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“One Must Actually Take Facts as They Are”: Information Value and Information Behavior in the Miss Marple Novels (Michelle M. Kazmer)

“There are many ways we prefer to look at things.
But one must actually take facts as they are, must
one not?”

Agatha Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage*¹

One perspective not often brought to the study of detective fiction is that from the field of information science. Among other topics, information science is concerned with information behavior, or how people behave with respect to information: needing, seeking, accidentally encountering, avoiding, evaluating, storing and so forth. Examining the solving of a mystery as an information behavior has potential for insights into the genre and into our twenty-first century readings of detective fiction. Current audiences are accustomed to modern

information technology and the information behaviors afforded by it: amateur sleuths hack computer systems or professional detectives analyze trace evidence for DNA. Highly technologized contemporary information environments leave us to ask: in what ways do the manipulation of information value, and the sophistication of the information behaviors, in novels written by Agatha Christie in the early- to mid-twentieth century, continue to enthrall readers in the twenty-first?

Within the information science discipline, many scholars have conducted research that focuses on information behavior and information value in real-life contexts; another important research stream focuses on the use and recommendation of fiction for entertainment. It is much less common to see information behavior theories applied to helping us understand the construction of fictional narratives and actions.ⁱⁱ Theorizing the solving of a mystery as an information behavior has potential for insights into the detective fiction genre overall. This approach can also increase our understanding of how information value is co-constructed in real-life contexts by focusing on how mystery authors' narratives succeed in convincing, holding the attention of, and occasionally fooling, real-world readers.

The analysis presented here is an extension of my work in studying shared knowledge practices and how those are shaped by the contexts in which they occur.ⁱⁱⁱ For this analysis, I chose the theoretical approach afforded by information worlds theory. The theory of information worlds was created by Gary Burnett and Paul Jaeger, and published in 2008.^{iv} In creating information worlds theory, Burnett and Jaeger drew on two existing conceptual frameworks. The first was Elfreda Chatman's "Small Worlds", where information behaviors occur within local, largely homogeneous social settings.^v The second was Jurgen Habermas's "Lifeworld", the sum total of all information resources and norms culture-wide.^{vi} Burnett and Jaeger sought to resolve this big/small dichotomy to examine information *within* individual

worlds as well as interactions *across* multiple worlds. Information worlds theory includes four concepts: social norms, social types, information value, and information behavior. Social norms are the shared understanding of rightness and wrongness in observable social behaviors; social types are the shared perceptions of individuals' roles in the context of the information world. The social norms, social types and social worlds as viewed through economic/political/sociological lenses have already been heavily studied for early detective fiction.

The concepts of information value and information behavior are open for analysis, specifically as they help us learn about how amateur detectives – and particularly women – function in the worlds constructed by and for them in the literature. Information value is defined as the shared understanding of what is worth attention and what information is meaningful within an information world. Information behavior is the full range of normative behaviors related to information. Information behavior includes such concepts as information needs, seeking, use, avoidance, rationing and management. People in various situations need information, and they may or may not be aware of those needs. Faced with an information need people may seek information actively, such as by searching a website, or passively encountering information during daily activities, for example, reading billboard advertisements while driving. People use information to inform decisions, to build knowledge or to influence the actions of others. They may avoid undesirable information, and withhold or ration information they give to others. Acquired or created information is managed: organized, stored/archived, preserved or discarded. Within this chapter, the two concepts of information behavior and information value are used to examine the twelve Miss Marple novels.^{vii} The analysis demonstrates that Miss Marple lives within sophisticated information worlds that are shaped not only by contextually-determined social norms and social values, but by information-oriented behavior and co-creation of information value.

Applying these concepts to the Marple novels indicates several aspects of Miss Marple's praxis that are susceptible to information worlds analysis.^{viii} This chapter focuses on three: access, tactics and value.

