

The Sense of Uncanny in Agatha Christie's *A Caribbean Mystery**

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Abstract

The prolific English detective and crime fiction writer Agatha Christie's A Caribbean Mystery (1964) has an outstanding status due to the number of controversies involved in the plotline, the complicated relationships between characters and the exotic setting in a supposedly colonial background. Moreover, the novel draws attention due to the tension that keeps rising until the end in addition to the fearful environment. In fact, the psychological response of the characters in the novel is worth studying due to the sense of uncanny. Apparently, only Miss Marple is capable of achieving the rationalising process that includes the familiar and the strange. The psychological understanding of the uncanny seems to be highly related to the fictional account in Christie's novel. Therefore, this work aims to analyse Christie's A Caribbean Mystery in the light of the sense of the uncanny to explain the response of the characters.

Keywords: Agatha Christie, A Caribbean Mystery, Uncanny, Sigmund Freud, Detective Fiction.

Agatha Christie'nin Ölüm Adası'nda Tekinsizlik Duygusu

Özet

İngiliz polisiye roman yazarı Agatha Christie'nin Türkçeye 2010 yılında Ölüm Adası olarak çevrilen A Caribbean Mystery (1964) romanı olay örgüsündeki karmaşık durumlar, karakterler arasındaki çekişmeler ve sömürgecilik geçmişiyile bağlantılı egzotik bir yerde geçmesi bakımından farklı bir konuma sahiptir. Ayrıca bu eser, korkutucu bir çevrede geçmenin yanı sıra romanın sonuna kadar artmaya devam eden gerilim sebebiyle de dikkat çeker. Özüne bakılacak olursa, bu romandaki karakterlerin psikolojik tepkileri olay örgüsüne hâkim olan ve Sigmund Freud'un ortaya attığı tekinsizlik duygusu nedeniyle incelenmelidir. Görünüşe bakıldığında, yalnızca Miss Marple bu mantıklı açıklama sürecini başarıyla yürütebilmekte ve tekinsizlik duygusunu açıklamaya çalışmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, tekinsizlik duygusunun psikolojideki etkileri Christie'nin eserindeki kurgusal durumla son derece ilgilidir. Bu nedenle, bu makale Christie'nin Ölüm Adası (A Caribbean Mystery) eserini Freud'un tekinsizlik kavramı ışığında incelemeyi ve karakterlerin verdikleri tepkileri açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır.

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Agatha Christie, Ölüm Adası, Tekinsizlik, Sigmund Freud, Polisiye Roman.

Introduction

One of the representatives of English detective and crime fiction in the twentieth century, Agatha Christie is a highly prolific writer in view of the number of novels and short stories that she published throughout her career, which covered a few decades. Christie was born in 1890 and grew up reading the works of nineteenth-century detective fiction writers such as Wilkie Collins and Arthur Conan Doyle while she developed an interest in reading: "After her parents read to her, Agatha asked permission to look at the book and she studied the pages until they made sense to her. When she went shopping, she asked adults to read the signs over the shops. As a result of this drive, she one day found herself reading a book called *The Angel of Love*" (Baghban, 1990: 42). Accordingly, it was not surprising that Christie was interested in literature and especially this genre in an early stage of her life. Beginning with her first works, she showed her interest in detective fiction and created characters whose adventures were followed by Christie's readers for decades. Especially, her fictional detective Miss Marple was an outstanding character and enabled the readers to feel the excitement and suspense in many of her novels. Christie's *A Caribbean Mystery* (1964) is one of her later works and draws attention not only because of the elements of crime fiction, but also the setting of the work that takes place out of British Isles. A work of detective fiction narrates events and conditions that lack sensible explanation in order to increase suspense and create an atmosphere dominated by mystery. Because of the eerie feelings, the characters in such works almost always find themselves in unpleasant, disturbing and scary conditions. According to the critical approach in this study, such circumstances, which require detectives in the first place to solve them, can be examined in view of the psychological concept of the uncanny to discuss their effects. "The feelings of the uncanny [...] that arise as a result of the conflict between the rational setting and the primitive atmosphere" in the story telling invites such an approach to analyse the condition of the characters (Chia-ying, 2007: 5). Therefore, the aim of this work is to analyse *A Caribbean Mystery* in the light of Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny in order to explain the experience of British characters in a detective novel that covers events, which take place quite far away from their homeland, in an unknown and exotic landscape full of mysterious incidents.

