

**‘How Are You Getting on with Your Forgetting?’ – Class, Gender and Memory in Golden Age  
Crime Fiction by Women**

Értekezés a doktori (Ph.D.) fokozat megszerzése érdekében  
az Irodalomtudomány tudományágban

Írta: Zsámber Renáta okleveles angol és francia nyelv és irodalom szakos bölcész és tanár

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**Doktori (PhD) Értekezés**

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Memory in Golden Age Crime Fiction by Women**

**Zsámba Renáta**

**Debreceni Egyetem**

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## Introduction

Relatively early in Margery Allingham's *Hide My Eyes* (1958), in a scene set in Edna's Club, Gerry Hawker, the villain and the murderer, suddenly starts playing the piano and improvising on a song, apparently in order to ease the tension between himself and his lover Edna Midget. Although we are not provided with details about the love life of the couple, Edna, who is probably furious with Gerry for neglecting her for a long time, is also desperate to warn him about a certain Warren Torrenden, a racing driver, who is after him due to some shady business. The whole scene seems rather absurd and tense as Gerry, while eagerly playing the piano, is also involved in a conversation with Edna, who is dancing with his new friend, Richard, to what is, a popular number of the day: "He was improvising on a popular number, a favourite with the crooners, 'How are you getting on with your forgetting?', and as he let the familiar notes trickle through his fingers he watched with wide-open lazy eyes the irritated woman standing above him" (71). The exchange between the two concerns Gerry's fishy affairs with Torrenden which he simply refuses to remember having ever taken place. To dissolve the tension, he is only focusing on this song, singing that "Nothing is serious today", while he is "shaking his head and sliding into a rumba rhythm," instructing Edna to "[D]ance [...] Dance it off" (71).

This scene in which the criminal is playing the piano to divert himself in order not to have to think about the consequences of his crimes might be seen as allegorical in terms of Golden Age whodunits. On the one hand, the song might be seen as a *mise en abîme* of the genre, often identified as "escapist" entertainment in a period of economic and political unrest and crisis. Since its birth in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Bargainnier points out in *The Gentle Art of Murder*, crime fiction had often been labelled as escapist, offering a temporary release from the grim realities of the present: "Classic detective fiction is a type of escape fiction, and no one wishes to escape into uncertainty, terror or poverty. The escape it provides is to a world of political and social order, moral certitude, and usually of wealth and culture. Though the peace of this world is broken, the reader can be assured that it will be restored or have a new birth by the end" (10-11). This view is reinforced by the observations of some of the leading writers of the Golden Age as well. Richard Martin's monograph on Margery Allingham, *Ink in Her Blood*, besides remarking that her choice of writing crime novels stemmed from her enjoyment of "lighthearted adventure stories" (17) and also that "[t]his enjoyment coupled with the natural

urge to write was encouraged by the demand for what she referred to as ‘a literate and intelligent literature of escape’”, recalls Allingham’s own definition. “Allingham defined the much maligned term ‘literature of escape’ as an instrument of solace, ‘an escape from an intolerable hour’ [...]” (18). Martin explains that the modern mystery story written within the framework of escape literature was undoubtedly a passionate reaction “to the crises and upheavals in Western society that began in the mid-thirties” (ibid.). What she considered to be the goal of her books was “the telling of home truths with the business of entertainment” (ibid.). Allingham’s own definition seems to endorse the critical dismissal of the genre. The very scene in question suggests that Golden Age fiction reflected upon its own identification as escapist, while also necessarily addressing the very world of crisis from which it provided escape. Until very recently, critical reception disregarded both the self-reflexive dimensions of this body of fiction and its sometimes half-hearted but always symptomatic engagement with the realities of the contemporary world. This tendency was obviously reinforced by the novels’ emphasis on the often puzzle-like plot at the expense of characterization or social commentary which might divert one’s attention from the abundance of cultural references and subtexts. Frank Kermode was among the first, who, in his influential essay of 1972, “Novel and Narrative”, set out to explore the claim that, unlike serious or highbrow literature, crime fiction is formula fiction written in accordance with a set of rules<sup>1</sup>, and therefore devoid of any serious “content.” Kermode pointed out that no one had actually tested these claims, and his essay anticipates the study of popular fiction enabled and initiated by the cultural turn in criticism. Kermode’s analysis of Bentley’s *Trent’s Last Case* (1913) – a precursor to Golden Age fiction – was one of the first memorable examples of a new kind of reading that tries to “activate other systems of reading or interpretation” (184) in dealing with popular genres. Kermode, who was experimenting here with the system of codes worked out by Roland Barthes, argued that, although the puzzle-like plot structure – what Barthes called the hermeneutic code – in itself might not be very interesting, “the processing of clues” (184) is never exhausted in a contentless winding down of the hermeneutic machinery, and that such fiction repays critical attention for its wealth of cultural and symbolic materials. According to Kermode, “the processing of hermeneutic material has entailed the provision of other matter from which we may infer an ideological system [...] so the hermeneutic spawns the cultural [and] it also spawns the symbolic” (ibid.). Thus, he concluded that Bentley’s novel “has a cultural significance” (ibid.). Following Kermode’s lead, one can approach crime fiction expecting that the processing of

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<sup>1</sup> In 1928, S. S. Van Dine (the pseudonym of Willard Huntington Wright) published twenty rules on how to write an appropriate detective story. The rules appeared in *The American Magazine*, titled as “Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories”.

hermeneutic material inevitably uncovers or “spawns” what he calls the cultural content waiting to be recognized behind the clues during the reading activity. Even though Frank Kermode was no devotee of cultural criticism, his argument can be seen as the precursor of the recent critical tendency to read popular literature with a view to unravelling the ideological and cultural presuppositions that govern the deeper layers of their organization. Approached with this kind of critical apparatus, the classical whodunit, which had its heyday between the two world wars, has turned out to be extremely diverse both in terms of themes and style<sup>2</sup>. It seems that some novelists not only violated the rules of the formula plot but also expanded the boundaries of the form to reflect on the social and cultural changes after the Great War. The writers in the focus of the present dissertation, for instance – Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham and Josephine Tey –, while they are recognized as major figures of the Golden Age, did not always produce traditional detective novels based on the prescribed narrative pattern but crossed generic boundaries, mixing the formula pattern with other genres, from thrillers and the romance to social realism and the novel of ideas (for instance, *Gaudy Night*). These mixtures also ensure that many elements of the classic formula are absent or appear in an altered form: some of the novels discussed here do not feature a detective at all, in others there is no murder but suicide or some sort of revolt against control, while in others the crime plot is combined with a love interest between the detective and his ideal woman – an anathema in the classical formula.

The vivid academic interest in the genre and the spate of critical studies in the past two decades indicate that this far from homogeneous approach, which combines the perspectives of gender studies, postcolonial theory, nationalism studies and memory studies, to mention just a few of its constituents, is a rewarding one that has revealed unsuspected complexity and diversity. Nicola Humble’s book *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950*, is clear evidence that such a rereading of not only detective fiction but the whole corpus of the feminine middlebrow, which is “clearly a product of the inter-war years” (3), can justify and reinforce assumptions similar to that of Kermode. Golden Age crime fiction is traditionally seen as part of middlebrow literature, so it is no surprise that it had been affected by the critical neglect<sup>3</sup> of all the genres that belonged to this type of literature. Humble suggests that the feminine middlebrow suffered in particular from being stigmatized as “the ‘other’ of the modernists”

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<sup>2</sup>Chapter One in Martin Edwards’ *The Golden Age of Murder* provides a detailed analysis of this argument.

<sup>3</sup>“Defining the parameters of the fictional middlebrow is clearly problematic [...] It is an essentially parasitical form, dependent on the existence of both a high and a low brow for its identity, reworking their structures and aping their insights, while at the same time fastidiously holding its skirts away from lowbrow contamination, and gleefully mocking highbrow intellectual pretensions. It is also a predominantly middle-class form” (Humble 11-12).

(24), and was not considered a suitable subject for academic discussion until the 1990s<sup>4</sup>. Humble describes the reasons for the lack of interest: “Middlebrow has always been a dirty word. Since its coinage in the late 1920, it has been applied disparagingly to the sort of cultural products thought to be easy, too insular, too smug” (1). She concludes by pointing out that this condescending treatment is primarily due to the fact that these texts were written by women (3). Her project to revise some novels by representative writers of the middlebrow, such as Ivy Compton-Burnett, Margaret Kennedy, Elizabeth Bowen, Nancy Mitford along with authors of detective fiction, like Dorothy L. Sayers, Agatha Christie or Margery Allingham, is just one memorable example of the recent revival of critical and readerly interest in this body of literature. Her claim that the feminine middlebrow played an essential role in the renegotiation of new class and gender identities in the period from the 1920s to the 1950s is an important step in the critical revision of the middlebrow writers of the age. She also points out that the rise of the middlebrow cannot be separated from the crisis of the middle class(es) after the war, a significant term that needs to be clarified before moving on to discussing the relation between Golden Age detective fiction and the memory crisis. Raphael Samuel’s “Middle Classes Between the Wars” gives a detailed analysis of the chaotic transformation that marked the post-war years in terms of class hierarchy: “The middle class before the Second World War was less a class than a society of orders, each jealously guarding a more or less self-contained existence, and exquisitely graded according to a hierarchy of ranks” (30). Connecting the middlebrow with Samuel’s remark, Humble says that “[i]n the years after the First World War, the middle class became increasingly self-conscious. Its members began to question their own identity, the role of their class and its future in the nation” (57). She claims that it is in the “women’s middlebrow novel that we find the most concerted analysis of what it means to be middle class” (59)<sup>5</sup>. Most of the studies on middlebrow literature between the 1920s and the 1950s have memory, nostalgia, gender, middle-class anxieties and the myths of Englishness in their focus, claiming that these texts adopt an elegiac tone lamenting the lost hegemony of the upper-middle classes due to the appearance of the new, modern middle classes after the Great War. Humble points out that “[...] the feminine middlebrow was profoundly at odds with the optimism of certain cultural commentators who welcomed the expansion of the lower middle class as heralding the erasure of class differences” (81). This observation echoes Orwell’s remark on

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<sup>4</sup>While the literature of the interwar period was extremely diverse in style and form, well-known critics, like Samuel Hynes or Valentine Cunningham who just simply disregarded writers out of the literary canon. This is a major lapse, says Nicola Humble because it was actually the feminine middlebrow novels that dominated the book market, shaped the public taste of literature and truly reflected on everyday experiences in the interwar era.

<sup>5</sup> Humble compiles a list of genres that belong to this category: “romances, country-house sagas, detective stories, children’s books, comic narratives, domestic novels and adolescent Bildungsroman” (12).



classlessness in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, according to which, until World War I every “human being in these islands could be placed in an instant by his clothes, manners and accents” (18). What happened after the war was “something that had never existed in England before: “people of indeterminate social class” (ibid.) began to appear, and the reason for this, at least according to Humble, was that “culturally as well as economically everyone was becoming middle class” (88). Nevertheless, this critical observation of Humble should be handled with scrutiny when it comes to the analysis of Golden Age queens of crime. It is true that they were suspicious and unappreciative of the changes, but they did not disregard completely the advantages of social mobility either. Also, middlebrow writers were far from being a homogeneous group, their views differing greatly in matters of traditional class values, and their novels describe diverse ways of how to treat and renegotiate class and social hierarchy. Most contemporary critics of crime fiction agree that Golden Age authors mostly approved of the existing class system but believed that it ought to be more inclusive than it was. This means that while they believed that social classes should expand and mutate, they represented upper-middle-class manners as a culturally dominant standard that could serve as an example for newcomers to adapt to. Susan Rowland’s *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* supports this claim: “The intentional conservatism of the golden age writers is complicated by their use of self-conscious fictionality to criticise traditional class structures as they threaten to become outmoded and morally empty in modernity” (42). This could have secured the continuity of the old modified by new values of the present. The recognition that Golden Age crime fiction operated in two opposing directions, that it could equally reflect on the past and the present was first thoroughly explored by Alison Light’s *Forever England* in 1991; her analysis of middlebrow novelists like Ivy Compton Burnett, Daphne du Maurier and Agatha Christie radically changed the course of scholarship with view to the conservatism of middlebrow women writers. Light’s idea of conservative modernity was her way of exploring how the “writing of middle-class women at home” (10) treated the contradictions and tension in English social life after the Great War, and how they related to “the ideologies of the home and womanliness which belonged to the virtues and ideals of the pre-war world” (ibid.). In Light’s reading, the conservatism of these writers is very different from what previous critics had supposed. She claims that these writers did not identify uncritically with pre-1918 values, their conservatism was more to be understood through their “traumatised relation to modernity” (10) and a radical response to it. The following passage illustrates Light’s point:

Janus-faced, it could simultaneously look backwards and forwards; it could accommodate the past in the new forms of the present; it was deferral of modernity and yet it also demanded a different sort of conservatism from that which had gone before [...] It is the women of an expanding middle class between the wars who were best able to represent Englishness in both its most modern and reactionary forms. (10)

Although Light only analysed Christie's detective fiction, her argument applies to the whole body of Golden Age crime novels of the period, fiction that investigated the paralysing effects of the past and revealed anxieties over the present. This concept has been effectively exploited by Susan Rowland, Merja Mäkinen, Melissa Schaub, and Megan Hoffman – all of whose books I am going to rely on in what follows – but not one of them attempted to think through the consequences of Light's approach with regard to Golden Age crime fiction in terms of the recent upsurge of critical and theoretical interest in cultural memory and nostalgia. This is precisely what the present dissertation undertakes: to explore some of the cultural implications, ambiguities and tensions of Golden Age crime fiction, focusing on issues of cultural memory and nostalgia as they are implicated in and interact with issues of class and gender. At this point, before I can develop my argument about how theories of memory and nostalgia can expand and deepen our understanding of the ambivalent relation to the past and the cultural displacement these authors portray in Golden Age crime fiction, I am obliged to return to the scene in Allingham's *Hide My Eyes* with which this Introduction began.

Apart from the perhaps self-reflexive use of the song as light entertainment that serves the purposes of an escape from the difficulties of the present, there is a more specific cultural relevance to Gerry's song, the title of which ('How are you getting on with your forgetting?') happens to coincide with one of the most essential concerns of Golden Age detective fiction, that is, the dynamics of forgetting and remembering in the post-war era. Especially as the song does not seem to exist outside the novel, it might be seen as a conscious allusion to the necessity and difficulties of – cultural – forgetting. Although the Golden Age of detective fiction is traditionally placed in the interwar period, representative authors of the genre continued to produce stories until the late 50s, as exemplified by Allingham's book<sup>6</sup>. While this particular novel is among the last texts by Allingham to evoke the glorious past by replaying imperial pride and Victorian respectability in a suburban location, it also does so in a highly ironic tone

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<sup>6</sup> The phrase 'Golden Age of detective fiction, coined in 1939, has stuck. Yet opinions vary about how long the Golden Age lasted, as well as whether it really was as golden as admirers claim. Julian Symons thought it logical to define the Golden Age as the period between the two world wars, and it is difficult to argue. Of course, Christie and her disciples continued to produce new books, and enjoy much success, long after that time, but most of the classic detective fiction appeared between the wars' (Edwards 106).

which wryly acknowledges the loss of an Edenic past, an England which is impossible to bring back. Even though one cannot be certain that Allingham's novel was making a point about memory politics by having the museum house destroyed<sup>7</sup>, yet, the novel implies that there is something intriguingly unnatural about a strategy of forgetting which also incorporates a desperate attempt to recapture what was lost after the Great War. The struggle or even the refusal to forget in the present context suggests an uncanny insistence of and on the past, a certain way of remembering which can be interpreted as a form of refusing to acknowledge the horrors of the present in the post-war period. As a result, the whole cultural project of forgetting is subverted or set aside, making room for an anxious insistence of and on remembering which preserves a particular past embedded in the myths of Englishness and cultural heritage. Due to this eager clinging to the past, the present is bracketed, a process which paralyzes the natural flow of time. The fact that time in the present is suspended in favour of the past creates a particular atmosphere that this genre dramatizes. It is the starting point of the present dissertation that Golden Age crime fiction played an important part in the memory politics of the interwar period and the mid-century. This is indicated by the very term "Golden Age". As Martin Edwards remarks, "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" (8). It is as if the literary or generic memory had replicated the mnemonic processes of the age in which this body of fiction was produced, with the object of nostalgic longing displaced into a literary period. The other starting point of the dissertation – something that crystallized slowly in the course of reading these novels – is that the attitude of Golden Age crime fiction is too diverse and complex to be characterized as escapist nostalgia. Even though a version of nostalgic escapism is not far from Golden Age authors, the novels discussed in the present dissertation present a more complex set of attitudes: these novels, although many of them might be said to embody escapist cultural nostalgia, are also critical of the memory politics of nostalgia, frequently staging the consequences of the bracketing of the present.

It appears then that the escapism of whodunits is more complex than it would seem at first sight: while Golden Age novels do provide a temporary escape for the reader from reality, the genre also reflects on the memory politics of the interwar years, staging and reflecting upon several strategies ranging from paralyzing nostalgia to a conscious confrontation with the contemporary world. In *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, Jan Assmann argues that "man's basic, natural disposition would seem to favour forgetting rather than remembering, and

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<sup>7</sup> Part of the house has been converted into a museum where odd objects symbolizing the British Empire are on display. The house as a site of memory is going to be discussed in *Chapter One*.

so the question that really needs to be raised is why he would be interested at all in investigating, recording, and resuscitating the past” (51). Assmann, an acclaimed Egyptologist and scholar of history, worked out his theory of collective memory which he defined as a social obligation “firmly linked to the group” (16) as opposed to the “art of memory” (ibid.), a classical invention that relates to the individual. In developing his ideas on memory culture, Assmann poses the question: “What must we not forget?” (ibid.). This question, he argues, is a “central element of any group” (ibid.) integral to the group’s identity and self-image which can only be sustained through memory. While Assmann’s general framework is useful in conceptualizing the social, political and cultural dynamics of memory, for the purposes of this dissertation, it is Paul Connerton’s *How Societies Remember* that has proved particularly inspiring, mainly because he addresses the importance of the frequently neglected field of ‘*habit-memory*’ (23), practices of the body or ritual performances that necessarily shape and solidify social or collective memory, also pointing out that this kind of memory pervades everyday life. This observation is crucial to my approach to Golden Age crime fiction which dramatizes – and, by offering the repeated experience of reading interchangeable texts, perhaps also exploits – this type of memory as part of its vested interest in maintaining middle-class identity after the war. One of the things that becomes apparent in most of the selected novels is that – since the unproblematic shared ideologies and platforms of collective and public memory seemed fragmented and untenable – characters tend to relive the past through bodily practices and everyday rituals which are reinforced by their physical environment. Connerton says that “our images of social spaces, because of their relative stability, give us the illusion of not changing and of rediscovering the past in the present” (37). Nevertheless, the way the past is reconstructed in the texts reflects on what Connerton calls the “distinction between two contrasting ways of bringing the past in the present: acting out and remembering” (25). This distinction is also central to the study of memory as understood in psychoanalysis. Drawing upon Freud, Connerton explains that, when acting out the past the subject feels as if it was immediate, even tangible, and refuses to acknowledge either the actual roots of these practices “or their repetitive character” (ibid.), as a result of which the “[t]he compulsion to repeat has replaced the capacity to remember” (25). It is not my aim to engage in the investigation of the selected corpus through psychoanalytic criticism, but this dialectics of remembering and reenacting or repetition seems crucial in trying to reflect on the dynamics of memory and forgetting as it is dramatized by Golden Age crime fiction, especially in the way this dramatization is related to the representation of location, the repressions of the characters and their everyday milieu.

The novels of Golden Age queens of crime, Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Ngaio Marsh provide a fertile ground for a more nuanced understanding of the social and cultural upheaval of the interwar period which they represent through its practices of everyday life, generally in a domestic environment and employing a personal perspective. While the work of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers has been the object of critical scrutiny – Christie is obviously the most critically acclaimed author –, Marsh and Allingham remain relatively neglected, let alone those equally popular writers who are not referred to as queens of crime, like Josephine Tey<sup>8</sup> or Gladys Mitchell, but whose work would also repay the same kind of critical attention. All of them were representative writers of Golden Age crime/detective fiction who shared predominantly conservative views, a strong belief in the old values related to traditional class structure as well as a distaste for social transformation and mass culture – a rather controversial feature, since the genre itself reached all classes of readers, making it the literature of the masses. While producing the most successful novels of the age they also shaped and modified the rigid structure of the whodunit, loosening the strict rules of the genre, as Martin writes of Allingham: “[...] the formal rigors of the detective story attracted Allingham for the very reason that they demanded new strategies of variation and innovation” (16). Driven by their objection to many contemporary changes and to what they saw as the alarming condition of the decayed classes, they aimed to sustain the illusion of an Edenic past. Colin Watson refers to the typical idyllic milieu in interwar whodunits with big houses and closed village communities as ‘Mayhem Parva’, but the expression also indicates the pathological, paralyzed nature of this setting and its connection with distorted forms of remembering and forgetting. The nostalgic preoccupation of Golden Age crime fiction with an idealised past is inseparable from a new emphasis on place, and the link between memory, forgetting and place is one of the central concerns in my proposed dissertation. As Mary McCarthy wrote in 1936: “The detective story writer today is [...] preoccupied with milieu” (qtd. in Richard Martin 13), which, according to Nicholas Blake, was far from the conventional concerns of the detective story, and therefore he even suggested that the new type could be labelled as “fashionable detective story” or “novel of manners” (Martin 13).

The interwar years “see an increasing interest in ‘Deep England’ [...]” (Stewart 98) associated with the landscape and the countryside of the south of England, “the repository for the skills, virtues and values that the depredations of modernity are causing to vanish elsewhere. The countryside is not simply at a geographical remove from the city; it also represents a lost past”

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<sup>8</sup> Born as Elizabeth Mackintosh, used two pseudonyms for her texts, Gordon Daviot for her dramas, and Josephine Tey for her detective stories.

(ibid.). Writers of classical whodunits actively joined this trend, so the fact that nostalgia for a glorious past pervades Golden Age of crime fiction is not surprising in itself; a closer scrutiny of this fiction, however, reveals a far from homogeneous set of attitudes within Golden Age fiction to the recreation of the myth of Englishness. In *Delightful Murder*, Ernest Mandel remarks that “[t]he subjective need to be filled by the classical detective story of the inter-war years was that of nostalgia” (29). Even though – or precisely because – the attitude of Golden Age writing to nostalgia is far from being homogeneous, accounts of the psychological and cultural dynamism of nostalgia need to be taken into account. Svetlana Boym’s book, *The Future of Nostalgia*, gives a detailed account of the historical and cultural evolution of nostalgia in Europe since the seventeenth century. She writes that, at first, nostalgia was considered to be a disease which needed medical treatment, but, after the advent of modernity, it transformed into a “public epidemic [...] based on a sense of loss not limited to personal history” (6) by the end of the eighteenth century. Boym explains that “nostalgia is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed” (xiii), which echoes Rita Felski’s claim in *The Gender of Modernity* where she defines the nostalgic person as someone who always has an “overwhelming desire to return to their homes [...] to a specific and crucial locus of the past” (40). For Boym, modern nostalgia is not only an overwhelming desire but “a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values;” (8). Grief and mourning are also linked to painful nostalgia by Roberta Rubenstein, who investigates the relation between nostalgia and cultural mourning in women’s fiction from Virginia Woolf to Toni Morrison. While her scope covers a much wider era with a greater diversity of writers than the present thesis, her interpretation of cultural mourning coincides with how female writers of the Golden Age viewed the loss of past values after the Great War. In her *Home Matters*, she explains that “cultural mourning [is] to signify an individual’s response to the loss of something with collective or communal associations: a way of life, a cultural homeland, a place or geographical location [...]” (5). People may mourn their separation from home, land, or language, but what is crucial for our interest is the lament over the loss of “cultural practices that contribute to identity” (6). The return to the past then signifies not only the retrieval of the home/land but the possibility to reconstruct one’s identity. Nostalgia thus marks a condition of longing for an imaginary place which results in a “retreat from the world of the living” (Felski 40). While this nostalgic retreat may show a passive, even painful relation to the present, the retreat might signify a more active contribution to the restoration of the past in a mode that Boym calls ‘restorative nostalgia’ (41). Restorative nostalgia “engage[s] in the anti-modern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths [...]” (41). From this perspective, I argue that habit-memory is closely related to restorative

nostalgia since both aim at the sustenance of the past. According to Boym, restorative nostalgia grounds itself on “restored or invented tradition through [...] a set of practices [that is] normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual of symbolic nature which seeks to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition which automatically implies continuity with the past” (42). It seems that the interwar years created a fertile ground for this type of nostalgic attitude. As Mandel puts it, the First World War marked the loss of Paradise:

the end of stability, of the freedom to enjoy life at leisurely pace [...] when the war ended and stability failed to return, the petty bourgeoisie, still essentially conservative, was consumed with nostalgia [...] The country-house and drawing-room settings of the novels [...] are not a reflection of contemporary life but a recollection of a Paradise Lost. Through them, the Good Life of antebellum days was relived – in imagination if not in reality. (30)

His comment on the intrinsic characteristics of the genre echoes those of other critics like Colin Watson, Charles J. Rzepka or Alison Light, and points towards two interconnected aspects of the classical whodunit that I wish to discuss in the dissertation. First, with reference to nostalgia, I consider classical crime fiction one of those discursive sites where the reinvention and relocation of the English middle class was taking place after the Great War. Both the trauma of the Great War and the weakening and later the loss of the Empire forced the English to reinterpret their own identity. Members of the middle-class, like others, chose what to forget and what to remember. The creation of an imaginary England from pieces of their recollections, which, as the chapters that follow will show, occasionally took pathological forms<sup>9</sup>, was a specific symptom of memory crisis affecting post-war Europe<sup>10</sup>. Tamás Tukacs’s *A megrekedt idő* (*Stalled Time: The Crisis of Memory in Late Modernist English Fiction*) is a study in the analysis of this symptom in interwar novels which both dramatized and demonstrated the memory crisis by incorporated pathological and broken pieces of memory when referring to the past and through their often fragmented and elliptic narrative structure. Tamás Bényei explains that pathological nostalgia appears when the nostalgist sees the present, the time of narration as “a void”, as “an inorganic”, “anti -narrative temporality” (*Landscape* 18), a “route-less non-narratable space” (19). The past in turn, is “imagined as the time of plenitude, presence, and the

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<sup>9</sup>In his *Az Ártatlan Ország* (*The Innocent Country*), Tamás Bényei explains that the consequences of the weakening and loss of the Empire could be seen in the form of nostalgic reactions as well as in the search of a new Englishness and English tradition. He also refers to Terry Eagleton claiming that the English-myth was reproduced by the English middle-class who sought their identity in country life rather than in the premises of the big cities (143).

<sup>10</sup> About this memory crisis, see, for instance, Richard Terdiman and Leo Löwenthal.

present as the time of dislocation, displacement, loss, absence, the exact opposite of the atemporality of the sacred domaine” (ibid.). Robert Hemmings’ book, *Modern Nostalgia*, argues that, though each historical era had its own nostalgia towards a particular period or “past values to stabilize an erratic present” (5), there is a huge difference between the nostalgia of previous eras and that of the post-war (post-First and Second World War) years: “Modern war enforced a destructive breach that made the past ever more inaccessible, apparently even more distant, which served to intensify the longing for it” (5). He argues that the pathology of nostalgia grows out of the impossibility of going back to the past, of going home, and that this preoccupation with homecoming was especially prevalent in British cultural discourse during the years between the world wars, when nostalgia, steeped with pathos, imbued with pathology, flourished in a range of English literary production (8). In *The Past is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal is also preoccupied with the twentieth-century crisis of memory, especially with the ways the past is recreated in the present and how this restoration might paralyze action in the present. He calls nostalgia, “[...] memory with the pain removed. The pain is today” (8), a ‘modern malaise’ (4). He concludes that “[b]eyond these nostalgic traits lurk truly pathological attachments to the past” (11). Victoria Stewart’s *Narratives of Memory* quotes Michael Wood to illustrate the same type of attitude: “Nostalgia looks to the past, but it belongs to the present” (qtd. in Stewart 96). I read Golden Age detective fiction as symptomatic of this cultural phenomenon separable from the post-war identity crisis of the traditional middle classes.

Susan Rowland observes that, while Golden Age authors embrace social conservatism with a view to a “nostalgic re-forming of social classes” (39), as argued earlier, she adds immediately that they “are not nostalgic for the social mores of the Victorian era” (40), in fact they handle nostalgic longing with irony and playfulness. Rowland’s remarks are undoubtedly grounded on Light’s notion of conservative modernity, which she applies to all the four queens of crime to see how the novels of the respective authors reflect on the urge to maintain pre-war values. Rowland’s book touches upon a wide range of topics, including the cultural significance of the genre, the gender question, the literary Gothic or the metaphysical dimension which she investigates in the novels of six crime writers, the four queens of the Golden Age and two contemporary dames of crime, P. D. James and Ruth Rendell. Drawing upon Light’s *Forever England*, her monograph endorses the claim that these writers did not write “unproblematically conservative country house mysteries” (43); on the contrary, their books represent the obsession with the past in an ironic manner, and, in more pathological cases, they show that it can even be deadly. Some of her observations, like the one on how fragile and non-coherent certain symbols such as the country-house can be, are more thought-provoking than elaborate, but their



relevance to the whole of the genre is extremely valuable. Her analysis of the literary representation of nostalgic longing in the Golden Age is an important step towards a more detailed analysis of the dynamism of memory and nostalgia which she basically leaves untouched. Her arguments imply the potential of discussing this corpus in terms of the distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia, which would not only enrich our understanding of Light's definition of the genre as Janus-faced, but could also enable us to explore thoroughly the ambiguity felt towards the transformation of cultural and social values as well as a greater diversity of symbols – Rowland's investigation is restricted to country houses and the gentleman detective but without classifying them as amateurs or professionals – applied to the cultural project of recreating the past. While she draws her conclusions from a reading of novels by all of the authors is convincing, her analyses of those texts tend to be on the brief side, preventing her from explaining why and how these symbols can become fragile or non-coherent, outmoded or even empty. She only hints at what Rubenstein says about moving beyond nostalgia itself by growing an awareness of it: "Several writers evoke nostalgia or the longing for home to enable their characters (and, imaginatively, their readers) to confront, mourn, and figuratively revise their relation to something that has been lost, whether in the world or in themselves" (6). This is the phenomenon Boym calls reflective nostalgia.

Taking its cue from the above considerations, my starting hypothesis is that many ambiguities of Golden Age detective fiction on the level of setting, character and plot stem from the fact that, in terms of the relationship with the past, memory politics and class identity, this body of fiction was working in two opposite directions by its ability to incorporate both, restorative and reflective nostalgia. The milieu it created with so much care was supposed to take one back to the glorious past, thus the genre contributed to the myth-making mechanism of the interwar years, manufacturing a national past and identity, while the intrusion of crime in the novels usually has the deeper function of disrupting the memory world and depriving characters of their imaginary past. While this would reinforce the genre's definition as escapist, these writers seem to be in two minds about the occasionally obsessive nostalgia towards bygone days which is demonstrated by criminal deeds as a result of the elimination of the present. Boym claims that reflective nostalgia operates upon defamiliarization and a sense of distance "to narrate the relationship between past, present and future" (49). In my interpretation, it is exactly the appearance of crime that reflects the instability of this memory world and calls attention to the impossibility of living out of historical space and time. In Golden Age detective fiction, the artificial milieu is deconstructed by the act of crime, which, however, is not necessarily an intrusion from the outside, but, in some cases, grows from the inside as a consequence of living too much in the past. Although the investigation successfully reconstructs

the actual sequence of events and restores order, the memory world cannot or must not be recreated any more.

Drawing upon Light's idea of conservative modernity and Rowland's remarks on the controversial nature of nostalgia, my dissertation explores this twofold nature of Golden Age crime fiction, but with a shift of focus. I expect to show that the ambiguous nature of Golden Age crime fiction originates from the conjuncture of two types of nostalgia – restorative and reflective. Further, I shall suggest that the workings of nostalgia and memory in Golden Age crime fiction cannot be explored without an investigation of the psychological and cultural investment in particular places. As Victoria Stewart claims, “[a]n inability to place faith in the possibilities of progress into the future will exacerbate the turn to the past, or rather, to a nostalgic conception of it, which will be centred around available artefacts, images or buildings” (96). Nostalgic longing, then induces practices of memory to recapture the milieus remote from the present. Golden Age crime fiction effectively exploits such images, symbols or artefacts along which it reconstructs the past. The conscious planning of what and how to remember triggers the dynamics of memory and forgetting which, as I argue, turns the genre itself into a *lieu de mémoire* of middle-class memory. This term was coined by Pierre Nora, who puts it in an overarching historical framework, speaking about the adverse way in which modernity affected traditional social cohesion, including forms of memory. Nora claims that “[t]he moment of *lieux de mémoire* occurs at the same time that an immense and intimate fund of memory disappears, surviving only as a reconstituted object [...]” (12). Although Nora states that “memory attaches itself to sites [...]” (22), his concept of *lieu de mémoire* exceeds physical sites to include ideas, books, events, fictional or historical figures – and it is in Nora's sense that I interpret Golden Age crime fiction itself as a complex site of memory that includes typical characters as *lieux de mémoire*. They can take various forms and recur in the manners, language and habits of those who maintain them that reinforce and sustain a world long gone, which I shall refer to as ‘memory world’. To be able to recreate a lost England from pieces of recollections, the novels erect sites of memory in the present in the hope to preserve the memory they are invested with. My objective is to explore how Golden Age fiction creates *lieux de mémoire* while at the same time exploring the workings of such sites of memory, both endorsing and critiquing the claim that such sites can resurrect the past and create the impression of a timeless existence through certain symbols, like old houses along with their relics and inhabitants all of which are necessarily fragile, vulnerable and ambiguous.

Beyond country houses, I investigate other locations as well, like Victorian houses in towns, or homes in villagized suburbs, but other sites of memory include the gentleman detective and the female gentleman, as well that also furnish stages where the search for a mythical essence of

Englishness may unfold. Finally, I also believe that treating the genre itself as a *lieu de mémoire* sheds light on a new aspect which has never been considered. At the beginning of this Introduction I referred to the fact that Golden Age authors experimented with the narrative form by disregarding or even eliminating several of the compulsory elements. It seems that the way these writers undermine the rules of the narrative pattern is inseparable from their deconstruction of the nostalgic milieu. Just as these novels keep pretending that they are classical detective stories on the surface, they also pretend they approve of the conservatism to hold on to pre-war values. Yet, the rigidity originating from both the narrative structure and nostalgic longing is harshly criticised and refuted in them.

Class and gender perspectives are difficult to disentangle in these memory sites. Many of them, for instance, are hybrids, and their hybridity cannot be defined exclusively in class terms: it also has a great deal to do with the crisis of masculinity after the Great War. As Alison Light says: “The post-war world [...] needed to give way to a more modest, sometimes agonised sense of English manliness. Most writers solved the problem of embarrassment [...] by the age-old recourse of reinstating the clever foppishness of the aristocrat”<sup>11</sup> (72). With its more modest representatives of masculinity – like Sayers’s shell-shocked Wimsey, or the seemingly idiotic Albert Campion – and confident, independent women as their partners – Harriet Vane and Amanda Fitton – Golden Age crime fiction tends towards androgyny, but finally resolving the tension by taking recourse to the traditional romance plot (Hoffman 73) in which both the man and the woman regain their traditional roles – a feature that Sayers and Allingham definitely have in common. Although the aristocrat is ironically represented in the selected books, the genre also evokes an elegiac tone lamenting for a “largely fantasized aristocratic past” (Humble 62) as well as by the desire of the middle class to associate itself with the aristocracy, what Raphael Samuel calls “borrowed prestige” (28).

All these writers were aware of the controversies of gender politics after the first wave of feminism, and the fundamental ambiguities informing these novels result in local ambiguities with regard to certain recurring character types, most of all the gentleman detective and the female gentleman, who in Melissa Schaub’s reading can be seen as an alternative version of The New Woman. The female gentleman is honourable and virtuous, she has gentlemanly manners which lifts her above the others showing an example of the successful, ideal woman of the interwar period, someone who is worthy of becoming the gentleman detective’s partner,

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<sup>11</sup>This is one of the reasons why Christie’s fiction is not considered in the present study. Her professional amateur, Poirot, is not an English gentleman, unlike the detective figures of the selected corpus, and, though Miss Marple is by all means a memory figure, the female characters in Sayers, Tey and Allingham stand for a very different idea, representing progressive gender politics – career and independence.

because she is his equal. Most of these characters are backward-looking in class politics and lifestyle, but they are forward-looking inasmuch as they are aware of the exigencies of the present. Nevertheless, I find that the female gentleman can be approached from a perspective different from that of Melissa Schaub and is more in line with Megan Hoffman's analysis of female characters in her *Gender and Representation in British 'Golden Age' Crime Fiction*. Hoffman also builds her argument on Light's idea of conservative modernity and claims that while women writers of the Golden Age elaborate on the "active model of femininity that gives agency to female characters" (2), they also display "with their resolutions an emphasis on domesticity and on maintaining a heteronormative order" (ibid.). The ambivalence which surrounds the woman's place and "the active models of femininity" (ibid.) in the interwar era has inspired me to revise the character of the female gentleman in the hope that a closer study of her relationship with the detective enables us to consider her, too, a site of memory. I shall argue that she functions as a bridge figure who nourishes the illusion of recreating the past for the detective, assisting him to rebuild his assertive masculinity by recapturing his true England – this way the woman becomes embedded in the myth of Englishness and a *lieu de mémoire* in the same sense as the gentleman detective.

Considering all that has been said about the leading authors of the Golden Age, it would seem obvious to include some representative novels by all the four queens of crime. Yet, I have decided to include only Dorothy L. Sayers and Margery Allingham, also discussing Josephine Tey, at the expense of Agatha Christie and Ngaio Marsh. My reasons for this decision are manifold. The absence of Agatha Christie clearly requires explanation, especially as her novels have been discussed as "active negotiations with cultural representations and formations" (Makinen 6). Her over-representation in the criticism of the genre at the expense of the others is only one of my reasons. Another reason for her relative absence from this dissertation is her unique approach to crime and criminals, one of the most important differences between her fiction and that of other Golden Age writers. Unlike her contemporaries, Christie retains the so-called 'one of us'<sup>12</sup> strategy, signifying both a distrust in human beings and the belief in an omnipresent evil in the world, which, as Richard York says, is not unlike "a traditional Christian distrust of human nature" (7). Although this aspect does not seem to be closely related to my interest here, it is in fact behind those features of her work that swayed me to ignore her here. For Christie, criminality dwells in the human nature rather than in social status. In Allingham,

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<sup>12</sup>Since Christie's villains are unsettlingly usually 'one of us', revealed from the midst of the ordinary social characters, they must inevitably be pretending to be something they are not, situated within the cast of innocent suspects (Makinen 166).

Sayers and Tey there appears to be a connection between criminality and either social standing, or some contemptible traits which clearly indicate the boundary between the good and the bad, while in Christie anybody can be a murderer. Aristocrats and members of the upper middle and traditional middle classes are usually depicted by the three writers as representatives of long established values and guardians of the social hierarchy, all the nice people who, in Christie, are always “the cleverest killers” (Light 95). Christie’s class politics is visibly different from that of the others. According to Alison Light, “[w]hat is striking about Christie’s fiction between the wars is not its snobbishness but its comparative freedom from much of the rancour and discontent about an expanding middle class which motivates her fellow writers” (76). While it is also true that most of these women writers approved of social mobility, they were also anxious to see newly promoted members adopt the old values. In a sense, Sayers, Allingham, Tey or Marsh meant to incorporate the old in the new and asked their readers to identify with the values and sentiments with their aristocratic or upper-middle-class detectives and major characters. Christie is more enthusiastic about a quiet life, her characters are not the large and sweeping aristocrats of the literary imagination but little people [...]” (106). Unlike her contemporaries, she is not worried about the expansion of the middle class, as we can see in her *The ABC Murders* (1936) where she is not biased about the lower classes. Nostalgia for Christie is more pernicious than for the others, who hesitate between the fantasy of stability sustained by the aristocracy and the present. While there is a detailed description of country houses in most novels I examine here, Christie’s novels lack in mesmeric details about the environment and location her characters occupy. Her first Miss Marple novel, for instance, *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930), does not provide any significant details about Old Hall, the home of the victim, churchwarden and local magistrate, Colonel Protheroe. In Allingham and Sayers, the reader can expect lush passages about the inside and the outside of these houses, and, though their decay is painfully acknowledged, these dwellings are still treated with awe and admiration. Their poverty and fading glory are considered respectable but in Christie they are interesting when “they are no longer inhabited by aristocrats but are modernised by the middle classes” (80). Unlike in the novels of Sayers or Allingham, big houses are not the places to preserve ancestry or national character for Christie, a feature which makes Light conclude that “hers is not a romantic conservatism” (81). In her books, big houses are intriguing not because of their history but because of their ability to deceive. *A Murder Is Announced* (1950) is a typical representation of how bucolic environment and idyllic homes can become deceptive, underlying Bargainnier’s claim in *The Gentle Art of Murder* (1980) that Christie creates “a kind of disjunction between the characters and their domestic environment” (24). The house of Letitia Blacklock, Little Paddocks, is not exceptional because it is old or can boast of a unique

history, but only because it hides post-Second World War traumas and the true identity of its owner. In this sense, houses may become powerful not because they reinforce national stability but because emerge as the metaphor of human nature. On a grand scale, Christie does not idolize the past and aristocratic order, and although a late novel, *At Bertram's Hotel*, (1965), does engage with the harmful consequences of excessive nostalgia – like some novels of Allingham –, I have decided to focus on those authors who share similar views in most of the issues discussed in the present dissertation.

Her gender politics seem to have a lot in common with that of Sayers, Tey and Allingham, none of whom were active feminists despite embracing the opportunities that the post-war world offered women. Beyond realizing the New Woman ideal in their private lives – Tey, living a very secretive, isolated and celibate life, might have been an exception – they also explored in their fiction the possibilities for women that the new century brought. Makinen points out that “[o]ne of Christie’s strengths as a writer is the wide range of available femininities that she develops in her novels” (64), but her wide range also involves that possibility that any of her female characters may turn out to be villains, regardless of their social status. *The Murder at the Vicarage* is again a significant text from her early period which delineates several kinds of modern middle-class women – ranging from potential killers to single mothers – without contempt. In the novels of Sayers, Allingham and Tey, female figures can also be divided into the categories of potential criminals and non-criminals but their classification strongly depends on their social class and position. While Christie’s women are inclined to murder no matter what position they occupy, these three authors seem to imply by their choice of criminals that free-spirited, educated, and sexually moral middle-class or aristocratic women can become ideals as opposed to either the obsessed domestic women or the monstrous, and sexually abnormal lower-class types. Also, the idealized young or youngish heroines, referred to as Female Gentlemen, are recurring figures in Sayers and Allingham, also become involved in romantic relationships with their male counterpart, and, consequently, undergo significant changes. While Makinen argues that, in the character of Tuppence Beresford, Christie had created the prototype of the young female detective and the detective’s lover Schaub calls Female Gentleman, before Sayers did, she cannot be included in my present analysis. Tuppence is already married to Tommy when their adventures start, she does not contribute to the psychic reconstruction of the detective and does not embody the image of the eternal woman by restoring the gentleman detective to his assertive masculinity – some points of interest that I place primary focus on when analysing the female gentleman. Among Christie’s detectives, it is Poirot and Miss Marple who are the most renowned. Poirot cannot be considered as an embedded figure in the myth of Englishness for the sole reason that he is a

foreigner, and Miss Marple, though a recurring character, and belongs to the past, is an elderly spinster, who is disinterested in love. She also stands for an idea that is very distant from the concerns of Sayers, Allingham and Tey. In Christie, Miss Marple becomes “hugely useful to an unappreciative community” which discriminates her on the basis of age and marital status” (62).

