

## Contrast between the Novels of Agatha Christie and James Patterson

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Paper Received on 01-01-2023, Accepted on 15-02-2023,  
Published on 19-02-23; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2023.8.1.161

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### Abstract:

Crime, mystery, and thriller stories are some of contemporary American literature's most widely read subgenres. The best examples of these types of writing are captivating and mysterious until the very last page is turned. They are consistently found at the top of the bestseller lists published by The New York Times. A significant number of them are the initial entries in more extensive series that continue to enthrall readers. Despite their similarities, thrillers, mysteries, and crime novels are all classified as separate literary subgenres. Each caters to a particular demographic and features its own set of distinctive colloquial expressions. This paper will talk about two authors, and this comparison has proved that each one is unique and quite different as a writer though they do write in the same genre.

Two novelists, Agatha Christie and James Patterson have nothing in common. But they are both detective fiction writers and that too famous and celebrated author of their period, though it is two different periods, ancient and contemporary. The process of comparison can start with the plot lines of their novels. Both in Christie's and Patterson's novels, the plot's direction is the same, with a few differences. A crime or a series of crimes happens, the

police and detectives find out about it and go in search of the wrongdoers with the clues left behind, by finding their motives, profiling them, etc. and finally the killer is revealed, and there is a definite twist when it comes to killers in both their novels. But, there are the plotlines of some books of each author, which are designed differently. Some stories are *Five Little Pigs* and *4:50 From Paddington* by Christie and *1<sup>st</sup> to Die*, *5th Horseman* written by Patterson.

*Five Little Pigs* is a novel about a case that happened sixteen years ago. A famous painter, Amyas Crale, was killed, and his wife, Caroline, was the accused. Caroline, who knew she was innocent, wrote a letter about it to her daughter about all this, and her daughter wanted to find out who did the deed. But, all this seems like her usual way of writing a plot. But the change comes when the reader learns that five people could have done it and all of them have motive as well as opportunity to commit the crime, and she further betters it by likening each suspect to one of the pigs from the five little pigs rhyme. Writing a novel designed around a children's rhyme is challenging, and Christie has done that. The verse goes like this,

This little pig went to market;  
This little pig stayed at home;

This little pig had roast beef;  
And this little pig had none;  
This little pig said, "Wee, wee,  
wee!  
I can't find my way home."

And each of the suspects had characteristics similar to one pig, which is why they were related to it, like Meredith Blake, a quiet, bumbling fellow interested only in Botany. So, he is the pig that stayed at home. And Elsa Greer is a spoiled woman used to getting what she wants. She is greedy and selfish and doesn't care about others, so she is the pig with roast beef. In the same way, the other three suspects also had a characteristic that was similar to the pigs in the rhyme.

*4:50 from Paddington* is the story of a woman witnessing a murder while traveling on the train. Mrs. Mc Gillicuddy was returning to Manchester on a train. During this journey, she saw a horrible event when her train ran parallel to another, and one of the carriages was blind and flew up. The event, as witnessed by her,

Standing with his back to the window, she was a man. His hands were round the throat of a woman who faced him, and he was slowly, remorselessly, strangling her. Her eyes started from their sockets; her face was purple and congested. As Mrs. Mc Gillicuddy watched fascinated, the end came; the body went limp and crumpled in the man's hands. (4:50 from *Paddington* 9).

This description of a crime is different from her usual style, and it is ingenious to think of a crime happening when trains run parallel. In this book, only this part is different from her usual way of writing. The rest of the book follows the same old formula. But imagining such an act shows why she is celebrated as one of the most popular writers even today. Because most writers only try to increase the intensity rather than writing a scene where a person witnesses this inhumane act in a few seconds. This scene makes this book a masterpiece and allows it to go on the list of best detective novels.

*1<sup>st</sup> to Die* is a novel about a serial killer who goes on a murdering spree and kills newly married brides and grooms. It encompasses everything a reader expects from one of Patterson's books- spine-chilling crimes, a killer who is an egoist or a narcissist, and chapters that travel back and forth between the killers and detectives. But, he introduces a new method which can be seen at the end of the book, which leaves the reader baffled. Towards the novel's end, the Bride and Groom killer's identity is confirmed, and it is Chris Jenks, a famous novelist, is arrested because of all the damning evidence. But then he starts to declare that someone has set him up, and the detective believes him and proves he is innocent. Then, suspicion falls on his first wife, who seems like a vengeful character, but they find her dead. So, they start to chase behind the natural killer and find out it is his second wife who was shot dead when she tried to attack the police. But, in the

last chapter, Chris Jenks tells the detective that he is the natural killer, playing a very sick game with his wife, who never fought back, and that he escaped scot-free. There is always a twist expected at the end of a detective fiction novel, but then he twists the twist with another twist and then back twists it going back to the person it began with. Patterson stuffed many twists into a minimal amount of text. For doing this, his innovativeness must be congratulated.

