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Winds of Change

Social, Societal and Moral Change in Agatha Christie's Miss Marple  
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Social, Societal and Moral Change in Agatha Christie's Miss  
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**ABSTRACT:**

Tutkielmassa selvitetään, millaisena yhteiskunta näyttäytyy klassisissa salapoliisiromaaneissa ja onko yhteiskunnan kuvauksessa havaittavissa muutosta pidemmällä aikavälillä. Tutkielman lähtökohtana on huomio siitä, että nykyajan rikoskirjallisuudessa yhteiskuntaa kuvataan hyvin eri tavalla kuin varhaisemmissa salapoliisiromaaneissa. Yhteiskunnallisuus tuli olennaiseksi osaksi salapoliisiromaaneja vasta 1970-luvulla, ja nykyään niissä otetaan selkeästi kantaa yhteiskunnallisiin asioihin, mistä syystä varhaisempien salapoliisiromaanien yhteiskuntakuvausta on mielenkiintoista tarkastella.

Tutkimusaineistona on kolme Agatha Christien eri vuosikymmenillä kirjoittamaa Neiti Marple -romaania. Christie oli yksi genren merkittävimmistä kirjailijoista ja neiti Marple yksi hänen tunnetuimmista amatöörietsivistään. Teoreettisena viitekehyksenä on käytetty hegemonian, ideologian, representaation ja yhteiskunnan rapautumisen käsitteitä. Hegemonia viittaa yhteiskunnan valta-asetelmien ja sen omakuvan muodostumiseen. Ideologia puolestaan yhdistää yhteiskunnan omakuvan ja sen jäsenten ajattelun. Tämä kudelma representoituu teksteissä, joissa luodaan merkityksiä kielen ja viestinnän avulla, mikä mahdollistaa sen ajan ja paikan tarkastelun, jossa teksti on tuotettu.

Yhteiskunta sekä sen muutos ja rapautuminen osoittautuivat olennaisiksi osiksi Neiti Marple -romaanien, ja niitä tarkastellaan tutkielmassa kolmen kategorian kautta: sosiaalinen, yhteiskunnallinen ja moraalinen muutos. Sosiaalinen muutos näkyy kirkon aseman heikkenemisen myötä pienen, sisäänpäin kääntyneen yhteisön avautumisena ja maailmallistumisena. Yhteiskunnallinen muutos näkyy patriarkaalisen yhteiskunnan väistymisenä naisten ja miesten välisen tasa-arvon tieltä ja nuoremman sukupolven esiinmarssina. Moraalinen muutos ilmenee seksuaalisena vapautumisena, rikollisten inhimillisempänä kohteluna ja rangaistustavoissa, mutta se ei ilmene yhtä selkeästi kuin muut muutoksen muodot.

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**KEY WORDS:** Agatha Christie, Miss Marple, detective fiction, society, hegemony, ideology, representation, grand narratives, micronarratives



## 1 INTRODUCTION

When Agatha Christie (1890–1976) created an elderly amateur detective Miss Jane Marple, she hardly foresaw how influential this spinster would be on future generations. Innocent as she seems, Miss Marple is an excellent judge of character who merely happens to solve crimes along with her dear hobbies, gardening and knitting. Simultaneously, she offers the readers a mental game of identifying the culprit before she does. The character of Miss Marple contributed to Agatha Christie's becoming one of the most popular writers of detective fiction of her time, and even though it is nearly forty years since Christie's death, the success has not faded; her works are read, performed and made into films and TV series even today.

Miss Marple's detections unfold in *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930) and are located mostly to St Mary Mead, a restful little village. Comparing St Mary Mead with the settings in contemporary crime fiction, however, exposes that the worlds the novels are set in are very dissimilar. A more contemporary colleague to Miss Marple is, to take an explicit example, a journalist called Lindsay Gordon who is first presented in a novel by Val McDermid, titled *Report for Murder* (1987). Even though Christie and McDermid are both British crime writers who write about female amateur detectives, the worlds in which their detectives solve their cases are very far from each other. Miss Marple's St Mary Mead is an idyllic place where crimes are frequent but only temporary disturbances, whereas the stories featuring Lindsay Gordon are situated in the modern and busy Glasgow where crimes are part of everyday life. The differences between these two detective fiction novels as regards the protagonists, their environments, the cases with which they deal and the values that seem to underlie their work refer to generic change, which is inherently connected to changes in society.

Miss Marple novels are examples of classic detective stories in which society did not play as dominant a role as in more contemporary crime fiction. Instead, classic detective stories focused mostly on the puzzle: who is murdered, who is the murderer, what is the motive, how is the murder solved? What did dominate in these novels was the evil side of human nature because the reason for crime was seen to lay in the lacks of an

individual. Miss Marple puts it plainly in *The Murder at the Vicarage* (Christie 1930: 324): “There’s money, and the mutual attraction people of an – er – opposite sex – and there’s queerness of course – so many people are a little queer, aren’t they?” It was only later, at the beginning of the 1970s, when the detective novel began to focus more on society, claiming that evil deeds by individuals correlate with social injustice. Because of their interest in pointing out social problems, they can be referred to as new types of novels of society.

Because literature is always produced in a certain place at a certain time, it obviously reveals something of the values, customs and mindsets of the place and time of its production. It is said that because Christie’s writings stretch over a long period of time during which England went through many changes, for example the world wars, population growth and emergence of television, Christie was able to document part of England’s history. Therefore, I examine in this thesis how society is represented in three Miss Marple novels by Agatha Christie. I also study whether the representation of society changes during the series.

What I mean by society is foremost cultural institutions and institutionally produced practices which are an integral part of society in that they represent the values, norms and ideologies which are the foundation of that society. The definition of society is formulated with the aid of Anthony Gramsci’s (1929–1935) concept of hegemony that divides society in superior and inferior groups of which the superior decides what is desirable in that society while the inferior group accepts this arrangement, and supplemented with Louis Althusser’s (1969) ideas on ideology that links the writer and the writer’s surroundings together. Jean-François Lyotard’s (1979) thoughts on the collapse of the grand narratives are used in describing the change (see chapter 3).

It is impossible, though, to pinpoint exactly that a certain historical detail would have resulted in a certain detail in a certain literary output, and it is equally impossible to claim that the reader’s ‘reading’ of it is pure and free from influences. Therefore, the concept of representation is used in order to get as near ‘the truth’ as possible. By communicating through language, the text, in this case a Miss Marple novel, mediates



the time of its production, just as the reader of the text interprets it in the light of his/her surroundings and time of reading.

### 1.1 The Queen of Crime

Agatha Christie has been referred to as “the queen of crime” or “the first lady of crime” (Bargainnier 1980: 1) because she was one of the most important writers of detective fiction and among the most influential developers of the genre. The official Agatha Christie homepage ([www.agathachristie.com](http://www.agathachristie.com)) recounts the impressive facts about her life and production. Although Christie is mostly remembered as a distinguished detective fiction writer and a creator of Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot, the Belgian detective, she was a versatile writer producing poems, plays, fairy tales, an autobiography, non-fiction and even romantic novels under the pseudonym of Mary Westmacott. Even though Christie’s most active writing career was 1920–1970, her works are still read all over the world. As many as two million copies of her works have been sold, which is a number that comes right after the number of sold copies of Shakespeare’s works. Her play, *The Mousetrap*, has been performed in London West End since 1952, and her novels are translated into 45 different languages, surpassed only by the Bible and Shakespeare translations.

Several reasons have been suggested for why her works have gained so much attention and popularity, and the explanations often coincide with the strengths and characteristics of the genre itself. Christie’s strength was that she was able to develop the genre with her excellent storyteller abilities as well as to surprise the readers, and her writing concentrated on dialogue which made it more accessible to a wider readership. Her works are optimistic because they do not concentrate on violence and because the crimes are always solved. Most importantly considering this thesis, Christie’s writing “provides a social history of England” (Bargainnier 1980: 202) because it stretches over a half a century, and during that time England went through many changes. Because Christie writes from the perspective of the upper middleclass, which dominated those years of change in England, she has been able to document the

social history of England in her novels. The changes may not be that apparent because the characters remain quite unchanged, but seriality creates continuity and reveals the change. (ibid. 199–204)

## 1.2 The Three Exhibits

The Miss Marple series comprises twelve novels. There are also several short stories or collections of short stories in which Miss Marple is the protagonist, for example *The Thirteen Problems* (1932). Due to the large number of novels and the limitations of the thesis, the number of the primary sources is reduced to three. The novels examined are *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930), *A Pocket Full of Rye* (1953) and *Nemesis* (1971), which are, henceforth, signified by MV, PFR and N in references.

There are three reasons why these particular novels are chosen. First, the novels cover quite substantially – starting from 1930 and ending up in 1971 – the most active writing career of Agatha Christie and the Miss Marple series as a whole. *The Murder at the Vicarage* is the first novel that introduced Miss Marple. *A Pocket Full of Rye* accounts for the middle part of Christie's writing career and Miss Marple's sleuthing. *Nemesis*, although not the last novel in the series, is the last novel published when Christie was still alive.

Secondly, the novels are chosen because of their divergent settings that supposedly bring along a variety of references to society. *The Murder at the Vicarage* is set in St Mary Mead where the vicarage plays an important part. *A Pocket Full of Rye* has London and its whereabouts as its setting, and it deals with the business world and the lifestyle of the upper-middle class people. *Nemesis*, although at the beginning situated in St Mary Mead, is set on a bus tour, and it includes a great deal of information on nature and architecture, but also on women's position in society.

Lastly, these novels cover the time from the 1930s to 1970s, the 50-year-period that comprised the Second World War, the Cold War, the emergence of popular media (TV), rapid economic growth and, resulting from that, the change of values.

*The Murder at the Vicarage* introduces the reader to the life of St Mary Mead where the elderly spinster lady Jane Marple lives solving crimes amongst other things. Even though Miss Marple is an important character in the story because she eventually solves the crime, the vicar of the village, Leonard Clement, is the narrator, and the story is told from his perspective. The story revolves around the shooting of Colonel Protheroe, who is one of the most disliked people in the village. After discovering the body at the vicarage, two people give themselves to the police admitting they have committed the crime, but the evidence seems to talk against both of them, which is why the police are not convinced. In the end Miss Marple catches both of them just in time to prevent another murder. Because of the narrator, the role of religion and Christian moral values are pronounced in this novel.

*A Pocket Full of Rye* is situated near London in the mansion of Baydon Heath owned by the Fortescues, and the novel deals with the lives of upper-middle class people. The head of the family, Rex Fortescue, a shrewd businessman, is found poisoned and soon afterwards his wife, Adele, and their parlourmaid Gladys. Mr Fortescue dies rye in his pocket and Gladys a clothes peg attached to her nose. The murders seem to be woven around an old nursery rhyme which makes the case very peculiar. Miss Marple arrives at the house because she is the former employer of Gladys and therefore able to help the police. The novel concentrates on following Inspector Neele at work, but it is Miss Marple who presents him the right conclusion. The only thing that is left for the Inspector, is to prove that Miss Marple's theory is accurate, which, of course, it is.

In the third novel, *Nemesis*, Miss Marple is hired by an old friend, Mr Rafiel, whom she had met in an earlier novel, *Caribbean Mystery* (1964), to solve a crime, but she does not know which one. Miss Marple is guided onto a tour of "Famous Houses and Gardens of Great Britain", and step by step she is directed to the vicinity of three sisters, and she realises what she has to do. In the end, she succeeds in solving three murders

and bringing justice to a young man who is falsely accused. This novel deals with British cultural heritage and comments on the role of women in society.

## 2 DETECTIVE FICTION UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

The genre of detective fiction started to take form already before Christie's time. It was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Edgar Allan Poe's stories *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* (1842) and *The Purloined Letter* (1844) presented the detective C. Auguste Dupin and gave Poe the status of 'the father' of the genre (Scaggs 2005: 7, 19). The origins of crime fiction can be traced even further back in time. Dorothy L. Sayers (quoted in Scaggs 2005: 7–8) has stated that the beginnings of crime fiction can be found in the Bible, for example in the story of the falsely accused Susanna in the book of Daniel, or in the Hercules myths. What has been essential since the first crime stories is that they concentrate on solving the crimes and penalising the wrongdoer, which are two things that culminate in early detective fiction.

Detective fiction gained popularity gradually, and it was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that it got footing as a literary genre. The Golden Age of detective fiction, the time when the classic detective story was at its peak, is seen to cover the time between the First and the Second World War, which is roughly 1918–1940 (Knight 2003: 77). Detective fiction flourished mainly in Britain where especially women writers dominated the field: Margery Allingham, Dorothy L. Sayers, Josephine Tey and Patricia Wentworth, not forgetting Agatha Christie (Kaplan 1997: 212; Scaggs 2005: 26–27).