Access

A central problem with fictional amateur detectives (as opposed to a government detective affiliated with the police or even a professional or a "licensed" consulting detective) is how the author can write them legitimately into the plot and offer them access to a mystery that is, strictly speaking, none of their personal or professional concern. From an information behavior perspective, this problem is reframed as how to secure the detective access to an information world. For Christie, in the Marple novels, the specific problem is how to get Miss Marple to a place where she can access information, make her own judgments as to its value, analyze the information and present her conclusions in a way that is valued by those in a position to act upon them.

In twenty-first century detective fiction the same access problems exist, although they are often framed in terms of technology access. The amateur sleuth has to break into a computer system to get a DNA or autopsy report, or has to figure out how to kludge together some kind of wireless network in the face of jammers set up by the enemy or the police (who are often the same). For Miss Marple, while the technologies may be simpler, the information access problems are not necessarily more tractable. Before using tactics (below), she has to get to the right place (a hotel, a house, a town) and to do so requires leveraging her social position. From a social perspective, Miss Marple gets embedded structurally via her interpersonal relationships with the clergy or with individuals (almost always men) who have law

enforcement power or substantial money. Miss Marple's presence is not sufficient to provide access; solving a mystery, and meeting her ethical imperative of seeing the culprit brought to justice (by causing or taking action), requires access to information.

Social and physical access facilitates information access, but even access to information is not enough – one has to be able to act upon information, manipulate it, and be able to convince others to act upon it. For example, in *The Body in the Library* (1942), once Miss Marple is placed in a nearby hotel and in view of people who can help her, she can then engage in dialogue with the former Commissioner of Scotland Yard, Sir Henry Clithering, who can act legitimately upon her deductions and provide access to a network of individuals who can provide information of high value. Miss Marple begins her probe into this mystery via a typical self-devaluing statement, saying, “It’s rather embarrassing for me, because, of course, I am no use at all”.^{ix} Sir Henry Clithering responds by interrogating the possibility that the people in this mystery will remind her of people she has already known, by asking, “No ideas? No village parallels?” Miss Marple then launches the rest of their interaction proper by offering the first move in an information-seeking process, saying, “I don’t know very much about it all yet”.^x A significant shift with respect to information seeking happens here: through the remainder of that chapter section, Marple does most of the talking; she is not seeking information *from* Sir Henry Clithering. Clithering has, as he phrases it, called Marple into consultation, and his contribution is actually to provide access to the people to whom Marple is subsequently able to speak in Chapter 9 – Adelaide Jefferson and Mark Gaskell – who provide key information needed for her to solve the murders.

In *The Body in the Library*, there is little difficulty in getting Miss Marple into physical proximity to the location where most of the information activity about the murders is conducted (that is, not necessarily where the murders happened or the bodies were found, but

where the key people are staying), because that location is a relatively public space (a hotel). A hotel-as-public-space is found in other Marple novels, such as *At Bertram's Hotel* and *A Caribbean Mystery*. In these cases, as in *The Body in the Library*, the question of access is of gaining access to the information world itself, because physical access to the setting is not overly difficult (and any difficulties of financial access are solved generously and graciously by Miss Marple's successful author nephew, Raymond West).

Some of the novels demonstrate a very different access problem, that of how to get Marple into a closed (country house) setting before she can focus on using information tactics to solve the mystery. *A Pocket Full of Rye* (1953) contains such an example of Marple gaining access to a very firmly bounded information world. In it she uses her age, gender, religion and social position, combined with the natural upheaval of a household that has been home to three murders, to insinuate herself not only into the mystery but into the house. This is described in Chapter 13, when she arrives unannounced at Yewtree Lodge after the third murder: "So charming, so innocent, such a fluffy and pink and white old lady was Miss Marple that she gained admittance to what was now practically a fortress in a state of siege".^{xi}

