



FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND BUSINESS STUDIES  
Department of Humanities

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*"There is Nothing More Deceptive than an  
Obvious Fact"*

A Feminist Study of the Detective Work by Miss Marple and Sherlock  
Holmes

Frida Winterkvist

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Supervisor: Maria Mårdberg  
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## Abstract

This comparative study focuses on the detective genre and is conducted through literary analysis with a feminist critical perspective of two of its most iconic protagonists, Sherlock Holmes and Miss Marple, created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in 1887 and Agatha Christie in 1930 respectively. The purpose is to attempt to establish the effect of the gender differences on these two protagonists. Both Holmes and Miss Marple are deemed as iconic in the detective genre, but the protagonists do not have similar experiences and are created by authors of different genders. Thus, the focus is to explore how gender differences are represented in the literary texts *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), “A Scandal in Bohemia” (1891), and *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930) when it comes to their work as detectives. By using a feminist critical perspective and with the help of previous research, the differences in three central issues, that is, work methods, attitudes and method of disguise, are established. The most prominent result from the analysis is that Miss Marple has to work independently from the police force and trust another character, Leonard Clement, with what she knows hoping that Clement will use her observations to make the case move forward. By contrast, Holmes is approached by clients and even assists the police force in investigations, while Miss Marple is dismissed because of gender discrimination and ageism when she reaches out to the police force. Miss Marple is clearly a victim of gender discrimination and ageism, while Holmes is seen as eccentric but fully competent as a detective. Holmes is even described as having “extraordinary powers” while Miss Marple is described as an “old pussy” in a derogatory manner. Therefore, the results are that there is a significant difference in attitude where Holmes as a man encounters more positive attitudes and Miss Marple as a woman encounters more negative attitudes, all because of gender discrimination and ageism. These results are of great importance as it reveals what gender differences Holmes and Miss Marple encounter in their literary texts. It opens up the opportunity for more research in gender differences and gender discrimination in comparisons between protagonists. That Miss Marple is successful in the end, however, functions as a feminist statement.

Key words: female detectives, detective genre, Agatha Christie, sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes, Miss Marple, women’s rights, gender studies, gender

differences, feminist criticism, *A Study in Scarlet*, "A Scandal in Bohemia", *The Murder at the Vicarage*

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## 1. Introduction

The detective genre is a well-established and popular literary genre. As the now iconic Sherlock Holmes stories within the detective genre were first published in 1887, a new ideal for detective protagonists was born due to Holmes being portrayed as such a 'brilliant' detective. However, the detective genre has not been free of gender discrimination. The cause for these gender differences appears to be gender discrimination in real life, and the lack of equal rights between the genders. Because of this, women writers have been fighting for their rights and to have similar opportunities to make it as detective genre writers just like men did (Šalinović 223). Feminist criticism has established that female protagonists or characters were prone to be written as stereotypes or as caricatures, so female writers wanted to make a difference by creating female protagonists who were just as brilliant as protagonists created by men (Aviram 249). Nevertheless, the genre has been through some changes through the years. These changes have been researched and still are being researched.

In gender studies, the changes in the representation of gender difference in detective stories have been explored. Two of these protagonists are the iconic Sherlock Holmes and Miss Marple, created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in 1887 and Agatha Christie in 1930 respectively. This essay will be a comparative study of the two protagonists Holmes and Miss Marple in terms of gender differences. While different perspectives are possible, this essay focuses on three central issues. These three central issues are work methods, attitudes, and the method of disguise, as they are prominent in the literary works analyzed in this essay.

The aim of the paper is to establish if two detective characters, Miss Marple and Sherlock Holmes, are depicted as having similar experiences whilst working on their cases. The aim is to demonstrate differences and similarities in what work methods they use, attitudes they encounter, and how they use the method of disguise. Most detective stories involve the method of disguise or the need for a new temporary identity, but the reason behind it could differ. This essay will investigate why the two protagonists use the method of disguise. The detective genre went from being male dominated to women writers striving for acknowledgement and recognition in said genre too (Šalinović 219). Comparing Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, a female detective, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, a male detective, could bring out some of the similarities and differences between the two protagonists, regarding characteristics but also regarding what difficulties they might encounter whilst working

and how they use the method of disguise. Therefore, the research questions were constructed as such:

1. What are the similarities in work methods between the two famous protagonists, Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes?
2. What attitudes do these protagonists encounter whilst investigating?
3. How do the protagonists Holmes and Miss Marple use the method of disguise in their investigations and what is the purpose for using a disguise?

The literary works Agatha Christie's *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930) and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891) have been analyzed respectively. To deepen the analysis, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), also by Conan Doyle, has been considered. Similarities and differences have been the main focus in the comparison, and they have been analyzed through feminist critical theory and by using theoretical texts taken up in the background section.

The three literary works in this paper were selected because *A Study in Scarlet* and *A Murder at the Vicarage* are the first works by Doyle and Christie respectively, where their now iconic protagonists Holmes and Miss Marple first appear. To obtain a better understanding how the authors present their protagonists the first time they are featured, the first literary works were chosen. The short story "A Scandal in Bohemia" is also included as it is the only literary work by Doyle that features his character Irene Adler, who is relevant for this paper due to the fact that she uses the method of disguise similarly to Miss Marple.

The theory used in this paper is feminist critical theory, where the concern is the equal portrayal of female and male protagonists within the detective genre. The representation of women is a major concern and all genders are to be portrayed with dignity and not as stereotypes or caricatures. Since this is a paper that will compare two protagonists of different sexes and their experiences in relation to their sex, a feminist critical perspective is appropriate.

A feminist critical perspective means that the representation of women has been the most central aspect (Barry 133), but literary analysis can only go so far. The literary works by Conan Doyle and Christie analyzed in this study were published in 1887, 1891 and 1930 respectively, which means it is almost 40 years between them. In that time,

there was significant progress in society in terms of women's rights and first wave feminism, which made women more included in spaces where they were previously excluded such as the detective genre. Such significant progress could also be represented in the literary world in an effort to bring the literary texts in line with the social progress.

Lastly, Holmes' case is about a photograph which could potentially be harmful for a prince's reputation, while Miss Marple investigates a murder, which means there is a difference in what type of case they are investigating. The comparison could have been more accurate if the cases would have been more similar. However, the experiences are still relevant due to the fact both Holmes and Miss Marple work as amateur detectives and use the method of disguise.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Women and Women's Rights During the 1800s

In the 1800s, many women wanted to have the same opportunities and the right to receive a proper education as men. They wanted their agency. In *Conversations with Parliament: Women and the Politics of Pressure in 19th-Century England*, Sarah Richardson discusses that historically women would go to great lengths to influence politics even though it was believed that they were powerless. Women had to become creative if they wanted change to come and their voices to be heard, therefore they would form groups which would work and campaign together (Richardson 38). Since the groups were successful and grew bigger, the parliament, which consisted of men, and men only, was forced to listen.

Equally important, women wanted to be taken seriously as professionals as well. It was during this time period that authors like Jane Austen and Emily Brontë published their now recognized works *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813 and *Wuthering Heights* in 1847 respectively. Female writers found writing to be the one way they could express their concern regarding oppression and gender discrimination without being silenced (Šalinović 219). However, it was not without facing any resistance from the public that these female writers were able to pursue their dreams as authors. According to Šalinović (219), men were starting to feel threatened by the fact that women wanted to be authors, novelists and writers as well. At this point in time, the world of literature was predominantly male, and women only wanted to be included and given space in that world too (Šalinović 219). According to Šalinović, women turned to writing as a coping process, and because it did not require any previous knowledge beforehand, which meant that the women who wanted to start writing could do so. Even so, it was still somehow believed that female writers were doing something wrong, and the criticism did not solely come from men.

The success of women's literature coincided with a strong opposition on the part of men writers. [...] They mocked them for their knowledge and they mocked them if they did know enough. Surprisingly, it was not only men who welcomed the changes with great skepticism. There were many anti-feminists who believed that the only place for women was their home (Šalinović 224).



Moreover, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, education was another field where women were denied the same possibilities as men. Regarding female writers in the nineteenth century, Šalinović points out how women were believed at the time to have smaller brains, and would not be able to handle the same type of education which men received (Šalinović 221). Therefore, women were left either to educate themselves, or to hope they were allowed to be taught by a brother's or close relatives' tutor.

Furthermore, the negative attitude based on gender discrimination started to change from the 1860s and onward as women began to be allowed to take examinations by the University of London, attend lectures at the University of Cambridge, and later the first university for women was opened which gave women the opportunity to finally receive an education. As the first university for women opened, it was something which is believed to have been too late for the writers in the nineteenth century, as they could not benefit from it (Šalinović 221). Because of this, many female writers were self-taught, but did not receive the same recognition as the male writers who were also self-taught, based on the previous mentioned belief that women's only place was at home (Šalinović 224).