The other queen of crime whom I have dropped in favour of Josephine Tey is Ngaio Marsh. In my dissertation, my aim was to include British/English authors only, whose representation of the English landscape sustained not only the memory of Englishness but who depicted the countryside as a lost Eden. Ngaio Marsh was born and grew up in New Zealand, and for her England meant the mother country. According to Susan Rowland, she is a colonial writer “in accepting the paradigms of Englishness and the English golden age genre as her 'norm' [and] [s]he is also a post-colonial writer in her exploration of the incoherencies of colonial and English identity” (66). This makes her very different from the other writers who did not have to experience the struggles attendant on this particular condition of in-betweenness. Also, her New Zealand novels portray the wild landscape as a site of lost values, similarly to what the other writers projected onto the English countryside. New Zealand, along with its Maori culture becomes the colonial other that can be portrayed through pastoral images, yet, Marsh keeps emphasizing the difficulty of describing the landscape in the terms offered by the Western literary tradition. Her country houses are referred to as ‘camp country houses’ by Rowland, which means that Marsh uses the country house as a theatrical setting in which to reveal her anxiety to construct and identify with Englishness as well as to express a strong criticism of upper-class manners, as her Second World War novel, *Death and the Dancing Footman* (1942) illustrates. My approach to the portrayal of country houses described in the novels under investigation concentrates on their role in the preservation of English cultural memory and a melancholic/nostalgic attitude brought about by their decay. While these dwellings do appear as tools for deception, a cover for crime, they still exude a sense of order and superior values that contemporary British society can rely on – until World War II, Allingham used country houses to recreate the myth of stability – in reconstructing a shattered and traumatized national identity in the chaotic present. Marsh’s gentleman detective, Alleyn, is a gentleman policeman, which distinguishes him markedly from the frivolity and ambiguity of the amateur sleuths in the novels analysed here. Unlike Campion, for instance, Alleyn would never break the law or do anything corrupt. Campion is an expert of role playing – the reader does not even know his real name and identity – and he often violates the law, in fact, he has a dark side, a criminal inclination (for instance, in *The Crime at Black Dudley*, *Mystery Mile*, *Look to the Lady*, *Death of a Ghost* or *The Tiger in the Smoke*). While Campion, Wimsey or Blair can co-operate with the police, they tend to work and investigate on their own, for Alleyn,

the police equals “divine justice” (140), as Rowland argues. Although Alleyn, like Wimsey and Campion, has an aristocratic background (his brother is a baronet), he finds it hard to balance his allegiance to the police and his genteel origin. This is particularly apparent when he needs to decide between the law and his respect for the expectations of aristocratic suspects. The other three detectives never struggle because of their class status, they use it for their own purposes by returning to the ancient role of the aristocrat to maintain order and serve justice. While Marsh’s female monsters, divas and artists, like Valmai Seacliff in *Artists in Crime* (1938), could have been included in the third chapter on villainous women, since it is exactly her novels that strongly argue for the connection between crime and female sexuality, I feel that I would not have been able to use her novels for the purposes of the first two chapters without upsetting the balance between symbols of Englishness, memory and the present, as her novels would have required a close examination of her representation of a colonial/postcolonial experience. Lastly, her female gentleman, Agatha Troy, is not analysed in the relevant chapter precisely because Alleyn is not a figure of memory in the same sense as Campion, or Wimsey, he is not a traumatised hero who is striving to get back to his England with the help of the female gentleman. Therefore, Troy cannot become part of the myth to sustain the illusion of a more ordered and stable past.

As my proposed dissertation is interdisciplinary in its approach, its theoretical background is situated at the intersection of several critical discourses: cultural studies, memory studies, spatial studies, gender studies and, naturally, the ever growing body of work on crime fiction. My general approach is primarily inspired by historical and theoretical approaches to crime fiction and by the young discipline of memory studies. Due to the rise of cultural studies in the past two decades, Golden Age crime fiction has also received sustained critical interest. The rereading of the genre allowed critics like Stephen Knight, Gill Plain, Charles J. Rzepka, Ernest Mandel, and even the critical writing of P.D. James – a contemporary queen of crime – to move away from the traditional focus on the structure of classical crime fiction, introducing questions of society, gender, race, colonialism and sexuality.

I draw upon Ina Haberman’s *Myth, Memory and Middlebrow* (2010) to analyse the relationship between detective fiction and the self-reflection of the traumatized middle class in the context of memory. Haberman’s views on myths/mythology in the construction of Englishness representing something that is “culturally elaborated” and constitutes “the collective unconscious” (12) are useful in discussing the elements of this artificial world as well its dismantling through criminal acts. She argues that “[the] process of mythmaking also implies



a relation to ‘the past’, and to memory. An exploration of Englishness thus needs to address various forms of memory” (26). Haberman relies on Jan and Aleida Assmann’s theories of communicative and cultural memory which, in turn, use Halbwach’s concept of collective memory as an origin. While these scholars approach memory politics from a more theoretical perspective than Nora, Haberman concludes that their concept of the connection between collective and cultural memory provides a fertile ground for studying middlebrow literature of the interwar period<sup>13</sup>. As far as the memory politics of interwar England is concerned, my main sources include Patrick Wright’s *On Living in an Old Country* (1985), which reveals how the unconsciousness of everyday life is connected to the myth of the glorious past, and David Lowenthal’s *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (1985), which analyses the obsession in British culture with things past. Ian Baucom’s *Out of Place* (1999) approaches the emergence of Englishness, and how it evolved against the experiences of the Empire from various aspects, discussing things like Victorian architectural theory or the writings of Forster, Rhys or Ford; his analyses provide a firm theoretical background to the discussion of memory sites. Baucom’s analysis of the locale has been essential in my analysis, since he clearly demonstrates how various sites “serve[s] a disciplinary and nostalgic discourse on English national identity by making the past visible, by rendering it present” (5). To investigate the connection between locale and national identity sunk in a pervasive nostalgia, he also relies on Nora’s theory of memory sites. While Jed Esty’s *A Shrinking Island* (2003) focuses mainly on canonical writers like Eliot or Woolf, his book is crucial in revealing the influence of the fading Empire on Englishness and the modernist form which could not totally separate itself from the aesthetics of the middlebrow given that the texts he investigates also address the reinvention of English culture.

The revaluation of the crime genre from a feminist perspective (including the rediscovery of forgotten female authors) has been particularly influential. Susan Rowland’s *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* (2001), for instance, discusses some issues – nostalgia, colonialism, gender, psychoanalysis, the Gothic and feminism – which are also crucial in my investigations. In studying issues of gender and femininity from the memory aspect, I shall use gender-inflected accounts of the major tropes of female identity that appear in these novels as ambiguous sites of memory. Melissa Schaub’s *Middlebrow Feminism in Classic British Detective Fiction. The Female Gentleman* (2013) and Megan Hoffman’s *Gender and Representation in British ‘Golden Age’ Crime Fiction* (2016) are both indispensable revisions

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<sup>13</sup> To speak about Englishness is always to tell stories about collective identity, and thus in a way to engage in a process of myth making a process which crucially involves the interaction between individual, communicative, collective and cultural memory (29).

of the connection between the past and present, Englishness and the character of the Female Gentleman. The New Woman, as a controversial figure, sometimes even verging on wickedness, who threatens the constructed milieu, will be analysed through Sally Ledger's *The New Woman, Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (1997), Rita Felski's *The Gender of Modernity* (1995) and Elaine Showalter's *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (1990). Cate Haste's *Rules of Desire* (1992) provides a thorough social and cultural source for the analysis of sexuality and the woman problem following the Great War.

The final component of my theoretical and critical context is provided by social history inflected by cultural studies, including Martin Pugh's thorough analysis of middle-class practices and attitudes in *We Danced All Night – A Social History of Britain Between the Wars* (2009), or analyses of the cultural meaning of locations like that of the countryside in Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973) or Alun Howkins' *The Death of Rural England* (2003), the suburban house in Todd Kuchta's *Semi-Detached Empire* (2010) and David C. Thorns's *Suburbia* (1972). Such cultural meanings and the binary oppositions rooted in them are crucial for my analysis, as the novels discussed are based on a number of oppositions such as the one between the city and the country, the country and the suburbs, the suburbs and the city centre, the public and the private, the old (the country-house) and the new represented by the suburban semi. The semi-detached house, which is described with such meticulous care by Golden Age authors, is "a cultural product" (129), producing specific meanings and identities for those who live there.

Consulting monographs on the three writers whose work is analysed in detail proved to be something of a challenge, since most of the books written about these authors are biographical rather than critical, like Sandra Roy's 1980 *Josephine Tey* – the only book-length study of Josephine Tey –, Barbara Reynolds's 1993 biography *Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul*, or Julia Jones 2009 *The Adventures of Margery Allingham*. The few critical studies include B.A. Pike's *Campion's Career: A Study of the Novels of Margery Allingham* (1987), Martin Richard's 1988 *Ink in Her Blood: The Life and Crime Fiction of Margery Allingham*, Catherine Kenney's *The Remarkable Case of Dorothy L. Sayers* (1990) and Crystal Downing's *Writing Performances: The Stages of Dorothy L. Sayers* (2004).

The chapters that follow will explore the complex interrelationships between memory, class, gender and nostalgia, trusting that this combination of perspectives allows for considering Golden Age detective fiction as a *lieu de mémoire* of middle-class remembrance – a combination that has never been applied in the study of the works of Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham and Josephine Tey. *Chapter One*, 'Sites of Memory in Middle-Class

Remembrance', discusses the house as a site of memory through various representations of homes that become scenes of crime. This chapter explores how the home becomes the embodiment of the tension between the memory world and the turmoil of the present, a tension that easily turns the comforting milieu into a place of horrors, erupting either as murder or as some other kind of crime. The selected books do not only portray traditional country houses with the image of the innocence of Deep England that evoke the glorious past, as Patrick Wright points out, but homes of various types, such as the respectable suburban home which is to evoke imperial pride and stability, situated as it is between the country and the city. This chapter analyses texts that feature various types of houses as memory sites: Margery Allingham's *The Crime at Black Dudley*, *Mystery Mile*, *Police at the Funeral*, *Sweet Danger*, and *Hide My Eyes*, and Josephine Tey's *The Franchise Affair*.

*Chapter Two*, 'The Gentleman Detective as a Site of Memory', explores the gentleman detective as a *lieu de mémoire* who, by his very ambiguity, constantly subverts and erodes his own position in the myth of Englishness. The gentleman has always been regarded as a bridge figure between the past and the present, someone who is also a part of the English heritage that guarantees the identity of Englishness. Sayers's Wimsey and Allingham's Campion are also aristocrats who do not only remind one of a very distant past but are supposed to confirm conservative beliefs in class structure and an ordered society in the present. Tey's Blair, on the other hand, is an example of the Victorian's appropriation of the most essential traits of the gentleman that could best characterize the masculine ideal of the British Empire. The present, however, erodes the carefully constructed image of the gentleman. After the Great War, he is no longer the epitome of masculine strength, and, in Tey, reduced masculinity is represented through an isolated lifestyle strictly regulated by an everyday routine in the post-Second World War era. While the gentleman detective is part of the memory world, he is also one agent of its deconstruction. A careful study of the historical and cultural development of the gentleman figure leads to the realization that the image of the gentleman has been considerably modified during the centuries. The interwar period shows him as a character torn between two worlds, who, despite his ability to embody permanence, erodes his own mythical image. The gentleman detective is going to be studied in Allingham's *The Police at the Funeral*, Sayers's *The Nine Tailors* and Tey's *The Franchise Affair*.

*Chapter Three*, 'The Other Society: Women and Crime', is concerned with the controversies of the gender politics of Golden Age crime fiction by discussing various types of female characters. Tey, Sayers and Allingham were all concerned about the social and cultural changes after World War I with special regard to the changing status of women, the growing

suburban culture and the dissolution of middle-class values and class boundaries. While they elaborated on symbols to reconstruct the myth of Englishness, and middle-class morals, they ceaselessly reflected on threatening elements that could easily destroy the illusion of the past. Fears of the new and the modern dominate these texts that foreshadow the appearance of evil and criminal disposition in particular characters, such as the modern, uneducated and sexually subversive woman, the ‘bad’ New Woman type who threatens the existing order of the respectable middle class. Although the ‘negative’ New Woman figures do not commit any ‘real’ crimes, they are represented with disapproval from a conservative middle-class perspective emphasizing their unacceptable attitudes, poor education, ill manners and sexual promiscuity as potential threats. Besides monstrous women, the figure of the spinster and the urban housewife become both tragic depictions of patriarchal control in a chaotic world leading to unexpected catastrophes. The novels analysed in this chapter are Allingham’s *The Fashion in Shrouds*, Sayers’ *The Documents in the Case* and Tey’s *The Franchise Affair*.

Finally, *Chapter Four*, ‘The Female Gentleman as a Bridge Figure’, investigates the possibilities that these authors offer to the controversies of gender politics with their female gentleman. The selected novels of Sayers and Allingham reflect on the competing gender ideologies of the 30s and early 40s. While Havelock Ellis and Mary Stopes’ reform movement on sex revolution was a success after the Great War, the 1930s saw a decline in feminist progress on a social scale. “Social and economic pressures – as Haste explains – were pushing women back into the home [...] Marriage was portrayed as a career for women” (89). Although Melissa Schaub describes the female gentleman as the detective’s equal based on her intellectual abilities and independence, I aim to show that her relationship with the detective, her mostly Victorian morals and strong belief in class hierarchy relocate her in the heritage of the English pastoral. Her marriage with the detective is also depicted as a definite resolution of their adventures, nevertheless, drawing on the series of books that feature this character, I argue that her decision to marry is rather out of choice than necessity. The chapter also addresses a shift in the representation of the heroine, Marion Sharpe, after WWII, and discusses features she shares with her interwar equivalents. Sayers’ Harriet Vane is going to be studied in *Strong Poison*, *Gaudy Night* and *Busman’s Honeymoon*, Allingham’s Amanda Fitton in *Sweet Danger*, *The Fashion in Shrouds* and *Traitor’s Purse*, and Tey’s Marion Sharpe in *The Franchise Affair*.

## Chapter 1: Places of Memory in Middle-Class Remembrance

The ancient mansion, Black Dudley, in Allingham's first novel, *The Crime at Black Dudley* (1929), is formidable and magnificent at the same time: "In the centre of this desolation, standing in a thousand acres of its own land, was the mansion, Black Dudley; a grey building, bare and ugly as a fortress. No creepers hid its nakedness, and the long narrow windows were dark-curtained and uninviting" (5). Despite the pastoral surroundings, the house in this novel is not the type of idealized country house that Henry James called the 'great good place' (Kelsall 7). Still, it evokes very ancient times with its gloom and loneliness that take one back to the first country houses that, as Malcolm Kelsall explains, "were fortresses" (25). The fortress-like building has a long history of aristocratic past, but looks "dark-curtained and uninviting" (5), furnished with old but lavish furniture in the post-war period. Having escaped modernization, the mansion is illuminated only by the faint light of the candles, so it stands in darkness, resembling a "great tomb house with its faintly musty air and curiously archaic atmosphere" (7). Black Dudley seems to stand for two fairly opposing ideas in the novel. While it exudes a "certain dusty majesty" with its ancient history that preserves the memory of an ancient and illustrious family, the Petries, it is also a gothic mansion, evoking a sense of horror with its ability to imprison and bury its inhabitants. The oppressive force of the house pervades the whole story, its remoteness and death-like appearance conjure up ghastly images that bring about the actual murder or death. Black Dudley with its "Suffolk air" (6) symbolically represents the fate of the country house which found its ultimate place after the Great War in the middle-class detective story which re-invented such locales as the perfect and somewhat picturesque location for moral transgression. Beyond reflecting on the requirements of the formula with a view to the setting of the crime, the depiction of the country house addresses the memory politics of Golden Age crime fiction and its mission to resuscitate the past through various symbols of Englishness.

Allingham's novel is the first in a long series of crime narratives with an almost obsessive awareness of place, and it is also typical in the sense that the evocation of place is characterised by a marked ambiguity. While most of the houses she depicts evoke nostalgia for the lost glory and an aristocratic past in the aftermath of the Great War, this desire for the past is hardly ever exempt from gothic horror in her fiction. Rowland claims that "[f]or Allingham the country house is the location of a myth of social stability beset by Gothic shadows of occult

feudality and/or Victorian oppression<sup>14</sup>” (44). *Black Dudley* exemplifies the author’s approach to both the past and the present. The ancient mansion standing in the unspoilt land of Suffolk elicits a sense of nostalgia and reconfigures a long tradition of country house writing that had idealised the dwelling and the countryside, but this idealisation is undermined by Gothic horrors that her characters experience. The ambiguity of the setting reflects a similarly mixed attitude to the inhabitants of the house: *The Crime at Black Dudley* expresses Allingham’s anxieties over the condition and role of a declining aristocracy – the aristocratic family are threatened by a modern gang of criminals –, while Wyatt Petrie, the scholar and the owner of Black Dudley, is also a resuscitation of the unreliable, even villainous aristocrat, a literary type with origins in them Gothic tradition. The ritual of the dagger, properly called the “Black Dudley Ritual Dagger”, which is said to be a part of the family history, seems to enhance the mysterious atmosphere. The ritual was initiated in the 1500s, as Petrie explains, after a guest was found murdered “with this dagger sticking in his heart” (17). Since then, the family had kept up the superstition according to which if the murderer touched or held the lethal weapon again, it would “become covered with blood as at the time of the crime” (ibid.). According to the chronicles of the Petrie family, someone in the family was beheaded because the dagger betrayed him. Ever since then, the Petries have been performing the rite of the dagger once a year, but it has considerably changed down the centuries. By the time Wyatt Petrie organizes the party for his distinguished guests, the ritual only involves passing the dagger on to each other in the dark. The one who still holds it after the lights come back, loses the game and has to pay a forfeit which “varied [...] from kisses to silver coins all round” (18). Nevertheless, the mystery and the old custom are both undermined by the revelation that it was invented by the host so that he could murder his uncle. The episode, thus, is about the power of the past not in the sense that the past is present in some supernatural way, but by showing that such an unthinking respect for this power makes characters susceptible to being manipulated and exploited.

In the novel, criminality is also induced by sexual desire that leads to domestic violence, the most typical form of crime. Petrie kills his uncle, Colonel Coombe, because of a young woman Petrie loves and the Colonel uses for his own maffia interests. The party and the ritual of the dagger that he makes up are only a pretext for stabbing the Colonel. Petrie believes that the group of people gathering in the old house can cause a chaos that helps him avoid the

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<sup>14</sup>*Sweet Danger* is characteristic of the former, while *Police at the Funeral* belongs to the latter category; both novels will be analysed in the present chapter.

consequences of the murder. He almost gets away with it, but Abbershaw<sup>15</sup>, a pathologist, exposes Petrie's guilt, although he eventually lets him go when Petrie pledges himself to retire into a monastery. The resolution may seem disappointing, since Abbershaw practically restores Petrie's aristocratic right to pursue his own interests, though in isolation, and leaves the reader to decide what is right and what is wrong. The monastery, just like Black Dudley itself, recalls the gothic tradition and the medieval age before "the emergence of the country house as the dominant architectural sign upon the face of countryside, [when] the two major forms were castle and religious settlement. The monastic settlements were expressive of an ideal antithetical to the materialistic powers of this world" (Kelsall 29). The rather old-fashioned plot device of the aristocratic criminal's retirement into a monastery might be seen as part of her criticism of modern capitalist society (the aristocratic transgressor is beyond the jurisdiction of modern justice) and a vindication of a higher order represented by the upper class embedded in the English pastoral.

### 1.1. The Myth of the Countryside and Country Houses

Victoria Stewart's study of British fiction of the 1940s, *Narratives of Memory*, which includes an analysis of Allingham's amnesia thriller, *Traitor's Purse* (1941), highlights the mythical force of the countryside in the literature of the period: "The countryside is not simply at a geographical remove from the city, it also represents a lost past" (98). Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* offers a thorough analysis of the dichotomy between the country and the city as that of two metaphors, suggesting that the former stands for the lost Eden and the latter for the devastating force of modernity encroaching upon the traditional order. Williams claims that this tension has been the most recognizable trait of English literature for the past three hundred years (2).

The interwar years witnessed an intensification of the return to and mythicisation of the English countryside (cf. Alexandra Harris's book among many others), a process that was no doubt related to the rupture in collective memory represented by the Great War. English literature was part of the cultural effort to recreate and reshape English identity, an effort often tinted by a pervasive nostalgia for an imagined idyllic past. The nostalgic and elegiac note acquired a rather introverted and isolationist tone aiming at the recreation and relocation of

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<sup>15</sup> The first Allingham novel features Campion not as a first-class amateur sleuth but rather as a half-witted petty criminal. He starts growing into his role as a private detective in the second Allingham novel, *Mystery Mile*.

England's "cultural origins on the island itself" (40), as Jed Esty remarks in *A Shrinking Island*. Esty's analysis of this process is not restricted to highbrow texts: he asserts that both popular and established writers "participated in the inward reorientation of English culture during the 30s and 40s" (39). This observation is also articulated by Ina Haberman, who argues that the broad field of middlebrow literature "promises important cultural insights" (32), adding that most texts "engage directly with the process of identity formation through memory" (41). The novels I am going to analyse in this chapter reproduce the same agony and contribute to the mythmaking process with the middle class in its focus. In the effort to maintain their identity, the middle classes were eager to reconstruct the past and invest their memories into symbolic places, figures and images, in tune with the way Pierre Nora describes the locatedness of cultural memory: "memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects" (9). Recalling Nora's argument in the context of this mid-century reorientation of cultural priorities, the country house can be interpreted as a *lieu de mémoire*: "We buttress our identities upon such bastions but if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need to build them" (12). Ian Baucom draws upon Nora's theory in his analysis of various sites of memory that have shaped English identity over the past 150 years. As mentioned earlier, in the Introduction, he says that "[t]he locale serves a disciplinary and nostalgic discourse on English national identity by making the past visible", by acting as what Pierre Nora calls a *lieu de memoire* that purports to testify to the nation's essential continuity across time (5).

On the one hand, the country house appears to provide a fixed point of national identity in the memory of Englishness, yet it always embodies ambiguity. If we take Pierre Nora's concept *lieu de mémoire* not simply as a metaphor of an anchoring point for collective memory but in the sense in which it was originally used by Nora, the big house is a site of memory precisely because it is contentious, standing not for any particular memory content but for the very possibility of organic memory. In the context of class, the big house as a site of memory in mid-century middlebrow literature is ambiguous not simply because it is highly exposed to the meanings or erosion of the present but also because it had never been a *middle-class* dwelling place, thus, its role as the repository of middle-class or national memory is questionable to begin with. These ambiguities left their marks on Golden Age crime fiction, too, which uses the great house to create an aura of timelessness after the war, but there is, nevertheless, a considerable uncertainty about the kind of past – which past? one could ask – it is meant to evoke. The great country house "gives the impression of being out of time, 'as if it had always been there'", (6) says Kelsall, also pointing out that the cultural value of country houses has greatly been shaped in its literary representation beyond popular texts as well. He asserts that the country house



ethos established by Austen, Richardson or Fielding had a great impact on succeeding generations of writers like Henry James, and his contemporaries and his mainly upper-class modernist successors, including E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West and Evelyn Waugh, who interpreted the big house as the embodiment of a higher order, high civilisation and beauty. In their fiction, the house and the land are always depicted as sites of the lost Eden of middle class fantasies whose memory of a pastoral England was strongly tied to the big house. A representative example of this phenomenon is Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) whose middle-class narrator, Charles Ryder, relates the stages of his adulation of a distinguished Catholic aristocratic family, the Flytes, based in their formidable ancient Brideshead Castle. Charles's first visit to the place makes an everlasting impression on him: "We drove on and in the early afternoon came to our destination: wrought-iron gates and twin, classical lodges on a village green, an avenue, more gates, open park-land, a turn in the drive; and suddenly a new and secret landscape opened before us [...] 'What a place to live in!' I said" (29). His narration recalling the events taking place at Brideshead or in Oxford demonstrates both the middle-class admiration of the aristocracy as well as the middle-class attempt to annex the values of the (Catholic) aristocracy. Charles's adoption of aristocratic culture is a sign that "the middle class was in the process of replacing the aristocracy in social, political and economic significance" (Humble 70). While Humble also claims that his surviving them is a symbolic indication that the time of the aristocracy is over and a new period is beginning with the establishment of "new codes of middle-class identity" (64), it is significant to remark that Ryder is a perfect embodiment of the victim of pathological nostalgia for whom the present holds no value or prospect, it is totally empty, it is inferior to the past (Tukacs 69). His narration makes clear his melancholic mood and attachment to the past enhanced by his dislike for his platoon commander, Hooper. Ryder is very critical of the changes that modern life has brought with the Hooper types who also become the symbol of Young England (*Brideshead* 7). The Hoopers represent the barbarians, the common man who will replace the aristocracy: they are characterized as shallow and incompetent, scornful of religion and education.

Golden Age crime fiction seems to subscribe to the above ideology of the countryside and the big house. In many novels of Christie, Sayers and Allingham, the charm of the English landscape and the village community is disturbed or destroyed by the irruption of crime. This meant the continuation of the shift of location in the crime story which started out as an urban genre (Poe, Sue, Gaboriau) before Conan Doyle and Chesterton made the landscape of crime more mixes, setting several of their stories in the countryside. After the Great War, the countryside, is no longer insulated from the corrosive and corrupting influences of modernity.

As pointed out in the Introduction, the idealised countryside appearing in Golden Age crime writing was christened ‘Mayhem Parva’ by Colin Watson, who claims that this imaginary realm stood for an idea of Englishness: “It [England] was of course, a mythical kingdom, a fly-in-amber land. It was derived in part from the ways and values of a society that had begun to fade away from the very moment of the shots at Sarajevo” (171). Interwar whodunits frequently used the aristocratic home or the country house, reinforcing the myth of the “Great Good Place” (3), as W. H. Auden suggests in his essay “The Guilty Vicarage”. Borrowing the term from Henry James, Auden uses it to show a dramatic contrast between the place and murder, a crucial juxtaposition for the purposes of the present discussion. In the light of what Lowenthal says about the mental state of the nostalgist, for whom “the pain is today” (8), the act of crime as it appears in Golden Age fiction is revealed as profoundly ambiguous, reflecting the troubled allegiances of these writers. On the one hand, following from the nostalgic myth of the countryside and the big house as England, the crime is a radical intrusion of the external (modern) world into the peaceful memory world of the countryside. On the other hand, however, the crime is frequently the product of this very memory world, suggesting the futile, pathological and dangerous qualities of the attempt to embalm or mummify the past or to stop or rewind the time. Crime serves to deconstruct the myth associated with certain places or symbols as well as to demonstrate the consequences of disregarding the present. Alison Light is right when she calls the genre ‘the literature of convalescence’ (70) in her *Forever England*, but it is doubtful whether crime fiction could ever live up to this expectation once one attends to the ambiguities of the memory politics of these novels.

Allingham’s second novel, *Mystery Mile* (1930), features an idyllic great old house simply called the Manor, the heritage of the Pagets, which hasn’t been altered<sup>16</sup> for centuries. *Mystery Mile* itself, like “many Suffolk hamlets [...] was more of an estate than a village. The half-dozen cottages, the post offices and the Rectory which were very much outbuildings of the Mansion, the old Manor house, the dwelling of the owner of the Mile” (34). Although the place looks timeless, its long history of peaceful if “gradually decaying times” (ibid.) has left its stain on the population and the land, both of which have suffered a decrease in number and value. A short description of the present condition of the Pagets is a direct reference to a romanticised but fading aristocracy, just like in the case of the Fittons in *Sweet Danger* (1933). The present squire, Giles Paget, and his sister inherited the house, but were left with practically no money

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<sup>16</sup> Mark Girouard’s *Life in the English Country House* describes the craze for old things during the first 30 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was characterized by a reluctance to make too many alterations on old houses and a hunger for buying old houses rather than new ones (304).

and worthless lands. They live in an isolated place relying on the loyalty of the old inhabitants, about “twenty of thirty villagers who looked to them as their natural means of support” (34). The Manor of the Pagets is described as a magnificent dwelling “hidden in the thick belt of elms which surrounded it [...]” (34). Once again, the lack of modernization is indicated by the lack of light inside the house: the Manor “had but one lamp shining from the big casement windows” (34). The house radiates an air of authority and grandeur, yet decay is present in the form of moulding plaster around the lintels of the windows.

The mystery concerns the death of the village rector, Swithin Cush, which is finally revealed to be a suicide. Being the rector of Mystery Mile, he is a respected member of the community, nevertheless, the investigation reveals that he has borrowed the identity of his brother, who died young with a very promising future in the church<sup>17</sup>. The Reverend Swithin Cush should be an archetypal image of goodness that holds the village community together and provides stability. The rector’s fake identity, however, dismantles the entire myth the villagers and the Pagets have woven about him. What is remarkable is Allingham’s strategy in the denouement: once again, the crime is left unpunished, and the discovery of the investigation is kept secret. Punishment is evaded either for the sake of the family or the community (that is, for the sake of a higher morality), similarly to Christie and Doyle.

While *Mystery Mile* is a true celebration of country living despite the rupture that the dead body causes, *Sweet Danger* seems more optimistic regarding the restoration of a past that is inseparable from the countryside and aristocratic glory. This is the first novel with a love interest, with Campion meeting Amanda Fitton for the first time. Like *Mystery Mile*, it is not a typical detective novel – Martin calls it an adventure thriller (65) – as there is no murder at all until the end, and the entire plot follows a linear sequence to dispel the mystery around the heredity of the title of Averno, a piece of land at the Adriatic Sea. The land and the title of the principality are supposed to belong to the Fittons, who live in the village of Pontisbright, in Suffolk. Since their right to the land and the aristocratic title are strongly doubted as no living heirs are known, Campion and his team decide to see about the case. When they arrive in the Suffolk village, they seem to be carried away by its unspoilt charm and traditional lifestyle. The living conditions and the financial background of the Fittons symbolize the vanishing authority of the aristocrats in a largely romanticized environment. Even their poverty is seen as a sign of respectability, a sort of superiority in the face of mass consumption so characteristic of the age.

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<sup>17</sup>The religious aspect is beyond the scope of the present chapter, but maybe it should be remarked that among the figures of memory, sacred people who are also depicted as a recourse to reconnect the nation with its past after the great loss of religious beliefs must also be considered. Sayers’ *The Nine Tailors* is probably the most complex novel regarding religion and fake identities. The novel is rich in Gothic elements too, such as a mutilated body disinterred, bigamous marriage, or a dead body found in the bell chamber killed by Paul Taylor, the largest bell.

The village takes the travellers back to the past and evokes their nostalgic attachment to the English countryside. “Pontisbright lay like a cluster of doll’s houses in the southern extremity, and, among the uncultivated fields which followed the winding valley, little dwellings nestled snugly. Even Guffy was partially mollified” (89). Similarly to the local aristocrats in the first two Allingham novels, the Fittons also live in a very old dwelling that is “nearly a perfect example of late fifteenth-century architecture [...] The charm of the place was increased by faded chintz curtains billowing through the open windows, and the gleam of polished wood from within. Even a remarkably complex wireless aerial festooned across the roof had a rustic and archaic look” (59). The reluctance to change anything inside or outside the house is highlighted in Allingham’s novels, suggesting a retrograde fight against modern things and a wish to foreground preservation and poverty as respectable, elegant and superior to consumption and contemporary housing trends. Wright’s *On Living in an Old Country* illustrates this phenomenon: “With history running down all the time, old housing is better than its modern equivalents, stagnant towns are better than those which are caught in the grip of development and change, and it is an act of civic responsibility to fight for the preservation of what little you may have” (201).

The opening chapters of the novel portray village life and the house unharmed by the outside world along with its owners, the Fittons, who live a peaceful life despite their modest circumstances. Champion’s efforts to restore the family to its legitimate position by proving their right to the Pontisbright title seem to be in tune with the conservatism of Golden Age writers. The plot is rich in unexpected turns and adventures but is confidently heading towards the triumph of the good – the aristocrats – against the bad, the public world of powerful financiers who want to secure the title for money. Although Allingham sketches a hopeful future by having the Fittons reacquire their aristocratic title, even this novel undermines the perfection of country idyll through certain characters or traces of contamination, like Dr. Galley, the village doctor, whose obsessive occultism threatens the village with decay, or the gang of Brett Savanake who invades the home of the Fittons in the hope of acquiring the title to the land of Aversa.

The governing idea of the novel grows out of the desire for the stability and continuity of the pre-war era. By linking the pastoral discourse with the idea of an aristocratic family restored to their deserved position, the novel confirms what David Gervais says about national ideology in *Literary Englands*: “Pastoral is usually an aristocratic form, or at least way of upholding the class structure [...]” (9). Gervais goes on to add that “the usual strategy of pastoral is to make the past stand for the whole” (11). This strategy is in accordance with that of Golden Age crime fiction in its construction of the essence of Englishness. Taking the books of Tey, Sayers and Allingham, it is evident that they all promote a fantasized aristocratic past

evoking the long-lost stability and order. On the other hand, as the brief readings of Allingham's early novels was trying to show, the idyll is never perfect – the awareness of the present and of dangers attendant on a perfect reconstruction of the past are always there. Thus, Allingham's novels are like more highbrow literary explorations of the countryside and big house myths. As Gervais explains, the literature of the thirties produced a country which is more contemporary than timeless. Analysing Evelyn Waugh's and George Orwell's novels, he claims that the image of England they were trying to describe ends up being more self-contradictory than concrete and united, its varied representations stemming from the loss and fragmentation between the two wars. Both writers "sought ways to build bridges between the seemingly unbridgeable pre-war and post-war worlds" (157), and for both of them, the best way to define Englishness was by saying what it wasn't" (176). The feminine middlebrow can also be seen as a significant part of this trend, drawing on fairly similar themes.

Rowland claims that "Margery Allingham's pastoral resides in the Gothic romance of her occult rurality. It encodes a perilous ambivalence about pastoral which prevents her work from simply sliding into an uncomplicated conservative aesthetic (70). In *Sweet Danger*, the fear and corruption that loom mysteriously behind the lovely façade of the bucolic sight are at the intersection of the old and the new. It is not necessarily the present which threatens these isolated places but an obsession with the past can equally result in a slow process of decay: "The green countryside looked very peaceful and lovely in the late afternoon sun, but there was no telling what cloud might hang over this gentle unspoiled area, what secret might be hidden in its lush meadows or behind the branches of its leafy overhanging trees" (47). The eccentric village doctor, Dr Galley, one potential source of disruption in the peaceful village, and he is certainly not the representative of modern technology or finance: he cultivates strange plants in his garden to serve as ingredients for his tricky ointments, and his occult beliefs infiltrate his medical practice. His house is described as a "big aromatic mausoleum" (87) where darkness dominates most of the rooms. Campion and his friends have a chance to look into. Although the doctor is partly a figure of comedy, his transformation into a spooky character in his house foreshadows the presence of evil in the village. It seems that as the house gets darker and darker, the doctor's mind is more and more preoccupied with unnaturally grim thoughts. He does not only call the valley of Pontisbright "Cain's Valley" (89), but undergoes some physical distortion as well: "The little man had changed [...] The eyes looked strangely fixed and the lips were drawn back over the gums like the lips of a maniac" (89). Darkness, eccentricity, and corruption are all part of the English landscape in *Sweet Danger*, subverting ideas about the fixedness and stillness of the countryside in the myth of Englishness. If Baucom is right about the connection

between national identity and a “type of imaginary, abstract or actual locale”<sup>18</sup> (4), Allingham’s early novels suggest that myths of rootedness in idealised locales were far from being intact in interwar middlebrow fiction. The contamination of the countryside with crime, fake identities and insanity, unveils a crisis in national identity as well.

## 1.2. Criminal Houses in Town

*Police at the Funeral* (1931) is probably not only Allingham’s best book<sup>19</sup> but also the most contemporary in terms of social and cultural issues of the interwar period as well as the tension that arises from the encounter of the old and the new world. This novel no longer depicts the English countryside and the fate of the aristocracy embedded in big country houses but brings such anxieties as well as Allingham’s gothic devices into Cambridge, inside the walls of a Victorian house called ‘Socrates Close’<sup>20</sup>, inhabited by an insane upper-middle-class family, the Faradays. The cast consist of Mrs Caroline Faraday, the elderly widow of the deceased academic Doctor John Faraday, and her three aging children, William, Julia and Kitty. Two more relatives are also part of the household, Andrew Seeley, Mrs Faraday’s nephew and Joyce Blount, a young girl who helps with domestic chores. Their dwelling is gradually transformed into a site of Victorian oppression with an increasingly gothic atmosphere. Socrates Close with its dark and gloomy appearance protected by Victorian creeper on the outside embodies the memory of the pre-war world, a house of memory or more precisely, a house that imprisons memory like that of Mr Rochester in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Baucom 172). Allingham emphasizes the medieval atmosphere of Cambridge and the house itself that exudes a sense of the gothic. Rowland points out that “[i]n the nineteenth century, the Gothic travelled more to the interior: to ‘England’ in both moorland and the metropolitan city, to domesticity in its eruption within the bourgeois family (110). Susan Rowland mentions the connection between the oppressive force of the house and its Victorian relics, but her discussion is too brief to engage with issues of collective memory and habitual practices Samantha Walton’s *Guilty but*

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<sup>18</sup>Baucom reflects on localism which “emerged in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and which came to be identified with an ideology of nationalism” (16). In localist discourse, he argues, English place rather than blood is the “one thing that could preserve the nation’s memory, and in preserving its memory secure England’s continuous national identity” (16).

<sup>19</sup> Richard Martin remarks in *Ink in Her Blood* that the book “was praised for the author’s genius for characterization” as Allingham was interested in her characters as human beings, not as mere adjuncts to some murders” (100).

<sup>20</sup>The name of the house foreshadows the type of murder that takes place, as Socrates himself was poisoned with hemlock. Metaphorically, Socrates may also stand for wisdom and the beginnings of tradition which the house is supposed to exude in the novel.

*Insane* applies Freudian theory to link Uncle William's amnesiac conditions to various mental illnesses and war neurosis. While both Rowland and Walton stress the ghastliness of the house, the insanity of its residents, and their fears of the modern, they do not discuss these details as symptoms of pathological nostalgia.

Allingham's novel seems to transport nineteenth century fears of science and technology into the post-war world through a shift of context. The Faradays become the embodiment of post-war fears of the (upper) middle class who obsessively insist on carrying on as if nothing had changed. Although Champion, thanks to his aristocratic background and his old ties with the Faradays, is part of this small but representative community, his function as a figure of memory turns out to be no less ambiguous than that of the house or its dwellers. While Champion is supposed to reinforce the legitimacy of the preponderance of the past in the family – this is why the Faradays call him rather than the police –, his mere presence is a sign of criminality and transgression. His first impressions of the house foreshadow all the horrors that the family is either secretly hiding or is going to face as a result of repressing the present.

When he first glimpses the house which he has known for long, he concludes that “[i]t hasn't altered outside” (26), to which Joyce reacts with a bitter remark: “‘Or inside’ [...] Does it occur to you’, she added, lowering her voice a little, ‘that there's something rather – rather awful about it?’” (ibid.). While Champion concludes that there is “nothing definitely unpleasant about the house” (26), his impression is still that of a rather terrifying “grim dignity and aloofness [...] of a house in which all the blinds have been drawn” (ibid.). Joyce's and Champion's unease probably grows out of the recognition that the house is not what it should be in the present, its escape of the changes of the decades turns it into a “great mausoleum” (33) imprisoning its inhabitants and the memory the house is meant to sustain. The house is outdone in ghastliness by the family whose lifestyle, manners and obsession with their everyday routine turn them into waxwork representations of Victorian figures. This is especially true of Mrs Faraday, whose mania to reproduce the past among the Victorian relics forbids her poor and incompetent adult children any deviation from the routine. Joyce's account of the family informs Champion that life in the house is based on routine set up in the previous century, around the 1870s by Mrs Faraday, and that “[t]he house is run like clockwork” (17), without any alteration of the daily ritual. Mrs Faraday, on whom all the others are financially dependent, strictly demands that everybody obey her rules in the house, and regards any change in the routine as evil.

Their seclusion is perfect, the house is surrounded with a high wall, and they disregard the outside world by keeping unconsciously to the routine. Analysing the importance of rituals in maintaining group identity in the face of change, Patrick Wright points out that “everyday

life can sustain [...] memories of class” (16), meant to provide stability and security, and, most of all saving the effort for one to make sense of their life. The faded Victorian decorations and furniture inside the house contribute to the preservation of the past, while also acquiring a symbolic meaning in the present. In the face of mass consumption, they are meant to sustain permanence and value where the ‘real’ things are on display, foregrounding Victorian domestic values. Christoph Asendorf asserts that “[t]he nineteenth century is the century of the *interieur*. The *interieur* developed as a protected, private space in opposition to the public sphere of social life and the world of work” (119). The Victorians took pride in the kind of domesticity where the whole arrangement of the building showed the comfort and the happiness of the family. In Allingham’s novel, the family home of the Faradays is the focal point of the realization that objects and spaces ceaselessly require one to remember oneself. This can only be achieved if the constructed milieu provides reinforcement for the individual to remember the past in a certain way. As earlier argued, *lieux de mémoire* recur in objects, manners, language and habits of the dwellers that reinforce and sustain a world long gone. As a result, an objectified milieu along with the performative act to ensure that the past can continue, create a memory world. Remembering oneself is inseparable from the memory world, because it is strictly up to the individual to discard any idiosyncratic ambition and continue living by performing the same old ritual inherited from the preceding generation. In this sense, remembering oneself means to identify one’s individual memory with group memory, which evokes Halbwachs’s theory of collective memory, which sees genuine remembering as always already collective, mediated by places, institutions and other people. He says that individual memory is “a part or and aspect of group memory” (*On Collective Memory* 53) and that each memory that occurs in individual thought can properly be understood only if one “connects the individual to the various group of which he is simultaneously a member” (ibid.). *Police at the Funeral* seems to stage this aspect of memory: foregrounding the past as a theatre where one remembers oneself by reproducing the memory of the past.

The house has a rich interior design: the hall is fully furnished with oil paintings, red damask wallpaper, heavy brass ornaments and Turkey carpets bringing the imperial exotic within reach. The main sitting room is equally untouched, its mahogany furniture with glazed chintz on display along with a marble fireplace and old-fashioned water-colours waiting to come back to fashion. The passing of time can only be noticed in the faded colour of the chintz and the dents in the green leather armchairs (*Police* 49-50). The whole ensemble brings back Victorian domestic ideology with its desire to invest into long-lasting, even seemingly old decorations “to escape the industrial present” (Asendorf 128). The surrounding milieu does not



only create the simulacrum of the original but, by repressing the outside – post-war – world, it creates a reality inside that takes its place.

The Faradays also refer to themselves as “we old families” (39), referring not only to an illusory aristocratic past but also to a superior position of being the carriers of tradition. To maintain this artificial world, objects and rituals become crucial: it is through them that traditional middle-class values and customs are made tangible and visible. The Faradays identify themselves entirely with the house that provides the stage where they carry out their routine activities. They can only exist and remember themselves as long as this milieu exists, leaving hardly any room for change, including individual desires. The memory crisis after the Great War intensified the need for the fetishization and memorialisation of the glorious past, an impulse which resulted in an objectified reality for the middle class. Objects start to “take on the aspect of heritage as they are endangered and the basic terms of their existence come into question” (Wright 95). Wright’s remark is essential in understanding the dynamics of interwar memory and how it relates to the crime narratives. Since the whole simulacrum is grounded on a loss which memory is trying to conceal, the struggle to hold onto it turns out to be a self-deluding and frustrating attempt. The Faradays are one of the upper-middle-class eccentric families that Humble discusses in her book, pointing out that it is in the feminine middlebrow where the family becomes a “profoundly eccentric organization” (149). She also argues that these families identify themselves as the other of society who construct their so-called family identity through invented languages and games (149). When Inspector Oates comes to the house to investigate, he remarks that the Faradays are funny people and that Mrs Faraday speaks a kind of language he does not understand (68). On the other hand, “although these families might appear to belong to the past, they are actually profoundly modern creations, surreal rereadings [...] of Victorian family structures and ideologies; turning the traditional family inside out to reveal it as a deeply pathological and anti-social structure” (195).

Although they are wrapped up in a fanciful world recalling the Victorian era, the Faradays cannot evade confrontations with the present that keeps intruding in a series of gruesome occurrences. Allingham’s novel is preoccupied with the anxieties attendant on reconstructing the past by trying to insulate and isolate it from the present. By keeping out the ‘alien spirits’, which, in this instance, is the outside modern world, she uses archetypal images of Englishness to represent the (obsession with the) past, which include the house with its furniture and residents, the geographical locations or the gentleman detective. This past world, however, as Humble suggests, is only a product of the present, continually eroded by the intrusion of the present, exactly because it is disregarded, hidden and eliminated. The memory objects or figures may be seen as spectres of the past because they have lost their cultural

relevance in the modern world. The family, the life of which dissolves in a routine defined by Victorian objects, creates an alternative, imaginary reality; as Asendorf says<sup>21</sup>, treating the past as if it was the present deprives the characters of experiencing the present. Facing what is repressed becomes inevitable in various situations, like the uncovering of the impoverished room of Uncle Andrew, the sexual repressions some of the characters suffer from or the return of the half-caste cousin, the black sheep of the family, George Faraday.

When Campion is invited to investigate the death of Uncle Andrew, he is mostly interested in his room and its contents. Entering Andrew's room, he is shocked to see that how different it is from the others, lacking the fancy furniture and ornaments. It is "large and inexpressibly bare, with white walls and no carpet [...]" The simplicity and poverty of the room compared with the solid comfort of the rest of the house, was startling to the point of theatricality" (92). The room with not so much modern as rather humble alterations may signify both Andrew's revolt against the insane routine and the overdecorated cluttered aesthetics of the Victorian interior. With its bare walls and poor furnishing, it looks like a prison, which is an overt allusion to the prison-house which it tries to conceal with its antique pieces<sup>22</sup>. Andrew's room within the house symbolises reality, the emptiness of the present without any fixed points for the Faradays to relate to. The act of removing the furniture is taken as an insult by the family, and his decision to live among such conditions makes him look insane, even evil, which is enhanced by his interest in reading about sex and having a secret correspondence with an old lover. These details recall what Anne Williams' *Art of Darkness* says about the house of the psyche that has secret chambers. The secret chamber in Gothic fiction is always the projection of repressed desire, "sex [which] is always the ultimate secret, indeed the only possible secret" (95). Browsing the bookcase in the room, Campion's attention is caught by a volume entitled *Sex and the Mind*, and he concludes that "Uncle Andrew's taste in literature appeared to have leant towards classical eroticism [...]" (92)<sup>23</sup>.