Marple's reason for putting all of these tools at her disposal into play is that she had prior personal knowledge of one of the victims – the victim whose role as a parlormaid rendered her the most powerless of the victims. Marple announces her arrival on the doorstep of Yewtree Lodge by saying, "I have come ... to speak about the poor girl who was killed. Gladys Martin". The butler immediately admits her to the house, where she engages in dialogue with a member of the household and is rapidly shepherded to Inspector Neele, the law enforcement representative on the premises in charge of the murder case. He uses his own knowledge of human nature to inform his decision to take Miss Marple into his

confidence right away (“Miss Marple would be useful to him. She was upright, of unimpeachable rectitude and she had, like most old ladies, time on her hands and an old maid’s nose for scenting bits of gossip”),^{xii} but later readers learn that he has also relied on a typical test of Miss Marple’s bona fides – verifying her worth with a powerful member of law enforcement – when he tells her: “I’ve heard something about you at the Yard ... It seems you’re fairly well-known there”.^{xiii} She responds in kind by admitting her long-standing friendship with Sir Henry Clithering. This information-world access problem resolved, Miss Marple and Inspector Neele proceed to share, sift, and organize information together to solve the mystery.^{xiv}

Tactics

Gaining access to an information world is a necessary condition for engaging in the information practices needed to solve a mystery, but it is not a sufficient condition. Social and physical access facilitates information access, but simply having access to information is not enough – one has to be able to act upon information, manipulate it, and be able to convince others to act upon it. Once Miss Marple has established her bona fides with the right people (such as Sir Henry Clithering; although establishment of that relationship occurs primarily in the short stories, the relationship is leveraged in the novels), those people’s descriptions of her represent high value on her, the information she provides, and her information behaviors. This is in contrast with the descriptions of Miss Marple by people who have not yet seen her proved, who tend to continue to refer to her as an “old pussy” who is “nosy”.^{xv} In other words, the uninitiated tend to consider Miss Marple an unsophisticated person who seeks information, but in a way that is morally questionable and of limited value because of her gender, her age and where she lives. Clithering, the retired head of Scotland

Yard who is familiar with her skills, poses the alternative view, saying “She’s just the finest detective God ever made. Natural genius cultivated in a suitable soil”.^{xvi} That “suitable soil” is exactly the small village in which she lives. Miss Marple argues for her use of the village as a source of knowledge about life by saying, “Nothing, I believe, is so full of life under the microscope as a drop of water from a stagnant pool”.^{xvii} Far from being an information-poor context, St. Mary Mead is unexpectedly information rich.

To solve each mystery, once she has gained access through physical location and through reputation, Miss Marple needs to act in various specific ways with respect to information. She needs to engage in a suite of information behaviors, most of which can be framed as “tactics”, because they are goal-focused and part of a larger – usually unexplicated, although not hidden, as part of Christie’s method for playing fair while keeping the solution from being too obvious to the reader – strategy of attack.

When readers of the novels meet Miss Marple in *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930), they soon encounter the conflict between her oft-repeated description of her own information world as being limited and simple – “Living alone, as I do, in a rather out-of-the-way part of the world” – and the complexity of her information behavior. One example of this complexity is her recognition of the need to ration information strategically when dealing with Inspector Slack: her tactic is complex rationing, in which she controls the amount, method and timing of disclosures, rather than a much more simplistic technique of withholding everything.^{xviii}

In addition to controlling her information sharing, Marple uses tactics to confirm and elicit information, tactics well known in the literature and to readers. A common one is the bluff or trap, usually sprung using another person as a cat’s paw. A significant complexity in the use of this tactic is that Miss Marple carefully assesses from whom the false information that

serves as the bait of the bluff or trap is likely to be believed. One example of this complexity is her choice of Megan, an unsophisticated twenty-year-old woman with no apparent qualifications as a blackmailer or as a detective's assistant, to set a "blackmail" trap in *The Moving Finger* (1943). When the protagonist and narrator of *The Moving Finger* accuses Miss Marple of "roping in Megan" to this trap, which all along he claimed was far too dangerous an activity for Megan, Miss Marple tells him sternly:

There was no evidence against this very clever and unscrupulous man. I needed someone to help me, someone of high courage and good brains ... Yes, it was dangerous, but we are not put into this world, Mr. Burton, to avoid danger when an innocent fellow-creature's life is at stake.^{xix}