## 2.2 *Sherlock's Sisters*

Joseph A. Kestner considers the literary work by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle about his famous detective Sherlock Holmes to be one of the most widely known works in the detective genre. The first work *A Study in Scarlet* was published in 1887 and featured his protagonist detective Sherlock Holmes accompanied by his doctor friend John Hamish Watson. It was an instant success for Conan Doyle and the now former physician could focus on building a career in writing rather than the medical field. Sherlock Holmes quickly seemed to become the ideal of how a great detective protagonist should be represented, such as his ability to use deduction and his observational skills.

However, although Sherlock Holmes soon became iconic, female writers or writers in general still added female detectives into the detective genre. According to Kestner, female writers were spurred to add “new inflections of the narrative” (Kestner 71); one of them was Mary Elizabeth Braddon, who decided, after reading Conan Doyle's detective stories, to re-form that “legacy to suit more proto-feminist objective” (Kestner 56). Braddon created Sibyl Penrith and through this protagonist and her stories

gained success. She turned that “sensation into detection” (Kestner 71), meaning she paved the way for future female writers by being determined to create a female protagonist who worked as a detective. Braddon was not the only one who wanted to expand the diversity of the detective genre. Catherine Louisa Pirkis wrote stories about her protagonist Loveday Brooks, also a female detective. Many female detective stories include the method of disguise or obtaining another identity to further investigate the person of interest (Kestner 4). In comparison to Conan Doyle’s Holmes, both Braddon’s and Pirkis’ protagonists seem to have the ability to sense the gender difference in society attributed to them (Kestner 71). Furthermore, Pirkis’ Brooks acknowledges that there is a system “by which physical appearance indicates criminality” (Kestner 77), which she decides to prove is wrong. Another characteristic that the protagonists Kestner mentions have in common is that they do not work for the police; rather, they are detectives who work completely independently from the police force. Women were being included in spaces where they were not included before, such as in work fields and working as detectives. The first female detective inspector in Britain, Lilian Wyles, was hired in 1922. Wyles’ job was to take statements from young girls and from women who had been victims of sexual assault or assault (Kestner 5). It seems as if the evolution of fictional female detectives is a response to the change in society where women were now being included, however not fully yet.

Moreover, in the world of literature, even if it was daring to create female protagonists, it would be rewarding at the same time. Braddon experienced sensation from her stories about Sibyl Penrith. The sensation gave Braddon an idea of how a female protagonist could be depicted to be a success. Another author who found success was Pirkis, who used her protagonist Loveday Brooks to show that a protagonist can still be empathic while working as a detective, something which is quite the opposite of Conan Doyle’s Holmes. Pirkis’ protagonist is also believed to be hinting that she is a victim of ‘potential oppression’, as Brooks and her employer Ebenezer Dyer does seem to have ‘disputious’ relationship as “Pirkis introduces some additional connotations in his surname, which might be read as 'die-her' or 'dye-her', the former suggesting potential oppression, the latter a compulsion to change the woman” (Kestner 72).

Throughout the entire series that features Loveday Brooks, the protagonist disagrees with male characters such as policemen and male detectives, on more than one occasion. In fact, she is “often correcting their assumption of male superiority in reasoning” (Kestner 73). Whenever Brooks is in a disagreement, she is the reasonable

one. During arguments, Brooks remains calm and collected to underline her professionalism and rationality. By representing Brooks as the reasonable one in an argument, Pirkis decides to make Brooks empathic, as she can understand other people's feelings and the reasons for those feelings, but at the same time not let that understanding affect her professionalism.

Many of the first female detectives use the method of disguising themselves or changing their identities. This is a trick that detectives use to investigate further than they would have been able to as themselves. Instead, the detectives take the form of someone's niece or a governess, like Loveday Brooks (Kestner 71), or even change their gender. Such is the case with Elizabeth B. Corbett's female detective Anne Cory. Cory turns into a detective when her fiancé is falsely accused of something he did not do. In order to gain more clues during the investigation, Cory decides to disguise herself as a man (Kestner 86). According to Corbett, "gender is a matter of performance" (Kestner 87), so for Cory to pass as a man, all she had to do is to 'perform' like a man for her disguise to work. Such 'performance' is something which is similar to Conan Doyle's Irene Adler. Both of these characters were empowered by the 'transgression of gendered borders' (Kestner 87).

### *2.3. Dainty Hands: Perceptions of Women and Crime in Sherlock Holmes Stories*

Hadar Aviram investigates the perceptions of women and crime in Conan Doyle's literary works which feature Sherlock Holmes. Aviram claims that based on previous research in criminology, female crime was rarely given any attention and that crime was a predominantly male phenomenon (Aviram 233). Female criminals were "doubly abnormal" in both their femaleness, as crime was not an aspect that was identified as part of femininity, and their criminality, as it was not that common for females to be criminals (234). Nevertheless, the field of female crime and criminals started to gain some attention eventually. Aviram mentions that there was a belief at the time of women's liberation in the mid 1970s that female crime, opportunities for crime, and female participation in crime would be on the rise. According to Aviram, the belief was that because of the women's liberation, women would begin doing what men had been doing for a long time, such as committing crime.

Moreover, Aviram claims that female crime is not a field which is given major attention in Conan Doyle's literary works. Holmes is a detective described as

“scrupulously rational, calculating, sometimes machine-like and devoid of feelings” (Aviram 241). Holmes relies on what he and others find at crime scenes to come to a conclusion and his reasoning is based on “generalizations about human nature stemming from his observations of human behavior” (Aviram 241). Therefore, Aviram argues that Holmes is more invested in the backstory and the crime rather than just the crime itself, and has a tendency to not report criminals to the police force if the criminal has a backstory which speaks to Holmes (242). In most of Conan Doyle’s literary works, Aviram claims descriptions of women focus on their appearance, rather than any other trait that they might have, and they are prone to be stereotypes based on ethnicity, social class, or such alike. The female characters are also mostly put into stereotypical “female positions” such as a damsel in distress-scenario (Aviram 249). However, Doyle’s female characters also commit transgression, but only to protect loved ones, which also could be seen as a stereotypical female position. Transgression in Doyle’s literary texts is mostly gender transgression where women disguise themselves as men. Regardless, Aviram identifies “A Scandal in Bohemia” as a reverse damsel in distress-scenario, as this time it is a man who seeks help rather than a woman seeking help. Aviram also highlights that Irene Adler is the perfect example of gender transgression as she dresses as a man and greets Holmes in the street, without him ever knowing that the man was her in disguise (Aviram 252).

#### 2.4. *Agatha Christie: Investigating Femininity*

Merja Makinen (2006) analyses Agatha Christie and femininity. During the beginning of Christie’s career, the author received recognition for her “originality in constructing puzzles” and how her puzzles had “supremacy” (Makinen 11). However, Makinen (2006) claims that it was peculiar that Christie was “almost willfully ignoring the range of independent women in the novels” (Makinen 11), such as *A Murder at the Vicarage*, which meant that her protagonists could have been more than they were, that they had the potential to be independent and modern women.

According to Makinen, Christie wrote in her biography about how her family was raised by a matriarch, one of her grandmothers, and Makinen notices that Christie grew up to be a conservative with patriarchal views as she dismissed the women’s rights movement and because she “ignore[d] her social contexts and retreats into her own unconscious to create these characterisations that fight shy of gender expectations” (Makinen 17). Because Christie ignored social contexts and retreated into

her own unconsciousness, she would not intentionally make her protagonists daring or break gender roles and this somehow made it seem like “there is no authentic feminist voice in the stories” (Makinen 14). The protagonist Miss Marple is depicted as an elderly woman. By being elderly and a woman, Christie made it socially accepted for her protagonist to be fond of gossiping and the fact that she has a great memory and remembers all the gossip is what makes her character believable. Miss Marple’s type of knowledge was dubbed as useful in that sense and as a “feminine form of knowledge” (Makinen 14).

Furthermore, Makinen argues Christie often uses female villains in her story and that could be interpreted in many ways depending on the perspective. Makinen (2006) presents two perspectives on the matter: that Christie’s characters were “punished for their attempted usurping of male status” or “the idea of the autonomous woman murderer led Christie into a greater psychological complexity and even sympathy” (Makinen 19). Yet, Makinen describes it as odd that Christie, who herself used to be a hospital worker during the war before she found success as a writer, did not find women’s movement to be of importance and something to support (Makinen 20). She had her independence during her time as a hospital worker and during her time as a writer, yet did not support a movement that gave her the right to work as she wished.

Christie is not a feminist by today’s standards, as she expressed deep dislike for career women in her autobiography which was published in her seventies (Makinen 56). Even so, she valued, and therefore wanted to show, what she identified as womanly attributes such as logic, morality and justice in her protagonists, such as Miss Marple (Makinen 56). Makinen argues that the whole detective genre is about challenging cultural and gender norms, which means that is not out of the ordinary for Christie to do so in her stories. Makinen also argues that “only female detectives were both agents and sexually challenged patriarchal precepts” (56), so the female detectives encounter more, and other, expectations than their male counterparts. In the terms of Miss Marple being elderly, it means her age discounts her sexuality, and thus it would be “no conflict of representation with her efficient ratiocination” (Makinen 57).