The wall around Socrates Close, which should be heightened according to Mrs Faraday, then, serves not only to isolate the inside from the outside physically but also to symbolize the silence over human desires that returns with Gothic horror. Andrew's anti-social

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<sup>21</sup>Asendorf argues that the layout of the homes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century allowed for family members to separate themselves from the others in their own rooms as a result of which "[t]he bourgeois creates for himself a second nature in the interieur" (120).

<sup>22</sup>His room is in sharp opposition with Julia's which was "crammed full of furniture of every possible description [...]" (93). Asendorf explains that the "[f]urniture becomes a means of filling the room" (121) with which "the space becomes obscured" (ibid.).

<sup>23</sup>Talking about sex or receiving sexual education were still unusual in the post-war era, in fact the older generation totally rejected the topic. "[s]exuality was regarded as a symptom of the modernisation" (157), says Martin Pugh in *We Danced All Night*. Female writers of Golden Age crime fiction often reflect on sexuality as one of the most contested and contemporary issues which also caused a rift between the generations in the interwar period, since Victorian attitudes still dominated the mindset of many.

and revengeful behaviour is evidently a proof of that, but Julia's hysterical attacks, Aunt Kitty's religious fanaticism, and the family's efforts to keep Cousin George<sup>24</sup> out of sight all suggest such repressions. John Jervis refers to Djuna Barnes, explorer of the transgressive uncanny, to illustrate this phenomenon: "Decadence inhabited the domestic; the apartment was a world in which moral and sexual codes were reversed", a place in which luxury and soft furnishings cohabited easily with perversion" (20). For Barnes, "home becomes 'the figure for universal loss, grief, and desire', a place of familiarity where the secrets invariably raise the spectre of taboo and transgression, with their profound consequences for identity" (ibid.). In classical crime fiction, the interaction between decadence and the domestic finds expression in some form of crime, but, in most cases, death. Following the murder of Julia, Joyce and her fiancé, Marcus, arrive to help, but are kept waiting in the hall. Confronting the interiors in the dim light<sup>25</sup> of the house, they are overwhelmed by fear at the mere sight of the furniture that had been standing there unmoved by any of its owners. It is there where they realize that the surrounding objects inhibit the soul of the dwellers with such an oppressive power that they are unable to move between the two worlds. The past haunts the characters as it tries to conceal the present in all possible forms.

But to two of the young people at least all this of this was subdued into a feeling of oppression [...] for them this great comfortable dwelling was a place of unknown horrors [...] To them it was a hotbed, a breeding ground of those dark offshoots of the civilized mind which the scientists tell us are the natural outcome of repressions and inhibitions. To them the old house was undergoing an upheaval, a volcano of long fermented trouble, and they were afraid of what they were about to find. (49)

Marcus's recognition of the detrimental effect of the unconscious routine in that desolate house recalls Wright's remark: "Nobody does much at all, indeed, to act is to reveal oneself evil, mad or at best the helpless victim of desperate circumstances" (115). Mrs Faraday is so insistent on the routine that even her daughter's death cannot stop her from carrying on with it. Not long after Julia has been poisoned, she calls out to Kitty: "I think we will play chess as usual, my dear" (84). However, it is exactly the passivity and disregard of the presence of evil<sup>26</sup> that starts

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<sup>24</sup>He is Mrs. Faraday's nephew, not only a heavy drinker but also a child of a mixed marriage, threatening the family with the revelation of his half-caste blood.

<sup>25</sup>"The interieur of the 1870s and 1880s was sunk in twilight" due to the cult of the draperies, (126) says Asendorf.

<sup>26</sup>Bényei Tamás explains in *Az Ártatlan Ország* that, for many critics, the traditions of the novel of manners had a negative effect on the development of the English novel as well as on society. The fact of focusing on only what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' prevented one from recognizing the presence of evil. After WWI, this attitude culminated in the inhibitions of everyday life. In classical crime fiction, which is also considered to have a lot in

dismantling the milieu, first Andrew's revenge on the family with his suicide and then his traps and poison that murder the other relatives, first Julia and then Cousin George. Even Campion, who should be at ease among the relics, feels the awkward atmosphere "settling down upon him, robbing him of his impartiality, drawing him into itself, forcing him to see life confined within its own tiny boundaries" (124). Campion experiences something inexplicably oppressive and queer about the place as if he could predict a series of unfortunate events that the peculiar atmosphere of the house may provoke. He realizes that the more the Faradays are trying to hold on to their past the deeper they are entangled in a web of crimes. The fact that Socrates Close is no longer a 'Great Good Place' but an evil house that can drive its inhabitants into madness is first articulated by Marcus upon Campion's arrival to Cambridge. Marcus's words, which turn out to be prophetic, contribute to establishing the suffocating ambience the reader feels about the place:

There they are, a family forty years out of date, all vigorous energetic people by temperament, all save for the old lady, without their fair share of brains, and herded together in that great mausoleum of a house, tyrannized over by one of the most astounding personalities I've ever encountered. Imagine Campion, there are stricter rules in that house than you or I were ever forced to keep at our schools. And there is no escape [...] What really frightens me is that I can easily imagine myself feeling like murder if I lived in that house. (33)

The house which returns with an image of a 'great mausoleum' imprisons and torments the inhabitants with all its gruesome décor due to which death is no longer incidental – or the irruption of the contemporary world – but a natural outgrowth of the place. After Julia is found dead in her bed, Mrs Faraday calls out to Uncle William: "Must I remind you that there is death in the house?" (53). Old Mrs Faraday's painful declaration signifies the physical presence of the dead corpse in the house, but I would argue that her recognition is another evidence for the entanglement of death and pathological memory attached to the building.

With its depiction of these psychological disturbances, *Police at the Funeral* becomes one of Allingham's most representative novels, recreating the sense of Gothic horror in the home as a result of isolation and of living too much in the past. Murder is also perceived as the final outcome of a long process of repression and inhibition, revealing the interconnectedness

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common with this genre, such inhibitions and suppressions were presented in various forms of crime within the family (60).

of locality and psyche. This novel exemplifies Allingham's ironical criticism of excessive nostalgia which uses symbols of Englishness to maintain stability and value in the face of mass consumption and rapid change, but they only transform the house into a theatre of memory where the act of remembering requires one to reenact the past obsessively.

Josephine Tey's post-Second World War novel, *The Franchise Affair* (1948), has a lot in common with what has been discussed so far in relation to Allingham. Her book is not quite a crime novel in its traditional sense since there is no murder in it, and it does not feature a self-appointed amateur detective either. The mystery develops around two women, Mrs Sharpe and her daughter Marion, who are accused of kidnapping a teenage girl, Elizabeth Kane. Tey's lawyer-detective, Robert Blair, is called on to investigate the case and decide if the young girl is lying or not. The house called The Franchise, located outside the small town of Milford, is not simply the setting of the alleged crime but also the symbol of repressed female sexual fantasies, probably both young women's, Betty's and Marion's. According to Sandra Roy, Tey is one of the least explicit authors of the Golden Age regarding male-female relationships and sexuality, so the connection between the appearance of Betty Kane in the house and Marion Sharpe's sexual repression is never made explicit. Marion is a young woman of Victorian morality who is confronted with the monstrous and sexually perverted Betty, whose fake story about her imprisonment in the house foregrounds contemporary anxieties over women's sexual liberation. This aspect of the novel will be discussed in *Chapter Three* –the present analysis is confined to the modes of remembering inasmuch as they are connected to the representation of the house.

Although country houses were endowed with a mythical ability to recreate the essence of Englishness, in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War this particular dwelling just does not seem to have this aura. Unlike Socrates Close in Cambridge, The Franchise is a lonely, irrelevant building that does not represent any of the major architectural trends of the period it was built in. The house was totally out of place given that, in terms of architectural style, the age saw the revival of the 'rural Italian style' but gothic, Tudor and Elizabethan manor houses came back to fashion as well (Girouard 272-73). Tey's description of the place and the house is realistic rather than romantic, and seems to mock the preservationist trend<sup>27</sup> of the age. Milford is just like any other provincial English town, and the house itself does not deserve to be listed as a place of national heritage. Robert Blair's first visit turns out to be an unexpected experience:

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<sup>27</sup> "It was not until the 1930s that a strategy for saving country houses emerged" (351), says Martin Pugh.

His first feeling was disappointment. It was not the fallen-on-evil-times look of the house – although that was evident; it was the sheer ugliness of it. Either it had been built too late to share in the grace of a graceful period, or the builder had lacked an architect's eye [...] Everything was just a little wrong: the windows the wrong size by half a foot, wrongly placed by not much more; the doorway the wrong width, and the flight of steps the wrong height. The total result was that instead of the bland contentment of its period that house had a hard stare. (13)

The history of *The Franchise* goes back to the last days of the Regency era when someone “had bought the field known as The Franchise, built in the middle of it a flat white house, and then surrounded the whole with a high solid wall of brick with a large double gate [...] It had no relation with anything in the countryside” (11). The unusual exterior of the Franchise might have to do with the theme of the novel. According to Tey's biographer, Sandra Roy, the “most pervading theme in all of Tey's novels is that of deception” (60). Just as Betty Kane is not the innocent teenage girl she pretends to be, *The Franchise* is not the comfortable ‘great good place’ threatened by the loss of its aesthetic values, given that it has not got any. For Tey, “[a]pppearances are deceiving” (17), which seems like a direct link between her and Christie's concept of criminality, however, unlike Christie, Tey protects her socially superior characters, like Blair and those who belong to his class or whom he protects. His movement between the different buildings and areas also reveals how he ranks the people according to the type of property they dwell in. When he goes to see the Wynns, who are Betty's adoptive family living in the suburbs of Aylesbury, the reader can see a sharp contrast between the old and the new is delineated. Blair's awareness of his being a member of the upper middle class fills him with both a sense of contempt and condescending cordiality. The houses where the Wynns live are compared to intruders upon the “unspoiled fields”. He is astonished by the vulgarity and “the sufficient beauty” (72) added to the buildings by their owners. While observing the houses in awe, “he was won over by the love that had gone to the decoration of these regrettable objects” (ibid.). The suburbs come to the focus in Sayers' *The Documents in the Case* (1930) and Allingham's *Hide My Eyes* (1958), and though, Tey's present novel gives negligible interest to these areas, Blair's contempt towards these homes and the people living them is a sign of the protest, - if not hatred – against suburban lifestyle that also characterised the fiction of Orwell or Waugh.

Nevertheless, the oddity of *The Franchise* might also hint at the contemporary housing trends that made newly-built houses look old since the demand exceeded the number of houses for sale, as Girouard explains (304). Tey seems to criticise the tendency of protecting anything old which started after the First World War but continued with a great intensity after the Second. In her novel, deception does not only work on the surface level to prevent the detective from solving the puzzle but it has cultural references in its deep structure. One can easily be deceived if one has no memory of middle-class symbols. *The Franchise* may recall the Victorian past with its high walls, isolation and privacy, but Blair easily recognizes that it is fake because he has been 'there' to judge. For classical crime authors, the experience of the old, traditional wisdom and heredity are crucial for the individual in overcoming, or at least coming to terms with, the uncertainties in modernity. Although the Sharpes are sincere and genuine, *The Franchise*, which they inherit and the name of which includes these qualities among other meanings, is the exact opposite of its inhabitants. Constantly economizing<sup>28</sup>, they still believe in Victorian respectability and the value of things but their heritage is neither the "embodiment of the true and essential past" (Wright 112) nor part of the modern housing styles described as "rows of semi-detached houses" (72) in the countrified suburb. While in new urban districts the almost identical houses can only be distinguished by numbers, old houses are supposed to possess unique features, but the only uniqueness about *The Franchise* is its oddity, which, however, is not of the kind that would make it into an attraction as, for instance, somebody's 'folly'. That fact that the Sharpes' heritage has no counterpart in the region could be an advantage, but "the place was as irrelevant, as isolated, as a child's toy dropped by the wayside" (11). Similarly to Allingham in *Hide My Eyes*, Tey does not only mock those who want to keep all kinds of junk or make copies look like the original, but also points out that these country houses are no fit dwellings for elderly people. Although the house can still provide shelter, and Mrs Sharpe insists on staying despite all the terrors she has to face, it has no future. Just like the house called Tether's End in Allingham's *Hide My Eyes*, it fulfils its destiny when it burns down.

While Allingham's representation of houses, like *Socrates Close*, is also highly ironic, her resolution at the end of the novel still maintains some idealism about these dwellings in the interwar period. Nevertheless, Tey's house, *The Franchise*, becomes the object of explicit mockery when it comes to the preservation of old things after the Second World War. It is not

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<sup>28</sup> Light says that poverty "can lie at the heart of respectability" and it can also "make the English middle class in its different historical forms a truly deprived class" (58). Marion's short description about the carpet covering only the first flight of stairs is a proof of "[a] Victorian way of economising. Nowadays if you are poor you buy a less expensive carpet and use it all the way up" (31).

an accident that Tey chose an upper-middle-class gentleman figure whose perception and judgement of real and fake sustains the belief that his class still stands for the genuine values of Englishness. Although the owners of the house are respectable and evoke sympathy, their dwelling turns out to be a worthless old edifice which is a miserable copy of the original. Tey also points out that the past is only available for those who have memory of it, who have been there to know it. The Franchise becomes the platform to negotiate the uncritical attitude towards safeguarding objects or buildings which seem worthy of symbolizing the past and its values but are fake and shallow inside. Tey's novel anticipates Allingham's 1958 *Hide My Eyes* which seems to come to the same recognition following WWII.

### 1.3. Suburban Homes

The historical process of suburbanization started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and intensified in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The ideology behind suburban planning had two major elements (apart from the attempt to recreate national pride in domesticity after the Great War). On the one hand, suburban housing reflected the changing conditions of real estate property, the fact that house ownership was becoming the ideal of the age, chiming with the old adage: "an Englishman's home is this castle" (Harris and Larkham 16). On the other hand, as suburbia was born with the utopian aim of reconciling country life and urban existence. Lynne Hapgood writes in *Margins of Desire*<sup>29</sup> that if rural England "belonged in the past [...] the suburb was the site of reconciliation" (7). This was a middle-class dream, and during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century "the middle classes became synonymous with the suburbs, a distinct spatial location between countryside and city" (Gunn and Bell 59). In *Semi-Detached Empire*, Todd Kuchta writes that "[s]uburbs emerged as a popular fictional setting in the late nineteenth century, inspiring a subgenre of domestic realism that flourished between roughly 1890 and World War I" (10). Literary reactions to the suburbs were widely divergent: they depended mainly on the social status of the author and of the characters that live in particular areas. Literary modernism treated suburbia with hostility and contempt, especially because "suburbia's perceived intellectual and aesthetic deficiencies made for poor literature in the eyes of many modernists,

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<sup>29</sup>In "British Suburban Taste, 1880-1939", Peter Newby and Mark Turner analyse the development of the middle-class suburbs in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and conclude that the garden attached to the suburban home is meant to sustain both rural lifestyle and imperial nostalgia. "The spatial separation of 'private' homes and public cities as captured in the ideas of the Garden City movement, influenced suburban development in the 1920s and 1930s" (174).



who snubbed the suburb as a haven of philistines and lowbrows, consumer kitsch and ersatz culture” (10-11). The treatment of suburbia was more ambiguous in the middlebrow literature of the interwar period, detective fiction being a crucial genre within it. While Tey’s *The Franchise Affair* gives less attention to life in a suburban home than Allingham’s *Hide My Eyes*, it can be concluded that Golden Age writers were just as critical of suburban culture as their more highbrow contemporaries like Eliot, Forster, Waugh, Betjeman or Orwell. The description of the suburban home of the Wynns in *The Franchise Affair* reflects many elements of suburban ideology and of Tey’s ambiguous attitude:

The WYNN’s home outside Aylesbury was in a countrified suburb; the kind of district where rows of semi-detached houses creep along the edge of the still unspoiled fields; self-conscious and aware that they are intruders, or smug and not caring, according to the character their builders have given them. The Wynns lived in one of the apologetic rows; a red-brick string of ramshackle dwellings that set Robert’s teeth on edge; so raw they were, so crude, so hang-dog. But as he drove slowly up the road, looking for the appropriate number, he was won over by the love that had gone to the decoration of these regrettable objects. No love had gone to their building; only a reckoning. But to each of the owner, as he took over, the bare little house had represented his ‘sufficient beauty’, and having found it he served it. The gardens were small miracles of loveliness; [...]. (72)

Tey fails to offer any further details, but the description seems to incorporate all of the main ideas that informed the suburban lifestyle of the mid-century. The little gardens of the Wynns reflect the contemporary trends of Garden City movements (Boag et al. 174), reinforcing the image of the ideal middle-class family and their pursuits in the home, not to mention the joyous union of country and city that starts a new way of life in a new world (Gunn and Bell 60). Tey’s criticism, however, can be felt in the way Blair perceives the houses. He sees them as lifeless and uniform, encroaching upon the English landscape. At the same time, he looks at them with sympathy, with a rather benevolent but upper-middle-class condescension. While he refrains from discriminative comments on the residents, his remark about the owner’s satisfaction with the beauty of his home implies that he identifies the residents with the vulgarity of these dwellings, just like a great deal of mainstream British writing in the interwar period, including Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* or George Orwell’s *Coming Up for Air* (1939) which describes suburban life in a dystopian way: “Because, after all, what *is* a road like Ellesmere

Road? Just a prison with the cells all in a row. A line of semidetached torture-chambers where the poor little five-to-tenpound-a-weekers quake and shiver, every one of them with the boss twisting his tail and his wife riding him like the nightmare and the kids sucking his blood like leeches” (12). Orwell’s protagonist, George Bowling, contrasts the good old days of the past with the emptiness of the present by undertaking a journey to the places of his childhood only to awaken to the horrid reality that the past cannot be retrieved.

Allingham’s thirties texts also nourish a sympathy with nostalgic attitude and idealism in her approach, unlike her post-Second World War novels that engage more seriously with contemporary social reality, leaving behind the “never-never land” of the detective story which she “rejected for her own work after 1945” (Martin 181). Allingham too was “aware of the irreversibility of change, she resented the pervasive gloom” (156) concerning the future prospects of England. Her interest shifted towards her characters’ psychology, and her work began to adopt the narrative form of the thriller. *Hide My Eyes*, published in 1958, represents her newly adopted approach to the preservation of old things or the role of the house in memory politics, and though the nostalgic attitude can still be felt, the past is more to be ridiculed and ignored than something to be regarded as a guarantee for stability. The house in the novel seems to magnify the tensions around national stability and cultural identity that Allingham staged in her interwar novels, especially in *Police at the Funeral*. Despite its terrifying appearance and the evil influences the house can have on its inhabitants, Socrates Close is still saved from final destruction, unlike the house in *Hide My Eyes* (36). The treatment of the house in the present novel seems to tackle the cultural phenomenon described by Esty:

With its increasing cultural isolation in the 1930s, then, England was becoming self-consciously antiquarian. As English culture moved from expanding imperial modernity to preservationist national past, the island itself became one large museum—a repository of history whose acquisition-and-collection phase was over. [...] Visiting England in the years just before World War II, Malcolm Cowley described the effect of “England under glass,” a nation becoming its own museum: “Even the people sometimes looked like wax figures dressed in authentic costumes. (42)

The novel portrays an elderly widow, Polly Tassie, living in a house in the London suburbs called Garden Green. Considering the location and characteristics of the houses in her other novels, the fact that whole area of Garden Green used to be a graveyard does not really come as a surprise, but the conversion of the house into a museum is a brand new feature in

Allingham's fiction. Garden Green is an old district badly damaged by the blitz; it is quiet with "little houses, beautiful porches, and horrible plumbing" (26), as Charlie Luke, a divisional detective inspector describes the area to Campion. This suburb, like most others, is a reproduction of the pastoral image of England. While Allingham's previous novels were accounts of the reconstruction of the past in a rural and isolated environment, *Hide My Eyes* chronicles life in the dream of the countryside that suburbia was originally meant to be, as is obvious from the name of the suburb. Garden Green is a visionary idyll of a quiet, respectable life in the outskirts of London.

The house itself, which used to be called Tether's End, is nothing very fashionable, "although it was apparent that it had been the subject of a great deal of thought" (81). It has been transformed into a museum in order to pay tribute to Polly's deceased husband. It seems that Polly's museum does not only supply the aesthetic pleasures of the past but it is also a petrified place in the present. According to Pierre Nora, the museum feeds the "illusions of eternity" (12), while Lowenthal claims that people can only be certain that "there was a past" if they see "at least some of its traces" (247). These traces are imposed on the visitors of the house-museum, an institution which Raphael Samuel's *Theatres of Memory* describes as an unofficial form of memory-making within the local and domestic context, "not just an elitist appeal to Heritage" (Esty 42). Polly Tassie is afraid of the passing of time and of fading away. By creating her museum, however, she also blocks her own progression in time, transforming herself into a museum item, one of "[t]he things are here to be looked at," (43) she says to Annabelle, a young relative who comes to London at Polly's request. "My husband loved showing his old toys to people", – Polly continues – That's what gave me the idea. It's much better than a grave, isn't it? [...] It can't last, of course, but then, what does?" (ibid.). The house built on a graveyard becomes a grave itself, preserving the memory of the husband through its odd outdated objects on display. Polly's preservationist enthusiasm serves to constantly reinforce her belief that the past must be remembered, that her home is also a place to remember because it belongs to old times. Talking about Mary Butts's interwar novels, Patrick Wright talks about an emergent tendency for "the home to become more and more like a *museum*: more and more something that is viewed not just aesthetically, but as a world which is separate and under threat [...] the threatened home becomes an irreplaceable 'period piece': rather too perfect: a museum-piece [...] you see it as an objet d'art" (113). In *Hide My Eyes*, such an irreplaceable piece in the collection used to be the two life-size waxwork figures of an old Victorian couple that have disappeared from the museum. The opening chapter mentions the two people sitting still on an old London bus and it seems that they will have a role later but the

reader is disappointed. They are mentioned in a conversation between Annabelle and Polly when Polly remembers the couple as “two dear old people” (44) sitting in a steamboat until Gerry lost them. The last reference to the waxwork figures comes during the investigation of Charlie Luke when he enquires about their whereabouts. Although it becomes evident that they are only red herrings for the police, one of Gerry Hawker’s pranks, they are still searched for to make sure whether they were real people or only puppets. When Luke asks Polly about the clothes of the old lady, she simply responds that they were not fancy but “you could have gone out in the street in them” (89). Polly’s remark is not only a reinforcement of what Cowley claims of England in the post-WWII era but also evokes the uncanniness of the contemporary world in which images of the past can still circulate as if they were real. In his essay on the uncanny, Freud refers to E.A. Jentsch’s argument according to which “doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive or, conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate” (5) can have uncanny effects, and “he refers in this connection to the impression made by wax-work figures, artificial dolls” (ibid.). Their disappearance in the course of the events foreshadows the fate of the “Collection of Curios” (38) at the end of the novel.

The very first description of the collection reveals a great contrast between the intended sublimity of the glorious past and its reception by the visitors. It is significant that Garden Green and the house are observed through the eyes of Annabelle, “who was too young ever to have encountered any entertainment of a similar unlikely kind, so fashionable at the end of the last century [...]” (44), and for whom Polly Tassie’s collection is beyond all imagination.

As she stood hesitating, she saw that [...] the whole of the room [...] was crammed with unexpected objects whose only common denominator appeared to be the staggering human folly which had perpetrated them [...] the centre of the hall was [...] a sort of big-game exhibit [...] On a carpet-covered dais two monstrous chairs [...] One had been constructed [...] inside the carcass of a small elephant who knelt [...] to permit the sitter to rest within its quilted stomach, whilst the other had been made in the same unlikely way out of a giraffe whose sad head rose disconsolate [...] Beside them a moth-eaten grizzly [...] and a moulting ostrich [...]. (39)

Polly intends the place to be what Patrick Wright calls a “museum of superior culture” (71), as well as a kind of colonial exhibition. For the visitor, however, it is only a heap of rubbish, and Polly is mocked by everyone who has no insight into her past and present. For the policeman Charlie Luke, Polly Tassie is just another lunatic from the crowd who is “dead ordinary” (94). Campion is of a different opinion. Though he finds the old lady’s collection miserable, he thinks about the reasons for keeping so many odd things. He understands that her collection is the

narrative of her life and the manifestation of an imaginary past at the same time, echoing Susan Stewart's claim in *On Longing*: "[...] we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative [...] The souvenir [...] is not an object arising out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia" (135).

Once again, we see Campion as a mediator between the dream and the real world. "I was thinking of her museum", he said [to Charlie Luke]. To keep up a nuisance of a place like that, which she doesn't think is funny, as a memorial to a man who was delighted with it, argues that she loved him in a particular way. She identified herself with him. (93). Polly fails to realize that living too much in the past is harmful and that she might look ridiculous among the 'precious junk'. Her life is also characterized by everyday routine, "She was pouring tea from the silver pot and looked as if she had been doing it for ever" (82), her things in the home create an atmosphere that make it "still a realm of charmed and irreplaceable particularity, to be understood in terms of style and priceless authenticity, not financial value" (Wright 112). She might be said to go one step further her obsession with the past than old Mrs Faraday in *The Police at the Funeral*: she does not only identify herself with the museum but with the objects and furnishings of her apartment, too.

Although Polly Tassie seems to be obsessed with the embalming of the past, she is an ambiguous character in terms of the memory politics of the period. Her material environment and overwhelming urge to remember her husband would seem to place her on the side of an uncritical preservation or reconstruction of the past, yet her knowledge of DIY and the latest home decoration trends or her fondness for the pictures identify her with the present, the suburban lifestyle of the interwar period. Her immersion in middle-class suburban culture is obvious from one of her conversations with Annabelle: " 'Do you like homes?', she enquired unexpectedly. Do it yourself, and how to make a spare bed for yourself out of old wine boxes? [...] I wondered, are you terribly interested in where you live? I'm too much that way. Whenever I go into any sort of building, church, cinema, anywhere, after a bit I always find I'm worrying how I could fix it up [...]" (83). Polly's remarks are typical of what Thorns calls 'domestic ethic': "One indication of the home-centredness of suburban living has been the growth, noted by many writers, of the cult of handyman, who becomes increasingly involved in a whole range of home maintenance and improvement jobs, decorating, modernizing, building home extensions" (140). Polly is poised between two worlds and belongs to both: the modern way of life well as an enthusiasm to preserve a ridiculous assortment of objects from the colonial era.

Polly's domestic museum with all its useless lumber has no future in modernity, it will never have a relevance beyond her own personal culture, with no chance to become part of some more general kind of heritage. Although no parallel has been drawn between the destruction of the house, crime and Polly Tassie's insistence on the past, I believe the two are related in the novel. Polly's surrogate son, Gerry Hawker, whom I referred to in the 'Introduction,' is a murderer and a villain. He uses Polly's devotion and disinterested love in his own interests, such as boasting a respectable family connection and, as B. A. Pike concludes, using Garden Green as a "sanctuary [...] which gives him an entirely false sense of security" (184). While Pike's analysis of the novel focuses on Gerry, whom he compares to Havoc in Allingham's *The Tiger in the Smoke* (1952), his remark on the role of the house and the physical environment is equally true for Polly. The tragedy seems to originate in this false illusion of security. The old lady refuses to acknowledge that the past is irretrievable, but she insists on maintaining it as much as she insists on the image she has created in her mind of Gerry. Pike also points out that the conflicts in the novel arise out of Polly's denials (195). Relying on his observation, I would suggest that the two comments are interconnected, since Polly's false sense of security is grounded on denial. On the one hand, she refuses to face that the collection is not worthy of preserving her husband's memory and their past. On the other, she keeps lying to herself about Gerry, even after she has no doubt that Gerry is a cold-hearted murderer. She wants to believe in her idealized world so much that she does not realize she is risking her own and Annabelle's life with this. When Gerry realizes that Polly has found out he is guilty of the murders the police are investigating, he decides to kill her and Annabelle. On the night of the tragedy, he arranges everything to make the death of the two women seem like an accident<sup>30</sup>, but does not reckon with the presence of Annabelle's friend, Richard in the museum as he is trying to sneak out of the house. The fire starts when Gerry is about to burn his jacket with blood stains on it, and as he is passing through the museum carrying the scoop with the jacket in it, he is hit by Richard and accidentally drops the scoop. As the smouldering jacket and the firelighters roll out of it, "[t]he heat had melted the wax and the sudden draught from the garden door had fanned the cloth into flame" (215). The final scene in which the house burns down marks the end of a period in history: "The museum was ripe for burning, like a bonfire saved for a celebration" (215). Allingham's ironic description of the destruction of the house is also a painful recognition of the dissolution of traditional middle-class life, warning that identity grounded on the past through places or symbols of memory is fragile and easy to crush.

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<sup>30</sup>Polly has been having trouble with the gas stove, so his plan is to insulate the house properly to block the way for the gas to escape

The decades after the Great War brought a proliferation of archetypal images of Englishness and a general reorientation of English cultural attitudes in both high- and middlebrow literature. Part of middlebrow literature, Golden Age crime fiction does reflect on contemporary themes by engaging itself in the mythmaking process through places of memory. One such symbol in middle-class memory of Englishness is the English house that classical crime fiction exploits to achieve a double purpose. While crime authors use it to recreate the lost glory of the past, it also functions as a perfect location for criminal acts, mostly murders that are rooted in the very nostalgic and preservationist attitudes celebrated or at least approved by Golden Age writers. The houses that function as embodiments of a preoccupation with the past and means of escaping and excluding the present – be they big houses, city domiciles or suburban homes – invariably turn out to be fragile and ambiguous, becoming their own caricatures, and often simply destroyed as a result of the conflicting forces embodied in them.

## Chapter 2: The Gentleman Detective as a Site of Memory

British crime fiction of the Golden Age period continued the generic tradition<sup>31</sup> of using the gentleman as a detective – in fact, this is one of its trademark features. As the crime fiction of the era responded to social and cultural tensions as well as to the desire to find order in a chaotic world after the Great War, it was trying to meet a double objective. By constantly referring to the unpleasantness of contemporary, modern life and by frequently evoking the horrors of the Great War, the genre sought ways to evoke the past and provide a seamless continuity of a secure, even imaginary world to offer some comfort. One of the key elements of this strategy was the showcasing of the figure of the gentleman, always regarded as part of the English heritage, a mythical character that represents and guarantees the identity of Englishness<sup>32</sup>, connecting the nation with its past. Robin Gilmour confirms this in *The Idea of the Victorian Gentleman*: “As such it can be seen as a bridging element [...] which historians [...] have seen as ensuring the stability and continuity of English society throughout the turbulent changes of the nineteenth century” (11). The revival of the gentleman myth is usually coupled with pervasive nostalgia towards a world which is superior to the present, but, most importantly, a world that is lost.

What is striking about this figure is that, as an archetype of Englishness, it had been able to retain the impression of eternity regardless of having circulated in literature for hundreds of years, inevitably undergoing several mutations and transformations. In *The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature*, Christine Berberich points out that “[b]ecause of its revered status, references to the gentleman are often made in a nostalgic manner, praising something which appears to be lost; something which existed in a past whose values were better than those of contemporary society. Because of this trend, there is the danger of closing one’s eyes to the potential pitfalls of a revered ideal” (12). By the time Golden Age writers borrowed the figure from their Victorian and Edwardian ancestors, the gentleman had already been heavily invested with competing ideologies that it had to stand for. In the interwar period, the traditional English middle classes felt threatened by the possibility of losing their position and identity, as a result of which they sought ways to reconstruct their past prominence after the Great War. Investing their memories into symbolic figures, such as the gentleman or

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<sup>31</sup>The first classical amateur detective was Edgar A. Poe’s Auguste Dupin, who made his first appearance in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), but we can also see William Godwin’s *Things as They Are; or the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) as an important forerunner.

<sup>32</sup> The literary image [...] is related to the historical evolution and ambitions of the English middle classes [...]” (Gilmour 11).



the big house, was a means to protect themselves from the uncertainties of the present. Nevertheless, it is precisely these symbolic figures that, paradoxically, contributed to the dissolution of the imagined milieus of stability. As the above sketch of the historical development of the gentleman motif has shown, the term had covered a long journey throughout the centuries, finding its final version as a middle-class Victorian whose charisma in English society “reached its peak between the wars” (Gunn-Bell, 105). However, the incompatibility between the heritage of the past and the difficulties of the present prevented this revived ideal from being an agent of the unproblematic reproduction of middle-class symbols and worlds of memory. The claim of this chapter is that Golden Age crime fiction is one of the key discourses that stage this paradoxical function of the gentleman (detective) as a memory figure. In this body of fiction, the character of the gentleman looks, on the surface, simple and concrete, but, on closer examination, it is revealed as complex and ambiguous. It is precisely this multivalence and ambiguity that transforms this figure into a site of memory – a *lieu de mémoire* as Pierre Nora calls it – of the British middle class in the post-war era. He silently slips from one century into another, carrying with himself all the traits he has acquired in the course of his historical journey, yet continuously reinventing itself to survive yet another period. Most critics who write about the Golden Age, like Rowland or Schaub, have claimed that this character is invariably resorted to as a figure of the past and is used to create a nostalgic atmosphere, but no one has explored the dynamics of permanence and change embodied in his character – an exploration that is greatly aided by drawing upon the insights of theorists of collective memory like Nora. The gentleman’s return in the guise of the detective ought to stand for permanence and grandeur, nevertheless, perhaps paradoxically, it is his very competence and dynamism in the course of the investigation that serve to erode this image. Thus, the seamlessness of the cosy world of interwar crime fiction is disrupted not only by the crime itself but also by the agent and the manner of its solution, by the presence of the gentleman detective who becomes a reminder both of the perfection of the idealised past and of the irretrievability of the past. This is not unlike the role of the gentleman figure in modernist literature, at least as it is described by Berberich<sup>33</sup>: “[...] the image of the gentleman was increasingly used for nostalgic regression, in a concerted effort to look at the past through rose-tinted glasses. At the same time, however, there were attempts to react against this, and to liberate the ideal of the gentleman from its iconic and mythical position, in order to adapt it to the challenges of the new century” (23).

Relying on Berberich’s suggestion, I would argue that the gentleman detective is exactly the type of gentleman who is liberated from many of the constraints he is expected to embody

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<sup>33</sup> For a slightly different account of the gentleman detective, see my article “Figures of Memory: The Gentleman Detective”.

and display, due to which he appears like a chameleon rather than an immobile symbolic figure. The three novels analysed in this chapter, Allingham's *Police at the Funeral* (1931), Sayers' *The Nine Tailors* (1934) and Tey's *The Franchise Affair* (1948), use the gentleman as a mediator in the reconstruction and deconstruction of the memory world. For the purposes of the present investigation, Tey's novel seems problematic at first sight, as her Robert Blair does not share the social status of Wimsey or Campion – he is a lawyer rather than a detective –, and because his eccentricities are symptomatic of the period after WWII. However, as my focus is the ambiguity of the gentleman detective as a figure standing and mediating between the past and the present as well as the widening scope of the interpretation of this ideal in social and cultural terms, studying Blair's character is, as I hope to show, very relevant. His transformation from a genuine bourgeois memory figure into a modern, dynamic one may seem to distinguish him from the other two in many respects – Wimsey and Campion show few signs of development in the course of the investigations –, but his character embodies the same middle-class anxieties as well as the way bourgeois culture reproduces the agony of self-preservation in the post-war era(s).

Allingham, Sayers and Tey all seem to be aware of the uncertainty that surrounds the position of their gentleman detectives, usually registering and signalling it through their references to the other characters' attitude towards them. After the First World War, this revered ideal provoked various reactions, which depended on several factors, including one's class identity or knowledge of the past. In *Police at the Funeral*, when Campion is invited to investigate the death of Andrew Faraday in Cambridge, Marcus, the family solicitor, turns to him and says: "[...] I feel [...] that it would be very useful for me to have someone [...] who would hold an intelligent watching [...] and, if you will forgive me, my dear Campion, for using the revolting term, someone who is a gentleman" (32). In *The Nine Tailors*, the coroner coming to Fenchurch St. Paul to investigate the circumstances of a murder case defines the occupation of Lord Peter Wimsey – or the lack thereof – as that of a 'gentleman': "...occupation?...what?...Well, we'd better say, Gentleman..." (100). In Tey's *The Franchise Affair*, Blair's gentle and knightly character is indirectly defined by the unjustly accused Marion: "I don't want a criminal lawyer. I want a friend. Someone who will stand by me [...] when I rang you up just now it wasn't because I thought you would be clever about things but because [...] I wanted the advice of someone of my own sort. And you looked my sort" (8). Blair seems to have something about him that makes him recognizable as a familiar figure, a gentleman who is there in need, but Marion finds it very difficult to clearly articulate what this feeling exactly means. Her difficulties indicate that William Hazlitt's remark, made more than

a century before, was as pertinent as ever: “what it is that constitutes the look of a gentleman is more easily felt than described” (qtd. In Berberich 4).

The first two instances indicate the ambiguous position of the term ‘gentleman’ in the world depicted by these novels and in the discursive universe of interwar middlebrow culture, but in the third case a certain kind of aura around the gentleman is implied. Blair’s obsession with his everyday rituals suggests an unconscious and permanent form of existence which does not only enhance the traumatic symptoms of the nation in the post-war era but also reinforces the gentleman’s static position in English heritage as it was formulated by Harold Laski’s maxim: ‘the gentleman is, rather than does’ (qtd. in Berberich 7). The sufficiency of simply ‘being’ is a sign of the constructed milieu these three novels describe. Unlike Blair in the opening scene of the novel, Campion and Wimsey turn out to be mere observers of rather than participants in the artificial environment they encounter in the course of detection. Blair’s case, however, also shows that his embeddedness in the memory world is affected by his own investigation when he takes action instead of just merely continuing his unconscious existence.

In the quotes from Sayers and Allingham, the characters seem to feel that there is something shady about being a gentleman: the word is used by the coroner as the very opposite of ‘occupation’, and the connotations seem to be even worse in the Allingham quote. The two quotes suggest a crisis and duplicity in the meaning of the term. Although the word ‘gentleman’ denoted a “man of a good family” (9) in 1929 according to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the expansion and internal diversification of the middle class(es) due to the social, political changes, as Berberich explains, meant that the term – along with the aristocratic manners – was adopted in the self-definition of the upper middle classes, marking the “ultimate benchmark” (19) for them.

The family solicitor in *Police at the Funeral* might be thinking of the resultant vagueness of the term in the contemporary world, yet in the same breath he also implies that Campion’s presence during the investigation is a privilege, ensuring the presence of a revered ideal of confidence and morality (a ‘confident’ gentleman) corresponding to the traditional interpretation of this label. Although the idea of the gentleman has changed through history, the traditional image of such a figure has always been that of someone who is distinguished by blood (a member of the landowning gentry) due to which ‘gentlemanhood’ was considered more as a rank<sup>34</sup> than attitude. Furthermore, a gentleman has no profession (which had been

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<sup>34</sup> Christine Berberich explains that while until the 16<sup>th</sup> century “it was essential for a gentleman to have a coat of arms, the emphasis shifted in the eighteenth century to attitude and manners” (9). The 19<sup>th</sup>-century definition puts more emphasis on manners, refinement, and intelligence, which is indicative of “the increasing middle-class appropriation and adaptation of the term following the 1832 Reform Act” (ibid.).

thought of as demeaning), he embodies and maintains tradition, and – and this is where a value judgement becomes part of the term – upholds the chivalric attitude. This feature becomes crucial in the evocation of a glorious past through the figure of the knight who helps the weak and punishes the wrongdoers – a figure that Berberich defines as a forerunner to the gentleman ideal (15). Campion's first encounter with Joyce in *Police at the Funeral* suggests a strong parallel between the role of the gentleman and the knight, a recurrent feature of Golden Age whodunits. Campion, though a fairly ironic incarnation of knightly virtues in this novel, reassures Joyce, who comes to ask for his help to investigate Uncle Andrew's death, that he is the right person to ask and is ready to help: "I'm honest, tidy, dark as next year's Derby winner, and I'll do all I can" (15). The mock-medieval motif of Campion's knight errantry is reinforced by the medieval setting, Cambridge with "its carved stone porticos" (27).

This tendency, not independent of the conservative political views of these writers, takes the reader back to an epoch of the chivalric tradition with the aristocracy in charge of legislation, and implies that they "deserved to rule because it possessed the moral qualities necessary to rulers. Gentlemen were to run the country because they were morally superior" (Berberich 21). It is obvious that Marcus, the family solicitor, refers to an idealized era of English history with the knight errant revived in the amateur detective. Although Mr Campion is committed to saving a young woman from danger and all those who are in need, he ironically concludes, somewhat in contrast to the chivalric code of honour, that his involvement in the investigation is a role which he actually enjoys. What is also obvious from his response to Marcus concerns the traditional opposition between amateur and professional detectives: "Campion laughed. 'I see,' he said. I'm to play my speciality role – the handy man about the trouble. I say I hope the police like me. This isn't the sort of idea they cotton to as a rule" (32). This passage clearly demonstrates the continuing presence of the crime genre's staples, the opposition between the eccentric and/or amateur crime investigator and official authorities. Although one can witness a relative reconciliation between the two by the interwar period, the roots of the rivalry and potential hostility had never really disappeared. Interwar crime fiction revises the role of the amateur detective alongside that of the police, and examines the possibilities of their co-operation. An early example of a harmonious relationship between the two dates back to the turn of the century in G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown series where the amateur detective, who is a Catholic priest by profession, does not only collaborate with the police but maintains a friendly relationship with a French policeman, Inspector Flambeau, an ex-criminal. Christie's Poirot too, is highly respected by Inspector Jupp whenever the two investigate together. Both Campion and Wimsey have a long-standing relationship with the police forces, but Tey's Blair

has to work with them for the first time. What is common in all three cases, though, is the writers' conservative respect and preference for the gentleman detective's higher intellect over the abilities of the new middle-class plods in the police. While Allingham's Campion indirectly refers to his enjoyment of being a sleuth, Sayers's Wimsey openly admits that investigation is a hobby for him in *Whose Body?* (1923), the first Sayers novel featuring him. In this novel, the stress is on his whimsical aristocratic character which is indicated by the family motto "As my Whimsy takes me". Detection is no more than an entertaining way of passing the time for someone with nothing else to do. In a conversation with Inspector Charles Parker, Wimsey admits his strange attraction to crime cases, echoing the aristocratic and amoral attitudes of Dupin and Sherlock Holmes: "But I'll tell you what, Parker, we're up against a criminal – the criminal – the real artist and blighter with imagination – real, artistic, finished stuff. I'm enjoying this, Parker" (29). In response to Wimsey's childish enthusiasm, Parker draws a line between them by saying: "[...] but you forget I do this for my bread and butter" (53). A similar intercourse takes place between Wimsey and Superintendent Blundell in *The Nine Tailors*: "'No difficulty, no fun'. 'Fun?' said the Superintendent. 'Well, my lord, it's nice to be you'" (156). These quotes suggest a fairly ambiguous vision of the aristocrat, the gentleman, whose wealth and status provoke fairly different reactions in the new society.

Sayers' decision to make Lord Peter Wimsey a frivolous and whimsical aristocratic detective, besides supplying the generically required recognizable and distinguishing motif in the detective's character, has a deeper source, stemming from the writer's dissatisfaction with and even mockery of the social and cultural changes of her age. Wimsey's encounter with the coroner exemplifies the clash between the middle and the upper classes. The coroner's reaction to Wimsey's admission that he is a gentleman in life and that he is not doing anything worthwhile smacks of middle-class hostility towards the aristocracy, which is not an interwar phenomenon but a Victorian heritage. As the political and economic role of the aristocracy was on the wane from the 1830s, the strengthening middle classes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century developed a rather unequivocal attitude towards them, as Robin Gilmour explains: "[...] middle-class attitudes to the aristocracy often combined admiration of inherited prestige and 'breeding' with a moral critique of irresponsibility and decadence" (84). Accordingly, *The Nine Tailors* offers two different conceptions of the term 'gentleman' and two attitudes to gentlemen. On the one hand, there is evidence of fascination with aristocratic breeding and antiquity. On the other, there are also doubts concerning the compatibility of work and gentlemanly ideals. Edward Thorpe, the 15-year-old Hilary Thorpe's uncle and guardian, avoids Lord Peter because he disapproves of his involvement in crime cases, as she explains to Wimsey: "He disapproves of

mysteries, too. It's rotten for Uncle [...] He thinks your hobby is unsuited to your position in life. That's why he's rather carefully avoiding an introduction" (133). Something similar happens to Campion in *Police at the Funeral* when Mr Featherstone, the family lawyer, comments on Campion's efforts: "'You Campion,' he said. 'I don't know what good Mrs Faraday thinks you are going to be to her [...] No amateur jiggery-pokery ever has done anybody any good'" (64).