Detective fiction novels are characterized by certain conventions (see 2.1) that received criticism and partly caused the genre not to survive in its purest form. Over time, crime stories developed different forms. In America they evolved towards the hard-boiled formula that brought along "the modern city" (Cawelti 1976: 140–141) where violence and death lay beneath the surface of lively and seemingly serene society. Nowadays, society is a vital part of the detective novel. Swedish detective fiction writer Liza Marklund interviewed by Heini Larros (2001) acknowledges the detective novel as a great medium for social criticism because crime is defined by society and every criminal is part of society. Even though classic detective fiction belongs to times passed, present-day writers have re-created classic detective fiction in the form of so called cozy

mysteries that resemble the Golden Age stories (Tirronen 2011: 26–29). This means that classic detective fiction has not come to an end.

## 2.1 Conventional Crimes

Classic detective fiction is characterized by certain conventions or rules. Many writers – some in a more detailed manner than others – produced lists of rules where they tried to explain the essentials of a detective novel. S.S. Van Dine wrote his “Twenty rules for writing detective stories” in 1928 stating most importantly that “[t]he reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery. All clues must be plainly stated and described”. Ronald Knox’s ten rules conclude, for example, that in a detective story, there cannot be any supernatural elements, the criminal must be mentioned in the early part of the story and that the number of secret passageways is limited (Scaggs 2005: 35–37). Of course, many of these rules have been broken during the history of detective fiction, quite notably by Agatha Christie, but they show how strict the formula was. As a result, the genre received a great deal of criticism for the lack of character development: characters’ motivations were too simple and the detectives too shallow (ibid. 35).

Besides the abovementioned rules, the conventions of classic detective fiction were very wide-ranging. Molander Danielsson (2002: 22–24), among other researchers of detective fiction, identifies the five most important conventions that are typical for a detective novel: structure, narrative world, detective, closure and audience. Firstly, a detective novel’s structure consists of four identifiable parts. The first part is concerned with the problem, which means that the crime is discovered, usually fairly early in the novel. The second part consists of the presentation of the clues. In the third part, the detective discovers the criminal, and in the last part, the evidence is presented and the detective is proved to be right. (ibid. 30) Applying this to the Miss Marple novels, the body is found on page 59 in *The Murder at the Vicarage* while the investigation takes up most of the novel, up to page 353, when Miss Marple reveals the murderer. In the

last three chapters, the police set up a trap for the murderer who is then caught, and Miss Marple gives a full account of how and why the crime was committed.

The main plot consists of the investigation process and the resolution (Dove 1997: 10). In every Miss Marple novel, the solving of the crime case forms the most important plot line, even though there may be numerous subplots, as for example Dr Stone as an impostor archaeologist with the aim to cover a theft and a dying mother in search for her child in *The Murder at the Vicarage*. At the end of every novel, the criminal is caught and order restored. The crime has to be very unusual (ibid. 10) which is the reason why Miss Marple novels cover at least one murder. Smaller crimes can be included in the subplots, but the main plot includes nothing less than a murder case.

Tzvetan Todorov has examined the structure of a detective fiction novel in his article “The Typology of Detective Fiction” (1988: 158–160). According to Todorov, a certain duality prevails in every detective fiction novel because they comprise of two different stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. Both of these stories carry their own status and in their purest form they do not have anything in common.

The story of the crime occurs before the story of the investigation begins, and it merely explains what has happened without giving any credit for the literary outcome of the rest of the novel. The special status of the first story lays in its absence. The writer cannot fully give the first story to the reader, because in doing so, he/she would diminish or erase the quest and the mystery of finding the murderer. Still, the story is real because otherwise there would not be any story to tell. This means that the first story is a prerequisite for the second one. (Todorov 1988: 158–160)

The story of the investigation takes up most of the novel when the clues are searched through one by one, but nothing really happens in it. As Todorov (1988: 160) writes, the characters “do not act, they learn”. The second story only mediates the first story to the reader. Todorov (ibid. 160) describes the duality by differentiating the story from the plot in the way that “the story is what happened in life, the plot is the way the author presents it to us”. Still, these two stories are united in one novel.

Secondly, the narrative world is usually “Edenic, The Great Good Place” (Molander Danielsson 2002: 35) that is threatened by the crimes committed. The crimes disturb the harmony and balance, and in order to regain the balance, society “must also be vindicated through [...] the disclosure and apprehension of the criminal, which then makes a return to order possible” (ibid. 39). When the criminal is identified, the evil is connected to that particular person (Bargainnier 1980: 191). This is the reason why society did not have a role in the early days of detective fiction. Corruption was seen to come from an individual who had his own motives. It was a disturbed person who committed the crime, and when this person was revealed and punished, the problem was solved.

Thirdly, the detective is the main character, whether professional or amateur, male or female (Dove 1997: 10), who works individually on the side of justice. Miss Marple is the main character in the novels although she is not the narrator in every novel. By using her abilities she has acquired without any education, Miss Marple can help in restoring the order in the community of St Mary Mead. She is involved because she is part of the community that is affected by the evil or somehow connected to the ones affected by the crime. She is old and living alone, so she is only glad if she can be of help. Being an amateur detective is Miss Marple’s strength because she does not have anything to gain or lose unlike the police (Molander Danielsson 2002: 48).

The amateur detective is always sharp-witted and erudite possessing a special gift that helps in solving the cases. Miss Marple is able to deduce who the criminal is on the basis of her experience of human character she has gathered during her long life. It is also typical that the detective has a sidekick. The role of the sidekick is to help, but not outwit, the detective. Using the sidekick as the narrator of the story instead of the detective is also a structural means that allows the writer to hide what is going on inside the mind of the detective and, by that way, mislead the readers and surprise them at the time of solution (Cawelti 1976: 83). Miss Marple does not have any particular sidekick – instead she has many. Due to the restrictions of her age, Miss Marple cannot physically accomplish all her investigations, thus, she asks for help. One of her



sidekicks is Lucy Eyelesbarrow in *4.50 From Paddington* (1957), not to mention her nephew Raymond West.

Besides the detective, there are always the criminal(s), the victim(s) and other characters involved. The criminal is always clever but not as clever as the detective, and the criminal may have complex motives. The victim has to be important because otherwise there would not be an investigation or a story to tell, but at the same time, the victim has to be unimportant because the story would not evolve if the other characters remained mourning the victim. The other characters are not able to solve the crime, but they can help the detective to do the work. (Cawelti 1976: 91–96)

The detective novel's closure is, fourthly, conventional because it has to be conclusive. It is very important that the criminal is caught in the end and that it is explained to the reader why this person committed the crime and how it was done, so that there is no doubt of the final outcome. In so doing, the reader is given "the intellectual satisfaction" (Molander Danielsson 2002: 52) he or she has waited for through the whole novel, which also underlines that the case remains on the level of a game, a battle of wits. The ending is very important because when the murderer is discovered, the innocent are, at the same time, freed from guilt (Bargainnier 1980: 191). Usually after the denouement and the last unexpected twist which brings the story to its end, Miss Marple explains how the crime was committed so that nothing is left unclear for the reader. However, even though it is obvious that the criminal will be punished in the end, the act of punishment is never carried out or, at least, it is not narrated to the reader.

The role of the audience is the last convention. The writers of detective fiction must consider the reader, offer him/her the game, but do it in a way that the reader is not disappointed or lured. It is vital that the writers play fair. They are not supposed to mislead the reader on purpose but the reader must be given all the important facts so that he/she will be able to try to solve the case before the detective. (Molander Danielsson 2002: 22)

## 2.2 Popular Crimes

What were the reasons for the great popularity of classic detective fiction? They stemmed from the changes that took place within society. The time when the three novels were written (1930–1971) was characterized by several considerable changes that took place in Britain. The two world wars had a great impact. Many lives were lost in the battles, and the wars affected the economic situation of Britain. Unemployment rates went up after the First World War, and the middle and upper middle classes had to work harder to keep the nation going during the inter-war period. The wars also resulted in something good, because while the men were on the battlefields, the women had to step up and take care of the men's chores by, for example, working in factories. It was an important breakthrough for women. (Johnson 1994: 283–290)

After the world wars, the Cold War dominated the international relations, as it did from the Second World War to 1991. It was a period of an arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States. (Painter 2002: 1–2) Despite the name, the war was not a shooting one but it was fought mostly with political, economic and ideological weapons, even though atomic weapons, generated by “[t]he systematic application of science to warfare” (ibid. 7), posed a threat to both sides and affected simultaneously other countries that were not directly involved, such as Britain.

After the Second World War Britain started to recover and develop into the welfare society it is today. Improvements in housing, diet, medical service and welfare increased population growth (Ryder & Silver 1981: 167). Married women started to work, so that when in 1911 only 9.6 per cent of married women were working, the corresponding number had become 29.4 per cent in 1961 (Bédarida 1979: 270). The family life was influenced by new means of birth control as well as more liberal policies regarding abortion and divorce (ibid. 263). Work outside home meant also more spare time that gave people more time to read. This, combined with the development of the mass media, affected the popularity and development of detective fiction and popular literature in general. People had more time and money to spend on literature, and

literature was more accessible because publishers, naturally, tried to keep up with the growing demand and give the readers what they wanted.

The readership of detective fiction consisted of middle class people and especially women. Because of its readership, detective fiction reflected the upper middle-class values, which Agatha Christie herself also represented. Detective fiction gave the readers faith in that there would be order, the law would help them to defend their lives and rationality would outweigh violence (Cawelti 1976: 153). Detective fiction often highlighted family life because "[t]he special drama of crime in the classical detective story lies in the way it threatens the serene domestic circles of bourgeois life with anarchy and chaos" (ibid. 96). Therefore the crimes depicted always took place within family circles. Detective fiction offered the readers one way to be freed from guilt and to escape from reality.

### 3 SOCIETY, IDEOLOGY AND REPRESENTATION

The Miss Marple novels are fictional products, which means that it is not possible to take them as accurate documents of history. However, all texts, whether historical documents or fictional stories like Christie's novels, are always representations of either real historical events or imaginary ones. In each case, the texts are rooted in social reality, which is why the texts can reveal a great deal about the values, practices and ways of thinking of their time.

Examining society in the three Miss Marple novels requires understanding of the concept of society. The most important ideas on society considering this thesis are those of Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser and Jean-François Lyotard.

Antonio Gramsci thinks that the reality we live in is constructed by hegemony. Society consists of different groups of people of which one group is dominant, ruling and leading the other groups by deciding which ideas are preferred and imposing these ideas on other groups. These other groups want to adopt the ideas of the dominant group because they want to understand the world better. (Finlayson 1999: 141–142; Storey 2012: 82)

Hegemony does not mean that a society is unanimous. Maintaining hegemony is “a continual process” (Finlayson 1999: 142) as the dominant group persuades others that its ideas are the best, but it is not stable because there are conflicts and the dominant group sometimes has to give in a little in order to maintain its ruling position. (ibid. 141–142; Storey 2012: 82–83)

Hegemony appears on two levels: on the level of ‘civil society’ and on the level of state. The level of ‘civil society’ refers to areas of social life that are private and not regulated by the state (the family, the church, the press, education). The level of state refers to, for example, political activities, the army and the police force. The state attempts to unify people culturally and morally. (Finlayson 1999: 143; Storey 2012: 84)

The concept of hegemony can be paralleled with Jean-François Lyotard's idea of the "Grand narratives" (for example Christianity, Marxism) that is based on the mainstream, the ideas of the dominant group, like hegemony. Lyotard is of the opinion that society can be seen in grand narratives or metanarratives. These narratives summarize comprehensively all historical events, social and cultural phenomena. Resisting these grand narratives causes them to become fragmented and eventually collapse, and instead, we create little narratives or micronarratives that better serve our own views and purposes. This gives way to fragmentariness and weaker society, and it separates the members of society further away from each other. (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Jean-François Lyotard; Storey: 190–192)

Hegemony is also closely related to Louis Althusser's ideas of social formation which is manifested, among other things, in ideological practices. He defines ideology as "a system of representations [...] through which men and women live their relations to the real conditions of existence" (Storey 2012: 73). Ideology adapts our experiences to the social formation so that the real world and our representations of it to us and others exist in parallel. (ibid. 72–74)

For Althusser, ideology always stays within its boundaries. In order to thoroughly examine a text and discover the problematic (the assumptions, ideas and motivations the text is based on) we should look at what is present and what is not present in a text, because this problematic reveals the ideological and historical conditions. (Storey 2012: 74, 78)

Ideology becomes visible in rituals, customs and patterns of behaviour (Storey 2012: 80). These can be seen through ISAs (Ideological State Apparatuses), by which Althusser referred to the state's means of exercising covert force in order to maintain ideological dominance (for example religion, education, the media), and RSAs (Repressive State Apparatuses), the state's means of exercising overt force (for example the police, the penalty system) (Cormack 1992: 11).