Nevertheless, Makinen still believes Christie wrote her stories to question, or to challenge, what is referred to as “old-style Victorian and Edwardian conventions and gender expectations” (25). Also, even though her protagonists often are portrayed as elderly, like Miss Marple, it does not mean that their views are old-fashioned or that they will reinforce what could be interpreted as outdated ways of being (Makinen 25).

Miss Marple is supposed to be the “village spinster” who is in center of her village; she is part of her community and not “marginalized by phallogentric society” (Makinen 53). She is described as having “white hair, gentle manner and apparent frailty” and that could be what disarms her in terms of being taken seriously as a detective. However, that could very well be the camouflage she chooses to use, as no one suspects her of investigating; she is just being nosy and chatty, like most elderly people are (Makinen 54). Makinen further argues that “there is no detective in England equal to the spinster lady of uncertain age with plenty of time on her hands” (Makinen 54) as it appears Miss Marple knows what people expect of her. She is elderly and therefore is expected to be acting as such. She uses said expectations to her advantage, and that “it is her success in playing the expected spinster role which enables her to gather needed information” (Makinen 54). She is also described as being a “fearsome oddity” and “moral force” as she has knowledge the police force does not have, something which is referred to as “female knowledge” (Makinen 54). Makinen argues that Miss Marple is aware of the ageism and how people expect certain behaviors from her since she is elderly. Therefore, Miss Marple uses the ageism to masquerade herself. She is often described as an “old pussy” and that is because she is a “big, soft, white, purry person” (Makinen 57). She plays the part of the elderly, nosy and chatty woman to gain information that helps solve the cases that the Scotland Yard is having difficulties with, even though they may not reach out to her for help. Her appearance and her age always receive textual focus and “the construction of the elderly amateur detective hinges on the disjunction construction if her appearance and her knowledge of human depravity” (Makinen 57). The reason it receives so much textual focus could be to point to elderly femininity as the act of masquerading oneself. It is a performance or a disguise to hide one’s true self, to obtain the advantages needed (Makinen 58). Makinen claims that Miss Marple’s masquerade points beyond her own individual identity to femininity as a whole (58).

Furthermore, Miss Marple seems to be in possession of a skill she uses whenever she is in the presence of men in power. According to Makinen, she gives her disquisition on her methodology in a way where she transforms the “feminine” into “masculine” terminology, rather than adopting the masculine position (60). One example is that Miss Marple does so by providing male characters she trusts, such as the vicar in *A Murder at the Vicarage*, with important observations she has made. Miss Marple is under the impression that the vicar will use her observations to investigate and she also tells him how the investigation can move forward. She inserts herself piece

by piece into the case by using others in this way, instead of forcing her way in trying to do the solving herself. By doing so, she takes control of the whole process, both the initial feminine disquiet and the masculine explanation of facts (Makinen 60). Thus, the police in power are amazed and impressed by her feminine knowledge (Makinen 61), even if Miss Marple does not see her knowledge as being feminine, and this is also textually embedded for emphasis in Christie's novels about Miss Marple. By doing this, Miss Marple puts herself in the center, rather than in the margin (Makinen 62).

And finally, Christie consistently blurs the boundaries between ratiocination and intuition, and accommodates feminine and feminized forms of detecting, or of knowledge, throughout her four main detectives' methodologies. Although the detectives are not the characters who form the major contentions and complications to modern contested gender norms in Christie's detective novels, they do nevertheless form discreet and confined challenges of their own (Makinen 63)

Makinen claims that even if Christie was not an outspoken feminist voice, somehow her protagonist Miss Marple seems to have such a voice, or at least the basics for one.

### *2.5. Desires and Devices: On Women Detectives in Fiction*

Birgitta Berglund argues that as society in Britain was moving forward in terms of equality during the 1800s and early 1900s, it was no surprise literary genres would do so as well. More specifically, in the detective genre, women writers wanted their women characters to be seen as subjects, rather than objects, which meant that they wanted equal rights. Birgitta Berglund notices that there are a great number of female writers in said genre in the early 2000s in comparison to the 1800s and 1900s. Only until quite recently the stories from 1800s, 1900s, and early 2000s had been dominantly about male detectives even if the writer was female. One reason could have been that women were more susceptible to stories about men than men were susceptible about stories about women. Thus, if an author wanted to be sure that their work would reach the largest crowd, they would pick a male protagonist (Berglund 138). Another reason could have been that "literature reflects reality" (Berglund 138), which meant that most detectives in literature were men because most detectives in reality were men. However, Berglund argues that this is a less convincing reason since "the detective story in its

vintage form is not really a realistic genre” (Berglund 139). The detective protagonists and their investigations are not real, and thus not reflecting reality.

Furthermore, Berglund argues that female writers, or writers in general, who wanted a female protagonist who worked as a detective faced some difficulties as such writing could be about ‘literary patterns’ and ‘expectations’ (Berglund 139) rather than real life issues such as inequality between the sexes. The ideal, evidently created by Conan Doyle with his Holmes, meant that the detectives had to be “strong, intelligent, resourceful, a latter-day knight who fights and defeats evil” (Berglund 139). Also, like Holmes, the detectives had to ‘have a degree of eccentricity and egocentricity’ (Berglund 139). Holmes is also described as almost superhuman and therefore allowed to be so because of ‘his extraordinary powers’ (Berglund 139). The woman in the story also had to have this ideal paired with the traditional feminine ideal to be credible as a female detective (Berglund 139). Thus, writers who wanted a female protagonist in their detective story had to find a way for their protagonist to be credible and believable for the literary text to work. There would have to be a way to make women the hero, and not the victim nor the villainess, of the story. However, according to Berglund, if a female character lived up to the feminine ideal, she would only be credible as a protagonist if she were a victim. If a female character did the opposite and did not live up to the feminine ideal, she would only be credible as a protagonist if she were the villainess. Sometimes, the woman will even be both, as in ‘hard-boiled detective fiction’. Thus, Berglund claims that a woman could ‘only’ be a heroine, never a hero, as a heroine is allowed to be everything that is feminine (Berglund 139). If the woman has all of the characteristics of a great detective mentioned above but is in a situation where she is suspected of a crime she did not commit, she has to play the part of both the heroine and the villainess. One example is the protagonist Laura in Vera Caspary’s literary text *Laura*, where she is both the victim and the villainess (Berglund 140). Because of Caspary’s literary text, female characters being portrayed as both a victim and a villainess became a stereotype. In Dorothy Sayer’s *Strong Poison*, yet another female protagonist is suspected of a crime she did not commit. The story turns into a damsel in distress-scenario as Sayer is rescued by Lord Peter, a male detective (Berglund 140).

Additionally, women started to be written in as partners of the male detective, as it was believed that writers were not sure that they could write female protagonists who were doing the job themselves. Some female writers had a desire to be



included in the detective genre and such desire could be compared to the chapter in the autobiography of a female artist that dreamed of marrying a male artist. She hoped that one day he would let her help him with his paintings, and therefore include her. In a similar manner, writers might have made their female protagonists like this female artist because they were “not daring to fantasise about actually being a detective herself, she fantasised instead about marrying one and being allowed to help him” (Berglund 142). Even when the female protagonist was put into a position where she was solving crimes, like in Baroness Orczy’s *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard*, she was doing it because she wanted to prove her husband’s innocence in a murder investigation and would be able to by joining the police force. When she succeeded, she retired from the force to live a domestic life once again (Berglund 143). This meant that this female protagonist, who is described as “a loveable, womanly woman who not only solves crimes efficiently and professionally, but actually does it inside Scotland Yard” (Berglund 142), is only doing so to help her husband. Berglund argues that it only seems to be an adequate reason for a woman to leave her household duties if she is doing it for someone else, such as a husband (Berglund 142).

Lastly, Christie’s Miss Marple is described as “the prototype of the elderly busybody female sleuth” by Michele Slung (Berglund 144), another author. Berglund mentions that Slung claims that Miss Marple is an elderly woman with nothing better to do all day but to invest her time into investigations, and Miss Marple became the ideal for when writers wanted to include protagonists or characters just like her. Dorothy L Sayers had told Christie that “dear old tabbies are the only possible kind of female detectives” (Berglund 144). Berglund claims these two authors might have had the same idea, as the historical situation between 1920 and 1930 resulted in a lot of unmarried, sometimes elderly or middle-aged, women. Thus, it might not be a surprise that they end up in detective crime stories as detectives; as Berglund claims that such characters had to find a way to support themselves independently (145).