Both Mr Featherstone and Mr Thorpe steer clear of the aristocratic detectives and display a certain unease towards the aristocratic past. This phenomenon continued to circulate in interwar society as a Victorian remnant. Relying on John Seed's suggestion, Robin Gilmour points out that the middle classes are distinguished from the aristocracy by generating an income from an active occupation and distinguished from the labouring-majority by their possession of property" (6). For the Victorians, the new masculine ideal was the gentleman that builds the British Empire and maintains a respectable image in private and public life as well, nevertheless, no other historical era found itself more uncertain about what it meant to be a gentleman than the Victorian, and this uncertainty continued into the interwar period. Wimsey's presence in the investigation may also be enraging for the respectable professional classes since he constantly reminds them of the traditional image of the gentleman who has the leisure to pursue intellectual activities instead of paying too much attention to work and money. In *The Nine Tailors*, when Wimsey finds himself in Fenchurch St. Paul, it is New Year's Eve, and the rector of the parish, Mr Venables, is preparing for a nine-hour session of change-ringing with his men. Unsurprisingly, Wimsey happens to know all about bell-ringing, and, substituting one of the change-ringers, turns out to excel at it. The wide range of his skills and arcane knowledge is shown in other situations, too: the rector knows that Wimsey collects old books and incunabula and has even written a scholarly monograph, *Notes on the Collection of Incunabula* – the title may be a playful indication of the gratuitousness of Wimsey's pursuits, since the book is not even about other books (that would be useless enough from a middle-class perspective) but about the collection of such rarities, clearly the privilege of a very lucky few. He speaks perfect French<sup>35</sup> and translates letters into English to help the police. As Catherine Kenney points out in her *The Remarkable Case of Dorothy L. Sayers*, Wimsey "[...] knows something about everything, so that just being in his company provides readers with endless tit-bits of history, science, literature, music and philosophy [...] Wimsey knows too much, [...] no one

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<sup>35</sup> His perfect knowledge of the French language is a signifier of the English tradition of the 18th century when young English men of rank were sent to France on the Grand Tour to learn the language perfectly, gain experience and study politics and the social institutions, in other words, to become a gentleman, explains Michèle Cohen in his *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century*.

could be so knowledgeable” (61). In a society where everybody’s identity depends on his class, it is extremely important to understand and reproduce one’s social identity in the hierarchical system of social classes along features such as “ancestry, accent, education, deportment, mode of dress, patterns of recreation, type of housing and style of life” (Cannadine 22). Wimsey’s refined intellect and diverse competences are all signifiers of an old class that had the time to learn and enjoy things that last. “These require that one occupy one’s time not economically but ceremonially” (87), explains Paul Connerton in *How Societies Remember*. However, this thorough and wide-ranging knowledge is related most of all to the biologizing metaphor of blood as a sign of value. As Foucault suggests, “power speaks through blood; it is a reality with a symbolic function. The true nobility is a race” (86). Wimsey’s wealth, knowledgeability and easy life remind the new classes that they are not eligible for this role, simply because they cannot acquire the qualities that make the traditional, true image of the gentleman.

Although the Victorians were aware of this deficiency, they hid their insecurity in very different ways: either by scorning the frivolities of the aristocracy, or, as Sean Latham suggests, by claiming to “be distantly yet plainly descended from the ancient aristocracy” (191). Regarding some other attributes of the noble race, such as good manners, language, lifestyle, housing or education, the self-conscious middle class saw them as acquirable since these properties were considered as flexible enough to identify with and turn the idea of the gentleman into a moral category, one indispensable for public servants<sup>36</sup>. Partly through public school education, the portrait of the modern gentleman in the British Empire was reconnected with the old image of the chivalrous knight, with the underlying idea that the imperial gentleman ideal “has to stand above self-interest and look to the good of his community” (Gilmour 98). The middle-class adoption and appropriation of aristocratic features and privileges, such as those of a gentleman, resulted in the fact that, as Gilmour says, “the English gentleman did not die, or simply fade away: he was overtaken by social inflation. By the twentieth century the words ‘gentleman’ and ‘gentlemanly’ have largely lost the force they had in Jane Austen or Thackeray, and have become part of the conditioned reflexes of class” (Gilmour 14). The key term ‘social inflation’ is essential here as it marks the shift of the gentleman from symbolic social status into a Victorian and a masculine ideal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first gentlemen detectives – including Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes – were constructed according to this criterion, a characteristic trait which was born with the establishment of public school culture. In

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<sup>36</sup> Beyond these qualities business activities also played a key role in the relative approach between the social classes: [...] English aristocrats were an open elite [...] not averse to making money, and not always over-proud as to who they made it with. [...] yet [...] those who wanted to get in had to know where the importance of money stopped and where the importance of manners began” (76), argues Robert Colls in *Identity of England*.

*Masculinities and Culture* (2002), John Beynon points out that “the Victorian public school is [...] nothing less than a factory for gentleman” (41) where “masculinity was both attained and displayed through athleticism, strength, speed [...] and muscularity” (42). This remark also alludes to the fact that the concepts of gentlemanliness and manliness in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were closely intertwined.

After the Great War the blending of masculine values with gentlemanly ideals, that is the image of the manly gentleman shows signs of incompatibility. What is common in the three detectives mentioned above is the fact that they have all been traumatized by the wars. Wimsey is so shell-shocked that he becomes hysterical during an investigation, Campion plays the role of an idiot, and Blair has withdrawn in the cosy memory world of a small town called Milford. To see them as embodiments of imperial masculinity is highly problematic, since, despite their public school education, they all represent a rather reduced form of masculinity. Nicola Humble argues that one result of the Great War was the discrediting of pre-war, heroic and military ideas of masculinity characterised by physical prowess, and this led to the appearance of male figures who “rejected the old masculine values of gravitas and heroism in favour of frivolity” (197). It is probably Christie’s Poirot who is the best-known detective figure to represent this tendency. Mr Campion’s absurd appearance, his “habitual expression of contended idiocy” (Allingham 13) and behaviour throughout *Police at the Funeral* bear out this claim, reinforcing what Alison Light argues in *Forever England*: “the post-war world [...] needed to give way to a more modest, sometimes agonised sense of English manliness. Most writers solved the problem of embarrassment at aggressive virility by the age-old recourse of reinstating the clever foppishness of the aristocrat” (72). When Campion first meets Joyce, a young relative of the Faradays, he introduces himself as a detective in the following way: “Am I a serious practitioner or someone playing the fool? I know that feeling [...] I’m deadly serious. My amiable idiocy is mainly natural, but it’s also my stock-in-trade” (15). Both Campion and Wimsey are fairly bohemian in their attitudes and relations to the others, a sign of a particular kind of snobbery that was associated with the aristocracy. Social changes of the interwar period, however, transformed the significance of such mannerisms and patterns of behaviour for an increasingly dominant middle class with their growing presence in public spheres and as chief consumers. Sayers and Allingham may be mocking the ambition of the middle class to replace the aristocracy in tradition and taste by foregrounding the extreme bohemianism of their gentleman detectives. Sean Latham points out that Sayers “may be launching a satirical assault on the mass-mediated reproduction of snobbery itself” (179). Colin Watson suggests that “[t]he Silly Ass convention was extraordinarily pervasive in the 1920s and 1930s. It had developed into



something quite different from the old dramatic device of dissembling and was almost a celebration of inanity as such" (186). While we can regard Campion's and Wimsey's frivolity as a disguised expression of their disdain for the middle classes, Tey's Blair himself becomes the embodiment and the mockery of middle class respectability and snobbery after the Second World War, someone whose life is exhausted in the everyday routine confined to the house, which also allows for a rather feminized representation of the detective.

A similarly ironic approach to masculinity appears in Sayers's and Allingham's characterization of the respective manservants of Campion and Wimsey. Campion's Magersfontein Lugg and Wimsey's Mervyn Bunter are both utterly ridiculous male companions to the detectives. They seem to be multi-functional, performing all sorts of tasks from cleaning to defending their masters. Bunter is a paragon of the respectable valet, while Lugg is an ex-criminal who speaks with a cockney accent. Both of them, however, turn out to fill one very important position, that of the protectors. Only Bunter can handle Wimsey's hysteria brought about by shell shock, and we know that Lugg's physical strength and criminal past help Campion escape rough fights with criminals. By the time, however, that this servant-cum-protector figure makes its way to the Golden Age, he finds himself highly ridiculed since he becomes the embodiment and the caricature of two distinct figures, the detective's sidekick and his manservant. In the detective fiction of the pre-war era, the assistance of sidekicks like Dupin's unnamed narrator friend or Holmes's Dr. Watson is valued, and the sidekick also mediates between the reader and the amateur sleuth, his bland mediocrity setting out the genius of the detective. Nevertheless, his continued presence in the genre after WWI was regarded as rather problematic by authors of detective fiction. Agatha Christie, for instance, abandoned Captain Hastings, the companion she created for Poirot, lacking a reasonable excuse for his presence at Poirot's side. In Wimsey's and Campion's case, the survival of the butler as a sidekick is an utterly English trait and a sign of the reluctance to break with the generic tradition, but also a proof of nostalgic longing to escape certain social developments: the post-war era saw a radical decline in the number of servants in upper- and middle-class households, as a result of more jobs in the factories. Keeping the manservant at the side of the gentleman detective can indicate the desire for a past with a clearly ordered class structure. Both Lugg and Bunter embody the social gulf between the aristocrats and the others; both of them are content with the reflected social prestige of having the honour to serve the distinguished class. Their position, however, is no less ambiguous than that of the gentleman detective in the memory world of the middle class. While the illusion of having a decent valet in the house is revived in Golden Age crime fiction as a sign of the presence of aristocratic values after the Great War,

the actual portrayal of the manservants, which amounts to a caricature of the original figure, does contribute to the dissolution of the possibility of bringing it all back. Nevertheless, their devotion to and friendship with the detective sustain an age-old belief in genuine trust and comradely collaboration among men during the time of crisis when masculine values were needed in order to strengthen a sense of security. In fact, such bonds between gentlemen-officers and their batmen were created and reinforced during the war. Thus, if the gentleman as a detective was not ambiguous enough in itself in terms of the revival of old glory, his manservant definitely confirmed the sense of the in-betweenness of the former in the memory world of the middle classes.

## 2.1. Albert Campion

In *Police at the Funeral*, the detective's position in this no man's land is made fairly clear from the start. When Mr. Campion arrives in Cambridge at the request of old Caroline Faraday, a member of a respectable upper-middle-class family, he finds everything shockingly unchanged in the family home, which reinforces his outsider position. Campion as a gentleman is a memory symbol, and his involvement in the investigation of the murder of Andrew Faraday reveals his intimate relationship with the world of the Faradays, which also explains why the family is desperate to have him around in this moment of crisis. He is, first of all, a family friend – the family has secrets and refuses publicity, as Joyce Blount, a family member remarks: “It – it isn't a matter for the police” (13). Second, he is an aristocrat, with an understanding of the secrets and manners of his class, and his presence is therefore not an intrusion. He functions as a tool to restore an illusory world nourished by nostalgic longing: with his fanciful clothes, including the “monstrous tweed erection” (5) on his head, he incarnates a different era, however ironically. He is treated by the family very differently from the police, considered to be their own kind: “I am not insulting you by suggesting that you behave like a policeman – Mrs. Faraday remarks –; I need the presence of an intelligent person in the house[...].” (58).

Although the family seems to know exactly who Campion is, the reader is left without fixed points of identification as his real name and identity remain hidden all through the Campion saga, a feature that makes Allingham's sleuth somewhat unrealistic and perhaps too exaggerated in his portrayal of an idiotic aristocrat and. When Campion meets his old friend from the police force, Stanislaus Oates, in *Police at the Funeral*, the inspector asks him: “What do you call yourself these days?” (6), which sounds like prying to Campion, who “looked at him reprovingly” (ibid.). The secrets of the old families are only known by those who share

their memories. Although the class status of the Faradays is not clearly stated, they are referred to as an ‘old family’ (39) by Uncle William – the middle-aged son of Mrs Faraday –, implying that they belong to the upper classes, very probably the upper middle class, clearly having connections with the great families of the old world – which is why Campion is present. In a conversation between him and Mrs Faraday it turns out that the old lady used to correspond regularly with Campion’s grandmother, the dowager Emily, and that she can see “the first family” (56) in him. From this intimate chat, the reader learns that Campion’s real first name is ‘Rudolph,’ but it is only years later, in *The Fashion in Shrouds* (1938), that we learn that Campion simply does not like his original name, preferring ‘Albert’. His real surname, however, is hidden for good<sup>37</sup>. In the first Campion novel, *The Crime at Black Dudley*, an amateur policeman, Abbershaw, refers to Campion as ‘Mornington Dodd’, which Campion completes with more unexpected information: “Mornington Dodd is one of my names. I have also been called the ‘Honourable Tootles Ash’, which I thought was rather neat when it occurred to me” (71). To Abbershaw’s inquiry whether Campion is his real name he only answers: “my own is rather aristocratic, and I never use it in business” (71). B. A. Pike suggests that ‘Mornington Dodd’ was the first of Campion’s several noms-de-guerre (8) when he was involved in intelligence work, and that he maintains his connections with the secret services after the war. In *Police at the Funeral*, there is no mention of his surname apart from Mrs Faraday’s reference to Campion’s brother (56) using the family title: “as long as that impossible brother of yours is alive the family responsibilities are being shouldered, and I see no reason why you shouldn’t call yourself what you like” (56). Mrs Faraday’s “discovery of his more intimate affairs” (57) is met with by his “remarkable equanimity” (57).

Although Campion’s belonging to a community mummifying the past may suggest the conservative view of Golden Age authors embodied in the figure of the gentleman detective, as Richard Martin would have it in his *Ink in her Blood*<sup>38</sup>, the mystery surrounding his name and identity indicates the uneasiness concerning the figure, and the novel itself implies that Campion’s position is more complicated than that. The following conversation takes place after Inspector Oates has committed an ungodly act by using the armchair of the late Doctor John Faraday: “‘Big policeman makes fatal error’, said Mr Campion laughing, and went on to

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Martin suggests in his *Ink in her Blood* that the name Campion has its origins in the old French word for ‘champion’ (64) but Paula M. Woods states in her essay, “The First Campion Novel” that the name ‘Campion’ was suggested by Allingham’s husband, Philip Youngman Carter, after Edmund Campion, “Jesuit martyr, and has himself been suggested as one of the models for some of Campion’s characteristics” (22).

<sup>38</sup> “Campion’s world is [...] a world in which a knowledge of people and contacts with them predominate [...] Above all, Campion – like most other detectives of the period, both male and female – is by the very nature of his avocation a conservative, a believer in the traditional values of the society to which he chooses to conform” (27).

explain. ‘Well I’m hanged, said the Inspector ruefully. But who’s to know a thing like that? It’s as bad as a caste system’” (68). Campion is equally at ease both with the Faraday family and with Oates: unlike Oates, he understands the proprieties of the Faraday world (Oates simply calls them “funny people” [73], while, on the other hand, he is also fluent in the modern discourse of newspaper headlines that blow up the trivial incident into tabloid bombast. The gentleman detective is positioned as a mediator – as well as a time traveller - between the police and the Faradays. This, however, also means that he does not quite belong to either of these worlds: that is why he is able to see the memory world of the Faradays from a distance and observe ethnographically the everyday rituals which organize their lives. “Mr Campion realized that he was looking upon a nightly ritual, and waited, not without apprehension, to see where he himself fitted into this ceremony” (84). He understands Joyce’s frustration with the old lady (Mrs Faraday) who does not let her smoke a cigarette in public, and he sympathises with Inspector Oates when the officer admits that Mrs. Faraday is beyond him: “She speaks another new language I’ve got to learn” (68). Campion’s uncertain position, his being everywhere and basically nowhere, reinforces his status as a mythical figure who can transcend spatial and temporal boundaries and adapt to as many roles as he is required to.

This feature is apparent in the tension within Campion’s image as a gentleman and a detective – rather a demeaning occupation for an aristocrat –, paradoxically, however, it is exactly this new disguise that can revive the status of the medieval knight, one of the oldest avatars of the gentleman<sup>39</sup>. For all the medieval allure, however, criminal investigation requires Campion to have a sound knowledge of and competence in the modern world. Coming to Cambridge to investigate a crime in the Faraday family as an amateur obliges him to belong to them on the one hand, and to see those people objectively, as an outsider, on the other. To ease the tension resulting from this ambiguous position, Campion claims at the very beginning: “In the first place, I’m not a detective [...] I’m a professional adventurer – in the best sense of the world. I’ll do anything I can for you” (13). His statement is also a testimony to the tension in his character: his pledge seems to evoke the cult of chivalry, while his self-identification as an adventurer<sup>40</sup> links him to the relative irresponsibility characterizing the aristocracy according to the middle-class view – while the adjective “professional” links him to middle-class mores. In

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<sup>39</sup>Maybe it is not accidental that the name of Simon Templar, The Saint in the novels of Leslie Charter coincides with the Knights Templar, or simply Templars which is very probably an ironic designation of a gentleman bandit. The interwar gentlemanly detectives see a revival in contemporary classical whodunits by P.D. James, Ruth Rendell, or Elizabeth George whose detectives, - Adam Dalgliesh, Inspector Wexford and Inspector Lynley – preserve much of these traits that evoke the myth of Englishness.

<sup>40</sup>“Another version of the gentlemanly idea was the adventurer or explorer” (110), say Gunn and Bell in *Middle Classes*.

a conversation with Joyce, Campion calls himself a “first-class professional” (15) when referring to his detective talents. I have already referred to the widespread idea that the aristocracy was fit to rule because of its moral superiority which was often claimed to include chivalric attributes. Campion’s duplicitous status as a detective is indicated by this combination of medievalism and professionalism – what may link the two distant spheres is the disinterestedness of both knight and amateur detective, although, at least in Campion’s case, this disinterestedness is questioned, and thus he is indelibly contaminated by the world of demeaning work.

Although Campion’s reduced masculinity, indicated by his funny appearance, could potentially make him ridiculous, his position as gentleman-detective can also be seen as a sign of a new maturity: as Berberich suggests, the question remains whether the gentleman indeed died a metaphorical death after the Great War, or he merely grew up, “from eternal boyhood into responsible manhood” (22). Richard Martin remarks that in the early thirties Campion develops from the position of a quasi-adventurer into someone “who offers his services in good causes” (27)<sup>41</sup>. The development of the detective from pleasurable irresponsibility towards responsible (and chivalric) seriousness can be traced in the fiction of both Sayers and Allingham: the detective realizes his responsibility for others, and remembers that a gentleman is someone who “never inflicts pain” (Berberich 7), but this moral maturity is invariably connected to the relationship with their female partners, which will be analysed in the *Chapter Four*.

B. A. Pike describes Campion as a man of action and authority, “an intriguing figure with very real possibilities for development” (8), and although “authority” might refer both to symbolic and actual prowess, being a man of action contradicts his position as a static figure of memory. In the memory world, it is all about ‘being’ rather than ‘acting,’ (115) claims Patrick Wright in *On Living in an Old Country*. As argued above, it is exactly the act of detection which distances him from the artificially nostalgic milieu, although the process is resisted by the police who consider themselves to represent competence and skills of the real world. What Campion can do against the hostility of the professionals is to prove his abilities as a detective. In most

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<sup>41</sup>Nevertheless, his knightly performance as an authentic gentlemanly gesture may also be questioned, especially if one keeps in mind that he is very probably paid for his services. In *Police at the Funeral*, Mrs Faraday promises to pay him “one hundred guineas if [he] remain[s ] in [her] employ for less than a month” (57). Whether he accepts the money or not remains dubious. His aristocratic background is inconsistent with accepting money for his services, but perhaps it is the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Victorian appropriation of the gentlemanly ideal that can be traced in this passage, as income played a significant role among the male members of the middle class. Campion is also charged with some shady task for financial reward in *The Crime at Black Dudley* that might also explain his hiding his real identity.

of Allingham's novels, the police are represented as competent, and Oates is portrayed as a particularly talented officer. In *Police at the Funeral*, however, realizing that the police do not consider him as an equal, Campion takes control and beats Oates in intellect and methods, in what is apparently a return to the roots of the genre<sup>42</sup>:

‘I couldn’t bear Stanislaus’s cold and slightly unchristian attitude any longer,’ he said. ‘He’s an old friend of mine, and contrary to the best traditions of the amateur sleuth, I have put my foot in it rather badly with him. It’s most unfair too,’ he went on. ‘I gave him the broadest possible hint [...] But just because I didn’t go further and mention that I had already interviewed [...] Mrs Finch, [...] he is quite ridiculously annoyed with me. I consider myself down-trodden.’ (166)

What is even more interesting is that he also emulates the police in other fields, proving himself more modern and efficient through his knowledge of and trust in modern trends of psychology. It is probably not an accident that he is revealed as someone who understands the workings and dysfunctions of memory: Campion seems to understand how memory controls unpleasant events in Uncle William's life (Mrs Faraday's middle-aged son), and explains the mechanism of amnesia to Oates, whose response is typically dismissive: “This is a job for a psychologist, I’m sure of that [...] What a chemist says is evidence. What a psychologist says isn’t” (131). As a memory expert, Campion, unlike the police officer, understands the inhibitions and restraints that the past imposes on us, and this is what enables him to sense the power of evil, even if his warnings are not taken seriously.

By experiencing the harmful, even evil<sup>43</sup> forces of the memory world in the house, he reconsiders the position of Uncle Andrew and the significance of his murderous acts. Eccentric Uncle Andrew, branded within the family as evil and cruel, chooses to commit suicide instead of conforming to the rules of the house. His eccentricity – or worse –, however, is not simply a personal idiosyncrasy. Marcus says that what frightens him is the family rather than any particular individual<sup>44</sup>. Uncle Andrew's frustration and anger seem to have originated in his recognition of the family's imaginary life. Campion also recognizes the inhibitions and repressions in the family as a “hot-bed, a breeding ground of those dark offshoots of the civilized mind” (49). As referred to in *Chapter One*, Uncle Andrew, recognizing the futility of

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<sup>42</sup>In his *Detective Fiction*, Rzepka claims that Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin is an impoverished aristocrat whose intellectual superiority and analytical skills are a compensation for the lost social status (73-74).

<sup>43</sup>The use of the word “evil” is justified by Campion's reference to Oates as “unchristian” quoted above.

<sup>44</sup>Humble considers that the family as a “profoundly eccentric organization” (149) is highly present in women's middlebrow novel adding later that “[t]he neurotic intensity of family life suggested by the Brontë paradigm makes the eccentric family a fertile subject for the detective fiction of the period” (183).

their lives stuck in the past, starts his revolt by displaying books about sex on his shelves by acquiring the habit of going to bookmakers - a vulgar act according to Mrs Faraday – and by rearranging his own room to demonstrate complete simplicity and poverty as if the place was a prison. Bearing in mind that “there is no escape” (33), he finally takes revenge on the family members by leaving traps before his death, and kills two of them. The closer Campion gets to the depth of the family’s inability to abandon the past, the less he is inclined to be a part of this world.

Campion’s portrayal in this novel perfectly illustrates the controversies that surround memory sites. While the gentleman detective’s presence serves to reassure the Faradays that it is possible to stop time and maintain the old hierarchy of order, it is also his return to Cambridge that creates a tension between the past and present. Having knowledge of his own class, he can easily become a mediator between the old (the family) and the new (the police), but his unproblematic relation to the present erodes his static position in the memory world maintained by the Faradays. Campion’s own roots and identity are also obscure, implying that there is nothing certain or legitimate about the restored world the family hangs on to. Nevertheless, the aristocratic gentleman as a detective can still live up to a double role. He becomes the saviour of those in need, thus reviving the image of the medieval knight, while at the same time he disrupts the continuity of the past attached to his own figure.

## 2.2. Lord Peter Wimsey

In Sayers’s *The Nine Tailors*, Wimsey’s involvement in the identification of a mutilated body revealed during the funeral of Sir Henry Thorpe and in the theft of the emeralds is due to an accident: his car gets stuck in the snow in Fenchurch St. Paul. This remote village in the East Anglian fens, having no railway even, revives the myth of the innocent English landscape which has not been spoiled by modernisation: “Fenchurch St. Paul is the smallest village, and has neither river nor railway; it is, however, the oldest; its church is by far the largest and [...] its bells beyond question the finest” (56). Unlike in *Police at the Funeral*, Englishness is not portrayed through the rituals of an old family in a Victorian house, but through the everyday life of a village community respecting and keeping English traditions like the Church of England and campanology. The life of the village is organized by their everyday practices and the regular festivals, such as Easter and the Harvest Festival. In their article, R.D. and Barbara Stock remark that “[i]ndeed the bells act as factors of order in village life, marking years and lives, warning, celebrating and because they are passed on from generation to generation and

do not die, forming a palpable continuity with the far past” (28). The villagers also draw a sharp line between the ‘us’ and the ‘them,’ identifying outsiders who might subvert the gentle routine of the tiny community. They seem to act collectively in organizing their rituals, and when it comes to the mystery puzzle, the residents discuss, solve and think about problems together, leaving no room for individual perspectives. Although strangers are immediately identified as ‘them’, Wimsey is not met with rejection and he seems to be recognized by the community as one of themselves. Unlike Campion, Wimsey has no mystery generated about him. On the contrary, he is proud to embody the privileged status of the aristocrat who embodies the spirit of the bohemian, carefree life, the living incarnation of the family motto quoted above.

Although the word ‘gentleman’ is used widely and somewhat confusingly in the novel, it seems that people in the countryside tend to identify it with its historic connections to the aristocracy and the land. Despite the fact that Wimsey is based in Piccadilly, London, and drives a fancy car, a Daimler double-six, which would seem to jar with the idyllic world of the countryside, his aristocratic background makes him fit in through the mythical relation between the aristocratic gentleman-landowner and the English landscape. Just like Campion in the Faraday mansion, Wimsey – apart from a few negative remarks – receives a warm welcome in the village community (especially after he helps them ring the bells). At first, he and his manservant, Bunter, are both called ‘gentleman’, although when Reverend Venables learns who Bunter is, he stops using the word. In other situations, Wimsey and Inspector Blundell are both referred to as ‘gentleman’ regardless of their different social status. Interestingly, this distinction is emphasized by Cranton, one of the suspects in the theft of the emeralds. He insists on calling Wimsey ‘my lord’ upon their first encounter but refuses to call the police officers ‘gentlemen’: “‘Well, my lord – no,’ said Mr. Cranton, ‘I won’t say gentlemen. Seems to go against the grain, somehow. Officers, if you like, but not gentlemen’” (310).

As the embodiment of a revered ideal coming to a remote place, Wimsey elicits absolute trust and emanates an air of reassurance – unlike the police, who are seen as uncouth intruders. Mrs. Venables is complaining to Wimsey about the police destroying the flowers in the garden while searching the rectory for the emeralds: “Well, my lord, the police did come and of course they hunted round a good bit, and we didn’t bless them, the way they morrised over the flower-beds [...] and breaking down the tulips” (51). Mrs Gates, a respectable woman from the village – though respectability is always suspicious in Sayers – flatly refuses to talk to Inspector Blundell, pointing out that the latter only feels competent to deal with the murder case because Wimsey is with him: “I suppose, since being patronized by the aristocracy, you consider yourself quite competent to deal with any description of crime” (158).



Mr Venables is convinced that Wimsey's knowledge and experience of the outside world – as well as his connections with the London police – can help their case. "I [...] ask you to give us some advice out of your great experience" (98) – he writes in his letter to Wimsey. The more Wimsey reveals about the case, however, the more harm he causes to the families involved – this is what Uncle Edward implies when refusing to meet Wimsey –, which is a sign of the limits of the game. From this perspective, Wimsey's position is also fairly ambiguous, given that it is he who dismantles the myth of the innocent countryside, although he is also apparently part of the idyll. He articulates his failure in the following passage: "Well, padre, I dare say you're right. Probably I'm trying to be too clever. That's me every time. I'm sorry to have made so much unpleasantness, anyhow. And I really would rather go away now. I've got that silly modern squeamishness that doesn't like watchin' people suffer" (307). Wimsey calls his squeamishness "modern" – possibly a reference to the trauma of seeing his men suffer and die in the trenches. For him, detection is a therapy enabling him both to forget about the war and do justice to all the innocent ones. In *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, Gill Plain comments on this feature in interwar detective fiction: "Someone is to blame, and the wartime absence of explanation is superseded by detective fiction's excess of possible solutions" (34). That, like Campion, Wimsey understands the workings of memory is clear from his reflections on the amnesia that overpowered the victim – Deacon – after desertion from the war. "'He seemed to have forgotten the War.' 'Lucky devil!' said Wimsey, with feeling" (211). Wimsey's emotional reaction can be interpreted as a wish to suppress his own wartime trauma, yet, the process of detection leads him "inexorably back into the reworking of the very depression he seeks to assuage" (Plain 48). Wimsey's recognition of his role and responsibility in the detecting game as well as his interaction with the police tend to deconstruct the nostalgic, quasi-mythical image of the impeccable gentleman who never inflicts pain (Cardinal Newman, qtd. In Berberich 7) and "never causes or feels embarrassment in any situation" (Jones and Montgomery's in *The British Aristocracy*, qtd. In Berberich 8). Nevertheless, *The Nine Tailors* is also an attempt to portray Wimsey more realistically, preparing the ground for the encounter between him and Harriet Vane in *Gaudy Night*, which is to be discussed in the following chapter.

### 2.3. Robert Blair

Josephine Tey's gentleman lawyer-detective in *The Franchise Affair* is portrayed as the archetypal figure of Englishness after World War II<sup>45</sup>. Unlike Campion and Wimsey, who come from the outside world and function as mediators between the past and the present, Blair is embedded in the unconscious flow of everyday practices in an objectified milieu. The following passage will illustrate this: "At 3:50 exactly on every working day Miss Tuff bore into his office a lacquer tray covered with a fair white cloth and [...] two biscuits; petit-beurre Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, digestive Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Looking at it now, idly, he thought how much it represented the continuity of Blair, Hayward and Bennet" (1). Sandra Roy points out that "In many of [Tey's] plays and most of her novels, the heroes are men who need comfort and protection – who are innocent and sometimes even boyish and romantic" (16). Blair clearly represents this type; his only chance for joining and truly inhabiting the modern world is through initiation into the world of crime. Indeed, the detective's encounter with the outside world seems traumatic – it makes Blair suffer more than the other characters around him. This can partly be explained by Auden's remark on the lawyer-detective in his "The Guilty Vicarage": "The lawyer-detective is never quite satisfactory [...] because his interest in the truth or in all the innocent is subordinate to his interest in his client" (4). Blair is clearly influenced by his keen interest in his client(s), the Sharpes, especially young Marion Sharpe, which could easily lead to breaching one of the rules of the whodunit, that of the emotional detachment of the detective. While there is no explicit connection between Blair's everyday rituals and the war, unlike in the case of the shell-shocked Wimsey, Tey's description of this unconscious, ready-made life implies pre-war cosiness, even a timeless atmosphere in the small town of Milford, where the story is set. Milford, which "could be duplicated a hundred times anywhere south of Trent. But in its unselfconscious fashion it typified the goodness of life in England for the last three hundred years" (4). The shrinkage of space and lifestyle is explained in Bényei's monograph on post-1945 British fiction: the loss of the Empire after the Second World War resulted in an inward-looking, nostalgic reaction: English identity was increasingly attached to the small town, the countryside, triggering off a fetishization of tradition and provincial attitudes<sup>46</sup> (145). Certain references to the war are made, but with a sense of indifference or lack of knowledge due to the connectedness with the past of the nation:

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<sup>45</sup>For a detailed discussion of the historicity of everyday life, see my article, "How are you getting on with your forgetting?: The Past and the Present in Margery Allingham's and Josephine Tey's crime fiction".

<sup>46</sup>My translation.

“After all, it *was* England; and the English countryside at that: famed for minding its own business. It was no country hand that had splashed that FASCISTS! on the wall. It was doubtful if the country had ever heard the term. The country when it wanted insults, used older, Saxon words” (Tey 128). In *A Shrinking Island*, Jed Esty reflects on the process of this re-imagination and re-orientation of England:

When imperial decline became an imminent prospect, critics of modernity – including most modernists – suddenly had an opportunity to imagine England outside the stream of worldwide modernization detached from the headlong “progress” of the British state. [...] Both popular writers and established modernists participated in the inward reorientation of English culture during the 30 and 40s. (39)

In the novel, this return to Englishness might be detected in Blair’s continuing the family business without ever questioning his own position in it. This timelessness tends to maintain the illusion that everything can remain the same if one obsessively insists on his immediate social and cultural milieu. Wright points out that “[e]veryday life is always experienced in relation to the immediate environment” (8), and Blair’s fixed identity can be acquired through an “identification with the system of customs” (10) that unified the members of his class. When Marion refers to Blair as being ‘their sort’, a friend who evokes trust and embodies gentlemanly values, she reinforces his embeddedness in the collective memory of the English that makes him look like an old acquaintance. I argue, however, that given his social status – the professional upper middle class –, Blair’s acquisition of the gentlemanly ideals depicts him as a relatively recent version of the gentleman, one that came into existence as a result of the adoption of these privileges by the Victorians. His obsessive repetition of his rituals to sustain the past maybe vaguely related to the national trauma of losing the Empire, but at a more personal level, the fading of his social class must also be considered. Gunn and Bell point out that “After the Second World War the group [the upper middle class] began to disintegrate under the effects of economic competition, rising taxation and the challenge to a traditional order of authority represented by the post-war politics of Labour” (91). Though it affects his routine considerably, Blair’s being charged with the investigation also opens up new possibilities to re-establish the traditional image of his class along with the revered image of the knight as in the other cases. Being a lawyer-detective, however, would seem to have a double function. As a lawyer, he occupies a traditional territory of the aristocracy many members of which worked in legislation and served justice, while his knightly disposition can be resuscitated through being a detective when he is asked to protect and help the falsely accused. Also, the fact that he has knowledge and an inherited concept of the past through his

rituals makes him a legitimate figure in the memory world, which is only enhanced by his distrust and disgust of modern/fake things. The first sight of The Franchise fills him with anxiety as he is confronted with the lost glory of the English country house – this aspect was discussed *Chapter One* –, while the disillusionment with the present state of the country living a uniform lifestyle in an endless row of suburban homes hits him when he meets the Wynns, the adoptive parents of Betty Kane, the alleged victim of the kidnappers.

Blair's movement between past and present is one-directional, which means that his investigation leads him to the outside, enabling him to leave his memory world behind, unlike Campion and Wimsey, who arrive from London and are already experienced in the matters of the world. Blair's genuine embeddedness in and his involuntary deconstruction of the memory world make him, nonetheless, an even more dynamic character than Wimsey or Campion. His inexperience in investigation and the public world of cruelty and dishonesty is crucial in his transformation into maturity and adulthood. If Blair's "static preindustrial world with its traditional and external hierarchy of values ever existed in a pure state, modernity has certainly seen its disruption" (Wright 17). Tey wants his sleuth to be competent in the institutionalised forms of modernity, just like Campion or Wimsey, a skill which "becomes a prerequisite for survival" (Wright 18). Blair cannot avoid leaving his life behind and coming out of his 'mouse-hole'. Like the other two, he will have to establish contacts with the real world, which he does by defending two female suspects as a legal advisor. There is a parallel between the unfolding of the mystery and Blair's developing awareness of his new life. The more he knows about the circumstances of the case, the larger the space he moves within. He embarks upon activities he has never pursued before, such as travelling, visiting friends or meeting women who go shopping or loathe domesticity. At the same time, he is portrayed as a genuine English gentleman struggling between the present and the past. He does not like to be emotionally stirred up or to meddle in others' private lives. The new world waiting for him is threatening now that he has become aware of his own life, echoing Wright's remark that "[i]n modernity the forms of life are open to interpretation and Man's life is no longer written in the stars" (16). The passage below illustrates Blair's transformation:

And he had been given tea by Miss Tuff out of the blue-patterned china on the lacquer tray covered by the fair white cloth and accompanied by two digestive biscuits on a plate [...] He had sat [...] feeling uneasy about his comfortable life and conscious of time slipping past him. But today the digestive biscuits held no reproach for him, because he had stepped outside the routine they typified. (131)

Robert's reconciliation with himself arrives in the final phase of this process, when available social and geographical space and possibility of movement exceed their former dimensions. By travelling to Canada to visit his sister, he gives his life a new beginning. It is fairly obvious that, in *The Franchise Affair*, the historicity of everyday life stands for the unconscious, forgetful and incompetent life of the middle-class, but it also strongly reflects the mental state of the nation. Tey's explicit mockery of this phenomenon shows that such a lifestyle is practically unsustainable after the Second World War, so Blair cannot become a mediator like Campion or Wimsey, what is more, his transformation justifies the futility of maintaining the illusion of the past. For Tey, recognizing and reinterpreting one's position in modernity is inescapable, and this realization makes for a conscious, efficient dynamism in space and time for the individual.

The analysis of the gentleman detective as a *lieu de mémoire* in Golden Age crime fiction allows us to explore thoroughly the reasons for the ambiguity that surrounds this character. The appearance of the revered ideal of the gentleman as a detective raises more questions and uncertainties in the deeper layers of the texts analysed here than it would first seem. Although writers use him to reinforce the illusion of the possibility of sustaining the past and reinforcing stability in the chaos after the Great War, his figure is also used to indicate how ambiguous, unreliable and fragile this image can be. Given that interwar detective fiction borrows the figure of the gentleman together with the different ideologies it has accumulated through the centuries, these layers creep to the surface and become visible in the course of the criminal investigation. While the detective returns as the embodiment of the traditional image of the gentleman, his competence and experience in the modern world and in the aftermath of wartime traumas (psychological instability reflected respectively in his ridiculous appearance, effeminate manners or extreme withdrawal in his domestic environment) tend to deconstruct the mythical features he is meant to perpetuate. Nevertheless, his involvement in crime provides the reader with a chance to reconsider his character and see it as a more modern, dynamic figure who contributes to the dissolution of the mythical image of England and Englishness as much as to its preservation.

### Chapter 3: The Other Society: Women and Crime in Golden Age Crime Fiction

Gill Plain's article on two of Allingham's novels<sup>47</sup>, "A good cry or a nice rape: Margery Allingham's Gender Agenda", quotes one of Campion's comments on his sister's emotional outbursts from *The Fashion in Shrouds* (1938) in its title. Campion's remark sounds brutal and entirely insensitive to his sister's troubles in her failing love affair with Alan Dell, the famous aircraft designer: "'Oh,' said Mr Campion furiously, 'this damned silly introspective rot. What you need, my girl, is a good cry or a nice rape – either, I should think'" (133). The incident suggests a shockingly new perspective on Campion's treatment of women in general, its apparent approval of misogyny leaving the reader in confusion regarding Allingham's gender politics, or her attitude to the role of women in interwar society, suggests Plain. She also calls Allingham a "troublesome figure" (61), because she is evasive and because her writings resist all sorts of categorisation normally applied in the genre.

Campion's sister, Val Ferris, is a very successful fashion designer who leads a financially satisfying and independent life. Yet, when Dell eventually proposes to her after considerable difficulties due to his own infidelity, she quickly agrees to marry him. While Val has everything to pursue her own ambitions in life, her future prospects as an independent woman are continuously undermined, which might suggest that Allingham leaves little space for a feminist sub-text in her novels and prefers a conventional pattern in the relationship between man and woman, inscribing her texts into the dominant ideology of the 1930s, explains Plain. Martin also focuses on Val's character, concluding that Val's views on married life<sup>48</sup> reinforce Allingham's "innate conservatism, which still thought in essentially traditional categories: the husband must be cast as a superior being, and if in reality he is not, then it's a minor, at times a major catastrophe" (118).

In the light of these two critical assessments, Allingham's gender politics seems less chaotic, but the overview would be incomplete without a discussion of other key female figures in the novel. *The Fashion in Shrouds* features three women as representative characters of progressive feminism, yet they vary considerably in terms of profession, social status and their relation to sexuality. Plain's assessment of Allingham as troublesome in her gender politics is based exclusively on her reading of Val's character, but a more inclusive approach to the female characters in the novel could lead to different conclusions. While it is undoubtedly Val who

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<sup>47</sup>*The Fashion in Shrouds* and *Traitor's Purse*

<sup>48</sup>"The hero persists. [...] I tell you I'd rather die than have to face it that he was neither better nor even more intelligent than I am" (64).

turns out to be the most ambiguous of the three major female characters, Georgia, a successful and celebrated actress and Amanda, Campion's would-be wife, are equally problematic representations of femininity, although from two very different perspectives. Georgia bears all the negative and subversive traits of the New Woman, becoming the embodiment of female monstrosity, unlike Amanda, who re-enters the scene – after *Sweet Danger* (1933) – as a confident professional woman whose sexual morals resemble those of her Victorian predecessors.

When Martin claims that, in *The Fashion in Shrouds*, Allingham's women are far more realistic than her men (118), he seems to disregard the fact that all of these characters are described from Campion's point of view – which, however, is also corroborated by the narrator's remarks. If Allingham chooses the perspective of Campion, an aristocratic gentleman detective, from which to represent the women of the interwar period, a view which seems to be in line with her own conservative ideology, this is very far from a realistic image of women. This is also the case in Tey's *The Franchise Affair* (1948) where the teenage female offender, seen throughout through Blair's perspective, is portrayed as a repulsive and unscrupulous sex-maniac. Similarly to Allingham's sexually abnormal Georgia Wells, Tey's villain, Betty Kane, is another distorted representation of the New Woman, contrasted with Marion Sharpe's Victorian morals. Sayers' *The Documents in the Case* (1930) introduces three very different women, a New Woman who is represented without any animus, a neurotic spinster and an urban housewife. Although Sayers's book is an epistolary novel portraying the characters from different viewpoints, the reader cannot escape the overall impression that it is Jack Munting's<sup>49</sup> point of view that dominates in the text and influences one's judgement of Sayers's female figures.

The ambiguous gender politics of these Golden Age writers – thus, the representation of these female characters – ought to be read as symptomatic of a changing society. Golden Age authors illustrate what Rita Felski highlights in *The Gender of Modernity*: “images of femininity were to play a central role in prevailing anxieties and fears and hopeful imaginings about the distinctive features of the modern age” (19). There is a considerable resemblance between the novels by the three writers, since they all portray the New Woman as the embodiment of these fears and anxieties, although they revise this figure and divide her into two contrasting characters. Sally Ledger explains that the original idea of the New Woman signified the enlightened ideal woman for the feminists of the age – the *fin de siècle* –, someone who is well-

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<sup>49</sup> According to Kenney, he is Sayers' avatar (146).

educated, determined and who “would demand that marriage should be freed from the contamination of male sexual licence” (20). Conversely, “the *fin de siècle* clearly marks her as a problem, as a challenge to the apparently homogeneous culture of Victorianism [...] It was the putative association between the New Woman and ‘free love’ that led to the labelling of the New Woman as a sexual decadent” (*The New Woman* 11-12). On the one hand, these Golden Age novels introduce this ‘bad’ New Woman type of the lower classes, stigmatizing her as dangerous and even villainous, and the ‘good’ New Woman, on the other, who is the educated, upper-middle-class, intelligent, professional woman. This latter type, called by Schaub the female gentleman, will be the subject of *Chapter Four*. The present chapter focuses on the subversive, or even sexually uncontrollable female type whose criminal inclinations are rooted not only in modern ideas but, in some cases, in heredity as well. This latter aspect becomes an important issue in Tey, but Allingham also implies the connection between villainous features and one’s social background.

In *Guilty but Insane*, Samantha Walton explains that in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, criminal anthropologists agreed that “[e]arly manifestations of vicious behaviour were seen by some as proof positive that children could be born with impaired moral sense irrespective of the environment in which they were raised” (136). Criminality, as Walton remarks, “was seen widely as an inherited trait” (142). In *Women, Crime and Criminology*, Carol Smart enumerates three notable – or, in two cases, notorious – works by criminal anthropologists and sociologists that shaped and considerably influenced public opinion about female offenders. Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero’s *The Female Offender* from 1895, W. I. Thomas’s *The Unadjusted Girl*, published in 1923, and Otto Pollak’s *The Criminality of Women* (1950), though they vary widely in many respects, originate in the “(mis)conception of the innate character and nature of women, which is in turn founded upon a biological determinist position” (27). Lombroso, who introduced the notion of the born criminal, was informed by Mendelian genetics and Darwinian evolutionary theories which became extremely popular around the turn of the century. He claims that the female criminal is the worst type of all because, besides manifesting male violence, she also lacks maternal instincts. As a result, “‘true’ female criminals are biologically abnormal, because first they are rare and second they are not fully female” (34). W.I. Thomas’s claim that “criminality or deviance is a [...] socially induced pathology rather than a biological abnormality” (37) found supporters in liberal humanist groups. Even the nature of crimes was considered to be different depending on one’s social status: there existed a so called ‘criminal class’ which lawmakers and law-enforcers usually identified with the lower classes (Pugh 103). According to Thomas, the female criminal



is amoral because she entirely lacks a middle-class moral code. “[She] will use her sexuality not for its appropriate purpose but in order to achieve [...] life-styles [she] desire[s]” (qtd. in Smart 44). Ferrero and Lombroso regarded prostitution as connected to criminal proclivities. In their view, “prostitutes are women who are interested in sex, who do not find satisfaction in indiscriminate sexual intercourse and who are apparently over-sexed” (Smart 80). Prostitution was seen as a sign of atavism and degeneracy. As a result, Smart concludes, they are “essentially uncivilized, wild, quite untrained and aggressive” (79). She also points out that prostitution was naively equated with less restrictive and different sexual mores which were contrasted with the Victorian ethics of repressed sexuality that symbolised a civilized society. Cate Haste also remarks that the general view in the interwar era still held that women who engaged in premarital sex were also ‘amateur prostitutes’ (72).