1. The Uncanny

The concept of the uncanny was scientifically discussed for the first time by Sigmund Freud in his essay published in 1919. The work was groundbreaking in terms of its approach towards the issue in the light of linguistic,

cultural and psychological references that created a comprehensive context in which the uncanny was presented as a concept worth detailed examination. Freud's inquiry of the concept was maintained to further levels by following critics like Jung, Lacan and Kristeva. However, this study limits its critical stance to Freud's perspective in order to account for the literary qualities that paved the way to the uncanny in *A Caribbean Mystery*. According to Freud, in his essay "Das Unheimliche," translated as the uncanny, "there is no doubt that [the uncanny] belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (2003: 123). In addition to the feeling of fear, Freud claims that "the uncanny is that species of frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (2003: 124). Briefly, the uncanny is something both familiar and mysterious while it creates a frightening feeling. For this reason, Freud attempts to explain the uncanny in his long comparative study on the origins of German words "Heimlich" and "Unheimlich", which illuminates the lack of exact words to describe this term in many languages. The main difference between these two words is being homely or unhomely in relation to the emotional experience based on the familiarity of a particular experience (Freud, 2003: 148).

Accordingly, Freud continues to discuss literary works to explain the uncanny and its impact on individual characters: While there seems to be various cases to talk about the uncanny such as "being unable to banish memories" (2003: 136), "the fear of death" (2003: 142), "the persistent recurrence" of encounter (2003: 145), phenomena like presentiments (2003: 146) and "a dead person seen alive" (2003: 149), one common point that brings all these examples together is "the special emotional effect" (2003: 135). This effect results from not only something new or strange, but also something familiar but forgotten long ago. So, such examples like a house, a person, an experience, an encounter and even death can be defined as uncanny. "Repressed childhood experiences" and "primitive beliefs" are referred to as the main reasons for the appearance of this feeling (Freud, 2003: 135). However, Freud's focus on literary works in order to explain the uncanny helps the aim of this study in that the literary context of Christie's work turns out to be more meaningful from the perspective of the characters' psychological experience. Bernstein believes that "the uncanny calls not for a definition, a collection of terms, but rather, as a formal, textual structure, demands reading" (2003: 1112). Hence, the critical reading process is essential for the recognition and discussion of the uncanny. Rather than dealing with fundamental qualities of the uncanny within psychology as a discipline, the search for alternative creations of the feeling in a narrative seems to be important. For this reason, Bernstein further argues that "the uncanny is not a stable concept (subject) to which the predicate of a clear definition can be attached. Likewise, there can be no reliable identification of

a text or event uncanny, no stable thing to which the qualities of the uncanny can be predicated” (2003: 1113). The study of the uncanny, especially in works of fiction, can be defined as a challenge because of the author's intention to create the effect on purpose. Similarly, Freud asserts,

the uncanny that we find in fiction [...] actually deserves to be considered separately. [...] The distinction between what is repressed and what is surmounted cannot be transferred to the uncanny in literature without substantial modification. [...] Many things that would be uncanny if they occurred in real life are not uncanny in literature, [...] there are many opportunities to achieve uncanny effects that are absent in real life. (2003: 155-156)

It can be put forward that many uncanny things in works of fiction are not necessarily uncanny in real life. However, the author's attitude in a literary work is highly influential in the creation of the uncanny effect, so that this concept is created in a life-like fashion. Freud concludes that “whatever has an uncanny effect in real life has the same in literature. [...] [The writer] tricks us by promising everyday reality and then going beyond it” (2003: 157). So, the apparently realistic depictions of a literary work render the work available for the discussion of the uncanny that creates this notion in the characters who are alienated from their natural environment.