### 3. Analysis

This comparative essay focuses on three main issues in relation to the two iconic protagonists Holmes and Miss Marple, created by Conan Doyle and Christie respectively. These three main issues are work methods, attitudes, and the method of disguise. These three main issues are selected because they are important thematic elements found in all three literary texts and show the difference in characteristics between the two protagonists and what they do to be able to work as detectives.

Disguise could be regarded as a work method, but using the method of disguise was so prominent for both protagonists that it deserves to be a topic of its own in the analysis.

### 3.1. Work Methods

In the beginning of the story, Agatha Christie's protagonist Miss Marple mentions the importance of having some evidence before accusing someone of committing a crime:

[...] I dare say everyone thinks it is somebody different. That is why it is important to have proofs. I, for instance, am quite convinced I know who did it. But I must admit I hadn't one shadow of proof. One must, I know, be very careful of what one says at a time like this – criminal libel, don't they call it? [...] (Christie 43)

By always being sure to have evidence before any accusations or theories are being laid out, Miss Marple makes sure that she can prove she is right first. She inspires others, such as the vicar and his wife Griselda, to help her to find any evidence or indications as to who might have murdered Colonel Protheroe. However, instead of using Miss Marple to help them, the vicar and Griselda try to solve the murder on their own, by using their own logic. However, it appears Miss Marple and her views on the importance of solid evidence before accusation seemingly makes an impact on them. The vicar and Griselda use the pieces of details they receive from Miss Marple, which eventually leads to them solving a part of the murder case. Thus, they find out that the note Colonel Protheroe was writing on when he was murdered was wrongly dated, to give the murderer an alibi (Christie 45). Hence, gathering any solid evidence before any theories or accusations can be laid out is an important work method Miss Marple uses.

Also, by providing others with what Miss Marple knows, for example by giving others pieces of details she has observed as the case goes on, she shows her imagination, and her thought process seems to be different from the others. She deduces which people will be able to take the information and use it properly. For example, by telling the vicar how important evidence is, Miss Marple makes the vicar want to gather evidence even more than before. Miss Marple appears to be aware of how one should work as a detective, but because of the ageism and sexism in the community, she is unable to do so at the moment herself. The vicar is a man who begins to trust her, and

Miss Marple takes advantage of this fact and that could be the reason why she decides to confide him with the information she has so far as she believes he will use it right. As the vicar is a man, Miss Marple could be using the vicar to do the work she wants to do but is unable to. Using others seemingly is Miss Marple's most valuable and useful work method as by employing others, she makes the murder investigation move forward.

Furthermore, Miss Marple can also look beyond what has already been established and analyze further than the other characters. For instance, she mentions that she has a theory of who has committed the crime as soon as she has observed some events, such as the fact that Mrs Protheroe was not carrying a knife or gun with her to the crime scene. As Miss Marple shares her thoughts that were mentioned above, it leads others to suspect that the murderer did not intend to just kill Colonel Protheroe. The murderer also wanted to hurt his wife Anne Protheroe and did so by making it seem like she had done it (Christie 72). Miss Marple intends to make sure that others keep their minds open for other suspects by telling them about her observations and theories, and here it seems to be working as they start believing that Mrs Protheroe did not do it.

In comparison to Miss Marple, Sherlock Holmes is consulted, does the solving himself and uses Watson to assist him while Miss Marple makes others do the solving while she assists, even if her assistance is not explicitly asked for. In Conan Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia", Holmes shows a glimpse of his work methods by analyzing Watson and his whereabouts the night before. By sharing his thought process with Watson and how he analyzes what he sees, the text illustrates Holmes' powers of deduction to readers. Holmes then proceeds to tell Watson how he uses deduction. For example, the dirt on Watson shoes can only be from one specific area which gives Holmes the indication of Watson's whereabouts the night before (Conan Doyle 7). As with Miss Marple, Holmes trusts his deduction and by being observant he can deduce and gather any evidence that he needs to solve a case.

Furthermore, Holmes and Watson are approached by a client who needs their help, which is different from Miss Marple who is not approached by the clients but rather has to approach the clients herself. The client who needs Holmes and Watson help wants them to obtain a photograph, which cannot be public knowledge in any way, is the King of Bohemia. Holmes deduces that the client is in fact the person on the photograph that he is supposed to retrieve, which turns out to be true. Again, Holmes uses his observational skills as he sees through the King's disguise. Holmes is therefore

proving his point by showing both the client and Watson that he can deduce the identity of the client with no prior knowledge of who the client is.

Additionally, Holmes has an archive with information regarding people that might be of interest, which means that keeping an archive of all that Holmes knows is one of his work methods. Watson describes it that Holmes has “adopted a system of docketing all paragraphs concerning men and things” (Conan Doyle 14). By having an archive, Holmes has found a way to keep all the information that he gains from his deduction and observations. Nothing is to be left out and all the information regarding people of interest is to be kept in his archive, as Holmes cannot keep all that information inside his head at all times. Holmes knows that Irene Adler, the person in possession of the photograph, and all of the information he has on her is there somewhere.

Moreover, after actually meeting Adler, Holmes once again shows his work method of observation of people and surroundings as he deduces that the photograph might not be with her at all times but rather somewhere in her home, hidden away where no one but her could have access to it as he cannot see where she would have it hidden if she had it on her. He deduces that the photograph would be too large to conceal on her body; the photograph must be hidden away in safety. His work method is to engage in rational thinking, using reasoned observation and therefore deducing. He proves his point when he later shows Watson his observations; he invites Watson to tag along to a crime scene that the Scotland Yard requests Holmes assistance. He shows Watson that by his observations of the crime scene and the murdered victim, he can deduce the height, age and complexion of the murderer, which astonishes Watson. Evidently, Holmes figures out that the murderer is a cab driver who has a history with the murdered victim, something that is revealed to be true in the second part of the literary text as the narrative changes to the murderer and reveals that Holmes’ deduction is correct.

Additionally, Holmes seems to be able to work freely, as Holmes has clients that actively seek his help. In comparison, Miss Marple tries to help the police force even if they do not request her help or even reject it, and she has to approach the clients or victims herself and not the other way around. By being rejected by the police force, Miss Marple is left to work independently but uses others to help her along the way. Similarly, Braddon’s and Pirkis’ female protagonists Penrith and Brooks also work independently from the police force as the police force do not request their help (Kestner 77). Moreover, in another story by Conan Doyle that features Holmes, *A Study*

in *Scarlet*, Holmes is requested by the police force to help out when a young woman has been murdered, which leads to the conclusion that he most likely always gets some credit or recognition for the work he does while Miss Marple does not.

Besides, taking the evolution of the female detective into account, Birgitta Berglund argues that fictional female detectives went from being women who felt that they had to temporarily become detectives, in order to save someone else, to being detectives for “fun, money or fame”. Also, Berglund further argues that female detectives were only detectives in the beginning because there was no man there to do the job. Regarding Christie’s Miss Marple, the men are there to do the job but Miss Marple seems to be working more efficiently than they do. However, as Miss Marple is not taken seriously, she is also treated as if she is not trustworthy or as having no worldly experiences. If it had not been for the vicar who started to trust and believe Miss Marple, the murder case might have had a different outcome as the police constable was ready to close the case as soon as someone confessed, even if he had no evidence to back up that statement. The police are satisfied as long as someone confesses. In Miss Marple’s opinion, the real murderer should be convicted and not just anyone who confesses. Thus, Miss Marple thinks a case should rest on evidence, which is why she is so careful to have evidence first before she can accuse someone.

Again, as mentioned, Berglund highlights that Christie’s protagonist Miss Marple is an elderly, non-working woman that was deemed as not especially attractive. She was just an older woman that lived alone and that was a common sight in England at the time (Berglund 144). Christie might have picked a way to make herself accepted in the detective crime story genre, and then could remove some of the common fictional work methods, such as the method of disguise, that other female writers before her had to include to be regarded as a legit detective story writer. If they, the female writers, had not used something that was common for the time period, there is a chance that their stories might have been dismissed as women trying to fit into the detective genre in which they were initially considered to not belong to.

In Christie’s novel, Miss Marple is the driving force when the investigation seems to have stalled; she gives advice on how the case can move forward. It is revealed that, even though the reason is unknown, the servants and maids do not like talking to the police. However, they might be in possession of information that is of great significance. Miss Marple suggests that Lawrence Redding should interview the female servants as they might reveal to someone like him what they know (Christie

105). Indeed, Redding decides to take Miss Marple's advice, and he does gain some information from the servants that will help the case move towards the "real" murderer, and potentially prove that he is innocent, or at least give the impression that he is innocent (Christie 123). As Miss Marple's advice makes the case move forward, that evidently means that Miss Marple could be right identifying the murderer. The fact that the servants tell Redding everything that they have seen and heard when he interviewed them is further evidence that Miss Marple has work methods that seem to be right. However, the information is wrongly used as Mr Redding is the murderer, and Miss Marple eventually realizes this as other evidence is revealed.