The present analysis is going to look at how the three writers treat their female offenders in their novels, which might also reveal more about their respective attitudes to the competing images of femininity after the Great War. Although these authors welcome the new possibilities that female emancipation achieved, they cannot truly give up their conservative ideology when it comes to the question of liberated sexuality which they automatically associate with lower class status, middle-class ethics, lack of intellect or congenial occupation. Aware of the controversies surrounding the figure of the New Woman, they were inclined to distinguish between the good and the bad type of woman, the latter not even worthy of being emancipated, for emancipation only makes her reckless and uncontrollable. The distortion of the bad New Woman type is inflected and enhanced by Tey’s ideas about genetics – such views, which give rise to outmoded ideas about the connection of crime and heredity, are only implied by Allingham’s fiction. While Golden Age authors are usually claimed to be forward-looking in gender politics, their treatment of women in general still reveals the influence of Victorian principles, especially in their representation of the villainous type of female.

### 3.1. The Female Criminal in Josephine Tey's *The Franchise Affair*

Tey's novel came out decades after these principles were widespread in England, still, she retains much of their spirit in her description of Betty, the female offender, who places false accusations of abuse and kidnap against the Sharpes, who are both representations of Victorian respectability. Sandra Roy observes that "After World War II, the emphasis [in Tey's fiction] was focused more on the sociology of the crime – the motivation of the criminal and his environment" (46). Tey's novel, however, seems to focus more on the effect of heredity in her description of Betty Kane's criminal inclinations than the social factor, which Roy sees as a reinforcement of Tey's belief in the connection between genetics and criminal behaviour (60). The story is located in a small town, Milford, where the inhabitants are suspicious of anything or anyone different from the ordinary. The fact that Marion has a dark complexion, for instance, awakens racist prejudices in some of the characters, such as Blair's aunt, who implies that Marion is genetically inclined to criminality. Nevertheless, Tey dispels these suspicions by portraying Marion an honourable woman, the opposite of Betty Kane. Tey's source, as Roy suggests (120), was probably one of the fictional recreations<sup>50</sup> of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century criminal case, (120), the disappearance of Elizabeth Canning on 1 January, 1753. Elizabeth claimed to have been kidnapped and held against her will and believed to have identified one of her captors, Mary Squires, whom she described as 'a gypsy'. The other captor, called "Mother" Wells, is very probably the original for Mrs Sharpe. Elizabeth Canning had eyes wide apart and was an infernal liar according to the sources, just like Betty Kane. Considering Tey's approval of long outdated theories of criminal anthropologists<sup>51</sup>, Betty becomes the most extreme representation of an inherently evil, demonic female character<sup>52</sup> in the novels discussed in the present chapter. Although we see her personality described by several other characters, like the Sharpes, or the liberal Bishop of Larborough (Roy 117), it is Robert Blair's conservative vision of her that dominates the narrative. Blair's devastating portrait of the girl is obviously aggravated by the fact that the loss of his cosy memory world – based on his unconscious daily routine discussed in *Chapter Two* – is due to what he sees as Betty's criminal inclination and liberated sexuality.

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<sup>50</sup> The crime novel of Lillian de la Torre, *Elizabeth is Missing* (1945), or the Arthur Machen book, *The Canning Wonder* (1926)" (Roy 120).

<sup>51</sup>In Sayers' *Gaudy Night* one of the undergraduates, Miss Pyke, brings up Lombroso's theory after overhearing Harriet's comment on one of the students in the Hall, "She looks quite normal" (108). In response, Miss Pyke remarks: "I suppose, [...] even murderers look much like other people, Miss Vane. Or do you hold any opinions about the theories put forward by Lombroso? I understand that they are now to a considerable extent exploded" (108).

<sup>52</sup>Sandra Roy points out that until 1949, Tey trusted "clever teen-age girls"<sup>52</sup> (16); because of her secretiveness, the reason why she changed her attitude is not known.

Betty is born to a working-class family in London. Only a baby when her parents die in a bomb explosion in the war, she is adopted by the Wynns and is moved to Aylesbury, a small town. From an old acquaintance of Betty's biological parents, Blair learns that her birth-mother was a bad wife and a bad mother, eager to "have the child off her hands" (*The Franchise Affair* 85), going out for her cigarettes three times a day and dancing with officers at night – the full-fledged middle-class fantasy of a working-class 'bad mother', coming straight from cinematic representations. The father, however, as this old friend says, "deserved better luck than that woman". He was "[t]erribly fond of the little girl" (86), he even wanted to go away to the country, but his wife would not go. Betty Kane, also labelled as a cupboard-love kid in London, has eyes set wide apart and of darkish blue colour, a physical feature that evokes popular ideas of sexual promiscuity. With such genes, it is suggested, she is doomed to be dangerous and follow her mother's path. The hereditary nature of criminality is openly articulated by Mrs Sharpe too: "I think she is her mother's daughter; and was merely setting out a little early on the road her mother took. As selfish, as self-indulgent, as greedy, as plausible as the blood she came of" (180). Marion formulates the ultimately racist conclusion about the girl's inherently evil nature: "I can tell you one thing about her. She is over-sexed [...] with that colour of eye [...] That opaque dark blue, like a very faded navy – it's infallible" (36). Her remark recalls the most abominable aspects of criminal pathology, more exactly the above mentioned Ferrero and Lombroso's characterization of the prostitute. Marion Sharpe's diagnosis is completely overlooked by the police but cannot evade Blair's attention who notices in the girl "a savage emotion, primitive and cruel" (33) during their first encounter. Betty's removal from the city into the peaceful monotony of a small town might also be seen as a peculiar version of the idea of 'city dirt' corrupting the English countryside. Since Golden Age crime fiction mostly subscribed to the myth of the country as the embodiment of stability and continuity of the pastoral idyll, it is no wonder that Betty's presence in Millford, where the house called The Franchise stands, reminds Blair of the perversions of modernity. In Tey's novel, the English countryside is preserved for those who deserve it and who are seen as 'good', respectable people.

As Golden Age crime fiction seeks to restore order and find a rational explanation to the mystery, it is hardly surprising that Blair is eager to do the same thing. Based on his beliefs about the so called 'criminal class', he is bound to see his investigation into Betty's family background as the only way to find a rational explanation to the deviant acts of a teenage girl, but his strategy is in the end revealed as only a middle-class illusion. By emphasizing the loving atmosphere that Betty receives from her adopting family, Tey seems to exclude the

presupposition that the criminal's environment is a determining factor in becoming a criminal. Blair's anti-liberalism is also evident in his hostility to the Bishop of Larborough, who, in letters sent popular magazines like the *Ack-Emma* and the *Watchman*, represents Betty as a victim who resorts to crime only because of her circumstances, calling her a "frustrated angel" (145). Blair's flat refusal of such liberal ideas is not unrelated to the traditions of the "classic detective story [that] has little patience with the seductive modern notion that people who turn to crime are "trapped" by their environment and therefore blameless" (Kenney 147). Accordingly, Blair tends to ground his judgment of Betty on contemporary scientific (pseudoscientific) theories, taking the middle-class value system as its basis. His prejudice towards the girl is further intensified by what Betty's stepmother tells him about the girl. She says that Betty "would never imagine the things [...] there had to be a real thing there [...] and she was always a little greedy" (77). Blair's emotional reaction to what he hears about the girl's childhood is rather fierce. The final shock comes to him, though, when Mrs Wynn, Betty's foster mother tells him that she has found a lipstick in her pocket on her return home; this was "a straw that could be added to the heap he had collected" (81). Blair is no longer in doubt that with the inclination to make-up and 'reality', Betty cannot be the innocent girl she pretends to be<sup>53</sup>. In Blair's eyes, she is impelled by her evil instincts to pick up a married man at a restaurant, invite him to the cinema, travel in his car and go off with him to Copenhagen. To hide all of what happens and justify her absence of a fortnight, she makes up a story of her being kidnapped and forced to do domestic labour in a house she has only seen from the outside.

From a different perspective, Betty's escape and sexual adventure with a married man could be interpreted as a form of female resistance and a revolt against control, but because Tey chose to portray her from the middle-class masculine point of view, the reader learns not only about her criminal inheritance but also about the process that transforms her from a revolting teenager into a Modern Avenger, a girl who finally grows into "a monster"<sup>54</sup> in his [Blair's] mind, he thought of her only as a perverted creature" (206).

This setup seems to characterize all the three novels, but with varying intensity. It could be suggested that, in all of them, the villain seems to be a threat to middle-class values because she functions as a return of the repressed, breaking the silence over the taboo of sexuality. The Franchise is surrounded with a high wall to designate the boundary between the public and the private, but the wall, I would argue, has yet another symbolic meaning. In his *Introduction* to

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<sup>53</sup> Apart from heredity, deception is a crucial theme in the novel, but as Roy says, it is the "most pervading theme in all of Tey's novels" (60). This feature, however, resembles Christie's method too.

<sup>54</sup> Smart remarks that according to Lombroso and Ferrero, "[a]s a double exception [rare and not fully female], the criminal woman is consequently a monster" (34).

*Gender and the History of Sexuality*, Franz Eder claims that “Victorianism, which brought about an extensive prudery, also erected a wall of silence around all sexual matters” (3). In “Dangerous Sexualities”, Judith R. Walkowitz claims that the respectable woman is sexually passive and talks about sex mostly when discussing sexual dangers and “the proliferation of sexual practices outside the sanctity of the home, disengaged from the procreative act” (370). Blair’s obsession may then grow out of his confrontation with the private on public premises which he feels he has to fight against and put it back into its proper place. Domesticity is a key motif and theme in the novel, one that could also be approached from the aspect of sexuality. While Marion keeps repeating how much she loathes domesticity, Betty is supposedly kidnapped to do ‘domestic’ chores since the other women refuse to do them. In “Prostitution”, Kathryn Norberg points out that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the French word ‘servante’ “covered not just housemaids but bar girls, in particular the women who worked in the taverns. Consequently, we may assume that the label *domestique* covered not just maids of all work, but hardened prostitutes as well” (471). While Betty is the embodiment of Blair’s fears and anxieties of modernity, she is also the exact opposite of Marion Sharpe, the idealized modern woman who is independent and leads a sexually pure life at the same time. Although this motif will be analysed in the next chapter, it should be noted here that these two women indicate how controversial the map of femininity was in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and how diverse their literary representations were.

Tey’s novel also sheds light on the spatial movement of Betty only to enhance the distressing traits in her character as well as to illustrate the relation between sexual liberation and women’s use of public spaces. Before she disappears with her lover, Betty’s interest is aroused by the Franchise during a bus-ride – on a double-decker – when she goes past the house and glances over the wall. As a reward for her good behaviour, the Wynns send her away on holiday to the Tilsits, relatives living in Larbourough. The Tilsits live in a deprived part of the town in “a row of indistinguishable houses where one shouldn’t leave his car out on the streets (97). For Blair, it is a puzzle to find out why Betty enjoyed her stay so much or what she found desirable in the dreary and grimy streets. He eventually discovers that Betty spent all her holiday going to the pictures<sup>55</sup>, small restaurants and cafés as well as bus-riding “anywhere the fancy took her” (101). These are public places where a respectable woman does not go. Betty Kane loitering in public places all alone combines the Victorian vision which associated such women with prostitution (Felski 16), with the later middle-class aversion to the working classes, once

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<sup>55</sup> “Among the young, and among women generally, the cinema offered serious competition to the pub. Moving pictures had appeared as early as the 1890s, but during the Edwardian period and the First World War thousands of cinemas opened, many of them in former music halls” (Pugh 229).

again using female sexual promiscuity as a marker of difference. The bus taking her around the country is viewed as an unwanted means of spreading evil in the innocent landscape. In Golden Age crime fiction, public transport and the demonic woman are both associated with modernity, although Betty's alleged incarceration in the attic of the Franchise may also refer to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, the madwoman locked away in the attic, a perfect place for hiding the cultural repressed. This hint might indicate that Tey's depiction of the Victorian tradition, which the country upper middle class still longs for, may be seen as ironic. By bringing pieces of the new life into the intimacy of the country, she points out that one cannot disregard the present any longer and wait for it to disappear. Blair's anxiety probably originates in the recognition of an inevitable change he is exposed to while dealing with the girl's case. He realizes that his investigation is no longer about finding out whether Betty is lying or not: it is her freedom, uncontrollable behaviour which he finds unnerving. He understands that his experience with this woman has resulted in an inevitable change in his consciousness that urges him to reconsider the values he has built his life on.

### **3.2. The New Woman as a Villain in Allingham's *The Fashion in Shrouds***

When Campion makes the acquaintance of Georgia Wells, the famous and successful actress in Allingham's *The Fashion in Shrouds*, he articulates a despairing vision of the modern woman to Amanda: "That's Georgia. That's what comes of emancipating the wrong type of female" (162). Campion's remark sounds as a succinct summary of what Tey's Blair feels when he faces the young female offender. Georgia Wells' character seems to embody both figures, the actress and the prostitute creating the image of a typical *femme fatale* of the 30s. Allingham contrasts Georgia with Amanda and Val to show how shallow and sexually promiscuous Georgia is in her social relations. As mentioned earlier, Allingham chooses Campion's point-of-view to represent Georgia's villainous nature. His opinion of her is reinforced and complemented by Amanda at times, but it is his analysis that becomes dominant in the novel. Both Tey and Allingham use a conservative male character from the respectable classes to define the 'wrong type of female' as a menace or a monster, someone likely to express a certain degree of unease about women's emancipation and to highlight the negative consequences of crossing moral and social boundaries. Although Mr. Campion's figure is drawn as the exaggerated silly-ass type at the beginning of his career, someone who can be easily overlooked,

this particular book shows him as a more mature person<sup>56</sup> in his judgements about the other characters. Campion's sobriety and seriousness here might be attributed to two facts. While he is charged with investigating the circumstances of the suicide of Richard Portland-Smith, a distinguished barrister and Georgia's former husband, he finds himself trapped in another murder mystery, the death of Raymond Ramilies, Georgia's present husband. From the very first encounter with Georgia, Campion feels a fair amount of shock in her presence and has a strong suspicion of her criminal inclinations. His first impressions are based on her rapid shifts between roles to catch other people's attention: "From that moment her manner changed subtly. It was such a gradual metamorphosis, so exquisitely done, that Campion only just noticed it, but the fact remained that she began to remind him strongly of the heroine in *The Little Sacrifice*. Touches of the character crept into her voice, into her helpless little gestures [...]" (30). Campion is "shocked and grudgingly impressed" (ibid.), and considers Georgia's ability to rapidly shift between roles as dangerous and uncanny. He cannot help noticing that her audience is duly enthralled, especially men, who fail to realize that she has only clothed "an embarrassing revelation of the ordinary with something rather charming" (31). Although Campion feels the attraction and stands in bewilderment, his aristocratic background and common sense do not let him down when facing something vulgar. In his world, as in that of most Golden Age crime writers, vulgarity is the ultimate argument, a quality that easily morphs into criminality. "Georgia was vulgar. Georgia's vulgarity was staggering. It was the overpowering, insufferable vulgarity to which nothing is sacred. It was also, he found, the vulgarity which breeds vulgarity<sup>57</sup>" (117).

Georgia's relationship with men, though revolutionary for the age, is limited to sexual satisfaction, possession and the exercise of control. She calls herself a 'natural actress' who is interested in embodying a character in a relationship, but when she is done, she loses interest and gets bored until she finds the next challenge. She compares people to gowns that one can wear off and then throw away<sup>58</sup>. Georgia's treatment of people as objects implies that she is hollow inside: "It's my tragedy. When I feel morbid I wonder if I myself exist at all" (200). The hollowness of a particular type of woman is dramatized not only by Allingham but by Sayers

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<sup>56</sup>The curiosity about the Campion saga is the visible character development in the series that Campion undergoes and this novel could be a relevant example to prove it.

<sup>57</sup> In the first Campion novel, *The Crime at Black Dudley*, Campion explains to Abbershaw, a pathologist that the superiority of his class is partly due to the fact that his kind never does and is supposed to do anything vulgar: "I live like all intelligent people, by my wits, and although I have often done things that mother wouldn't like, I have remembered her parting words and have never been vulgar" (73).

<sup>58</sup>"I love them. I want to be them. I want to get into their lives...I can't stop it. I'm just the same as any little servant girl helplessly in love for the first time, but it wears off... When I've made a character I've made it and she's done [...] She bores me unbearably. Val you understand. You've made some divine gowns but you wouldn't wear any one of them for the rest of your life" (200).

too, whose Mrs Harrison in *The Documents in the Case* tends to play roles to get love and attention. The two female characters live in very different financial conditions – Georgia is part of London’s high society – but the fact that they share some of the villainous traits of female culprits might imply the belief that evil is not only “universal but also made to appear harmless because ever-present” (25), says Richard Martin. Campion’s discriminative remarks against Georgia then may be articulated on the basis of her humble origins and his observations of her sickening personality. Her second husband, Ramilies, refers to Georgia as a monstrous creature whose mission is to seduce and destroy men due to the “damned low-class blood in her” (104), and yet another reference to her class is revealed when she is forced to admit her marriage to Portland-Smith which had to be kept secret because of the difference in their social status<sup>59</sup>. The figure of the actress who is primitive and driven by animal instincts is not a novelty in Allingham’s oeuvre, but it is in *The Fashion in Shrouds* that she becomes a real character. In *The Crime at Black Dudley*, the aristocratic host of the ancient house is in love with a similarly low-class actress who performs various services for the mafia. In the first novel, this actress is only mentioned as one of the reasons for the murder, but what is more exciting is that she as a professional is already represented as sexually dangerous and demoralizing, let alone her involvement in crime. This foreshadows one’s conclusion about this female figure who represents the wrong type in Campion’s eyes<sup>60</sup>. Just like in the first novel, the actress is not directly guilty of murder but is responsible for inducing men to commit crimes<sup>61</sup>. In the present novel, it is Georgia’s manager, Ferdie Paul, who destroys the husbands only to make her life and career more enjoyable and successful. Judging from what Georgia has told him before his decision to kill, he finds justification by pointing out to Campion that the first husband was “pompous, pig-headed and thick-skinned” (273), while the second was dangerous, wild, reckless, the “scatty beaver breed” (273). Apart from Ferdie’s confession of having murdered these men for Georgia’s sake, he explains that he could not let these men ruin her since she is a great artist. He concludes that Georgia’s talent as an artist is justified by the amount of money she makes: “‘She’s a considerable artist, you know’, he said. ‘She makes a lot of money [...] She’s a valuable property, Campion; a great possession’” (273). Georgia seems to serve a double function: she is the maker and the object of her own production which can be exchanged for money. Ferdie Paul’s views on the professional actress as commodity recall Felski’s

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<sup>59</sup>“‘He insisted on it being a secret,’ she protested. ‘It was his career. Apparently if you’re going to be County Court judge the stage is still a bit low to marry into’” (199).

<sup>60</sup> Sayers’ *Strong Poison* also mentions an actress, Cremorna Garden, who becomes the scapegoat of the family because of her choice to run away from home and go on the stage. Although the family has cut ties with her, her wealth is still considered after she dies which causes the death of Philip Boyes, Harriet’s lover.

<sup>61</sup> This is an exciting resemblance between the Golden Age and the American hard-boiled crime fiction. Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* (1939) is a typical example of this feature.



argument: “Woman has been seen as an object exchanged between men in a capitalist economy, compelled to render herself as seductive as possible in order to attract the gaze of the male buyer” (64). Although it is the prostitute who is the perfect embodiment of female commodification, the actress too is a figure of public pleasure, as previously argued, someone who is able to reproduce the “structuring logic of commodity aesthetics” of society<sup>62</sup> (19).

Shallowness and promiscuous sexuality are tightly knit in all the three novels but still it seems that Allingham is the most outspoken in her description of how the younger generation related to this matter in the interwar era. In *Rules of Desire*, Cate Haste says that by the 1930s “Women were no longer sexual innocents” (61); although pre-marital constraints still applied, a strong emphasis was placed on sexual satisfaction for both parties in a relationship. Mary Stopes’s *Married Love*, published in 1918, broke the silence over female sexuality. Stopes was one of the pioneers “in the transformation of the sexual ethic of the next two decades” (Haste 58), who claimed that women, too, needed sexual pleasure that could contribute to their happiness and health in their lives as either a wife or a mother. Nevertheless, these women writers still treat the issue with Victorian prudishness, especially in their representation of the evil low-class woman versus the educated one with a more distinguished social status and a negligible interest in sexuality. It seems that the peculiarity of the gender politics of these Golden Age writers stems in the fact that considerations of class intersect with and override gender considerations: emancipation, admirable in upper-class women, becomes repulsive in representatives of the lower classes. While all the three novels sound a relatively pessimistic and disapproving note on the issue of female sexuality, the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter from Allingham’s novel seems to blur the division between the two types. Richard Martin suggests that the author’s use of the motif of strengths and weaknesses in her analysis of femininity may clarify Allingham’s ambiguity concerning women’s roles (118), which I also consider as a recourse to her conservatism in social hierarchy. In the novel, it is Val who keeps meditating over the differences between men and women and brings up the topic of love over and over again. This is due to the conflict instigated between Georgia and her after the actress seduced Alan Dell, the man she is in love with. While Georgia is evidently the portrait of the sexual and moral transgression of the modern woman, Val’s monologue about the inherent problem of the female race and their relation to love tends to obscure the boundary between the social classes. In a conversation with Campion, Val expresses the irreconcilable differences

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<sup>62</sup>Beyond resonating with contemporary fears and anxieties about female sexuality, Allingham here may also imply the same concern in her novel as Sayers’ *The Documents in the Case*. Money devalues art, art has become a commodity to be consumed in great quantity. The art denounced in these novels is all about glamour and spectacle to make an impression but shockingly shallow in reality.

between men and women which originate from the traditional division between them, granting that women are more emotional and instinctive:

If you fell in love and something went wrong you'd think it all out like a little gent and think it all quietly away [...] You're a civilized masculine product. But when it happens to me, when it happens to Georgia, our entire world slides round [...] Our feeling is twice as strong as our heads and we haven't been trained for thousands of years. We're feminine, you fool! (132)

Val sounds confused about the success and the legitimacy of women's emancipation, and her doubts are echoed by the narrator. Val's lifestyle and professional success, however, are in marked contrast with her ideas of women's place in society. The above passage seems to question the values of her own achievements and talent as a woman since she will never live up to the rational ideal of masculinity. The narrator expresses the same controversy in a lengthier passage which, at least according to Martin, articulates Allingham's own conservatism and experience:

They were two fine ladies of a fine modern world, in which their status had been raised until they stood as equals with their former protection. Their several responsibilities were far heavier than most men's and their abilities greater. Their freedom was limitless. There they were at two o'clock in the morning, driving back in their fine carriage to lonely little houses, bought, made lovely and maintained by the proceeds of their own labours. They were both mistress and master, little Liliths, fragile but powerful in their way, since the livelihood of a great number of their fellow beings depended directly upon them, and yet, since they had not relinquished their femininity, within them, touching the very core and fountain of their strength, was the dreadful primitive weakness of the female of any species. (210)

The juxtaposition of strengths and weaknesses, which is originally articulated by Campion in the dénouement as he analyses the possible reasons for and the circumstances of the murders, is also an essential part of Allingham's analysis of femininity (118), claims Martin. Both of the quotations imply the strengths and weaknesses of being a woman, but it is probably the one by the narrator which gives a clearer picture of the author's own idea. While she approves of the opportunities due to which women could take up a profession and pursue a career as a strength, the weakness comes from their nature, implying that to become a career woman, they need to relinquish their femininity and become like "masculine women" (Martin 119). The trouble comes only for women in love who have to choose between "the subordinate role of the beloved

or by remaining single, to confirm male prejudices of her lack of attraction or her essential immorality" (ibid.). Alan Dell's proposal to Val is a clear allusion to the narrator's remark: "I don't want a mistress or a companion. I want a wife" (262). Val's immediate acceptance of Dell's proposal and demand is totally inconsistent with her professional success and independence. The fact that she needs to submit herself to her would-be husband and give up her career suggests a very different image of the professional woman from the one Allingham realized in her own life. She never gave up her professional autonomy even after her marriage, despite the fact that as a wife she would have been willing to "play a conformist role" (118). Her biographers, nevertheless, always remark that she could have hardly embraced this ideal, being financially responsible for the whole household. At least, in her fiction "she could envisage the sacrifice of professional independence to the demands of a masculine vision of domestic bliss" (119).

### 3.3. Sayers' Women in *The Documents in the Case*

Leahy argues that Sayers' *The Documents in the Case* is her "most complex detective novel, not only in the carrying out of the murder but in all the often superfluous and yet fascinating moral discussions prompted by the killing" (84). The complexity, however, is also enhanced by the epistolary form, which is rather unusual in Golden Age detective fiction. As the form suggests, the reader is informed about the characters from letters describing them from a subjective and often biased perspective. In one of her essays, "Gaudy Night" (1946), Sayers described the book as a "serious criticism of life," implying that the crime interest was secondary to discussing contemporary issues in relation to the woman problem and marriage which were the foremost concerns for Sayers in some of her other novels, such as *Gaudy Night*. It seems that with regard to this particular problem, *The Documents in the Case* can be read as the counterpart of *Gaudy Night*, drawing on similar dilemmas, the role of women in contemporary society, the clash between the old-fashioned housewife and the New Woman. Catherine Kenney says that *The Documents in the Case* was also an attempt to portray an ideal marriage between equals, preparing the ground for Wimsey and Harriet. To criticise outmoded ideas about women after the war, Sayers did not only use fiction but shared her views in essays, too. The most notable pieces are included in *Are Women Human?* which reflect on similar questions, with the difference that the novel approaches the issue through the perspective of various characters, leaving it all to the reader to decide. While she never claimed herself to be a feminist as she explains in "Are Women Human?", for fear that feminism might mean something aggressive which "might do more harm than good" (21), she did have advanced

ideas about sex-equality. *The Documents in the Case* is able to incorporate both the old and the new in its representation of female characters who do not only reflect on the anxieties originating in female emancipation and the modern, but on those of Victorianism still strongly prevalent in interwar society. Unlike Tey or Allingham, Sayers does not look upon the past to find reassuring answers to the dilemma but illustrates the tragic consequences of its continued presence through her treatment of female characters.

The novel features five people living in a mid-Victorian house in Bayswater where the domestic sphere dramatizes, as Kenney remarks, the tragically little interest or challenge that the mistress of an average modern home is left with (145) and which might also result in the murder of the husband. The author's devastating diagnosis of the middle-class milieu which becomes the location of crime is partly due to the banality and lack of individuality that the housewife embodies and partly to sexual frustrations, inhibitions, loneliness, and isolation, all of which arise from dull middle-class respectability. *The Documents in the Case* reminds us of Sayers's provocative observation in the 5 August 1934 issue of *The Sunday Times* about the hardly acknowledged relationship between respectability and crime: "of all motives [...] respectability – the least emphasized in fiction – is one of the most powerful in fact, and is the root cause of a long series of irregularities, ranging from murder itself to the queerest and most eccentric misdemeanors" (qtd. in Kenney 144). Looking at the reasons that lead to the murder of Mr Harrison – which she sees as far from inevitable – Aoife Leahy concludes that the murder is primarily the result of the characters' ignorance of Victorian law<sup>63</sup>. She sees the characters as typically Victorian figures who are unable to recognize themselves as such due to the modern context. While Leahy offers a meticulous analysis of Sayers's references to Victorian art and literature, she does not highlight those Victorian ideas which could paralyze women's ambitions in the interwar years. According to Gunn and Bell, Victorian respectability involved a very strict code of middle-class behaviour concerning sexuality, employment and education. For men it also meant an enormous pressure, as by the 1860s it had become a convention that a man was not supposed to "marry until he could keep his wife and family in comfort" (50). By the interwar years, they point out, suburban respectability refashioned Englishness, giving way to a "more peaceable and domesticated national self-image" (80), yet, respectability still entailed "moral rectitude [...] frugality and temperance", which "were valued not just in themselves but in also as indicators of the uprightness of individuals and families" (72). The interwar years still maintained the gendered division of spheres, with the difference that the new suburban

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<sup>63</sup> She brings up the unconsummated marriage of Effie and John Ruskin as an example, in which case the marriage was annulled (58).

housewife was expected to take pride in domesticity due to the lack of servants. In general, however, like her Victorian sister, she “was not expected to engage in paid work outside the home” (69). Indicating the perseverance of Victorian codes, sexuality, or “rather its denial, lay at the heart of respectability”<sup>64</sup> (73).

Margaret Harrison is evidently a victim of Mr Harrison’s respectability, as her lover, the young artist, Lathom put it: “It’s this damned awful suburban respectability that’s crushing the beautiful life out of her” (97). Although Sayers does not deny the woman’s responsibility in the death of her husband, Kenney’s analysis of Margaret Harrison as the archetypal Sayers villain, one who makes another person her “job”<sup>65</sup> or one who allows herself to be so used” (152) seems harsh and only partly justified. Kenney may have disregarded what she herself quotes from Sayers about respectability and what Sayers sees as an urgent problem in her above mentioned essay, which also argues that a woman is [also] a human being, “and a human being must have an occupation, if he or she is not to become a nuisance to the world” (33). Sayers, thus, seems to carry out an experiment by showing how an energetic young woman can be transformed into a potential monster as a result of her imprisonment. Kenney’s conclusion seems hasty without a more detailed analysis of the female figures and their representation in the letters that comprise Sayers’s novel.

Apart from the owners of the house, Mr and Mrs Harrison, the cast includes Miss Milsom, the neurotic spinster employed by the Harrisons, and two tenants, both artists, a painter called Harwood Lathom, and a writer, Jack Munting. When Munting moves into what he jokingly calls the “mid-Victorian skyscraper” (15), he starts to write his fiancée letters describing the other residents in the house. As befits someone facing marriage, most of his letters deal with the unhappy married life of Mr and Mrs Harrison, especially with Mrs Harrison, who interests her “as a type – as a personality” (34). It is a significant clue in evaluating Munting’s judgement of Mrs Harrison and the other characters that his fiancée, whom he does go on to marry, is a typical New Woman, a successful novelist. Elizabeth Drake or ‘Bungie’, as Munting calls her, is the very opposite of Margaret, who suffers from her husband’s tyranny confining her to the house. Her enforced passivity obviously results in a distorted or even ridiculous image of the contemporary female type, at least in Munting’s far from objective view. The narrative is dominated by Munting’s intelligent and frivolous voice and by his judgements; Kenney

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<sup>64</sup>“Middle-class codes of respectability differentiated [them] from the working classes, where attitudes towards sex were assumed to be more relaxed and ‘natural’, and from the aristocracy, who were deemed morally decadent and irresponsible” (Gunn and Bell 73).

<sup>65</sup>This is a reference to Sayers’ *Gaudy Night* where the culprit, Annie, is making her suicidal husband’s fate her objective in life. The dangers of devouring and being devoured in a relationship will be analysed in *Chapter Four*.

considers him Sayers's spokesman in the novel (146), but it would be a mistake to regard Munting as an entirely reliable narrator just because he is a serious novelist and keeps trying to take into consideration several points of view. While he sounds conservative in his views of women in certain situations, he also seems to be seeking his fiancée's approval in his conclusions and longs for her recognition. Sometimes the reader has the impression that Munting's opinion is easily influenced by Bungie, although he keeps proving his intellectual superiority over the others. Young Paul Harrison's remark on Elizabeth, who "in practical common sense, is worth ten of her husband [...]" (225), however, could undermine Munting's vain attempts to demonstrate himself as an intellectual authority in dubious situations.

Although Elizabeth's voice is restricted to a couple of narrated conversations, we may conclude from Munting's remarks that she has a lot in common with Harriet Vane, the clever, upper-middle-class and honourable female gentleman who may become the ideal partner of the gentleman detective. Whether Munting is comparable with Wimsey or Campion is doubtful given that it is usually Elizabeth who teaches Munting about the secrets of a modern marriage. She also points out to him that he is catty, mid-Victorian in his reactions and has persecution phobia (18). Munting's acceptance of her criticism may stem from the fact that, of the two of them, Elizabeth is more successful as a writer<sup>66</sup>: "I did not know I was all those things, but being a modern woman and a successful novelist, no doubt you are quite right" (18). Nevertheless, his masculine pride is hurt, and he tries to restore it by resorting to Victorian sexist clichés, claiming that because he is a man and has lived more, he knows more: "[...] there are some sides of life which I, as a man, may possibly know more about than you do, merely through having lived longer and knocked about more. I assure you I can size up some types of people pretty well" (18). Elizabeth's remarks foreshadow that, at least as regards his gender views, Munting's reliability can be questioned, and he can also be seen as the embodiment of the condescension of the upper-middle-class writer towards the middle class and the middlebrow. Kenney claims that "Taking all of the different viewpoints of the letter-writers [...] into consideration, the novel paints a strongly unsympathetic picture of Margaret Harrison [...]" (145). This claim, however, needs to be revised in the light of Munting's masculine conceit which pervades most of what he has to say about Mrs Harrison and Miss Milsom. By

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<sup>66</sup> This seems to be a parallel with Harriet and Philip Boyes in *Strong Poison*. They are both writers, but Harriet is more successful. Harriet is nevertheless the victim of public prejudice when it is suggested that she has murdered Philip for professional jealousy. Public opinion held that a woman could not be more successful than a man in a traditionally male profession. Munting articulates the same fears in his letter to Bungie: "Bungie, I've never told you how jealous I was because your books sold and mine didn't" (76). On the other hand, Elizabeth's popularity might be said to brand her as a worthless, 'feminine' middlebrow author in the eyes of the – male – establishment, represented by Munting's modernist ambitions.

juxtaposing the narrative voice of worldly and clever Munting to that of hysterical Miss Milsom in the first half of the novel, Sayers might have been making an oblique comment on the accepted views concerning the reliability of men's and women's voices.

Miss Milsom, the housemaid and a spinster is not at all critical of Mrs Harrison's romantic disposition, having witnessed how unhappy and miserable she feels in her marriage. Miss Milsom is a paid 'servant' or rather the caricature of a Victorian housemaid whose very presence might be seen as an ironic counterpart of Mr Harrison's obsession with the past. She is the typical elderly, dysfunctional servant whose 'work' is totally worthless. Her voice and her opinions are qualified by their context; in fact, her voice is completely erased by the male characters, who keep emphasizing her neurotic behaviour and irritating habits, although her letters prove that she is capable of interpreting what is going on in the house, or even in the household of her sister.

Agatha Milsom is a typical example of the odd woman, the subject of public debates since mid-Victorian times. Elaine Showalter points out that "[s]exual anarchy began with the odd woman. The odd woman – the woman who could not marry – undermined the comfortable binary system of Victorian sexuality and gender roles" (19). While at the *fin de siècle* the odd woman appeared as a potential rival in the job market, the woman with opportunities, Miss Milsom – and not merely because of her age – is a reduced and weakened version of the competent and working woman who was also stigmatized in late Victorian society as "conspicuous, troubling and dramatic" (21). Although she is systematically undermined as a reliable narrator and witness in the course of the investigation, it is her letters that open the novel and dramatize the dilemma of women trapped between two worlds. While her mental problems are Victorian (her symptoms are caused by severe sexual repression), she is 'modern' inasmuch as she consults a psychiatrist, she is openly discussing her psychotherapy with her new doctor and stressing the importance of sexuality in a woman's life. The fact that she is ready to submit herself to analysis and honestly admit this is a sign of the change of the social and cultural context: 'I suppose it is sex, doctor, isn't it?' (3). Agatha Milsom's therapist, talking about the sublimation of feelings, dream analysis and the interpretation of unconscious betrayals, seems to follow the principles of Freud's psychotherapy in his treatment of female hysteria. Very little is said about her possible childhood traumas – with one exception –, which Freud considered as the primary cause of hysteria, but she – following no doubt her therapist – clearly subscribes to the Freudian assumption that women also have sexual desires, and their repression can cause hysteria. Agatha's argument indicates how widely disseminated psychoanalytic theories – including those concerning female sexuality – had become by the

interwar period. According to Havelock Ellis, one of the best-known physicians campaigning for equal erotic rights, the Victorian idea that women had no sexual desires was the “product of cultural training which taught [them] to repress their sexual impulse” (Haste 23), which he saw “as disgusting and sinful” (ibid.). Miss Milsom’s new treatment also indicates the changing status of women. The first few lines of her very first letter emphasize that at last, she no longer has to have a rest-cure<sup>67</sup> which would only “turn you in upon yourself and that makes things worse” (3). She also reflects on the social conventions that prevent people from openly talking about the matter and describes her doctor’s advice on dealing with it: “I must learn to throw all these bottled-up desires outwards, and give them something to do” (3).

Miss Milsom is encouraged to take up creative activities that would divert her attention from her sexual problems or emotional involvement in other people’s problems. She says she would like to write sketches and articles, or just observe her environment: “He [Dr Trevor] says [...] I ought to encourage it [writing] by just putting down my observations of people and things as I saw them” (4). While she is talking about her plan of starting to write, she is already doing it in her letters. Thomas O. Beebee’s *Epistolary Fiction in Europe 1500-1850* points out that letter writing in Miss Milsom’s case can already function as a part of her psychotherapy where the letters provide the premise for an imaginary dialogue between doctor and patient (132), suggests Miss Milsom’s opening letter to her sister introduces two important motifs in the book, the dialectics of the inside and the outside and the characters’ personal point of view. It is important that her statement on offering her own perspective upon the events precedes her description of the Harrisons, especially Mrs Harrison. She describes her as an intimidated bird locked in a cage who just cannot find the means to get out. Miss Milsom sounds very sympathetic – “I do feel for her” (3) – when describing Mrs Harrison who is left with very little to do: “If anything at all is left to her to do, she is so apt to lose herself in a book or a daydream and forget all about it” (3). Living in a Victorian rather than a modern suburban household, Mrs Harrison is even denied the outlet of the suburban housewife, as her husband, a stickler for respectability, forbids her to do domestic work. Miss Milsom’s first description of Mr Harrison shows him “as a dry sort of man and so lacking in sympathy” (5).

Munting’s approach to Mrs Harrison is far from being sympathetic, yet he cannot help admitting in one of his letters to Elizabeth that Mrs Harrison is trapped in the house: “It’s not much to do, and I don’t believe she has any other job in life except to sit reading novels in the front window all day” (22). Mr Harrison’s idea of isolating his wife from the outside world is

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<sup>67</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story, “The Yellow Wall-Paper” (1892) is one of the most famous literary examples of how the famous rest-cure of Dr. Weir Mitchell drove women into insanity.



in sharp contrast with contemporary suburban ideals; his attitude perfectly justifies what Sayers articulates in her essay, “The Human-Not-Quite-Human”: “The boast, my wife doesn’t need to soil her hands with work,” first became general when the commercial middle classes acquired the plutocratic and aristocratic notion that the keeping of an idle woman was a badge of superior social status. Man must work, and woman must exploit his labour. What else are they there for?” (63). Gunn and Bell explain that the middle-class suburban home in the interwar period “was identified with a further feature of ‘modern’ living, the ‘companionate marriage’ [...] Above all, married couples in the suburbs shared an enjoyment of, and pride in, home and garden” (71). David C. Thorns also points out that the essence of suburban life is home-centredness and the nuclear family:

The suburban dweller is seen as being able to indulge in a home life where he may demonstrate his individual achievement in his pride of ownership and workmanship in his ‘cultivation of flowers, manicuring of lawns and shrubs [...] Firstly family unity is increased through a common interest in and concern for the house [...] Thirdly, role differentiation within the family [...]. (114)

Socializing still followed very strict social codes and boundaries, but the growing number of department stores, local shops and hair saloons created the sense of belonging and a “continuous community” (77). Mrs Harrison cannot enjoy any of these modern facilities in her marriage, not to mention the age difference between them – Mr Harrison is much older than her –, which prevents her even from having children. Sayers’ novel can be read as a diagnosis of the consequences of this enforced passivity. The husband’s regime that includes keeping Mrs. Harrison away from the public sphere is rooted in his Victorian habits of mind, and thus, in a broader sense, has to do with the dynamics of modernity and nostalgia. Mr Harrison idealizes his wife as “the eternal type of female purity” (Gilbert-Gubar 20), and Mrs. Harrison’s passive life – a truly immobilized existence – makes her a belated replica of the Victorian figure of the Angel in the House: “He would have liked her to shine for him and for him only [...] Harrison’s instinct was to dominate [...] (91), writes Munting in his statement of the case. Mr Harrison is not unlike Mrs Faraday in *The Police at the Funeral*, believing that it is possible to perpetuate the past by simply replaying what he thinks of as Victorian values in his marriage. He is sexually uninterested in his wife and means to keep her in the house without any purpose, a decorative object to look at, like a painting to satisfy the possessor who has the exclusive privilege to give his object a meaning and find pleasure in it. Gilbert and Gubar claim that “[w]hether she becomes an objet d’art or a saint, however, it is the surrender of her self-of personal comfort, her personal desires, or both - that is the beautiful angel-woman’s key act [...]” (25). Compelled

by the lack of intimacy in her marriage, Mrs Harrison finds consolation in the company of Lathom, to whom she reflects on her wretched life in one of her letters: “He just wants to have me in a cage to look at, darling – not even to love” (108).

Miss Milsom’s reflections on the Harrisons do not only evoke womanly solidarity in her but provide the ground for the discussion of the ultimate differences between men and women. Her second letter opens with her refusal of her sister’s accusations claiming that she prefers her present doctor to the previous one only because Dr Trevor is a man. Agatha’s fervid reactions recall Sayers’s words from “Are Women Human?”: “I am the last person to imagine that a woman doctor is necessarily inferior [...] but if the man happens to be right and the woman wrong, it would be absurd not to admit it”<sup>68</sup> (6). She also reproaches her sister for adopting her foolish ideas from her husband, Tom. “I daresay Tom has been airing his opinions, but that does not impress me at all [...] I do beg you will not take Tom’s pronouncements for Gospel where I am concerned” (6-7). Her remark sounds advanced as well as acute and would seem to contradict the view, shared by Munting, too, that she is nothing but an irritating, half-witted spinster: She develops her point by referring to an article by Storm Jameson<sup>69</sup>, who claims that “all women in the depths of their hearts resented men” (7), which she totally agrees with and attributes to the high-mightiness of men in general who are all “self-centered” and “self-regarding” while “women have to be other-regarding – on account of their children and so on” (6). To illustrate her point, she describes an incident that has taken place between Mr and Mrs Harrison. One evening Margaret starts talking about Einstein in connection with an article she has read, and Mr Harrison ignores her. She insists on discussing the topic, and asks her husband questions, only to make him infuriated and answer her arrogantly that the Sunday press “was not always the best guide to knowledge” (7). When she remonstrates that she is not the one to read the papers, and asks how is she to improve her mind, Miss Milsom can feel Mr Harrison’s deep contempt as he rattles *The Times*. Agatha concludes that Mr Harrison still believes in the Victorian woman ideal, someone like Mrs Harrison No. 1 – and he tries to evade acknowledging changes by escaping from his wife. Miss Milsom understands the root of the problem, the clash between “the virtues of the old-fashioned domestic woman and the perpetual chatter of the modern woman about things which were outside her province”<sup>70</sup>. It is the fatal subject” (8). The

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<sup>68</sup>“If they are going to adopt the very sound principle that the job should be done by the person who does it best, then the rule must be applied universally. If the women make better office-workers than men, they must have the office work” (Sayers 33).

<sup>69</sup> Margaret Storm Jameson was a notable writer, feminist and left-wing intellectual.

<sup>70</sup>“[...] in many cases woman is regarded as mentally inferior to man for the simple reason that she is a woman. In the official view, women in the new suburbs were primarily home-makers, concerned with looking after husband and children, with shopping, cleaning and cooking” (Gunn and Bell 69).

whole incident ends with Mrs Harrison's crying and her husband's angry departure: he leaves the scene to be absorbed in his painting or natural history.

In her account of the above scene, Miss Milsom, once again, displays her skills as an analyst who is precisely aware of what women need in a relationship and berates men's utter egotism: "How true it is that men live for Things and women for People!" (ibid.). She claims that her competence lies in her wealth of experience gained from observing other people: "lookers-on see most of the game, you know" (ibid.). As she sees it, Mrs Harrison would "be ready to attach herself to him [Mr Harrison]" (ibid.), but she only receives cold refusals. Then she admits that she really admires Mrs Harrison because "she never loses hope, but goes on, day after day, trying to be brave and devoted and to keep up her interest in life" (9).

For all her clear-sightedness, Miss Milsom's overall reaction to what she sees from this marriage from one day to the next reveals her prudishness, her nearly pathological fear of men and sexuality despite the fact that she is versed in Freudian ideas and analyses her own mental condition through such concepts: No, my dear! No men for me!" (9). Her pathological anxiety over men's approach is shown in other situations too, especially in the one when one night she accidentally bumps into Lathom, taking him for Munting in the dark; Lathom grabs her arm, which she interprets as a sexual assault and has an attack of hysterics. Next day, she bolts the door of her room. Following this incident, Miss Milsom is described as an unbalanced woman who is in a state of violent hysteria by Mr Harrison or referred to as a "[d]isgusting old woman" (95) by Lathom. This event, however, precedes a series of extremely unpleasant ones she feels she cannot cope with any more as the experience in the household exhausts her emotionally, and her condition seems to worsen: "This household is most trying to live with [...]" (29). While she is trying to practise detachment for her doctor's advice, she cannot let down Mrs Harrison, who clings to her for sympathy and support. When the chance of taking up office work again arises, Mrs Harrison brightens up and announces it to her husband. Agatha cannot but approve of her decision, but the Bear – Mr Harrison, as Miss Milsom calls him – starts blackmailing her, pointing out that the task of a wife is to make a home for her husband and wait for him all day: "This is the usual idea, isn't it?"<sup>71</sup> But I suppose the modern woman thinks differently about these things" (30), he adds. After Margaret bursts out in tears, Agatha feels empowered to interfere and defend her against her husband's tyranny. She argues that Mrs Harrison is sacrificing herself only to please him, appealing to him to consider her a little bit

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<sup>71</sup>"Suburban society was often viewed as monotonous, conformist and narrow-minded and there was undoubtedly some truth in the accusations" (74).

more than himself. She keeps returning to her initial claims concerning the dialectics of the inside and the outside.