2. The Uncanny in *A Caribbean Mystery*

In the light of these psychological accounts, this study argues that numerous elements in Christie's *A Caribbean Mystery* correspond with Freud's discussion of the uncanny and reflect the concept in various forms, which are examined in three main aspects. Accordingly, the structure of the uncanny will be initially studied as a form of repression, an emotional experience that results from lack of certainty and security. Since the uncanny appears as a feeling in most of the novel, it will be discussed in this regard. Secondly, the uncanny as something to be dreaded and avoided will be handled because of the attitude of characters. Thirdly, the sense of uncanny that results from the setting, far away from home, needs to be analysed for a comprehensive study of this concept. In fact, as a detective novel set in a fictional setting in the Caribbean, the novel draws the readers' attention because of the typical qualities in this type of narrative and the yearning for home – symbolised by the British Isles – from the perspective of Miss Marple along with some other British characters. Although Christie has taken this character to numerous journeys in the course of decades as she continued to appear in appreciated novels, *A Caribbean Mystery* is an exception due to the changing environment for the typical British woman who is now quite old and has to adapt herself to changing conditions. While the novel presents a life-like depiction of the experience of the characters, the uncanny is gradually

experienced throughout different episodes making it appropriate to adopt Freud's critical stance to account for this notion.

2.1. *The Uncanny as The Emotional Response*

In Christie's *A Caribbean Mystery*, characters in accordance with their perception of the changing circumstances experience the uncanny. From the beginning of the novel, the tension continues to increase and along with many conflicts, the resolution of the novel brings light on the uncanny. The title itself mentions the mystery in this detective novel. The narrative deals with mysterious occasions after the death of a character, Major Palgrave, whose brief dialogue with Miss Marple just before his death introduces him to the readers. The incident, initially portrayed as a natural consequence, turns into something worth exploring in a few days. The skilful detective Miss Marple tries to understand the sequence of events that led to this mysterious case. In the middle of a paradise-like environment in the Caribbean, all characters slowly experience the uncanny. The dialogue between Miss Marple and the Major is marked by the latter's reference to a murderer as follows:

The Major was still shuffling and muttering. "Forgotten all about that business. Good-looking woman she was, you'd never suspect! Now, where? Ah, that takes my mind back, what tucks! I must show you." He stopped, sorted out a small photographic print and peered down at it. "Like to see the picture of a murderer?" He was about to pass it to her when his movement was suddenly arrested. Looking more like a stuffed frog than ever. Major Palgrave appeared to be staring fixedly over her right shoulder from whence came the sound of approaching footsteps and voices. (Christie, 1964: 8)

The ordinary talk, actually boring from Miss Marple's point of view, discloses a great secret of the Major. In addition to her rising interest to the subject of a murder, the abrupt ending also creates an uncanny feeling for both the protagonist and the readers. As the Major says, "Well, I'm damned. I mean!", there is the hint of an approaching danger towards the character. Yet, the origin of this threat cannot be located in a particular notion. Hence, the mentioning of murder and uneasiness of the Major in the face of something that he feels necessary to hide from dominate the talk with a familiar person on a trivial matter. The sense of uncanny begins to take shape in the face of this mysterious incident. From this point onwards, the uncanny surrounds the characters in this once familiar, yet gradually strange environment. As a matter of fact, this uncanny feeling has a source of its own. Nevertheless, a later dialogue between the owners of the hotel make it quite clear that there is something uncanny that the readers should expect in the novel. Just before the news of death in the hotel, Molly and Tim talk to each other late that night as follows:

"I tell you we've got it taped," [Molly] repeated. "Why do you always worry?"

"Made that way, I suppose. I'm always thinking, suppose something should go wrong."

"What sort of thing?"

"Oh I don't know. Somebody might get drowned."