Having decided that Megan was the correct person to deliver the blackmail information most plausibly, Miss Marple is not to be dissuaded by risk. Similarly, in *The Murder at the Vicarage*, the "false warning" trap Marple creates for the murderers is sprung by a village doctor, whom she chooses as being the most plausible deliverer of the false warning. Dr. Haydock has, earlier in the book, spoken openly of his sympathy for a medicalized view of crime, speculating that the tendency to murder or theft may be glandular and in that case should be cured rather than punished (judicially and socially).^{xx} When Miss Marple plans to trap the murderers by having a false warning delivered to them that will stimulate their flight (an explicit indicator of guilt), she therefore selects Haydock as the most plausible information carrier, saying, "the warning should come from somebody who is known to have rather unusual views on these matters. Dr. Haydock's conversation would lead anyone to suppose that he might view such a thing as murder from an unusual angle".^{xxi} Because the

doctor could plausibly be believed to be sharing true information that would facilitate the murderers' escape, he is the perfect person to ensure their capture.

While much of Miss Marple's information is acquired through everyday conversation and through her day-to-day lived experience, she also explicitly engages in information *seeking* tactics. Three of these will be discussed here. First is her use of what a modern reader would think of as an *information source*; Miss Marple's personal use of *formal* information sources is relatively rare, and thus is noteworthy when it happens. For example, in *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side* (1962), she pursues "her own methods of research", requesting old film magazines from the proprietor of the local hairdressing parlor to help her understand the social world of film stars.^{xxii} In *4.50 From Paddington* (1957), Miss Marple reaches out to Leonard Clement (the now-grown son of the vicar who lives next door to Miss Marple) for a railway map, using it to discover a likely dumping place for a dead body.^{xxiii}

Miss Marple also uses *informal* information sources, which include personal exchanges in which she is explicitly seeking information via questions, as well as artifacts that are not formal information sources.^{xxiv} An example of such an artifact is found in *A Murder is Announced* (1950), when Miss Marple refers to Miss Blacklock's old correspondence to help solve a riddle of identity and subsequently a murder. Asking questions is considered a normal part of Miss Marple's social role, and therefore is an information behavior she can perform without raising undue suspicion about her motives (even if she annoys people in the process, they are unlikely to be suspicious). As Inspector Neele muses to himself in *A Pocket Full of Rye*,

She'd get things out of servants and out of the women of the Fortescue family perhaps, that he and his policemen would never get. Talk,

conjecture, reminiscences, repetitions of things said and done, out of it all she would pick the salient facts.^{xxv}

Miss Marple herself repeatedly points out that it would be considered less normal if she *didn't* ask questions in an inquisitive way. In *Sleeping Murder* (1976) she explains to the young married protagonists Gwenda and Giles that she has learned so much about the past surrounding the victim by “gossiping a little. In shops – and waiting for buses. Old ladies are supposed to be inquisitive”.^{xxvi} Similarly, she reassures Inspector Craddock in *A Murder is Announced* that she will be safer (despite being in assumed proximity to an as-yet-unidentified murderer) if she asks questions of the people she meets, saying, “we old women always do snoop. It would be very odd and much more noticeable if I didn't”.^{xxvii} Leveraging this ability to ask personal questions of practically everyone she meets allows Marple to elicit the information she needs in order to compare the situation at hand with a parallel experience from St. Mary Mead, or to share with the relevant law enforcement representative to build a more complete picture of the crime.

Lastly, Miss Marple uses physical tactics to seek information. Although her age generally prevents her from engaging in very vigorous or dangerous physical endeavors, she is not loath to perambulate herself in the service of justice. This is seen throughout the twelve novels, from the earliest to the latest. *The Murder at the Vicarage* finds her outside, ostensibly birdwatching while using her binoculars to gain information by spying on Gladys Cram. Later in that book, she is impelled by her curiosity at having received a wrong-number telephone call to venture abroad in the middle of the night to find out if she “couldn't do something”.^{xxviii} “something” turns out to be identifying the murderer(s), saving an innocent man from being wrongly convicted or allowed to die, and designing the trap through which the murderer(s) would be caught. She spends her own money and embarks on two extra train

journeys in *4.50 From Paddington* in an effort to locate the likeliest spot for the disposal of the murder victim.

