ARTÍCULOS

Anaquel de **Estudios Árabes**
ISSN-e: 1988-2645

https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/anqe.83976

EDICIONES COMPLUTENSE

Ibrāhīm Aḥmad's *The Harp of Agatha Christie*: Postcolonial and Biofictional Perspectives on Iraq's Post-World War I Past and Post-2003 Present

Adrianna Maśko[1]

Recibido: 29 de septiembre de 2022/ Aceptado: 25 de noviembre de 2022

Abstract. In recent years, several anglophone biographical novels devoted to Agatha Christie have been published. Some of them focus on her 1926 disappearance in England, while others allude to this incident as a significant event from her past. The article investigates Iraqi author Ibrāhīm Aḥmad's *The Harp of Agatha Christie* (2016), an Arabic novel that tells the story of Christie's disappearance in Baghdad in 1949. This novel is considered a postcolonial, postmodern and biographical novel in the article, and thus examined with reference to a number of studies on postcolonial fiction, biofiction and Genette's narratology. Emphasis is placed on its narrative structure and "dual temporality", a term introduced by Michael Lackey to describe how a biographical subject is employed in a narrative as a means for reflecting upon both his or her times and present-day reality. The article seeks answers to the question of how Aḥmad's historical and cultural background impacts his vision of particular events in Christie's life. The article concludes by identifying four diegetic and temporal levels in the novel that resembles a portmanteau narrative. Agatha Christie and the story of her disappearance serve as a pretext to discuss Iraq's post-World War I past and post-2003 present. Several other stories are included in this narrative, all of which involve encounters between representatives of the East and the West.
Keywords: Agatha Christie; postcolonial novel; biofiction; biographical novel; Arabic novel.

[es] *El arpa de Agatha Christie* de Ibrāhīm Aḥmad: perspectivas postcoloniales y de bioficción sobre el pasado de Irak tras la Primera Guerra Mundial y el presente posterior al año 2003

Resumen. En los últimos años se han publicado varias novelas biográficas en inglés dedicadas a Agatha Christie. Algunas de ellas se centran en su desaparición en 1926 en Inglaterra, mientras que otras aluden a este incidente como un hecho significativo de su pasado. El artículo investiga la obra del autor iraquí Ibrāhīm Aḥmad, *El arpa de Agatha Christie* (2016), una novela árabe que narra la desaparición de Christie en Bagdad en 1949. En el artículo se considera esta novela como una novela poscolonial, posmoderna y biográfica, y por ello se hace referencia a una serie de estudios sobre la ficción poscolonial, la bioficción y la narratología de Genette. Se hace hincapié en su estructura narrativa y en la "doble temporalidad", término introducido por Lackey para describir cómo un sujeto biográfico se emplea en una narración como medio para reflexionar tanto sobre su época como sobre la realidad actual. El artículo busca respuestas a la pregunta de cómo el trasfondo histórico y cultural de Aḥmad influye en su visión de determinados acontecimientos de la vida de Christie. Concluye identificando cuatro niveles diegéticos y temporales en la novela semejante a una narración portmanteau. Agatha Christie y la historia de su desaparición sirven de pretexto para hablar del pasado de Irak tras la Primera Guerra Mundial y del presente posterior a 2003. En esta narración se incluyen varias historias más, todas ellas con encuentros entre representantes de Oriente y Occidente.
Palabras clave: Agatha Christie; novela poscolonial; bioficción; novela biográfica; novela árabe.

[1] Institución: Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland.
E-mail: adrianna.masko@amu.edu.pl

Cómo citar: Maśko, Adrianna. "Ibrāhīm Aḥmad's *The Harp of Agatha Christie*: Postcolonial and Biofictional Perspectives on Iraq's Post-World War I Past and Post-2003 Present", *Anaquel de Estudios Árabes* 34/1 (2023), pp. 159-180. https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/anqe.83976

Introducción

In a blog post entitled *The Many Disappearances of Agatha Christie*, James Bernthal-Hooker, a British academic specializing in the famous mystery writer's oeuvre, points to an explosion of novels that fictionalize her. Some of them – along with biographies, films, radio dramas, television programs, etc. – are primarily concerned with Christie's 1926 disappearance[2]. Jared Cade, a British author who has investigated the incident in depth, mentions in the preface to *Agatha Christie and the Eleven Missing Days* that she "mysteriously vanished from her home in Berkshire, England. […] She was found a week and a half later in a luxurious hotel in Harrogate, Yorkshire, reading newspaper accounts of the nationwide search for her"[3]. Although Christie shed some light on her disappearance in interviews she later gave to the press, there have been many doubts about what happened to her in those days. These doubts were not dispelled even after the publication of her autobiography in 1977, because in it she did not see "the need to dwell on" the incident[4]. And so, the event that so roused public opinion more than 90 years ago continues to generate a lot of excitement among the mystery writer's fans around the world, some of whom tirelessly attempt to reconstruct the facts[5].

In the aforesaid blog post, Bernthal-Hooker enumerates – in addition to Christie's own literary reference to the 1926 disappearance, *Unfinished Portrait* written under the pseudonym Mary Westmacott (1934), and Kathleen Tynan's *Agatha: the Agatha Christie Mystery* (1978) – the following recent novels concerned with the event in

---

2 BERNTHAL-HOOKER, James (19 April 2017), "The Many Disappearances of Agatha Christie" [online], JC Bernthal Blog, available at: https://jcbernthal.com/2017/04/19/the-many-disappearances-of-agatha-christie/ [Accessed 6 August 2021].

3 CADE, Jared, *Agatha Christie and the Eleven Missing Days: the Revised and Expanded 2011 Edition*, Scarab eBooks, 2011, p. 11. Much has already been written about that episode in Christie's life. See, e.g., OSBORNE, Charles, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie. A Biographical Companion to the Works of Agatha Christie*, HarperCollins E-Books, 2000, pp. 58-63; YOUNG, Laurel, "The Mystery of the Vanishing Wife", in *Living with a Writer*, Dale Salwak (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 176-183; NORMAN, Andrew, *Agatha Christie. The Finished Portrait*, Stroud: The History Press (e-book), 2010, pp. 80-92, 99-116; THOMPSON, Laura, *Agatha Christie. A Mysterious Life*, New York-London: Pegasus Books (e-book), 2018, pp. 183-252; and STREET, Sarah, "Re-Writing the Past, Autobiography and Celebrity in Agatha (1979): 'An Imaginary Solution to an Authentic Mystery'", *Open Screens* 3/1 (2020), pp. 1-30 [online], available at: https://www.openscreensjournal.com/article/id/6928/ [Accessed 20 July 2021], pp. 1-4.

4 CHRISTIE, Agatha, *An Autobiography*, HarperCollins e-Books, 2010, p. 354. See also OSBORNE, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*, p. 63; CADE, *Agatha Christie*, p. 172; and STREET, "Re-Writing the Past", p. 3.

5 For more see OSBORNE, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*, p. 63; NORMAN, *Agatha Christie*, pp. 93-98; CADE, *Agatha Christie*, pp. 117, 126, 172; and THOMPSON, *Agatha Christie*, pp. 249-250.

greater or lesser detail: *Silence and Circumstance* (2015) by Roy Dimond, *The Woman on the Orient Express* (2016) by Lindsay Jane Ashford, *On the Blue Train* (2016) by Kristel Thornell, and *A Talent for Murder* (2017) by Andrew Wilson. With respect to these and other works mentioned in the post, the British researcher remarks that "The many ways in which the disappearance has been 'used' form a strong illustration of Christie's appeal: through her writing, she has become all things to all people (…) she is what we want her to be"[6].

However, literary interest in the world's most acclaimed detective story author and the mystery behind the days she went missing reaches beyond anglophone fiction, and here I would like to present the example of *The Harp of Agatha Christie* (*Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, 2016) by the Iraqi writer Ibrāḥīm Aḥmad[7]. As compared with most of the works mentioned above, the Arabic novel recounts yet another disappearance of the Queen of Crime, a fictitious one in Baghdad in 1949. Similarly to Ashford's *The Woman on the Orient Express*, Aḥmad's literary text places Agatha Christie in the Middle East and relates some biographical facts connected with the years she spent with her second husband, Max Mallowan, in that part of the world. Unlike the anglophone novel, however, *The Harp of Agatha Christie* does not depict the Orient solely as a picturesque scenery in which the adventures of the heroine unfold, as it also outlines Iraq's socio-political reality in the late 1940s. What is more, Aḥmad's novel does not present Arabs merely as unvoiced secondary characters observed by her and other Western protagonists[8].

In the present article, I will consider *The Harp of Agatha Christie* a postcolonial (and postmodern) work of fiction. According to Monika Fludernik, "Postcolonial fiction does not define itself by the use of certain techniques but by the deployment of strategies that allow a critical or ironic perspective on (neo)colonialism and by the assertion of indigenous values, languages, myths, history, and traditions"[9]. Fludernik also writes that postcolonial novels give "postcolonial protagonists, attitudes and interests greater space to the reduction and even elimination of European or North American values and views"[10].

In addition, Aḥmad's work can be identified as being representative of Iraqi post-2003 narratives[11]. Haytham Bahoora explains that Iraqi novels written after the

---

6 BERNTHAL-HOOKER, "The Many Disappearances".

7 Ibrāḥīm Aḥmad was born in Al-Anbār Governorate in 1946. He studied law. In the 1960s and 1970s, he published a large number of articles in Iraqi journals and two collections of short stories that were censored after he left his homeland in 1979. Aḥmad lived first in Algeria, then in Hungary, and finally settled in Sweden in 1989. He continued writing articles for Arabic journals based in various countries. He has also authored several novels and collections of short stories, which were translated into many languages, including English, German, Swedish, Russian, Norwegian, and Danish. See AḤMAD, Ibrāhīm, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, ʿAmmān: Dār al-ʿArab li-l-Našr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 2016, pp. 79-80.

