

Agatha Christie (1890 - 1976)

A. Christie represents the "light genre" in the twentieth-century English literature. A great master of a detective story, she thrilled the world. As yet, little scholarship has been done on the detective story as a literary form. First, the form is still relatively new, if one accepts the 1841 publication of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" as making the birth of the detective story, and this date is now generally so accepted. Thus, the detective story is a good century younger than the novel, if we take Henry Fielding's "Tom Jones" and other works to represent the birth of the novel.

A. Christie found it hard to be specific about just how she created the plots which consistently baffle her readers. She readily acknowledged her debt to Conan Doyle, in fact, she admitted that she carried on the torch lighted by Conan Doyle. The author's first detective novel "The Mysterious Affair at Styles" was written in 1915 and published in 1920 — seven years before the last Sherlock Holmes short story collection appeared in book form. She produced a mystery novel or a short-story collection at the rate of at least one a year since 1920, and one might imagine that the early books would be somewhat dated by this point. Surprisingly enough, they are not. A career which exceeds forty-five years in length is remarkable in any field, but is especially noteworthy in the field of so-called "popular" literature, for it would seem that people's tastes would change radically in that span of time.

Although A. Christie's mysteries remain remarkably consistent in their appeal to readers, it is possible to notice some changes or advances in the manner and style of mystery-writing from 1920 to the present day. As the mystery story as a form becomes more mature and sophisticated, so do its readers. They can keep in their heads as many details as the detective can. So diagrams, maps and parables have been out of vogue since the 1930s. The two devices which the author has used over and over again are the nursery rhyme as an organizing theme and spiritualism as a cover for a perfectly straightforward crime.

A. Christie has evidently found in nursery rhymes an inspiration which permits her to develop plots with built-in suspense: the reader knows that the murderer is following the rhyme, and he knows in general terms what will come next (if he can remember the rhyme), but he is kept guessing as to how the author and the murderer will make the crime fit the rhyme. The most famous example of a nursery rhyme followed to the last detail is "Ten Little Niggers." Other favorite nursery rhymes of the author include "Sing a Song of Sixpence," which has been used in the short story of that name from "The List-erdale Mystery," very prominently in the full-length novel "A Pocket Full of Rye," and also in the short story "Four and Twenty Blackbirds" from "The Adventure of the Christmas Pudding and Other Stories." "How Does Garden Grow?" provided a unifying theme for the story of the same name in "The Regatta Mystery." "One, Two, Buckle My Shoe", was followed religiously in the novel of the same title, called "The Patriotic Murders" in America. "Five Little Pigs" suggested the inspirations for the Poirot novel which was later made into a very successful play. One of A. Christie's own special favorites is "Crooked House." which she says "saved up for years, thinking about it, and working it out." "Hickory, Dickory, Dock" (1955) is the full-length novel using a nursery rhyme as its theme.

A. Christie's interest in spiritualism is evidently quite an old one. "The Hound of Death" short-story collection contains quite a few stories which are not detection at all, but rather pure fantasy. In her 1956 interview with Nigel Dennis, the author expressed a keen interest in science fiction, but in the intervening decade she avoided both science fiction and fantasy as main themes. She rather made spiritualism a cover or camouflage for straight mystery and detection, although one at times wonders in "The Pale Horse" if it is possible to commit murder by telepathy.

A. Christie's talents seem most aptly used in the detective story — her talents are analytical, wryly humorous, and penetrating in telling a tightly-knit story, and her romance always seems less convincing. Perhaps this is due to the fact that detective story and novel are essentially a cerebral form, thanks to their conventions and confines of plot and the sort of mind who likes well-made plots is not likely to go in for formless romance and affection.

II. Give Russian equivalents to the following words and word combinations. Use them in the sentences from the text and in your own situations:

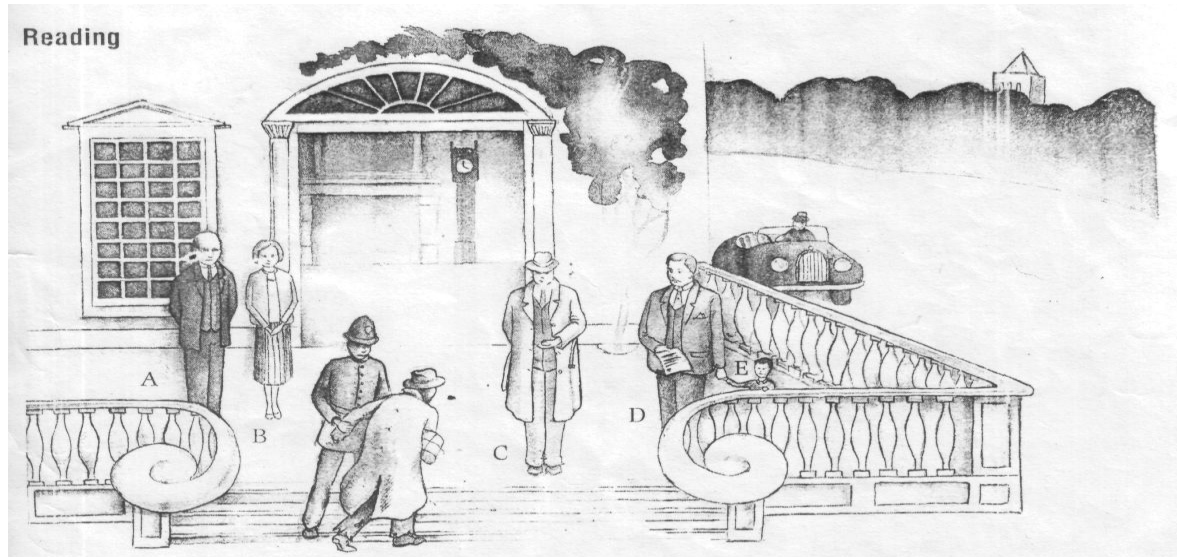
to do scholarship, to baffle the reader, to acknowledge the debt to, to carry on the torch lighted by, to produce a mystery novel, at the rate of, span of time, consistent in its appeal to readers, to become more mature and sophisticated, a nursery rhyme, an inspiration, built-in suspense, to follow the rhyme, a full-length novel, to be made into a successful play, a special favourite, to express a keen interest in science fiction, less convincing, affection.

III. Answer the following questions:

1. What can you say about the detective story genre? Prove that it is relatively new.
2. Whom did the author acknowledge her debt in creating a detective story?
3. Was A. Christie a prolific writer?
4. What devices did the author use in her novels?
5. What inspired her to create interesting plots?
6. What nursery rhymes were used by the author?
7. In what other genres did A. Christie express her keen interest?
8. Have you read any stories by A. Christie? Have you read them in the original? What language does she use?

9. What is the most popular novel by A. Christie with Russian readers?

AGATHA CHRISTIE was born in Britain in 1890. She is well known all over the world as the Queen of Crime. She wrote 77 detective novels and books of stories, which have been translated into many languages. She began writing detective fiction at the end of the First World War when she created Hercules Poirot, the little Belgian detective. Her other world-famous creation is Miss Marple, whom many readers identify with Agatha Christie herself. She died in 1976. 'The Adventure of Johnnie Waverly' comes from Poirot's Early Cases, a collection of her short stories first published in 1974.



A = Tredwell B = Miss Collins C = Inspector McNeil D = Mr. Waverly E = Johnnie Waverly

VII. Look at the picture of a scene from a detective story. In the story, a Belgian detective, Hercules Poirot /'3:kju:l 'pwa:rou/ investigates the case of a kidnapped child, Johnnie Waverly.

Mr. and Mrs. Waverly were warned in an anonymous letter that their son would be kidnapped on the twenty-ninth of the month at exactly twelve o'clock. In the extract below Mr. Waverly meets Hercules Poirot some days later and tells him the story of the kidnapping.

The picture shows what was happening at exactly twelve o'clock, but there are a number of mistakes in it. Read the extract and, on the picture, circle the differences between what you can see and what you read.

Inspector McNeil arrived about ten-thirty. The servants had all left by then. He declared himself quite satisfied with the internal arrangements. He had various men posted in the park outside, guarding all the approaches to the house, and he assured me that if the whole thing were not a hoax, we should undoubtedly catch my mysterious correspondent.

'I had Johnnie with me, and he and I and the inspector went together into a room we call the council chamber. The inspector locked the door. There is a big grandfather clock there, and as the hands drew near to twelve I don't mind confessing that I was as nervous as a cat. There was a whirring sound, and the clock began to strike, I clutched at Johnnie. I had a feeling a man might drop from the skies. The last stroke sounded, and as it did so, (here was a great commotion outside - shouting and running. The inspector flung up the window, and a constable came running up.