Furthermore, when the story begins to reveal the real murder, Miss Marple begins to interfere with the police investigation even more as she is certain that she knows who the murderer is. Again, Miss Marple uses her observational skills. Miss Marple reaches out to the vicar to let him know that she has once again observed an event by her house. She has witnessed Miss Gladys Cram go into the woods with a suitcase, only to reappear without it, and describes it as a "peculiar" thing (Christie 112). This is the manner in which Miss Marple seemingly describes evidence or important information, something that the vicar also begins to do (Christie 141). By using the same terms as Miss Marple, the vicar gives the impression of wanting to use the same methods as Miss Marple; he starts to work with her rather than independently of her. The vicar runs into Constable Hurts, who is investigating the woods to search for said suitcase, where the vicar mentions that Miss Marple was the witness to the events and says "[...] I've been thinking, Miss Marple said it was quite short time before the girl reappeared empty-handed. In that case, she wouldn't have had time to get up here and back" (Christie 142).

By telling the vicar what she saw, Miss Marple could in fact want to make the vicar inform the police, as they are probably more likely to listen to a man rather than a woman. Miss Marple has provided the vicar with almost every important detail which he in turn has proceeded to give to the police force, as he has started to think of her as trustworthy. Again, this shows that providing others with what she has observed is one of the work methods.

Furthermore, as Miss Marple has observed that Miss Cram had entered the woods with a suitcase and then re-entered without it, the vicar decides that he has to search for it. By following Miss Marple's observation, the vicar finds the suitcase. By

believing her observations, the vicar again shows his trust in Miss Marple. He proceeds to phone the police force who sends Inspector Slack to open it. The content of the suitcase is revealed to belong to the now murdered Colonel Protheroe. Now, Miss Marple reveals that she remembers that Colonel Protheroe had, weeks earlier, expressed how he wanted his belongings valued so that he could receive the proper insurance (Christie 151), which is also an example of how observant Miss Marple is, as she can recall certain events and information without forgetting details. In comparison to Holmes, who has an archive, Miss Marple keeps all of the important information in her head. She also shares with the vicar that she has a theory that the belongings are not missing, but have been replaced, and they had not been discovered by the now murdered Colonel Protheroe. The items have not been noticed missing by his wife Anne Protheroe either, so the appropriate thing to do is to visit the now widowed Protheroe and find the potential replicas (Christie 152).

Additionally, as Miss Marple observes that the vicar uses the information she gives him in the way she wants him to, she writes him a letter as she once again has more observations to share (Christie 169). However, as they proceed to meet, Miss Marple decides to share with the vicar how she obtained this hobby in the first place:

‘You see’, she began at last, ‘living alone, as I do, in a rather out-of-the-way part of the world, one has to have a hobby. There is, of course, woolwork, and Guides, and Welfare, and sketching, but my hobby is – and always has been – human nature. So varied – and so very fascinating. And, of course, in a small village, with nothing to distract one, one has such ample opportunity for becoming what I might call proficient in one’s study. One begins to class people, quite definitely. Just as though they were birds or flowers, group so-and-so, genus this, species that’ (Christie 169).

The way in which Miss Marple operates and how she has learned how to observe, and categorize others, could be an indication that Makinen’s theory is accurate, that “there is no detective in England equal to the spinster lady of uncertain age with plenty of time on her hands” (Makinen 54). Miss Marple has had plenty of time to become proficient, as she describes it, as no one suspects an old lady to be investigating. The police force might not have the same amount of time to do the same as they only

work during their working hours, while Miss Marple is observant as many hours as she is awake, and she is able to make people talk as she is perceived as just the old lady living next door and not as a detective. Miss Marple eventually suggests that the two, the vicar and Miss Marple, work together to solve the case. The vicar asks her who she thinks is the murderer, whereby she decides not to answer, but that she has three theories as to what might have happened. She also mentions to the vicar that “if you have a theory that fits every fact – well, then, it must be the right one”, which leads the vicar to believe that she is onto something but refuses to reveal it until she is certain (Christie 173). When Miss Marple is on her way to leave the vicar to go home, she mentions that something just occurred to her, and yet again she will not tell him (Christie 175). Again, Miss Marple teases the vicar that she knows something more, that she has remembered another peculiar thing, but as she leaves without revealing what that might be, it could be an indication that she wants to gather evidence first.

Eventually, Miss Marple decides that she must reveal how she has solved the case to both the police force and the vicar, because as many events have passed and details have been revealed, she now has a perfectly clear theory about the murder, both about who had done it and how it was done. She exclaims that Lawrence Redding, who in the beginning had confessed to the murder but then had been deemed to be innocent, is the real murderer. She describes it as such:

I know that in books it is always the most unlikely person. But I never find that rule applies in real life. There it is so often the obvious that is true. Much as I have always liked Mrs Protheroe, I could not avoid coming to the conclusion that she was completely under Mr Redding’s thumb and would do anything he told her, and, of course, he is not the kind of young man who would dream of running away with a penniless woman. From his point of view it was necessary that Colonel Protheroe should be removed – and so he removed him. One of those charming young men who have no moral sense (Christie 187)

She says that Anne Protheroe might be the one who actually shot Colonel Protheroe, because, like she stated earlier, Mrs Protheroe would do “anything” for Lawrence Redding. Additionally, Miss Marple explains that the sneeze that the maid



had heard could have been a Maxim Silencer that could have been attached to the murder weapon, hence it must have sounded like a sneeze (Christie 190).

### 3.2. Attitudes

The two protagonists Miss Marple and Holmes clearly experience different attitudes from their surroundings, and therefore might have to work differently to receive the same result. The attitude that Miss Marple faces is first shown when she is going to be questioned regarding the murder case and what she has observed during the night of the murder. She is going to be questioned by the vicar and Colonel Melchett from the police force, and the latter asks the vicar how he would describe this Miss Marple. The vicar describes her as follows:

‘I think she is quite dependable’, I said cautiously. ‘That is, in so far as she is talking of what she has actually seen. Beyond that, of course, when you get on to what she thinks – well, that is another matter. She has powerful imagination and systematically thinks the worst of everyone’ (Christie 56)

However, after the questioning, Miss Marple is not believed to be very accurate as both the vicar and Colonel Melchett doubt that she can be truly sure about what she saw that night. She could easily be mistaken as she is both female and elderly, and because she appears to almost never have left the village and therefore should have no life experience of importance. Melchett describes it as such: “I really believe that wizened-up old maid thinks she knows everything there is to know. And hardly been out of this village all her life. Preposterous. What can she know of life?” (Christie 61). The suspicion that Miss Marple is mistaken, because of her age and gender, is one example of the ageism and the sexism that she faces throughout the literary work.

Furthermore, the vicar did agree to Melchett’s description of Miss Marple as he had himself described her as “not trusting” before, which might mean they both believe she is not someone to trust even when they take her statement (Christie 17). In comparison, in *A Study in Scarlet*, the first literary work that features Sherlock Holmes, Holmes is introduced as being “eccentric” and “brilliant” and with a “specialized knowledge but diverse” (Conan Doyle 12). Miss Marple could be said to have the same qualities, but she is never described as having them until she has proven herself in the end of the literary work even though she seemingly has been from the start.

Nevertheless, Melchett eventually believes that she is a valuable witness, but that might only be because in the beginning of the police investigation and she is the only eye witness.

As mentioned previously, the murder victim is Colonel Protheroe, a man with a questionable reputation who is generally disliked by villagers, and the two people who have already confessed to his murder are his wife Anne Protheroe and a man named Lawrence Redding. However, Miss Marple's observant eyes can testify that neither of their stories check out, as the time frame for both the suspects is not completely accurate according to Miss Marple. By knowing the time frame from the two confessions by Anne Protheroe and Lawrence Redding, and when the murder actually took place, Miss Marple shows her ability to put two and two together. The police force did not do that as they were just satisfied that someone confessed. Miss Marple even suggests how the police force could go about to find out the truth:

If you were to tell Mr Redding what Mrs Protheroe has done and then explain that you don't really believe it is her. And then if you were to go to Mrs Protheroe and tell her that Mr Redding is all right – why then, they might each of them tell you the truth. And the truth is helpful, though I dare say they don't know very much themselves, poor things (Christie 60).