One of the most memorable of Miss Marple's very physical excursions in search of information is her broken-heeled-shoe trek in *A Caribbean Mystery* (1964). Desiring to observe the surreptitious actions of Arthur Jackson in the cabin of his employer, Mr. Rafiel, she produces

a pair of shoes the heel of one of which she had recently caught on a hook by the door. It was now in a slightly precarious state and Miss Marple adroitly rendered it even more precarious by attention with a nail file.^{xxix}

Carrying this engineered shoe as a prop, "with all the care of a Big Game Hunter approaching upwind of a herd of antelope, Miss Marple gently circumnavigate[s] Mr. Rafiel's bungalow".^{xxx} She lies down on the ground, waiting to see if Jackson has heard her and ready with her broken heel excuse should he appear. He does not, and, "shielding herself slightly with a festoon of creeper she peer[s] inside ...".^{xxxi}

Marple engages in a variety of information behaviors, including seeking information from formal and informal sources, using physical tactics to seek information, and developing complex techniques for providing information to others. For information to be useful, or considered useful, or acted upon, it also needs to be considered valuable within the information world in which it is being deployed. Miss Marple and Agatha Christie work together to characterize, describe and manipulate information value for the characters within the novels and for the reader.

Value

Marple often signifies the disclosure of valuable information by undervaluing herself, prefacing her disclosure by saying things such as, “I know that I am very often rather foolish and don’t take in things as I should”.^{xxxii} She then provides information that others value because it is based on her sound logic (for example, the flawed timing of the Colonel’s note in *The Murder at the Vicarage*) or on tangible physical evidence (such as Lawrence Redding’s rock which is not the correct type for her rock garden, or the wilted plant in the Vicar’s study). Although Miss Marple consistently presents her evidence and logic using devaluing language, her information behaviors are not only complex. They also intentionally produce information that will be valued and thus acted upon by people who need it and have the power, directly or by proxy, to protect the innocent and convict the guilty.

In the earlier section on “access”, I argued that Miss Marple had to rely on people in authority to facilitate her access to information settings; similarly, because she is a private individual, she must convince someone with law enforcement authority that her information has value. Only once they are convinced will they be willing to act. In general Miss Marple relies on one key player figuring out for himself (he being a man who has the needed authority or power) that her reasoning and conclusions are almost always accurate, rather than she actively seeking to prove her worth. This one key player who satisfied himself of her value – often Sir Henry Clithering, as noted earlier – then justifies Marple to others who may question her skills. In some cases, such justification is not sufficient, and Marple is explicitly tested.

Inspector Craddock explicitly “tests” Marple soon after the first murder in *A Murder is Announced*. As Sir Henry Clithering’s godson, Craddock has already been told that Miss Marple is a worthy ally, but, as a competent detective, Craddock is determined to verify this

information himself. Craddock tests Marple during their first meeting by saying, “The truth of the matter is that the facts are indisputable. Whatever conflicting details these people give, they all saw one thing”. Miss Marple responds by pointing out, “gently” we are told, that “[t]hey couldn’t – actually – have seen anything at all” because they were all in a dark room with a single bright light being shined into their eyes.^{xxxiii} In response Craddock increases his assessment of the value of her potential contributions, thinking to himself, “She’d got it! She was sharp, after all. He was testing her by that speech of his, but she hadn’t fallen for it”.^{xxxiv}

Another way Miss Marple helps shape others’ valuing of the information they find is by encouraging skepticism. She frequently reminds people that they need to question the value of all the information around them, but particularly information they get from other people. It is not that she places no value on information provided by people, but again (as with her use of the rationing tactic mentioned earlier), her approach is more nuanced than binary (by binary I mean a choice of assigning no value or having absolute trust). So, while Miss Marple rarely uses formal information sources, and makes extensive use of information she gets from other people, she treats that information with high skepticism and processes it using logic and her prior knowledge of how humans act in specific situations or in response to specific stimuli. She frequently reminds others that they should apply more skepticism in their valuations of information. In *The Body in the Library*, Miss Marple summarizes this process of information valuing to Mrs. Bantry: “The trouble in this case is that everybody has been much too *credulous* and *believing*”, she states. “You simply cannot *afford* to believe everything that people tell you. When there’s anything fishy about, I never believe anyone at all! You see, I know human nature so well”.^{xxxv}