The key element in manifesting, maintaining and overruling ideology is communication. Communication requires language, which leads us to representation. Representations (images, discourses, ideas, concepts etc.) help us to comprehend reality. They present one version on reality, and we understand and affect others through them (Ashe 1999: 148; Storey 2012: 73). Richard Dyer (1993: 3) has stated that “there is no such thing as unmediated access to reality” and that “one apprehends reality through representations of reality”. What he means is that we comprehend reality through different kinds of media, for example, through texts and images, but that the media in itself has already produced a representation of reality in its attempt to convey it. Comprehending reality depends on what and how is presented and how we interpret it.

Because representations are understood within a larger context, they are not ‘pure’ (Dyer 2002: 13). They use the surrounding conventions that on the one hand restrict them but on the other make the understanding of them possible (ibid. 13). Even though representations seem to restrict reality because they only give a certain view of it and are not actual entities of it (like a picture of a tree: it only represents a tree, it is not any actual or particular tree), representations make it possible to comprehend reality (we can talk about, analyse and compare trees). So representations operate in two different ways at the same time.

Irene Costera Meijer and Liesbet Van Zoonen (2002: 326–329) distinguish two types of representation: representation as the reflection of reality and representation that refers to a culture’s values. By representation as the reflection of reality they mean that what we see in the media is taken to be real even though it is not. If we see an advertisement in which a woman is wearing a long white coat and is telling us that we should use a particular brand of toothpaste, we believe that the woman actually is a dentist, even though she probably is an actor. We accept that the woman ‘stands for’ the dentist, and we believe that this is the truth. Then, representation that refers to cultural values emerges when the dentist is considered in the light of cultural values. If the dentist is a woman and has blonde hair and a white smile, it signifies the cultural values of society in which the advertisement is made and shown. In some other culture, the advertisement would be very different or perhaps there would not exist such an advertisement at all.

Stuart Hall (1997: 15) has described representation aptly as “using language to say something meaningful about the world to other people”. It is a process that links language, meaning and culture together. According to Hall, representation works through a set of concepts because we perceive the world through concepts that are in various ways linked together in our minds forming a multifaceted map. Representation also works, inseparably from the set of concepts, through language because we use language in order to create meanings and to communicate with other people. (ibid. 19–21) That way we can invoke feelings in other people via representations that become alive in our language. Mikko Lehtonen states in his book *Merkitysten maailma* [The world of meanings] (1996: 46) that using language (speaking, reading and writing) does not mean that we just reproduce the reality but instead we give meaning to it.

Language is arbitrary. In English, we call an object that has covers and text on its pages a book, because we have agreed to do so, not because the letters of that word combined together carry a deeper meaning or because the word reminds us of that object. The arbitrary nature of language means that language can change for example as times go by (to give an example: ‘gay’ used to mean ‘carefree and merry’, nowadays it means ‘homosexual’). Meanings are therefore produced in a particular culture at a particular time. This means that meanings can change when other meanings and interpretations become topical. This notion puts the reader of the meaning in a special position.

## 4 WINDS OF CHANGE

The analysis is divided into three parts: social, societal and moral change. It becomes evident in the course of the novels that society plays an important role and that it develops and transforms over time. Social and societal change are the most apparent forms whereas moral change is not as explicit. These changes also reflect the transition from hegemonic society to a society of micronarratives that results in the end of the series in more complex society than at the beginning.

### 4.1 Social Change

Social change shows how the power of the church decreases and is replaced by rationality. It also shows the infrastructural change and the growth of population that opens up the small community to welcome the rest of the world.

#### 4.1.1 Church

The Church of England has a long tradition, and it has been characterised by High Church views, meaning that it has been conventional in its practices and even resisted modernisation (High Church 2012). The Victorian era (1837–1901) was the heyday of the church when considering the investments made in church buildings. At the time, the church had not only religious but also social functions because it, for example, took care of educational responsibilities and served as a meeting place. However, the church's standing has changed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the lessening number of churchgoers, and many explanations to this phenomenon have been presented: the knowledge on human origins introduced by Charles Darwin diminishing the ideological credibility of the church, the transference of many of the church's responsibilities to the state and the two world wars, to give a few examples. (Johnson 1994: 428–429)

The church is remarkably clearly present in *The Murder at the Vicarage*, as can be deduced from the title of the novel, but neither in *A Pocket Full of Rye* nor in *Nemesis*.



*The Murder at the Vicarage* presents church very positively through the narrator, the church building and the Bible. The role of the church as an authority and a creator of togetherness is highlighted by describing how the villagers of St Mary Mead live around the church and how they resent other authorities, such as the police and the magistrates, but not the church. In *A Pocket Full of Rye*, the church is viewed more negatively, whereas in *Nemesis* the tone is more neutral.

The church is present in *The Murder at the Vicarage* through the narrator, the vicar Leonard Clement, who is an intelligent and learned character. Dr Haydock complements the vicar by saying that “[y]ou’re an intelligent man, Clement, which is more than some parsons are” (MV: 164), and this is reinforced by the vicar himself when he says to his wife that “[l]ooking up a reference, I became so engrossed in Canon Shirley’s *Reality* that I haven’t got on as well as I should” (MV: 12). Other characters give credit to his intelligence, and the vicar reads demanding books and looks up for references when he prepares his talks, which indicates that he is a learned person.

The vicar has different kinds of responsibilities. Especially at the beginning of the novel, Leonard introduces many aspects of the vicar’s duties, but small pieces of information come up throughout the novel, and this information gives reason to believe that the clergyman has a central position in society. Leonard says that “I took the eight o’clock service the following morning” (MV: 258) and that “[t]he Wednesday evening service was sparsely attended as usual” (MV: 33). These examples indicate that the vicar has to officiate at the services in the mornings as well as in the evenings, which shows that there is a need for so many services. But Leonard frets about the listeners being so few in numbers, which means that churchgoing is not as popular as it used to be.

In addition to the services, Leonard has educational responsibilities, such as teaching the Sunday School teachers and tuition in the Church Day School. He describes his tasks as follows: “I teach in the Church Day School on Wednesday mornings” (MV: 11) and “I now proceeded to ring up the Sunday School teachers, who were coming at

7.45 for their weekly preparation class” (MV: 70). In addition to being a teacher, Leonard is in connection with various unions and clubs, for example “the C.E.M.S.” (MV: 12), “Mother’s Union” and “District Visitors” (MV: 176). These examples show that the vicar is sociable but also a role model and an authority because people want to hear what he has to say. They want to learn from him, and his presence is preferred in various occasions.

The vicar’s responsibilities include being available for the villagers. Leonard states himself that “[i]t is one of my duties to call on my parishioners” (MV: 186). One way to be available is to visit dying parishioners like Mr Abbot: “I [Leonard] was informed that Mr Abbot of Lower Farm was dying and would I please come at once” (MV: 54). The vicar, not the doctor, has to be present when somebody is dying, which means that his presence is comforting and that people rely more on religion and belief than on science. Leonard’s presence is also important to Chief Constable Melchett who needs to visit Miss Marple in order to ask her some questions, and he wants Leonard to come along: “You’d better come with me, Vicar,’ he said. ‘I don’t want to give a member of your flock hysterics. So lend the weight of your soothing presence” (MV: 99). This statement implies that the vicar usually appears to be an authority whose presence is preferred because he represents the morals, faith, the church and God. The vicar is the one people can rely on, like the bedrock of society. Referring to Miss Marple as a member of Leonard’s ‘flock’ implies that Leonard is seen like a shepherd (also a metaphor for God) who tends his flock. He is the most important person leading and guiding the members of his congregation.

The villagers regard the vicar as an authority and respect him. What Griselda says is very revealing: “Nobody flutters round him [Dr Haydock] and calls him “the dear Vicar”, and embroiders awful slippers for him, and gives him bed-socks for Christmas” (MV: 11). This means that people like Leonard because they give him gifts and talk to him warmly and respectably. Furthermore, it reveals that the vicar is better liked than the doctor, and this reveals that religion comes first, then science. Instead of the doctor, people rely on the vicar because of what he represents and because they presume that the church is more important considering their afterlife.

Even though Leonard is an important person in a respected position, his emotional life is in turmoil because he has strong opinions of what a vicar should be like and he feels he cannot live up to his own expectations. This reveals that the church is in an in-between state where the old and modern ideas intersect. Firstly, the vicar claims at the beginning of the novel that he has “always been of the opinion that a clergyman should be unmarried” (MV: 8). He thinks that marriage is “a serious affair, to be entered into only after long deliberation and forethought, and suitability of tastes and inclinations is the most important consideration” (MV: 8), continuing that “I am more than ever convinced that celibacy is desirable for the clergy” (MV: 9). In spite of these views, even though some of them are meant to be jokes, Leonard’s actions speak against him. He is a middle-aged man married to Griselda who is younger than he is, they got married hastily and she is pregnant. His conventional ideas and modern lifestyle reveal that he is a very humane character.

Secondly, Leonard feels that he is not a good Christian. This issue comes up when Leonard mentions Hawes, their new curate, and says that Hawes “has High Church views and fasts on Fridays” (MV: 10). Then later, he confesses that “I felt rather remorseful when he [Hawes] had gone for not liking him better. These irrational likes and dislikes that one takes to people are, I am sure, very unChristian” (MV: 22). Hawes has quite strict ideas of religion and practical matters, and therefore Leonard feels that he is threatened by him, that he is not as strong a believer and good a person as Hawes is, and that bothers him. Leonard also states directly that he does not like Hawes and he feels guilty thinking like that. All in all, Leonard knows what a vicar should be like, but he has failed to live up to his own ideas, and therefore, he feels inferior and sinful. His emotional turmoil shows that the vicar is only human and that there are divergent views inside the church on religion, practices and teachings.

It would seem natural that the evidently humane character of the vicar could bring the vicar and his congregation closer to each other, but there is distance between the vicar and the ordinary people. This reinforces the existence of social hierarchies in the village. The people of the village are of the opinion that the vicar does not know what is going on in ‘the real world’. Inspector Slack states the following when he is suspecting

Mrs Lestrangle of the murder, and the vicar does not agree with him: “you’re a clergyman. You don’t know half of what goes on” (MV: 209). On the other hand, the vicar feels that he is much more than his post and he would like the others’ to see it, so he thinks that it is “a pity that the mere presence of a clergyman should have a dampening effect” (MV: 45). These examples show that although the vicar is a person that glues society together and maintains the morals of the people, he is alienated from reality. This fact cannot be based on the vicar’s personality because he is a learned character and the villagers like him, but it can be due to the fact that a vicar’s occupation is a calling and, therefore, people look up to him. Leonard can be trusted because he is so unlike a ‘proper’ vicar should be, but at the same time, because Leonard represents the moral institution, people feel that they do not want to get close to him personally but rather keep good relations with him because he is in the service of God. The vicar, instead, knows that he is on the same level with the villagers despite his post, but his post hinders him from connecting with the villagers.

In addition to the important role of the vicar, the church building in itself has a special role in the novel. When the police ask Miss Marple to give the exact time when she had talked to Mrs Protheroe, the widow of the murdered Colonel Protheroe, she states that “I should say it was just a minute of two after a quarter past six. Yes, that’s right. The church clock had just chimed the quarter” (MV: 101). This means that the church and church clock, being in the middle of the village, guides the villagers’ everyday life. The people in the village identify time by remembering the church clock and its chiming which can probably be heard through the entire small village. Moreover, the vicar points out that “[w]e have some rather fine old stained glass, and indeed the church itself is well worth looking at” (MV: 33). The church is magnificent thanks to the villagers’ investments. They have wanted to make it something that the passers-by can stop to look at. They have done this although they do not have that much money to spend, but this is something they have wanted to spend on. An impressive church at the heart of the village reinforces the power and importance of it.

The church is also present in the novel through the Bible. A quotation taken from the Bible underlines the importance of the church when Leonard describes his sermon in the

following way: “I finished up with those beautiful and poignant words – perhaps the most poignant words in the whole Bible: ‘*This night thy soul shall be required of thee*’” (MV: 319, original italics). This quotation has been taken from Luke 12:20. Besides that these words fit in the subject matter of the novel, the murderer is revealed soon after Leonard has quoted these words in his speech in the church. Hence, this quotation serves the plot of the novel as well as it underlines the importance of church.

The church is described positively. The village is small, centred around the church so that everybody knows each other and trusts one another: there is a strong air of togetherness. The power of the church is reinforced by the villagers criticising the authorities, the police and the magistrates, but not the church. People do not rely on the police because the police are taken as stupid and inefficient as if they did not know what they were doing. Miss Cram utters the following when she speculates the arrest of Lawrence Redding with Leonard and Griselda: “I really couldn’t believe my ears when I heard the police had arrested him. Still, one has always heard they’re very stupid – the county police” (MV: 113–114). Miss Cram is of the opinion that the police have arrested the wrong person because of their lack of expertise. The police try to use their authority by putting pressure on people when they try to persuade someone to do something – without success. The Inspector tries to get Mary to tell him what she had heard just before the murder but she does not give in. The Inspector says that “I cautioned her – did what I could to put the fear of the law into her, but no good” (MV: 146). The Inspector’s words reveal that people do not fear the police; they do not respect them, not even to help them to solve the murder.