As a last resort, Miss Milsom encourages Margaret to occupy herself by studying Freud, to talk freely about repression – she also gives Mrs Harrison her handbook to Freud – and to escape into reading. “I am encouraging her to live in her books, and abstract herself altogether from wearing and irritating realities of life. It is easy, because she has a wonderfully vivid and romantic imagination, which makes the world of literature very real to her” (48). Miss Milsom’s remark on Margaret’s romantic and naïve nature and her reading habits recall Flaubert’s Madame Bovary, whose character, as Andreas Huyssen puts it in *After the Great Divide*, became identified with the “reader caught between the delusions of the trivial romantic narrative and the realities of French provincial life during the July monarchy, a woman who tried to live the illusions of aristocratic sensual romance and was shipwrecked on the banality of bourgeois everyday life” (45). Margaret Harrison is described by Leahy as a woman who reads trashy literature (65), either due to her naivety, distaste for highbrow texts, or Munting’s disapproving opinion. Kenney also claims that she gleanes her ideas “from popular novels and the daily papers” (144). She is taken to task by Kenney, for instance when she does not get the point in D.H. Lawrence’s novel which after Lathom offers her to read. This failure to understand Lawrence is attributed by these critics to the fact that her mind is too simple for highbrow literature. Here is the relevant quote from the novel: “I have got that book you were talking about, *Women in Love*. It is very queer and coarse in parts, don’t you think, and rather bewildering, but some of the descriptions are very beautiful. I don’t understand it at all, but it is thrilling, like music. [...] I can’t quite make out what he means, but it is terribly exciting” (117). Mrs. Harrison may not fully understand Lawrence’s approach to sexuality and his philosophy of relationships, but she is not indifferent about the novel. She has not only read it but appreciates its novelty, feels excited about getting the point and expressing her feelings about it. Hers is definitely not the reaction of a philistine. Kenney’s and Leahy’s claims about Mrs Harrison’s reading are not really borne out by what we learn about it from the letters of Munting, who frequently talks about Mrs Harrison’s books. There is very little to suggest that she reads cheap, popular literature; if the names mentioned by Munting are anything to go by, she seems to prefer higher category middlebrow writers. Once when they discuss literature, he remarks that, although they have very little in common in their approach to writers and texts, they agree that both Margaret Kennedy’s *The Constant Nymph* and A.S.M. Hutchinson’s *If Winter Comes* are very good middlebrow books (34). On closer inspection, then, Mrs Harrison turns out to be rather an unusual housewife, more curious about Einstein and discussing

literature than domesticity. Nevertheless, she does not like Munting's novel, *Deadlock* at all. Upon returning it to the library she says that she is "disgusted with its coarseness and cynicism" (18), and borrows a Michael Arlen novel. Her prudishness – which she shares with a large number of highbrow critics and intellectuals of the age whose reaction to something like *Deadlock* would have been very similar – prevents her from opening up her mind to new trends in art, which she conventionally thinks must only show beautiful things. On the whole, it seems that the critical consensus concerning Mrs Harrison is the result of a myopic reading that accepts Munting's voice as the carrier of truth. It is certainly true that Munting's is the dominant voice in the narrative, and it is also undeniable that he considers himself an expert on Mrs Harrison.

Right after he moves into the house, he focuses his attention on Mrs Harrison, whom he tends to understand, despite his obvious dislike (93). His letters also reveal a sense of uncertainty about the success of his future marriage with Elizabeth, who is cast in his letters as the perfect woman. He becomes a kind of mediator between the two women who occupy very different positions in life but both of whom plan to pursue a profession they like. Elizabeth is a successful woman who can have it all, a profession and a satisfying relationship. Mrs Harrison cannot have either, and her situation does not evoke real sympathy in Munting. Quite the contrary: he always observes her from a superior position. His very first description of Mrs Harrison establishes a fairly negative, if not devastating portrait of her: "I didn't think much of Mrs H. – she's a sort of suburban vamp<sup>72</sup>, an ex-typist or something, and entirely wrapped up, I should say in her own attractions" (16). In all of his letters, he speaks in a fairly elitist, cynical and condescending manner, suggesting that Munting might not be more reliable as a narrator than Miss Milsom. His comments on Mrs Harrison sound more truthful because of his profession and public school education, but there is a fair amount of inconsistency in his reactions. His advanced ideas about modern relationships blend with Victorian ideology in his reports about the Harrisons. In one of his first letters, he tells about an evening row when Mrs Harrison is late for dinner and Mr Harrison starts an argument with her. At first Munting seems to disapprove of Mr Harrison's fierce treatment of his wife: "I fancy he must have read somewhere that women like to be treated rough and feel the tight hand on the rein and that sort of thing" (21), but after a little contemplation he brings up the question: "Why shouldn't the woman come home in time for dinner?" (22). Although he learns that Mrs Harrison has been out to buy a gift for their wedding anniversary, he will not agree with Lathom, who simply calls

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<sup>72</sup>Munting's description of Mrs. Harrison as a suburban vamp and Bayswater as a typical suburban district have led to some confusion in critical discussions of the location and the characters. Since neither Bayswater or Mrs Harrison stand for the typical suburban image, I believe that Munting's usage of the words, 'suburb', 'suburban' should be interpreted in a metaphorical sense as signifiers of stupidity, boredom, philistine indifference and aesthetic sense.

Mr Harrison a ‘brute’ (ibid.). He holds on to his opinion in all of his letters, insisting that a decent man like Harrison must find it hard to cope with such an egotistic wife as Mrs Harrison. The origin of his sympathy for Mr Harrison, however, remains unclear, unless it is simply male solidarity. To explain the problem with Mrs Harrison, he – just like Miss Milsom – applies a universalising theory he has read about in J.D. Beresford’s *Writing Aloud*: “And after all, this business of imagining that one is one kind of thing and being actually another, all the time [...]” (32). As he sees it, Mrs Harrison is a perfect illustration of this theory:

Our friend Mrs Harrison is a perfect example of this dramatization business – and is quite capable of dramatizing herself in two totally inconsistent directions at once [...] If she reads a piece in the paper about the modern woman who finds spiritual satisfaction in a career, she is that woman; and her whole life has been ruined by having had to give up her job at the office. (32)

In Munting’s view, Mrs Harrison is a type of woman who tends to represent herself as a victim and complains about her miserable life to everyone. Munting understands that she “feels cramped in her surroundings” (33) because her “mentality has no room to expand” (ibid.), concluding this part of his letter to Elizabeth with a rhetorical question: It is so hard for a woman, isn’t it? (33). The same conversation is also significant in terms of the relationship between the self and the other that Miss Milsom keeps emphasizing. While Mrs Harrison’s idea of a better life that would mean “living for and in others” (ibid.) sounds nonsense to him and awakens his sarcasm when he says that her hypothetical family would end up being devoured, he ponders over this idea when he imagines his future marriage. His idea of happiness is associated with prioritizing one’s own life rather than someone else’s: “I don’t want to feel that anybody’s life and happiness is bound up with mine [...] people should set their own value on themselves and not ‘live for others’ or ‘live only in their children’ [...] It’s beastly” (39). Munting’s opinions, however, are rooted in his own problems as much as Miss Milsom’s ideas in hers. While he keeps denouncing Mrs Harrison, there are some hidden parallels between him and the woman. In the first half of the novel, Munting keeps telling his fiancée about a biography, *Life*<sup>73</sup>, he has to work on. This sort of writing, however, does not interest him, he finds no creativity or imagination in it. In most letters, he says that *Life* will soon be finished but then he still needs to continue with it. Munting, thus, also deals with somebody else’s life instead of concentrating on his own, more creative ideas, and he experiences this as a

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<sup>73</sup> This is also a reference to Sayers’ own biography on Wilkie Collins’ life. Sayers started collecting materials in 1921 and the same year, a bookseller, Myles Radford, asked her when her ‘Life’ would be finished (Reynolds 196).

deprivation. At one point, he exclaims in relief: “Thank heaven, the *Life* is practically finished with” (57). His further comments reinforce the inconsistency between his work and his losing artistic skills as it is “of no use to anybody, and least of all to a creative writer [...] And the further you go with it, the worse it gets” (58). It is hard not to think that his moaning about the last phases of his job are unrelated with the growing frustration he feels in the house which originates from concentrating too much on others’ lives.

At one point, Munting compares Mrs Harrison’s unbalanced personality to a prism which shines glamorously if someone “gives her the colour and splendour her dramatic soul craved for” (93). He enhances his description by connecting the influence of popular literature, like Hichens and de Vere Stacpoole with poorly trained minds, like that of Mrs Harrison: “She saw herself robed with all the glowing radiance that dazzled her half-educated eyes in the passionate pages of Hichens and de Vere Staccpole” (93). Margaret is portrayed by Munting as a kind of empty, amoral figure who is able to identify with anything as long as it pleases her fancy or makes her feel important. All of this, he believes, can add to Mrs Harrison’s ability to mould herself into the image of the wronged and slighted woman. In his view, she is a kind of woman who is able to identify with as many roles as would please her, provided that she could shine in them. Munting’s characterization evokes one of the best known stereotypical images of the dangerous woman, the figure of the actress who, as Felski suggests, became associated, similarly to the prostitute, with “the generation of modern forms of desire [...]” (19). The only person for audience at home is Miss Milsom “with her warped mind and perilous occupation” (94), and Lathom, of course, after he has come along. In his statement of the case, Munting admits that the frustration in the marriage is very much due to Mr Harrison’s jealousy and to the fact that Harrison “was [...] inexpressive and sexually unimaginative” (92), still he finds him a decent man, the victim of his wife’s ill-regulated intelligence. Munting is always on Mr Harrison’s side, he even says he likes him and it is only the selfishness of his wife that always makes him look foolish: “I think he’s worth a hundred of her – and yet, every time there’s a row, she ingeniously manages somehow to make him appear to be in the wrong” (73).

Munting seems to be in two minds about gender roles in a marriage and it is a challenge to see what he really thinks. In his own way, he seems like a man trapped between two worlds. As a modernist writer, he believes in the mission of art and creativity, he is open-minded towards changes, including those in the role of women or sex equality, but at the same time he seems to be unwilling to renounce his male authority. Seeing the silly little things going on in the house, he is no longer sure that he would always remain the kind of man he is now in his relationship. Such fears are conveyed when he is writing about his would-be weaknesses as a

husband. Munting's agonies imply that, by reflecting on himself, he reveals a much deeper understanding of Mr Harrison's attitude to his wife than his descriptions of the man would first suggest. The passage below illustrates this point:

Dearest, do you really want to be married to the sort of unsatisfactory bloke I am? It is extraordinarily brave and dear of you. You will have a devil of a time. I want to warn you now that when I say I want you to keep your independence and exquisite detachment, I don't really mean it. I shall try to mould you into the mirror of myself, fatally and inevitably. When I say I am not jealous, either of your work or friends, I am lying. When I promise to look at things from your point of view, I am promising what I cannot perform [...] I shall put my interests before yours, and the slightest suggestion that I should put myself out to give you piece and quietness to work in will wound my self-importance. I know it. I shall pretend to give you freedom [...] You will end by hating me [...]. (38)

As she made it clear in her essay "Are Women Human?", Sayers harshly criticized claims that supported the existence of the female point of view and also the belief that women are supposed to agree on most things among themselves. For her, it only held relevance as long as the female point of view came out of special knowledge, such as children's education or housing, but in other fields, such as literature or finance, she refused to believe that a woman's point of view is of value once it is beyond her special knowledge; without such special knowledge, her opinion is nothing but "a judgement of an individual" (41)<sup>74</sup>. Yet, in this novel she was playing with the juxtaposition of male or female points of view. Perhaps the narrative strategy applied in the novel is more acute than her head-on confrontation with the problem of gender roles: in the novel, the relevance of "male" and "female" perspectives and discourses is demonstrated by the difference in the way Miss Milsom's and Mr Munting's accounts of the case are treated. In this sense, the "female" point of view is that which is ignored or dismissed as irrelevant or distorted – and this is precisely what has happened to Miss Milsom's account of the case, which

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<sup>74</sup>"Are Women Human?" gives a detailed description of Sayers' idea on the woman's point of view, which she treats with a fair sense of irony: "There are certain questions on which what is called 'the woman's point of view' is valuable, because they involve special knowledge. Women should be consulted about such things as housing and domestic architecture because, under present circumstances, they have still to wrestle a good deal with houses and kitchen sinks [...] Similarly some of them know more about children than the majority of men, and their opinion, as women, is of value [...] But there are other questions – as for example, about literature or finance – on which the woman's point of view has no value at all [...] No special knowledge is involved and a woman's opinion on literature or finance is valuable only as the judgement of an individual" (41). "It only means that you cannot ask for 'the woman's point of view', but only for the woman's special knowledge – and this like all special knowledge, is valuable, though it is no guarantee of agreement" (43).



might be the reason why the novel bears the self-reflexive title *The Documents in the Case*: this book is as much about the way we read others as about the criminal case itself.

Pursuing art and creativity also become a subject matter in the letters suggesting that everyone, even Mr Harrison and Miss Milsom, considers their own contribution to art as a serious attempt for self-expression. Miss Milsom's artistic experiments are seen as ridiculous as her observations and comments<sup>75</sup>, due to which she is constantly exposed to the other residents' brutal intolerance. Creative activities would mean the way out of grim reality for her, so to throw all these bottled-up desires outwards, she starts knitting socks. She feels inspired by what she sees in her environment, a cat's coat, or a pattern in the rug. Agatha believes that Mr Perry, the vicar, is serious when he tells her that she is talented and that she should take orders, but his remarks sound more like pity than real compliments. Miss Milsom believes that her handmade socks are truly original "in these machine-made days" (13), just as she believes in the uniqueness of the feelings she puts down on paper for Dr Trevor. She is portrayed as a piteous spinster whose 'art' is made for and judged by men, Mr Perry, or her doctor. Munting calls her a "dreadful middle-aged female with a come-hither eye" (16) after their first encounter, Mr Harrison describes her as a lazy and untidy woman who, "instead of putting her mind to the housework, litters the place with wool and bits of paper which she calls 'art materials'" (63). Both men relate to Miss Milsom with Victorian masculine arrogance, retaining for themselves the right to significant creative work and dismissing an elderly spinster's artistic efforts as by definition worthless. Agatha's warning is – fatally – disregarded by her family as well who refuse to listen to her advice on how to handle their son's love affair, which makes her a kind of Sybilline figure, the madwoman as oracle. Her unstable mental condition deteriorates, and after her final breakdown, caused by the suicide of her nephew, she is sent to an asylum. She is the useless, problematic odd woman who needs to be got rid of. Her insignificance clinched by Paul Harrison, Mr Harrison's son, who simply erases her statement as possibly relevant to the murder case, claiming that "nothing which Miss Milsom says later than April, 1929, is of any evidential value" (64).

Miss Milsom's artistic efforts do not seem to be less worthwhile than those of Mr Harrison, still, Munting insists on defending the latter. Mr Harrison, spends his leisure time producing water-colours as one of his ways of self-expression. Lathom is truly irritated by Harrison's vanity to show off with his "rotten paintings" (96), but Munting recognizes his merits in cooking. Mr Harrison is evidently "weak, conventional and sentimental" (92) in his

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<sup>75</sup>Being an elderly spinster with her eccentricities who is also an outsider, she confronts similar prejudices to Miss Marple in Agatha Christie, who is also regarded as a gossipy, incompetent old woman.

water-colours, he says, but has some imagination in “sauces and flavourings” (ibid.). He tends to be lenient and forgiving when it comes to Mr Harrison’s hobbies whereas he becomes a harsh critic of Mrs Harrison’s comments on literature. Munting appreciates Mr Harrison’s cookery book on toadstools and mushrooms, especially his illustrations. Cookery is another ground for Munting to disapprove of the efforts of women, who, he thinks, are not as a rule creative. Pondering over the subject, he concludes that cookery may be one of “the most severely intellectual of the arts” (ibid.), thus unappealing for women. Munting’s general view of women’s creativity and intellectual abilities is fairly devastating, and his accounts of his literary conversations with Margaret remain patronizing throughout: “She said she didn’t mind a book’s being ‘powerful’, provided it was filled with a ‘sense of the beautiful’ [...] She thinks that if only I wouldn’t be so harsh and mocking I might write a book as strong and really beautiful as that [*If Winter Comes*]. These are the people who read the books Bungie. And what are we to do about it, you and I, if we want to live by bread?” (34).

This remark echoes Sayers’ own dilemma as a writer as well as her reflections on the reading public<sup>76</sup>. Margaret Harrison would seem to be a perfect example of the way the figure of the contemporary reader was conceived by most middlebrow writers in the interwar period, at least as she is described by Nicola Humble (50). In her analysis of the reading trends and the reading public, she shows that middlebrow writers were in a position to offer a more nuanced picture of the relation between literature and average readers than modernists. Humble also claims that the relatively hostile reception of middlebrow fiction on the part of the literary establishment was due to its identification with the social standing of the reading public that consumed it, especially middle-class women – like Mrs Harrison – as the chief consumers of literature. The traditional idea of men as producers of fiction and women as consumers (9) is not absent in the feminine middlebrow, nevertheless, these authors always sought to distinguish the “ignorant or uncritical reader, who misses the point of the books she reads, or fails comically to appreciate her own limitations” (50) from the one who contributes to interpreting, discussing and experiencing them. Sayers’ novel is remarkable not only for reflecting on intellectual discussions of the future of art and literature but also because it incorporates many of the contemporary social, moral and aesthetic dilemmas. The fact that Sayers chose a young middle-

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<sup>76</sup> Sayers never truly committed herself to writing ‘real’ crime fiction which offered very little room for the artistic skills and polished style she possessed. On the other hand, while she had everything to become a highbrow writer, she never really felt at ease with the modernist technique. Leahy observes that she is “strikingly modern in her themes but deliberately avoids any modernist literary techniques” (26). This reluctance to adopt modernist techniques might be explained Sayers’ desire to teach, she adds, to bring modernist issues within the reach of her readers (ibid.).

class woman to be the focal point of negotiating the social and cultural issues of the interwar period is in itself remarkable.

Mrs Harrison's only chance of a meaningful contact with high art is as its object. Lathom paints the portrait of Mrs Harrison – he paints Miss Milsom's too, but his aim is to ridicule her rather than to create something of artistic value. (On the other hand, one might wonder about the roots of and motivation for his portrait of Mrs Harrison, too: the sittings might have been part of the courtship or even excuses for intimacy.) According to Munting, who considers himself a real authority in judging art, the picture is truly fascinating. Although the painting connects the people living in the same house, it does separate them too on account of their relation to 'real' art. Harrison finds it hard to accept that the portrait of his wife should be exhibited at the Academy of Art: it is very much against his principles to expose his wife to "unwelcome notoriety" (70). Munting, who is devoted to helping Lathom with the project, concludes that Harrison's aversion to put his wife on display originates from the belief that art is imitative, and should show what one sees in the 'real' world – just like he himself does in his water-colours. Munting claims that Harrison misses the point of modernist art, namely the idea that "the painting was the important matter, and that the subject had no personal bearings of any kind" (70). After the portrait finds its way to the Academy, most of the main characters come together to appreciate Lathom's skills. Here is Munting's account of the scene: "Almost the first thing I saw, as we surged through the crowd, was the painted face of Mrs Harrison, blazing out from a wall full of civic worthies and fagged society beauties, with the loud insistence of a begonia in a bed of cherrypie" (102). A leading painter of the day, Marlowe, who paints "knotty nudes" (102), is also carried away by the picture, and asks Munting to introduce him to Lathom. Munting feels a bit awkward, since while Marlowe is waiting for Lathom to join them, he is harshly criticizing a fellow painter, Gavice's portrait, and all the other painters who have their paintings exhibited. Nevertheless, he recognizes a genuine talent in Lathom, who has done a "good piece of work" (103). The painting is admired by everyone, painters, visitors, and Mrs Harrison of course is vibrating with colour and light, in full prismatic loveliness: "Fancy that! It does make me feel important – though, of course, I don't count for anything, really. The painting is the thing, isn't?" (105). Mrs Harrison's comment seems to reconnect with what Munting has previously said about modernist art, which may show that Margaret has intuitively grasped something about it, unlike Mr Harrison, despite his long discussions about art with Munting. Elizabeth Drake, who is already Munting's wife by the time the picture is exhibited, meets the Harrisons for the first time, and notices something inexplicably uncanny in the portrait. The first thing she asks Lathom concerns the artist's talent

to “get the personality on canvas” (ibid.) without realizing the connection between what she says (“but what is to do if there is no personality?”) and Mrs Harrison’s alleged emptiness. She sees something completely striking as she looks at Margaret and recognizes the difference in the portrait but does not talk about it. Maybe Elizabeth has realized that Mrs Harrison is exactly the type of person whose personality had to be ‘invented’ or she has realized the intimate connection between Margaret and Lathom. When they change the subject to Laura Knight’s pictures, Mrs Harrison’s prudish Victorian views return. She does not like nudity in them and claims that “they are rather peculiar for a woman to have painted [...] And I think pictures ought to make one feel – uplifted somehow” (106). When Mr. Harrison scorns her for talking too much, she retorts that he has said the same thing, an ironic hint that at least Margaret’s more conservative views about art are shared by the respectable husband who is contrasted to her by Munting. The two comments that Mrs. Harrison articulates about art not only contradict each other totally but also indicate how challenging a task it is to place her in any of the prevailing categories retained for women in the interwar era.

Margaret Harrison’s alleged amorality and hollowness might be said to be borne out in her own love letters to Lathom, in which she represents herself as a victim to marvellous effect. Although her husband’s tyrannical coldness and her imprisonment in the house are never really questioned by the other characters, her talent for self-dramatization is very much in evidence, justifying this aspect of Munting’s diagnosis: “But no – if I want to stir out of doors, I’m a bad woman – ‘one of these modern wives who don’t care for their homes. What kind of place is my home, that I should care about it?’” (117). Although he talks about suburbia, David C. Thorns’ point about the “loneliness, boredom and frustration of the captive suburban wife” (118) seems to apply to deprived and neglected middle-class housewives like Mrs Harrison, too. This is seen clearly by Lathom, who is inclined to believe that it is Harrison’s obsessive respectability that is responsible for the domestic crisis. Lathom, however, cannot see that Mrs Harrison is no less a prisoner of the Victorian idea of respectability when she says that she cannot divorce her husband. She complains that she cannot go on with her miserable life, but she is shocked by Lathom’s request that she must get a divorce if she truly loves him. Margaret’s agony is more about the public image of herself than her unhappiness/happiness: “Darling, do think how horrible it would be! How could I go through all that terrible shame in public, and all my friends looking on and thinking hateful things about our beautiful love!” (114).

Margaret’s image amounts to a fairly miserable portrait of the middle-class ‘modern’ woman of the interwar period who can transform into a monstrous creature by the pointless

restrictions imposed on her by Victorian respectability. Although there is no evidence that either Munting or young Paul Harrison assumes that Lathom is her victim, one of her letters is interpreted by the two men as licencing him to kill Mr. Harrison: “What right have the useless people to get in the way of love and youth? [...] Get rid of the ugly and sick and weak and worn-out things, and let youth and love and happiness have their chance” (122). Both write in their statements that Lathom was under Margaret’s influence and must have felt compelled to kill the old man. Munting’s final remarks on the tragedy are also pervaded by sexist and stereotypical ideas about women who finally ruin men:

I want to know whether Lathom knows the sort of woman he did it for. I want to know how much she really knows or suspects. I want to know whether, when she wrote that letter which drove him to do it, she was deceiving him or herself. I want to know whether, in all these months, he has been thinking that she was worth it, or whether, in a ghastly disillusionment, he has realised that the only real part of her was vulgar and bad, and the rest merely the brilliant refraction of himself. (258)

It seems that Munting acquits Lathom, whom he also considers a potential victim, partly because of his young age and inexperience in love and partly for his devotion to youth and beauty. These accusations and presumptions, however, are not grounded on any evidence: both Munting and young Harrison rely on their own biased perceptions of Mrs. Harrison.

Sayers’ novel joins the other two writers in its approval of the newly acquired opportunities of female emancipation with view to education, professional pursuits and financial independence – the ideal New Woman type –, but she differs in her representation of the female villain. Drawing upon the dynamism of modernity and nostalgia, *The Documents in the Case* seems to offer the most varied and unbiased picture of the symptoms of a changing society as regards fears and anxieties concerning femininity. While the other two attribute the monstrous features in their female offenders to the lack of a middle-class code, low social status and reckless sexual appetite, and would favour Victorian principles of a virtuous life, Sayers criticizes the extreme insistence on old-fashioned ideas about women and, especially, about Victorian respectability. Her Mrs. Harrison is a troublesome figure, who is much harder to categorize than Tey’s Betty Kane or Allingham’s Georgia Wells because Sayers does not influence the reader with a dominant male voice but offers several perspectives. The novel is an attempt to portray the difficulties of getting rid of ossified ideas associated with men and women and the way these ideas can paralyze relationships. Mrs. Harrison is not an “honourable”

woman, and, unlike her educated, professional counterpart, Elizabeth Munting, she lacks identity and strong moral principles. She is neither a victim nor a criminal, but rather an indecisive woman who seems to realize the opportunities modern women have access to but is far too controlled by her own Victorian prudishness, which results in a permanent state of frustration and leads to an ultimately harmful, even fatal attempt to escape into imaginary identities.

## Chapter 4: The Female Gentleman as a Bridge Figure

Six years after the incidents in Allingham's *Sweet Danger* (1933), in *The Fashion in Shrouds* (1938) Mr. Campion once again meets Lady Amanda Fitton, the now independent woman, who works as an engineer. Campion's attraction to Amanda has not abated since their first encounter in *Sweet Danger* – where they both fought for the land of Avera and the aristocratic title of the Fittons – and a mere glimpse of her early in the novel leads him to the following conclusion: "Her manners were irreproachable. Amanda was, as ever, the perfect gent" (76). Later, she is described as making a noise like "an angry old gentleman" (96), and as someone who considers herself as the only person with "disinterested intelligence" (214) in the investigation of the death of Raymond Ramilies. These references endow her with male, more exactly, gentlemanly features – and she is far from being alone in this among characters in Golden Age crime novels: Sayers' *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937) also draws on the representation of the woman as a gentleman, illustrated in the following conversation between Wimsey and Harriet Vane:

'My husband would do *anything* for me. [...]'It's degrading. No human being ought to have such power over another.'

'It's a very real power, Harriet.'

'Then,' she flung back passionately, 'we won't use it. If we disagree, we'll fight it out like gentlemen. We won't stand for matrimonial blackmail.'

[...]

'Do you mean to say we are to play out our domestic comedy without the great bedroom scene?'

'Certainly. We'll have nothing so vulgar.' (344)

Harriet's vision of her own gentlemanliness excludes traditional femininity and the usual role a woman is meant to play in a marriage. She refuses to resort to womanly tricks, such as manipulation or blackmail, and is desperate to emphasize intellect over flesh in their married life. Marion Sharpe, Tey's heroine in *The Franchise Affair* (1948) also rejects being identified with womanly traits like intuition. During his first visit to the Franchise, Blair asks Marion about Betty Kane, the alleged victim of the Sharpes, who, as earlier remarked, describes the girl over-sexed:

'We must find out more about Betty Kane.'

'I can tell you one thing about her. She is over-sexed.'

'Is that just feminine intuition?'

'No. I am not very feminine and I have no intuition.' (36)

While these three characters differ in many respects, it seems that all of them are financially and existentially independent – though Marion lives on inherited money –, and value intellect more than the traditional feminine attributes; as Melissa Schaub argues in her *Middlebrow Feminism in Classic Detective Fiction*, they distinguish themselves from other women – and, one could add, from the majority of men –, by acting and thinking differently, just like gentlemen. Amanda and Harriet are representatives of this recurring type – Schaub mentions Agatha Christie’s Tuppence Beresford and Ngaio Marsh’s Agatha Troy –, but one also finds “dozens of non-recurring characters” (1) as well, women who “all distinguish themselves as heroines by acting like gentlemen – as distinct from “men” in general. Not all of them use the word explicitly, but all embody a remarkably consistent code of behavior and set of personality traits” (1). Schaub introduces the term ‘female gentleman’ to refer to this character type – though Allingham’s contribution to the designation cannot be doubted –, “depict[ed as] a consistent ideal of female behavior, [which she sees as] a feminist reappropriation of the Victorian ideal of middle-class masculinity. The female gentleman unites old ideas about class with new ideas about gender, in a combination that sheds light on today’s feminisms” (2). Her analysis of this female character not only reinforces Light’s theory of conservative modernity, presenting her as a hybrid figure, but also underpins Humble’s claim, according to which the gender crisis in post-World War I Britain resulted in the renegotiation of male and female roles: “The new man of this moment rejected the old masculine values of gravitas and heroism in favour of frivolity and an effete and brittle manner. The new woman took on the practicality and emotional control once the province of the male: she was competent, assured and unemotional” (197). While Humble’s argument applies to a great deal of interwar fiction, classic detective fiction emerges as a key site of the literary representation of this phenomenon. Amanda, Harriet and Marion not only embody these traits but embody them in contradistinction to the weakened gentleman figure. The fact that these women are represented as empowered after World War I and as able to appropriate gentlemanly ideals can suggest a reconsideration of the female gentleman as a site of memory. Does the renegotiation of female roles also imply that the female gentleman should replace and take on the role of the gentleman to maintain and continue the traditional value system as well as occupy her place in the myth of Englishness? This is one of the questions I intend to focus on in this chapter, after revising what critics like Schaub, Hoffman and Rowland have said about the relationship between the detective and his partner. Schaub holds that these women are successful as opposed to their New Woman predecessors because they are self-reliant, competent and courageous (8) and achieve a respectable social status – usually through the gentleman detective’s intervention – which is understood in class terms. The female gentleman, thus, is elevated to the gentleman



detective's status and is worthy of his company because she is his intellectual and moral equal. Although Schaub's thorough analysis of female characters in the novels of Golden Age queens of crime proves that it is a challenge to establish firm categories that would equally apply to all the figures she would call a female gentleman, she still feels compelled to narrow down the diversity to some basic features that they commonly share:

1) upper-middle-class in birth, with some exceptions; 2) physically and/or morally courageous (resulting in self-reliance and economic independence); 3) honorable, in all the many senses that the term has acquired over the years; 4) possessed of strong emotions and the desire for emotional connection, but able to subordinate emotion to reason and present a reticent surface, which frequently results in a detached and ironic manner. (62)

Her categories, however, start to lose their contours immediately after being established for several reasons. She enumerates the contradictions of the term 'gentleman' and its distortion by the Victorians, who turned it into a moral category as discussed in *Chapter Two*, which was equally projected upon the New Woman of the interwar era but her other points also become questionable as she expands her investigation, mainly because Golden Age queens did not share the same views on women's roles or on matters of class privilege, courage, honour<sup>77</sup> or love. While Schaub's criteria can sustain the illusion that the female gentleman is a homogeneous character type, she is also obliged to admit that the characters she examined differ in many respects, depending on their profession and choices.

Another problematic aspect of her analysis is the supposition that recurring characters, like Allingham's Amanda and Sayers' Harriet are unchanging portraits of the female gentleman from their first appearance. While she emphasizes their transformation in the course of the events which finally transform them into a fully developed portrait of the female gentleman, she applies the designation to the few available traits they possess at their first encounter with the detective, like Harriet's intellectual capacity or the gamine element in Amanda's character. I would argue, however, that Amanda and Harriet are not female gentlemen when they first appear despite some of the qualities that are indeed those of a gentleman: Amanda is only a teenage girl in *Sweet Danger* while Harriet is a suspect in a murder case in *Strong Poison* (1930). Schaub's list of criteria suggests that they both acquire the position of the female gentleman only later, through their cooperation with the gentleman detective, and that it is also

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<sup>77</sup> For example, in Christie courage and honour are not necessarily connected to gentlemanliness (84).

crucial for the female heroine to radiate sexuality in order to draw the detective's full attention. If it is a non-recurring trait that qualifies a character as a female gentleman, then it is possible to regard her as a ready-made type, like in the case of Marion Sharpe, who meets some of the criteria from the beginning, but, because of her less prestigious class affiliation and lack of interest in marriage, she may turn out to be problematic. As for class concerns, Schaub overrides the criterion of social status, pointing out that class scepticism frequently occurs in the novels of Marsh and Christie, and arguing that honour, courage and rationalism can all be possessed by women of any origin (69). This, however, eliminates birth as a historically essential element of gentlemanliness and foregrounds other personality traits that the Victorians added to the image to best suit their needs.

Another issue that might be raised in connection with Schaub's idea concerns gender. Schaub argues that "[i]t is always marriage or nothing for the Female Gentlemen – but marriage played out between equals who embrace the same standards and values" (51). While the ideological battle about the gender crisis and the marriage question certainly affected Golden Age authors, whose female heroines constantly reflect on such dilemmas, I would hesitate to restrict the category to those who embrace marriage, especially because marriage seems to be almost the final stage in their character development. I believe that it is her journey or agony until this final resolution, the process of coming to terms with herself and her own values, that provides a more fertile ground for the analysis of the female gentleman as well as.

Schaub's argument that the female gentleman is a new, modern form of femininity precisely because she, as a male woman, can become the gentleman detective's – the female man's – partner/equal (108) is not echoed by Megan Hoffman, who studies not only the female gentleman but female characters in general in her *Gender and Representation in Golden Age Crime Fiction*. Her focus is more on the "the changing models of femininity" (1) which turn out to be more ambivalent than it would seem on the surface.

As argued in the Introduction, Hoffman sees these female characters as models of modern feminine agency incorporating all the advantages that the first feminist revolution achieved; nevertheless, marriage with their ideal partners reinforces their loyalty to domesticity and a heteronormative order (2). Schaub calls it a utopian alliance, which Hoffman regards as a sign of retrograde ideological retrenchment. I do not think, though, that one needs to insist on either of these two opposing views, especially because for all the similarities, the gentlemanliness of the female gentleman takes different forms in the three writers. One of the striking differences has to do with the treatment of class, while the other with the decades in which these characters are active. While Schaub restricts the appearance of the female gentleman to the 20s and 30s, I

believe that it is not impossible to extend the relevance of the term beyond World War II<sup>78</sup>, which enables us to consider Tey's Marion Sharpe as an alternative representation of the female gentleman despite the obvious differences between her and the other two.

Amanda's and Harriet's marriage to the gentleman detective and the open-ended fate of Blair and Marion's relationship raise more questions than reassuring answers. Unlike Schaub, Hoffman suggests that one possible interpretation of the equivocal position of this female character can be carried out by placing her at the intersection of the old and the new, advocating neither "a radical feminist dismissal of social conventions [n]or a return to a Victorian ideal of submissive domesticity" (2). Drawing upon this observation, the female gentleman might be seen as no less ambiguous in terms of the memory politics of Golden Age writing than her male counterpart analysed in *Chapter Two*, and, similarly to him, she becomes an in-between figure in a no man's land. Schaub also remarks that the female gentleman in the 20s and 30s is represented as a modern and more successful woman than her New Woman predecessors. Taking these two arguments into consideration, it is obvious that there is something definitely new about the female gentleman and that this novelty can be recognized in her success as an independent woman who can live up to her own ambitions without grim consequences. While Sayers and Allingham see the culmination of this success in a somewhat more utopian relationship between equals, Tey does not connect happiness and love, at least, not explicitly. The female gentleman, thus, appears as a more radical but unique figure, whose revolt is directed not so much against the traditions or values of her own class but against misconceptions about women. The fact that she is in possession of gentlemanly traits such as honour, courage, common sense, restraint and self-control foreshadows the fact that her character plays a similar role in the symbolic and narrative economy of Golden Age fiction as the gentleman detective. Her narrative and symbolic function is to embody as well as ease the tension between the past and the present, with the additional remit of softening contemporary views of radical feminism. The female gentleman portrays herself as an advanced modern woman, whereas her family background, manners and firm belief in class hierarchy create the impression of a desire to restore or reclaim pre-war England. The nostalgic atmosphere around this female figure is further enhanced by the encounter with the gentleman detective. Taking these factors into consideration can point towards a more nuanced analysis of this recurrent character type, with special regard to the connection between memory politics and war traumas. This recognition seems to open up the possibility to view the female gentleman embedded in the memory of Englishness, an idea which Susan Rowland hints at in *British Women Crime Writers* only to

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<sup>78</sup> Allingham's Amanda reappears in *The Tiger in the Smoke*, published in 1952 and Schaub also remarks that women authors produced Female Gentleman novels until about the 1950s (3).

leave it entirely undeveloped. She asserts that modernist fragmentation offers “opportunities for the feminist writer. Now free of a unified masculine model of identity, she can explore more relational and provisional modes of being, bringing the feminine out of the dark other of realist representation [...] Psychic construction through detection, in this argument, is a feminine modernist strategy” (24). Although Rowland describes several factors that can contribute to the psychic construction<sup>79</sup> of the detective, here I shall focus on the role of lovers who stand against the fragmented male ego in this process. Analysing Sayers’ *Busman’s Honeymoon*, she concludes that Wimsey returns to his essential self as an English gentleman through his attachment to Harriet: “Only alliance with Harriet, with otherness as the feminine, can superimpose a delicate restitution of paradise” (77). Rowland’s short remark seems to reconnect with and modify my previous claim about the female gentleman’s position as a site of memory and the possibility that she may replace the role of the gentleman. Such a replacement certainly does not happen in the selected novels, the mission of the female gentleman is definitely not to undermine the heroism of the gentleman but quite the opposite, she helps him to come to terms with himself and restore him to his former self. This also seems a natural outcome since they share similar roots and they become each other’s mirror image. The female gentleman can thus be regarded as a bridge figure between the detective and his psychic reconstruction, or, in other words, his reappropriation of a modified masculine sexuality. This reappropriation, in turn, allows the female gentleman to avoid having to decide between the two roles – the equal partner or the domestic wife – since she can have both. Regarding the novels of Sayers and Allingham featuring the female gentleman, it becomes apparent that she cannot escape a considerable transformation while she assists the detective to evolve as a ‘real’ man who strives to get back to his England. Critics differ as to whether this unusually harmonious romance can or needs to take place between the two without upsetting the dynamics of the formula and come up with various explanations. Schaub argues that this perfect love affair is meant to sustain the illusion that such marriages between equal partners can be “models for others implying that they will produce a more honorable next generation through motherhood or education” (87)<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup> It is “the argument that the self of the detective exists in an interconnecting web of emotional energy within the novel. Much of the time the energy is overtly sexual, particularly for Peter Wimsey, Roderick Alleyn, Adam Dalgliesh and Albert Campion (a bit). These male figures are construed as eroticised beings from a feminine point of view whether by the narrative inclusion of lovers [...]” (22).

<sup>80</sup> Schaub’s conclusion might be a bit risky given that the interwar period saw a strengthening approval of eugenics. Suzanne Bray explains in her article “Gaudy Night and the Eugenics Debate” that all eugenic theory was based on the theory that “talent is transmitted by inheritance in a very remarkable degree” and that by persuading the healthy, rich and intelligent to have more children, the quality of the offspring produced must necessarily be improved” (83). Although this aspect is beyond the scope of my dissertation, it is intriguing to find out more about these authors’ relation to eugenics implied by Schaub. I find her remark disturbing because she comes to the conclusion that the future of the nation is based on the hegemony of the upper middle class/aristocracy without paying attention to the ideological debate on race and hostility towards foreigners. The books discussed in this chapter do

Conversely, Kenney and Hoffman claim that elaborating on the love interest is a sign that these writers were returning to an earlier tradition that could successfully combine the detective formula with romantic elements; this return is seen as the sign of the return to the old order in gender relations<sup>81</sup>. Both Kenney and Hoffman affirm that Sayers and other Golden Age writers excel in the reproduction of the traditional English romance plot that appears as a subtext of the crime narrative. Addressing the question of why the female gentleman seeks to be on the side of the detective, Kenney is seeking an answer by discussing the difference between the representation of Wimsey and Harriet. She concludes that, in order to have Wimsey's figure develop, Sayers needed Harriet, who is described as a lifelike figure: "Since Harriet was a real human being from the beginning, she could not be forced into marrying a caricature [...]. [Sayers] resolved to do "radical surgery on Peter" to turn him into a whole human being [...]" (87). While this statement is only concerned with Wimsey, one notices similar motivations in Allingham and Tey as well where the detectives experience a considerable change in their personalities beginning with the first encounter.

Sayers' *Busman's Honeymoon* and Allingham's *Traitor's Purse* (1941) both depict the female gentleman as a kind of 'eternal Englishwoman', a figure embedded in the heritage of the English pastoral. Her adventures as an active partner come to an end with married bliss on the side of the detective, which also implies that this character is unavoidably heading towards the past. By the time she identifies herself with this final role, she has gone through a series of violent adventures, which strengthens the desire for security and stability on the detective's side. Although Susan J. Leonardi suggests that Harriet "embraces domesticity to a limited extent in *Busman's Honeymoon*" (96), it is in this final novel that she comes to terms with herself by marrying an English aristocrat who has also been exposed to the cruelties of the world. The role of the lover in the detective's identity construction has been analysed by Ariela Freedman, among others, who remarks that Harriet's holding Wimsey close to her breast at the end of the novel is a "utopian answer to the continued problem of integrating shell-shocked soldiers into society — through the figure of the infinitely patient, infinitely forgiving woman" (383). Hoffman assumes that this scene endows Harriet with the role of a symbolic mother (100), which is precisely what Gill Plain claims about Amanda in Allingham's *Traitor's Purse*. In Allingham's book, the amnesiac Campion finds his way back to himself and his beloved

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imply a belief in the future of a well-bred race, especially Allingham's *The Fashion in Shrouds* and *Traitor's Purse*, but Sayers's *Gaudy Night* and *Busman's Honeymoon* also touch upon the question of eugenics without clearly indicating the side these writers take.

<sup>81</sup>"[...] often within these couples' relationships the feminised, 'masochistic' modern male must return to a paradigm of dominant aggressive masculinity and the modern female must return to a traditionally submissive role in order to establish a successful romantic relationship (Hoffman 8).

England through his female partner who “fits the iconic template of Kristeva’s virgin mother” (Plain 68). Wimsey’s coming to rest in Harriet’s lap is also a sign of his coming home and finding his place in society, which is justified by two short stories and an unfinished novel<sup>82</sup> that show the Wimsey family with children. According to Plain, Wimsey’s holding on to Harriet in the last completed novel resembles the way Campion feels about Amanda in *Traitor’s Purse*: “The infant Campion yearns for the security of the pre-symbolic dyad. If he has a wife, he has a mother, and he can retreat into this idealised place” (68). This is not Allingham’s last novel to feature Campion and Amanda, but it is the last one to take place before their married life, which suggests that, similarly to Harriet, Amanda is going to occupy a double role, that of the wife and the mother. In the subsequent Allingham novels, Amanda does not fully take part in the investigation, or is kept away<sup>83</sup>, just as Harriet is eliminated as a partner in Sayers’s short stories. The female gentleman’s acquisition of her new role seems to have terminated her journey as the detective has come to terms with himself and no longer needs her as a partner. Although they find themselves relocated in the domestic sphere, which may suggest a reinvigorated masculinity for the gentleman detective, their decision does not entail the renunciation of their professional career. What distinguishes them as female gentlemen from other female characters is the possibility to have both marriage and work.

Unlike Amanda and Harriet, Tey’s Marion only appears in a single novel, stands lower in the social hierarchy<sup>84</sup> than Blair, does not seem to have ambitions in life, and declines the lawyer-detective’s proposal in the end. Nevertheless, her contribution to Blair’s character development is comparable to that of the other two female gentlemen, making her also a bridge figure between the detective and the reconstruction of his masculine self, although in this case there is no reconstruction of the memory world, and Marion herself does not qualify for the title of the eternal woman that also equals England. Also, it needs to be emphasized that Tey’s novel was published in 1948, after the Second World War, when the illusion to restore old England had largely dissolved and was seen as even more unrealistic than in the interwar period. Marion’s success is not idealized in a consummated relationship with the detective but rather in her choice to remain an independent woman in the modern world; her decision, however, changes the life of the gentleman detective forever, leading Blair to the realization that there is

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<sup>82</sup> In 1936, Sayers started to write *Thrones and Dominations*, which was never finished; this unfinished novel and two short stories, “The Haunted Policeman” from 1936 and “Talboys” describe Wimsey’s family life.

<sup>83</sup> In *Coroner’s Pidgin* (1945), she stays at home with their son while Campion is in the war and also investigates a case, and in *The Tiger in the Smoke*, she starts investigating without Campion’s consent. Sayers’ “The Haunted Policeman” shows Wimsey investigating alone, and “Talboys” with his 6-year-old son.