Similarly, in *Sleeping Murder*, Marple uses her concerns about the naïveté of the protagonists (young Gwenda and Giles, mentioned above) to justify gaining access to the information

world surrounding their mystery. Of Gwenda and Giles, she says, “I’m worried about those two. They’re very young and inexperienced and much too trusting and credulous. I feel I ought to be there to look after them”.^{xxxvi} Having gained access to this information world (on “doctor’s orders”) Miss Marple frequently reminds the protagonists *and thus the reader* to apply skepticism to any information that comes from people. By the end of the book, she has repeated this exhortation so many times that she even reveals a hint of exasperation, saying, “My dear Giles, you’ve fallen into the trap again – the trap of believing *what is said to you*”.^{xxxvii}

Marple’s skepticism over information provided through what people say is foregrounded in *They Do It With Mirrors*, where it is apparently placed in direct contradiction with her friend and host Carrie Louise Serrocold’s inherent trusting nature. Miss Marple says of her old friend, “Carrie Louise is *not* an ordinary woman. She lives by her trust, by her belief in human nature”.^{xxxviii} While in *Sleeping Murder* the need for skepticism is stressed repeatedly, in *They Do It With Mirrors*, Marple’s tendency toward skepticism is repeatedly contrasted with Mrs. Serrocold’s trusting nature. In the end, however, Serrocold’s trust and beliefs in what she thought and felt provide Marple with the most effective direction for her own skepticism; Marple realizes that, rather than her normal tactic of not believing what she was *told*, she needs in this case to disbelieve what she *saw*. Marple explains towards the end:

Everyone kept saying how Carrie Louise lived in another world from this and was out of touch with reality. But actually, Carrie Louise, it was reality you were in touch with, and not the illusion. You are never deceived by illusion like most of us are. When I suddenly realized that, I saw that I must go by what *you* thought and felt.^{xxxix}

She goes on to say, “So therefore, if I was to go by you, all the things that *seemed* to be true were only illusions”.^{xl} Even a reader familiar enough with Marple to exercise a healthy skepticism of information provided by others can be fooled by this subtle twist.

The Moving Finger provides an extended example of information value that includes aspects of skepticism, authority, and truth.^{xli} The plot of *The Moving Finger* is organized around a specific information type – the malicious anonymous letter – that is in one way of very low value, because it is despised, detested, and reviled, yet is in some ways that actually “count”, of very high value. By “ways that actually count”, I mean value assessments that influence people’s beliefs and actions. Information does not have to be true to have value in the sense that it influences thoughts and actions. False information can also have high value in the sense that it influences people to behave or act badly; the value here is not in the truth, but in the impact on actions.

Within the novel, one character (Mrs. Dane Calthrop, who also serves as Miss Marple’s means of access to this information world; as the vicar’s wife and Miss Marple’s friend, she invites Marple to stay in her home specifically to help solve the mystery) points out that the information contained within the anonymous letters is factually inaccurate – but false information can have high value and influence people’s behavior strongly. The malicious letters in *The Moving Finger*, or rather the information contained within them, influence people’s beliefs and actions in specific ways. Boyfriends are made to feel (unjustly) suspicious of girlfriends; a brother and sister are made to feel (inaccurately) unwelcome in town; a secretary and a maid change employers to avoid (non-existent) scandals.

Mrs. Dane Calthrop has pointed out that the anonymous letters are not true and have no face value as information; but the information contained in them still has high negative value as evaluated by its influence on thought and action. At this point Marple engages in the second

prong of the double bluff and reveals that in reality, the letters also do not actually carry the high negative value that pretends to undergird them. Not only do the letters and their contents have no information value that derives from truth, they also have no true intentional value; there is no true malicious intent behind the letters because they are all just a distractor. Or, while there is malicious intent behind the sending of the letters, it has nothing to do with the information contained in the letters (true or false) or its perceived value by their recipients. They are serving exclusively as a distractor, and their complicated low/high information value is distracting the characters in the novel and the reader from a far more mundane act of evil: a man's murder of his wife.