Colonel Protheroe, a magistrate, is seen as judging a man too easily. This is what Mary thinks: “I don’t hold with the law. *He* was a magistrate. Many a poor fellow sent to jail for potting at a rabbit” (MV: 240, original italics). Mary’s utterance is a little biased because Colonel Protheroe had earlier jailed the man Mary is dating. On the other hand, the Inspector is of the same opinion even though he talks about juries: “You’d be surprised if you knew the murderers that have got off through the soft-heartedness of the jury” (MV: 301). This can be interpreted that everybody is not equal before the law

but that the sentence depends on the person or the people judging. This, in turn, has an effect on how people consider the authorities.

Even though the villagers regard the police and the magistrates unreliable, they do not question that crimes could occur where they live, which is further proof of the power of the church and the air of togetherness it has created. When Colonel Melchett asks Lawrence Redding whether he locks his door when he leaves his cottage, Lawrence replies that “[n]o; why on earth should I? I’ve nothing to steal. And no one does lock their house up round here” (MV: 138). This example shows that people do not consider that they have something worth stealing and therefore do not lock their doors. They trust one another because everybody knows each other in the village.

The role of the church in *A Pocket Full of Rye* and in *Nemesis* differs to a great extent from that of *The Murder at the Vicarage*. The role of the church in both of these novels is trifling compared with the role in *The Murder at the Vicarage*. *A Pocket Full of Rye* presents the church almost disparagingly, whereas in *Nemesis* the attitude is more neutral.

*A Pocket Full of Rye* views the church very negatively and gives it only a minuscule role. The only Christians in the novel are Mrs Mackenzie and Miss Ramsbottom. Mrs Mackenzie lives in a sanatorium because she is not mentally healthy, and she is depicted as reading the Bible when Inspector Neele visits her. Miss Ramsbottom is very old and often quoting the Bible seemingly keen on her faith, but her actions speak against her. While playing patience, she exclaims that “[b]etting and card-playing – all devices of the devil!” (PFR: 142). She even admits herself that she likes to play bridge. Even her family thinks that she is not mentally healthy because Pat declares that “I think she’s crazy. I think she’s got religious mania” (PFR: 173). Church and religion are considered to be obsessions of older women and even signs of insanity.

In *Nemesis*, there are even fewer references to the church than in *A Pocket Full of Rye*. It is described how the church used to be the centre of the village but the situation has changed because new people have moved to St Mary Mead building new houses and

renovating the old ones, but otherwise the church does not have a role in the novel. However, the attitude towards the church is neutral rather than negative, as it was in *A Pocket Full of Rye*. The novel is located on a bus tour where the participants visit church buildings. The participants, comprising almost entirely of members of the older generation, merely comment on the architecture of the churches. This suggests that the church belongs to the past. Now it is accepted to admire and aestheticise the architecture of these churches, as if they were relics from the olden days.

The lessening interest in the church shown in *A Pocket Full of Rye* and *Nemesis* correlates with the trend that prevailed in Britain at that time. For a long time people had been displeased with institutional religion for several reasons, but during the 1960s it totally seemed to lose its appeal. In 1966 less than 25 per cent of adults were members of any religious group. The Church of England had to try to renew itself by creating “a new image of God” (Bédarida 1979: 265) with the help of different organisations, such as Shelter for the homeless, that aimed to erase suffering and by that way make people again interested in religion. (ibid. 263–265)

#### 4.1.2 Rationality

Rationality is presented in *A Pocket Full of Rye* by describing technological development, scientific development and rational thinking in general. *The Murder at the Vicarage* and *Nemesis* leave rationality almost thoroughly aside. Highlighting rationality reveals that after *The Murder at the Vicarage* society has become a more unsafe place. Based on this, the reader gets the impression that society is in some kind of an in-between state: there are signs of development but still, a great deal remains to be improved, and this corresponds with the situation in Britain in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Technological development is an important topic in *A Pocket Full of Rye*. Technological development has, firstly, improved the means of communication of which one example is the telephone. The popularity of telephones grew very fast in Britain because “there were 3.25 million subscribers in 1939, 8.5 million in 1962, and 30 million in 1975”

(Bédarida 1979: 256). This is substantiated in the novel by The Inspector who uses the telephone to get information from the hospital concerning the death of Rex Fortescue. However, the telephone does not work properly because it is noted that “[t]here were then various clicks, buzzes, and far-off ghostly murmurs” (PFR: 9). Even though the telephone facilitates the Inspector’s work, there is still room for improvement because the telephone does not work as it should.

In *A Pocket Full of Rye* however, the means of communication work better than in *The Murder at the Vicarage*, in which the telephone exchanges are complained about because people often got the wrong number when they telephoned someone. Colonel Melchett, trying to telephone Doctor Haydock gives a sudden exclamation: “Wrong number, wrong number – always wrong numbers!” (MV: 347). A little later, Miss Marple makes a comment on the telephone exchanges: “So careless with their wrong numbers, aren’t they?” (MV: 350). The telephone exchanges, the people connecting the calls, were either inefficient or the technology was not very well-functioning. These examples reveal that the means of communication have improved a little by the time of *A Pocket Full of Rye*, and by the time of *Nemesis*, the means of communication have improved even further when it comes to telephone since the telephone is mentioned only a couple of times in the novel and there is not a single mention of the telephone not working properly.

Secondly, technological development has improved the means of transportation. Miss Marple travels by train from St Mary Mead to Baydon Heath, and her journey is depicted as follows: “Miss Marple had left St. Mary Mead by the early train, changing at the junction and going on to London where she took a Circle train to another London terminus and thence on to Baydon Heath” (PFR: 92). In *The Murder at the Vicarage*, people are dissatisfied with the transportation system. The local chemist complains to the vicar that the “[t]rain I came down by was ten minutes late. And that on a Saturday with no traffic to speak of. And... last Thursday. [...] How late do you think the 6.50 was? *Half an hour*” (MV: 223, original italics). The long monologue of the chemist exemplifies that people are displeased with the transportation system because the trains running behind the schedule cause them to miss their appointments or connections. It



seems to be impossible to move around by train, but this is not the case in *A Pocket Full of Rye* since Miss Marple catches her connections.

Besides the trains, people travel by car. The number of cars grew rapidly in Britain considering that in 1930 the number of people per car was 43, in 1960 the number was 9.3 and in 1970 the number of people per car was 4.7 (Bédarida 1979: 256). The car was seen as “the supreme symbol of the consumer society” (ibid. 256) because it was not just a means of transportation but it signalled “personal status and prestige” (ibid. 256) and provided an “extension, both spatial and psychological, of the home” (ibid. 256). One car model in particular is mentioned in the novel: “a Rolls Bentley sports model coupé” (PFR: 45). Mentioning a particular car model suggests that cars have become more accessible and affordable. But the roads are not in very good condition because it is mentioned that “[t]he lane was little more than a cart track and too muddy for cars” (PFR: 139). The roads are not developed in phase with the rise in number of cars, which implies that development has been fast. In *Nemesis*, the number of cars continues to rise because it is noted that the car parks are very crowded. The development of roads can be seen in the rising number of road accidents: “Run over, she was. Run out into the street, went to get sweets at the sweet shop. Happens a lot nowadays with cars going through at the pace they do” (N: 142). Even though the means of transportation and the roads have developed, many people get killed in road accidents because of speeding.

Flying has become a more common form of travel. This implies that the means of transportation have developed and opened up the possibility of travelling abroad more easily. When Lancelot and Pat travel home to Baydon Heath, they fly from Kenya to London via Paris. People took advantage of this possibility and “[b]etween 1951 and 1970 the number of British who went abroad for their holidays was quadrupled” (Bédarida 1979: 256). Air travel has become so popular, that even the wills are changed so that they take into account accidents because of the rise in air travel. Mr Fortescue has changed his will so that his wife inherits his money only, if she lives two months longer than him. It is said that this “is a clause fairly common nowadays. It has come into operation owing to the uncertainties of air travel” (PFR: 146). Accidents occur so often that it has been necessary to take that into account in wills. The means of

transportation have developed and become more diversified, but again, there seems to be room for improvement because accidents are frequent and the roads are in bad condition.

Thirdly, technological development has improved the living standards. In the period of 1953–1972, “7 million houses were built in the United Kingdom” (Bédarida 1979: 255), and thanks to technological development, the majority of dwellings were improved, for example the houses were more frequently equipped with toilets and showers (ibid. 255). The Inspector reminisces that when he was a little boy, his home was filled with luxuries like “electric irons, slow combustion stoves, airing cupboards, hot and cold water from taps, and the switching on of light by a mere flick of a finger” (PFR: 24). His family had had domestic appliances that had been luxury when was a little boy, but at the time of the story, the things he describes are not considered to be luxuries because of the vastly improved living standards.

In addition to technological development, rationality is highlighted by describing scientific development. An important medium is the public press that informs the readers and assists in forming a uniform society by telling the readers what and how to think. When Inspector Neele goes through Gladys’ belongings, he comes across newspaper cuttings about “flying saucers, about secret weapons, about truth drugs used by Russians and claims for fantastic drugs discovered by American doctors” (PFR: 90–91). The newspapers articles also include information about “the manufacture of atom bombs” (PFR: 137). Besides that these examples reveal what is going on in the world and what people like to read about, they exemplify the juxtaposition of Russia and the United States and the speculations about scientific development during the Cold War. Furthermore, the novel takes a stand on the situation by hinting that communist ideas are not accepted. Elaine’s father had forbidden her relationship with Mr Wright because Mr Wright supports communism: “Father discovered the young man had communistic ideas and came down on the romance like a ton of bricks.” (PFR: 32) This suggests that the horrors of the Second World War are still fresh in mind, and the power struggle of the two nations during the Cold War affects society and its members as well as that the public press echoes the dominant opinion.

It is Miss Marple who reveals that the public press is powerful in unifying society because people are ready to believe what is written in the newspapers: “nobody believes that anyone can [...] wave a wand and turn you into a frog. But if you read in the paper that by injecting certain glands scientists can alter your vital tissues and you’ll develop froglike characteristics, well, everybody would believe that” (PFR: 202–203). According to Miss Marple, what is printed in the newspapers is often taken unchallenged to be true.

Lastly, rationality in general is preferable. Inspector Neele is known for his logical investigation process, and he underlines all the time that he is searching for facts in a logical way. By working rationally, the Inspector is able to find the guilty and reveal the murderer. The Inspector is critical because his main task is to question, which is why he does not thoroughly support scientific development. Instead he thinks that they are “[a]ll the witchcraft [...] of our twentieth century” (PFR: 91). This shows that the attitude towards the latest discoveries is not entirely positive.

Rationality is contrasted with irrationality. Society is more unsafe in *A Pocket Full of Rye* than in *The Murder at the Vicarage*, which is revealed by the fact that people are more cautious. Inspector Neele is trying to figure out how the murderer possibly got into the house and asks Miss Dove if the side door is kept locked. Miss Dove answers that “[n]ot until the house is locked up for the night” (PFR: 113). Now people lock their doors for the night, which was not the case in *The Murder at the Vicarage*. In *A Pocket Full of Rye*, of course, it is a wealthier family in question, and this family obviously has the need and want to protect its possessions. Baydon Heath is also a bigger place than St Mary Mead which may initiate these precautions, but this reveals that society is not as uniform and tight as in *The Murder at the Vicarage*. Society is threatened both from the inside (murderer) and from the outside (other societies). But it suggests that society has become more unsafe or the members of this society more cautious.

#### 4.1.3 The Transformation of a Small Community

Social change culminates in society's transformation process. In *The Murder at the Vicarage*, society is both infrastructurally and socially very uniform. In *A Pocket Full of Rye*, there are features of society opening up, and by *Nemesis*, society has become very complex and worldly. This complexity appears through urbanisation, mobility, immigration and centralisation, but the change also brings out less desirable consequences: alienation of the members of society from each other.

As mentioned earlier, the village of St Mary Mead comprises an idyllic setting for the narrative in *The Murder at the Vicarage* because the community is tight and very coherent. The vicar illuminates how well people are acquainted with each other: "The whole village of St Mary Mead probably knows exactly where you [Lawrence Redding] keep your toothbrush and what kind of tooth powder you use" (MV: 225–226), and he continues that "[i]f you change your shaving cream it will be a topic of conversation" (MV: 226). The village houses surround the vicarage which forms the heart of the village. This is unfolded by the narrative but also by providing a map of the village (MV: 102). In other words, the village is an infrastructurally well-knit and socially coherent community.