8 See, e.g., chapters 11 and 12 in Ashford's novel, in which the travel of three English women through what is today Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq is narrated: ASHFORD, Lindsay Jane, *The Woman on the Orient Express*, Lake Union Publishing, 2016, pp. 107-116, 121-127.

9 FLUDERNIK, Monika, "The Narrative Forms of Postcolonial Fiction", in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Fiction*, Ato Quayson (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 932.

10 FLUDERNIK, "The Narrative Forms of Postcolonial Fiction", p. 932.

11 Some researchers use the term "the Iraqi postcolonial novel" with regard to novels written after 2003. See HAMEDAWI, Shayma, "The Postcolonial Iraqi Novel: Themes and Sources of Inspiration", *Babel. Littératures plurielles* 36 (2017), pp. 211-228 [online], available at: https://journals.openedition.org/babel/5043 [Accessed 3 December 2022] (DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/babel.5043); MHOODAR, Rana Ali and MHOODAR, Tahseen Ali, "Postcolonial Iraqi Novels and Their Theoretical Implications", *Maŷallat Abḥāt Maysān* 33 (2021), pp. 309-318 [online], available at: https://www.iasj.net/iasj/download/e08e9067bef4517b [Accessed 3 December 2022].

US-led invasion cover a wide range of topics, "including the decades of Saddam Hussein's destructive rule, (…) the rise of a pervasive and destructive sectarianism, the presence of American occupation troops in the country," and numerous other painful experiences shared by millions of Iraqis[12]. The researcher likewise argues that "In many novels, the post-2003 period in Iraq is narrated as a culmination of many decades of political repression and war, interweaving the past and present." These works therefore not only describe "the difficult conditions of contemporary Iraq" but also "reconstruct and rewrite the Iraqi past"[13]. Similarly, Yasmeen Hanoosh claims that the post-invasion novels "interrogate and deconstruct Iraq's cultural formations and initiate a new multifaceted reading of Iraqi identity"[14]. This is why several Iraqi intellectuals perceive these novels as alternative historical and socio-cultural narratives[15]. Moreover, it should be emphasized, that Iraqi novels written after the ouster of Hussein's brutal regime deploy various (and often experimental) literary styles and thus are not always easy to classify[16].

In my analysis, I will also regard Aḥmad's work as a biographical novel. This genre has grown in world literature to a notable literary form in the last three deca-

---

Other academics prefer the umbrella term "the contemporary Iraqi novel". See JUBAIR, Ahmed Karyosh and BIN ABDU, Abdul Ghani, "Contemporary Iraqi Novel: Abundant Production and New Trends", *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation* 2/6 (2019) [online], available at: https://al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/ijllt/article/view/502 [Accessed 4 December 2022] (DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2019.2.6.29).
In recent years, other terms related to the post-invasion fiction, including "the new Iraqi novel" and "the Iraqi novel after the change", have been also widely discussed among Iraqi intellectuals. See ḌIYĀB, Ṣafā' (15 April 2014), "Taḥawwulāt al-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya wa-l-tagīīr" [online], *Ṯaqāfāt*, available at: https://thaqafat.com/2014/04/23037 [Accessed 1 December 2022]; ḌIYĀB, Ṣafā', "Al-Riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya… bayna al-taḥdīṯ wa-l-tabaʿiyya al-klāsikiyya" [online], *Al-Binā'*, available at: https://www.al-binaa.com/archives/article/50358 [Accessed 2 December 2022]; ḤASAN, ʿAbd ʿAli (16 June 2020), "Tawṣīfāt al-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya al-muʿāṣira" [online], *Al-Ṣabāḥ al-Ŷadīd*, available at: http://newsabah.com/newspaper/240601 [Accessed 2 December 2022].

12 BAHOORA, Haytham, "Iraq", in *The Oxford Handbook of Arab Novelistic Traditions*, Waïl S. Hassan (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 259 (DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199349791.001.0001). For more on themes debated in post-2003 Iraqi novels see HAMEDAWI, "The Postcolonial Iraqi Novel"; JUBAIR and BIN ABDU, "Contemporary Iraqi Novel", pp. 250-254; IBRĀHĪM, Salām (4 March 2019), "Al-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya raṣadat al-jarāb al-ʿirāqī fī azmān al-dīktātūriyya, wa-l-ḥurūb wa-l-iḥtilāl wa-ṣulṭat al-ṭawā'if" [online], *Al-Nāqid al-ʿIrāqī*, available at: https://www.alnaked-aliraqi.net/article/61287.php [Accessed 1 December 2022]; MHOODAR and MHOODAR, "Postcolonial Iraqi Novels and Their Theoretical Implications", pp. 309-310, 312-313.

13 BAHOORA, "Iraq", p. 260.

14 HANOOSH, Yasmeen (1 April 2013), "Beyond the Trauma of War: Iraqi Literature Today" [online], *Words Without Borders*, available at: https://wordswithoutborders.org/read/article/2013-04/beyond-the-trauma-of-war-iraqi-literature-today/ [Accessed 2 December 2022].

15 For more see ḌIYĀB, "Taḥawwulāt al-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya wa-l-tagīīr"; AL-RABĪʿĪ, Zaydān (9 March 2015), "Al-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya fī qalb al-nār" [online], *Mulḥaq al-Jalīŷ al-Ṯaqāfī*, available at: https://www.alkhaleej.ae/ملحق/الرواية-العراقية-في-قلب-النار [Accessed 2 December 2022]; IBRĀHĪM, Salām (18 April 2021), "Afkār ḥawla al-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya" [online], *Al-Ḥiwār al-Mutamaddin*, available at: https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=715870.

16 For more on different literary styles used in post-2003 Iraqi novels, see AL-ŠABĪBĪ, Ŷamīl (28 December 2014), "Al-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya baʿda al-tagīīr 2003. Taʿāluq al-faḍā' al-tasŷīlī wa-l-tajīīlī" [online], *Al-Ḥiwār al-Mutamaddin*, available at: https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=447957; BAHOORA, "Iraq", pp. 259-260; ḌIYĀB, "Taḥawwulāt al-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya wa-l-tagīīr"; HAMEDAWI, "The Postcolonial Iraqi Novel"; SAʿDŪN, Nādiya Hanāwī (26 March 2017), "Taḥawwulāt al-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya fī marḥalat mā baʿda al-tagīīr" [online], *Al-Quds al-ʿArabī*, available at: https://www.alquds.co.uk%EF%BB%BF-2تحولات-الرواية-العراقية-في-مرحلة-ما [Accessed 1 December 2022].

des, even though it appeared much earlier[17]. In the realm of post-2003 Iraqi fiction, it likewise seems to be gaining in importance since we can find other literary works centered on historical figures, some of whom have left their indelible mark on Iraq's modern history[18]. Bellow, I would like to clarify why it is worth to examine Aḥmad's fictional text by employing a biofictional perspective.

For Julia Novak, "Biographical fiction – or 'biofiction' – is a narrative based on the life of a historical person, weaving biographical fact into what must otherwise be considered a novel"[19]. According to Michael Lackey, biofiction can be briefly characterized as "literature that names its protagonist after an actual biographical figure"[20]. In his view, a biographical novel constitutes a genre that is clearly distinct from both biography and the historical novel. It does not pretend to reveal the truth about past events or historical figures, but instead offers new possibilities for seeing both of these symbolically[21]. "What we get in a biographical novel is the novelist's vision of life and the world, and not an accurate representation of an actual person's life," as Lackey puts it[22]. In contrast to a historian or biographer, a novelist can imaginatively manipulate selected facts to combine them with non-factual elements[23].

The fictional nature of narratives involving real persons is often emphasized by their authors in paratexts[24]. However, Ibrāḥīm Aḥmad does not provide his readers with information about how he carried out his research in writing *The Harp of Agatha Christie*. The Iraqi author does not explain in a paratext how some factual

---

17 See LACKEY, Michael, "Locating and Defining Bio in Biofiction", *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 31/1 (2016), p. 8 (DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2016.1095583); LACKEY, Michael, *The American Biographical Novel*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016, pp. 1-33.

18 In 2003, a novel about Saddam Hussein was published by an unknown author under the pseudonym Mahdī Ḥaydar. *ʿĀlam Ṣaddām Ḥussayn* (The World of Saddam Hussein) opens with the Iraqi dictator sleeping in an underground shelter during a bombardment of Baghdad in 1991 and dreaming about his childhood in a village near Tikrit. For more see: ḤAYDAR, Mahdī, *ʿĀlam Ṣaddām Ḥussayn*, Köln: Al-Kamel Verlag, 2003; NAGGAR, Mona (April 2003), "Cruelty and Strength" [online], Worldpress.org, available at: https://www.worldpress.org/europe/1002.cfm (from *World Press Review* (50/4 April 2003)). *Jātūn Bagdād* (The Lady of Baghdad, 2017) by Šākir Nūrī can also serve as a good example of this genre. The novel revolves around the character of Gertrude Bell, an icon of British Orientalism, and draws on her earlier media representations. It sheds light on both the heroine's attitude towards her colonial mission in Iraq and the country's inhabitants, and Iraqi characters' perceptions of Bell. For more see NŪRĪ, Šākir, *Jātūn Bagdād*, Bagdād: Dār Suṭūr, 2017 (e-Book); AL OQAILI, Jafar (28 February 2018), "Shakir Noori: "Literature Creates Legends… and Legends Create Literature"' [online], *Nasher*, available at: https://nasher-news.com/Shakir-Noori-literature-creates-legends-and-legends-create-literature/ [Accessed 20 July 2021].

19 NOVAK, Julia, "Experiments in Life-Writing: Introduction", in *Experiments in Life-Writing. Intersections of Auto/Biography and Fiction*, Lucia Boldrini and Julia Novak (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 9.

