



INTERVIEW WITH TITO PRATES, OFFICIAL BIOGRAPHER OF AGATHA CHRISTIE, ON THE AUTHOR'S 135TH ANNIVERSARY

ENTREVISTA COM TITO PRATES, BIÓGRAFO OFICIAL DE AGATHA CHRISTIE, PELOS 135 ANOS DA AUTORA



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Resumo: Esta entrevista com Tito Prates, escritor brasileiro e biógrafo oficial de Agatha Christie, aborda sua trajetória intelectual, suas práticas de pesquisa e suas contribuições para o estudo da literatura policial. Realizada por e-mail entre junho e julho de 2024, por ocasião dos 135 anos do nascimento de Agatha Christie, a entrevista discute a abordagem metodológica de Prates na escrita biográfica, incluindo o uso de materiais arquivísticos raros e documentos anteriormente considerados perdidos. A conversa explora as técnicas narrativas de Christie, sua influência duradoura na literatura policial e na cultura popular, bem como a recepção de sua obra no Brasil. Ao situar o trabalho biográfico de Prates em contextos nacionais e internacionais, a entrevista evidencia o papel da biografia como elo entre pesquisa acadêmica, crítica literária e difusão cultural.

Palavras-chave: Biografia de Agatha Christie. Literatura policial. Recepção literária no Brasil. Biografia e arquivos.

Abstract: This interview with Tito Prates, Brazilian writer and official biographer of Agatha Christie, discusses his intellectual trajectory, research practices, and contributions to the study of detective fiction. Conducted via email between June and July 2024, on the occasion of the 135th anniversary of Agatha Christie's birth, the interview addresses Prates' methodological approach to biographical writing, including his use of rare archival materials and previously lost documents. The conversation explores Christie's narrative techniques, her lasting influence on crime literature and popular culture, and the reception of her work in Brazil. By situating Prates' biographical work within both national and international contexts, the interview highlights the role of biography as a bridge between academic research, literary criticism, and cultural dissemination.

Keywords: Agatha Christie biography. Detective fiction. Literary reception in Brazil. Biography and archives.



1 INTRODUCTION

Tito Prates da Fonseca Brandão, known as Tito Prates, is a Brazilian writer specializing in crime novels and the official biographer of Agatha Christie in Brazil. With degrees in Dentistry and Business Administration, Prates discovered his passion for the British author at the age of 9 after reading Christie's first book. Since then, he has intensely dedicated himself to studying her life and work, becoming the first biographer to write an extensive and detailed biography of the "Queen of Crime" in Portuguese (Prates, 2016).

Among his most notable works are *Agatha Christie: From My Heart - Uma Biografia de Verdades*, *Viagem à Terra da Rainha do Crime*, and *Guia Brasileiro da Obra de Agatha Christie*. He is also the editor and owner of the magazine *Mystério Retrô*, dedicated to the study and dissemination of crime literature. His dedication to research has led him to undertake several trips to the United Kingdom in search of unpublished documents and little-explored sources, resulting in new perspectives on the life of Agatha Christie (ISTOÉ, 2016). The investment in field research and international primary sources is illustrated in Figure 1, which records a moment of his investigation in the United Kingdom.

Figure 1 – Tito Prates at Lucy Cavendish College, University of Cambridge, during an interview about Agatha Christie, 2017.



Source: Personal archive of Tito Prates (2017).

The work *Agatha Christie: From My Heart - Uma Biografia de Verdades* is particularly important as it is the first biography of the author written originally in Portuguese, with the authorization of the Agatha Christie Trust, Agatha Christie Ltd., and the author's grandson, Mathew Prichard. This support was crucial in legitimizing Prates' research and ensuring access to valuable documents and archives that enriched the narrative presented in the book (Hoje em Dia, 2022).

In his own fiction works, Prates applies literary techniques developed by Christie, demonstrating his deep understanding of the narrative structure and the characteristic elements of the crime genre. He faced the challenge of presenting an original perspective on an author who has been widely studied, using an innovative approach based on rare and little-known sources (ISTOÉ, 2016).