The fact that society is opening up can be noted already in *A Pocket Full of Rye*, even though the story is not located to St Mary Mead. The story is situated mostly to the countryside in Baydon Heath even though some of the events occur at the Fortescue's office in London. Baydon Heath is a more peaceful place than London but not as restful as St Mary Mead. It takes only half an hour by train from London to get to Baydon Heath. But development is the word of the day in Baydon Heath, which becomes evident through Inspector Neele who reflects on the existence of a tree that "had been there long before the rash of newly-built red brick houses had begun to spread over the countryside" (PFR: 25) and even "before the golf courses had been laid out and the fashionable architects had walked round with their rich clients pointing out the advantages of the various sites" (PFR: 25). Inspector Neele articulates the construction boom of new houses emerging more rapidly and more extensively in the countryside.

Homes and buildings are invested in and architects are employed to design them. This suggests that people have more money to carry out this kind of projects. Even though Neele thinks that this is just one way the rich can spend their money, this clearly shows that the small communities, as the one seen in *The Murder at the Vicarage*, have initiated the process of development and growth.

This trend continues in *Nemesis* in which the first signs of urbanisation can be seen. The population growth is undeniable, and it generates in turn a greater demand for housing and services. *Nemesis* brings the attention back to St Mary Mead that has changed notably since *The Murder at the Vicarage* and appears as a community reborn. The village is changing infrastructurally as new houses are built. It is said that the village is “not so small nowadays, there is so much building going on everywhere” (N: 104) and that “[i]t used to be a very pretty old-world village but of course like everything else, it is becoming what they call developed nowadays” (N: 126). Miss Marple comments that in St Mary Mead “things do rather revolve round the church. I mean, they always have. In my young days, that was so. Nowadays of course it’s rather different” (N: 147–148). According to Miss Marple, St Mary Mead is changing from the small community that we saw in *The Murder at the Vicarage* into a bigger place. Miss Marple suggests that it is not only the village that is developing but also all the other things. There is an underlying drive to get rid of the old and to make things better by creating something new.

Growing population means mobility. New people move to St Mary Mead from other parts of the country but also from other parts of the world. Miss Marple mentions how fast the population is growing by saying that “it was probably those newly built houses at the end of Gibraltar Road. Several families had moved in in the last year” (N: 23). These examples concretise mobility. New people move to the village, build new houses and renovate the old ones with exceedingly fast pace. Now people move around which is a stark contrast compared with the two other novels.

The village becoming inhabited by new people causes alienation because the people living in St Mary Mead do not know each other anymore as they did in *The Murder at*

*the Vicarage*. Miss Marple notices this when she tries to remember a house at the end of the village that has got new owners: “The people there haven’t been there very long. I don’t know what their names are” (N: 50). A little later she remarks that “one really only does see one’s neighbours on the bus route, or else go by a taxi from the village” (N: 59) Miss Marple does not even know the names of the new villagers like she used to. Even St Mary Mead has become less coherent and less tight.

The transformation process includes immigration, and the newcomers, especially foreigners, are greeted with distrust. It is said that Miss Marple “had never quite succeeded in abandoning her Victorian view of foreigners. One never *knew* with foreigners. Quite absurd, of course, to feel like that – she had many friends from various foreign countries. All the same...?” (N: 107). A little later Miss Marple remarks that “I suppose there are always hooligans about. You know, some young foreigners or students” (N: 313). It is interesting that Miss Marple who is famous for her knowledge of human nature has prejudices against foreigners and students by default. She thinks that they are unpredictable, even hooligans, but at the same time it is noted that her ‘Victorian view’ is old-fashioned. Foreigners have become part of society. People travel more, and immigration is a common phenomenon. This shows that England and even its smaller societies have opened up and become international.

Another sign of society’s transformation is centralisation. “Esther Anderson came out of the Supermarket and went towards where she had parked her car” (N: 57). This is the first time that supermarkets are mentioned. Now, people do their shopping in large supermarkets, and there are no references to the butcher’s or the groceries’ unlike in *The Murder at the Vicarage*.

These changes are not only positive because people consider society’s current state as prevailing disarray. Things do not always develop for the better. Miss Marple states directly that “[o]ur country is in rather a bad way just now” (N: 360). It seems that people are not very optimistic about the future and the changes that are happening in society.

The transformation of a small community is drastic. *The Murder at the Vicarage* presents a small and quiet village that is founded in the shadow of the church. *A Pocket Full of Rye* shows the first signs of development. The change is very perceptible in *Nemesis* where modern life has gained ground to the extent that the small community has been forced to adjust to the changes: there are new houses, new people and new marketplaces. But the development is not seen exclusively positively because people have become strangers. Things have changed, and the small community is little by little becoming more aware of the rest of the world and opening up.

## 4.2 Societal Change

Societal change shows how the class boundaries fade and how women's position becomes more stable. It also brings up the new generations and how they take their place in society.

### 4.2.1 Class

English class society is made visible in the novels through money that has an effect on the lives of society's members. Class society changes over time which is also noticeable in the novels. The different classes are very well presented in *The Murder at the Vicarage* in which the overall economic situation is weak correlating with the situation in Britain after the First World War. *A Pocket Full of Rye* depicts the economic growth that occurred after the Second World War by concentrating on the lives of wealthy upper-middle class people and forgetting the lower class. In *Nemesis*, the class differences recede, but money still remains as an important factor because people either have it excessively or barely make a living.

In *The Murder at the Vicarage* money is a crucial factor, and both sides of the coin are presented: the excesses as well as lack of money cause problems to all the characters. In the 1930s the unemployment rate in Britain was on the high level of 12.7 per cent, which resulted from the First World War followed by the depression (Johnson 1995:

180, 320). This means that people did not have paid work and in consequence not money to spend. Society in *The Murder at the Vicarage* is divided in three: the upper-middle class, the middle class and the lower class. The Protheroes, for example, represent the upper-middle class, and they have money and power in society. Mr Protheroe is a magistrate who can decide on other people's lives. The Protheroes own a large house, a car and employ several servants. However, the Protheroes are not portrayed as an ideal family in spite of their good financial situation because their family relations are tense which leads to the murder of Mr Protheroe committed by the wife and the daughter spending her days by loitering around and dreaming of modelling.

The majority of the characters belong to the middle class without great wealth. One example is the Clements, the vicar and his wife. Although the vicar is a respected person in the village because of his post, his family is not rich. They do not own a car and because Leonard does not know how to ride a bicycle, he has to walk to see his parishioners. Leonard states directly that "I can't afford a University education, I'm afraid" (MV: 166) when he is talking to Dr Haydock about Dennis, Leonard's nephew. Even though the vicar is one of the most central characters in the village and he has a good post, he is economically equal with the other middle class members.

The lower class members, and especially women, are unequal compared to the members of other social classes. They do not have enough money to get an education, they have to start working at an early age, and their chances to climb higher in society are restricted. The lower class is depicted mostly through servants who are usually unqualified young women. Mary works at the vicarage but the vicar is not pleased with her because she cannot do her duties properly: the meals are always too early or too late, she refuses to speak with respect to the family, and she is not too careful with cleaning. She cannot afford to leave her job because she is not particularly good at it also due to not having money to get an education.

The class division remains the same in *A Pocket Full of Rye*, but this time the focus is shifting more on the upper-middle class people compared to the general overview on



social classes presented in *The Murder at the Vicarage*. This turn of focus suits the prevailing situation in society. After the Second World War, England started to recover from the depression due to the enhanced international trade, and the economic situation started to improve (Johnson 1995: 320). Mr Fortescue, the victim, is a company owner who has a London-based office, expensive cars and a mansion, Yewtree Lodge, with a perfect garden near London. It seems that no expense is spared: there is a room “with paneling, rich upholstery, large stuffed chairs, and a suitable set of sporting prints on the walls” (PFR: 26). Mr Fortescue seems to have more money than he can spend.

Only Miss Marple, the Inspector and the typists at the London office belong to the middle class and, similarly, the servants at Yewtree Lodge belong to the lower class. The lower class members are in the same position as in *The Murder at the Vicarage*. They are depicted as inefficient and untrustworthy: Gladys is one of the murderers (even though not deliberately) and Miss Dove has suspicious affairs and not thoroughly pure intentions either. Yet again, it is money that causes problems suggesting that not even the rich can be happy or untouched by crime.

There is a clear gap between the richer and the poorer which is reinforced by a certain hierarchy that exists among the characters and how they behave towards each other. Mr Fortescue’s employees have different positions at the office. Miss Grosvenor is Mr Fortescue’s personal secretary, and therefore higher up in the social ladder than the other employees. Miss Griffith is in charge of the typists, which makes her superior to them. Miss Somers is the ‘lowest’ in the pecking order because she has just started working at the office and she is depicted as very inefficient, unlike her co-workers. The servants at Yewtree Lodge also have their own positions. Mary Dove, the housekeeper, is the head of the staff. She supervises that everything happens on time and that everything is as it should be. Gladys Martin, the parlourmaid, is at the bottom. She does everything she is told to do, and she is not particularly good at her job.

The social structure is underlined further by treating people differently on the basis of their position in society and how much money they have. This is indicated at the very beginning when Mr Fortescue’s secretary makes him a cup of tea. “Mr. Fortescue had

different tea, and different china and special biscuits. Only the kettle and the water from the cloakroom tap were the same” (PFR: 2). Mr Fortescue, the rich businessman, cannot even eat the same biscuits or drink the same tea using the same cups as his secretaries who are all women and subordinate to him. This special trait of Mr Fortescue’s indicates that in addition to being immensely rich, he is in charge and therefore he can execute his seemingly absurd whims.

The important and insignificant people are separated physically at the office. When Miss Grosvenor takes Mr Fortescue his tea, she goes “[t]hrough the inner office and through the waiting room, where the more important clients were allowed to sit, and through her own anteroom and finally with a light tap on the door she entered that holy of holies, Mr. Fortescue’s office” (PFR: 2). There is a separate room for the most important clients, as if they were not to be mixed with the personnel or anybody unimportant, which supposedly appeals the future client’s feeling of superiority and importance. The word choice in the previous example parallels Mr Fortescue’s office with heaven or church as if Mr Fortescue were God himself in his miniature universe – the office.

The class division prevailing in *The Murder at the Vicarage* and in *A Pocket Full of Rye* still exists in *Nemesis* but is not as apparent. In this novel, most of the characters belong to the middle class, but there are only few who are very rich and few who are very poor. The middle class people have more money than the middle class people in the two other novels because they can afford a recreational bus tour. This reflects the improved economic situation in England that gave way to consumerism: people had more money to spend and more time on their hands, for example because they were able to spend money on consumable goods, such as washing machines, refrigerators and cars (Johnson 1995: 321–324).

Even though people have more money, its value has decreased. Mr Broadribb, a lawyer, puts it plainly when he talks to Miss Marple about her reward if she will accept the offered post. “That [20 000 pounds] is a very large sum of money,” said Miss Marple. ‘Not quite so large as it used to be,’ said Mr Broadribb (and just restrained himself from

saying, ‘Mere chicken feed nowadays’)’ (N: 34). For Miss Marple, however, it is a large sum of money. She states herself that she has been aided financially by her nephew Raymond West. Miss Marple mentions many times during the tour that she could not have afforded that kind of tour unless Mr Rafiel had given one to her as a present. When she thinks about what she could do with the money, things that are luxury to her, different kinds of food and entertainment in the form of a visit to the opera, come first to her mind. At the end of the novel, when she gets her award she states very clearly that she does not want to save the money but to spend it before she dies.

What is remarkable is that the members of the lower class are not as visible as in the two other novels. Only one servant who works part-time for the three sisters is mentioned. One of the sisters clarifies that “[w]e have a very nice woman who comes in but she is only here in the morning” (N: 120). Furthermore, servants are not young girls anymore, but now the word used is “woman”. The sisters do not complain about their servant either, and this shows that the attitude towards servants has changed, or the servants have better education because they are not inefficient anymore. Another example of lower class members is Mr Rafiel’s son who is mentioned as being “a bad lot” (N: 177). He is a social outcast living on the streets. It seems that the gap between the rich and the poor has widened. Even though most of the characters are quite well-off, the extremes are further away.

Money still separates people, and even though it is the driving force in *A Pocket Full of Rye*, in *Nemesis* its importance is foregrounded even further, which is a sign of a micronarrative that creates distance between people. The whole story is initiated by an extremely wealthy man whose dying wish is to save his son, and he succeeds in his mission with his money. He finances the bus tour for the people he thinks can help him. Miss Marple is beginning to be old, and financially at the mercy of her nephew, and by solving the case she gets access to a large amount of money, so in a way, money is a strong motivator in this novel. Mr Rafiel and Miss Marple are friends, so it can be assumed that she wants to help him even though she would not benefit from it financially, but still, she is excited to get the money.

#### 4.2.2 Women

Societal change is exposed in the three novels through the depiction of women and their position in society – as well as what they do not or cannot do or say. In *The Murder at the Vicarage* and in *A Pocket Full of Rye* women's position signals that society is patriarchal, meaning that men have power over women and children and that society's structures in general are male-dominated. In *Nemesis* the difference between men and women is not highlighted.