20 LACKEY, "Locating and Defining Bio", p. 3.

21 LACKEY, "Locating and Defining Bio", p. 5; LACKEY, *The American Biographical Novel*, pp. 13, 20; and LACKEY, Michael, "Death-Bringing History and the Origins of Biofiction", in *Biofiction and Writers' Afterlives*, Bethany Lane (ed.), Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020, pp. 18-25. See also NOVAK, "Experiments in Life-Writing", pp. 10-11; CYMBRYKIEWICZ, Joanna, *Biografia jako pretekst. Modele współczesnych duńskich biofikcji*, Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland, 2019 [online], pp. 27-29, 37-39, available at: https://repozytorium.amu.edu.pl/handle/10593/24508 [Accessed 17 June 2021]; and CHRISTENSEN, Henrik, *We Call upon the Author. Contemporary Biofiction and Fyodor Dostoevsky* (Ph. D. Thesis, Stockholm University), Stockholm, 2021 [online], pp. 20-22, available at: http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1516107&dswid=-15 [Accessed 15 August 2021].

22 LACKEY, *The American Biographical Novel*, p. 20.

23 See NOVAK, Julia, "Biographical Fiction to Historiographic Metafiction: Rewriting Clara Schuman", *Brno Studies in English* 37/2 (2011), pp. 146-147 [online], available at: https://digilib.phil.muni.cz/handle/11222.digilib/118146 [Accessed 15 July 2021]; and NOVAK, "Experiments in Life-Writing", p. 7.

24 CYMBRYKIEWICZ, *Biografia jako pretekst*, p. 32.

elements he referred to are intermingled with fictional ones in his novel. In a conversation with Salām Ibrāhīm, a well-known Iraqi writer and researcher, he even denied that he had relied heavily on historical facts, except for some essential ones[25]. Nonetheless, it is hard to resist the impression that he must have read a large number of studies on Agatha Christie, including her autobiography, along with studies devoted to other historical figures (and in some cases their own publications), who became protagonists in his literary work.

What distinguishes biographical novels is their dual temporal approach. This means that they often use biographical subjects to simultaneously reflect upon two-time dimensions, as Michael Lackey argues[26]. "While the novel gives readers a vivid and compelling vision of the past, it does so in order to tell us something substantive and relevant about the present," he writes[27]. According to him, biofiction in which "a biographical figure is converted into a cross-temporal symbol"[28], "enables general readers to connect with history in meaningful but less demanding ways"[29]. Among many questions Lackey asks in this respect, is the following: "How do authors' historical and cultural orientations impact their portraits of a biographical subject?"[30]

This question is of special relevance as far as this article is concerned. To answer it, I will follow Joanna Cymbrykiewicz, who examined several Danish biographical novels in terms of their pretextuality[31]. In her view, biofiction constitutes a pretext for an author "to present his or her vision of a protagonist and to highlight issues connecting the past he creates with the present"[32]. By utilizing Lackey's category of a literary figure as a cross-temporal symbol, the Polish academic scrutinizes how a protagonist becomes an emblem, a vehicle for messages vital both in the "past" depicted in a work and the "present time" of its writing[33]. While pondering how a historical figure is fictionalized in a biographical novel, Cymbrykiewicz refers to the categories of "narrative modes" (moods) and "focus" (focalization) defined by Gérard Genette, and "polyphony" as coined by Mikhail Bakhtin. An analysis of narrative modes and focalization can be helpful in grasping the dual temporality of a literary text, according to her[34].

The purpose of this article is, therefore, to look at *The Harp of Agatha Christie* from both postcolonial and biofictional perspectives. On the one hand, my intention is to show how Ibrāḥīm Aḥmad discusses (neo)colonialism in Iraq in his fictional work. On the other hand, I will try to consider how the author's historical and cultural orientation affects his literary image of Agatha Christie and the story of her disappearance. I aim to elucidate how this historical figure becomes a "cross-temporal symbol" relating to Iraq's past and present. In the main section of the article, I will

---

25 IBRĀHĪM, Salām (24 July 2020), "Wuŷhat naẓar: "Qiṭārat Aŷāṭā Krīstī" riwāyat al-ʿirāqī Ibrāhīm Aḥmad" [online], Al-Nāqid al-ʿIrāqī, available at: https://www.alnaked-aliraqi.net/article/80747.php [Accessed 11 August 2021].

26 LACKEY, "Locating and Defining Bio", pp. 8-9.

27 Ibid., p. 179.

28 Ibid., p. 167.

29 Ibid., p. 226.

30 LACKEY, Michael, "The Futures of Biofiction Studies", *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 32/2 (2017), p. 344 (DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2017.1288978).

31 CYMBRYKIEWICZ, *Biografia jako pretekst*, pp. 5, 7-8.

32 Ibid., p. 41.

33 Ibid., p. 43.

34 Ibid., pp. 33, 42-44.

scrutinize the narrative structure of the novel by highlighting some of its postmodern (and postcolonial) features and drawing on Gérard Genette's narratology. In this descriptive section, Agatha Christie and other protagonists will be exhaustively presented. It will be followed by some concluding remarks.

1. *The Harp of Agatha Christie* as a Portmanteau Narrative

The Harp of Agatha Christie can be considered postmodern experimental fiction by virtue of its complex temporal structure, multiple story lines, and changing narrative voices. In this Arabic novel, composed of 80 chapters, the linearity of events is distorted in the sense that the present-day chapters (chapters 2-4, 78-80) are interspersed with chapters centered on the past. Furthermore, both in the former and latter chapters, retrospection is used. Most notably, the story told in the present-day chapters serves as a framework into which stories from the past are inserted on several intersecting temporal levels, giving the impression of a portmanteau narrative[35]. Below, I will examine Aḥmad's fictional work in terms of multi-levelled diegesis that usually consists of – in line with Genette's theory – three diegetic levels: extradiegetic, intradiegetic, and metadiegetic[36].

1.1. The Story of an Exiled Iraqi Author

In the present-day chapters, the first-person narrator introduces himself as an exiled Iraqi author who has returned to his homeland after spending twenty eight years in Sweden. He was forced to flee Iraq in 1979 after having been arrested for being a purported communist. What he finds in Baghdad in 2007 is chaos caused by sectarian strife, epitomized by the dead bodies of random victims lying on the streets, ruined historic buildings, barbed wire, soldiers with guns, men wearing black turbans, checkpoints, explosions, suicide bombers, and many other elements of the country's post-2003 reality. In such circumstances, the narrator feels trapped. On the one hand, he would like to depart this unsafe place where, on top of everything else, he is treated as an outsider, especially by those intellectuals who stayed in Iraq during the era of Ba'ath party rule. On the other hand, he cannot imagine emigrating once again and leaving his older sister alone in their family home and abandoning his beloved, with whom he has been reunited after several decades. For him, exile would be worse than death. And so, while isolating himself from the grim world outside, he immerses himself in his memories and thoughts. The repatriate likewise works on a novel on Agatha Christie, a chapter of which he wrote from memory many years ago in Sweden[37].

Before the narrator fled Iraq, he had befriended the elderly caretaker of an old Turkish building in the Karrādat Maryam neighborhood, known as the house of

---

35 See NOVAK, "Experiments in Life-Writing", p. 16.

36 GENETTE, Gérard, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*, trans. J. E. Lewin, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980, pp. 227-234. See also PUCKETT, Kent, *Narrative Theory. A Critical Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 269-270.

37 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 14-15, 27, 29-30, 365-369.

king ʿAlī, where the British Archeological Expedition was based since 1946[38]. The caretaker showed the captivated young man all of its rooms and the archeological artifacts stored in them, and told him numerous stories about living there with Max Mallowan and Agatha Christie in the late 1940s. One day, the caretaker recounted an incident that echoed throughout Baghdad – the distinguished writer had disappeared from the Tigris Palace Hotel in spring 1949 for several days. Moreover, the old man gave the narrator Agatha Christie's type-written notes, in which she mentioned Wilfred Thesiger, a renowned British explorer, along with her diaries and some pages of her unpublished novel. There were also notes written by Mallowan and Thesiger and letters the latter wrote to Agatha Christie. The narrator hid most of the documents in his old friend's house and could not recover them until almost thirty years after, facing difficulties and risks along the way[39].

In an interior monologue, the Iraqi author meditates on why he is so determined to write a novel focused on Agatha Christie's disappearance in Baghdad in the post-World War II period. This does not seem to be an appropriate topic in the face of the horrifying post-2003 reality in which a writer should devote his undivided attention to the many victims whose bodies were piled up on the capital's streets. Is it a form of escape to those long bygone days, to beautiful places he remembers that have been turned into ruins (*aṭlāl*) in Baghdad? Or maybe to restore memory as a means for him to be free? And perhaps this is a means for searching for himself? In a conversation, the narrator hears from a friend that he was not wrong in choosing Baghdad in the 1940s as the set of his novel, since there is no way to escape from present-day Iraq other than to Iraq of the past. In fact, as the friend concludes, Iraqis are still living the same historic plight. The narrator, on his part, reveals to his friend the meaning behind the title of the novel by saying that melodies played on harp are the melodies of Iraq's tragic past. In his soliloquy, the narrator states that what is happening in his country now is a consequence of what has been happening there for decades[40].

The narrator also compares the crimes depicted in Christie's detective stories to those Iraq is witnessing nowadays. In the novels created by the Queen of Crime, there is usually one murderer hunted by investigators. In his homeland tormented by the civil war, there are thousands of unknown killers who do not comprehend why they kill and thousands of victims who will not know why they were killed. The time of Christie's "small crimes" is gone, he says. The time of "great crimes" has come, a time when people turn into bombs to exterminate innocent others. These suicide bombers are likewise victims in a way, while the real killers are somewhere else, he notes[41].

In telling his own life story, the Iraqi author thus performs the function of a homodiegetic and intradiegetic narrating instance of the lowest diegetic level[42]. Additionally, his frame narrative (about his return to Iraq in 2007), which encompasses subordinate temporal levels, or "analepses" (his life in Iraq in the 1970s and Swedish exile)[43], can be seen as a "quest narrative" because he seeks to regain the above-men-

---

38 See CHRISTIE, *An Autobiography*, p. 531 and JABRA, Ibrahim Jabra, *Princesses' Street: Baghdad Memories*, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2005, pp. 35-36.

