

Little Grey Cells – Dedicated to Agatha Christie©

My review of the latest Christie offering by Channel 5 – “Agatha and the Midnight Murders.”



Photography: Channel 5

“Behind The Curtain” by Dee Steel©

The Premiere aired in the UK on the 7th October 2020 on Channel 5 at 9pm. I need to stress that this film was NOT Endorsed, Licensed or Authorized by the Estate of Agatha Christie or by Agatha Christie Ltd.

The BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) has most rights on any new Christie adaptations made, as seen in the previous 5 ‘remakes’ by Screenwriter, Sarah Phelps: The first being “And Then There Were None” (2015), followed by “The Witness for the Prosecution” (2016), “Ordeal by Innocence” (2018), “The A.B.C. Murders” (2018) and lastly, “The Pale Horse” earlier this year in 2020. This exclusivity for TV has left other companies and Channels with two options; either accept the fact that the BBC can produce authorized Christie adaptations and forget it! Or. Make. Them. Up.

This is exactly what Channel 5 have done but with a twist. They have made Agatha Christie, herself, the main character and have addressed various situations in her life to base their new stories around. So, in theory, there is an element of truth to the concept of the plots, however, certain liberties have been taken and, with the aid of Artistic License, they can produce something ‘new’ without any infringements to the Christie Estate.

So, moving onto “Agatha and the Midnight Murders”, this was the third in the series of independent stories developed for Channel 5 by Writer, Tom Dalton and Director, Joe Stephenson. The first, “Agatha and The Truth of Murder” (2018) featured Ruth Bradley as Agatha, and featured her 11 day disappearance in 1926. The second, “Agatha and The Curse of Ishtar” (2019) featured Lyndsey Marshal as Christie, which addressed her first encounter with (her then 2nd and) future husband, the prolific Archaeologist, Max Mallowan.

“Agatha and the Midnight Murders”, set in 1940, concentrates on Agatha’s dire financial situation, possible bankruptcy and the manuscript of the last ever Hercule Poirot Case, “Curtain.”

The Plot (SPOILERS)

The setting, London, in 1940 during the Blitz.

The film opens with an obvious direct hit on a London Street, with smoke, fire and rubble everywhere. Visibility is low. Amidst the smoke we see a lone Air Raid Warden, wearing a gas mask, walking through the rubble checking for survivors of the bomb blast. A gloved-hand appears and is stretching up out of the rubble. Its’ owner trying to break free from the collapsed debris overhead. The Air Raid Warden, upon seeing the movement through the smoke, goes over. Grabbing the hand, the Warden removes the glove. It is a female hand wearing a beautiful and large diamond ring. Suddenly, the Air Raid Warden produces a big, almost Bowie-shaped knife, then turns their back and bends over the rubble (where she is trying to break free from) and, in silhouette, we are left in no doubt that they continue to hack off the poor, helpless woman’s finger to retrieve the diamond ring!

Little Grey Cells – Dedicated to Agatha Christie©

The scene changes and we see Agatha, played by Helen Baxendale, sitting in the back of a car, talking to Travis Pickford (Blake Harrison) whom she met 14 years earlier (in the 2018 offering “Agatha and the Truth of Murder”). It is in the evening and they are en route to an appointment.

“.....The Death of Poirot won't be in vain..” says Travis, looking in his rearview mirror at Agatha. He has agreed to act as bodyguard and to drive her to a meeting with a private buyer, a Chinese super-fan named Frankie Lei (Thomas Chanhing) who has agreed to pay £20,000 for the Manuscript. Agatha had decided to sell off her most famous creation to Lei, who wants to own a piece of history and keep the detective alive. She explains to Travis that the Inland Revenue are stalking her, she is almost bankrupt and is in desperate need of money. She has no choice. She must sell her only asset. After all, what is more valuable than the last Poirot novel?