In *The Murder at the Vicarage*, the essential elements of patriarchal society are visible. Men occupy the public sphere and women the domestic. Men stand in better positions, have better occupations and act as the pillars of society. For example the vicar is a very important person because of his position in society. Because men support the family, they are in charge and make decisions. Colonel Protheroe, for instance, decides that his daughter, Lettice, cannot be painted in her bathing suit because it is not appropriate. On the other hand, men are not always obeyed, which is a rebellious sign against the patriarchal views. In spite of her father's orders, Lettice is getting her picture painted.

The conventional division between rational men and irrational women is present. Inspector Slack, while trying to figure out with Colonel Melchett and Leonard Clement why Mrs Protheroe has confessed the murder, comments that “[s]he's a woman, and women act in that silly way” (MV: 121), a generalisation not objected by the other conversationalists. In addition, the older women are not seen as very plausible witnesses due to their peculiar concept of time, as explained by Constable Hurst: “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 simply flies for them. And anyway, no lady knows anything about time” (MV: 276–277). Constable Hurst regards women as irrational because they do not run systematically according to the clock and notice time passing the same way he does. Instead, women are inquisitive and equipped with lively imagination, which makes them volatile and swayed by whims. These ideas lead Constable Hurst to believe Miss Marple could not help the police to solve the case. At the same time, this example projects policemen as unprofessional and somewhat stupid

because they reject the help they need to solve the case. They do not realise that women could be of help on account of these abovementioned qualities he thinks they possess; if they are nosey, they must know everything.

In their domestic spheres, women stand in the shadow of men. The vicar's wife, Griselda, is a housewife and merely a decoration, and she is expected to keep up the social relations of the vicar. Griselda jokes about it as follows: "My duty as the Vicaress. Tea and scandal at four-thirty" (MV: 2). She stays at home and engages in voluntary work which clearly annoys her because she would like to do more.

Women's position is further underlined by occupations men and women have, and it is especially significant which career paths they do not or cannot choose. Women cannot be policemen and men cannot be servants, except chauffeurs, valets and butlers. This is the situation in the novel, although Leonard tries to reason that men and women are equal: "But surely,' I [Leonard] said, 'in these days a girl can take a post in just the same way as a man does" (MV: 23). But Leonard's remark is overruled by the older women of the village who are of the opinion that women cannot work like men because business trips and sleeping arrangements during them would be problematic. Interestingly, Leonard's word choice (girl-man) reveals that he thinks less of women even though he tries to support them.

Furthermore, women's possessions are restricted whereas men have money. The only way for women to end up rich or climb higher in the hierarchy is to inherit or marry a rich man. Griselda jokes about this by saying that "[d]o you realize, Len, that I might have married a Cabinet Minister, a Baronet, a rich Company Promoter, three subalterns and a ne'er-do-weel with attractive manners, and that instead I chose you?" (MV: 14). Griselda could have chosen differently and married a rich husband, but her choice suggests that she really loves Leonard because she did not marry money. Miss Marple shares Griselda's view by giving a fully plausible explanation why a woman would marry an unattractive man: "Do you really think she wants to marry that bald-headed dull man?' 'I understand he is quite well off,' said Miss Marple" (MV: 24-25). By this

she means that money is often more important than love, a fact that makes marriage a game. Women have to consider the economic aspect as well.

In this novel, women's position is underlined by the economic situation, occupations and attitudes towards the opposite sex. There seems to be a shift towards a more equal view (Leonard's comment on women's occupations), but it is not approved of by the older generation. Women are in a weaker position when compared to men, and because Leonard is the narrator, women's voices are not mediated. However, both men and women have flaws (Colonel Protheroe is very stern and Mary is a terrible cook), so either of the sexes is not seen as superior in that light.

A similar kind of juxtaposition of men and women continues in *A Pocket Full of Rye*, but now women's perspective is well presented. The novel shows that women's lives are restricted by various social norms. The novel depicts upper-middle class people, and the tendency is that men are company leaders who work hard to support the family, which is why they are almost constantly away from home. Women simply stay at home. The initial arrangement presents a distinct duality: public sphere controlled by men and domestic sphere controlled by women.

Even though women control the domestic sphere, they do not have to work hard because they have servants to run the domestic affairs. Instead, women have to come up with something to do while men are at work. Adele Fortescue plays golf and has an affair with her golf instructor, and Elaine Fortescue, Mr Fortescue's daughter, is absorbed in all kinds of sports. Jennifer Fortescue is depicted as follows: "Though she had achieved leisure by her marriage with a well-to-do man, leisure had not satisfied her. She bought clothes, read novels and ate sweets" (PFR: 122). Jennifer is simply bored. She spends her days at home waiting for her husband to come home from work, and when he eventually comes, he wants to be left alone. She does not have to do anything because servants run the domestic affairs, and, therefore, she spends her time shopping, eating and reading novels.

Besides novels, women read about “[r]ecipes for beauty, for attracting the man you love. And witchcraft and charms and marvelous happenings” (PFR: 202). Women are not interested in high literature but instead in beauty and how to attract the man, which portrays them as superficial. These interests seem to undermine their capabilities. They do not have ambitions, and they are not interested in educating themselves. Women only wait to get attention from their husbands, and when their wishes are not fulfilled, they seek attention elsewhere. On the other hand, taking care of the looks would give the feeling of control and also better prospects.

Even though upper-middle class women do not seem to be interested in education, it is possible for women, also for members of the lower classes, to get an education. Women who come from orphanages are educated there and afterwards by other women. Miss Marple depicts how she came to know Gladys Martin: “She came to me from the orphanage. [...] We do our best for the girls there, try to give them a good training and all that. [...] I taught her how to wait at the table and keep the silver and everything like that” (PFR: 94–95). Women learn household matters, like cleaning the silver, and when they have learned enough, they move on. They can also be trained in other institutions and holiday camps.

Restrictions govern women’s behaviour around men. Adele Fortescue, for example, makes a feminine gesture when she touches her hair in the presence of Lancelot who is very handsome: “She set down the scone she was eating with her left hand and just touched the arrangement of her hair. It was a feminine gesture.” (PFR: 79) Touching hair is seen as a feminine gesture and conveying a greater meaning, not forgetting the fact that Adele is depicted as a sexually active young woman. When Lancelot arrives at the office in London, the women start powdering their noses. They are worried about how they look because they want to attract the man. These examples show that women are depicted quite stereotypically, as being interested only in the external factors and pleasing the men.

Women are expected to behave in a certain way. When Mary Dove says that Adele Fortescue is “very good-looking—a real sexy piece” (PFR: 31), Inspector Neele thinks

that “[a] girl like Mary Dove ought not to say such things” (PFR: 31). Inspector Neele’s perception is that a woman in Mary Dove’s position should watch her language. Miss Marple sits very upright because she has been taught to do so as a child. Another rather peculiar restriction is that women prefer to sit in the shadow. When Inspector Neele questions Mary Dove, he notices that she faces the light. “She chose, he noticed, to face the light. An unusual preference for a woman” (PFR: 26). This remark reinforces the invisibility of women and their dull life. Women’s place is aside while men stand in the limelight.

Women’s dull life is visible in that women like drama. Jennifer, for example, “takes an absolute delight in death and misfortune” (PFR: 76–77). She is, in fact, excited when Rex Fortescue is murdered, because it means to her that something exciting happens for once. Similarly Elaine Fortescue “enjoys disasters” (PFR: 110) because “she finds in disaster a kind of pleasurable drama” (PFR: 110). It seems reasonable that women want excitement in their lives because usually nothing really happens.

Women are economically dependent on men, either the father or the husband. Elaine Fortescue would like to get married to the man she loves, Gerald Wright, but because her father does not approve of him and does not want to give money for the wedding or for the dowry, they cannot get married. This becomes evident when Mr Fortescue is murdered, and Elaine comments that “Gerald and I can get married now. I can do everything that I want to do” (PFR: 59). Because her father is dead, she inherits the money and is able to do what she wants with it. She wants to open a school, even though men advise her to save the money for a rainy day. Gaining money through inheritance or by marrying are the only ways for upper-middle class women to get money, and therefore they are advised to save it and not to spend it.

For both men and women, the way to climb the social ladder is to marry money. It is said that before Adele Fortescue married Rex Fortescue, she “was a manicurist on the lookout for big money” (PFR: 31). Women want a better life, and that can be done by marrying money. The same applies to men. “People like young Ellis and this Gerald Wright are only really disagreeable when they’ve married a poor girl for love. They are



so annoyed with themselves for doing it that they take it out on the girl. But if they marry a rich girl they continue to respect her.” (PFR: 174) What Miss Marple means by this is that economy goes before feelings. If a man marries a rich woman because of her money, the relationship can succeed even without love. Money is involved in the personal relations and not only in the business. There is a clear gap between the rich and the poor. The ones who belong to lower classes have to marry money if they want to have a better and easier life.

Not only are women’s lives restricted, but also men’s view on women is restricted. They see women as untrustworthy because they do not keep their promises and because they gossip. Vivian Dubois makes the following comment: ”Why have women got to be such damned fools? Surely common prudence...” But then, Mr. Dubois reflected gloomily, women never had any prudence” (PFR: 72). He is afraid that his affair with Mrs Fortescue is exposed because she keeps phoning and writing to him. He also continues that “[w]omen were all the same. They promised to burn things and then didn’t” (PFR: 73) by which he means the letters he has written to Adele and which she has promised to get rid of. These letters would give him a motive for murder. Only Mary Dove makes an exception. Her leaving the room when Adele Fortescue is informed about her husband being poisoned, makes Inspector Neele think that it is “[a] remarkable display of tact and discretion, and also a rather remarkable lack of curiosity. Most women...would have remained” (PFR: 45). Inspector Neele is amazed when Mary Dove does not want to stay and listen to the conversation because he assumes that she would want to gossip about it afterwards.

Women’s perspective dominates in this novel, and it results in an ideological awakening. It is Jennifer who says that “I do think women ought to stick together” (PFR: 125). This can be seen as a reaction against the patriarchal system and pro feminism. Because women live in the shadow of men, they have realised that they should be loyal to each other and take care of each other, step forward from the shadows casted by men.

Women's position is not as clearly visible in *Nemesis* as in the two other novels. This novel includes men and women as well as the other novels, but either of the sexes is not highlighted as being prior to the other, even though women have a more prominent role in the novel: most of the characters are older women, the victims are women, the murderer is a woman and the amateur detective is a woman.

Women's lives are not as restricted in *Nemesis* as in the previous novel. In this novel, women have occupations that would normally be connected with men, for example there are two female body guards involved. Furthermore, women do not settle for being merely home decorations as in the previous novel, but they work and are appreciated because of their talents and abilities. One of the victims is a retired teacher and even the Archdeacon talks about her warmly because she had "a great sense of each girl's capabilities – for what she was best fitted for in studies. She urged careers on girls that she felt were not really suited to them" (N: 270). The Archdeacon reckons that she had been a very talented pioneer of girls' education who urged girls to take on untraditional career paths. Moreover, the focus in this novel has shifted from the juxtaposition of men and women to that of young and old which is examined in what follows.

#### 4.2.3 Rise of the Younger Generation

Societal change is manifested in the fact that society is aging (Miss Marple is older and there are more old people in the novel than in the two other novels) and a new generation is gradually taking over. The new generation is not, however, greeted with open arms by the older generation, but with a negative attitude and even prejudice. This tendency culminates in *Nemesis*, while *The Murder at the Vicarage* and *A Pocket Full of Rye* concentrate on depicting the generation gap with stereotypical characters.

The generation gap is visible already in *The Murder at the Vicarage* but it is quite insignificant. Most of the characters are rather old, as the old ladies of the village, Miss Marple and Mrs Price-Ridley, but there are also younger villagers, for example Lettice, Leonard's nephew Dennis and Griselda. The portrayal of these characters is stereotypical, since the older women of the village are depicted as gossiping know-it-

alls and the younger ones naive and immature. Lettice, for instance, is depicted as a difficult girl with problematic family relations, who only wanders around in the village, making her a very potential suspect. Dennis is only curious about the murder investigation, not being mature enough to understand what murder means and that it should be taken seriously.

The generation gap is also present in *A Pocket Full of Rye* but this time it is associated with a negative attitude and even prejudices that do not spare either the older or the younger generation. The older generation is represented by Miss Marple and Miss Ramsbottom. Inspector Neele is many times worried that Miss Marple is just a silly old lady who cannot be trusted in a murder investigation. He, however, decides to trust her because “[s]he was upright, of unimpeachable rectitude and she had, like most old ladies, time on her hands and an old maid’s nose for scenting bits of gossip” (PFR: 98). It is expected that elderly women gossip because they do not have anything else to do, as in *The Murder at the Vicarage*, but now the police know how to take advantage of their knowledge, even though Inspector Neele’s tone is coloured with prejudice. Miss Ramsbottom’s situation is even worse. She is thought to be insane because she likes to spend her time alone in her room reading the Bible. It is said that “[a]t her age one does really feel that she ought to be in some kind of a home. I mean somewhere where she will be properly looked after” (PFR: 80). Old people are seen as burdens to the rest of the family, and they can be put away from sight.