Melchett and the vicar eventually agree that Miss Marple's theory might be accurate in order to proceed with the investigation as they have almost no evidence other than the confessions that the suspects did it. Therefore, they believe Miss Marple is right, without giving her any credit for remembering important details that they did not remember. Still, Miss Marple's statement does affect Melchett and the vicar, as the latter decides to also question his maid Mary. However, when he asks her and is using details that Miss Marple has told him about, she instantly says that she had heard a faint shot coming from the woods (Christie 65). Miss Marple seems to be right again, but she does not receive recognition. However, the vicar's wife Griselda reaches out to Miss Marple and pleads to her to solve the case, as Miss Marple seems to be the right person according to Griselda (Christie 68). The act of Griselda reaching out to Miss Marple could be a sign that even when the men are doubting her, there is at least someone in the village that seems to see her for what she is. Miss Marple is an observant person that deserves to be a detective, as she appears to have the right skills to be one, even if it is

not stated clearly that a detective is what she is trying to be. Later on, it becomes evident that much of what Miss Marple has deducted is true. The vicar also turns to Miss Marple to receive some answers. For example, the identity of the seven people that she in the beginning suspected could have done the murder (Christie 60), because he is too curious to ignore the fact that Miss Marple have some guesses. The act of excluding Miss Marple appears to be because the vicar and the police want to work independently of Miss Marple even though it seems that she might be the help they need as they appear to not be as observant or imaginative as her. It is only when she has told the vicar details about her observations or such alike that the case moves forward. Miss Marple even helps the vicar and his wife to figure out who could be a suspect, as she herself is uncomfortable with just naming the people she had in mind, because, as stated before, she wants evidence before she makes accusations.

As the case goes on, Miss Marple has yet to win over the police constable Colonel Melchett and inspector Slack, who is in charge of the investigation, but when the vicar tries to convince them that Miss Marple might be right, the police constable expresses doubt about her abilities:

‘At first the case looked very black against Mrs Protheroe’, said the Colonel thoughtfully. ‘Much blacker than against young Redding. There was that old woman Marple’s evidence that she didn’t have the pistol with her, but these elderly ladies are often mistaken’ (Christie 78)

Again, Miss Marple is dismissed because of her age, and her gender, and the Colonel uses a generalization that old ladies are often mistaken, he is prejudiced as he still does not believe that Miss Marple can be right. However, the vicar expresses his belief in her abilities. In contrast to Inspector Slack who later mentions that he does not believe that Mrs Protheroe had a gun with her that night either, but only because “women never like fiddling about with firearms” (Christie 79). Slack does not believe Miss Marple is right. Further evidence of the negative attitude against Miss Marple comes from Constable Hurts, who is not impressed by Miss Marple’s stated observations. Instead, he dismisses it, not only because of her age but also because of her gender. Hurts proclaims that “You can’t take any notice of what old ladies say. When they’ve seen something curious, and are waiting all eager like, why, time flies for them. And anyway, no lady knows anything about time” (Christie 146).

In spite of Miss Marple not being believed by the police force, the vicar thinks that he himself does not have a great sense of time, while Miss Marple does on the other hand, and she is rarely wrong about any aspect. Besides, the vicar is irritated by the constable's generalization of old women and says that "I often wonder why the whole world is prone to generalize. Generalizations are seldom if ever true and are usually utterly inaccurate" (Christie 146). Thus, the vicar is finally aware of the ageism and sexism Miss Marple is facing. For this reason, he decides that he will try to find the suitcase himself as he wants to investigate the case because of curiosity. Such action pays off as he does find the suitcase by following a faint trail in the woods (Christie 147). He decides to share this with Miss Marple, and not the police force, which might be an indication that the vicar has begun to trust her more than the Scotland Yard. Miss Marple exclaims that she is certain that the suitcase that the vicar has found is the one she saw Miss Gladys Cram have in her hands as she went go into the woods, but the vicar thinks that this might be an exaggeration as the suitcase is ordinary and that most people have a suitcase just like this one in their possession (Christie 149). By not believing Miss Marple, the vicar shows that he is not entirely certain that Miss Marple is right in her deduction and observations.

Moreover, in "A Scandal in Bohemia" that was published in the year 1891, it is Holmes that goes on to show his negative attitude towards women, the same type of negative attitude that Miss Marple encounters, that a woman cannot be great without it being something wrong. Adler is thought to be a one of a kind woman, and that it would be impossible for someone just like her to exist. She is the only one and she is extraordinary. In the same way that Miss Marple has to prove herself, Adler has to prove to Holmes that he cannot beat her so easily just because she is a woman. He cannot comprehend that she could be cleverer than him, and puts her on a pedestal and refers to her as "The Woman". It appears that Holmes does not want to mention her by name as she is seemingly the only woman that has managed to outsmart him. By being this way, Holmes shows that he is not affected by discriminatory attitudes toward women, but instead has them himself.

According to feminist critical theory, it is important that women are fairly portrayed and not as stereotypes or even caricature (Barry 135). In *The Murder at the Vicarage*, Miss Marple is portrayed as an observant and imaginative woman who knows how to work a case, but is somehow not taken as seriously as she should. She is not deemed to be that important as the police constable even postpones a meeting with her

because he believes that it is not important enough for the investigation at that moment. However, the meeting with her turns out to be crucial as she gives them the details they need to continue on with the case, as she is a witness to what might have happened at the time of the murder, but she is still not truly believed to be important or of any use. The same attributes that Sherlock Holmes is praised for, which is being observant and able to deduce, Miss Marple is dismissed for. No one seems to have thought that she could have been the one to solve this case, and does not seem to believe that she actually remembers most of what she sees. Not only that, but she had the ability to imagine possible scenarios from what she has observed, thus helping the police force to arrest the one who actually committed the murder instead of just arresting the one who falsely confessed to having done it.

A good disguise is then not a necessity, or at least not in the same way as before within the detective genre, for Miss Marple to be able to do detective work. All it takes is a set of observant eyes and an imagination that uses logic and facts to determine the cause and outcome. The police force does not seem to want her to be working with them, so they decide to work against her by postponing meetings and withholding the information they have on the case. Hence, Miss Marple is neither a stereotype nor caricature, but gender discrimination is illustrated in the negative attitude of the male characters in the literary work. She does not need to disguise or change identity either, just be observant and gather the information she needs to make sense of what might have happened.

The difference in attitude from the police force that Holmes and Miss Marple encounter, where Holmes encounters positive attitudes and Miss Marple negative ones, reflects the different treatment of female and male detectives in the literary texts. Miss Marple has to prove herself worthy of helping out, even if she does not seem to be bothered by this, while Holmes is sought after by the police or clients for his skills in solving cases. Even if Miss Marple could be working more efficiently than Holmes as she has to prove herself while he does not, she still does not receive a similar kind of respect. Somehow, other characters appear to be surprised when she comes up with the possible answers, even as this is not her first time solving a case, as Griselda mentions that she has solved one before, though not as serious as this one (Christie 68).

Additionally, feminist critics also look into women's experiences and strive to draw attention to literature written by women (Barry 133). The representation of Miss Marple might differ in comparison to the representation of Holmes as the times

were evidently different as the literary texts were published several years apart. Miss Marple could not work freely and independently like Holmes did, as their genders were different and different genders meant encountering different attitudes. Even so, female detectives seem to have evolved from having to disguise themselves and/or giving themselves a temporary new identity when they are investigating into just having to be thinking further or being more imaginative than the police, which is exemplified when Miss Marple explains how she eventually explains how she solved the crime in the end of the literary work. Miss Marple is an amateur detective, a profession that was previously considered a man's work. Christie was also working in a field that was previously considered to be for men only, which meant that both her and her protagonist had the opportunity that women before them did not have. There is a chance that if not for the women's rights movement, if no one stood up for equal rights and demanded that women were to be let into the same spaces as men, Christie might have been a hospital worker all her life instead of pursuing a career as a writer in the detective genre. Even if Christie did not approve of the women's movement, it paved the way for her to become a detective genre writer.

As Miss Marple proves throughout the story that she is observant with a great memory, the other characters slowly begin to believe it too, even if they do not do so consciously. Miss Marple has witnessed Miss Gladys Cram walk into the forest with a suitcase in a hurry, and come back out without the suitcase. Inspector Slack decides to leave Miss Marple's property to continue on with the investigation as he wants to question Miss Gladys Cram about the suitcase. Miss Cram is brought to the police station, where she is utterly annoyed and expresses it as such:

Just because one of these gossiping old cats had nothing better to do than look outside her window all night, you go on and pitch upon me. She's been mistaken once, remember, when she said she saw me at the end of the lane on the afternoon of the murder, and if she was mistaken then, how can she possibly have recognized me by moonlight? [...] Wicked it is, the way these old ladies go on down here. Just say anything they will. And me asleep in my bed as innocent as can be. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, the lot of you. [...] You've made a mistake. You and your meddling Marples (Christie 158)

Here, it is clear that Miss Cram attempts to discredit her because of her age and gender, meaning that not only the male characters try to dismiss her for being an old and nosy woman. Also, the vicar mentions to Inspector Slack that “Miss Marple is usually right. That’s what makes her unpopular” (Christie 158). The vicar believes that this could be the real reason she is not well-liked even if people do not realize it. When Slack starts to doubt that Miss Marple has observed any event of importance from the previous night, he expresses that “women cause a lot of trouble” (Christie 159). Also, Slack exclaims to the vicar how it is sad that “there’s not a single spinster lady living along your road” because he bets that “she’d have seen something if there had been” (Christie 159). However, Miss Marple is that spinster lady he wished would be living in the village, according to Makinen. Inspector Slack must start believing her abilities, and the range her imagination has, just like the vicar has started to do as he describes Miss Marple as “not only does she see and hear practically everything that goes on, but she draws amazingly neat and apposite deductions from the facts that come under her notice” (Christie 169). More than once, the vicar is approached by Colonel Melchett, who asks him in a derogatory manner “how are things down here? Any more old ladies hot on scent?” (Christie 177), which is Melchett’s way of teasing the vicar and ridiculing Miss Marple. Melchett also notes that “women like that always think they know everything” when he is informed of what the vicar knows so far. Melchett reveals to the vicar that the letter that was found on the crime scene was in fact not written by the murder victim at all, something that Miss Marple had suspected earlier. The vicar proceeds to tell Melchett this, but he dismisses it and says “comfound the woman, she couldn’t know more about it if she had committed the murder herself” (Christie 178).

