Born in Torquay, Devon, England in 1890, Agatha Christie is one of the world's best known mystery writers. One fact which many people don't know is that Mrs. Christie was dyslexic. (Ref 1) When World War I broke out in 1914, Agatha was in her twenties and worked as a nurse. (Ref 2) It was during this time that she began work on her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, featuring one of her most famous characters, Hercule Poirot.

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1 Pronounced Tor-KEE.
Hercule Poirot fled his native land of Belgium and settled in London. When we first meet M. Poirot, he has already earned a great reputation. He is reacquainted with a friend, Lt. Arthur Hastings, who later becomes a Captain, who is staying with some friends at Styles Court. When the mistress of the manor is killed, Lt. Hastings quickly summons M. Poirot to try to solve the case. Throughout this first novel and in many subsequent novels, M. Poirot is portrayed as a very egotistical and conceited man. Although always polite, M. Poirot is fond of bragging about his abilities. Lt. Hastings, who is portrayed as very unimaginative is often unable to grasp the subtleties that M. Poirot notices. Over many years in post World War I England, M. Poirot solves mysteries and other crimes and has adventures from places as exotic as the River Nile in Egypt and the Orient Express as it travels through Yugoslavia to places as near as his dentist’s office. M. Poirot is accompanied on many of these adventures by Captain Hasting as well as his faithful secretary, Miss Felicity Lemon. He is acquainted with many members of Scotland Yard, especially Inspector Japp. M. Poirot is called in on cases that no one else can seem to solve. In many of her stories, Mrs. Christie creates a character in the story that is, as she, a writer of mystery. In several of M. Poirot’s cases, he is asked to solve a problem by a friend who is a great author, Mrs. Ariadne Oliver. In one case, Mrs. Oliver asks M. Poirot to solve the murder of a child at a Halloween Party. In another case, Mrs. Oliver asks M. Poirot to solve a mystery that occurred many years earlier. In this novel, Elephants Can Remember, M. Poirot becomes philosophical in the last line of the novel and makes the profound statement that “Elephants can remember, but human beings, mercifully, can forget.” It might surprise a casual reader of Mrs. Christie’s works that M. Poirot did not always bring killers to justice. In one of Mrs. Christie’s greatest works,
The Murder on the Orient Express, M. Poirot solves the murder, but takes it upon himself to not turn the killers over to the police. M. Poirot also does not prevent a character from committing suicide in the novel Peril at End House. At the end of his great career, M. Poirot and Captain Hastings again return to Styles Court. In this final novel, Curtain, published in 1975 shortly before Mrs. Christie’s death, M. Poirot actually becomes a murderer. M. Poirot is a complex hero, but is certainly one of the most well known fictional characters in history.

Agatha Christie wrote more novels featuring Hercule Poirot than any other detective. Unlike most of the other detectives Agatha Christie created, Hercule Poirot had a background as a policeman. In one of her stories, we find that M. Poirot actually got something wrong. A man was murdered, and Poirot accused the wrong man. The actual murderer confessed. Poirot did not arrest the murderer.

Another of Mrs. Christie’s great detectives was a spinster who lived in the village of St. Mary Mead. Miss Jane Marple never married, but has several nephews. She is a typical gossipy old lady, but manages to solve very difficult cases. We first meet Miss Marple in 1930 when the novel The Murder at the Vicarage was published. It is many years later that we see Miss Marple again in The Body in the Library in 1940. (Ref 3) She is a thorn in the side of Inspector Slack whom she assists in some of his cases. Miss Marple has a champion at Scotland Yard in Sir Henry Clithering. Sir Henry has a great deal of respect for Miss Marple. Miss Marple does not always stay in St. Mary Mead. In A Murder is Announced, she travels to Chipping Cleghorn, and in A Caribbean Mystery, she travels to a resort in the West Indies. This novel led to a future novel, Nemesis, which involved one of the characters from A Caribbean Mystery. This novel was technically the last Miss Marple novel, even though the novel Sleeping Murder was
published 5 years after it. Miss Marple solved her cases by using one simple principle: Never take anyone’s word for granted. Mrs. Christie did not write a final farewell novel for Miss Marple, so we are left to remember Miss Marple as she was in her novels: shrewd, clever, and unafraid to bring a killer to justice.

Thomas Beresford and Prudence Cowley, known affectionately as Tuppence\(^2\), were the only duo that Mrs. Christie used in her novels. Shortly after the first World War ended, Tommy and Tuppence ran into each other when neither of them had much money. A coincidence led them into a very mysterious and dangerous affair known as The Secret Adversary. Tommy and Tuppence married and remained married in the rest of the novels featuring them. The last novel featuring them was The Postern of Fate published in 1973. Tommy and Tuppence solved many cases in their career. This last case was actually a mystery involving events of many years earlier.\(^3\)

There were other detectives that Agatha Christie created in her works that are not as well known as Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. Although they don’t appear in many novels, Inspector Battle, Inspector Spence, Mr. Parker Pyne, and Harley Quinn each possess that unique brilliance that Mrs. Christie was able to instill in her characters. As an author, Agatha Christie has only been outsold by The Bible and Shakespeare. Some conservative estimates put the number of her books sold at over 100 million (Ref 5), whereas the more accepted estimate is over 2 billion. (Ref 6) Agatha Christie will

\(^2\) Sleeping Murder was written around 1940. (Ref 3)

\(^3\) The English word twopence is pronounced like tuppence.
continue to be an iconic symbol in the world of mystery novels, and as new generations discover her works, she is sure to develop many more legions of fans.

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