Travis drives them to The Keys Hotel in London. Upon arrival, they wait in the seated bar area. It is already occupied by Sir Malcolm Campbell (Alistair Petrie) and his companion Miss Grace Nicory (Gina Bramhill) who are talking over cocktails. Travis and Agatha are served by Canadian barman Clarence Allan (Scott Chambers). ‘Businessman’ Eli Schneider (Daniel Caltagirone) is also sitting in the bar area, drinking, when another two ladies enter. They explain they are tourists and introduce themselves as Audrey (Jacqueline Boatswain) and Nell (Vanessa Grasse) who have been sightseeing London and are in need of refreshment. Frankie Lei (Thomas Chanhing), his Associate, Ms. Jun Yuhuan (Elizabeth Tan) and their bodyguard, Rocco Vella (Morgan Watkins) appear and join Agatha and Travis. Upon seeing proof of the manuscript in Agatha's bag, and the money in Lei's pocket, they rise to complete their negotiations.

Unfortunately, just at that moment, the air raid warning siren sounds loudly and there appears to be some discord among the hotel guests as to whether to retreat to a shelter or stay in the bar. Campbell, Nicory, Schneider are all in favour of staying and continue drinking but the barman, Agatha, Travis, the tourists and Lei's party want to head for a shelter. With time ticking on, their arguments get more heated and WPC O'Hanauer (Jodie McNeen) enters the hotel. She heads straight for the bar as she has seen their lights on. She orders them to head for the bar cellars as reaching the shelter would be out of the question whilst the air raid is on. There then seems to be some consternation as to whether the hotel has a cellar area. She looks around, sees a curtained off recess and a door behind the bar. The barman tries all he can to dissuade the policewoman that the cellars are out of bounds to guests. She guesses, quite correctly, that he is likely to be shielding a stash of Blackmarket Goods that are hidden down there.

They all eventually realise that they have no choice other than to do as the WPC says and one by one, they file through the bar and downstairs into the cellar area. There is a door off to one side which houses a small ante-room but it is closed. The 12 individuals are then shut in by a tall, metal swing gate. Agatha, innocently asks if the WPC had seen any markers or flares on her way into the building. She hadn't, there had been none. Agatha then goes on to explain that she needs to go into the anterior room as she needs to complete her deal with Frankie Lei and then go home. She is told that is impossible. Lei's party have other ideas, however, and Rocco breaks the door down. The room is full of contraband. Whilst a fight breaks out during the anterior room being broken into, Agatha jumps up and joins them as she really wants to conclude her business. She leaves her bag, containing her manuscript, with Travis, and gets involved with the rumpus. WPC O'Hanauer waves a gun around and Travis jumps up and blocks it from Agatha as he is there, primarily, to protect her. Calm is maintained by O'Hanauer and Agatha and they all return to the main cellar room, only to find the manuscript gone from her bag!

Agatha speaks to O'Hanauer in the ante room and explains who she is, why she is there, and that she needs to retrieve the manuscript. They strike a ‘deal’. After some comical banter about Agatha's writing, she ‘agrees’ to write a detective story about a policewoman who's a villain if she helps her get her manuscript back to finish her deal. Lei, injured during the fracas, accepts a drink from Travis's hip flask and, claustrophobic and afraid of the air raid, he wants to stay in the sub room as he feels safer. Schneider insinuates that he knows who has it and points the finger at Campbell.

Little Grey Cells – Dedicated to Agatha Christie©

Another scuffle breaks out between the men. Rocco and the barman step in. Rocco punches Allan and knocks him to the floor. Lei is now in trouble as he is on the floor in the sub room and cannot breathe, having a suspected heart attack. Agatha immediately runs to his aid and starts to massage his heart.

Meanwhile, in the large cellar room, Allan the barman, has cracked his head and has died on the floor, comforted by Grace. Each party are then told about the other death which has occurred in the other room. They set up a temporary morgue in the ante-room, laying out Frankie Lei and moving Clarence Allan, the barman beside him.