39 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 16-21, 27-29, 33-34, 360, 370-376.

40 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 16, 28, 30, 34, 374, 376-377.

41 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 358-361.

42 See GENETTE, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 245, 248.

43 See GENETTE, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 47-64.

tioned documents to complete his novel[44]. Indeed, these documents seem to be the primary source of the stories recounted on higher diegetic levels. The first of these levels, covering the circumstances surrounding Agatha Christie's disappearance in 1949, may be identified as the main line of action, or "the first narrative"[45]. On this diegetic level, the Iraqi author becomes a third-person heterodiegetic and extradiegetic narrating instance[46]. Yet, he also frequently employs variable internal focalization and sheds light on the events through the prism of several characters' thoughts[47].

1.2. The Stories of Max Mallowan and Several Iraqis

Max Mallowan becomes both the main protagonist and focaliser of the second diegetic level, i.e. the first narrative. The narrator introduces this character when he wakes up in a hotel room and does not see Agatha Christie by his side. Mallowan initially thinks that his wife has gone for her customary morning stroll, but he grows concerned when she does not return. After hours of searching for her in places she often visited, including their house in the Karrādat Maryam neighborhood, he concludes in horror that she was probably kidnapped for political reasons. He decides to inform the British embassy staff and the Iraqi authorities. He is asked to stay close to the Tigris Palace Hotel during the search for his wife. In the hotel, he is questioned by Iraqi police officers and meets a befriended British embassy official and Iraqi journalists, writers, and poets seeking to console him after having heard the news[48]. He likewise stays in contact with other Iraqi intellectuals, who are eager to help in the search because they believe that "Agatha Christie does not belong exclusively to the Englishmen but the Iraqis and humanity as well"[49].

Over several days of waiting and worrying, Mallowan meditates on his life with Christie, recalling facts from her past, including her 1926 disappearance[50] and conversations they had held on various topics. The protagonist thereby dwells on their love[51] and their shared devotion to archeology, as well as Agatha's everyday activities in Baghdad, her passion for writing, the things she liked to do in Iraq, the places

---

44 See NOVAK, "Experiments in Life-Writing", p. 17.

45 See GENETTE, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 80.

46 See GENETTE, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 243-245.

47 See GENETTE, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 189-194.

48 The latter characters are historical figures: the esteemed Palestinian-Iraqi author Ŷabrā Ibrāhīm Ŷabrā (1919-1994), the Iraqi poet Badr Šākir al-Sayyāb (1926-1964), as well as the Iraqi poet Ḥusayn Mardān (1927-1972) whom Max Mallowan meets in the company of the other two in a cafe. It is worth mentioning that Ŷabrā described his first encounter with Max Mallowan and Agatha Christie in his memoirs, and his visit to their house in the Karrādat Maryam neighborhood in 1949. He also recalled his stay at the excavation site in al-Nimrūd, where he met them again in 1951, and a conversation with Agatha Christie in Baghdad in the early 1960s. See JABRA, Ibrahim Jabra, *Princesses' Street*, pp. 33-45.

49 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, p. 14.

50 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 43-44.

51 Their love is idealized in Aḥmad's novel. This corresponds with the following words from Christie's *Autobiography*: "Nothing could be further apart than our work. I am a lowbrow and he a highbrow, yet we complement each other, I think, and have both helped each other" (see CHRISTIE, *An Autobiography*, p. 526), and the following words from *Mallowan's Memoirs*: "Four years later Agatha married again and we have experienced together the joys of a companionship which has grown and matured over the forty-five years of our union" (see MALLOWAN, Max, *Mallowan's Memoirs. The Autobiography of Max Mallowan*, Dodd, Mead & Company, 1977, p. 201). In some of Christie's biographies, their marriage is also described as happy. See NORMAN, *Agatha Christie*, p. 161. Jared Cade, for his part, maintains that it was so in its first two decades (see CADE, *Agatha Christie*, pp. 138-142, 147, 150-168). Later on, as Cade argues with another Christie's biographer,

to which she dreamed of travelling in the Middle East, and other things[52]. When wondering to what extent the investigation led by the Iraqis is politicized, Mallowan reflects upon the hostile attitude some inhabitants of Iraq have taken to British citizens due to his country's pro-Jewish politics in Palestine. But he and his wife do not perceive Iraqis in a negative way, he muses. On the contrary, they feel well welcome in Iraq. And they do not want to steal precious archeological artifacts, as German archeologists did during World War I. By helping in the excavation of ancient relics, Max and Agatha wish to help Iraqis discover their great history and make them aware that they are the proud heirs of Mesopotamia's glorious civilizations[53]. In turn, Mallowan hears from the acclaimed poet Badr Šākir al-Sayyāb, one of the young Iraqi intellectuals visiting him in the hotel, that he and his wife are much appreciated by those Iraqis who can distinguish between exploiting Western colonizers and the progressive Western intelligentsia[54].

Furthermore, in his desperate pursuit for the answer to where Agatha might be, Max goes through his wife's hand-written and typed notes. He finds a note about an excavated golden Sumerian harp and reads a fragment out loud whereby she imagines ancient people playing on it. He remembers that she had been dreaming of writing a novel in which the present merges with the past. At one point, his attention is attracted to a file labelled *The Disappearance of Wilfred Thesiger in the Rub' al-Khali: an Adventure among the Arab Tribes of the Persian Gulf*. He notices Agatha's dedication: "For Wilfred Thesiger searching for the Girl from the Marshes (*bint al-Maʿīdī*)." The protagonist then recollects their encounter with the admired explorer on the first day of their stay at the Tigris Palace Hotel and Thesiger's earlier visit to the Expedition House. At that time, Wilfred asked Agatha to write a novel about him, and she, in turn, asked him to write down his memories, which would be instrumental in creating her narrative. What is more, the married couple later spent a week in the Marshes (*Al-Ahwār*), the wetlands of Southern Iraq, where Thesiger resided among members of the local tribes[55]. When pondering these facts and experiencing a growing restlessness at the prospect of Agatha's potential love affair and escape, Max delves into Thesiger's notes[56].

The second diegetic level is also focalized through several Iraqi characters participating in the search, which gives readers some idea of the socio-political situation in the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq in the late 1940s. First, the third-person narrating instance depicts a conversation between an English ambassador and the Iraqi prime minister, Nūrī al-Saʿīd, about the alleged kidnapping of Agatha Christie. After their meeting, al-Saʿīd wonders in his internal monologue if the kidnappers would demand he to turn off the oil pipelines and close Nuqrat al-Salmān prison, where mainly political prisoners were detained, to ruin the country's reputation in the world. He thus demands his subordinates search for the vanished woman and secure the bor-

---

Laura Thompson, this relationship was not as ideal as it is commonly believed, due to Mallowan's long-lasting romance with his co-worker, whom he married after Agatha's death (see CADE, *Agatha Christie*, pp. 169-212).

52 AḤMAD, *Qīṭārat Aŷāṭā Krīstī*, pp. 5-14, 35-57, 71-82, 129-140.

53 AḤMAD, *Qīṭārat Aŷāṭā Krīstī*, pp. 40-41, 72, 144, 262-263, 339-340.

54 AḤMAD, *Qīṭārat Aŷāṭā Krīstī*, p. 133.

55 It should be pointed out that Thesiger first came to the Marshes in 1950. See THESIGER, Wilfred, "The Marshmen of Southern Iraq", *The Geographical Journal* 120/3 (1954), p. 273. He met Agatha Christie and Max Mallowan in May 1950 while visiting the excavations at al-Nimrūd in Northern Iraq. See MAITLAND, Alexander, *Wilfred Thesiger. The Life of the Great Explorer*, Harper Perennial, 2010, p. 308.

56 AḤMAD, *Qīṭārat Aŷāṭā Krīstī*, pp. 71-76, 83-94.

ders in an effort to avoid showing Iraq's weakness to his British partner[57]. Second, the extradiegetic and heterodiegetic narrator concentrates on the deeds and thoughts of ʿAṭiyya, the chief of Iraq's secret services, who believes that the celebrated writer was kidnapped by members of the Iraqi Communist Party, which was striving to rid Iraq of British domination and make the country dependent on the Soviet Union[58]. Consumed with personal hatred and a desire to take revenge against the leader of Iraqi communists, Comrade Fahd, ʿAṭiyya orders his subordinates to conduct a manhunt for party members hiding in Baghdad. He likewise demands the arrest of citizens who have criticized the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1948 and British participation in the Partition of Palestine in 1947[59].

The narrator next presents Jālid Samīr, a young detective and enthusiast of Christie's mysteries, whom Max and Agatha had encountered in northern Iraq several years earlier. The detective monitors how the Iraqi press covers Agatha's disappearance. Some newspapers call her a British spy who, together with her husband, digs tunnels leading to Iraqi military bases under cover of excavating archeological artifacts. Other newspapers, in turn, argue that her disappearance is being exploited in the nationalist campaign against Iraqi communists. Being aware that none of these narratives will lead him to the truth, Jālid Samīr meets with Max Mallowan, who gives him some of his wife's documents he found in the hotel room. The detective starts to read Agatha's notes, searching for a clue. His attention is drawn to her description of a Sumerian harp and a mention that she wished to write a novel in which she would be a ghost coming from the future to those ancient Sumerian times. Seven days after her vanishing, as the third-person narrator relates, Jālid visits Max in the hotel and asks where the Sumerian harp is. They both go to the Expedition House, where they find the missing heroine. She has been hiding there to create a text inspired by the ancient instrument. In the novel she wrote during those days of self-imposed isolation, she combined stories about the Sumerian harp, Wilfred Thesiger, and the Girl from the Marshes. The inspector suggests that the work be entitled *The Golden Harp of Agatha Christie*[60].