With a career marked by rigorous research and a passion for Agatha Christie's work, Tito Prates continues to significantly contribute to the dissemination and study of crime literature, both in Brazil and abroad (Prates, 2016).

With his extensive knowledge and unique perspective on Agatha Christie's life and work, Tito Prates shares his journey and insights in the following interview conducted via email between June 2 and July 13, 2024.

Q: Can you tell me about your professional and academic journey, including your aspirations and challenges, before becoming the official biographer of Agatha Christie?

A: I have degrees in two areas that are quite different from literature: Dentistry and Business Administration. I have been reading Agatha Christie since I was 9 years old. By the age of 20, I had read her entire body of work and began wanting to know more about the person behind the author. Later, I envisioned writing about her, but my professional commitments didn't allow it. It was only in 2013 that I took this decision more seriously, increased my research efforts, traveled to England over ten times in search of material and information, and finally managed to find a way to write the first book.

Q: How and when did Agatha Christie enter your life, both as a reader and as a professional?

A: I actually covered this in the previous question.

Q: How would you describe Agatha Christie's influence on your development as a crime fiction writer? Which techniques learned from her do you apply in your own works?

A: Numerous techniques. Every modern detective novel uses techniques developed by the Queen of Crime, and my last book about her explores exactly this point, as I write entirely based on what she did, modernizing some aspects.

Agatha Christie's creative approach revolutionized detective fiction and captured the imagination of readers from the outset. Her debut novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, marked the first appearance of the beloved detective Hercule Poirot and established the foundation for her prolific career. Initially released in serialized format in England in February 1926, this publication allowed readers to follow the unfolding mystery in installments, heightening the suspense with each new release. The image below, kindly shared by Tito Prates from his personal collection, showcases this landmark moment.

Figure 2 - First serialized publication of Agatha Christie's detective novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, February 1926.



Source: Image kindly provided by Tito Prates from his personal archives.

Q: Agatha Christie is often called the "Queen of Crime." In your opinion, what are her main contributions to the detective novel genre and literature in general?

A: Sixty-six detective novels, 20 plays, and over 150 short stories, in addition to being the most read and best-selling author in human history, with one of her books among the top 10 best-sellers. And people tend to forget that she was also the first lady of English theater, alongside Shakespeare.

To provide a visual summary of Agatha Christie's extensive literary work, the Brazilian periodic table of her oeuvre, created by Tito Prates in 2020, is presented below. This unique infographic categorizes her contributions by distinguishing between different characters and formats. The colors represent various detective figures, including Poirot, Marple, Tommy &

Tuppence, Mrs. Oliver, Battle, and Colonel Race, as well as works without a detective, theater plays, radio dramas, short stories, and novels written under her pseudonym, Mary Westmacott.

Figure 3 - Brazilian periodic table of Agatha Christie's works

The image shows a periodic table of Agatha Christie's works, organized into a grid. The title is 'AGATHA CHRISTIE 100 ANOS DE LITERATURA'. The grid is color-coded and contains 135 entries, each with a title in Portuguese and its original English title, along with the year of publication. The works are categorized into various series and genres, such as Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple, and other detective series.

Source: Tito Prates, 2020.

Q: How did the invitation to become the official biographer from Agatha Christie's family come about?

A: Actually, I invited myself to write her first biography originally in Portuguese and sent all my work for pre-publication approval.

Q: What were the biggest challenges you faced when writing the first biography of Agatha Christie originally in Portuguese? How did you overcome them?

A: That was the topic of my lecture in Cambridge in 2017: originality. How to write something new about someone who already has over 150 books on her work, personality, techniques, theater, radio, cinema, and characters? The way to overcome this was by reading all these works and thoroughly researching the information that was inconsistent, hence the subtitle: A Biography of Truths.