Again, Miss Marple is right but the police force does not give her any credit. Instead they dismiss her because of their prejudice, gender discrimination, and ageism. As they are abruptly interrupted when the phone rings, the vicar recognizes the voice on the phone and decides to go to the person who called (Christie 179). It is Mr Hawes who called him. When the vicar arrives, Mr Hawes is described to be sleeping, while he is in fact drugged (Christie 182). The vicar dials Colonel Melchett who arrives and tries to call for doctor Haydock, but accidentally dials the wrong number before eventually reaching the doctor. This is when Miss Marple shows up to Mr Hawes’ property and the vicar notes that “Colonel Melchett was regarding her in a somewhat disgusted fashion” (Christie 183) and the vicar confesses that he was “slightly repelled” by her appearance (Christie 185). Even in the end when Miss Marple tells the police

force and the vicar that she is certain how and when the murder occurred and who the murderer is, Colonel Melchett is quick to dismiss this as “absolute nonsense” (Christie 185), but Miss Marple decides to go on with her theory, because now she has evidence that will show everyone that she does know what she is talking about. When Miss Marple is done explaining her theory, Colonel Melchett looks like he is impressed by her, but the vicar notes that he tries to hide it as he would not want to admit it (Christie 193). Melchett says that he does not believe a word she just said, because she lacks any evidence to the theory she just laid on them, even if it is a plausible one (Christie 193) but he eventually confesses that he believes Miss Marple’s theory to be true (Christie 194).

Even when Miss Marple has solid evidence to her theory and operates in such a way that would take a professional, the Colonel does not want her to be right, as he does not want her to show how great a detective she is. Because if she succeeds, it must mean that he fails as she is then doing his job. As he asks for evidence, Miss Marple suggests that they stage a trap that will make Lawrence Redding and Anne Protheroe accidentally reveal themselves as the murderers. It is successful as both Mr Redding and Mrs Protheroe are caught discussing said crime and it is noted that Miss Marple “was right on every count” (Christie 198). When Miss Marple leaves Colonel Melchett and the vicar, the vicar tells her that her theory is much better than the one her nephew had mentioned to her previously, and that she is now “in the lead” over her nephew when it comes to solving crimes, whereby she says that “the young people think old people are fools; but the old people know the young people are fools” (Christie 197). This again shows how Miss Marple is aware of the fact that everyone younger than her might take her for a fool, and that her being old means that she knows nothing and has done nothing of her life, when in reality they might be the fools because she evidently knows more than they think she does.

In terms of attitude, Holmes is invited by the Scotland Yard in *A Study in Scarlet* to assist as they are unable to solve the case themselves, while Miss Marple is never approached by the police force in Christie’s literary text. Holmes’ case is written about in the papers, and Holmes is mentioned as an amateur detective that assisted, which means he did receive credit for his work. Both seemingly are so much to the investigations that they give a part of, and only one of them receives some recognition for all the hard work. Here, Holmes does not have to play into any negative expectations that people might have on him, other than the expectations of being brilliant, while Miss



Marple evidently has to prove herself first in order to investigate at all. The times when Holmes believes that he needs a disguise seems to be when he is already a well-established detective that is regarded as one of the best, like in “A Scandal in Bohemia”, and not because people dismiss him for his age or gender. It is to protect himself from being caught investigating.

As Aviram claims, Holmes is prone to use generalizations about human nature for his reasoning, and these generalizations are based on his personal observations of human behavior. Because of this, whenever Holmes might encounter someone like Adler, who is more intelligent and imaginative than females are expected to be, he is blinded by his own perception based on generalizations. Thus, Adler uses this to her advantage, as she is aware that Holmes might not believe that she is just as smart as him. Even if Adler is a fictional character, similar standards might be inserted into the story like the standards in real life, such as the disinterest in female crime that Aviram discusses. There is no or very little interest in female crimes, or female criminals (Aviram 234), which might result in Conan Doyle making Holmes’ being oblivious to the fact that females can be criminal masterminds just as well as men. As Holmes is unable to see beyond these generalizations before Adler has beaten him, he is implicitly beaten by his own attitude and work method as it was used against him.

### 3.3. Method of Disguise

It was mentioned earlier that disguise is an important part of several female detective stories written by female writers (Kestner 71). The female detectives take on a new identity as someone’s niece or cousin, or completely change their appearance and/or gender in order to be able to continue working with the case they are assigned (Kestner 71). However, the method of disguising oneself in order to investigate further is an aspect that is also found in Conan Doyle’s “A Scandal in Bohemia”. His protagonist Holmes seems to be eager to pick a disguise to be able to move closer to what or who that needs to be investigated. On the other hand, what Christie’s Miss Marple needs to do in *The Murder at the Vicarage* is to be observant, as she is described as an individual that sees everything, to the point that she herself becomes a witness in the murder investigation that she tries to solve. Here, Miss Marple is not in need of an obvious disguise, or at least the disguise of being someone else, as she is perceived as a harmless, old lady in the villagers’ eyes, which in itself could be a disguise.

Also, even if it was a failure, it is noteworthy that not only detectives use the method of disguising themselves to retrieve what they want. In “A Scandal in Bohemia”, it is the King of Bohemia that uses the method of disguise as he does not want it known that he has used a private detective. Furthermore, as Holmes accepts the case, he decides that he needs to acquire a better understanding as to who Adler really is. Thus, Holmes uses the method of disguise as well and goes to spy on her. By disguising himself, he can make sure that she will not know who he is, despite the fact that the two have never met before and she would not know who he is if he decided to spy on her as himself. Regardless, he uses a disguise to be able to be closer to Adler and to establish what daily routines she has, and to possibly obtain any evidence as to the whereabouts of the photograph she is in possession of. As he returns to Baker Street to meet up with Watson, he describes Miss Adler as someone with a remarkable appearance and appears has the same daily routine each day: “Oh, she has turned all the men’s heads down in that part. She is the daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet. So say the Serpentine-mews, to a man. She lives quietly, sings at concerts, drives out at five every day and returns at seven sharp for dinner” (Conan Doyle 22).

Holmes continues his description of Adler saying that “she was a lovely woman, with a face that a man might die for” (Conan Doyle 23), which means that Holmes also sees Adler as just a beautiful woman, nothing more and nothing less. Hence, Holmes is under the impression that it is going to be easy to retrieve the photograph. As Holmes was in disguise while watching Miss Adler, he tells Watson that he decides to follow her when she leaves her building. Holmes begins following her to a nearby church, which results in Holmes being mistaken as a priest, as Adler is on her way to her own wedding where she is going to marry Godfrey Norton (Conan Doyle 24). Holmes is a well-known detective in London, and in disguise he is so unrecognizable that he is mistaken as someone else, just based on the fact that he is in the position that they, the individual that he is mistaken as, should have been. Being mistaken as someone else could be his plan all along, and he believes that Adler does know his real identity. By being blinded by Adler’s beauty just like all the other men that encounter her, Holmes has fallen victim for Adler’s own disguise. Adler is aware that she is viewed as a pretty woman and therefore takes advantage of that, because no one would suspect a beautiful woman to be as clever as she evidently is. As Adler is dismissed as only being attractive, Miss Marple is dismissed as being unattractive. By deceiving others with her beauty, Adler is working in the same manner as Miss Marple,

who also uses the prejudice to her advantage. Both use the prejudice they encounter to receive what they desire which for Adler is safety and for Miss Marple it is to solve the murder.