<sup>84</sup> The question of class is an exciting aspect in the relationship between the two characters as all the three of them stand lower in the social hierarchy than the detective when they first meet but only Marion remains in the same status.

no way back to the past. The assumption behind the present chapter is that the female gentleman can be seen as an example of what Light understands under ‘conservative modernity’ by accommodating the past in the new forms of the present. She appears as a confident, modern woman who shows herself capable of a successful life and career, but her value system, respect for the past and gentlemanly virtues also allow her to be part of the conservative myth of Englishness, just like her gentleman detective partner. She is also an ideal candidate to restore the detective to his masculine self which draws on a sense of nostalgia, recreating the illusion of pre-war England by the end of her journey. In the post-World War II era, however, she is portrayed as a more confident and optimistic figure who is able to preserve her gentlemanly virtues without evading modernity.

#### 4.1 Harriet Vane as a New Woman

Of the three writers, it is evidently Sayers who does most “to explore the possibilities of the modern for women” (59), as Mary Evans argues in *The Imagination of Evil*, and Harriet Vane can be seen as the embodiment of all the contradictions of Sayers’s perception of the New Woman. She first meets Wimsey in *Strong Poison* where Harriet is being tried at court, accused of killing her lover, Philip Boyes, with arsenic. This novel introduces Harriet as a problematic woman – exactly the same type I have analysed in *Chapter 3* - whose free spirit and independence challenge the established patterns of contemporary society. She holds a first class degree from Oxford maintaining herself as a writer of detective stories, and has co-habited with her murdered partner. Apparently, Harriet has violated the boundaries between the sexes in all respects. She is not only financially independent, which, as Cate Haste notes, was widely frowned upon (42), but she has also chosen a profession which was traditionally reserved for men. Sally Ledger explains that there was a close association between “novel-writing and feminist activism: writing itself was seen as a liberatory activity” (27). Showalter also points out that “[a]ny woman who has attained to even a small measure of success in literature or art has done so by discarding [...] the traditions in which she was reared, by turning her back upon the conventional ideas of dependence [...]” (225).

Harriet’s unorthodox lifestyle is openly criticised by the judge, who does not fail to emphasize that he considers her to be a wicked woman who does not only write “detective” stories that “deal with various ingenious methods of committing murder” (4) but has also “consented to live on terms of intimacy with him [Philip Boyes] outside the bonds of marriage” (5), which “was anything but an ordinary, vulgar act of misbehaviour” (5). The judge also emphasizes that

for free love, “the woman always has to pay more heavily than the man” (5), reiterating the age-old imperative according to which it is the woman’s duty to demonstrate sexual chastity and refuse sexual advances. The fact that Harriet did not resist Philip Boyes is a proof that “she was a person of unstable moral character” (5). The way Harriet is characterized by the judge recalls the contemporary image of the villainous woman analysed in *Chapter Three*, whose sexual promiscuity aligns her with a murderous inclination. Although Sayers’ competent, independent and university-educated women are honest and self-respecting, Harriet is presented in *Strong Poison* as dangerous both to men and to the social order by the authorities and the public due to her ‘tarnished’ sexual history (153), asserts Cora Kaplan, adding that “[s]exual desire, even heterosexual love, is the ‘wild card’, the Achilles heel of the emancipated woman, threatening her civic, mental, and emotional independence” (153).

The way Harriet is described by the judge seems to be very far from the qualities of the female gentleman. Looking back from the concluding scene in *Busman’s Honeymoon*, where the two are silently holding on to each other in their country house, Harriet seems to have distanced herself considerably from this image. Before attaining this final and more domestic femininity, she goes through three different stages as the novels chronologically unfold her adventures with Wimsey, and her trajectory as a woman is the reverse of the temporal linearity of the events. While in the first novel she is portrayed as a modern and sexually liberated woman who is forced to face the prejudice of public and stigmatization for living with a lover, *Gaudy Night* (1935) portrays her as a deeply wounded person who is uncertain about the priorities in her life, wondering whether it is possible to keep a balance between the flesh and the intellect or contemplating the social consequences of a sexual relationship on one’s personal integrity.

Schaub remarks that “[a] true gentleman recognizes a female gentleman despite any obscuring circumstances” (67). Despite the fact that Harriet is publicly denounced as a bad woman, Wimsey intuitively feels that she is not the kind of woman the judge wants the public to consider her to be. When he goes to see her in Holloway Gaol, even Harriet is being ironic about the judge’s character assassination, pointing out to Wimsey that he cannot possibly fancy such a corrupt woman. This first exchange between them is really witty, if not sarcastic, which is one of the early signs that they are intellectual equals; at this point, however, Harriet feels so bitter and humiliated that she is unable to take Wimsey seriously and trust him. Instead of alleviating her pain, Wimsey’s pomposity and impulsive proposal in the prison makes things worse, since she takes it for granted that he is just another ‘imbecile’ making fun of her and admiring his own greatness.

Although his successful investigation of the case rescues her from death, it leaves a long-lasting discomfort in her that she should be indebted to Wimsey for the rest of her life.



Discussing the lack of balance between them, Hoffman argues that Wimsey's proving her innocence in the murder case serves more to declare "her innocence of symbolic criminality [which is] much an affirmation of her potential for marriage as it is an exoneration of nonconforming sexuality" (Hoffman 67). It is not simply that the incident forces Harriet to play the extremely traditional role of the persecuted maiden who can only be rescued by the heroic knight: it is as if Wimsey were reconstructing her (public) personality after its denigration by the judge. By redescribing or reinventing her, Wimsey, as it were, appropriates Harriet, which might explain her reservations and subsequent desire to keep away from him, while it also implies that the woman can only enter the unique world of gentlemanliness if she is endowed with all the symbolic traits that the gentleman detective finds appropriate and desirable in a woman. It is, in this sense, only due to the gentleman detective's intervention that Harriet can be regarded as his equal, it is only through his cleverness and eloquence that one learns about the values of the female gentleman, which creates an irremediable imbalance between the two and which Harriet fights against in *Gaudy Night*.

Also, the fact that that innocence in a criminological sense and sexual chastity are interconnected in the novels show a strong resemblance between the female gentleman and her Victorian predecessors. Although there is considerable sexual tension between the detective and his partner, it seems that the two can only achieve their goal together if they remain sexually abstinent until they are reconciled in marriage. Sexual restraint appears to be a necessary attribute of the female gentleman<sup>85</sup>. Golden Age writers seem to have refused to identify with the modern feminist achievements such as free love or engagement in casual erotic relationships. Although Harriet has tried herself in co-habitation, it is not accidental that Sayers starts *Strong Poison* with describing the negative consequences of such a decision, and suggests that Harriet's development into a more mature and conscious woman who can live up to her ideals entails abstaining from sex. As Schaub puts it, "Sayers requires that her hero and heroine have an honor of the body and of the mind" (92).

The emphasis on chastity, however, does not simply mean Harriet's reduction into an embodiment of Victorian ideas of wifely chastity. Sexual abstention can also be seen as a counterpart of what the male gentleman is doing – at least in the medieval, chivalric sense of the word. Remembering that the true gentleman can only align himself with his female equivalent, they both have to follow this code of honour. *Strong Poison*, on the contrary, portrays both of them as grossly deviating from the ideal image they are meant to embody by

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<sup>85</sup>While the interwar period continued the controversies about female sexuality that started in the late nineteenth century allowing for a more liberated and eroticised vision of the female body, old Victorian values of sexual purity still appealed, what is more, they became a grounding force of the national stability after the war.

the end of their journey. Wimsey's first proposal to Harriet comes rather as a shock when he is boasting of his success in sexual relationships with other women to flatter her: "I can produce quite good testimonials. I'm told I make love rather nicely [...]" (51). Although the novel portrays the two as individuals having tried pleasures that modern life can offer to them, neither can achieve happiness and satisfaction in these relationships. Harriet's refusals of Wimsey's persistent proposals ensure sexual chastity for both, which signals a return to the former masculine ideal of sexual purity<sup>86</sup> as well. Harriet's understanding of the honour of the body guarantees Wimsey's observation of the codes of gentlemanliness, too, while also giving Harriet the opportunity to start her life all over again and reconsider her position as an independent woman in society.

*Strong Poison* foregrounds two fairly contrasting views that define Harriet's character in widely different ways. Her public image defines her as a promiscuous independent woman, who is also a suspect in a murder case. From this perspective, she is no different from the villainous New Woman type analysed in *Chapter 3*. However, the focus in the novel is placed more on her essential qualities, such as intellect, virtue and honour, features that the lower-class dangerous female type is not allowed to possess in this body of fiction. Nevertheless, her gentlemanly traits start to emerge only through her contact with Wimsey, which creates a relative imbalance between the two. Although they are each other's equals in intellect and humour, it takes another book before Harriet can finally grow into the role of the female gentleman by following her own heart and standing on equal grounds with Wimsey.

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<sup>86</sup> In *Chapter Two*, it was pointed out that the early Victorians required gentlemen to control their sexual energies.

## 4.2. Harriet Becomes a Female Gentleman

The opening scene of *Gaudy Night* shows Harriet feeling nostalgic about Oxford as she is staring at the invitation to the Gaudy, a reunion of former students in Shrewsbury College<sup>87</sup>. In her mind, Oxford is an idealized place, like a fairy land of moral purity. Looking at the letter, she is filled with nostalgia for a time when she was not yet tainted by notoriety, before she was not tried for murder or stigmatized for an immoral relationship with a man. Oxford enters her mind as the site of glory which has been able to reconcile and synthesize tradition with the present – meaning primarily the female presence among the ancient buildings. Oxford, “the haven for the intellectual life and a ground for the establishment of male relationship” (Leonardi 20), tolerates the intrusion of Shrewsbury College: “She saw a stone quadrangle, built by a modern architect in a style neither new nor old, but stretching out reconciling hands to past and present” (1). Although the building itself is a newcomer that stands for women’s intellectual achievements, it “was fully worthy to take place among the ancient and noble building which were the glory of [the] University” (13), says the Vice Chancellor at the opening ceremony of the Gaudy.

While Harriet projects the building of Shrewsbury in her mind as a place that can reconcile the past and the present, she is still inclined to disconnect her vision of Oxford from the present with its painful reality to contrast it with the carefree and happy years of her life. She remembers the time she spent with Mary Stokes, when they “punted up the Cher” (3), “when they climbed the Magdalen tower” (ibid.), and “the long discussions about art and love, religion and citizenship” (ibid.). Oxford, as she reconstructs it from the present, is like an isolated, unspoiled place with a utopian community where one can feel safe and do one’s job without the distractions of the outside world. Her recollections of the past in Shrewsbury resemble the same idyllic representation of the innocent English landscape with its images of the pastoral:

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<sup>87</sup> Shrewsbury College is a fictional place taken on Somerville College, Oxford where Sayers read Modern Languages. Somerville became a full member of Oxford in 1920 gave B.A. and M.A. degrees to five women retroactively, including Sayers (Dawning 42).

Memory peopled the quad with moving figure. Students sauntering in pairs. Students dashing to lectures, their gowns hitched hurriedly over light summer frocks...Bicycles stacked in the porter's lodge, their carriers piled with books and gowns twisted about their handle-bars. A grizzled woman don crossing the turf with vague eyes, her thoughts riveted upon aspects of sixteenth-century philosophy [...] Two male commoners [...] talking loudly about boats [...] The college cat, preoccupied and remote, stalking with tail erect in the direction of the buttery. (2)

In Harriet's mind, Oxford ceases to be a real place and emerges as an idea, a concept where intellect rules over emotions, where women are given the opportunity to show that, in terms of intellectual abilities, it is impossible to distinguish between male and female, they are on an equal platform since it is the (androgynous) mind and pure reason that guide everyday life. Similarly to the previously analysed memory sites, Oxford is also endowed with mythical attributes. Through Harriet's recollections, it seems that memory has preserved it as an eternal ideal of Englishness with its old buildings, ancient rituals and scholarly reputation. Even the contents of her old trunk, cautiously guarding her relics from Oxford, are described as practically untouched by the passing of time: "Books. Discarded garments. Old shoes. Old manuscripts. The gown, worn only once [...] has suffered nothing from its long seclusion [...] The crimson silk of the hood gleamed bravely. Only the flat cap showed a little touch of the moth's tooth" (4). The idealized vision of her former college and her former self as a prominent student results the devaluation of her present life as a crime fiction writer, and, even worse, a notoriety. She feels that the years in Oxford seem so far and intangible as if they had never happened: "[i]t was all so long ago; so closely encompassed and complete so cut off from the bitter years that lay between" (2). Reflecting her present life in the reconstructed image of Oxford, she can only see herself as a failure who has not achieved "the kind of career that Shrewsbury expected of its old students" (3). Nevertheless, it is the idealized image of her old school that not only prevents her from seeing it as part of the real world but has also prevented her from participating in former Gaudies for fear that she would be insulted or discriminated because of the Boyes case. When Harriet finally decides to go this time, she expects a painful confrontation between the past she left there and her present life, yet her experience at the Gaudy not only exposes her to facing her own misconceptions about Oxford, but also makes her reconsider the rigid but safe structure she has forced her life into. The disturbing incidents that start on the first night of the Gaudy require Harriet's full involvement as a detective, which means that Oxford becomes a place that very much belongs to the present. As the investigation

proceeds, and the memory world of Oxford slowly disappears, she also becomes a more accepting and emotional woman who realizes how much her judgments were distorted by her preconceptions about life and people.

When Harriet arrives at Shrewsbury, she feels anxious about her encounter with her former teachers and mates. Although the Dean, Miss Martin, greets her with pleasure, she still feels bound to say that the female educators might think it a daring act that she is present: “Rather brave of me, don’t you think?” (10). This is one of the first signs of Harriet’s misconceptions about the staff of Oxford, since she projects her own fears and insecurities over her environment, assuming that the others have the same view of the horrible things in her past. “ ‘Oh, nonsense!’ said the Dean. She put her head on one side and fixed Harriet with a bright and birdlike eye. You mustn’t think about all that. Nobody bothers about it at all. We’re not nearly such dried-up mummies as you think. After all, it’s the work you are doing that really counts, isn’t it? By the way, the Warden is longing to see you. She simply loved *The Sands of Crime*” (11). The changes in the attitude of the management also reinforce the impression that Oxford has changed greatly since the times when “it fought for Women’s degrees it had been guided by a diplomat” (11), but now “its behaviour was made acceptable by a personality” (ibid.). Mistaken in her belief that Oxford would judge and condemn her, she can still hold on to the principle of professional integrity in this “quiet place, where only intellectual achievement counted [...] The fact that one had loved and sinned and suffered and escaped death was of far less ultimate moment than a single footnote in a dim academic journal [...]” (18-19).

Female scholars are seen as the equals of their male colleagues, possessing the same capacity to think rationally and stick to the facts without being swayed by emotions. In “The Human-Not-Quite-Human”, Sayers argues for the androgyny of the mind: “But the brain, the great and sole true Androgyne, that can mate indifferently with male or female and beget offspring upon itself, the cold brain laughs at their perversions of history” (63). Sayers’ advanced ideas are put to test in Shrewsbury College where there is no direct male influence and presence to undermine women’s intellectual ambitions. Nevertheless, the old myths that discriminated and stigmatized women for centuries still seem to be at work, leading to violence and confusion in the community. Also, Sayers displays her fondness for parallels and oppositions that dynamically interact with each other and lead to conflicts inside and between the characters. One of the most severe conflicts she delineates in the book originates from the clash between the past and the present regarding the role of women in society, in professional

pursuits, and the possibility of maintaining a balance between marriage and a professional career.

All of these issues are brought into play on the first night of the Gaudy when the case of the poison-pen letters begins (40). Walking in the quad after dinner, Harriet finds a piece of paper in the trim turf which shows the image of a “naked figure of exaggeratedly feminine outlines, inflicting savage and humiliating outrage upon some person of indeterminate gender clad in a cap and gown. It was neither sane nor healthy” (40). It fills her with disgust and keeps her mind occupied even the next day when she starts looking at the women with a different eye, suspecting everyone. One day later, she comes upon another message that has been hidden in the sleeve of her gown, with the words: “You dirty murderess. Aren’t you ashamed to show your face?” (62). Harriet cannot help associating the culprit with the women’s community of Oxford by stating rather than claiming: “Oxford, thou too?” (63). The idealized place devoid of corruption, as she has imagined it to be, transforms into a haunted castle where ancient myths of the independent woman start to creep up, as Leonardi claims: “The reversion to the mythical reinforces the depth, the cultural pervasiveness, of the fear of the unnatural woman. Not simply a fear born of Oxford’s nervousness over the women in their midst, the dread of the independent, assertive woman is “ancient”, rooted in the myths of the civilization that Oxford exists to perpetuate (94).

Harriet’s painful cry is also an expression of disappointment. For her, Oxford is the last shelter for higher principles as she has imagined it to be before coming to the Gaudy. Nevertheless, it is also after this first shock that Harriet is starting to see other faces of Oxford too, which slowly dismantles the utopian image. Although she leaves for home after the Gaudy, the poison-pen letters keep circulating in the college, and the Dean finally asks her to help and investigate the case in order to keep the thing within the college. Although Harriet is trying to do her best, her efforts prove to be futile. One possible reason for her failure may be that she is afraid to discover that the intellectual side of life she has trusted so much might betray her Oxford, which would equally justify the ancient anxiety that educated women are dangerous, an issue Sayers had already explored in *Unnatural Death*. Harriet’s fears that women’s independence and education may not be natural are echoed by Miss Hillyard, a history tutor at Shrewsbury, who is savagely critical of women having both a family and a profession. The conflict comes to a head at a meeting after everyone has returned from the vacation, except Mrs Goodwin, the Dean’s secretary, whose young son is ill. While everyone seems understanding, Miss Hillyard attacks her colleagues, accusing them of agreeing with putting domestic interests before professional duties. Her frustration reveals a deeply rooted image she is coping with and

is projecting onto the others: “The fact is, though you will never admit it, that everybody in this place has an inferiority complex about married women and children. For all your talk about careers and independence, you all believe in your hearts that we ought to abase ourselves before any woman who has fulfilled her animal functions” (261). The various reactions of the female dons show that it is out of individual preferences that one chooses either a family or a profession or is trying to do both. Miss Martin concludes that Miss Hillyard’s prejudices and hatred of men arise from her failure to have married: “I always think it’s a very great pity she never married” (263).

The female community at Shrewsbury is far from homogeneous in its ideas about a ‘proper’ life for a woman and, with the exception of Miss Hillyard, they are not discriminative with married women. The exchanges between Harriet and the former students show that women with an academic degree have a greater freedom to pursue the life they want, which does not exclude the possibility that some return to their traditional roles. Nevertheless, the fate of the married woman with brains is not described as an attractive option for Harriet, who is also to face the dilemma of having to choose between single or married life in this novel. A conversation with Catherine Freemantle, who is now Mrs. Bendick, leaves Harriet puzzled about marriage. Catherine, who used to be a talented student, married a farmer, had children, and abandoned her dreams of intellectual achievement. She says that she is happy in her marriage, but cannot help admitting that she misses some things sometimes. Harriet reads Catherine’s confession about her marriage as one more repetition of the usual script in which the woman gives up her dreams for her family and domesticity: “She parted eventually from Mrs. Bendick with a depressed feeling that she had seen a Derby winner making shift with a coal-cart” (53). Harriet’s experience of married women at the Gaudy leads her to conclude that it is rare for a great woman to find a great man who appreciates his partner’s brains “since the rule seemed to be that a great woman must either die unwed [...] or find a still greater man to marry her. And that limited the great woman’s choice considerably [...] indeed, it was often found sweet and commendable in him to choose a woman of no sort of greatness at all” (57). The only good example she sees is the marriage of Phoebe Tucker, whose husband, just like Phoebe, is an archaeologist who is both a partner and her professional equal. Nevertheless, Harriet cannot get rid of her ideas that married life is destructive for the woman as a rule. Although in a conversation, the new research fellow, Miss de Vine, whom Harriet admires, points out to her that there are a few examples to contradict the rule, she is still not prepared to

change her prejudices<sup>88</sup> and the gendered categories she has established in her mind. On the one hand, her rigid view, her conviction about the superiority of intellect over emotions and about the consequences of one's decisions might be the source of her hesitation to accept Wimsey's proposal. On the other, it can explain her inability to put an end to the circulation of the anonymous letters.

Harriet's inflexibility and fears rooted in generalizations and prefabricated ideas about either married or intellectual women reveal a hidden parallel between her and the scout of Miss Lydgate, the English tutor, Annie, who eventually turns out to be the author of the poison-pen letters. Although they are each other's exact opposites at first sight, they are also secret sharers, sharing some of the misconceptions and rigidity in their attitude to women's role in society. In order to see this, one only has to recall the conflict in the Senior Common Room when Miss Hillyard attacks the female dons. The incident impels Harriet to reconsider what is meant by a natural and unnatural woman, two concepts behind the most passionate conflicts in the novel, also analysed by Susan J. Leonardi. It seems that this question has to be resolved within Harriet before she is ready for a utopian relationship with Wimsey. A question posed during a conversation with Annie reveals her anxieties concerning women's education and women's scholarly activity: "But it seems to me a dreadful thing to see all these unmarried ladies living together. It isn't natural, is it?" (134).

The difference between natural and unnatural is turned on its head when a 'natural', that is, traditional woman, turns out to be the perpetrator, someone whose mind is totally blinded by her infatuation with her husband mixed with social prejudice against learned women. Before the resolution of the case, Miss de Vine anticipates the reasons that might explain Annie's deviant acts. In an exchange with Harriet, she develops her views on the pitfalls of relationships and gender roles. She sees devoted love as dangerous, since it has a fatal effect on one's character: "I'm very sorry for the person who is somebody else's job; he (or she, of course) ends by devouring or being devoured, either of which is bad for one" (202). As it later turns out, Annie's hatred of educated women is based on her personal experience which also corrupts her ability to distinguish between the members of Shrewsbury and see them as individuals rather than a group of women with identical features. Annie is considered as someone who has made her husband's life and failure her job. Her husband lost his job as a professor, and his M.A. degree was also withdrawn at Flamborough College due to the intervention of Miss de Vine,

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<sup>88</sup>Even Wimsey draws her attention to the paralyzing effect of thinking along constructed categories: "For God's sake, put your prejudices aside and think it out. What's happened to you that you can't put two and two together?" (455).



who noticed that the thesis was grounded on false argumentation as a result of its author's suppression of evidence. The husband, unable to cope with this shame, finally committed suicide. For Miss de Vine, her decision was a matter of intellectual integrity, since "One can't be pitiful where one's own job is concerned" (201). Nevertheless, her attitude, as Leonardi argues, is a characteristic typical of the unwomanly/unnatural woman (*Dangerous* 92). "Annie is the natural woman, the woman who fights for her man no matter what he does, whose violence is unchecked by a trained intellect" (93). Annie hates educated women, because she is convinced that they put professional integrity above personal interests in all circumstances. Her distorted ideas, however, are refuted on several occasions, when the female dons do consider personal circumstances, for instance in the case of Jukes, the old porter, who is caught stealing, or when they exert themselves to find a comfortable place for Annie's daughters. The fact that she wants to take revenge on all educated women for her husband's suicide proves not only how dangerous "womanly women" can be but also the grotesqueness of being overpowered by anger, revenge and personal bias. According to Leonardi, "[...] *Gaudy Night*'s claim is quite clear: the unnatural woman turns out to be the civilized human being and the hope for a saner society; the natural woman, the womanly woman, not the educated woman, is the real danger" (93).

Miss Hillyard's passionate outrage and discriminative remarks about men and women could have been a clue for Harriet to find Annie, since the former clearly understands the significance of personal history behind all sorts of harsh rejections. Harriet's confusion about the whole case evokes unexpected emotions: "The situation was becoming a nightmare. Faces had grown sly and distorted overnight; eyes fearful; the most innocent words charged with suspicion [...] She was suddenly afraid of all these women [...] they were walled in, sealed down, by walls and seals that shut her out [...] the atmosphere of Shrewsbury was getting on [her] nerves" (297-8). Her distress may arise from the ancient myth about women according to which too much learning can drive a woman mad. As indicated at the beginning of this subchapter, Harriet's discomfort may be nourished by the fear of the unnatural, independent woman (Leonardi 94), "the ancient dread [that] clouds her judgement" (ibid.). Failing to solve the case, she feels compelled to ask for Wimsey's help, whose experience of the world would be an invaluable intervention that would also put an end to the matter. Nevertheless, it may be somewhat ironic that it is he, a man, who should call her attention to where she has been mistaken about the whole case:

‘Even if much learning makes one person mad it need not make everybody mad. All these women are beginning to look abnormal to you because you don’t know which one to suspect, but actually even you don’t suspect more than one.’  
 ‘No; but I’m beginning to feel that almost any one of them might be capable of it.’  
 ‘That, I fancy, is where your fears are distorting your judgement’. (339)

While Wimsey is right about Harriet’s fears and rejection of personal involvement in a case that would totally override the principles she has relied on so much –Oxford’s purity and the responsibility of educated and independent women – she realizes that cannot escape any longer from the revision of her own emotions which would probably rearrange the priorities in her life. The conversations with Wimsey make her realize that the whole project should be carried out through her crime writing which she has used so far to conceal her feelings and live up to a professional ideal of objectivity:

‘You would have to abandon the jigsaw kind of story and write a book about human beings for a change.’  
 ‘I’m afraid to try that, Peter. It might go too near the bone.’  
 ‘It might be the wisest thing you could do.’  
 ‘Write it out and get rid of it?’  
 ‘Yes.’  
 ‘I’ll think about that. It would hurt like hell.’  
 ‘What would that matter, if it made a good book? [...] What’s the good of making mistakes if you don’t use them? Have a shot. Start on Wilfrid.’ (348)

For Harriet, writing crime fiction is like a self-therapy: she can work according to a pattern that does not stir her personally. Wimsey’s advice, encouraging her to change her writing strategy, comes quite late as compared to her recognition of the same problem with regard to her books. From the start of the investigation, Harriet contemplates her professional merits and the hidden factors that make her suppress her own feelings and prevent her from developing into a ‘real’ writer:

The books were all right as far as they went [...] But there was something lacking about them; they read now to her as though they had been written with a mental reservation, a determination to keep her own opinions and personality out of view. She considered with distaste a clever and superficial discussion between two of the characters about married life. She could have made a much better thing of that, if she had not been afraid of giving herself away. (72)

Again, Sayers seems to play with parallels and oppositions with view to Harriet’s development as an individual and as a writer. By the end of the novel, the figure of Wilfrid, who has been

causing trouble in her work in progress, is solved, and Harriet thinks that she owes Peter gratitude for this: “Yes, I’m re-writing Wilfrid [...] He’s better, I think. Almost human [...] To Peter, who made Wilfrid what he is – that sort of thing...Don’t laugh like that. I’m really working at Wilfrid” (525). Harriet’s metamorphosis into a more emotional and serene human being is represented as parallel with her professional development as a writer, which enables her to concentrate more on the psychological side of her characters instead of producing detective stories according to a particular pattern. While Harriet elaborates on revising and re-interpreting the pattern of her novels, she does the same regarding the choice between marriage or a career. Harriet not only becomes a more mature woman due to all the incidents in *Gaudy Night*, but she is also more convinced by the end – also inspired by her discussions with Miss de Vine – that her profession as a writer is more important for her than anything else: “‘But suppose one does not quite know which one wants to put first. Suppose,’ said Harriet [...] ‘suppose one is cursed with both a heart and a brain?’ – ‘I’m quite sure, [said Miss de Vine], that one never makes fundamental mistakes about the thing one really wants to do’” (199).

What she also needs to understand, though, is that Wimsey does not require her to give up her life and identity. Harriet’s decision to marry Wimsey, however, is born only after a prolonged deliberation due to her fears of married life and, most of all, to her awareness of the unequal relation between them which she attributes to the circumstances of their first encounter in *Strong Poison*: “She had taken it for granted that she could never again attract any man’s fancy, except the eccentric fancy of Peter Wimsey. And to him she was, of course, only the creature of his making and the mirror of his own magnanimity” (282).

Just like her vision of Oxford as an unchanging ideal calls for revision, she must also get rid of her prejudices about Wimsey. Although Oxford has not let Harriet down regarding professional integrity, it has taught her that intellectual women are not unemotional or indifferent to the outside world. The enigmatic Miss de Vine, who turns out to be a real judge of character, reinforces Harriet’s belief that she is capable of making a good decision if she listens to her heart: “Forgive me. I don’t suppose you’ve had a very easy time with yourself. But it can’t have been a very easy time with yourself [...] He’ll never make up your mind for you. You’ll have to make your own decisions. You needn’t be afraid of losing your independence; he will always force it back on you” (517). Harriet realizes that marrying Wimsey does not mean embracing traditional domesticity and wifely duties, but a unique chance to reinvent the institution by pushing its boundaries towards incorporating both roles, the woman as a professional and the woman as a wife. With this, Sayers has created a utopian relationship between the male and the

female gentleman, with the latter seeming to have retained her career while also gaining a loving partner. It is in this book that Harriet matures into the role of the female gentleman, and her experience in an all-female college leads her to recognize the importance of individual pursuits and ambitions as well as the dangers of blindly devoted love. *Gaudy Night* also prepares Wimsey and Harriet for their shared life in *Busman's Honeymoon* after they have revealed their virtues, flaws and weaknesses to each other. While she is greatly appreciated for her intellect, and has shown her moral and emotional integrity, the most important mission in *Busman's Honeymoon* proves to be the one of recreating their mutual life based on pre-war values. Having thus experienced the world, they are prepared to return to the beginnings by retiring to Talboys which stands for the England they are about to retrieve.

#### 4.3. Harriet as a Bridge Figure

Both Hilary Hinds and Alison Light argue that it is in the feminine middlebrow novels that the domestic sphere is depicted as a place to recreate the sense of Englishness, which does not only involve a “realignment of sexual identities” (Light 8) but also the construction of a more inward-looking, more domestic and more private England. Light’s argument is obviously grounded in the wartime traumas that lingered on into the interwar years, accelerating the need to establish pre-war standards in the home for the agonized male. Hind’s essay confirms Light’s thesis, elaborating this feature in feminine middlebrow novels:

If the home was conceived as a proper space for the formation, reproduction, and celebration of the masculine self, rather than simply a place of recuperation and retreat from the cares and strife of the masculine public world, to threaten its stability could be understood as undermining of masculinity itself. And if the home was newly identified with, and validated as, the epitome of what was best about the English, then self-sacrifice for the good of the nation could no longer be seen only as a masculine matter undertaken on the battlefield. The domestication of that self-sacrifice made it also a feminine matter undertaken at home. Feminine selflessness and domestic duties become, by this account, matters of national as well as familial loyalty. (313)

The concluding scene of *Busman's Honeymoon* shows the gentleman detective and his wife in the self-contained little world of Talboys, an old country house in Harriet’s native county,

Hertfordshire. The sub-text of this final completed novel describes Harriet's fight to find her position in the Wimsey family and continue the tradition as the wife of an English aristocrat, despite the fact that their marriage is a symbol of "social mobility in an increasingly bourgeois world" (Kenney 105). The opening chapter includes some correspondence between friends and family concerned with the marriage of Wimsey and Harriet and her personal qualities. Among the many hostile comments<sup>89</sup> about Harriet quoted from Helen's – Wimsey's sister-in-law – letter, Bunter's observations in his letter to his mother suggest a more promising perspective on Harriet's new role among aristocrats: "I was very pleased with her new ladyship's behaviour towards the guests, which was frank and friendly to all stations, but of course, his lordship would not choose any but a lady in all respects. I do not anticipate any trouble with her" (9).

Bunter's calling Harriet a 'lady' highlights and foreshadows a shift in Harriet's status at Wimsey's side and raises questions about the survival of her gentlemanly traits that Schaub sees as a 'reappropriation of Victorian masculinity' (2). This confirms Kenney's claim that Harriet's marriage to Wimsey is a sign of the middle-class adoption of aristocratic manners, and the appellation 'lady' is one of the symbols or symptoms of this social phenomenon. Bunter's reassuring comment on Wimsey's ability to recognise a lady no matter what her background is draws a parallel between Harriet and Jane Eyre or even the princesses of Grimm fairy tales where the prince recognizes the true value of the poor or suffering girl and rescues her from her deprived conditions. Geraldine Perriam's essay analyses Allingham's *Sweet Danger* from the same perspective, pointing out that detective novels featuring a romantic love interest have a strong resemblance to fairy tales. The love affair of Harriet Vane and Lord Wimsey can also be seen as a medieval romance where Wimsey appears as a knight who saves the lady from danger and disgrace and wins her heart by defeating all the enemies, finally buying Talboys' as a wedding present, enabling Harriet's return to the village next to her own birthplace and to the old house she has longed for so much. The village and the house symbolically reverse chronology by returning Harriet into her familiar environment and, in a wider sense, to a feminine role - confined to the house – of an earlier period. Harriet's restoration is, however, a slow process. Wimsey's mother, the Dowager Duchess describes Harriet as someone who needs help and guidance to feel sure of herself: "Desperately anxious I should get hold of Harriet and make her understand she was welcome – poor child, it is hard for her, left here to face us all, when she can scarcely feel sure of herself or anything yet" (12).

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<sup>89</sup> Gunn and Bell emphasize the fact that "[i]t is about the growth of a new 'upper middle class' supplanting the landed aristocracy as the single most powerful force in British society in the early twentieth century" (91). Helen's open hostility towards Harriet might also be based on such fears that foreshadow the vanishing of the aristocracy.

Judging from these comments, family members evaluate Harriet's character according to how much she is able to attain to Wimsey's level. Wimsey's mother, though she accepts her the way she is, does not fail to enumerate in her diary all the things Harriet is not capable of performing for lack of experience in high society, such as finding a housekeeper or choosing the right staff. In the process of acquiring the art of being a wife, Harriet is asking her mother-in-law for advice, deferring to her authority and, by implication, accepting her own position: "She wondered whether her own decision 'not to be wifely and solicitous' had been a wise one. She wrote, asking for counsel" (442). Harriet's reliance on her mother-in-law's judgement and experience in attempting to fit in represents the power of the past which she is ready to embrace, but the most evident example of this continuity is probably their move to the countryside and occupation of Talboys. Nevertheless, Harriet is still full of uncertainties about the success of their marriage as ancient ghosts haunt her mind when she thinks of the word her 'husband', "the man in possession" (38). The murder case they investigate during their honeymoon, however, resolves all of the doubts and uncertainties about their marriage, and the house is transformed into a shelter where the two deeply wounded people can make a new start.

The house is an old mansion and with its grim atmosphere it is shown as a typical setting for murder mysteries. Wimsey's description of Talboys foreshadows what is about to happen to them there: "It's beautiful. It's like a lovely body inhabited by an evil spirit. And I don't mean only the furniture. I've taken a dislike to our landlord, or tenant, or whatever he is. I've a fancy he's up to no good and that the house will be glad to be rid of him" (87). Talboys has the same ghastly atmosphere about itself as all the other houses in classical whodunits; it is as if the house had been transformed into a battleground of good and evil, waiting for either its eternal doom or salvation. The crime interest in the book obviously lies in the discovery of the dead body of Mr. Noakes, the former owner, in the locked house, but it may also symbolize the obstacle of the Wimsleys in their regaining their past selves. They need to eliminate the dead body in order to take up their roles as wife and husband, but the investigation brings up past traumas. Harriet wants to make sure that, by fulfilling a woman's duty to marry, she will not be expected to "accept that traditional union of male and female which privileges the male and represses the female" (Leonardi 96), but Wimsey, too, has his own worries. He is afraid that his engagement in criminal investigation might corrupt their relationship as a result of which he will be more of a troublemaker than a protective husband. Their final reward for solving the puzzle of the murder is that their anxieties about married life are dispelled and Talboys is transformed into a fairy land where the past and the present can be reconciled. Although Harriet's insistence on spending their honeymoon there may appear at first selfish on her part,

it proves to be the right thing for them to do, for it is here that they can begin to recognize themselves as belonging to England, as carriers of the memory of Englishness. Not long after their arrival in the countryside, Harriet's vision of Wimsey changes for good while she is observing his manners and attitude to the people and to his environment. Nowhere else does Harriet allow herself to be so emotional as in this scene when she recognizes Wimsey as *a lieu de mémoire*. He turns out to be a familiar, reassuring figure implanted in the English countryside, which provides an everlasting warmth and comfort for the female gentleman:

She understood now why it was that with all his masquing attitudes, all his cosmopolitan self-adaptations, all his odd spiritual reticences and escapes, he yet carried about with him that permanent atmosphere of security. He belonged to an ordered society, and this was it. More than any of the friends in her own world, he spoke the familiar language of her childhood. In London, anybody, at any moment, might do or become anything. But in a village – no matter what village – they were all immutably themselves: parson, organist, sweep, duke's son and doctor's daughter [...] She was curiously excited. She thought, 'I have married England'. (105)

For Harriet, Wimsey recreates the atmosphere of her childhood which she associates with an 'ordered society' where everybody knew their place and role. Wimsey speaking the language of her childhood might imply the sense of innocence that the countryside could embody, preserving pre-war values. One again, the motif of innocence seems to return in the reconstruction of the woman's identity which is induced by the gentleman detective's presence. Harriet's recognition of the fact that Wimsey belongs to the England she knows from her past brings her a sense of relief that impels her to disclose her deepest romantic feelings in a somewhat melodramatic fashion: "Oh Peter –' [...] I have been wandering in the dark – but now I have found your heart – and am satisfied [...] I love you – I am at rest with you – I have come home" (326).

Harriet's confession is important in several respects. It seems that she finds her stable identity as a woman, a lady, at the side of the detective, which in turn enables her to restore the detective to his true self, reinforcing the aforementioned mutual dependence between the two. This is obvious from the closing scene of *Busman's Honeymoon*. While Wimsey is away to attend the execution of Frank Crutchley, the murderer of Mr. Noakes, Harriet is waiting for him in the dark house. Wimsey's final arrival at Talboys in an agonized state brought about by his shell-shock defines Harriet's position as that of a caring and tender woman waiting for her tortured man to return to her from his 'war': "'it's my rotten nerves. I can't help it. [...] I hate behaving like this. I tried to stick it out by myself' [...] 'Well', he said, with a transitory gleam of himself,

‘you’re my corner and I’ve come to hide’” (449). Once the house has been liberated from the taint of criminality, the female gentleman appears to have re-established herself in the domestic sphere, creating a home where they can both find shelter. Her body literally becomes part of the idyll of the country house, an image that was frequently used to bolster the semblance of national security and social stability in the post-war era, which also recalls Rowland’s claim about Harriet’s role in the psychic reconstruction of Peter “into signifying England” (77). Even if it is fiction constantly remade through these images, Sayers shows that it is through the female gentleman’s reoccupation of England that the detective can stay at home. The image of the lady keeping the gentleman safe in his habitat, the old country house, does not only satisfy post-war nostalgia but also deepens the sense of eternity these symbols add to the myth of Englishness.

#### 4.4. Amanda Fitton: The Growth of an Adolescent into a Female Gentleman

The question of home and identity becomes an intriguing one in the representation and reconstruction of the gentleman detective and the female gentleman in Allingham’s novels that feature Campion and Amanda before their married life. They first meet in *Sweet Danger* when Amanda is only seventeen, a young, innocent member of the impoverished Fitton family consisting of her two siblings and aunt. Perriam reads Allingham’s novel as if it were a fairy tale, with the glamorous hero, Campion, starting to fall in love with an impoverished beauty who finally turns out to be the inheritor of an aristocratic title and valuable land. “[...] as a fairy tale heroine in *Sweet Danger*, Amanda fulfils several requirements: she is beautiful, young, motherless, and of aristocratic birth but poor. Like Cinderella and other heroines of fairy tales, Amanda requires her ‘prince’ to restore her to her rightful place” (44). Without the gentleman detective’s intervention, the Fittons would never be able to regain their legal claim to their inheritance: raised to Campion’s status, Amanda will be referred to as Lady Amanda Fitton.

Although both Harriet and Amanda are praised for their intelligence, when the latter first appears, though adventurous, she is innocent and inexperienced. Just like Harriet, she gradually transforms into the image of this idealized female figure, although her trajectory is different. While she is an “unwomanly woman” inasmuch as she wears unfeminine clothes and is interested in engineering<sup>90</sup>, she is also obviously beautiful. While Campion is aroused at the sight of Amanda, Wimsey begins by appreciating Harriet’s voice and charisma. Evans points out that “[p]hysical beauty in women is [...] seen by women writers, from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, as highly problematic, inviting as it does, they often suggest,

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<sup>90</sup>“She runs a dynamo and charges up wireless batteries” (50).



narcissism in the beautiful women themselves and false expectations in others” (72). This probably explains why Sayers refused to make her female protagonist beautiful or why Amanda, despite her physical beauty, wears unusual clothes<sup>91</sup> and her burning red hair in “no modern fashion” (*Sweet Danger* 63). Campion and Amanda’s love affair is described with more reserve than what we have in Sayers, who is quite explicit about sexuality and marriage. As Julia Jones puts it, “[Allingham] could write most convincingly of romantic love in her detective stories but rarely described its physical manifestations” (16). Perriam also notes the suppression of sexuality in Allingham’s main characters, suggesting that “sexual arrangements” could “defy logic and prediction” (45). She also adds that, while there is “mutual trust and affection between them and physical attraction” (ibid.), there is “little sexual tension” (ibid.). Amanda remains sexually rather passive, perhaps a sign of her Victorian chastity and ladylikeness, although she shows interest in a ‘real’ relationship with Lee Aubrey in *Traitor’s Purse*. Campion, who tends to be diffident towards women<sup>92</sup>, realizes the intensity of the emotions that overwhelm him at the sight of Amanda. He does not only feel protective about her<sup>93</sup>, doing his best as a knight, but even allows himself the luxury of showing emotions: “His face was expressive, a luxury he scarcely ever permitted himself. At last he rose slowly to his feet and stood looking down very tenderly at this odd little person who had come crashing through one of the most harrowing adventures he had ever known [...]” (251).

I have already emphasized the importance of emotions in the development of the male and female protagonists into the traditional image of man and woman. Amanda, however, is not portrayed as a tortured woman who is fighting her own emotions. She seems more confident and determined in what she wants, a leisured aristocrat who is not afraid to express herself<sup>94</sup>. At the end of *Sweet Danger*, somewhat less immature, she is astoundingly daring and easy-going in offering her assistance to Campion: “Don’t be frightened,” she said. “I’m not proposing marriage to you. But I thought you might consider me as a partner in the business later on” (250). Unlike Harriet, she seems openly conservative in certain issues concerning gender and women’s education: “No higher education for me” (251) – she assures Campion. Amanda seems to be echoing the views of Allingham, who, as Jones says, “never attended or wished to attend a university and was perhaps all too ready to draw unflattering portraits of desiccated

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<sup>91</sup> In *The Fashion in Shrouds*, Amanda tells Campion that her brother, Hal, chooses her clothes in good undergraduate taste which is “the only safe criterion of modern clothes” (74), as well as providing a sexual control in the absence of a father or a husband.

<sup>92</sup> He was not very daring with Biddy Padgett in *Mystery Mile*.

<sup>93</sup> She is wounded by a shot in *Sweet Danger*.

<sup>94</sup> In *The Fashion in Shrouds*, Amanda ventures her views on the importance of class: “Class is like sex or the electric light supply, not worth thinking about as long as yours is all right but embarrassingly inconvenient if there’s anything wrong with it” (89).

academic families: the Faradays in *Police at the Funeral*, the Palinodes in *More Work for the Undertaker*” (9). However, her aversion to higher education – which does not amount to denouncing it *tout court*, though – is not the result of her approval of Victorian gender roles. In *The Fashion in Shrouds*, she is proudly talking to Campion about her professional career which is even more unusual than Somerville College: “It took me three and a half years to do it, but I’m a pretty good engineer, you know. I went straight into the shops when I got some money. I hadn’t sufficiently decent education to take an ordinary degree, [...] My title helped, though, she added honestly” (70). Her unusual occupation – as well as her title – might contribute to the fact that, unlike Harriet, Amanda – despite the fairy tale premise – is accepted straight away by Campion as his equal, while the former is struggling to forget the unequal beginning of her relationship with Wimsey.

*The Fashion in Shrouds*, set six years later, introduces Amanda as a more mature woman who works as an engineer for the famous aircraft designer, Alan Dell. Campion and Amanda set out on an investigation together once again, and it is this co-operation that makes Campion realize the extent of her devotion to Amanda. While in the first Campion novel, as has been seen in *Chapter Two*, Allingham’s sleuth is mostly portrayed as a caricature of a real detective, “the silly ass”, now he is starting to show signs of a more traditional kind of masculinity, which prepares his more eroticised presentation in their third adventure, *Traitor’s Purse*. It is in *The Fashion in Shrouds* that Amanda becomes the most overt representation of the female gentleman. Her manners, common sense, intelligence and sexual chastity are emphasized throughout and commented on by other characters. The novel, as shown in *Chapter Three*, introduces different types of women, but it is only Amanda who can live up to Campion’s expectations in fact, she is the only one who is not labelled by him as a vulgar beast. After Campion admits to himself that Amanda “had grown astonishingly good to look at” (74), he seeks physical contact with her, but Amanda keeps withdrawing from these situations: “Mr Campion dropped his hand over Amanda’s, but she drew it away from him and began to eat as resolutely and angrily as her Victorian grandfather might have done in similar circumstances” (78). The two pretend to be engaged throughout the novel, as if playing in a dress rehearsal for the real thing. It is important in this respect that, although her beauty and sexual appeal are foregrounded, Alan Dell calls her a “Botticelli angel” (82), Amanda is not just a conveniently pretty appendix for Campion, who is involved in the serious work of detection: she is indeed his partner, and her intelligence – in true female gentleman fashion – is described not as the opposite but as an important aspect of her femininity.

