



# UNIVERSIDAD DE OVIEDO

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

## TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

FEMININE ARCHETYPES IN AGATHA CHRISTIE'S  
*DEATH ON THE NILE* (1937)

Curso: 2019-2020  
Autora: Noemí Rubio Fernández  
Tutora: Elena Avanzas Álvarez

Oviedo, 15 de Junio de 2020

## **ABSTRACT**

Since women's liberation movements have acquired a crucial role in the past century, the incorporation of a feminist approach to literature is necessary to battle patriarchal society. This B.A. thesis aims to analyse the two main female characters in one of Agatha Christie's serialized crime fiction novels, *Death on the Nile* (1937). Even though Christie's text is not a feminist writing *per se*, but a detective novel, the empowerment and representation of the leading women is paramount to break with Linnet Doyle's (née Ridgeway) and Jacqueline De Bellefort's feminine archetypes — attached to a 'standardized' historical construction of female behaviour.

Conventional narrative devices have held that central characters have to be antagonists, and so will be their archetypes. Linnet's impersonation as a flapper portrays her as an attractive female who catches men's attention due to her wealth and physical attributes. Linnet stays up the social ladder, resulting in jealousy for those who surround her. On the contrary, Jacqueline symbolizes the evil maiden, the lower-class woman with economic problems, dependent on her partner. At the same time, both characters share common features, mainly on an intellectual level (e.g. their astuteness). Therefore, a profound study which differentiates both women in terms of marriage, revenge or even social status will be provided.

Belonging to the crime fiction genre, the novel encapsulates different killings which will be carried out by the most unthought-of individuals. As a result, any former premise or impressions should be left aside, causing a commotion among readers and altering fixed stereotypes we connected to each woman in the initial chapters.

Keywords: Agatha Christie. *Death on the Nile*. Feminine archetypes. Flapper. Evil maiden. Literature. Crime fiction.

## **RESUMEN**

Dado que el movimiento de la liberación femenina adquiere gran relevancia tras el siglo XX, la incorporación de un enfoque feminista en la literatura resulta necesario para luchar contra la sociedad patriarcal. Este trabajo se dispone a analizar los personajes femeninos más emblemáticos de una de la gran colección de novelas de Agatha Christie,

*Muerte en el Nilo* (1937). A pesar de que esta prosa no se inscriba dentro de la narrativa feminista, pero sí en la detectivesca, el empoderamiento y la representación de ambas damas en la misma resulta primordial para poner fin a los distintos arquetipos que Linnet Doyle (nacida con el apellido Ridgeway) y Jacqueline De Bellefort representan — asociados a una conducta femenina 'normalizada' a lo largo de la historia.

Las estrategias narrativas convencionales apoyan la idea por la cual los protagonistas tienen que ser antagonistas entre sí, así como los arquetipos con los que son asociados. La personificación de Linnet como una flapper hace de la misma una mujer atractiva que capta la atención de cualquier hombre tanto por su riqueza, como por sus atributos físicos. Pertenece a la clase alta de la sociedad, lo que a veces causa envidia entre quienes la rodean. Por el contrario, Jacqueline se asemeja más bien a una doncella malvada, una mujer de clase baja con problemas económicos totalmente dependiente de su pareja. A su vez, ambos personajes comparten ciertas características o habilidades; principalmente a nivel intelectual (como podría ser la astucia). Por consiguiente, se proporcionará un estudio completo que diferencia a ambas mujeres en cuanto a temas relacionados con el matrimonio, la venganza o el estatus social.

Incluido dentro del género de la novela negra, la obra engloba una serie de asesinatos llevados a cabo por los sujetos más inesperados. Como consecuencia, cualquier primera impresión o suposición no deberían tomarse en cuenta. La ruptura con aquellos estereotipos ligados a cada mujer durante los primeros capítulos, por tanto, causará gran revuelo entre los lectores.

Palabras clave: Agatha Christie. *Muerte en el Nilo*. Arquetipos femeninos. Flapper. Doncella malvada. Literatura. Novela policíaca.

## INDEX

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Agatha Christie's life and work.....	4
3. Hercule Poirot's detective technique.....	5
4. <i>Death on the Nile's</i> plot.....	7
5. Patterns of behaviour for Linnet's and Jacqueline's archetypes.....	8
5.1. External descriptions.....	9
5.2. Marriage.....	13
5.3. Social status. Money.....	15
5.4. Revenge as a fatal tool.....	16
6. Similarities make female protagonists more distant.....	19
7. Conclusion.....	21
8. Bibliography.....	23

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The detective fiction genre involves an investigator who compiles clues so as to solve a malefaction, usually murders. This sort of narrative follows a circular story line: — the seemingly perfect crime, the alleged suspects, the evidence, the revelation of real culprits and the detention. This raises the issue of whether readers are told how to interpret situations and events and fully rely on character's words. The narrator is in charge of developing the plot and presenting the protagonist's descriptions and their actions, which results in inserting them into a certain archetype. This lack of agency on the part of characters, makes it easier for readers to believe in the narrator's neutrality regarding the already made stereotypes and set ideas derived from them since he only acts as an external observer.

The zenith of this literary genre appeared at the same time Agatha Christie made her contributions to British crime fiction. She had never considered herself a professional author even though her works are still nowadays the paramount example of 'The Golden Age of detective fiction' (Veselská 2014: 5). Her novels' success basically relies on the complex puzzles that serve as the plot.