"Not they. It's one of the safest of all the beaches. And we've got that hulking Swede on guard." (Christie, 1964:18)

As the dialogue suggests, there is an imminent threat that may harm these characters suddenly and this condition leads to the suffering of the hotel owner Tim Kendal in a state of suspense and ambiguity. Without any clear reason, he believes that something bad will happen and there is no way to prevent it from happening. Tim's feeling is an example of the uncanny due to its quality. While he is supposed to feel safe and firm in view of the success in his business and happiness with his wife, he has an unreasonable trouble that makes him fear. Both of these episodes create the sense of uncanny at the beginning of the novel. Moreover, the rest of the narrative deploys these feelings to increase the tone of mystery and create an even more suspicious environment. The reader expects to come across the feeling of uncanny.

The sense of uncanny appears throughout these earlier cases as the mysterious events continue to revolve around the same feeling. The most concrete object in terms of this effect is the photo that the Major mentions in the dialogue above. Apparently, the photo belongs to the adventurous stories of the Major and is at the same time a proof for his knowledge about the murder. Upon the news of his death, Miss Marple starts to question what happened on the previous night and feels that there is again something mysterious. That particular day turns into an uncanny experience due to the swiftly changing aura. The strange surrounds the familiar, which creates anxiety and fear in the characters. Before hearing the news of death, Miss Marple thinks that "today would be a day like any other day," similar to her earlier days on the island (Christie, 1964:19). Nevertheless, the news of death makes everyone "depressed" according to Molly, which shows that her and her husband's worries come true in a short time (Christie, 1964:19). This condition is uncanny, because an earlier feeling without any grounds indicated above comes true.

Furthermore, the sense of uncanny is maintained by Miss Marple's ventures to explain this development, which is an attempt to familiarise the unfamiliar experience along with Molly, and her obsession with the photo that disappeared without any trace. Upon delivering the news, Molly says, "it all seems quite straightforward. This kind of thing is quite liable to happen when you have high blood pressure, especially if you overdo the alcohol, and Major

Palgrave was really very naughty that way” (Christie, 1964: 20). This remark clearly shows her intent to find some kind of familiarity with this exceptional incident. Moreover, Miss Marple’s inquiry about the photo adds onto this attempt to familiarise the incident of death. She feels that there is something strange in this event despite the appearance of a typical death resulting from old age, use of alcohol and high blood pressure: “She took out her knitting and the needles clicked rapidly as though they were trying to match the speed of her thoughts. She didn’t like it; no, she didn’t like it. It came so pat” (Christie, 1964: 21). The description of her curiosity into the hidden reality behind the Major’s death gives the readers some clues about her intention to explore the unknown aspects in the story. For this reason, the photo that the Major wanted to show Miss Marple is a key for a reasonable explanation. However, her focus on the photo is quite different from the attitude of other characters in the novel, especially that of Mr Graham, the doctor. In spite of her attempts to learn the whereabouts of the photo that could bring light on the Major’s unusual behaviour the night he died at the expense of “feel[ing] ashamed” for telling lies, the photo remains a mystery for the detective (Christie, 1964: 22). This point of view is also related to her upbringing “with a proper regard for truth” (Christie, 1964: 23). In other words, her curiosity aims to explain the mystery resulting from the uncanny, because the familiar and the strange come together in the fate of this photo. In this small community, only Miss Marple is aware of the mystery behind the Major’s death. According to Portier, who comments on the impact of the uncanny on characters, “if characters’ understanding of the world is shaped by their linguistic, cultural, social and historical circumstances, then their experience of the uncanny – that which disrupts the familiar/everyday, that which brings what has remained hidden or secret to light – is also shaped by those circumstances” (2013: 2). For the experienced detective, the socio-cultural experience, as well as the history devoted to solving criminal cases contribute to her worldview. More importantly, “a photograph which evokes uncanny feelings for one character may evoke some other or even no emotion for another” (2013: Portier 3). The personal impact of the uncanny is a matter continually discussed by Freud who, for example, refers to the story of Sand-Man (2003: 136). Due to earlier emotional traumas, the experience affects the character in this case much more than other children. Similarly, Miss Marple’s knowledge of such mysterious links makes her look for the mystery. As she tells herself, “money might have been stolen, but no one would want to steal a snapshot. Unless, that is, they had a special reason for so doing” (Christie, 1964: 30). The missing snapshot arouses curiosity, as there is a strange condition in its disappearance. In addition to creating suspense, the link between the photo and a murder mentioned by the Major himself turns the incident into something uncanny. In fact, it is exactly Miss Marple’s attitude that creates the sense of uncanny for the readers since the detective unites both the familiar and the strange in her inquiry. Because of