"We've got him sir," he panted. "He was sneaking up through the bushes. He's got a whole dope outfit on him."

"We hurried out on the terrace where two constables were holding a ruffianly-looking fellow in shabby clothes, who was twisting and turning in a vain endeavor to escape. One of the policemen held out an unrolled parcel which they had wrested from their captive. It contained a pad of cotton wool and a bottle of chloroform. It made my blood boil to see it. There was a note, too, addressed to me. I tore it open. It bore the following words: "You should have paid up. To ransom your son will now cost you fifty thousand. In spite of all your precautions he has been abducted on the twenty-ninth as I said."

'I gave a great laugh, the laugh of relief, but as I did so I heard the hum of a motor and a shout. I turned my head. Racing down the drive towards the south lodge at a furious speed was a low, long grey car. It was the man who drove it who shouted, but that was not what gave me a shock of horror. It was the sight of Johnnie's flaxen* curls. The child was in the car beside him.

The inspector ripped out an oath. "The child was here not a minute ago," he cried. His eyes swept over us. We were all there:

myself, Tred-well, Miss Collins. "When did you last see him, Mr. Waverly?"

'I cast my mind back, trying to remember. When the constable had called us, I had run out with the inspector, forgetting all about Johnnie.

'And then there came a sound that startled us, the chiming of a church clock from the village. With an exclamation the inspector pulled out his watch. It was exactly twelve o'clock. With one common accord we ran to the council chamber; the clock there marked the hour as ten minutes past someone must have deliberately tampered with it, for I have never known it gain or lose before. It is a perfect timekeeper.' Mr. Waverly paused. Poirot smiled to himself and straightened a little mat which the anxious father had pushed askew; 'A pleasing little problem, obscure and charming,' murmured Poirot. 'I will investigate it for you with pleasure. Truly it was planned a merveille*.' Mrs Waverly looked at him reproachfully. 'But my boy,' she wailed.

I. Vocabulary:

Find the words below in the text. Tick (*) the meaning which best matches (the meaning of each word as it is used in the text).

1. to post (line 3) a. to make someone stand somewhere b. to send to someone c. to stand straight as a post	9. a vain endeavour (line 18) a. a successful attempt b. a hopeless attempt c. a hopeless wish
1. a hoax (line 5) a. the truth b. a trick c. an argument	10. to ransom (line 22) a. to find something b. to take away c. to pay for someone's freedom
3. a correspondent (line 5) a. someone who writes letters b. someone who looks like a reporter	11. to abduct (line 23) a. to hide a person or thing b. to kill someone someone else c. to take someone away by force
4. to clutch (line 10) a. to hold tightly b. to hit c. to smile	12. to tamper with (line 39) a. to change by mistake b. to change something you shouldn't c. to wind up
5. a commotion (line 12) a. a gardener b. a storm c. a lot of noise	13. anxious (line 42) a. guilty b. carefree c. worried
6. to fling up (line 13) a. to open slowly b. to break c. to open hurriedly	14. askew (line 42) a. not straight b. tidy forcefully c. upside down
7. to sneak up (line 14) a. to move quickly and noisily b. to look carefully c. to approach secretly	15. to wail (line 45) a. to shout with anger b. to cry with sadness c. to speak very quickly
8. shabby (line 17) a. in bad condition b. clean and new c. brightly colored	

II. Which of the following do you think are true? Give reasons for your answers:

1. The Waverlys are very rich.
2. Johnnie is quite young.
3. Poirot solves the crime.
4. Inspector McNeil solves the crime.
5. Mr Waverly is lying.
6. Tredwell wasn't involved in the kidnapping.
7. The man in the garden knows nothing about the kidnapping.

8. Mrs. Waverly was ill at the time that Johnnie was kidnapped.
9. The man in the garden changed the time on the clock.
10. The boy in the car was Johnnie.
11. Johnnie was kidnapped by his father.

III. Write an article for a newspaper reporting the kidnapping. Use one of the headlines and first lines below to start your report.

WAVERLY HEIR KIDNAPPED

The only son of millionaire couple Mr. and Mrs. Marcus Waverly was kidnapped yesterday afternoon in a daring raid on Waverly Court, the family home in Surrey.

CLOCK KIDNAP MYSTERY

A vital clue in the Johnnie Waverly kidnapping case is the family grandfather clock, which was mysteriously tampered with yesterday, shortly before the three-year-old disappeared.