I must just stop my plot summary now to add my opinion in here. Whilst watching this Premiere, I was making notes for this review, and I have written in the margin ‘..very slow going at the moment! 5th set of adverts and it’s only 9:45pm!! ...’ Then under it, I have written for my own thoughts and records:

- A closed room mystery? 12 people in a cellar area.*
- And Then There Were None. A mystery person?*
- Taken at the Flood or The Clocks*

I even contemplated turning it off as I just couldn’t see this film getting any better or clearer in plot. Very little was happening in quite a large chunk of time. I was already 45 minutes into 2 hours (minus adverts) so I just knew this was going to be slow going until the last 10 minutes when everything would, hopefully, come together during some kind of denouement at the end. They could quite easily have condensed this 120 minute film into 90 minutes or, at a push, 60 minutes! But. I was not going to give up with it, as I had promised myself to give it a chance, as I had already done with the previous two offerings. So, getting back to the plot.....

Agatha had stayed with Frankie until his death, which was ascertained as a heart attack. Something didn’t quite sit right with her though. After speaking with Jun, she found out that he’d never had a heart problem in the past; was in good health and was prone to bouts of excitement. She needed a closer look without O’Hanauer breathing down her neck. Once the WPC was back in the main cellar room, leaving Agatha in the ante room with Lei’s body, she soon realizes that Frankie had died through a possible poisoning. This was aided by the fact that the money was no longer in Lei’s pocket as it had been in the bar area at the beginning of the night and her manuscript had gone missing. She makes a decision.

When Agatha returns back into the main cellar, she addresses everyone in the room. She starts by explaining who she is and that she has had a very important manuscript stolen from her bag. She offers a £1,000 reward, although she does glance at Travis whilst offering this amount! There was an amount of consternation amongst Campbell and Schneider as to why they should search. O’Hanauer, getting fed up with the arguing, pulls her revolver and demands a search for the manuscript in all their personal belongings. Still more protestation from everyone but, after a while, a rather hesitant search is started by Grace, Nell and Audrey. Suddenly, Schneider’s bag is opened and the manuscript is found within. Schneider pleads innocence. *To me, the whole situation just screamed of a ‘plant’.*

Agatha tries to retrieve her manuscript as she and Travis try to leave. She mentions that she hasn’t heard the air raid siren for a while and enquires whether the air raid is over above ground. O’Hanauer doesn’t want anyone to leave until she is sure so pulls her gun again to try to keep order.

At this point I was seriously wondering what on earth was going on with this girl. She seemed to be ok one minute then completely possessed the next minute. I assumed she had quite a thankless job as a WPC in wartime, especially during an air raid, during the Blitz, trying to control a bunch of individuals that were

Little Crey Cells – Dedicated to Agatha Christie©

somewhere they didn't want to be and with people they didn't particularly like. So, a gun was probably her only way to control quite a volatile situation....

They discuss the possibility of the air raid being over but someone needed to check. Travis would not let Agatha go so they arranged for O'Hanauer to accompany Travis to the upper level to ascertain whether the air raid had, indeed, passed and had ended. Agatha agreed to stay with the remaining group, downstairs, in the cellar. Whilst waiting for them to return, the Champagne and a deck of cards reappear on the table again as the men resume their drinking. One of them asks Agatha: "How a man can get away with murder?."

She enters into the conversation in good humour and goes along with this trail of thought. A book about the War is mentioned as is a Spy story. Agatha goes on to explain that she had already written a spy story, the previous year in 1939, but it was yet to be published. They couldn't understand how an author, especially Christie, could sell one million books yet have no money!

Travis and O'Hanauer return, explaining that, unfortunately, the air raid was still going on above ground. The gents resume their card game; the women continue to stand and wander about. Christie looks at the manuscript, there is a warning written on the front cover:

'LEAVE THE MANUSCRIPT AND DEED ON THE BAR OR MORE PEOPLE WILL DIE!'

