancer is Mary Moss in "Sanctuary." Gerda Grant attempts to pass as Helen Montessor, distant cousin of a banker Alistair Blunt, in One, Two, Buckle My

Shoe. Nadina (dancer in Paris), pseudonym Mrs. Grey, is really the South African Anita Gruenberg in The Man in the Brown Suit. Bianca Capelli has become an opera diva as Mme. Paula Nazorkoff ("Swan Song"), though Christie's singers usually have but one name. Major Arthur Neville is a phony name in The Big Four, a book that also has a conspirator known as No. 4. Greta Ohlsson (what a way to spell a Swedish name!) is the Ingrid Bergman nurse you remember from Murder on the Orient Express, in which (you may recall) there is a lot of hiding of identities and some foolishness over H and N embroidered as a monogram on a handkerchief. In fact, practically everyone, it almost seems, is someone else (and they all, it happens, committed the murder--except for the police and train officials, of course, while even Poirot is guilty of killing a lot of time...). But back to our long list. A Mrs. Wallace, actress, rents a country house as Mrs. Pardonstenger (surely overkill) in "The Golden Ball." Prince Paul of Maurania calls himself Count Feodor in "Jane in Search of a Job" in the Listerdale collection. Mrs. Alice (Amos) Perry is the Friendly Witch (By the Pricking of My Thumbs). Alex Pritchard, who fell over a cliff (in Why Didn't They Ask Evans? or The Boomerang Clue), was really Alan Carstairs (which is a better name in either case than those of corpses such as Verity Hunt, Mrs. McGinty, Lady Vere Merivale, and--brace yourself--Barbara Allen of "Murder in the Mews"). Walter Protheroe, deceased, was really Wendover ("The Market Basing Mystery"). Pyne's aide Dolores Ramona, alias Madeline de Sara, was simply Maggie Sayers ("The Problem at Pollensa

Bay"). Samuel Edward Ratchett aboard the Orient Express is really Casetti and (like the others) goes way back to a crime forgotten by most people but not by all. French-Canadian Paul Renauld (who wants to hire Poirot in Murder on the Links) is really one Georges Conneau (but is not connu). Andrew Restarick is really Robert Orwell (The Third Girl), and Mrs. Restarick (Mary) uses the alias Frances Carey; I mean the second Mrs. Restawick in this complex story (in which a number of people are dead). Fenella (Ellie) Rogers (Mrs. Michael Rogers, he being the narrator of Endless Night) also used Goodman and Guteman surnames. Amelia (Mrs. Abner) Rymer, client of Pyne in "The Case of the Rich Woman," was later Hannah Moorhouse. Daphne (Mrs. Gerald) St. John, a young wife who stole a diamond ring in "The Case of the Distressed Lady," was really Ernestine Richards. William Sandbourne (a surname Christie also used in Nemesis) in "Sanctuary" was Walter St. John. Anna Scheele in They Came to Baghdad used the alias Grete Harden. Julia Simmons, "distant cousin" of Miss Blacklock (A Murder is Announced), is Emma Jocelyn Stamfordis. Simone (full name unknown) is a medium in "The Last Séance" (though in "The Voice in the Dark" the medium is known by a surname, Mrs. Lloyd, and in The Pale Horse the medium is Sybil--an apt forename--Stamfordis). Count Stanislaus, murdered at "Chimneys" in The Secret at Chimneys, is really Prince Michael Obolovitch, small-change (though I think obol is accidental) British candidate for the throne of Herzoslovakia (obviously carpentered from Herzegovina and Czechoslovakian). Stephens, the window washer in Cards on the Table, is actually Gerald Hemmingway (an actor).

Mrs. Rose Emily Templeton (At Bertram's Hotel) used the alias Cayman. The jewel thief King Victor uses the alias Captain O'Neill in The Secret of Chimneys. Romaine (Mrs. Leonard) Vole alias Mrs. Mogson is really Heilger in "Witness for the Prosecution" (as film fans will recall). Finally, more devious than Countess Renata Zerkowski (a/k/a Mary Ann and Daphne Theodofanous, who switches identities with another in one of Christie's works, Passenger to Frankfurt, which is full of tricks), Christopher Wren of "Three Blind Mice" and The Mousetrap.