In the novel *5<sup>th</sup> Horseman*, another slice of his genius is visible. He weaves two criminals and their deeds into one book, and these perpetrators are entirely different, even in their motives for killing people. The two criminals are the Night Walker and Louie and Ken. The Night Walker considers herself a person who can end people's suffering, and it doesn't matter to her if they are suffering or on the way to recovery. She saw it as a means to help them. And Louie and Ken are a couple who love killing escorts just for the fun of it. More importance was given to the Night Walker because it caused more of a sensation as it looked like people died because of medical errors, but he does knit the crimes of the homicidal couple along with it. But, the book is designed, so the reader doesn't get confused even when there are two stories inside one book.

Both writers are equally skilled in writing new and innovative plots, and it seems they have everything. But their actions could be better because there are parts from both authors' stories that can be tweaked and made better. But, if their plot could be better and more enjoyable, they

wouldn't become famous and still enjoy a position of prestige among other writers.

The next element that will be compared is the crimes designed by the authors in their books. Corruption can be aptly described by the following line from *The 5<sup>th</sup> Horseman*, "Sometimes a bad wind blows" (140).

A crime is an unlawful act punishable by a state or another authority. This criminal act can mean any offense done against anything, whether it is a human, an animal, or even an object. So, it is viewed as deviant behavior that violates prevailing norms-cultural standards prescribing how humans ought to behave normally. An accepted definition of crime is "An act harmful not only to some individual or individuals but also to a community, society or the state."

A crime is supposed to have three essential elements:

A criminal act is also called an Actus Rea. The Actus Rea is the actual voluntary, deliberate act of a crime. Actus Rea originated from Latin, and it means "guilty act." This indicates that the individual in question must have committed the crime alone without any compulsion from anybody.

A criminal intent, also known as Mens Rea. Mens Rea is the act's intentional, deliberate, and purposeful portion. When translated from Latin, Mens Rea means "guilty mind." This would mean that the criminal wanted to do the show and had no scruples or misgivings.

Concurrence, i.e., to have a crime, the act and the intent must occur at the

same time. There cannot be one without the other. Actus Rea and Mens Rea must coexist, and a crime is performed if it does.

Starting with Christie was in a period when detective fiction began, and there was no proper, set, definite structure to it. Only a few authors had written before her, and though she liked them, she had a mind of her own. In her novels, the crime was not the focus, but the battle between the detective and the criminal and, more importantly, the detection process. The crimes occurring in her novels are, at best, two or three lines long and straightforward. It is like ripping a band-aid off quickly. The reader won't even know it happened. Some examples of criminal acts from her novel,

The woman had been struck down by a heavy blow on the back of the head, probably while she was reaching down. (The ABC Murders 33)

In this instance, a woman was murdered, but the lines make it feel like an evil act, not a heinous crime. The very act of murder is stripped down to its bare essentials, a victim and an object of murder.

The woolen scarf was slipped around her neck and then, suddenly, pulled tight.....

Miss Murgatroyd's mouth opened, but no sound came to a slight choking gurgle.

And the scarf was pulled tighter still.....(A Murder is Announced 295). This shows a definite improvement, as it is from one of her later novels, and she

understood that people's tastes have changed. But it still needs improvement. And it is a fact all her other novels too have similar depictions of crime. And it always ends up needing something.

They are moving on to her worthy opponent, Patterson, who seems to have bettered the formula of depicting a crime. All the crimes in novels have the same elements-violence, intensity, and scaring the living daylights out of people. In just a few lines, Patterson's crimes will make its readers fear for their own lives. He has the gift of turning words on paper into real-life incidents. He does this by writing them so that the reader doesn't need the imagination to picture the crime, and when creativity comes into play, the crimes are intensified. An example from one of his novels,

We finally saw the naked body, at least what was left. There was no clothing visible at the murder scene. The woman had been tied to a small sapling with what appeared to be a thick leather bond. The dead woman was white. It was impossible to tell too much more about her at this time. Birds and animals had been feasting on her, and she almost didn't look human anymore. There were no fixed, staring eyes, just dark sockets like burn marks. She didn't have a face; the skin and tissue had been eaten away. (Kiss the Girls 42).

These lines prove all that has been mentioned above. He can strike fear deep in readers' hearts by using his words. So far, this paper has compared two authors,

proving that each is unique and quite different as writers though they do write in the same genre.

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### How to cite this article?

**P.Kanimozhi, " Contrast between the Novels of Agatha Christie and James Patterson"** Research Journal Of English (RJOE) 8(1), PP:162-166, 2023, DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2023.8.1.166