The young ones in this novel are Adele, Mr Fortescues’s wife, and Gladys, and neither of them is portrayed very pleasantly. Adele seems only to be after her husband’s money, and she is having an affair with her golf instructor. She is portrayed as quite unscrupulous and histrionic. Gladys is portrayed incapable of doing what she is supposed to do, and she also is one of the murderers, which does not speak for the younger generation. She is tricked into murder, which shows that she is very naive, gullible and attention seeking.

*Nemesis*, instead, shows many details that underline that the generation gap has widened and that the attitude towards the young is mostly negative. When Miss Marple reads the

newspaper and columns of births, she notes the growing population. It is stated that “[p]eople had babies, but the people who had babies were not likely to be even known by name to Miss Marple“ (N: 12). This indicates the fact that Miss Marple is beginning to be very old because she does not know everybody who live in the village anymore; she is much older than in the other novels. The quotation shows that the population is getting younger. It was especially the time after the Second World War when the birth rates got to their peak because “[...] many women left [the postwar labour market] voluntarily to start families having delayed marriage or childbirth due to the war; hence the postwar baby boom” (Johnson 1995: 394). The quotation states that more babies are born than before, which initiates the social change: there are more people now living in the village, and many of them belong to the new generation.

There are many references to young people, but the attitude towards them is mostly negative. For example Mr Rafiel’s solicitors wonder what Miss Marple is like before she arrives at their office: “She’s elderly, I gather, and much more punctilious than the young scatter-brains of today” (N: 28). The youngster’s conception of time seems to be underestimated, whereas it was the older women who did not appreciate time in the previous novels. The word choice (“the scatter-brains”) reveals that they are not seen as particularly intelligent either.

The language usage of the young, as well as their appearance, is criticised. One of the tour members describes Emlyn Price as follows: “One of these long-haired students, you know. Always going on demos or something like that. Why can’t they say demonstration properly? I hate abbreviations.” (N: 286) The use of abbreviations suggests that language is changing. A new way of speaking is a unifying factor for the young, a way to convey togetherness and identity, and a way of standing out from the crowds of older generations, creating something of their own. To the older generations this exposes a threat and marks a lack of a backbone. Clotilde, one of the sisters, describes Emlyn Price as follows: “Very modern-looking, and a lot of hair and all that” (N: 155). This shows that their appearances are criticised because they use strange clothes and even men let their hair grow long. This seems to indicate that the young are

seeking their identities: they want to make a difference. The older generation misunderstands these signs, or at least interprets them in their own way.

The young are depicted as radical and aggressive, even capable of horrible deeds such as murder. Miss Marple describes what they can do: “You know, putting things in horses’ eyes, smashing Legation windows and attacking people. Throwing stones, at people” (N: 315). It is remarkable how unadmirable the young are seen. They clearly can do very appalling things. It is Miss Marple who gives an explanation to this behaviour when she ponders on who would be the possible murderer: “She [Joanna] and the anarchistic Emlyn Price might combine in the cause of anti-capitalism” (N: 87). Miss Marple is of the opinion that the young are prepared to do anything in order to support their ideologies, such as anarchism and anti-capitalism. They are depicted as knowing what to alter in society, what the weakest points are and wanting to search for their boundaries and do things differently than before, opposing the social order. They think the old habits and beliefs should be altered, and that is the reason why they take part in demonstrations. They want to have an influence on society.

Based on these examples, it can be observed that Miss Marple is one of the characters with prejudices against the young. This is an interesting observation because Miss Marple is the main character, right-fighter and the one standing on the side of the mistreated and still described as prejudiced. The novels show that society changes and Miss Marple gets older, but her ideas do not change. The reason may lay in the same fact: because she is the main character owning knowledge on human nature, she knows not to generalise and condemn everybody as thoroughly wicked. This can be deduced from the only positive thing she says about the young: “‘I don’t know what one would do without the younger generations,’ said Miss Marple. ‘They are so kind, are they not?’” (N: 133) Essentially, she thinks that the younger generation can be relied on because she has her nephew, Raymond West, taking care of her and she could not cope without his help.

### 4.3 Moral Change

Moral change is presented in connection to sexual norms, reasons for crime and the absence of punishment. Moral change is not, however, as perceptible as social or societal change, which suggests that moral change is a slower process.

#### 4.3.1 Sexual Norms

Every society has a certain moral code with which it manifests what is good/right and bad/wrong in that society. The crimes the novels depict expose a problem by going beyond the accepted. They violate the social order and force society to face the difficult situation and to react to it in order to restore the order. In the three Miss Marple novels, morals stems from the traditional Christian way of thinking connected with sexual norms. The change can be noticed in the fact the sexual norms become looser in the course of the novels.

In *The Murder at the Vicarage* sexual norms are depicted by insinuating that sex is only accepted as part of marriage and only between the spouses. When the older women of the village meet at the vicarage, Miss Wetherby states that “[n]o nice girl would [...] [b]e a secretary to an unmarried man” (MV: 23). Miss Wetherby thinks that it is inappropriate for a young girl to work for an unmarried man because it is perceived that it has to include something else than a purely professional relationship; at least it is not what a ‘nice’ girl would do. This conversation exaggerates old maids’ tendency to gossip but at the same time it reflects the traditional Christian views the elderly villagers have.

Not only are the young girls blamed for immoral behaviour. Men are depicted as indulging in adultery. Miss Wetherby notes that “[m]arried men living apart from their wives are, of course, notorious” (MV: 23) and Miss Marple continues that this also applies to “some of the ones living with their wives” (MV: 23). The women seem to generalise as if men would not be capable of controlling their wants and feelings at all. Also men recognise that they are unfaithful because it is Inspector Slack who comments

on Mr Protheroe that “[h]e wouldn’t be the first churchwarden who’d led a double life” (MV: 186). Inspector Slack suggests that adultery concerns everybody in spite of their position in society.

It becomes evident that the church does not accept adultery. This is revealed when the vicar discovers Mr Lawrence and Mrs Protheroe in his own garden shed where Mr Lawrence is painting. The vicar tells about his discovery as follows: “I backed out precipitately and beat a retreat to my study. There I sat down in a chair, took out my pipe, and thought things over. The discovery had come as a great shock to me.” (MV: 37–38) The vicar takes adultery very seriously. He is shocked which is why he needs to sit down to reflect upon what he saw. The vicar does not accept adultery and therefore he tries to reason with Mrs Protheroe as follows: “Above all, I begged her to do nothing rash. To leave her home and her husband was a very serious step” (MV: 42). The vicar is of the opinion that Mrs Protheroe should not leave her husband, but instead Mr Redding should leave the village and Mrs Protheroe for good. He is of the opinion that even a dysfunctional marriage is better than a divorce.

Consequently, divorce is not accepted. This follows the trend in Britain, because in 1937 only 2 per cent of the marriages ended in divorce (Ryder & Silver 1981: 301). In spite of the problems the married couples may have, divorce is not a normal procedure. One reason is that divorcing and remarrying is seen to affect the children whose family is broken. Colonel Protheroe’s daughter Lettice is constantly wandering from one place to another and is very good at losing things. In addition, she hates her stepmother. Mrs Price Ridley talks about Lettice as follows: “Pity the girl hasn’t got a mother. A stepmother is never the same thing” (MV: 26). Mrs Price Ridley blames the stepmother for what Lettice has become like, or rather that she has not had her own mother to bring her up. A stepmother cannot replace the real mother, and a real mother is the only good mother. At the same time as this example underlines the abnormality of divorce, it shows that it is possible for a woman to divorce.

Adultery is more acceptable in *A Pocket Full of Rye*. Rex Fortescue is married to Adele who is much younger than him, and this has led to the situation that Adele has an affair

with her golf instructor – quite openly. Inspector Neele says that this is a “familiar kind of pattern” (PFR: 21), by which he means that this often happens. Therefore, he later comments that “[i]t may be considered taking rather a risk to marry a woman very much younger than yourself” (PFR: 70). This comment shifts the blame on women suggesting that especially young women are sexually very active and that older men are not capable of satisfying their needs, which is why adultery occurs. Divorce is not talked about, which suggests that it is still seen as abnormal. This correlates with the fact that the number of divorces was lowest in 1958 (Ryder & Silver 1981: 300). It needs to keep in mind that the church’s view is not presented in this novel.

When comparing the two other novels with *Nemesis*, it becomes evident that divorce and remarriage are more common and acceptable in *Nemesis*. One of the solicitors states matter-of-factly to Miss Marple that “Mrs Walters’ name is now Mrs Anderson, by the way. She has re-married” (N: 38). It can be presumed that he would not make a fuss about the matter because of his post, but the statement does not need further explanations either. It is something that can be uttered casually, and Miss Marple does not react in any particular way to his statement.

The most striking thing is that sex is talked about openly for the first time. Miss Marple’s opinion is the following: “There is too much talk about sex, too much attention is paid to it. I do not mean that anything about sex is wrong” (N: 274). She clarifies that “sex cannot take the place of love, it goes *with* love but it cannot succeed by itself. To love means the words of the marriage service. For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health” (N: 274, original italics). She is of the opinion that sex is talked about too much and that it is mixed up with love. Her view on sex is very traditional, but it shows that sex can now be talked about openly.

Sexual norms have changed in *Nemesis*. While sex was seen as part of marriage in the two other novels, especially the young girls are depicted as keen to have sex in *Nemesis*. The girls are depicted as “boy mad” (N: 263). Sex is depicted as occurring often outside marriage, but then leading to marriage if the girl gets pregnant. This is seen as a problem because girls get pregnant at a young age, and there are only two ways to deal



with it: the couple is forced to marry or the girl reports a rape. Miss Marple enlightens how this happens: “Mum tells the girl she’s got to accuse the young man of rape even if the young man hasn’t had much chance, with the girl [...] badgering him until she’s forced him to sleep with her. Then, as I say, mum tells the girl to call it rape” (N: 218–219). Miss Marples’ words show that pregnancies outside marriage are not accepted and that people are ready to stretch their moral boundaries in order to avoid humiliation that the bastard children would bring to the girl’s family. This reveals that the situation has not changed so much compared with the two other novels. The change can be seen only in that sex is now a conversation topic.

#### 4.3.2 Reasons for Crime

In accordance with the genre conventions, murders are included in all the three Miss Marple novels, which gives reason for pondering upon the culprit’s motives. The main reasons that are given are an external cause, mental instability, society and love. The reasons remain the same in all three novels, but the attitude towards the criminal changes. In *The Murder at the Vicarage*, the vicar is seen to be able to cure the evil, in *Nemesis* it is the doctor. The criminals are helped. The role of society remains superficial. Only the world wars are said to have a negative effect on people’s lives whereas otherwise society is not held responsible.

One external cause is brought up in *The Murder at the Vicarage*: drugs. The vicar sees the curate taking headache powder and comes to the following conclusion: “I suddenly wondered whether Hawes might have become addicted to drugs” (MV: 288). The curate has been acting very peculiarly and because the vicar has started to think like a detective owing to him assisting the police with the investigations, drugs seem to be a plausible explanation. The story reveals in the end that the vicar had drawn a hesitant conclusion since Hawes really was sick, but this shows that drugs existed and were misused and therefore could be a reason for criminality. Drugs are not mentioned in the other novels as reasons for criminal activity.

Mental instability is first mentioned in *The Murder at the Vicarage*. The doctor's opinion is that people show signs of mental instability already early on. He gives an example of a girl called Lily Rose who "killed her uncle because he docked her of sweets. Hit him when he was asleep with a coal hammer. Went home and a fortnight later killed her elder sister who had annoyed her about some trifling matter" (MV: 164–165). Even though he paints a very unsettling picture before the reader's eyes, he is of the opinion that these evil deeds are not these children's fault only there is a medical explanation: glands. He gives perfect justifications for his reasoning but he does not explain which glands could have this kind of an affect or how they affect the children, neither how these children could be cured. This shows that there is a need for an explanation for things that are still unknown, and that scientific development is seen to bring about 'the truth'.

Even though it is not possible to cure mental instability in *The Murder at the Vicarage*, the doctor believes that it is possible in the future. The doctor speculates with the vicar about what will happen in the future, and he is of the opinion that crimes can be erased. He says that "I honestly believe crime is a case for the doctor, not the policeman and not the parson. In the future, perhaps, there won't be any such thing. [...] We'll have cured it" (MV: 164). He seems to think that people are not basically evil and that they can be cured thanks to the medical advance. It is the individual who has gone mad, but it is only temporary. Because of his occupation, he naturally stands for the medical view.