Dell's remark, however, also foreshadows Amanda's final transformation into the image in which Campion recognizes the eternal woman he wants to re-unite with in his amnesiac state in *Traitor's Purse*. Gill Plain remarks that "[t]his is a novel in which a woman's devotion to man's genius and the emotional constipation of the detective are subject to serious scrutiny, and both are found wanting" (65). The novel was published in 1941, the same year as *The Oaken Heart*, an account of Allingham's life in an English village after the outbreak of the Second World War. In *The Oaken Heart*, her East-Anglian village stands for the whole of England, just like Amanda and the English countryside in *Traitor's Purse*. Plain concludes that *Traitor's Purse* is no longer a fantasy of the domestic ideal but a reinforcement of the needs that call for "structures of belief that represent a welcome point in an uncertain, ever changing world" (74). The novel starts with two severe obstacles to the successful union of Campion and Amanda in marriage. In what Gill Plain calls "a rebirthing scene" (66), Campion wakes up in a hospital as an amnesiac, not knowing whether he is guilty of murdering a policeman or not, or who he exactly is. He believes Amanda to be his wife, but later realizes that she is his fiancée who is about to break off the engagement and call off their marriage because of the appearance on the scene of a third party, Lee Aubrey. The tone of the novel is more serious, given the task of restoring Campion to his true self embedded in England, reinforcing a traditional image of Englishness as a guarantee of national safety and security<sup>95</sup>. Amanda seems to fulfill two narrative and structural needs: she has to arouse what Hoffmann calls Campion's "aggressive, sexually dominant masculinity" (95), and occupy the role of a mediator between Campion's England and himself. In *Chapter Two*, I argued that the gentleman detective is also a mediator. A reading of the relevant novels by Sayers and Allingham makes clear that her female counterpart has similar functions. *Traitor's Purse* depicts the rebirth and reconstruction of the amnesiac detective through two of his protectors, Amanda and Lugg. Having lost his memory, Campion is deprived of authority over the events. As indicated earlier, Gill Plain sees Amanda's figure as both a wife and a mother to Campion, a doubleness which she links with Kristeva's theory of the virgin mother. Plain asserts that because "the symbolic order is an unsuitable place for the woman, what remains as available is "the memory or the idealisation of the mother, an ideal totality that no individual woman could possibly embody that is enshrined in symbolic representation. And while the ideal of woman is placed on a pedestal, the actual function of

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<sup>95</sup> Sir Henry Bull, a high-ranking member of the Treasury and a senior member of the Institute is telling Campion about the possible disaster of Campion's becoming corrupt. Since Campion cannot remember anything, he cannot defend himself either. Nevertheless, the essence of the conversation is the parallel Sir Henry draws between Mr. Campion and England: "I cannot and will not believe that the incredible story which I have heard has any reality, but if it has, if it has, Campion, well then [...] the Dark Ages again, that's what it will mean [...] It is true that at this moment Britain depends practically entirely on her faith in herself and on her own internal stability. If that could be destroyed suddenly, by a single stroke, there would come confusion, exhaustion and finally decay" (164).

mothering within the symbolic is appropriated by men" (70). Amanda and England become interconnected in Campion's memory, which does not only justify the union between the innocent female body and eternity in the post-war years, but also a desire to return to the "symbolic mother, fixed and objectified" (72), that is, England herself, to whom Campion returns. Campion's new-found and secure masculinity, thus, finds its true expression in his devotion to his country, in his patriotism, one of the carefully policed areas towards which "[c]onstructions of masculinity permit[s] [an] open expression of emotion (Plain 71): "Now it was awake all right and recognizable a deep and lovely passion for his home, his soil, his blessed England, his principles, his breed, his Amanda and Amanda's future children" (*Traitor's* 116). Nevertheless, Campion's ability to recapture England, which becomes a national mission during wartime, is only possible through Amanda's intervention in the restoration of Campion's masculinity. Campion's desperate obsession with Amanda, his 'mother' is a sign of his re-experiencing "atavistic urges and destructive drives of infancy" (Plain 78): "She looked very young and very intelligent, but not, he thought with sudden satisfaction, clever. A dear girl. *The* girl, in fact. His sense of possession was tremendous. It was the possessiveness of the child, of the savage, of the dog, unreasonable and unanswerable" (52). Susan Rowland also asserts that Campion's most sexually energised moments [...] desperately requir[e] the devotion of Amanda to restore not only his identity but also some stable structures of masculinity (23). For Amanda, this means that she must first give up her love for Lee Aubrey, which is suggested to be foolish and potentially dangerous not only to Campion, but to the nation as well. Thus, she ceases to be an independent agent and resumes the traditional role of women placing the interest of others above their own. The elimination of Aubrey, the villain and the seducer, is crucial for two reasons: Campion will not only regain the lady of his heart but protect England as well.<sup>96</sup> The motif of innocence, which recurs once again in this love triangle, is crucial in the context of the female gentleman. As she is meant to represent something stable in a chaotic world, "a friendly truth in a world of villainous fantasy" (26) as Campion calls it, Campion also recognizes himself in her: "Amanda was not only his: she *was* himself" (78).

Understanding that Campion can only find his non-fragmented identity in a mythical England, the woman entering the scene as a carrier of this memory is evidently a new phenomenon in the genre, as it requires that the female gentleman also be read as a *lieu de mémoire* in the myth of Englishness. Amanda's fixed position in Campion's memory is reinforced by the very fact that she is able to appear many times in emergency cases and help him. In *The Fashion in Shrouds*, Campion suggests that Amanda should start using the word

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<sup>96</sup> Lee Aubrey is the principal of a scientific concern called the Institute. He is a powerful figure, implicated in political corruption at the expense of the working classes.

‘comfort’ as a middle name. In the present novel, the mere thought of Amanda fills Campion with the sensation of comfort, which might imply that the woman as a piece in the recollection of Englishness stands against the present turmoil of history, just as much as the English landscape as an image of the pastoral idyll. Although the reader does not have an insight into the affair between Aubrey and Amanda, Campion can only hold on to her as a young and uncorrupted woman. While Amanda is coping with her own frustration in an unconsummated relationship with Campion<sup>97</sup>, it is exactly the implication of her virginity that relocates the female gentleman in the nostalgic body of England before the war, the only world Campion can rely on in his restoration of identity. This echoes typical essentializing ideas of femininity, for instance, those of Georg Simmel:

[...] woman is in fact positioned in Simmel’s writing as the overt object of nostalgic desire. This yearning for the feminine as emblematic of a nonalienated, non-fragmented identity is [...] a crucially important motif in the history of cultural representations of the nature of modernity. Woman emerges in these discourses as an authentic point of origin, a mythic referent untouched by the strictures of social and symbolic mediation; she is a recurring symbol of the atemporal and asocial at the very heart of the modern itself. (qtd. in Felski 37-38)

Simmel resuscitates the divine nature of the woman who is also an angel. Amanda appears to have been endowed with this angel-like status who does not only look like one but becomes man’s saviour and “God’s gift to anyone in a hole” (188). For Campion, “she had emerged as a necessity, a lifeline, heaven-sent and indispensable. Now, with the full recollection of a long and sophisticated bachelor life behind him [...] he was startled to find that she remained just that; static and unalterable, like the sun or the earth” (190). Amanda is transformed into the figure of the divine woman whose innocent and unpenetrated body redirects the detective to his one and only true mother, England. Her final acceptance of Campion’s proposal is not only a “culmination of the romance plot” (Hoffman 96), but also a sign that she is ready to embrace the domestic ideal to perform the traditional role of the true lady with the reconstructed hero on her side.

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<sup>97</sup>“You see, we’ve never had a love affair, have we?”, says Amanda to Campion (30).

#### 4.5. A Post-45 Postscript to the Union of the Gentleman Detective and the Female Gentleman

Marion Sharpe, the female protagonist of Tey's *The Franchise Affair*, does not qualify as a female gentleman if we settle for Schaub's characterisation of this type as a figure of the interwar years who belongs either to the upper middle class or to the aristocracy. In my view, however, the figure of Marion Sharpe, who shares important features with Harriet Vane and Amanda Fitton, can be seen as a post-WW2 variation of this type. While most of the traits listed by Schaub's fit her, she would seem to fail the test in the matter of marriage, even though the open ending of the novel does not preclude this possibility.

Marion lives with her mother in respectable poverty in the Franchise, an old and ugly house in Milford. There is nothing extraordinary in their lifestyle, they might also be considered as respectable Victorian ladies, with the difference that there is something mysterious about their past and isolation, at least according to the townspeople. There are even rumours suggesting that Mrs Sharpe and her daughter are witches, or that the father was a drunkard who left them penniless. Marion, however, is no Victorian ingénue: she is a free-spirited woman who defies the social pressure society puts on single women. Like Harriet and Amanda, she pursues her own ideas and ambitions<sup>98</sup> in life, but without the financial and professional success that the two other women achieve before their union with the gentleman detective. As a modern woman, she refuses to be identified with stereotypical gender attributes like intuition<sup>99</sup> or traditional gendered spheres like that of domesticity, which she loathes (36). This latter detail may foreshadow the ending of the novel and her refusal to create a home for the detective. She is also very brave: she would not hesitate to defend herself and take justice in her own hands<sup>100</sup>, were she not a law-abiding citizen.

Like the Female Gentlemen of the other novels, Marion is a woman who embodies the old and the new, but lacks the desire to relive the past. While a seemingly modern and independent woman, she follows a strict sexual moral code which is not only apparent in her

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<sup>98</sup> Although one cannot be sure what exactly her ambitions are; she seems to be satisfied with the mere fact that she does what pleases her.

<sup>99</sup> At the beginning of this chapter, I indicated that Marion refuses Blair suppositions concerning her intuition as regards her conclusions about Betty Kane. One aspect of the 'fair play' rules for detective fiction was that authors could not use 'women's intuition' as a means of solving the crime (103).

<sup>100</sup> Talking about Betty, Marion gets passionate: "I would swat her off the earth's face as I would swat a moth in a cupboard – except that I am always sorry about the moth" (242).

refusal of love relationships but also in her condemnation of Betty Kane.<sup>101</sup> Like Blair, she draws a parallel between the lustful nature and criminal inclinations of Betty's type. For all her virtuousness, she has to face the accusations of Betty, and is obliged to ask for Robert Blair's professional help. Thus, the question of innocence, a crucial element in the female gentleman's contribution to the psychic and sexual restoration of the detective, returns in Tey's post-war novel, too.

Blair, who lives a life of unthinking routine, feels attracted to Marion from the first moment. Marion is not a classic beauty but an exotic one, who looks as dark as a gypsy, which leads to her stigmatization among the inhabitants of the town. Their first encounter turns out to be a pleasant one for Blair, who admires Marion's grey hazel eyes, just like Wimsey does Harriet's voice and Campion Amanda's hair. Nevil Bennett, Blair's cousin, is also fascinated by Marion's manners, and is hard put to find the word that could best describe her uniqueness. The one he finds is reality: "Reality. That is her great quality, isn't it? I've never met anyone as real as Marion is" (56). Nevil's words echo Campion's thoughts about Amanda in *Traitor's Purse*: "Now, again, it returned to him that Amanda was real, and, being real, she was consistent [...]" (53). While Sayers makes Harriet real by refusing to hide her flaws, agonies and emotions, the other two women's 'reality' is something that is noticed by the male protagonists who admire their honesty and genuineness, or their contempt for hypocrisy. While Campion and Wimsey reveal their true devotion to their loved ones, Blair is fighting himself and his prejudices which very probably originate from the different social status of the Sharpes and the scandalous rumours about them. Unlike the aristocratic sleuths, Blair is not an amateur detective who has already tried himself in the world. As argued in, his cosy life is upset by the proximity of crime and an attractive woman, which he finds hard to handle at the beginning. He is trying to keep up a respectable facade in front of his cousin, even after the realization that something has totally changed inside him: "'As far as I am concerned,' he said, 'Marion Sharpe is just a skinny woman of forty who lives with a rude old mother in an ugly old house, and needs legal advice on occasion like anyone else'". But even as the words came out he wanted to stop them, as if they were a betrayal of a friend" (57). As the investigation proceeds, however, Blair realizes how important Marion as a person has become to him, and he becomes obsessed with the search for a solution of the case that could prove her innocence. Blair's transformation is brought about by both the investigation and Marion, leading him to the bitter recognition that he cannot resume his comfortable life: "His whole world looked different. The dark skinny

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<sup>101</sup> According to Haste, sexual morality continued to be the central focus of authorities after WWII, who wanted to restore pre-war standards in post-war society: "Sex outside marriage was firmly proscribed in this reformulation of sexual morality" (145).

woman he used to see sometimes stopping in the High Street, for instance had turned into Marion. Well, one result of stepping out of a routine life was, of course, that you couldn't put on your hat and stroll home at four o'clock of an afternoon" (142). Although Blair's romantic thoughts are revealed to the reader by the narrator, Marion's true emotions remain hidden despite the friendly interactions with Blair. Tey was extremely reticent about sexuality in general, and, as Sandra Roy notes, "none of her characters experience a significant male/female relationship" (16). The lack of physical interaction, however, does not mean the absence of sexuality. Similarly to Allingham's Amanda, Marion's physical appearance is also unique enough to catch the detective's attention: "As Robert got out of the car Marion came round the corner of the house, wearing gardening gloves and a very old skirt [...] The first summer sun had darkened her skin and she looked more than ever like a gypsy. Coming on Robert unexpectedly she had not time to guard her expression, and the lighting of her whole face as she saw him made his heart turn over" (174). While Blair's emotional development takes a while, there is also an exciting parallel between his strengthening masculinity and the unravelling of the mystery which ends with his triumph in clearing the Sharpes' name. It is Blair's new sense of his masculine power that urges him to propose to Marion. He carefully prepares the whole scene and plans their future life together in a perfect home. When, however, he finally musters the courage to propose, Marion refuses him. Unlike Harriet or Amanda, she has no intention of changing her life or of giving up her independence for anyone:

So on the ninth green he suddenly stopped wagging his putter at the ball and said:  
 'I want you to marry me, Marion.'  
 'Do you, Robert? [...]'  
 'You will, won't you?'  
 'No, Robert dear, I won't.' (273)

Of the three heroines, she seems to be the only one who is able to remain loyal to her modern principles and does not need the endorsement of male authority to live a full life which "in [her] experience is usually full only of other people's demands" (274). Marion's refusal is not only a sign of her will to preserve her personal integrity but also a revolt against continuing pre-war values. Whether it is Tey's own reaction against the growing intervention of authorities into the private lives of individuals<sup>102</sup> or her conviction about the irretrievable nature of the past is hard to decide. The closing scene of the novel may, however, suggest some answers. After the Franchise is burnt down, the Sharpes decide to travel to Canada to live with a cousin in

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<sup>102</sup> Haste explains that after WWII, the importance of marriage returned with a much stronger force, leading to the establishment of organizations to facilitate the restoration of family life: "State responsibility to shore up marriage was handed over to voluntary bodies who became the recipients of government grants [...] the objective was to rebuild monogamous marriage and family life" (145).



Montreal. Blair, realizing that his old life cannot be continued, decides to fly with Marion under the pretext that he wishes to see his sister in Saskatchewan. Their departure from England may demonstrate Blair's acknowledgment of the social transformation represented by the disintegration of the upper middle class<sup>103</sup> and the role of the woman in restoring man to his masculine self. While Marion displays several features of the female gentleman, she fails to assist in the reconstruction of a bygone world with Blair. She is a self-confident individual whose Victorian morality easily resonates with the lawyer-detective's principles but whose progressive ideas about life and happiness in the post-war years can save him from becoming a suburban housewife, from being transformed into a symbol of mythical Englishness or from being turned into a museum piece.

Female middlebrow novelists excelled in the representation of interwar ideals like the connection between heroism and domesticity, and the figure of the female gentleman in the work of these three Golden Age crime writers is best seen in this context. The female gentleman turns out to be a key figure in establishing the connection between the two despite all her modern femininity, independence, professional and financial success. The role of the female gentleman as an ideal partner for the distressed hero is crucial in the restoration both of the fragmented male psyche and of a utopian memory world of the national imaginary. Her final reconciliation in marriage with the gentleman detective clinches her adoption of traditional social and moral values, yet without the repressed feminine ideal. The female gentleman's moral disposition and sexual chastity equate her with the image of the innocent woman who becomes the ideal partner of the gentleman detective, embedded in the myth of Englishness. Tey's novel reflects the shift in the heroine's set of beliefs regarding her role and position in post-WWII society. While her refusal to embrace the national ideology promoting domesticity and stability is a deviation from the interwar pattern, her encouragement of and co-operation with the detective do help his psychic reconstruction. In all the three writers, the detective's return to the past must be mediated by his female partner. While the interwar period portrays a utopian solution as an imaginary treatment to traumatized society, post-WWII crime novels – if *The Franchise Affair* is anything to go by – no longer entertain such illusions. Seeking to unite with his loved one, Blair must acknowledge that the only possibility for him to achieve this is to identify with the (new) world his ideal woman intends to pursue her ambitions in.

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<sup>103</sup> Gunn and Bell explain that “[a]fter the Second World War the group began to disintegrate under the effects of economic competition, rising taxation and the challenge to a traditional order of authority represented by the post-war politics of Labour” (91).

## Conclusion

The inquiry into Golden Age crime fiction undertaken by the present dissertation has borne out Frank Kermode's hypothesis concerning the cultural relevance of crime fiction: despite their formula-like and seemingly rigid structure, these narratives do address contemporary social and cultural changes and issues. This recognition failed to inspire critics of the last century to explore how these authors address and reflect on their own time. Until the 1990s, it was claimed that Golden Age authors of crime fiction, driven by their conservative beliefs in social order and class hierarchy, uncritically identified with pre-war values, and that their novels nostalgically evoke a stable and class-conscious society with traditional middle-class values to offer a temporary escape from the present to like-minded readers. This view was first challenged by Alison Light, whose idea of conservative modernity, when applied to middlebrow writers, helped to reveal that these texts work in two opposite directions, and are able to reflect upon the excesses of the desire for a world long gone by and to the hollowness of the present. Light herself discussed Agatha Christie as a conservative modernist, and her argument was subsequently applied to the works of all the Golden Age queens of crime by Susan Rowland, who argued that the genre did not only resemble mainstream literature in its formal and structural experimentation but dealt with exactly the same dilemmas, such as national identity, female emancipation, war traumas, and the dissolution of traditional class hierarchy. Rowland's critical investigation did not disregard the importance of the nostalgic preoccupation these novels evince, either: drawing upon Light, she emphasized that the evocation of the past through certain symbols, such as the country house or the gentleman detective, is uncertain and vulnerable.

In my dissertation, I have argued that while both Light and Rowland discuss how Golden Age authors undermine traditional conservative ideology and the nostalgic tendency by portraying the controversies, fragility and non-coherence of the lost world reconstructed in the present, they did not engage in discussing this phenomenon through the dynamics of memory and nostalgia. I suggested that this novel approach could not only extend our understanding of the Janus-faced quality of the genre, but would allow one to explore more thoroughly Rowland's suggestion, which she failed to follow up, concerning the ambiguities and controversies of nostalgic longing and remembering the past. To justify my point, I introduced Boym's definitions of restorative and reflective nostalgia, and examined how these writers reflect on the urge to recreate a lost England from pieces of recollections. This mythical England is evoked through sites of memory, or as Pierre Nora put it, *lieux de mémoire*. *Lieux*

*de mémoire*, linked by Nora to modernity, are born when a certain amount of memory has disappeared, which transforms organic recollection into a strenuous effort which requires external support. In the foregoing, I attempted to investigate more deeply the way Golden Age fiction, rather than simply reasserting them, interrogates these sites and their role in the construction of English identity. Since *lieux de mémoire* are established in the present with the hope of preserving the memory they are invested with, they are necessarily fragile, vulnerable and ambiguous. This was realized by Golden Age writers, and, therefore, in Golden Age crime fiction, the memory world constructed out of the desire to return home and find a stable identity is treated with criticism and irony, and the sites created to keep or reconstruct what is lost are constantly eroded in the present. Finally, I proposed that a certain parallel could be traced between how Golden Age authors played with the narrative pattern to incorporate new elements and the way they related both to the obsession with the past and to the rapid changes of the present. It seems that there is an intimate connection between content and structure when it comes to the analysis of the dynamics of memory and forgetting.

Margery Allingham, Dorothy L. Sayers and Josephine Tey frequently broke the rules of the detective formula and sought ways to mix it with other genres, producing a great diversity of plot types, themes and styles. As a result, the strict boundaries of the pattern became blurred, allowing for the appearance of unorthodox elements like the detective who falls in love and marries his ideal partner, or detective stories in which, instead of murder, we have suicide, accident or offences like false accusations or poison pen letters. Memory sites dissolve in the same way as the traditional formulaic elements, and these deviations from the norm are rooted in the texts' engagement with contemporary issues like the post-war stage of the gender crisis, middle-class anxieties and the traumas of the war. In the post-war years, the members of the middle class started to rethink their identity, redefining themselves as the true guardians of past values in the face of the unpredictable expansion and ascending of the lower classes and mass culture. As the readings above tried to show, while these authors contributed to the reconstruction of middle-class memory, they did not restrain from approaching this process critically and showing the consequences of suppressing the present in favour of the past. Although in some of the novels sites of memory are destroyed or corrupted by the intrusion of the outside world, in others, the exact opposite happens: the memory worlds are destroyed from inside, by the moribundity of the nostalgic impulses that maintain them. All the three writers stage the symptoms of mental disorders, frustrations and repressions which originate in living or having to live in an artificial milieu or from the unconscious repetition of certain behavioural patterns; thus, crime is no longer an intrusion from the contemporary world into

a normal and orderly microcosm but as a natural outcome of these psychological disturbances. Although there is a wide spectrum of *lieux de mémoire* in which the collective memory of the nation or a class is trying to embody itself, I have considered the ones which recur in all the three writers. My analysis has mainly focused on locations, such as the countryside and small historic towns, diverse types of dwellings, like the country house, Victorian and suburban homes, everyday rituals, and two figures: the gentleman detective and the female gentleman.

The investigation of country houses in *Chapter One* has shown that, while these buildings can provide the illusion of aristocratic grandeur or a sense of antiquity, as the one in Allingham's *The Crime at Black Dudley* does, they are also perfect scenes for criminal acts, murder or some other kind of violence. These great dwellings that are supposed to recreate the illusion of an edenic state become haunted houses, indicating the fragility of the memory they ought to sustain. While the countryside is still usually associated with innocence, the houses and even the land are already contaminated by the intrusion of the present, usually represented by characters driven by monetary interests, like in Allingham's *Sweet Danger* or *Traitor's Purse*. Family secrets which keep coming to the surface are also reasons for crime inside the walls of the mansions, as we have seen in *Mystery Mile* and *Police at the Funeral*. This latter novel by Allingham, whose books portray a particularly diverse range of houses, describes the psychological disorders, even madness, stemming from an obsession with the past. In a gothic ambience, the past which the house is supposed to preserve haunts the characters and transforms the whole place into a nightmare. The suppression of the present and an eccentric insistence on a Victorian past lead to the decline of the Faradays along with their fading relics. Allingham's post-Second World War novel, *Hide My Eyes*, relocates the nostalgic atmosphere into a suburban house converted into a museum of 'curios' saved from the pre-war years. Although the house as a museum is an ironic allegory of a nation being wrapped up in its own past to escape war traumas, economic crisis and the loss of the colonies, the fact that the building burns down is also a silent acknowledgement that the past is irretrievable. Tey's house, 'The Franchise', is doomed to the same fate. Just like the culprit who pretends to be a different person, the Franchise is also fake despite its appearance. Its architectural features, thoroughly studied by the gentleman detective, reveal it as the unsuccessful copy of the original and thus prevent it from becoming a heritage piece. Sayers's Victorian house in *The Documents in the Case* is also a prison-like dwelling whose captive is the young wife of the owner. While the house itself is not the focus of the novel, it becomes the seat of the kind of middle-class respectability that frustrates its inhabitants on an everyday basis. Similarly to the

‘great good place’, the gentleman detective is also summoned to evoke the past and maintain stability in a chaotic present.

Nevertheless, as we have seen in *Chapter Two*, the gentleman detective as a site of memory is equally ambiguous and tends to complicate the interwar memory rather than resolving it. This chapter discussed the significance of the gentleman in the cultural heritage of England, tracing the process through which he had come to epitomize the masculine ideal and English identity through the centuries. Golden Age fiction portrays him as a fairly attenuated version of the traditional gentleman figure, but someone who still carries the potential to reclaim his earlier image. This is what Allingham and Sayers illustrate through *Campion* and *Wimsey*. The fact that they are aristocrats serving justice and enforcing order evokes a distant, even chivalric past, while their idiosyncratic eccentricities and war experiences distance them from their traditional image. Tey’s novel represents a different facet of the engagement with the cultural and memorial function of the gentleman detective: Blair represents the Victorian’s annexation of the gentleman ideal, turning it into a moral category. The novels show that the gentleman detective as a site of memory is able to nourish the illusion that the past is retrievable, but his figure, rooted in the post-war era, can also extinguish such fantasies with equal ease. Also, his contamination by criminality and his unexpected competence in the post-war world represent him as a dynamic and modern figure, who, despite his ability to embody permanence, erodes his own mythical image.

*Chapter Three* discussed how the Golden Age of crime fiction reflected on the prevailing anxieties over the woman question. The interwar years witnessed a more radical break with the past regarding women’s professional career, financial independence and sexual freedom, all of which were characteristic of the New Woman. The New Woman, a contested figure since her first appearance, returns in the selected texts as a split character, a symptom of the tensions and controversies still surrounding the woman question. These Golden Age writers create a negative New Woman type endowed with monstrous traits and can easily become a villain. This character is usually of humble origins, lacks identity and is even biologically determined as we have seen in *The Franchise Affair*. The bad woman, however, is always contrasted with a more positive New Woman figure, who – following Melissa Schaub – I am referring to as the female gentleman. Although Allingham’s gender agenda is ambiguous and hardly anything is known about Tey’s attitudes, they seem to agree on the consequences of emancipating the ‘wrong type of female’. The female villain becomes a rather distorted image of the emancipated woman who tends to undermine the principles of the female gentleman ideal. Allingham’s *The Fashion in Shrouds* and Tey’s *The Franchise Affair* both articulate

criticism of young and sexually liberated women, questioning whether women's emancipation can be successful with such deviancies. Sayers' epistolary novel, *The Documents in the Case*, also contrasts women of different social status and opportunities. These include the educated New Woman, a sexually repressed hysterical spinster and an urban housewife who is the main focus of the text. As opposed to Allingham and Tey, Sayers does not represent her villain, Margaret Harrison, as an inherently evil person, but investigates the possible reasons that can transform a young and energetic woman into a potential criminal. Margaret's marriage to a much older man who is obsessed with respectability and Victorian traditions deprives her of personal ambitions and agency. Sayers, however, is careful to maintain the balance, partly by counterpointing this relationship with one based on equality, and partly by indirectly criticizing men, regardless of their profession and social status, who retain old-fashioned ideas about women – like the professional writer, Munting, who is shown to be no less prejudiced about women than the husband whom he criticises for his pettiness and lack of creativity. Although Sayers seems to treat Mrs Harrison's self-dramatization as a victim with a great deal of scepticism, she also attempts to show how a young wife confined to the house all day becomes paralyzed due to her husband's tyranny putting on different roles and finding solace and excitement in a love affair that leads to the murder of the husband.

As opposed to the villainous woman, the female gentleman embodies all the virtues that the previous one lacks. These female protagonists, explored in *Chapter Four*, are usually represented as forward-looking in gender politics and backward-looking in class politics, and, similarly to the gentleman detective, they are able to reconcile the past and the present. The investigation of this memory figure drew upon Melissa Schaub's study which argues that the character's most essential traits correspond to those of a gentleman, which enables her to be the detective's ideal partner. I have indicated that her categories are not necessarily helpful in classifying these characters and sometimes tend to be a little too restrictive. Relying on Megan Hoffman's monograph on female characters in Golden Age crime fiction, I attempted to fuse the two approaches— Schaub and Hoffman – to investigate the female heroines in the work of these three writers. In Sayers and Allingham, my analysis focused more on the female gentleman as a bridge figure whose marriage to the gentleman detective does not only restore him to his masculinity but portrays the woman embedded in the pastoral idyll of the English landscape. Their decision to accept traditional femininity also suggests that they are willing to create a home for their traumatized (war) heroes, reinforcing the female gentleman's role in the recreation of the stability and security of pre-war England. I read Tey's Marion Sharpe as an alternative version of the female gentleman, someone who does not satisfy some of

Schaub's criteria, including the chronological, but embodies the type in many important ways, warranting the extension of the relevance of the category beyond the Second World War. I have argued that, though there are important differences between Marion on the one hand and Sayers' Harriet and Allingham's Amanda on the other in terms of class and professional career, which she practically lacks, she is honest and honourable and has very strong moral principles. She liberates herself from the obligation to marry despite the gentleman detective's proposal. On the one hand, her refusal portrays her as a truly modern woman who is determined to follow her own principles. On the other, it also indicates the female gentleman's role in creating a world for the detective who also acknowledges that he cannot recapture a bygone world.

My inquiry reinforces the findings of recent studies of Golden Age crime fiction in the sense that this body of fiction, far from being frozen into its timeless puzzle pattern, was truly contemporary, with a capacity to reflect on the controversies of a changing culture and society in the interwar period regarding class, gender and memory. Reading the fiction of Allingham, Sayers and Tey itself as a *lieu de mémoire* of middle-class memory has not only revealed that the genre played an important part of the memory politics of the age but has also opened the possibility to examine how critically these writers treated escapist nostalgia in their novels. The present dissertation has restricted the investigation of memory to a limited range of sites. The investigation could be extended to an analysis of elderly figures or religion, especially characters representing the Church. A more extensive analysis would also be able to consider differences between Golden Age writers in terms of their preferred or typical sites of memory (like houses in Margery Allingham). A more comprehensive study of this body of fiction would also consider the work of critically neglected popular crime writers of the period like Gladys Mitchell, Patricia Wentworth but acclaimed male writers too, like Henry Wade, Johnathan Dickson Carr, Anthony Berkley, Freeman Wills Crofts or Edmund Crispin with view to memory sites and nostalgia, considering their idiosyncrasies in characterization, gender and psychology. I would be interested in the reasons why and how male writers of the Golden Age have been forgotten even eliminated from critical discussions of the genre. Including texts by some of the leading male authors would probably not only enrich the picture of memory politics in the interwar years but would also modify the results of the present thesis regarding the gentleman detective, the nature of crime, sexuality, or the representation of women and places.

My decision to disregard Christie and Marsh from the present analysis also needs to be revised. Considering the fact that my dissertation established strict boundaries in its approach

to themes and writers, it now seems to be a fruitful venture to expand the horizon and examine Christie's and Marsh's texts as well, not to mention Tey's other novels, *The Daughter of Time* (1951), *Brat Farrar* (1949) or *Miss Pym Disposes* (1947). Although a lot has been written about Christie, her novels have not been thoroughly discussed from these aspects, and Marsh's construction of Englishness or her interpretation of symbols with a colonial background are likely to make the memory politics of Golden Age queens of crime more diverse. Relying on what was said about Christie's anti-romantic nostalgia, it would seem reasonable to compare some of her novels and their film adaptations, exploring the extent to which these film adaptations misrepresent Christie's own relation to nostalgia as well as how much they distort our memory of the post-war world – and, of course the filmic strategies of constructing Golden Age crime fiction itself, especially Christie, as a *lieu de mémoire* –, resulting in a tension between Christie's novels and the film adaptations in their approach to contemporary society since the filmic portrayal is an attempt to stop time, whereas the novels approve of change and progress.

The past few decades have seen the proliferation of sub-genres within crime fiction, from forensic and true-crime through feminist to versions of historical crime, and, although, at least according to Martin Edwards, Golden Age crime fiction was the root for all of them, all these genres define their own position vis-à-vis classical crime fiction. The hard-boiled version, for instance, positioned itself from its inception against classical (British, feminine) detective fiction, claiming to offer a more authentic way of confronting contemporary issues. Despite the rise of dozens of subgenres, the classical whodunit has not faded from the literary map of crime fiction but seems to be flourishing, though, mainly produced by female writers. It is an intriguing phenomenon that the Golden Age itself has been associated purely with women writers and regarded as a feminine genre. A more extended examination of this body of literature would also enquire into role female authors of the Golden Age had in the birth and sustenance of some of these biased views.

In relation to this, the role of Golden Age crime fiction as a site of memory in the generic memory of the genre should also be explored. Such an enquiry would have to address the recycling of Golden Age themes, tropes and narrative strategies in recent crime fiction. The two major disciples of Golden Age novelists in contemporary British crime fiction are P. D. James and Ruth Rendell, but such an analysis should consider the American crime writer, Elizabeth George as well. In general, their version of the nostalgic re-visioning of England expresses nostalgia towards the past in terms of class hierarchy, religion and national stability. Rowland argues that it is James who is probably the most conservative of all the six queens of



the Golden Age (40). Her social conservatism can be traced not only in her substitution of professional hierarchies for traditional social classes (*ibid.*), but also in her desperate religious nostalgia that counterpoints what she sees as the moral decline of society. Unlike James, who predicts social anomie if hierarchy is not maintained, Ruth Rendell, claimed by Rowland to be the most liberal of the three, asserts that criminal desire is the result of social conservatism (39). Although Rowland sees this as a typical characteristic only of Rendell's novels among queens of crime, I would treat her claim a bit more cautiously – not all Golden Age crime writers shared the conservative ideology –, and consider a larger corpus of crime novels between the 1920s and 1950s to see if other popular writers, like Margaret and George Douglas Howard Cole, implicitly negotiated such ideas. James's anxiety over the decline of religion recalls the agony of Allingham and Sayers, so a more panoramic view of religious symbols in their novels and their collision with contemporary social mores from the Golden Age to the present day could also contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the memory politics of the Golden Age as well as of the function of Golden Age writing in the memory politics of the subsequent decades. Other emblems of national stability, like the country house or the gentleman detective could also be brought to the fore in the work of these writers, and of writers like Robert Barnard, who wrote a number of big house mysteries, some of them set in the 1930s, as well as a monograph on Golden Age writers. My dissertation focused only on amateurs but the detectives of James, Rendell and George are all gentleman policeman, like Marsh's Roderick Alleyn or Tey's Inspector Alan Grant. These avatars of former gentlemen detectives do resemble the image of the archetypal gentleman and live up to this ideal in contemporary Britain struggling with issues of class, immigration, racism, or dysfunctional families. The latest example of a British gentleman detective would possibly be J. K. Rowling's Cormoran Strike who, as a war veteran having fought in Afghanistan, does not only remind one of Sayers' Wimsey in many respects but of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century BBC version of Sherlock Holmes too.

One of the favourite periods evoked in historical crime fiction is the interwar period – one thinks of Frances Brody's Kate Shackleton mysteries or British Phryne Fisher, the female gentleman featuring in the novels of Australian writer Kerry Greenwood. Such historical ventures inevitably position themselves vis-à-vis the implied politics (for instance, gender politics) of Golden Age fiction. Conversely, the books of M. C. Beaton featuring a middle-aged female detective, Agatha Raisin, investigating in the fictional village of Carsley, recreate the atmosphere of Golden Age mysteries in the present. Colin Watson's Flaxborough novels featuring Inspector Walter Purbright investigating in the small fictional town of Flaxborough.

Watson's novels are intriguing not only for the caricatures of everyday people but also for delineating a rather vulgar but charming woman, a con-artist, Miss Teatime, who likes enjoying life. Watson's work is all the more interesting as he wrote a monograph on Golden Age fiction (*Snobbery with Violence*). One strand in the afterlife of Golden Age fiction is the spate of sequels and resuscitations of emblematic detectives. Apart from the Christie rewrites (like Sophie Hannah's Poirot), we have Jill Paton Walsh's Wimsey and Harriet series; more surprisingly, Josephine Tey has been turned into a fictional heroine and detective in Nicola Upson's detective novels. Upson honestly talks about sexuality in her books as if inspired by Tey's very prudish attitude towards heterosexual relationships and the silence over homosexuality and lesbianism among writers of detective fiction in the interwar years. Although Sayers was probably the most daring in her representation of male-female relationships and sexual tension, her androgynous views might have been an influence on Sarah Caudwell's legal whodunits: the sex of the detective, Hilary Tamar, a professor of medieval law, remains a mystery. While Caudwells' novels are written in the Golden Age tradition, she no longer identifies with the anxiety over social constructions of gender, which was a major concern and preoccupation of Sayers.

Depicting symbols of Englishness has also led me to address the fate of the gentleman detective and the nostalgic atmosphere surrounding this character after the Second World War, mainly between the 50s and the 70s. What have the novels of popular, although critically neglected male mystery writers got to say about memory sites, such as the amateur sleuth, the country house or the female gentleman, if she is featured at all? Do they still sustain the illusion of national stability and Englishness? Beyond the above mentioned writers, like Carr and Crispin, Michael Gilbert's crime fiction produced between the 40s and the 90s is likely to offer a versatile picture. Although he is hard to classify, it is exactly the diversity of subgenres (police procedurals, hard-boiled and classical mysteries, just to mention a few) he works with and his various detective figures which would make his work an interesting object of enquiry. Michael Innes' Appleby series, published between the 30s and 80s, would also repay interest, since his Sir John Appleby is said to have the longest career among fictional detectives.

The diverse legacy and popularity of the Golden Age in contemporary crime fiction are not only obvious but also prove that classical whodunits have the ability to adapt to and reflect on contemporary social issues. Although my suggestions cover only a tiny area of this inexhaustible field, further research into the influence of the past and how detective fiction reflects on memory politics after the Second World War and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century could possibly address dilemmas of national identity and cultural crisis of Great Britain today.

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## *Magyar nyelvű összefoglaló*

Jelen értekezés célja, hogy a klasszikus angol detektívtörténet aranykorának (Golden Age) legjelentősebb képviselői közé tartozó három író, Margery Allingham, Dorothy L. Sayers, és Josephine Tey detektívregényeiben megvizsgálja az angolság mítoszát megidéző szimbólumok, emlékezhelyek szerepét, valamint az ebből fakadó ellentmondásokat, feszültségeket – mindezt a nosztalgia és emlékezet mechanizmusainak középpontba állításával. A dolgozat további célkitűzései közé tartozik annak bemutatása, hogy a műfaj – a klasszikus krimi – a látszólag sematikus narratív struktúra ellenére meglehetősen intenzíven reagált az 1920-1950-es évek között végbemenő kulturális és társadalmi változásokra, és meghatározó szerepet játszott a korszak emlékezetpolitikájának felülvizsgálatában. Ennek a felismerése egy szélesebb kritikai irányzatnak tulajdonítható, amely az ún. „középfajú” (*middlebrow*) irodalom újraolvasását kezdeményezte, melynek része a klasszikus krimi is. A *middlebrow* irodalom legfontosabb fókuszpontja, így az Aranykor detektívregényeie is, a középosztály válsága, szerepe, identitása a két világháború közötti időszakban. Az első világháborút követő drasztikus társadalmi és kulturális változásoknak köszönhetően a (viktoriánus) múlt újratерemtésére, egy mitikus Anglia megidezésére és az oda való visszatérésre irányuló erőteljes nosztalgikus vágyódás figyelhető meg a középfajú irodalomban, ezen belül a detektívtörténetben, mely utóbbit azonban semmiképp nem kezelhetjük homogén egységként. A dolgozat újdonság, hogy szövegközeli elemzések révén kimutatja: a három szerző a korábbi kritikai megállapításokkal ellentétben nem tette magáévá fenntartások nélkül az első világháborút megelőző világ újratерemtésére irányuló nosztalgikus vágyakozást, hanem ellentmondásos módon viszonyult a nosztalgikus attitűdökhöz és a múltra való emlékezéshez. Értekezésemben éppen ezt a kettősséget igyekszem vizsgálni a resztoratív és reflexív nosztalgia - kétosztatúsága alapján. A nosztalgia és emlékezet mechanizmusait azonban csak konkrét helyek, szimbólumok emlékezetpolitikai szerepének vizsgálata révén lehet feltárni, amihez Pierre Nora emlékezhely-fogalmára (*lieux de mémoire*) támaszkodom. Ez lehetővé teszi, hogy a műfajt magát is a középosztály emlékezhelyeként kezeljem, de mindezt úgy, hogy az ezzel együtt járó ellentmondásokat is következetesen is feltárjam. Vizsgálatom elsősorban arra irányul, hogy ez az emlékezetfoszlányokra épülő törékeny miliő hogyan bomlasztja fel belülről saját magát, pontosabban, hogy az egyes helyekhez, karakterekhez csatolt emlékezetpolitika mennyire bizonytalan és működésképtelen. Több regény továbbá azokat a szorongásokat és elfojtásokat is dramatizálja, melyek az emlékezet által fenntartott mesterséges környezetből erednek, és törvényszerűen előrevetítik a bűncselekmény bekövetkezését. Ez a megközelítés nemcsak arra

világított rá, hogy a klasszikus krimi fontos szerepet játszott a két világháború közti időszak emlékezetpolitikájában, de azt is lehetővé tette, hogy megvizsgáljam, ezek a szerzők miként viszonyultak a nosztalgikus hangulatból táplálkozó eszképzizmushoz. Ennek feltárása során azt a következtetést vontam le, hogy ezekben a szövegekben a resztoratív és a reflexív nosztalgia összeeszik, a szerzők egyszerre tesznek kísérletet egy mitikus, idilli Anglia megidézésére és kezdik ki vagy zúzzák szét ezt az illúziót. A disszertáció azokat az emlékezhelyeket emeli ki, amelyek mindhárom szerzőnél jellemzően megjelennek. Ezek elsősorban az alábbiak: a vidéki táj vagy történelmi város, a vidéki kastély és uradalom, a viktoriánus ház vagy éppen külvárosi otthon, a hétköznapi rituálék, valamint a gentleman-detektív és a female gentleman alakja.

## ***Abstract***

The aim of the present dissertation is to revise the dynamics of nostalgia and memory in Golden Age crime fiction produced by leading female authors, Margery Allingham, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Josephine Tey, in the hope of proving that these texts actively engaged with the social and cultural upheavals of their times and played a significant role in the memory politics of the period between the 1920s and 50s. Recent criticism has shown that Golden Age crime fiction, although it had been pejoratively labelled as escapist literature, played a significant role in negotiating issues of class, gender and war traumas in the aftermath of World War I. This recognition is due to the vivid academic interest which started around the 1990s focusing not only on classical whodunits but the whole corpus of middlebrow literature which Golden Age crime fiction is traditionally seen as a part of. Also, the social and cultural upheaval after the war resulted in a more introspective attitude and an obsession with the past arising from nostalgic longing. Most of the studies on middlebrow literature between the 1920s and the 1950s have memory, nostalgia, gender, middle-class anxieties and the myths of Englishness in their focus, claiming that these texts adopt an elegiac tone lamenting the lost hegemony of the upper-middle classes due to the appearance of the new, modern middle classes after the Great War. Even though a version of nostalgic escapism is not far from Golden Age authors, the novels discussed in the present dissertation present a more complex set of attitudes: these novels, although many of them might be said to embody escapist cultural nostalgia, are also critical of a memory politics based on nostalgia, frequently staging the fatal consequences of the bracketing of the present which such a nostalgic attitude entails. This is precisely what the present dissertation undertakes: to explore some of the cultural implications, ambiguities and tensions of Golden Age crime fiction, focusing on issues of cultural memory and nostalgia as they are implicated in and interact with issues of class and gender. I show that the ambiguities of Golden Age crime fiction originate in the conjuncture of two types of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. Further, I suggest that the workings of nostalgia and memory in Golden Age crime fiction cannot be explored without an investigation of the psychological and cultural investment in particular places. The conscious planning of what and how to remember triggers the dynamics of memory and forgetting which turns the genre itself into a *lieu de mémoire* of middle-class memory. This term was coined by Pierre Nora, who uses it as the pivot of an overarching historical framework, speaking about the adverse way in which modernity affected traditional social cohesion, including forms of memory. My dissertation explores how Golden Age fiction creates *lieux de mémoire* while at the same time exploring the workings of such

sites of memory, both endorsing and critiquing the claim that such sites can resurrect the past and create the impression of a timeless existence through certain symbols where the search for a mythical essence of Englishness may unfold. My inquiry reinforces the findings of recent studies of Golden Age crime fiction in the sense that this body of fiction, far from being frozen into its timeless puzzle pattern, was truly contemporary, with a capacity to reflect on the controversies of a changing culture and society in the interwar period regarding class, gender and memory. Although there is a wide spectrum of *lieux de mémoire* in which the collective memory of the nation or a class is trying to embody itself, I have considered the ones which recur in all the three writers. My analysis has mainly focused on locations, such as the countryside and small historic towns, diverse types of dwellings, like the country house, Victorian and suburban homes, everyday rituals, and two figures: the gentleman detective and the female gentleman.

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