After reading the warning aloud, Agatha then starts to look at the writing and the grammar. It is written in perfect English. But was it written by the businessman? Doubtful as the writing was perfect. This then led the party into thinking that Schneider might not be who he says he is, but there is no doubt that he is a racketeer of some sort. Yet another scuffle breaks out and whilst confusion reigns over the warning, Schneider is knifed in the eye! Dead. Once order is regained and the shock of his death has registered with everyone, they move his body into the ante-room alongside Lei and Allan. Suspicion is now on WPC O'Hanauer as she was the only person with access and opportunity. She seemed, quite clearly, shocked at the scene of Schneider's murder so another theory is put to the group. Sir Malcolm Campbell draws his gun! He's had enough and wants to leave. He intimates that there is 'another person in the room who is not known' as there have been too many deaths in the space of a short period of time for any one of the group to have managed to kill the deceased. He wants to leave as 'the unwanted guest may return.'

The company now make the decision to split up into two groups; Agatha, Sir Malcolm, Grace, Audrey and Nell want to leave so make their way up the stairs to the upper level. Meanwhile Travis, Rocco, O'Hanauer and Jun stay down in the cellars. Travis's sole purpose is to keep an eye on O'Hanauer while Jun and Rocco do not want to leave their boss, Lei's, side through loyalty. Rocco's job now protecting Jun, whom he had a rather soft spot for. On the upper level, Sir Malcolm takes his party through another room, its' furniture covered with dust sheets. Sir Malcolm sprays the room with bullets, peppering all the furniture and walls. The party look on, stunned, until he explains that 'they now have the psychological advantage' over their enemy. Suddenly, they hear a gunshot back down in the main cellar where they had left the other group. They all run back to the cellar when Grace screams upon entering the room. The scene is a bloodbath. Jun is lying dead, Rocco is on the floor, Travis is alive but stunned and bleeding from a head wound and O'Hanauer is bruised and shaken. Asked what had happened, she said she nearly got shot for £20,000. On the floor, written in blood, are the words 'WARNED YOU.'

Too much blood and too many deaths. Audrey and Nell step forward to reveal that they are, in fact, working for the Government and are investigating Agatha Christie. They are agents to National Security and the Monarchy and are privy to the evacuation plans for the King and his family to escape London. Sir Malcolm Campbell vouches for them as he, himself, works for the Government and the Monarchy. After a long, stunned silence, O'Hanauer brings everyone out of their reverie and back to the present with the news that the air raid is over.

Little Crey Cells – Dedicated to Agatha Christie©

O'Hanauer, Agatha, Audrey, Nell, Campbell and Grace all leave the main room, head upstairs to the main bar and lounge area leaving Travis and Rocco in the cellar to recover after their attack. Relief hits the survivors up in the hotel bar as they organise themselves to discuss the revelations from downstairs then leave the hotel.

Suddenly O'Hanauer pulls her gun on Agatha, telling her to sign the Deed then orders Audrey and Nell to get behind the bar. She wants the Deed signed so she can take it, along with the manuscript and the money. Agatha explains that it would be pointless to kill her as she needed to sign the Deed and that is also needed a witness to oversee it to make it legal. O'Hanauer tires of all Agatha's stalling tactics and goes to shoot her. The gun fires. O'Hanauer drops to the floor, blood pouring out of her gunshot wound and her mouth. They all look behind them where the shot had originated. A rather bloody-faced Travis is leaning against the wall at the top of the cellar stairs. O'Hanauer has the £20,000 in her pocket. He had saved her life again. Sir Malcolm Campbell and Grace leave the scene.

As I surmised, the last 10 minutes proved the most exciting as it tied up all the loose ends and discounted all the random theories and red herrings.

Agatha and Travis were left with Audrey and Nell. Audrey speaks to Agatha in private. Here is their conversation.

Agatha: "How much trouble am I in?"

Audrey: "That depends."

Agatha: "Tell me what you know about Bletchley Park?"

Agatha: "Bletchley?"

Audrey: "The reason your spy novel hasn't been published is because we have it!"

Agatha: "You do?"

Audrey: "We are trying to ascertain whether its' author has intimate knowledge of a Classified Project."

Agatha: "I thought you were glorified Tax Inspectors!"

Audrey: "We're Government employees – concerned with safekeeping matters essential to the War Effort."

Agatha: "You're Spies?!"