Marple explains the letters' role as a distractor using a phrase ("no smoke without fire") that is a motif of the novel: "If you disregard the smoke and come to the fire", she suggests, "you know where you are. You just come down to the actual facts of what happened. And putting aside the letters, just one thing happened – Mrs. Symington died".^{xlii} The plot twist revealed when Marple solves the mystery is an information value twist. Once Miss Marple (and the other characters, and the reader) disregard the smoke and come to the fire – that is, focus on the information whose value is associated with real motivations – only then can justice be achieved.

This chapter has focused on a small yet rich sub-set of the Christie corpus, the twelve Miss Marple novels. Using information worlds theory, and specifically the concepts of information behavior and information value, I examined three aspects of Miss Marple's praxis: access, tactics, and value. In each case, the hard work put in by Agatha Christie and by Miss Marple is shown to be more nuanced than might be expected, and indicates how information sources and information behavior operate in complex ways in these information worlds. Miss Marple, as a woman, often uses typically feminine self-devaluating language and relies on men to

gain access to information worlds and to support the perceived value of her information – to make it “actionable”. This analysis has demonstrated that the information tactics she employs are smart, sophisticated and effective.

My hope is that the reader, having read this chapter, will in the future encounter detective fiction in part by looking at information worlds, how the fictional detectives are constrained by their information worlds and how they gain access to information worlds. Information behaviors and tactics used in detective fiction are complex and rely on the readers’ shared and usually tacit understanding of information value, which can be manipulated by the author through the characters’ actions and dialogue as well as through narrative. Both formal and informal information sources are discovered, referred to, evaluated, and applied in detective novels; the use of modern information technology to support storage, access and delivery of sources does not matter so much as the information behaviors and valuations that are applied to them. Information behavior in detective fiction is not just finding the facts and then solving the murder. It is a much more complex story of access, tactics and manipulating information value.

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ⁱ Agatha Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), p. 56.

ⁱⁱ For exceptions, see Rhiannon Gainor, “The Relevant Clues: Information Behavior and Assessment in Classic Detective Fiction”, Presented at the annual conference of the Canadian Association for Information Science, Fredericton Canada, June 2-4 2011; Deborah Hicks and Caroline Whippey, “Everyone Forgets that Knowledge is the Ultimate Weapon”: Information Seeking Practices in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*”, presented at the annual conference of the Canadian Association for Information Science, Waterloo, Canada, 31 May 2012; Don L. Latham and Jonathan M. Hollister, “The Games People Play: Information and Media Literacies in the Hunger Games Trilogy”, *Children’s Literature in Education*, 45 (2014), pp. 33-46.

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^{iv} Gary Burnett and Paul R. Jaeger, “Small worlds, lifeworlds, and information: The Ramifications of the Information Behavior of Social Groups in Public Policy and the Public Sphere” *Information Research*, (2008), 13.2, paper 346.

^v Elfreda A. Chatman, “Life in a Small World: Applicability of Gratification Theory to Information-Seeking Behavior”, *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 42 (1991), pp. 438–449; “A Theory of Life in the Round”, *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 50.3 (1999), pp. 207-217.

^{vi} Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

^{vii} These are the Marple novels with the date of first publication in brackets: *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930); *The Body in the Library* (1942); *The Moving Finger* (1943); *A Murder is Announced* (1950); *They Do It with Mirrors* (1952); *A Pocket Full of Rye* (1953); *4.50 from Paddington* (1957); *The Mirror Crack’d from Side to Side* (1962); *A Caribbean Mystery* (1964); *At Bertram’s Hotel* (1965); *Nemesis* (1971); *Sleeping Murder* (1976, but written decades earlier)

^{viii} The word “praxis” is not a focus of this chapter, but it was selected intentionally because of Miss Marple’s insistence on action. Her middle-of-the-night raid on Mr. Rafael in *A Caribbean Mystery* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1965, pp. 226-7) has all the key elements of Miss Marple-ness—a surprise attack, a knitted scarf, an insistence on action, and the ostensible devaluing of her own ideas—in one tidy package: “Miss Marple, standing there in the moonlight, her head encased in a fluffy scarf of pale pink wool” says, “I think we may have to act quickly. Very quickly. I have been foolish. Extremely foolish. I ought to have known from the very beginning what all this was about. It was so simple”.