the doctor's account for the missing photo, Miss Marple tries to familiarise with the apparent reality until she resumes her attempts to explore the uncanny in line with other accounts, like the one by Victoria.

Similarly, the cause of the Major's death creates an uncanny experience for the characters who feel anxious in the face of an unknown danger. The first time this issue is mentioned in the novel, Miss Prescott says, "he has blood pressure" (Christie, 1964: 14). Later on, following the news of his death, Molly explains the cause as follows: "He had high blood pressure" (Christie, 1964: 19). Along with Miss Marple's inquiry about the photo, this issue turns into a rumour and there is no clear distinction about the origins of the claim. Until Victoria's interference in the story, everyone is well acquainted with the account of blood pressure for the Major's death. It can be stated that there is a process of familiarisation in order to accept the death of a well-known character. However, Victoria claims that "those pills [of Serenite] weren't there before. I've not seen them in his bathroom before" (Christie, 1964: 41). Her claim leads to a confusion for Molly and the doctor who listen to her and begin to realise that there is actually some kind of a puzzle that needs to be solved. About the use of drugs and other chemicals in Christie's works, it must be noted, "drugs are used or referred to for use as therapeutic agents for the treatment of various medical problems in fifty-six Christie novels and a score of short stories. Of the more than 200 specific individual citations to drugs or classes of drugs, in twenty works medication cause death or play a significant role in the development or progression of the story" (Gerald, 1992: 95). The allusion to Serenite, of which "there was a bottle of one [...] in [the Major's] room," increases curiosity of the detective and the uncanny feeling for other characters (Christie, 1964: 29). Just like the photo, which attracted Miss Marple only, the pills matter solely for the maid at the beginning of the novel. Yet, further investigation of the matter helps to solve the mystery. From the perspective of this study, the pills also evoke the sense of the uncanny, because they look both familiar and strange in view of the stories, like the one accepted by everyone as if the Major was really suffering from blood pressure, and the contradictory one showing Victoria's challenging attitude. In fact, Dr Graham's persistent questions to Tim later in the novel result in his confession to his fear and show this emotional reaction: "Afraid of what? The police? Because they've been hounding you, asking you questions? I don't wonder. Anyone might feel frightened" (Christie, 1964: 135). For this reason, it can be argued that the mystery around the death of the Major creates the sense of uncanny in the novel. Therefore, it turns into a frightening event for the characters like Miss Marple, Victoria and especially Molly, who begins to suffer from the effects of the uncanny incident and experiences a mental breakdown similar to the characters in Freud's Sand-Man example.

2.2. *The Uncanny as The Fear*

The second point in relation to the sense of uncanny is about the attitude of the characters in the face of death. Except for Miss Marple, the characters are not interested in the subject of the Major's death. In fact, they even try to avoid this matter. The fictional island in the Caribbean promises these characters a beautiful holiday in tranquillity and calmness without anything to worry. It is quite likely that no one wants to talk about death in this environment. However, there is also the growing influence of the uncanny on the characters reflected in their emotional response. About the lack of interest in the Major's death, it is explained that "after all, nobody had known the deceased very well. [...] Major Palgrave might have been a lonely man; he had also been quite a cheerful one. He had enjoyed himself in his own particular way. And now he was dead, buried, and nobody cared very much, and in another week's time nobody would even remember him or spare him a passing thought" (Christie, 1964: 27). In only a few days, the Major seems to have been forgotten by all the characters. In addition to Miss Marple, Victoria is the only character in the hotel who shows some interest in the matter because of her ideas about the pills that were found in the Major's room after his death. Her inquisitive attitude results in her death, heralded by Molly once again who discover the poor girl's corpse in the bushes very close to the residents at the hotel:

"I don't know," said Molly. "I don't know what happened. I don't know anything. I can't remember. I" She raised her head suddenly. "What's the matter with me? What's the matter with me?"

"It's all right, child. It's all right."

Tim was coming slowly up the steps. His face was ghastly. Evelyn looked up at him, raising her eyebrows in a query. "It's one of our girls," he said. "What's-her-name Victoria. Somebody's put a knife in her." (Christie, 1964: 77)

The death of Victoria creates a fearful atmosphere for all characters, yet the strange incidents continue in the once-familiar hotel. Moreover, the sudden disappearance of Molly builds onto the sense of uncanny since the situation becomes more and more threatening. On the one hand, the characters want to leave all these issues behind. On the other, they cannot escape the subject of death and imminent threat, an obvious source of uncanny, on their holiday. Molly's disappearance is another incident that evokes the uncanny as follows:

"Oh, Miss Marple? It's Mrs. Kendal. Her husband woke up, found she'd slipped out of bed and gone out. We're looking for her." He hurried on. Miss Marple walked more slowly after

him. Where had Molly gone? Why? Had she planned this deliberately, planned to slip away as soon as the guard on her was relaxed, and while her husband was deep in sleep? Miss Marple thought it was probable. But why? What was the reason? Was there, as Esther Walters had so strongly hinted, some other man? If so, who could that man be? Or was there some more sinister reason? Miss Marple walked on, looking around her, peering under bushes. Then suddenly she heard a faint call: "Here... This way..." (Christie, 1964: 155)

All these questions that pass through Miss Marple's mind aim to understand the mystery hidden behind these events that frighten everyone. In line with Freud's point of view, fear is one of the strongest feelings associated with the uncanny due to its strange nature. The action in the novel, triggered by the Major's death and maintained by Victoria's a little later, reaches its climax around Molly's disappearance: "With the leaves and rushes of the creek, it seemed almost like a scene from *Hamlet* with Molly as the dead Ophelia" (Christie, 1964: 157). The reference to Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* helps to create the sense of uncanny for the readers who now realise that there is an even greater mystery to be solved by the characters, along with Miss Marple's concern and anxiety about the latest developments in the paradise. Nevertheless, all these strange events constitute a stark contrast with the tranquillity and familiarity at the beginning of the novel. At the end of *A Caribbean Mystery*, all characters feel that there is some kind of danger in this place. As Freud states, "the notion of the hidden and the dangerous, which appears in the last section, undergoes a further development, so that *heimlich* acquires the sense that otherwise belongs to *unheimlich*. [...] *Heimlich* thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*. The uncanny is in some way a species of the familiar" (2003: 134). Christie successfully creates the sense of uncanny in the characters and the readers. Likewise, the following inquiry into the origins of the murder contribute to this feeling: "That's very difficult to tell. There are people, you know, who are naturally nervous about their own safety, about being mixed up with anything. It isn't necessarily because they have any guilty knowledge. On the other hand, it might be just that" (Christie, 1964: 82). The familiar and the strange are brought together by means of the murders and the inquisitive mind of a detective to learn the truth behind all this mystery. In his argument, Freud draws attention to "doubt as to whether an apparently animate object really is alive and, conversely, whether a lifeless object might not perhaps be animate" (2003: 135). This approach can be employed to explain the sleepwalkers, who are neither sleeping nor awake in this state, which is highly relevant in the example of Molly since she is prone to this act in *A Caribbean Mystery*. Her practice of sleepwalking, with a deadly outlook while she is

alive, is uncanny as well. Additionally, Miss Marple and others fear that she is dead once they find Molly in the darkness of the night. Molly's condition is between life and death, creating uncertainty. This inbetweenness plays an important role in the fear raised around her disappearance.

