

## AGATHA CHRISTIE'S MISS MARPLE: FEMINIST APPROACH

Ligeerle Qi

*Белорусский государственный университет, г. Минск;*

*qiligeerle@gmail.com;*

*науч. рук. – Н. С. Поваляева, канд. филол. наук, доцент*

В статье производится феминистский анализ одного из ключевых персонажей серии детективных романов и рассказов А. Кристи – мисс Марпл. Доказывается, что писательница намеренно создает контраст между видимостью (пожилая дама, незамужняя, проживающая в деревне, не имеющая профессии и т.п.) и сущностью (человек, обладающий незаурядными способностями в области расследования криминальных дел, имеющий твердую морально-нравственную позицию и последовательно осуществляющий свою волю) персонажа для того, чтобы разрушить стереотипное восприятие женщины, укорененное в патриархальном обществе. Образ мисс Марпл рассматривается также как пародия на образ Эркюля Пуаро.

**Ключевые слова:** feminism; feminist criticism; gender; female detective; detective fiction; parody; patriarchy; feminist character.

Agatha Christie may not be one of the greatest feminist writers in women's literary history. Nevertheless, as Roberta S. Klein points out, "Christie's work may lack a formal feminist agenda, but it repeatedly subverts patriarchy" [3, p. viii]. One of the most effective means of this subversion is of course Christie's most prominent character, Miss Marple.

This character first appeared in six short stories by Agatha Christie written in 1927–1928, and later, in 1930 – in the novel "The Murder at the Vicarage". It was shortly after the end of the first wave of feminism. By this time British women won their voting rights, as well as some financial independence, but many patriarchal stereotypes were still alive. It was still commonly approved that for a woman the best thing is to marry, get children and live the traditional family life.

Having this in mind, it is easy to understand why A. Christie couldn't really create a hardboiled female detective in the literary world dominated by male authors. Instead, she created an old "weak" lady in old-fashioned clothes, a vicar's daughter, a spinster who lives in a typical "idyllic" English village, takes care of her garden, watches birds, and is constantly knitting. She is unimportant, almost invisible to other people. One may say – it is hard to imagine more "anti-feminist" character.

And still Miss Marple is a feminist character. First of all, her life is her choice. Miss Marple has never been married in her life, and this choice lets her to live how she wants and to do what she likes. Here I'd like to recall Virginia Woolf's essay "A Room of One's Own" and her famous "recipe": "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" [5]. Miss Marple has money and a room of her own – not to write fiction, but to solve crimes. And, besides money and a room of her own, her ability to solve crime cases is based on two things: her strong moral feeling and her intelligence.

Miss Marple's moral feeling is simple: everyone who commits a crime must be punished, and doesn't matter who is the culprit (male or female), to which social class he or she belongs, which is his or her profession, etc. But at the same time Miss Marple is broad-minded and tolerant, she understands that time passes and everything is changing. In the novel "The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side", we find following passage: "One had to face the fact: St Mary Mead was not the place it had been. In a sense, of course, nothing was what it had been. You could blame the war (both the wars) or the younger generation, or women going out to work, or the atom bomb, or just the Government - but what one really meant was the simple fact that one was growing old. Miss Marple, who was a very sensible lady, knew that quite well. It was just that, in a queer way, she felt it more in St Mary Mead, because it had been her home for so long" [2].

Miss Marple's intelligence – her ability to observe, to ask right questions and to listen to what people say to her and to each other, to collect facts and to analyze them – is paradoxically the result of her lonely village life. Her general instrument of crime investigation is *comparison*. St. Mary Mead is a real microcosm, and Miss Marple has no need to travel and see other places to know the world. All that she needs is to find a parallel to a character or a situation that had place in her village. Over her lifetime St. Mary Mead has given her seemingly infinite examples of the negative side of human nature. No crime can arise without reminding Miss Marple of some parallel incident in the history of her time. Miss Marple's acquaintances are sometimes bored by her frequent analogies to people and events from St. Mary Mead, but these analogies often lead Miss Marple to a deeper realization about the true nature of a crime. She also said that the person who more kind and weaker are more dangerous. She has her own kind of ways and thoughts to the crime. In the novel "Nemesis", for example, after Miss Marple notices that Clotilde Bradbury-Scott has too much attention and love to Verity Hunt, she gets a conclusion – with the help of parallel to St. Mary Mead.

One more important thing to be mentioned is that Miss Marple in Agatha Christie's series of detective novels is set as a figure who mocks the elite and authority of the great detective Hercule Poirot. Poirot is famous not only for his ability to solve most difficult crime cases, but also for his vanity, his addiction to high-class clothes, his weakness for aristocracy, etc. He likes when people call him "the greatest detective", and when newspapers write about his triumphs. On the contrary, Miss Marple is modest and never mind when the police gets all the credit. But – and this is the most important thing – Miss Marple is equal to Poirot in her intellectual abilities.

Miss Marple is not a professional private detective like Poirot, she just "helps" police officers, and never gets payment for this. This could be seen as a weak point of Agatha Christie's work: a man gets payment for his work, and a woman is just "volunteering" for free. But we have to remember the time when the character of Miss Marple was created and keep in mind the real circumstances.

What really lets us consider this character as a feminist heroine is that in a male-dominated world Miss Marple establishes order and morality and proves that women are as intelligent, reasonable and ready for challenges as men.

## References

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