1.3. The Stories of Agatha Christie and Wilfred Thesiger

Max Mallowan and Jālid Samīr give voice to Agatha Christie and Wilfred Thesiger while reading their notes and commenting on their words. Hence, both the Queen of Crime and the explorer of Rubʿ al-Jālī and the Iraqi Marshes become homodiegetic and intradiegetic narrating instances of the third diegetic level. Their own stories may be seen as analepses inserted into the main narrative of the 1949 disappearance.

---

57 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 47-50, 57-58. On the role Nūrī al-Saʿīd played in Iraqi politics in the 1940s, see TRIPP, Charles, *The History of Iraq*, third edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 105-107, 114-117.

58 On activities of the Iraqi Communist Party at that time, see TRIPP, *The History of Iraq*, pp. 111-114; THOMPSON, Elizabeth F., "The 1948 Wathba Revisited: Comrade Fahd and the Mass Appeal of Iraqi Communism", *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 12/2 (2018), pp. 127-145.

59 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 50-54, 59-107. On the Iraqi opposition's reaction to the 1948 agreement, protest marches and demonstrations in Baghdad, see TRIPP, *The History of Iraq*, pp. 117-118. On the persecution of the domestic opposition by Nūrī al-Saʿīd and his involvement in the question of Palestine, see TRIPP, *The History of Iraq*, pp. 115-116, 120-123.

60 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 107-111, 141-144, 174, 292-293, 330-335, 340-358.

To put it differently, while being a protagonist on the second diegetic level, Agatha Christie acts as the metadiegetic narrator on the third level[61].

In her diaries and notes, Agatha Christie reminisces about her happy childhood, her early years with her first husband Archibald, and their fate during the Great War[62]. She also reveals that writing detective novels is her way of searching for justice, convicting those who have committed crimes and helping their victims[63]. Being unable to chronicle the real crimes the world is witnessing, she depicts imagined ones[64]. In connection with her first travel on the Orient Express in 1928 and her further journey by bus through Syria and Iraq, she meditates on the reason behind her travel to the latter state. Is it her attempt to come to terms with both her failed great love and her mother's death? Or is it because of the stories about Old Testament prophets she listened to and her wish to see Ur and Babylon? Or is she perhaps driven by her desire to see the sun over this land as a woman from an island shrouded in fog?[65]

When describing her second visit to Iraq in 1930, the heroine devotes particular attention to how her romantic relationship with Max Mallowan developed following their first meeting at the excavation site in Ur, where she first heard from him about the Sumerian harp. During their tours of other archeological sites and contemporary cities, Max told her many other stories about ancient gods and priests exploiting religion for millennia to control the people living in that land. Upon observing Shia self-flagellation rituals in the city of Karbala, Agatha listened to his conversation with their Iraqi driver about the rising disagreements between Shia and Sunni Muslims and the role the British state played in dividing them[66]. In the same conversation, the driver expressed his concerns over the fact that both clergymen and feudal lords did not want Iraqi children to be educated. After hearing this, Agatha wondered what the future of Iraq would be like[67]. She then recalls later events in her life, including her return to London and wedding with Max, their further work at several dig sites in Iraq and Syria, and the time they lived separately during World War II[68].

Similarly to her husband, the heroine contemplates her stance on Iraq (and other Middle Eastern countries in general) and its inhabitants[69], different from the views

---

61 See GENETTE, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 227-234 and PUCKETT, *Narrative Theory*, pp. 269-270.

62 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 174-175.

63 In her autobiography, Agatha Christie writes: "It frightens me that nobody seems to care about the innocent. (…) Nobody seems to go through the a*gony* of the *victim* – they are only full of pity for the young killer, because of his youth." See CHRISTIE, *An Autobiography*, p. 439.

64 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 175, 204.

65 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 175-182. Cf. a fragment of Christie's *Autobiography* in which she confesses that she fell in love with Ur and describes a romantic view of the excavation site at sunset: CHRISTIE, *An Autobiography*, p. 377.

66 On the political situation of Shia Muslims in postwar Iraq, see TRIPP, *The History of Iraq*, pp. 107-108, 124-125, 129-130.

67 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 204-222. On Christie's second visit to Ur, her first encounter with Max Mallowan and their trips to other archeological sites and cities of Najaf and Karbala, their stay in Baghdad, and their travel to Syria, see CHRISTIE, *An Autobiography*, pp. 387-403 and NORMAN, *Agatha Christie*, pp. 157-158.

68 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 238-259, 267-270, 274-276. On these periods in Christie's life, see CHRISTIE, *An Autobiography*, pp. 403-430, 441-533; NORMAN, *Agatha Christie*, pp. 158-161; and CADE, *Agatha Christie*, pp. 138-161, 168, 177-180.

69 In the context of her visit to Mosul in the 1950s, years after she participated over several seasons in excavations at al-Nimrūd, Agatha Christie wrote in her autobiography about their former native co-workers: "How good it is to have these friends. Warm-hearted, simple, full of enjoyment of life, and so well able to laugh at everything. Arabs are great ones for laughing, great ones for hospitality, too. (…). How much I have loved that part of the world. I love it still and always shall." See CHRISTIE, *An Autobiography*, p. 532.

expressed by British citizens who still perceived the state as a colony heavily dependent on its metropolis[70]. During her travel by bus through Syria and Iraq, Agatha observes various manifestations of French and British domination and expresses her feelings about how her country is responsible for stirring up wars in different places[71]. Her thoughts focus primarily, however, on her husband's archeological activities, in which she has taken part for long years[72]. Like Max Mallowan and his fellow archeologists, she is convinced that Western scientists must care for what remains of Iraq's ancient civilizations. She is saddened that Iraqis do not know their illustrious history and do not realize how much their land gave to the world in the past. She further dwells on why so many of them still look at British archeologists as if they were thieves stealing and smuggling their country's ancient treasures[73].

Moreover, both in her internal monologues and conversations with ʿĀ'iša al-Salām, an Iraqi woman whom she got to know during her first journey on the Orient Express and with whom she spent time in Baghdad[74], the heroine reflects upon Gertrude Bell's contribution to the establishment of the modern Iraqi state. Agreeing with ʿĀ'iša, Agatha regards her as a person who devoted herself to a great civilizational mission. Despite her genuine desire to support the Iraqis, Bell has been seen by a vast number of them solely as a representative of an oppressive colonial power. However, for the crime writer, she was a tragic figure that deserves to be portrayed as the protagonist of one of her novels[75].

As for Wilfred Thesiger's notes, these were written at different times in his life. They constitute a collection of texts narrated in the first-person voice. They contain a concise description of Thesiger's childhood and youth in Ethiopia, his travels through the Rubʿ al-Jālī, and his life among Arab Bedouin tribes. Mesmerized by the beauty of the desert and the sense of freedom it evokes, the protagonist writes down in his notes a story about the ancient inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula that he heard from a tribesman[76]. Subsequently, Thesiger extensively chronicles his long

---

70 There are multiple studies discussing Agatha Christie's stance on modern British imperialism and Orientalism in the Middle East, her attitude towards the Orient and Orientals, and how they changed from the interwar to the postwar period, as reflected in her novels, memoirs, and autobiography. See, e.g., MULLINI, Roberta, ""How Much I Have Loved That Part of the World": Agatha Christie and the Orient", *Linguae &. Rivista di Lingue e Culture Moderne* 5/1 (2006), pp. 25-33 [online], available at: https://www.ledonline.it/index.php/linguae/article/view/202 [Accessed 29 June 2021]; SUH, Judy, "Agatha Christie in the American Century", *Studies in Popular Culture* 39/1 (2016), pp. 61-80 [online], available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/26644402 [Accessed 21 July 2021]; and LINARES, Trinidad, *Dis-Orienting Interactions: Agatha Christie, Imperial Tourists, and the Other* (MA Thesis, Bowling Green State University), Bowling Green, 2018 [online], available at: https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_olink/r/1501/10?p10_etd_subid=163287&clear=10 [Accessed 15 August 2021], pp. 50-77, 86-103, 111-117, 119-123.

71 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 176, 183-184.

72 See Christie's words about the passion for archeology she shared with her husband: CHRISTIE, *An Autobiography*, pp. 457-458, 526-527. See also NORMAN, *Agatha Christie*, pp. 159-161.

73 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 267-271, 274-276, 310-314.

74 In her autobiography, Agatha Christie mentions that while travelling on the Orient Express in 1928, she became acquainted with a woman she called "Mrs. C.", an elitist representative of the English colony in Baghdad, whose company she seemed not to enjoy. She does not mention, however, ʿĀ'iša al-Salām. See CHRISTIE, *An Autobiography*, pp. 363-364, 371-373.

75 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 176, 185-188, 314-315.

76 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 96-107. See authentic descriptions of Thesiger's adventures in Africa and the Arabian Peninsula in his memoirs: THESIGER, Wilfred, *The Last Nomad. One Man's Forty Year Adventure in the World's Most Remote Desserts, Mountains and Marshes*, New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979, pp. 14-116; THESIGER, Wilfred, *The Life of My Choice*, London: Collins, 1987. See also MAITLAND, *Wilfred Thesiger*

stay among the Marsh Arabs (*Maʿdān*) of Southern Iraq as if through the eyes of an anthropologist. He examines closely how they look, behave, work, and rest, and depicts their origins, beliefs, superstitions, customs, and habits linked with living on the water. He scrutinizes the social structure and position of women in their numerous tribes. He also relates his meetings with tribal sheiks and ordinary tribe members as well as his work among them. He retells their stories about tribal feuds and, last but not least, he admires the charms of nature in the Marshes[77].