Without having a clue as to Adler's brilliance, Holmes decides to fake illness right outside Adler's building, without a disguise this time as he believes that Adler does not know what he looks like. Holmes decides that he will take the risk of being recognized to enter her home. He does this when he is certain that she will be home based on his previous observations on her daily routine. When Holmes retells his plan to Watson, he mentions that Adler "stood at the top with her superb figure outlined against the lights of the hall, looking back into the street" (Conan Doyle 30). Again, describing her appearance in such way means that Holmes still views her as nothing but a beautiful woman. When Holmes has been brought into Adler's home, and begs for a window to be opened, Watson sits right outside that window to be ready to throw in a rocket and yells fire. Such action would result in Adler looking at where the photograph is hidden, as Holmes explains that "when a woman thinks that her house is on fire, her instinct is to rush to the thing which she values most" (Conan Doyle 32). The plan appears to be successful, and Holmes deduces that the photograph is hidden in a "recess behind a sliding panel just above the right bed-pull" (Conan Doyle 33), as he catches a glimpse of Adler almost pulling it out. The only thing remaining would be to retrieve the photograph from the sliding panel. Holmes is still under the impression that Adler has no idea what his plan was, and that she has not seen him noticing her almost retrieving the photograph. As both Holmes and Watson arrive at Adler's home to retrieve the photograph, they are greeted by an elderly woman who works for Adler. She lets them know that her mistress had informed her that Holmes and Watson would be arriving at Adler's home at this exact time. They are also told that Adler and her husband have left England never to return, which leads them to trying to locate after the photograph at the place where Holmes had deducted it would be. Instead of the actual photograph, they find a handwritten note that reads as follows:

My dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes, you really did it very well. You took me in completely. Until after the alarm of fire, I had no suspicion. But then, when I found how I had betrayed myself, I began to think. I had been warned about you months ago. I had been told that, if the King employed an agent, it would certainly be you. And your address had been given to

me. Yet, with all this, you made me reveal what you wanted to know [...] (Conan Doyle 37).

By leaving a letter stating that Adler was well aware of Holmes and that she had been warned a long time ago that he might try to investigate her, Adler reveals she has seen through his previous disguise and known that it was him that had faked a medical emergency outside her building. Thus, she quickly came up with a plan to run away with her husband and to bring all of her photographs with her as safekeeping. However, Adler mentions in her letter that “the King may do what he will without hindrance from one whom he has cruelly wronged” (Conan Doyle 38), which means Adler will not make the photograph public. Adler expresses that she only keeps it for her own security because she could use it for black mail to save herself. The King is delighted, and informs Holmes that Adler could have been an admirable queen, and Holmes agrees that “she seems, indeed, to be on a very different level”, even if Watson remembers that this remark is said coldly (Conan Doyle 38). Holmes was beaten by a woman’s wit, which must make Holmes feel ridiculed as he himself would be deriding women who were trying to be clever. He gives Adler the “honorable title of The Woman” (Conan Doyle 39), and never mentions her by name again. According to Watson, this title is something that Holmes has never before given any other woman and Watson expresses great confusion regarding this newfound obsession over Adler that Holmes appears to have. The obsession could be regarding the fact that he is unable to understand how a woman could be brilliant. For Holmes, the method of disguising oneself was not successful, as Holmes made the mistake of actually revealing to Adler what he looks like. He believed that she was unaware of who he is, but she is described to have such wit that even Holmes could not deduce her plan. As mentioned above, she uses the prejudice against her to her advantage, something not even Holmes could deduce.

By contrast, Miss Marple does everything that she does without an outspoken disguise. All she has to do is to be in her garden, observing her surroundings. The vicar describes Miss Marple’s abilities by stating that ‘if Miss Marple says she had no pistol with her, you can take it for granted that it is so’, I said. ‘If there was the least possibility of such thing, Miss Marple would have been on to it like a knife’ (Christie 61).

Miss Marple even has to tell the Colonel “my dear Colonel Melchett, you know what young women are nowadays. Not ashamed to show exactly how the creator made them. She hadn’t so much as a handkerchief in the top of her stocking” (Christie 59). Miss Marple tries to make him understand that she is certain about what she saw. When comparing Christie’s literary text to “A Scandal in Bohemia”, it becomes obvious that Holmes uses disguises to work closely, meaning that the method of disguise differs between the two protagonists. Holmes uses it when it is necessary for no one to recognize him, whilst Marple uses the ageism and sexism against her as the disguise.

According to Makinen, Agatha Christie did not identify as being a feminist and did in fact dismiss the whole women’s rights movement as unnecessary. Makinen finds it odd that “as a woman who had herself found a degree of independence as a wartime hospital worker and then as a highly successful writer, Christie might at least have been expected to celebrate the increase in women’s rights accompanying the female Suffrage of 1928” (Makinen 20). Still, Christie seemed to have no time for gender roles and absolutely no interest in what was regarded as male narcissism that was found in crime fiction at the time, hence her protagonist Miss Marple could be the way that she is. If Miss Marple was Christie’s own response to the changing society, she exposed gender discrimination by showing that Miss Marple did not need to disguise herself in order to investigate. Makinen, when analyzing Christie and her work, highlights that female villains are often “punished for their attempted usurping of male status”. However, some critics believe that “the idea of the autonomous woman murderer led Christie into a greater psychological complexity and even sympathy” (Makinen 19). By ignoring women’s rights movement and still making her protagonist break gender roles, Christie does what would be expected by a feminist writer or supporter of the women’s rights movement, all whilst being conservative. Christie might have felt that her protagonist needed no reason to be a detective other than the fact that she was really good at it. As stated before, a disguise and/or a new identity used to be reasonably important step in an investigation for a female detective to be able to continue working as they would need to make sure no one knew that they were either women and/or that they were investigating as they would not receive the same treatment as their male counterparts. Still, Miss Marple is able to work as a detective as herself, or at least appear to be herself. Her disguise is the prejudice that others have on her, and she uses it to her advantage.

Also, Miss Marple is apparently aware of the ageism in her village and her community. She is an elderly woman and therefore decided to play into those expectations that she figured that others had on her, and this is what evidently gave her the much-needed information she needed to solve the case (Makinen 54). She is expected to be nosy and talkative, therefore she is nosy and talkative, and people do indeed tell her what she needs to know whenever she behaves as such as no one seems to suspect that she is in fact investigating when she is doing so. This is evidence that Miss Marple is masquerading herself, using the expectations as a disguise to her advantage (Makinen 54). The male vicar does not believe she is of worth for the investigation until after he discovers that whatever she has told him has turned out to be true.

As formerly mentioned, if Christie valued and therefore wanted to show womanly attributes such as logic, morality and justice in her protagonists, such as Miss Marple (Makinen 56), could be the reason behind the method of disguising oneself. Because even though eventually the police and others seem to be impressed by her abilities and knowledge in the end, they probably do not understand that she did so by using their ageism against them, a form of discriminatory behavior that Holmes never had to experience. Miss Marple had to use a disguise that meant that she had to alter herself to become a stereotype, while Sherlock Holmes had to pretend to be someone else, just like a child's parent might pretend to be Santa Clause on Christmas Eve. Because of that, Miss Marple could forever be thought of to be her disguise, when the truth is that she is not just some old lady living next door, when the case is eventually solved. On the contrary, Holmes is not being confused as being his disguises when it is revealed that he was investigating and the case is solved, instead he is perceived as being a brilliant detective. Conan Doyle once stated, through his protagonist Holmes in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, that "there is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact" (Conan Doyle 3), and that is something that is applicable to Miss Marple who used that obvious fact, that she is an old lady that likes to gossip and observe others, to her advantage to become the detective that the case needed.

#### 4. Conclusion

To summarize, *A Study in Scarlet*, “A Scandal in Bohemia”, and *The Murder at the Vicarage* all feature detectives who are working outside of the police force, but somehow manage to outsmart them as they are the ones who provide the leads that will eventually solve the cases. However, Conan Doyle’s Holmes’ and Christie’s Miss Marple’s methods differ, and also at least the experiences along the way. Holmes is even invited into a murder case to help, as the Scotland Yard feels that his ability to observe and deduce could be valuable to the investigation. In comparison, the police reschedule meeting Miss Marple because they do not value her as someone of significance for the case. When it later reveals that not only is she an important witness, but she also has the ability to deduce and is imaginative to such extent that she is able to solve the case, she is still not given any credit. She is even dismissed as “old ladies are often mistaken”.

Evidently, both Holmes and Miss Marple try to make it as detectives, and both might believe in justice. Thus, *The Murder at the Vicarage* shows that when a Miss Marple tries to work as a detective, she has to be clever enough to disguise her true self and know how to play a different person in order to investigate. In comparison, Holmes might only need a disguise once he is already a well-regarded detective, and that is merely to avoid recognition. Miss Marple has to use society’s expectations, or prejudice, and she has to do it well, so that no one suspects her of doing some actual investigating. Even when the dedication is the same, as they both dedicate all of their time to solve their cases, the measures that the Miss Marple has to take are different to her male counterpart Holmes. The prejudice that Miss Marple encounters is the major obstacle that she faces, and she has to be imaginative enough to take on the challenge to overcome said prejudice, which Miss Marple seemingly does. In this sense, *The Murder in the Vicarage* becomes a feminist statement.

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