Audrey: "We're representatives of the Security Services."

Agatha: "..And you think I'm in possession of State Secrets?"

Audrey: "Are you??"

Agatha: [laughs] "No!.. No, good Lord!" [Seriously] "No. I have absolutely no idea what you are talking about."

Audrey: "If you co-operate, I can make all this go away.." [Looking around the room and sweeping an arm over O'Hanauer's body.]

Agatha: "Can you take away all my debts, placate the IRS and Inland Revenue then force the Americans to start paying my Royalties again??? All I'm trying to do is earn a living. Whatever you think I've done, I haven't. Everything I have ever written is just a figment of my imagination."

Audrey: "Then you've quite an imagination!"

Agatha: "Yes. It's a curse."

Audrey: "I can see!" [Looking straight at the bloody body of O'Hanauer.] "You've left us with quite a mess to clean up!"

Agatha: "Can I do anything to help?"

Audrey: "Go home. Keep quiet. And if you ever get the call...remember, you owe us!"

Audrey Evans and Nell Lewis collect their belongings leaving Agatha and Travis alone in the bar.

Little Grey Cells – Dedicated to Agatha Christie©

Agatha is left contemplating the fact Travis saved her life several times during the events of the night. He is sitting down, sipping from his hip flask while Agatha decides what she is finally going to do with the manuscript. She enquires if Rocco is still downstairs in the cellar and asks Travis to fetch him. A confused Travis looks at her as he folds his coat over the bar. She explains that they need a witness to sign the Deed over to him.

Agatha: “Aren’t you forgetting something?”

Travis: “Hmmm??”

Agatha: “My money. The twenty thousand pounds in your pocket!” [laughing]

Travis: [Laughing, holding up his blood-stained hands] “Bloody hands – ‘caught red-handed!’ ”

Agatha: [Laughs] “You saved my life.” [Wipes his blood-stained face with the ice bucket water and a cloth.] “I’m going to do something for you in return. If I’m not mistaken, Rocco is still downstairs?”

Travis: “Yes. I think he’s taken it badly.”

Agatha: “See if you can persuade him up here. We need a witness..... For the Deed..?! Once you’ve sold the manuscript, you can give me a commission.”

Travis: “I don’t know what to say.” [Looking genuinely stunned.]

Agatha: “Thank you??” [Laughing.]

Travis: [Laughing] “Thank you!”

Agatha: “Go on, just hurry up. Our two spies won’t be happy if we’re still here when the Police arrive.” [Pointing to his jacket] “Take that off, Rocco won’t want to be reminded!”

Travis takes his coat off, leaves it on the bar before going to get Rocco in the cellar.

A dumfounded Travis hobbles back downstairs to collect Rocco. When they return, Agatha has all the paperwork organized and ready to sign. His job done, Rocco explains he needs to retrieve some belongings from his room upstairs and tells them he won’t be long.

Agatha, a strict tee-totaller, refuses a celebratory drink suggested by Travis. Alone now, the pair stand at the bar. She hands over the Deeds and the manuscript. He looks on dumfounded.

For those of you who like a good old summing up at the end of a Christie, you wouldn’t have been disappointed with this one. While they are waiting for Rocco to return to the bar area, they discuss the events of the evening. Again, the conversation went like this:

THE DENOUEMENT

Travis: [Upon receiving the manuscript from Agatha] “Just like that?”

Agatha: “Not quite.” [Turning to the bar.] “You were right, I’ve changed my mind!” [Grabs a bottle of Whiskey.]

Travis: “Hold that thought!” [Grabbing some glasses.]

Agatha: “Why?”

Travis: “If you’re going to start drinking, you can’t open your account with *that!*” [Pushes bottle away.] “Get some soda water.” [Walks to a table.]

Agatha: [Turning her back on him, she scours all the bottles on the bar. Suddenly, she thinks she finds it. Holding up a soda syphon.] “Will this do?” [Joins him at the table.]

Travis has already filled their glasses with whiskey from his hip flask then sprays soda in and laughs. He pushes one across the table to Agatha. She looks at it then laughs.