In the last verses of his notes, Thesiger directs the following words to Agatha Christie: "If you wrote a novel about me, it wouldn't be so popular as criminal stories, but it would be a story about us, British intellectuals in Iraq. We have not come here to carry weapons but love and science. Nonetheless, we have been greeted with weapons"[78]. He later asserts that he does not blame Iraqis for their reluctance, for he knows that British and Indian troops entered the country during World War I. The British authorities played a significant role in developing the newly-created state, but they also left behind a myriad of wounds, as he claims[79]. Similar comments made by Thesiger are scattered among the above-mentioned descriptions and other fragments of his notes. The esteemed explorer remarks, for instance, that Iraqis do not detest every Englishman, as they can differentiate between an engineer who came to build a bridge or powerhouse from a soldier who came to kill them[80]. Thesiger does not see himself as falling into the category of those who came to Iraq in search of gold, oil, precious artifacts, and stones or sought "maidens from *The Arabian Nights*" among poor women recruited in bars[81].

Likewise, the explorer does not regard himself as belonging to those travelling Orientalists who identified themselves with both the Imperium's colonial theory and its apparatus[82]. Thesiger even recounts his encounter with a British employee of an oil company on a plane, presenting the latter as being guided by prejudices and a sense of superiority toward Middle Easterners[83]. Thesiger, on the contrary, characterizes himself as an Orientalist enchanted by the East, a space where he is pursuing his dreams[84]. What is more, he declares his authentic attachment to the Marsh Arabs, despite some unpleasantness he faced when he lived among these people, and a number of them accused him of being a British spy[85].

---

and BARR, James, *Lords of the Desert. The Battle Between the United States and Great Britain for Supremacy in the Modern Middle East*, New York: Basic Books, 2018, pp. 121-133.

77 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 152-171, 192-196, 226-232, 271-274, 276-279, 307-310. Thesiger's descriptions of the Iraqi Marshes and their inhabitants in the novel, albeit fictive, are undoubtedly inspired by his authentic texts. See THESIGER, "The Marshmen of Southern Iraq", pp. 272-281; THESIGER, *The Last Nomad*, pp. 161-212; and THESIGER, Wilfred, *The Marsh Arabs*, Penguin Classics, 2007. See also MAITLAND, *Wilfred Thesiger*, pp. 309-323. On Thesiger's "participant observation" of the Marsh Arabs, see SIMMONS, David, Wasfi Shoqairat, ""Sahib, You Are No Longer a Guest… You Are One of the Family": Wilfred Thesiger and the 'Problem' of Participant Observation", *American, British, and Canadian Studies* 17 (2011), pp. 36-47.

78 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, p. 338.

79 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, p. 338.

80 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, p. 165.

81 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 173, 191.

82 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, p. 222.

83 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 287-288.

84 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 234, 242-243.

85 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 277, 336. In *The Marsh Arabs*, Thesiger writes, for instance, about his "instinctive sympathy with the traditional life of others" due to his long years of living among tribal people in remote parts of the world. While being displeased with different modern manifestations of Western civilization, he claims that he "was always happy, in Iraq or elsewhere, to share a smoke-filled hovel with a shepherd, his

Furthermore, Thesiger records his conversations about Iraq's political situation in the late 1940s with his two friends: Colonel Stevenson, an employee of the British embassy, and Salīm, an Iraqi journalist whom he meets during his short visits to Baghdad. In these conversations, they mention demonstrations against the Portsmouth Treaty of 1948 and the hatred cultivated by many Iraqis toward the Englishmen. They discuss the growing competition between Great Britain, once a global imperial power, and the United States, a rising world power, in the Middle East. The latter state, they argue, has incited Iraqis to mutiny against the pro-British government. In addition, the Americans have been trying to stir up Shia Muslims against their Sunni counterparts, and religious Muslim believers against communists[86]. Salīm predicts that a military junta will govern Iraq at some stage, and that there are no prospects for instilling democracy in his homeland in the foreseeable future[87].

1.4. The Story of the Girl from the Marshes

Thesiger also converses with Salīm about his love for the Girl from the Marshes. One day, the British explorer sees her picture in a coffee house in Baghdad. Although he is informed that this is an image created by an Orientalist that hangs in all coffee shops in Iraq, he decides to search for her. In fact, the girl is the main reason behind his journey to the Marshes. In his dialogues with Salīm and other Iraqis he encounters during his travels through the country, Thesiger gathers information about his beloved. The explorer repeatedly hears that his dream woman, commonly known as the "Mona Lisa of Iraq", was kidnapped by a British soldier and transported to England during World War I or the British Mandate in Iraq. For Iraqis, her story epitomizes the fate of their homeland under colonial rule. In their view, the girl has become an icon symbolizing their resistance against occupiers, which is also expressed by Max Mallowan commenting on Thesiger's words[88].

With the passing of time, Thesiger realizes that the picture of the "Mona Lisa of Iraq" is gradually replaced by other images in bars, hotels, and other public places he enters while moving across the state[89]. These are predominantly pictures presen-

---

family and beasts." He describes the Marshmen as "cheerful and friendly", their way of life as "unique" and "as yet little affected by the outside world," and the Marshes as "beautiful" (see THESIGER, *The Marsh Arabs*, pp. 59-60). In their article, David Simmons and Wasfi Soqairat remark that Thesiger belonged to those "Western voices" who conveyed "a particularly neo-liberal Western romanticism that resist the transformation in culture engendered by the wealth and the technology of the oil industry in the Arabian area" (see SIMMONS, Shoqairat, ""Sahib, You Are No Longer a Guest…"", p. 37).

86 James Barr writes in the introduction to his book about the battle between the United States and Great Britain for supremacy in the modern Middle East. He argues that "oil and the vast profits it generated influenced almost everything that happened after 1947 in this story: they were a constant source of tension between Washington and London." See BARR, *Lords of the Desert*, p. 11.

87 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 117-123, 244-247, 321.

88 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 113-116, 124-125, 264, 282-286, 289-292. See also a documentary film: (21 May 2018), "Ḥikāyāt al-ʿābirīn 6: bint al-Maʿīdī, al-ʿIrāq – al-Ahwār" [online], *Al-Ŷazīra al-Waṯā'iqiyya,* available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usu3DO7SVMA [Accessed 20 August 2021].

89 On the popularity of the image of the "Mona Lisa of Iraq" in the 1930-the 1970s, and various references to it in arts (paintings, poems, plays) and popular culture (television series), see AL-RASSĀM, Mahdī Salmān (31 March 2015), "Bint al-Maʿīdī… Mūnālīzā al-ʿIrāq al-maŷhūla" [online], Mu'ssasat al-Nūr li-l-Ṯaqāfa wa-l-Iʿlām, available at: http://www.alnoor.se/article.asp?id=271135 [Accessed 17 August 2021] and AL-ASʿAD, Muḥammad (23 August 2015), "Mūnālīzā al-Ahwār al-ʿirāqiyya: imrā'a wāqiʿiyya am usṭūra?" [online], *Al-ʿArabī Al-Ŷadīd*, available at: https://www.alaraby.co.uk/مونالیزا-الأهوار-العراقية-امرأة-واقعية-أم-أسطورة؟ [Accessed 20 August 2021].

ting Shia clergy, which heralds the increasing radicalization of socio-political views among Iraqis[90]. The journalist Salīm touches upon this changing post-World War II reality by saying that all the religious, sectarian, ethnic, and political groups in Iraq that have produced these pictures and slogans, would like to rule the country. He predicts that today's pictures will be replaced by tomorrow's bloodshed[91].

In a conversation with Thesiger, Salīm remarks on the strange competition between various ethno-religious and political groups concerning the origins of the "Mona Lisa of Iraq"[92]. According to the most widespread version of her story, she was born in the Marshes as Fāṭima, the daughter of a buffalo farmer. However, each of these communities tells its own version of the story of the girl abducted by an Englishman that reflects this community's historical experiences. There is a Turkmen version, according to which the girl was raised in Kirkuk, and another in which she was born in Basra. In a communist version, she was transported to Moscow. In a Kurdish version, she was involved in the conflict between Iraqi Kurds and the nationalist government. In an Assyrian version, in turn, her English husband was Churchill's nephew, which resulted in British promises to protect the Assyrian Christian community in Iraq[93]. And on top of that, the image of the girl is also known among Lebanese, Syrians, and Palestinians who tell their own versions of her story related to the Jewish-Palestinian conflict[94]. These stories told around Iraq and the Levant over the 20th century, and which are retold by Salīm and other Iraqis in a third-person perspective embedded into Thesiger's narrative, can be considered the fourth diegetic level in *The Harp of Agatha Christie*.

Concluding Remarks

The multiplicity of stories and voices embedded in Aḥmad's novel makes its narrative structure very complex. There are four diegetic and temporal levels in *The Harp of Agatha Christie*. Only the first refers to the present time, whereby the first-person homodiegetic and intradiegetic narrator relates his life experiences. This narrating instance appears to have much in common with the Iraqi writer himself, which may indicate the postmodernist tendency to include the author/narrator as a character in the story[95]. The second diegetic level is narrated by the third-person omniscient voice and focalized through four protagonists (one British and three Iraqis). On the third level, we find two first-person homodiegetic and intradiegetic voices, that of Agatha Christie and Wilfred Thesiger. The last diegetic level incorporates all the stories about the Girl from the Marshes, recounted in a third-person narrative.

In *Postcolonial Arabic Novel*, the distinguished literary critic and scholar, Muḥsin al-Mūsawī, writes with respect to works created by Arab novelists in the 20th century that "A substantial portion of modern Arabic narrative uses the encounter with

---

90 On the rising Shia opposition in the 1950s, see TRIPP, *The History of Iraq*, pp. 138-139.

91 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 149, 295-297, 315-327.

92 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, p. 254.

93 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 125-129, 146-161, 197-202, 223-224, 232-234, 254-255, 259-261.

94 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, pp. 264-266. On different versions of the story of the Girl from the Marshes, see AL-RASSĀM, "Bint al-Maʿīdī…".