For those who have been too busy over the last 30 years or so to get to see The Mousetrap, I may just remark that Christopher Wren is supposed to be an architect--and that the very aptness of the moniker might tip you off to the fact that he is not one. In fact, Christie misses many opportunities to play games with aliases and cannot be said to have made her characters even as inventive or witty in creating aliases as she herself was in (say) calling a girl guide Small (The Body in the Library) or a society matron Mrs. Upward (Blood Will Tell or Mrs. McGinty's Dead). The supposedly realistic surface of detective stories may militate against too much or too obvious onomastic play in general, but people within the stories devising aliases ought to be able to do better than No. 16. Surprisingly, there is no John Smith in all her works (only an Ivor Smith, an old friend of Tommy Beresford in the intelligence game). Is it too much in detective fiction to ask that phony names sound phony, or clever, or give clues to the clever? I believe Christie misses many an opportunity here, as usual.

In summary it can be said that Christie has a tin ear for foreign names, uses some unusual British ones (Angkatell is one) and varies the spelling of others (Heavywether, Gorringe, Raddish, etc.), seems to be stuck on certain odd forenames (Violet Mannering, Violet Marsh, Violet Milray, etc.) with certain surname initials, and peppers her entertainments with double-barreled surnames (Gore-West, Lee-Wortley, Leigh Gordon, Llewellyn-Smythe, Reece-Holland, Rees-Talbot, Brice-Woodworth, etc.). Apart from repeated surnames dictated by family relationships, she appears to be very fond of some common surnames (Johnson, Lee, etc.) and some less common ones (Halliday, Prescott, Rice, etc.), scattering them around with little discrimination as to social status or other factors. She probably had to be very careful not to use, accidentally, the name of anyone who might sue--her Sir Eustace Pedler, MP is one of her few characters based upon real people--and this may account for the unique spellings of some of her names, her habit of picking them up from any source including the kitchen dishes (Quimper is used for a family doctor) but usually giving them a twist. Overall, her numerous charactonyms--pages 116 through 178 in Russell H. Fitzgibbon's The Agatha Christie Companion, 1980, a labor of love through not without glaring if trivial errors, a book to which I am here, of course, very much indebted--have a very old-fashioned and artificial ring to them. Consider: Blanche Amery, Emily Harriet Laverton Arundell, Elsie Batt, Anthea Bradbury-Scott, Lady Vanda Chevenix-Gore, Alexander Bonaparte Cust, Lady Cynthia Drage, Esmée Farouhar, Mlle. Zélie Meuporat, Mrs. Murgatroyd, Mrs. Salome

Otterbourne (a flamboyant novelist), Gene Pleydon, Isaac Pointz (a diamond merchant), Hermia Redcliffe, two people named Vyse and a woman named Thyrza Grey, not to mention psychics named Zara ("The King of Clubs") and Zarida ("The Blue Geranium").

One "rule" of detective fiction (according to Nancy Ellen Talburt and Lyna Lee Montgomery's anthology, A Mystery Reader, 1975) is: "There must be no undue amount of time and space devoted to characterization...." All the more need then for fictive names which enable us to place the characters correctly in society and keep track of them in the story. Realism militates against the shorthand of the names of humour comedy, satire, and other such broad genres, but in some sense names need to be apt, and credible. Christie's charactonyms too often sound fishy (or should that be "smell fishy?"), though they seldom involve red herrings.

Another "rule," at least in the heyday of Christie's detective fiction, was that the characters should gather if not on some means of transportation (cruise ship, train, etc.) then at the vicarage or some country estate. W. H. Auden in "The Guilty Vicarage" stressed the need for "a closed society" with "all of its members...potentially suspect," which meant "a) the group of blood relatives (the Christmas dinner in the country house); b) the closely knit geographical group (the old world village); c) the occupational group (the theatrical company); d) the group isolated by the neutral place (the Pullman car)." All echt Christean locales. Indeed, Auden said that "the story must conform to certain formulas (I find it very difficult, for example, to read one that is not set in rural

England)...." Even Christie ventured farther afield --there's one (Death Comes as the End) chock full of Egyptians whose names I have not bothered with--but she concentrates on Devonshire, Yorkshire, "Middleshire," etc. Miss Marple lived in the village of St. Mary Mead (Radfordshire), a map of which decorated Murder at the Vicarage, some 20 miles from London (and 12 from the coast). There her friends (Dr. Haydock, Mr. Satterwait~~e~~, Sir Henry Clithering, retired Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Rev. Dr. Pender, Colonel and Mrs. Bantry) watched her in operation as she, with the field glasses she ostensibly used for birdwatching, watched others. She did get away for a Caribbean holiday, to the Canary Islands, to Dartmoor and Cornwall, to London, etc., but she did not have to leave her rustic haunts to find people who were neither "bad or good, but simply, you know, silly"--and murderous.