Mental instability is still one of the reasons for criminality in *Nemesis* but the attitude towards the criminals has changed. The attitude is more humane and the criminals are given help. Professor Wanstead has studied "the different types of criminal brain" (N: 170) for a long time. Studying the criminal mind is stated here the first time in the examined novels. The professor admits that his studies have aroused divided opinions: "I have written books on the subject, some of the violently disputed, some of them which have attracted adherence to my ideas" (N: 170). This example shows that the scientific approach is not entirely welcomed, but it has its supporters. The professor explains further what he does: "I am consulted fairly soon after whatever the – shall we call it – crime has happened, to judge such matters as treatment, possibilities in the case,

prognosis favourable or unfavourable, all the various words” (N: 175–176). This example shows that the criminal mind is examined and treated which deviates from the procedures in the other novels.

The attitude towards the criminals in *Nemesis* is so humane that the criminals are not punished as in the two other novels. This causes divergent opinions in the public. Miss Marple talks to the housekeeper of the three sisters who says the following: “They say nowadays as there are those as can’t help what they do – not right in the head, and they can’t be held responsible. I don’t believe a word of it! Killers are killers” (N: 138). The common belief seems to be that criminals are mentally ‘sick’, and instead of punishing them, they are cured. The housekeeper does not believe in such a thing. In her eyes some people are just evil and they should be responsible for their actions. Miss Marple seems to think in a similar way: “If you expect me to feel sympathy, regret, urge an unhappy childhood, blame bad environment; if you expect me in fact to weep over him, this young murderer of yours, I do not feel inclined so to do (N: 179). She thinks that people are either good or bad and she does not support the theory that the environment should affect what a human being will become like.

Another reason for criminality is society. The idea is that individuals are basically good but then something happens which is not their fault, and they become ‘wronged’. This means that these individuals can be cured and crime erased. It is the Inspector who mentions in *The Murder at the Vicarage* that maybe society is responsible when he says that “[t]here’s a lot of gentlemen [who] went a bit balmy after the war” (MV: 124). He means the First World War, and the explanation given is simple: “Ever since the war there has been a loosening of moral fibre” (MV: 153). Blaming the war means that society is held responsible. The same mindset is present in *A Pocket Full of Rye*, only this time the number of references are fewer. The war is still seen as something that disrupted people’s lives. Pat Fortescue recalls warmly her childhood “in Ireland, riding, hunting, and a great big, bare draughty house with lots and lots of sun in it... It was afterwards – when I grew up – that things seemed always to go wrong. To begin with, I suppose, it was the war” (PFR: 171). Here, she means the Second World War in which her first husband had died. For her it naturally was the beginning of the downhill.

In *Nemesis*, society is not blamed. Professor Wanstead is of the following opinion: “If people knew the bad environments that people have had, the unkindness, the difficulties of their lives and the fact that nevertheless they can come through unscathed, I don’t think they would so often take the opposite point of view” (N: 179). He believes that the reason for criminality lies in genes: “The misfits are to be pitied, yes, they are to be pitied if I may say so for the genes with which they are born and over which they have no control themselves“ (N: 179). It is no longer glands but genes that are seen to cause criminal behaviour. It is good to bear in mind that it was actually somewhere between the 1960s and the 1970s that genes were discovered.

Lastly, another universal explanation for crimes is love. In *The Murder at the Vicarage* the murders occur because two lovers want to be together and remove the obstacles that hinder their love. In *Nemesis* it is maternal love that drives one of the sisters to murder. Love is so powerful that people are ready to commit crimes because of it. Miss Marple depicts what might happen when love drives people to such deeds: “a man of brutality, who wouldn’t hesitate to bash in a girl’s head after he’d killed her. The kind of man who could be driven frantic with jealousy. There are men like that” (N: 190). Committing crime because of love, passion or jealousy were adequate reasons.

#### 4.3.3 Absence of Punishment

In order to be vindicated, society needs to identify and punish the criminal. The need of punishment is present in all the three novels, which becomes evident through the different offences. However, the act of punishment is absent in every one of them, which is typical of detective fiction novels. The only factors indicating change in society is that the criminals are treated differently and that the capital punishment is abolished during the period the novels were published.

In *The Murder at the Vicarage* it is made clear that punishment is needed. A criminal should be punished when caught, and the law should be the same for all who break it. The Magistrate is of the following opinion: ”It’s all the same to me – no matter what a man is – doctor, lawyer, clergyman, poacher, drunken wastrel – if you catch him on the

wrong side of the law, let the law punish him” (MV: 52). He thinks that criminals should be punished according to the law, and mitigating factors should not be considered (e.g. family that the man has to support). The punishment should be linked with the crime committed.

An example of what society regards as a punishable offence is poaching of which it is possible to get a prison sentence. Archer, the man who is dating Mary, the housekeeper at the vicarage, has been in prison for poaching. Blackmailing is referred to as “a punishable offence” (MV: 187), and it seems that the law has recently been changed: “The law has taken up a very different stand. Every facility is given nowadays to people prosecuting for blackmail – names are not allowed to be reported in the press” (MV: 208). This means that society’s view was changing because the law was altered in order to protect the victims.

It becomes evident that capital punishment, hanging, is used. For example in connection with Colonel Melchett it is said that “[h]e had caught a murderer and he wanted his murderer hanged” (MV: 346). The suspect, Lawrence Redding, confesses terrified that “I don’t want to be hanged” (MV: 229). Hanging is used for murders, and it is a punishment people are afraid of, but it does not prevent them from murdering.

In *A Pocket Full of Rye* the number of references is scarce. According to Miss Marple, punishment is needed. She states that “the wicked should not go unpunished” (PFR: 100), and Inspector Neele answers her that it is “an unfashionable belief nowadays” (PFR: 100) but that he agrees with her. It is because Miss Marple knew one of the victims very well that she is particularly interested in getting the murderer caught, but her thirst for justice makes sense because she is the amateur detective; she wants to find the murderer. Tim Lambert writes in “A Brief History of the death Penalty in England” (2012) that public opinion started to turn against hanging in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Lambert, the reason was that cases of miscarried justice were revealed: it turned out that innocent people had been hanged. Miss Marple utters that in this case, hanging would be an appropriate punishment for murder, but because hanging

is not considered the right way of carrying out punishment, Neele thinks that it is an “unfashionable” idea.

Capital punishment is still used in the novel, but if there is evidence against the mental stability of the murderer, the culprit is instead institutionalized. Inspector Neele is worried about the guilty getting away when he says that “I suppose at the end of it all he’ll [Redding] go to Broadmoor, and we shan’t be able to hang him because he’s crazy” (PFR: 205). Broadmoor is a psychiatric hospital in England. Inspector Neele thinks that Redding may be mentally unbalanced and therefore hospitalised instead of hanged. He is, nevertheless, keen to judge Redding as a murderer who has committed a crime in his full senses and needs to be punished. Inspector Neele’s words point out that the ones in power are ready to murder, and this is because of the hegemonic decision that capital punishment is acceptable.

Punishment is needed in *Nemesis*. Mr Rafiel wants to get the murderer caught because his first priority is to get justice in front of God. In his letter to Miss Marple he quotes the Bible, Amos 5:24: “*Let justice roll down like waters. And righteousness like an everlasting stream*” (N: 41, original italics). He also continues a little later that “[w]hat is involved on my problem is justice. *Either to set right an injustice or to avenge evil by bringing it to justice*” (N: 91, original italics). Mr Rafiel is a businessman who has not shown any interest in religion, which is why the Bible quotations feel out of place. But writing these words as a dying man highlights his desperate need for justice and punishment for the wrongdoer. He wants to set things right for his son, and he believes that justice is possible to achieve: the world will be a better place for his son when evil is found out and erased.

The most drastic change compared with the two other novels is that capital punishment has been abolished: the murderers are not hanged anymore. The death penalty for murder was completely abolished in Great Britain in 1969 (Bromhead 1985: 78). In *Nemesis*, Elizabeth Temple tries to remember what had happened to Mr Rafiel’s son and says that “[t]hey’d abolished hanging by then – or else he was too young. ... It may have been Bostol or Broadsand – one of those places beginning with “B” as they sent

him to” (N: 139). This shows that hanging has been abolished, and before it was totally abolished, it was not applied to people under 18 (Capital punishment 2012).

Instead of using the capital punishment, new procedures are used especially when it comes to minors. Professor Wanstead tells more about this: “There are certain establishments which, in the event of crime, provide board and lodging for certain types of criminal [...]. They remain there [...] for a definite length of time and in direct association with their age” (N: 175). This means that even though criminals are not hanged, they are punished according to their age. Instead of murdering the murderers, society tries to help them.

The criminals and their mental state are examined. Professor Wanstead explains further how he acted with a criminal: “I approached him as a friend but also as an enemy so that I could see how he responded to different approaches, and I also made a good many physical tests, such as we use very frequently nowadays” (N: 181). The criminals are tested both physically and mentally in order to see if the results of these tests could affect the verdict. This is progress because in the first novel the murderer is hanged without further examinations, or at least the reader is not given these details.

The criminals who are mentally unbalanced get treatment, but in some cases, the criminal is beyond help. Professor Wanstead tells how he saw the situation of Mr Rafiel’s son: “If you have a son who is sick morally, shall we say, and for whom there is no cure, I have done what I could” (N: 184). He feels that he had done everything he could with Michael, but it was not enough because he could not cure him. Professor Wanstead explains that “the boy was the kind of criminal type who would never go straight no matter what treatment was given to him, would never reform himself” (N: 180). He thinks that evil cannot be cured even though he has himself tried to cure the criminals. The Archdeacon is of the same opinion. He tells about the situation when he had advised Verity not to get married to Michael because he thought Michael was not good for her: “I warned her [Verity] that that would not happen, he [Michael] would not change. People do not change” (N: 273). Here the scientific and religious opinions seem united: both sides believe that people do not change.

People react to this new way of handling the criminals. They think that some of them get away too easily “with a verdict of diminished responsibility” (N: 219) and that the magistrates are too soft-hearted: “They don’t want to upset a young man’s university career. And so they let them off with a – I forget what they call it – a suspended sentence, something of that kind” (N: 229). The new ideas on criminals and punishment bring about conflicting opinions.



## 5 CONCLUSIONS

This thesis pursued to study how society is presented in three novels by Agatha Christie featuring Miss Marple which follow the conventions of Golden Age of detective fiction. Although socially critical tendencies become pronounced only later in crime fiction, society plays an important role and is a salient part of these classic detective fiction novels.

Another question that was to be answered in this thesis was whether the society represented changes during the series. The answer is simply: yes. England goes through the two world wars, modernisation, urbanisation, population growth, rise of popular cultures and improves means of travel and communication, just to give a few examples, and all these significant changes are represented in the novels. The change was analysed more particularly through three different categories: social, societal and moral change.

Social change can be seen in the diminishing role of the church. The church as an authority and a creator of togetherness is remarkably clearly present in *The Murder at the Vicarage* but neither in *A Pocket Full of Rye* nor in *Nemesis*. Instead, rationality gains ground in *A Pocket Full of Rye* which reveals that after *The Murder at the Vicarage* society is in some kind of an in-between state: there are signs of development but still, a great deal remains to be improved, corresponding to the situation in England in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Social change culminates in society's transformation process which can be seen in infrastructure, urbanisation, mobility, immigration and centralisation. The change also brings out less desirable consequences in the form of alienation of the members of society from each other.

Societal change emerges in the fading of the class boundaries. The different classes are very well presented in *The Murder at the Vicarage* and *A Pocket Full of Rye* depicts the economic growth that occurred after the Second World War by concentrating on the lives of wealthy upper-middle class people and forgetting the lower class. In *Nemesis*, the class differences recede. The strengthening of women's position in society also signals societal change that stems from the patriarchal order visible in *The Murder at*

*the Vicarage* and reaches towards a more equal view presented in *Nemesis*. Societal change is manifested in the fact that society is aging and a new generation is gradually taking over, but the new generation is not greeted with open arms by the older generation, but with a negative attitude and even prejudice.

Moral change is presented in connection with the loosening of sexual norms, reasons for crimes and abolishing the capital punishment. Moral change is not, however, as perceptible as social or societal change.

When looking at the three Miss Marple novels as a whole, it can be constituted that *The Murder at the Vicarage* and *A Pocket Full of Rye* include most of the references to social and societal change whereas *Nemesis* contributes most with references to moral change. Here, it should be noted that *Nemesis* differs from the other two as regards the subject matter. In *Nemesis*, the crime Miss Marple needs to solve is old and it is uncertain whether crime has taken place at all. This is why Miss Marple first has to untangle the mystery, which is why the novel consists of surplus of, especially, moral speculation. The other two novels are more traditional and straightforward in that the crime, murder, is discovered early on after which the investigation process is initiated.

It needs to be reminded that reading and analysing a novel always happen individually, which means that a novel can produce many different interpretations. It would be intriguing to read further studies about whether the findings of this thesis can be applied to other detective fiction novels by other writers and to the contemporary crime fiction novels. It would also be interesting to study in depth why moral change remains so superficial in detective novels even though it is an intrinsic part of them.

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