Little Grey Cells – Dedicated to Agatha Christie©

Travis: “It won’t kill you!”

Agatha: [Laughing.] “It might!”

Travis: “We all end up dead, it’s just a question of how and why... and what we have drunk at the time!”

[Toasts glasses.]

Travis: “Cheers!”

Agatha: “Cheers!”

Travis knocks his drink back in one gulp whilst Agatha looks on at him. But she does NOT drink from her glass!

Agatha: “Oh, on second thoughts, I can’t break a habit of a lifetime.” [Puts the glass down.]

Travis: “No. Go on, come on.” [Pushes the glass back towards her.]

Agatha: “No. Sorry.”

Travis: “I can’t change your mind?”

Agatha: [Shakes head.] “You know how stubborn I am!”

Travis: “Ain’t it the truth!”

They both laugh. Travis then reaches behind his back and produces a large bladed knife!

Now this was exactly what I was waiting for. The entire story had so many individual people, whom apparently, were unknown to each other. However, in the final scenes it became obvious that something else was going to occur. We’d already established who Audrey, Nell and Sir Malcolm Campbell were. Grace, affiliated with Campbell and Jun, Frankie and Rocco were of the same party. Schneider and Allen, both working in the black market, which to me, left WPC O’Hanauer but she was dead. I had always thought that she was the Air Raid Warden at the very beginning of the film. Same build, same kind of tin hat but the gas mask obscured any face as did the smoke and rubble leaving it impossible to recognize who it actually was. I knew the bomb site scene at the beginning had to be significant, more than perhaps the Government officials and Agatha’s financial difficulties with the Inland Revenue. But why and how was still unknown. Until the final conversation in the film...

Agatha: “I understand the money and the manuscript but why do you want to kill me? Did I do something all those years ago?”

Travis: “You’re too clever for your own good.” [Laughing.]

Agatha: “Is that the point? You want to punish me?”

Travis: “You think too much. ‘What is more valuable than the last ever Poirot novel?’ It’s your last ever book!”

Travis: “Was it the fingerprint? I decided last minute to write you that message..”

Agatha: “Before you gave the envelope to WPC O’Hanauer.”

Travis: [Wistfully.] “She really is a copper, you know.”

Agatha: “I wondered..”

Travis: “She knicked me for looting but she was easily corruptible.”

Agatha: “Well, she must have trusted you.”

Travis: “Mmm. She loved me. People are stupid.”

Agatha: “Up to a point!”

Getting up quickly from her chair opposite Travis, she moves away from him. Travis tries to stand but falls after losing his balance and is seemingly disorientated.

Agatha: “Once I’d acknowledged the awful possibility that you planned the whole thing, the truth was quick to unravel. Even then I wanted you to come up those stairs and prove me wrong.”

Travis now flat out on the floor, his head against the bar, dropped the knife and incapable of moving.

Little Grey Cells – Dedicated to Agatha Christie©

Agatha: “Two pockets. Two flasks. I just swapped them. After you poisoned Frankie, you made a good show of giving us all a drink. Like the writing in the blood, you wanted to be clever. You overthought it. Your insecurities undid you... like all of us.”

Travis, was by now, writhing around on the floor, trying to loosen his collar to breathe. Choking, trying to catch his breath. Agatha walks away from him. She walks towards a pair of heavy, red velvet curtains which seemed to hide a recess. She pulls them back and walks in. There in front of her is a gramophone and some records. There is already a disc in place on the turntable. She proceeds to crank it up and it kicks into life as the needle is placed on the wax. It is the sound of an air raid siren streaming from the horn. She leaves it playing, slowly walking back out from behind the curtain and rejoining Travis. Kneeling down beside him, looking on, watching him struggle for breath. He tries to speak. All he manages is:

Travis: “I’m sorry.”

Agatha: [Shakes her head, tears in her eyes.] “I don’t believe you.”