2.3. *The Uncanny Resulting from the Setting*

The third point to discuss on the sense of uncanny in *A Caribbean Mystery* is about the matter of the home. For Miss Marple and other British characters, the experience on the exotic island calls for the uncanny, because they are far away from their home in the sense that the concept of home stands for both their domestic area and the country, Great Britain. In relation to Freud's account of the uncanny, in which he defines the Heimlich as "belonging to the house," "familiar," "intimate" and "homely," the uncanny stands for being away from home, in an unfamiliar environment, distant from what is recognisable and unhomely (2003: 126). The setting in Christie's novel is highly relevant to the discussion of the uncanny because of its impact on the characters, among them especially Miss Marple. As a native British, Miss Marple has been to different parts of the world in her other adventures to come back to Britain ultimately.

However, this fictional island, which at the same time refers to the colonial past of the British Empire in the Caribbean, evokes uncanny feelings in the detective. Her attitude is depicted as follows: "Tonight, for the first time, she began to feel slightly at home in her new environment [...] She had, possibly, been dazzled by the gay clothes and the exotic colouring; but soon, she felt, she would be able to make some interesting comparisons" (Christie, 1964: 15). In order to feel at home in this exotic place, Miss Marple tries to find similarities between her home and the island. For instance, she resembles Molly Kendal to the "conductress on the Market Basing Bus," Tim Kendal to "the head waiter at the Royal George in Medchester," Greg to "a dash of Sir George Trollope" or to "Mr Murdoch the butcher" since he was American and Lucky to "easy Marleen at the Three Crowns" (Christie, 1964: 17). In other words, this exotic place creates an uncanny feeling in Miss Marple. According to Towell "characters are apt to experience the uncanny when seemingly familiar places and people become 'unhome-like' – they no longer appear safe and inviting" (2009: 1). It is clear that her experience on the island is highly disturbing for the old woman since she cannot adapt herself to this new environment as well as these new people, their appearances and manners. She begins to associate them with people that she knew back at home.

Moreover, the owner of the hotel, Tim Kendal, also touches upon her apparently upset countenance and comments as follows: "Nothing special you want, is there? [...] Because you've only got to tell me, and I could get it specially cooked for you. Hotel food, and semi-tropical at that, isn't quite what you are used to at home, I expect?" (Christie, 1964: 27). In this exotic land,

she feels like a stranger and despite her attempts to get herself acquainted with these new people, she cannot stop missing her home. Likewise, Miss Marple feels sorry for the death of Major Palgrave mainly because of his dying very far away from home: "It seems so sad [...] to think of anyone dying like this away from home. Though I gather, from what he himself told me, that he had no immediate family. It seems he lived by himself in London" (Christie, 1964: 27). Maybe, if Major Palgrave were to die back in London, Miss Marple would not have felt so much pity for him. At least, he would have died in Britain that is home for both of them. The unknown location and unfamiliar experience in terms of the setting, thus, increase the sense of uncanny.