95 SAUNDERS, Max William Mill, "Byatt, Fiction and Biofiction", *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 6/1 (2019), pp. 88, 99 (DOI: https://doi.org/10.18352/hcm.543).

the West as its trajectory towards self-knowledge"[96]. In his study on biographical novels focused on Fyodor Dostoevsky, Henrik Christensen underscores, in turn, the dual roles played by the biographical subject in biofiction. He or she serves "as a receptacle for the past and its concerns and as a prism through which we attempt to understand our contemporary world and identities"[97]. These words may also be applied to Ibrāḥīm Aḥmad's novel, in which Agatha Christie and the story of her disappearance in Baghdad in 1949 serve as a pretext to discuss Iraq's post-World War I past and post-2003 present. The juxtaposition of Iraq's socio-political situation in the late 1940s with that in the post-invasion era features Lackey's dual temporality quite explicitly, as reflected in descriptions of several narrating instances and thoughts expressed by some characters on the aforesaid diegetic levels. The literary text exposes parallel phenomena in the two periods, including Western interference in Iraqi affairs and rising Muslim radicalism. *The Harp of Agatha Christie* not only underscores this parable between Iraq's past and present but also showcases the former as a harbinger of the latter. "The present is only a child, legal or illegal, of that past," as the Iraqi expatriate and narrator of the first diegetic level says[98].

Aḥmad's novel juxtaposes Iraq's past and present by addressing the Western perspective on its cultural legacy. When depicting the post-2003 mayhem, the Iraqi exiled author and narrator of the present-day chapters mentions the looting of the National Museum of Iraq, whereby countless archeological artifacts were lost, among other things. He states that American soldiers observed this incident indifferently[99]. By contrast, the anglophone protagonists and narrators of the second and third diegetic levels – Max Mallowan, Agatha Christie, and Wilfred Thesiger – reflect upon their own role and the contribution of others (Gertrude Bell) in discovering Iraq's unique culture, whether ancient or contemporary. They all declare their positive approach to Iraqis. At the same time, none of them wants to see themselves or be perceived by the natives as a representative of British imperialism, nor do they want to be included among the ranks of colonialists who exploited the local population. Mallowan, Christie, and Thesiger's sympathetic attitude towards Iraqis is additionally emphasized by some members of the Iraqi intelligentsia in the late 1940s.

Notwithstanding this, all of the English characters in *The Harp of Agatha Christie* share a romantic nostalgia for polytheistic times, ancient myths, Biblical tales, Oriental landscapes, and the simple, authentic life of Iraq's indigenous inhabitants[100]. They are therefore presented as having much in common with real Western Orientalist travellers in the Middle East in the 19th and the 20th centuries. In line with Ali Behdad, we could risk the statement that these protagonists are characterized by "the desire for the Orient, which holds a mediating relation with the orientalist desire for knowledge and power, as a subtle critique of Western superiority and a mode of cultural association with the Other that recognizes the latter's subjectivity"[101].

---

96 AL-MUSAWI, Muhsin Jassim, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence*, Leiden: Brill, 2003, p. 178.

97 CHRISTENSEN, *We Call upon the Author*, p. 19.

98 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, p. 16.

99 AḤMAD, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, p. 31.

100 See SUH, "Agatha Christie", p. 69.

101 BEHDAD, Ali, *Belated Travellers. Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1994, p. 14. In their analysis of Thesiger's authentic texts in terms of "participant observation", Simmons and Shoqairat argue that although the acclaimed explorer was "documenting certain cultural images of the Marsh people by sharing their life," his "presence in the Marshes indicates the 'Orientalist' power-relations."

It is thus striking that on almost every one of the above-mentioned diegetic levels, major and minor characters, representing both Iraqi and English-language cultures, ponder the relationship between the East and the West, the Iraqis as (former) colonized and the Brits as (former) colonizers, not to mention the Americans, who began intervening in Iraqi politics in the late 1940s and invading the country in 2003. Moreover, these characters not only meditate on the aforesaid questions in internal monologues and conversations with others on the same diegetic level, they also participate in a multi-voice discussion with characters placed on other diegetic levels. This kind of polyphony engaging past and present voices results from the construction of Aḥmad's narrative, in which narrators and/or characters on lower diegetic levels tell or read stories of characters from higher diegetic levels.

These stories within stories (or texts within texts) bring to mind the structure of *The Arabian Nights.* In fact, Šahrazād's name is mentioned in Aḥmad's novel by the exiled Iraqi narrator who returns to his homeland. He compares the old caretaker of the British Expedition House telling him his life stories in the 1970s to the woman who enchanted king Shahriyār with her words[102]. The journalist Salīm, in turn, says to Wilfred Thesiger that Iraqis are distinguished by a fertile imagination when it comes to storytelling, and they often combine stories with images, as exemplified by the numerous versions of the story about the Girl from the Marshes[103]. If seen as folk tales circulating in Iraqi society since the early 20th century, interwoven in Aḥmad's literary text, these narratives may "express the author's attempt to make sense of the entanglements of personal and national history"[104].

It is worth adding that *The Harp of Agatha Christie* likewise encloses stories created by the ancient civilizations of the land between the two rivers. Inspector Jālid Samīr, for instance, alludes to the myth of Gilgamesh, whereas Max Mallowan tells Agatha Christie the legend of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. What is more, the British archeologist recounts to his wife several stories related to his research, in particular, one about Sumerian royal funeral rituals during which handmaidens played golden harps[105].

The interconnections between various stories incorporated in Aḥmad's novel are not limited to its multi-layered body. Both its title and front cover additionally emphasize them. In terms of the title, the link between Christie and the (golden Sumerian) harp, visible on several diegetic levels, has already been discussed above. In turn, on the front cover, there is a picture featuring the beautiful young girl known as the "Mona Lisa of Iraq". This image of her, one of the most popular versions, maintains the conventions of Orientalist painting[106]. This reflects how the encounter between the East and the West is succinctly evoked in readers' minds: by connecting the name of a prominent British-American mystery writer who was passionate about discovering ancient Iraqi civilizations, with both the word "harp" – and thus alluding to a musical artifact from Sumerian times and one of the finest examples of Iraqi cul-

---

The reason for this is that by writing his travel account "from which he remains removed if only through the process of authorial control," he acts like an Orientalist writer. See SIMMONS, Shoqairat, ""Sahib, You Are No Longer a Guest…"", pp. 38, 41-43.

102 AḤMAD, *Qīṭārat Aŷāṭā Krīstī*, p. 19.

103 AḤMAD, *Qīṭārat Aŷāṭā Krīstī*, p. 297.

104 NOVAK, "Experiments in Life-Writing", p. 15.

105 AḤMAD, *Qīṭārat Aŷāṭā Krīstī*, pp. 293, 238, 208.

106 See AL-RASSĀM, "Bint al-Maʿīdī…" and AL-ASʿAD, "Mūnālīzā al-Ahwār al-ʿirāqiyya".

tural heritage – and the Orientalist portrayal of the girl about whom various members of Iraqi society have over many decades told countless different stories, all of which share the context of British control over these lands.

To sum up, although the story of Christie's disappearance in Baghdad serves as the central axis of Aḥmad's novel, several other stories are included in this narrative, all of which involve encounters between Easterners (the colonized) and Westerners (the colonizers) who discuss (neo)colonialism in Iraq. *The Harp of Agatha Christie* can be thus definitely categorized as a postcolonial novel[107]. The famous heroine embodies in the fictional work a representative of Western culture who reflects upon its legacy in the Middle East and her country's political interference into the history of modern Iraq, starting from the post-World War I period, through the 1940s, to the post-2003 present. Aḥmad's literary text can hence be labelled as a biographical novel in which the biographical subject (Agatha Christie) is "recontextualized and reappraised" in connection with the author's historical and cultural orientation[108].

Bibliografía:

AḤMAD, Ibrāhīm, *Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī*, ʿAmmān: Dār al-ʿArab li-l-Našr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 2016.

AL-ASʿAD, Muḥammad (23 August 2015), "Mūnālīzā al-Ahwār al-ʿirāqiyya: imrā'a wāqiʿiyya am usṭūra?" [online], *Al-ʿArabī Al-Ŷadīd*, available at: https://www.alaraby.co.uk/مونالیزا-الأهوار-العراقية-امرأة-واقعية-أم-أسطورة؟ [Accessed 20 August 2021].

ASHFORD, Lindsay Jane, *The Woman on the Orient Express*, Lake Union Publishing, 2016.

BAHOORA, Haytham, "Iraq", in *The Oxford Handbook of Arab Novelistic Traditions*, Waïl S. Hassan (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 247-264 (DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199349791.001.0001).

BARR, James, *Lords of the Desert. The Battle Between the United States and Great Britain for Supremacy in the Modern Middle East*, New York: Basic Books, 2018.

BEHDAD, Ali, *Belated Travellers. Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1994.

BERNTHAL-HOOKER, James (19 April 2017), "The Many Disappearances of Agatha Christie" [online], JC Bernthal Blog, available at: https://jcbernthal.com/2017/04/19/the-many-disappearances-of-agatha-christie/ [Accessed 6 August 2021].

CADE, Jared, *Agatha Christie and the Eleven Missing Days: the Revised and Expanded 2011 Edition*, Scarab eBooks, 2011.

CHRISTENSEN, Henrik, *We Call upon the Author. Contemporary Biofiction and Fyodor Dostoevsky* (Ph. D. Thesis, Stockholm University), Stockholm, 2021 [online], available at: http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1516107&dswid=-15 [Accessed 15 August 2021].

CHRISTIE, Agatha, *An Autobiography*, HarperCollins e-Books, 2010.

CYMBRYKIEWICZ, Joanna, *Biografia jako pretekst. Modele współczesnych duńskich biofikcji*, Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland, 2019 [online], available at: https://repozytorium.amu.edu.pl/handle/10593/24508 [Accessed 17 June 2021].

[107] See FLUDERNIK, "The Narrative Forms of Postcolonial Fiction", pp. 207-208.

[108] CHRISTENSEN, *We Call upon the Author*, p. 10.

ḌIYĀB, Ṣafā', "Al-Riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya… bayna al-taḥdīṯ wa-l-tabaʿiyya al-klāsikiyya" [online], *Al-Binā'*, available at: https://www.al-binaa.com/archives/article/50358 [Accessed 2 December 2022].