The somewhat silly team of Tommy and Tuppence Beresford--we first meet her as Prudence Cowley, one of the daughters of an archdeacon in Suffolk--is into "Intelligence" but in N or M? they advance the war effort by repairing in disguise (he as Mr. Meadows, she as I have noted above as Mrs. Blenkinsop) to the coastal village of Leahampton, where they spy on spies. By the Pricking of My Thumbs, their last adventure, is involved in an old folks' home, another little society.

Parker Pyne (really Christopher Parker Pyne) advertized in the newspaper "Are You Happy? If Not, Consult Mr. Parker Pyne, 17 Richmond Street," and let excitement come to him, retired as he was after a career as a government statistician. He tended to employ

glamorous, theatrical assistants such as Madeleine de Sara and Claude Luttrell ("The Case of the Middle-Aged Wife," etc.). His sense of drama is almost equal to that of Harley Quin (who was once a ballet dancer) and they, like Superintendent Battle of Scotland Yard, are obviously city people; however, the social whirl of January to April on The Riviera, summer at Deauville, shooting on country estates in the Fall, London "for the [winter] season," etc., creates a number of small, closed social groups, and Battle gets involved by being drawn to investigate crimes at country estates (for instance, his first two novels are set at that of the Marquis of Caterham), and so on. Col. John Race is an international figure, but Sparkling Cyanide, at least, is set entirely in a somewhat closed group in England. Mark Easterbrook is featured only in The Pale Horse, the title taken from the name of an old inn now the scene of dark doings involving three mysterious women. Geophysicist Arthur Calgary is out to reopen (and solve) a crime long since closed; in Ordeal by Innocence the setting is one family. And in The Sittaford Mystery (Murder at Hazelmoor) Inspector Narracott is called to Sittaford House, near Exhampton (obviously Exmoor). Throughout the Christie stories and novels we are less likely to find ourselves at Monte Carlo or Baghdad than at Kings Lacey, Gorston Hall, Styles, Gipsy's Acre, End House, Nasse House, Prior's Court, Sittaford House, and Monkswell Manor (in the play with the title allusion to Hamlet: The Mousetrap). It is often a world not of Petra and Cairo but of Milton St. John, Churston, Chipping Cleghorn, Jocelyn St. Mary, Much Benham, Market

Basing, Market Handford, Lymestock (Lyme), Loomouth (Looe), and such, invented names which capture the essence of the now-lost railway stops (with the stations where station masters grew flowers in their spare time) on long-cancelled branch lines, a comfortable old world of pubs (The Jolly Roger), tea rooms (The Ginger Cat), small hotels (Sans Souci), occasional visits to the metropolis (Bertram's Hotel, The Porcupine Assurance Company, The Daily Budget newspaper). These names work well and are unobtrusively effective. Once in a while Manstone prison, Sunny Ridge rest home, Saltmarsh sanatorium, Balmoral Court hotel, Royal Spa hotel, Majestic hotel, the village of Hurst St. Cyprian, Stonygates asylum, or such, reveals a certain onomastic opportunity fluffed, as when James Billy in "The Man in the Mist" is said to be the author of a slim volume called Pacifist Poems; there is too much haste (I do not think any, or much, satire) in these choices of names. Maybe in detective stories the murder must come first, and the placenames need be only "blunt instruments." But I do suggest Christie might have employed in onomastic creations more of what Poirot so boringly and repeatedly calls "little grey cells."

"S. S. Van Dine" (Willard Huntington Wright) more than half a century ago (American Magazine for September 1928, reprinted in Philo Vance Murder Cases, 1936) gave us a list of detective-story devices even then worn out and to be avoided: the cigarette butt at the scene of the crime leading to identifying the murder by his brand of cigarettes, the bogus séance to frighten the culprit into confession, the dummy-figure alibi, the dog that does not bark in