Travis Pickford loses his battle with the poisoned drink and dies on the floor in front of her. Crying with relief, sadness, temper and embarrassment she regains composure very quickly as she sees Rocco appear in the bar lounge. She gives him the £20,000 which was left of the bar.

Rocco: “I’m sorry.” [Looking down at Travis.]

Agatha: [Composing herself.] “I don’t know what I was thinking!” [Looking at the signed Deeds. She places that and the manuscript back inside her bag.] “How can I kill the only thing in life that I can truly rely upon!?”

After collecting her belonging and gently patting Rocco’s arm, Agatha leaves the hotel with Rocco looking on over the dead bodies of Travis and his lover, WPC O’Hanauer.

Copyright: Screenplay by Tom Dalton and Directed by Joe Stephenson for Channel 5 productions.

Although I did find the whole thing rather tiresome and long-winded, I did enjoy the ‘summing up’ and the plot twist at the end. I believe that Agatha felt something for Travis and, although married, there were soft undertones all the way throughout the film that she and Travis could have been closer if only the right moment had arisen. They met fourteen years earlier, where Blake Harrison first appeared as the lovable rogue, Travis Pickford. He starred opposite Ruth Bradley, who played the lead role in “Agatha and the Truth of Murder.” Since that initial meeting, Agatha had divorced Archie Christie and married Max Mallowan. Agatha even mentions her second husband at the beginning of this film whilst in the back of Travis’s car. He notices her wedding rings. She comments, rather drily, that ‘he knows which side his bread is buttered on!’ which, at the time, made me raise an eyebrow.

So, straight away, there alluded to be some kind of attraction between the two. Pickford even saying, at the very end of the film, whilst Agatha is wringing out a bar cloth, that ‘wiping blood from a man’s face hardly breaks any wedding vows!’ I think she is tormenting herself all the way through and, maybe, trying to suppress her feelings and deny that she feels anything for him at all. Unfortunately, after saving her life several times during the evening, Agatha does start to look on him as some kind of guardian angel, sent from above to save her from all the danger. I believe she so wanted to be wrong about him when she states:

“Once I’d acknowledged the awful possibility that you planned the whole thing, the truth was quick to unravel. Even then I wanted you to come up those stairs and prove me wrong.”

This story was mainly about her relationship with Travis and the attachment she had for Poirot. Although she needed money, as she so rightly believed, the Inland Revenue were looking into her financial affairs, she soon realizes that no amount of cash or prying into her affairs by the Government was ever enough to make her part with her biggest asset and her money-maker, Hercule Poirot.

Helen Baxendale was superb as Agatha Christie. She played her with just enough gumption but not too much as to be overbearing. Her comedy side showed through in the script and she was believable as Agatha. Christie fans will, of course, remember seeing Helen Baxendale in two previous TV adaptations. In 2008 she played Mary Dove opposite Julia McKenzie’s Jane Marple in ‘A Pocket Full of Rye’ and in 2013 she portrayed Elizabeth Cole in the last ever Poirot episode, ‘Curtain’, ending David Sachets’ incredible reign of playing Poirot for 25 years. Both were filmed and produced for ITV broadcasting.

Little Grey Cells – Dedicated to Agatha Christie©

Helen Baxendale and Julia McKenzie in 'A Pocket Full of Rye' (2008)/ Helen Baxendale as Elizabeth Cole in 'Curtain' (2013)



Photography: ITV/Marple. ITV/Poirot.

Blake Harrison came into his own in this as Travis Pickford. Very witty, very believable as a lovable rogue, looter, always on the wrong side of the law but with just enough humility as to convince us that he feels something for Agatha. He's come a very long way since Channel 4's 'The Inbetweeners.'

The rest of the cast did justice to their fictional characters. I couldn't help but think it was just a wee bit too long. By dragging it out to 2 hours long, it felt as though we (the viewers) were being tortured with a slow story and unnecessary scene fillers just to get to the point of unveiling the truth of Pickford and O'Hanauer working together to get the Deed, the Manuscript and the money.

3/5 Star Rating

“Behind the Curtain” by Dee Steel© 17.10.2020