ḌIYĀB, Ṣafā' (15 April 2014), "Taḥawwulāt al-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya wa-l-tagīīr" [online], *Ṯaqāfāt*, available at: https://thaqafat.com/2014/04/23037 [Accessed 1 December 2022].

FLUDERNIK, Monika, "The Narrative Forms of Postcolonial Fiction", in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Fiction*, Ato Quayson (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 903-937.

GENETTE, Gérard, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*, trans. J. E. Lewin, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980.

HAMEDAWI, Shayma, "The Postcolonial Iraqi Novel: Themes and Sources of Inspiration", Babel. Littératures plurielles 36 (2017), pp. 211-228 [online], available at: https://journals.openedition.org/babel/5043 [Accessed 3 December 2022] (DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/babel.5043).

HANOOSH, Yasmeen (1 April 2013), "Beyond the Trauma of War: Iraqi Literature Today" [online], *Words Without Borders*, available at: https://wordswithoutborders.org/read/article/2013-04/beyond-the-trauma-of-war-iraqi-literature-today/ [Accessed 2 December 2022].

ḤASAN, ʿAbd ʿAli (16 June 2020), "Tawṣīfāt al-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya al-muʿāṣira" [online], *Al-Ṣabāḥ al-Ŷadīd*, available at: http://newsabah.com/newspaper/240601 [Accessed 2 December 2022].

ḤAYDAR, Mahdī, *ʿĀlam Ṣaddām Ḥussayn*, Köln: Al-Kamel Verlag, 2003.

(21 May 2018), "Ḥikāyāt al-ʿābirīn 6: bint al-Maʿīdī, al-ʿIrāq – al-Ahwār" [online], *Al-Ŷazīra al-Waṯā'iqiyya*, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usu3DO7SVMA [Accessed 20 August 2021].

IBRĀHĪM, Salām (4 March 2019), "Al-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya raṣadat al-jarāb al-ʿirāqī fī azmān al-dīktātūriyya, wa-l-ḥurūb wa-l-iḥtilāl wa-ṣulṭat al-ṭawā'if" [online], *Al-Nāqid al-ʿIrāqī,* available at: https://www.alnaked-aliraqi.net/article/61287.php [Accessed 1 December 2022].

IBRĀHĪM, Salām (24 July 2020), "Wuŷhat naẓar: "Qīṯārat Aŷāṯā Krīstī" riwāyat al-ʿirāqī Ibrāhīm Aḥmad" [online], *Al-Nāqid al-ʿIrāqī*, available at: https://www.alnaked-aliraqi.net/article/80747.php [Accessed 11 August 2021].

IBRĀHĪM, Salām (18 April 2021), "Afkār ḥawla al-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya" [online], *Al-Ḥiwār al-Mutamaddin*, available at: https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=715870.

JABRA, Ibrahim Jabra, *Princesses' Street: Baghdad Memories*, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2005.

JUBAIR, Ahmed Karyosh and BIN ABDU, Abdul Ghani, "Contemporary Iraqi Novel: Abundant Production and New Trends", *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation* 2/6 (2019) [online], available at: https://al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/ijllt/article/view/502 [Accessed 4 December 2022] (DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2019.2.6.29).

LACKEY, Michael, "Locating and Defining Bio in Biofiction", a/b: *Auto/Biography Studies* 31/1 (2016), pp. 3-10 (DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2016.1095583).

LACKEY, Michael, *The American Biographical Novel*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

LACKEY, Michael, "The Futures of Biofiction Studies", a/b: *Auto/Biography Studies* 32/2 (2017), pp. 343-346 (DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2017.1288978).

LACKEY, Michael, "Death-Bringing History and the Origins of Biofiction", in *Biofiction and Writers' Afterlives*, Bethany Lane (ed.), Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020, pp. 12-25.

LINARES, Trinidad, *Dis-Orienting Interactions: Agatha Christie, Imperial Tourists, and the Other* (MA Thesis, Bowling Green State University), Bowling Green, 2018 [online], available at: https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_olink/r/1501/10?p10_etd_subid=163287&clear=10 [Accessed 15 August 2021].

MAITLAND, Alexander, *Wilfred Thesiger. The Life of the Great Explorer*, Harper Perennial, 2010.

MALLOWAN, Max, *Mallowan's Memoirs. The Autobiography of Max Mallowan*, Dodd, Mead & Company, 1977.

MHOODAR, Rana Ali, and MHOODAR, Tahseen Ali, "Postcolonial Iraqi Novels and Their Theoretical Implications", *Mayŷallat Abḥāt Maysān* 33 (2021), pp. 309-318 [online], available at: https://www.iasj.net/iasj/download/e08e9067bef4517b [Accessed 3 December 2022].

MULLINI, Roberta, ""How Much I Have Loved That Part of the World": Agatha Christie and the Orient", *Linguae &. Rivista di Lingue e Culture Moderne* 5/1 (2006), pp. 25-33 [online], available at: https://www.ledonline.it/index.php/linguae/article/view/202 [Accessed 29 June 2021].

AL-MUSAWI, Muhsin Jassim, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence*, Leiden: Brill, 2003.

NAGGAR, Mona (April 2003), "Cruelty and Strength" [online], Worldpress.org, available at: https://www.worldpress.org/europe/1002.cfm (from World Press Review (50/4 April 2003)).

NORMAN, Andrew, *Agatha Christie. The Finished Portrait,* Stroud: The History Press (e-book), 2010.

NOVAK, Julia, "Biographical Fiction to Historiographic Metafiction: Rewriting Clara Schuman", *Brno Studies in English* 37/2 (2011), pp. 145-158 [online], available at: https://digilib.phil.muni.cz/handle/11222.digilib/118146 [Accessed 15 July 2021].

NOVAK, Julia, "Experiments in Life-Writing: Introduction", in *Experiments in Life-Writing. Intersections of Auto/Biography and Fiction*, Lucia Boldrini and Julia Novak (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 1-36.

NŪRĪ, Šākir, *Jātūn Bagdād*, Bagdād: Dār Suṭūr, 2017 (e-Book).

AL OQAILI, Jafar (28 February 2018), "Shakir Noori: "Literature Creates Legends… and Legends Create Literature"' [online], *Nasher*, available at: https://nasher-news.com/Shakir-Noori-literature-creates-legends-and-legends-create-literature/ [Accessed 20 July 2021].

OSBORNE, Charles, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie. A Biographical Companion to the Works of Agatha Christie*, HarperCollins E-Books, 2000.

PUCKETT, Kent, Narrative Theory. *A Critical Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Al-RABĪʿĪ, Zaydān (9 March 2015), "Al-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya fī qalb al-nār" [online], *Mulḥaq al-Jalīŷ al-Ţaqāfī*, available at: https://www.alkhaleej.ae/قلم-الورقية-العراقية-في-قلب-النار [Accessed 2 December 2022].

AL-RASSĀM, Mahdī Salmān (31 March 2015), "Bint al-Maʿīdī… Mūnālīzā al-ʿIrāq al-maŷhūla" [online], Mu'ssasat al-Nūr li-l-Ţaqāfa wa-l-Iʿlām, available at: http://www.alnoor.se/article.asp?id=271135 [Accessed 17 August 2021].

SAʿDŪN, Nādiya Hanāwī (26 March 2017), "Taḥawwulāt ar-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya fī marḥalat mā baʿda al-tagīīr" [online], *Al-Quds al-ʿArabī*, available at: https://www.alquds.co.uk%EF%BB%BF2-تحولات-الرواية-العراقية-في-مرحلة-ما/ [Accessed 1 December 2022].

SAUNDERS, Max William Mill, "Byatt, Fiction and Biofiction", *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 6/1 (2019), pp. 87-102 (DOI: https://doi.org/10.18352/hcm.543).

SIMMONS, David, Wasfi Shoqairat, ""Sahib, You Are No Longer a Guest… You Are One of the Family": Wilfred Thesiger and the 'Problem' of Participant Observation", *American, British, and Canadian Studies* 17 (2011), pp. 36-47.

STREET, Sarah, "Re-Writing the Past, Autobiography and Celebrity in Agatha (1979): 'An Imaginary Solution to an Authentic Mystery'", *Open Screens* 3/1 (2020), pp. 1-30 [online], available at: https://www.openscreensjournal.com/article/id/6928/ [Accessed 20 July 2021].

SUH, Judy, "Agatha Christie in the American Century", *Studies in Popular Culture* 39/1 (2016), pp. 61-80 [online], available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/26644402 [Accessed 21 July 2021].

AL-ŠABĪBĪ, Ŷamīl (28 December 2014), "Al-riwāya al-ʿirāqiyya baʿda al-tagīīr 2003. Taʿāluq al-faḍā' al-tasŷīlī wa-l-tajīīlī" [online], *Al-Ḥiwār al-Mutamaddin*, available at: https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=447957.

THESIGER, Wilfred, "The Marshmen of Southern Iraq", *The Geographical Journal* 120/3 (1954), pp. 272-281.

THESIGER, Wilfred, *The Last Nomad. One Man's Forty Year Adventure in the World's Most Remote Desserts*, Mountains and Marshes, New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979.

THESIGER, Wilfred, *The Life of My Choice*, London: Collins, 1987.

THESIGER, Wilfred, *The Marsh Arabs*, Penguin Classics, 2007.

THOMPSON, Elizabeth F., "The 1948 Wathba Revisited: Comrade Fahd and the Mass Appeal of Iraqi Communism", *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 12/2 (2018), pp. 127-145.

THOMPSON, Laura, *Agatha Christie. A Mysterious Life*, New York-London: Pegasus Books (e-book), 2018.

TRIPP, Charles, *The History of Iraq*, third edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

YOUNG, Laurel, "The Mystery of the Vanishing Wife", in *Living with a Writer*, Dale Salwak (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 176-183.