The uncanny resulting from this unhomey experience can be observed in the relationship between Evelyn and her husband Edward Hillingdon as well. Above all, the couple has a very complicated affair with Greg and Lucky. Although they are married, this is just a public show to cover the mysterious affair. In fact, Lucky and Edward are in love and the couples just continue their relationship. At this point in the novel, Edward feels that he is tired of their lifestyle and wants to go back home despite their initial agreement: "Evelyn, would you mind if we chucked all this and went home to England?" (Christie, 1964: 70). Evelyn answers the question as follows: "You really want to go back to England. Back home?" (Christie, 1964: 71). The explanation by Edward for his sudden wish is to feel himself in tranquillity and calmness, where he is remote from the tension he experiences on the island. He says, "I'm at a breaking point. I can't stick it any longer, Evelyn. I can't. [...] Nothing's the matter except that I want to get out of here" (Christie, 1964: 71). Their unusual relationship is attached to the island and their long holidays to the other couple. For this reason, Edward realises that if they stay away from the island and go back to their home, they will solve their problems. Due to the tension in their personal affairs, he feels himself under pressure as the dialogue indicates: "The quite Edward Hillingdon was transformed. His hands shook, he swallowed, his calm unemotional face seemed distorted by pain" (Christie, 1964: 70). In addition, the following revelation as regards the fate of Gregory Dyson creates an uncanny feeling for the reader: "No. She died. Out here, I believe. I don't mean this particular island, but one of the West Indies islands. There was some sort of trouble, I believe" (Christie, 1964: 48).

Accordingly, it can be argued that the sense of uncanny resulting from the exotic and unknown setting disturbs the characters, who miss the "sense of safety – a sense of home" (Towell, 2009: 2). Freud says that "starting from the homely and the domestic, there is a further development towards the notion of something removed from the eyes of strangers, hidden, secret. This notion is extended in a number of ways" (2003: 133). Kimball states that "the home, the *Heimlich*, is precisely the site of the *unheimlich*, so that to return to

home may not be to return from the uncanny but to return to it and yet another encounter with terror and dread” (1987: 530). Seymour supports this point as follows: “The intersection of the meaning between heimlich and unheimlich, moreover, occurs because both words can mean which is kept hidden. What is familiar, therefore, may indeed be what has been held in secret, concealed” (2006: 4). In addition to the connotation of the uncanny with home, the emphasis on what is meant to be hidden and secret plays an important role in the experience of these characters. As Freud further argues, “uncanny is what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open” (2003: 132). The culmination of Molly and Tim’s marriage because of the affair of the latter with Esther, which is a secret revealed later in the novel as part of the mystery behind murders (Christie, 1964: 161), is rooted in this longing for home due to their life on the island.

Thus, the distance from their home, indeed anxiety resulting from unhomeliness, creates the sense of uncanny for many characters in *A Caribbean Mystery*. Moreover, this feeling of being far away from their home is strengthened by a vital threat in the form of imprisonment on this island. As Caspore informs other characters about the police investigation, she says “[...] the police do not let us go from this island. I storm, I scream, I stamp my foot, but all they say is ‘No’. No. You know how it will end, we shall all be killed” (Christie, 1964: 127). As her statement clearly indicates the uncanny feeling is associated with this island, which awaits them for awful incidents. Nevertheless, “the uncanny is highly subjective,” which explains the contrasting attitude of the characters to the same incidents such Miss Marple’s calmness and Molly’s fear in the face of death (Brown, 2007: 12). The mystery in the title of this novel appears in the murder cases and the affairs between these couples as well as the relationship between Tim and Esther, all of which create the sense of uncanny. Therefore, tension continues to increase and the characters find themselves in an environment both familiar and strange, secure and threatening as well as carefree and anxious.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Christie’s *A Caribbean Mystery* is a narrative that presents the uncanny through the fictional account of various characters in this work. In addition to the literary qualities that classify this novel as an example of detective fiction, the attempts by the writer to create the feelings of fear, eeriness, doubt and disturbance turn the novel into a literary work that enables the analysis of the uncanny. Indeed, the sense of uncanny does not operate on its own due to the literary qualities of the novel. For this reason, the sense of uncanny actually contributes to the suspense that can be attributed to the crime and detective novels. In the light of Freud’s approach to the concept as a psychological phenomenon, major dilemmas about mystery, fear and homeliness within the context of the uncanny have been studied in Christie’s

novel and they show that this detective novel makes use of the uncanny to increase suspense throughout the adventures of the detective. Accordingly, it can be argued that the sense of uncanny is successfully created in *A Caribbean Mystery* and contributes to the narrative technique in terms of the readers' experience in reading a work of crime fiction.

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