the night (which Holmes showed us indicated a familiar intruder), the culpable twin who turns up to take the suspicion off an innocent sibling, "the hypodermic syringe and the knockout drops," the locked room in which the murder is committed after the police have broken in, the "word-association test for guilt," the cipher or code which is broken by the sleuth. To this today, I suppose, we add these outworn onomastic devices: The Case of, The Adventure of, and The Mystery of in titles; detectives named such as Joshua Clunk (H.C. Bailey's Orphan Ann, 1941), blind such as Max Carrados (Ernest Bramah [Smith]'s Max Carrados, 1914, has been copied in print, on screen, etc.), or otherwise handicapped (as, for instance, in a wheelchair) if the name puns on the disability; pseudonyms concocted like Manning Coles (from Adelaide Manning and Cyril Coles) or without attention to slang connotations (Ellery Queen, Matthew Head) or phony (A. A. Fair) or male for a woman clearly (Anthony Gilbert for Lucy Beatrice Malleson) or by implication (P. D. James) or female for a man (Hannah Lees for Lawrence Bachman) or involving anagrams (E. C. R. Lorac for Edith Caroline Rivett) or used unpredictably (Q. Patrick was used by Richard Wilson Webb alone, then by Webb and Martha Mott Kelley, then by Webb alone again, then by Webb and Hugh Callingham Wheeler), or in fact in any way attracting attention to the fact that they are pseudonyms -- consider John Le Carré as opposed to Kurt Steel or John Stephen Strange or Hake Talbot or W. Bolingbroke Johnson, let alone the puns, most egregious in the case of parodies of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "Great Detective" (whose name was made from that of a famous cricketer

in England and America's own Oliver Wendell Holmes): Shylock Homes in 1903, Sherlaw Kombs in 1895, Hemlock Jones in 1902, Holmlock Shears in 1907, Shamrock Jolnes in the Sixes and Sevens of "O. Henry" [W.S. Porter] in 1911, and--probably the worst--R. C. Lehman's The Adventures of Picklock Holes, 1901). You can give your detective a striking forename (Cordelia in E.D. James, Philo in "S. S. Van Dine") or surname (Sam Spade, Dr. Gideon Fell, Simon Templar, Sgt. Cuff). You'd better steer clear of Charlie Chan and Colonel Gore and Lord Peter Whimsey and Rouletabille and Constantine Dix and Raffles, for various reasons, and names constructed on similar patterns. You're better off with names like William Dawson and Philip Trent than Dr. Fortune or Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, Ph.D., Ll.D., FRS, MD, etc. Father Brown in Chesterton's stories has a fine, simple name; Foate's Dr. Bentiron (Behind Locked Doors) is trying too hard, however memorable the character himself may be. You can get names from your childhood (as Poe did Pauline Dubourg in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue") or from the newspapers (as Dickens did) or, today, the telephone book. E. M. Wrong's dead right introduction to Crime and Detection (1926) makes it clear that;

What we want in our detective fiction is not a semblance of real life, where murder is infrequent and petty larceny common, but deep mystery and conflicting clues.

We also want, however, little or no "deep mystery" in the names,

no "artistic" manipulation which will distance the reader from the story in which he, if it is to be an escapist literature, finds it easy to grant Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief."

Moreover, detective fiction these days and for some time past has been created for an international market, read worldwide. If artistic, onomastic skill had been available to and expended by Christie, points in the novels and stories may well have hinged upon deriving from names something quite untranslatable into another culture, another language. Had she truly relied upon onomastic skill, Christie's novels might well not have achieved the pinnacle of success which she reached not only among her generally unsubtle English readership on both sides of The Atlantic but fans around the globe. As it is, the United Nations cultural authorities tell us, Christie has been translated into more than 100 languages--and is available in more tongues than Shakespeare. Her translators do not have to cope with knotty problems of conveying onomastic tricks from one language into another. Her readers do not miss details in Russian, say, such as Dostoevsky's readers do in English (as Charles Passage's detailed study of the names in Dostoevsky, which I reviewed a year or two ago in Names, made clear).

We like to "curl up" with a good mystery, not "get down" to reading it with care. It is not intellectual exercise but a vacation for intellectuals, as even TV Guide has noticed. Nicholas Meyer in a "background" essay in that esteemed publication (9 February 1980, pp.23-24) stressed how detective fictions "organize life

and provide it with meaning and answers.... delivering to us that reassuring picture we all crave of an ordered world," but not an aesthetic thrill or a word puzzle. He (you may recall he introduced Holmes to Freud in The Seven Percent Solution) continued:

And pleasurable indeed is the process of watching the tracking [of the murderer]. There are some highfalutin apologists of the detective genre who would have us believe it is the intellectual exercise of following the clues along with the detective-- the reader's or viewer's participation in a kind of mental [sic] puzzle--that provides the satisfaction associated with detective stories. I believe such participation is largely illusory. We don't really ever have all the pieces at our disposal and most of us are not inclined to work with them very thoroughly, even in those rare cases when the author has been scrupulously "fair" in giving them to us. We enjoy the illusion of participation without really doing any of the mental legwork beyond the normal wondering "Whodunit?"

Consequently, clever wordplay, loading all names with freight of significance, is inimical to the casual reader's enjoyment of this easy-reading (if we can have a literary equivalent to half-engaging "easy-listening" music) genre. Too much like work.