^{ix} Agatha Christie, *The Body in the Library* (London: HarperCollins), p. 77.

^x *Ibid.*

^{xi} Agatha Christie, *A Pocket Full of Rye* (London: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 82.

^{xii} *Ibid.*, p. 87.

^{xiii} *Ibid.*, p. 165.

^{xiv} Among the Marple novels this one is unusual: at the end of the narrative, the reader, Miss Marple, and Inspector Neele all know who the culprit is, but an arrest has not occurred.

^{xv} Agatha Christie, *Nemesis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), ch. 3, section 3; Agatha Christie, *At Bertram’s Hotel* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal, 2007), p. 11; Christie, *The Body in the Library*, p. 140.

^{xvi} Agatha Christie, *A Murder is Announced* (New York Black Dog & Leventhal, 2006), p. 47.

^{xvii} Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, p. 168.

^{xviii} In *The Murder at the Vicarage*, another female character, Lettice Protheroe also engages in strategic information rationing, and like Miss Marple, is more interested in an accurate outcome than in providing strictly “true” information during the rationing process (p. 184).

^{xix} Agatha Christie, *The Moving Finger* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), ch. 13.

^{xx} Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, p. 112.

^{xxi} *Ibid.*, p. 247.

^{xxii} Agatha Christie, *The Mirror Crack’d From Side to Side* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), ch. 13.

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- ^{xxiii} Agatha Christie, *4.50 From Paddington* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal, 2007), p. 30
- ^{xxiv} See Donald O. Case, *Looking For Information: A Survey of Research on Information Seeking, Needs, and Behavior*, third edn. (Bingley: Emerald, 2012).
- ^{xxv} Christie, *A Pocket Full of Rye*, p. 87.
- ^{xxvi} Agatha Christie, *Sleeping Murder* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), ch. 11.
- ^{xxvii} Christie, *A Murder is Announced*, p. 127.
- ^{xxviii} Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, p. 237.
- ^{xxix} Christie, *A Caribbean Mystery*, p. 184.
- ^{xxx} Ibid.
- ^{xxxi} Ibid, p. 185. Ellipsis original.
- ^{xxxii} Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, p. 54. See related literature: Pamela McKenzie and Philippa Spoel, “Borrowed Voices: Conversational Storytelling in Midwifery Healthcare Visits”, *Canadian Journal for Studies in Discourse and Writing*, 25.1 (2014); R. Savolainen, “Asking and Sharing Information in the Blogosphere: The Case of Slimming Blogs”, *Library & Information Science Research*, 33.1 (2011), pp. 73-79.
- ^{xxxiii} Christie, *A Murder is Announced*, p. 102.
- ^{xxxiv} Ibid. In *A Pocket Full of Rye*, Inspector Neele similarly tests Miss Marple by making a false assertion about the order of two of the murders to see if she will correct him. She does.
- ^{xxxv} Christie, *The Body in the Library*, p. 127. Emphasis original.
- ^{xxxvi} Christie, *Sleeping Murder*, ch. 25.
- ^{xxxvii} Ibid. Emphasis original.
- ^{xxxviii} Agatha Christie, *They Do It With Mirrors* (London: HarperCollins, 2013), ch. 11.
- ^{xxxix} Ibid, ch. 23.
- ^{xl} Ibid. Emphasis original.
- ^{xli} “Truth” is a contentious characteristic of “information”, and rightly so. See Case, *Looking for Information*, pp. 67-68.
- ^{xlii} Christie, *The Moving Finger*.