Q: With Agatha Christie's 135th anniversary approaching, how do you assess the relevance of her works today? To what do you attribute the enduring legacy of the author?

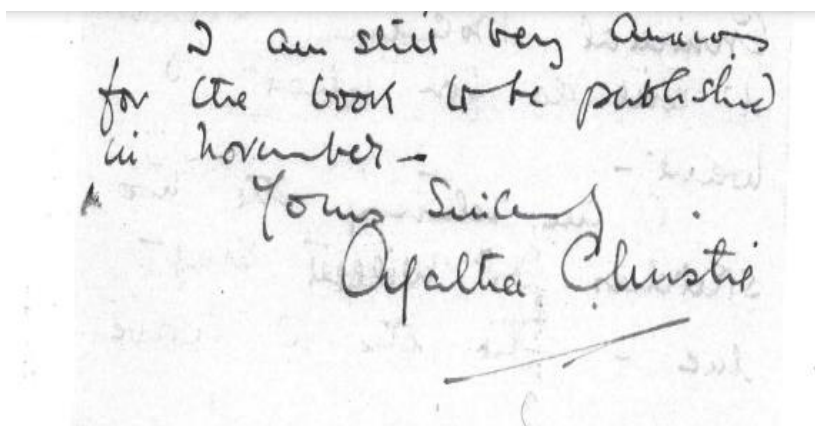
A: I often say that books are like characters. Her characters are alive. Moreover, her language is straightforward, making her works very easy to translate (she has been the most translated author in history since 1962) and her stories deal with mystery, which has always piqued human curiosity.

Q: During your research for the biography *Agatha Christie – A Biography of Truths*, what were the most surprising discoveries you made about the author? How did these discoveries impact your perception of her and her works?

A: I believe it was the lost documents mentioned briefly in a biography about her from 1980 and never cited again. The university that housed them was sold, they went to auction and were bought by a private collector, and no one knew or remembered their existence. It took four trips to England and a traffic ticket... The discovery of these documents, starting in 2015, changed concepts about her work, such as the correct dating of the first film based on her work and the discovery of letters with forged signatures attributed to her.

Amid his thorough investigation, Tito Prates discovered original documents that had been lost for decades, including the authentic signature of Agatha Christie shown in the following Figure.

Figure 4 - Authentic signature of Agatha Christie found among previously lost documents at the University of Reading, discovered by Tito Prates during his research.

A photograph of a handwritten note on aged paper. The text is written in cursive and reads: "I am still very anxious for the book to be published in November - Yours Sincerely Agatha Christie". There is a horizontal line drawn under the signature.

Source: Image kindly provided by Tito Prates from his personal archives.

Q: Agatha Christie managed to achieve significant popularity that transcends generations. What do you think contributes to this universal accessibility of her works?

A: Nowadays, her work is almost universally classified as appropriate for all ages and can be read by people of any age group.

Q: How do you see Agatha Christie's influence on modern popular culture and her relevance today?

A: She is a pop and cult phenomenon, influencing cinema, literature, and television through authors who try to reproduce her universe and tricks in numerous films like *Murder Mystery*, *Knives Out*, and its sequels, among many others.

Q: Do commemorative events, like Agatha Christie's 135th anniversary, help keep the author's memory and recognition alive? What are your expectations for next year's celebrations?

A: I haven't seen the official program yet, nothing has been announced, but just like the centenary and the 125th anniversary, it is a way to spark the curiosity of younger generations, just as new films based on her work do.

Q: Agatha Christie has many fans in Brazil. How would you describe the reception of her works in the country and her impact on Brazilian crime literature?

A: She is still admired and read by genre enthusiasts but attempts to produce a good English-style "Cozy-Mystery" novel in Brazil are still few, and it was only in the 21st century that we managed to create some works of significance.

Q: Considering your entire journey as the official biographer of Agatha Christie, what would you recommend to those who wish to follow in your footsteps?

A: Don't copy books. Question all information. Seek out documents. Good luck!

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