I do want to suggest, nonetheless, that onomastic cleverness, if it did not distract the ordinary reader, might have a place in amusing the rare reader who appreciates wit and art, even in pop

products. It might even prevent Dorothy Sayers and her ilk from going off on disquisitions on campanology or some other arcane subject just to prevent the simple tale of motive and mayhem from becoming too slight a divertissement for thinking people. We really ought to be looking at something essentially concerned with the crime, even if it is only the length of a bird's claws in Erle Stanley Gardner's The Case of the Lame Canary or the letter on the mantelpiece ("The Purloined Letter") in full view. Names might amuse while not distracting us. Now the detective story is giving pride of place to the defector story. E. Phillips Oppenheim and Eric Ambler, W. Somerset Maugham and Graham Greene, among others, have given way to "John Le Carré" and Smiley's People--espionage and, more importantly, psychology are driving the oldfashioned whodunit into oblivion because it "lacks depth." Thoughtful onomastics might give it at least a small semblance of artistic merit, not enough to frighten the hoi polloi, just enough to titillate the critics and give the smarter readers a little something extra to ferret out and appreciate, something less contrived than, for instance, the women's college setting of Gaudy Night or the Parisian setting for an American true crime in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt."

Christie told Francis Wyndham (an interview in Sunday Times Weekly Review, 27 February 1966) that "what I'm writing is meant to be entertainment." It was, in fact, too devoid of any appreciation of progress or politics to be instructive; it was pure escape into an upper middle-class world, between the wars (chiefly in rural Britain), where superannuated persons (chiefly) proved useful in

bypassing the drudgery of police procedures (the guesswork and persistence that Poe has Dupin notice was the soul of Vidocq's success) and muddling through, in true British fashion, in the days when Britain was still getting through and not merely muddling, to the solution of a crime, a dénouement (a French word that emphasizes the artificial aspect of untying a knot which has been tied just for the purpose). It was as a pretty slick writer of well-crafted but certainly not "important" escapist fiction that Dame Agatha became the "Queen of Crime" (as Nigel Dennis' article in Life for 14 May 1956 dubbed her), the "First Lady of Crime" (as Henry R. F. Keating's anthology of accolades, 1977, put it in more American terms). Perhaps to demand literary devices such as fedende Namen from her is to forget that she did not become more famous than the giants of the genre (such as Wilkie Collins of The Moonstone, 1868) by writing better than they did. Her first novel (1920) made the rounds of publishers before John Lane at The Bodley Head saw that however badly she wrote, however "flat" her characters might be (in E. M. Forster's terms), however wobbly her grammar and poor her ear for dialogue (even after much practice and extensive editing), she had a firm grasp on plot. That may not make it literature but it made her work entertaining and herself famous. She gained far more readers than her female predecessors in the genre (including Anna Katherine Green of The Leavenworth Case, Baroness Orczy, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, Caroline Wells, and Mary Roberts Rinehart), her female contemporaries of note (Dorothy Sayers, Josephine Tey, Ngaio Marsh, Margery Allingham, et al.), and all the men.

Man does not live by high culture alone. She gave "value for money." Like "Bunch" at the beginning of "Sanctuary," Dame Agatha may have only "scraggy chrysanthemums" ("I wish we had lilies") from her garden. "There was nothing particularly original or artistic about the decorations, for Bunch Harmon herself was neither original nor artistic, but it was a homely and pleasant arrangement." Dame Agatha went one beyond "Bunch," the vicar's wife, in her boldness: as early as The Murder of Roger Ackroyd she played fast and loose (and predictably, it must be added) with the conventions of a genre she had studied carefully, and that was "original" enough. Literature was beyond her ("I wish we had lilies") but she gave us big bouquets of colorful flowers to lighten our spirits. If her onomastic skills were rudimentary, it mattered little: in escapist fiction it is always nice to notice a touch of wit but there need be "nothing particularly original or artistic about the decorations."

Christie's world is, Edmund Crispin noticed, essentially a "never-never land," perhaps her own escape, for her husband in Mallowan's Memoirs told us she had "a quality of elusiveness which stemmed from her earliest days"--days which involved a sensational disappearance we need not investigate here--"a defensive resistance to inquisitive probing, an inbuilt armour off which any questionnaire was liable to glance like a spent arrow." Whatever her motive, she created a world she could dominate. She was tireless, "a sausage machine," she said, "a perfect sausage machine."

Well, not perfect, but successful and sui generis. In her Autobiography she boasted that "though I have given in to people on every [other] subject under the sun, I have never given in to anyone over what I write."

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