Despite the fact that writing had been taken up as part of leisure time, making money out of it was not the main interest for middle and upper-class women as was Christie's case. She produced novels non-stop, in which she inserted high standing detectives, such as Hercule Poirot or Miss Marple, amongst others. Some of Christie's most famous novels are *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) and *Death on the Nile* (1937), both of them having been made into films.

Nowadays, Christie's characters archetypes are subject to study because of their complexity and their masterful delivery of crime fiction plots. Bernthal (2015: 135) argues that 'Christie draws attention towards a common desire to know a person essentially, and to label them accordingly' (2015: 135). Thus, there is a belief that behaviour produces prejudices. For these particular purposes, *Death on the Nile* will serve as a vehicle to conduct a thorough research about the main roles the feminine protagonists represent.

The terms archetype and stereotype are sometimes misused. *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* (2020) defines archetypes as 'the original pattern or model of which all things of the same type are representations or copies'. On the contrary, stereotypes are 'a standardised mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment' (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary 2020). Archetypes are normally positive since they offer a perfect model that has persisted throughout history. For example, our conception of a wizard is a person that has special powers. However, stereotypes tend to have a negative connotation since they simplify the perception of an individual. In this sense, a wizard is often depicted as wearing conical hats and long robes while using potions for causing terror.

In Christie's work, a higher-than-average status versus an ordinary position in society reveals what sort of attitudes will be attributed to the characters that impersonate them. The archetypes in question are the flapper and the evil maiden, which emerge from imagination and an outsider gaze, probably male. Such archetypes are capable of moulding the individual's consciousness or the perception readers have towards a character. Those archetypes are constructions derived from a patriarchal society. Both men and women created this imagery. Nonetheless, since Christie was a female and most of her readership too, we are left with no other option but assuming they emulated, identified or at least, were conscious of some of the already established assumptions.

The delicacy of the maiden contrasting with the empowerment of the flapper are starting points. Divided into different sections, these women will be analysed in terms of visible depictions as well as their views on marriage, wealth and vengeance. Despite their disparities, both characters share a common ground: they are rational people who do not give up easily. Even when discussing monetary interests or not losing the love of their life, both women will sacrifice whatever they have so as not to be deprived of what makes them happy.

Nonetheless, the problem relies on the fact that appearances are deceitful and who appears to be harmless may be not. Common assumptions are constantly being reversed, leaving no clear evidence of the direction each characters' actions will follow. Using

Christie's novel as a basis along with past and current presuppositions the society has as a whole, readers will become aware of the deviation from traditional womanliness.

## 2. AGATHA CHRISTIE'S LIFE AND WORK

Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller was born in Torquay, Devon, in 1890 to a rich American father who worked as a stockbroker and an English mother, daughter of a British army captain. She was brought up by both her mother and her sister after the early death of her father. During the First World War, she worked as a nurse. Her huge knowledge of pharmacy was essential for her literary work — most novels incorporate a crime that involves a toxic shock. Christie first married Archibald Christie in 1914, an aviator in the Royal Flying Corps and had a daughter. The couple soon divorced after he had fallen in love with someone else.

After this experience, her life was marked due to her 11-days disappearance. She was found in a Harrogate hotel under another woman's name, though the mystery of her disappearance was never resolved. Some people blamed her mother's death while others opted for her discovery of her husband's affair. Her second marriage to archaeologist Sir Max Mallowan took place in 1930, and she lived happily with him until her final days despite his well-known extramarital affairs. Her travels with her second husband really inspired some of her novels; mostly those set in the Middle East. She died in 1976 at the age of 85.

Christie was mainly a crime and detective writer, remembered for her over 40 novels starred by Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot. Short with a waxed moustache, Poirot is described as a Belgian detective, notably known for his fool proof method which he solves crimes with. He appears for the first time in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920) and is present in successive novels.

On the contrary, Miss Marple is portrayed as a traditional English country lady. Regarding her detective technique, she is notorious for her abilities involving quick problem solving as well as her huge understanding of human behaviour. Some of the novels that featured this character are *Murder at the Vicarage* (1930) and *A Murder is Announced* (1950).

Writers of detective fiction enjoyed prestige throughout the 1920s and 1930s but, Agatha Christie is the most outstanding novelist of the genre. According to Havlíčková (2005), her success comes from her ability to give advanced hints of what will come



next, fundamental for bewitching readers and further develop their expectations. Her ingenuity enables her to narrate numerous crimes with a great level of complexity without room for error. Ultimately, Christie's literary career is compiled by almost 100 short stories, 80 detective novels and 19 plays. However, many other works are attributed to her under the name of Mary Westmacott, a pseudonym derived from her middle name.

### **3. HERCULE POIROT'S DETECTIVE TECHNIQUE**

On the whole, it seems that the dominant feature of the crime fiction genre is the detective's figure. Poirot is in charge of conducting the crime detection in *Death on the Nile* along with Colonel Race, who acts as an assistant. They are responsible for compiling clues, from names to times, so as to later create a timeline of what happened, when and where. When everything seems to be solved, complications arise — nothing appears to match. From one central problem (the murdering) we have extra branches (people, objects, places) that do not seem to give off any clue at first glance. However, after making big efforts to fit the pieces together, it all collapses making Poirot start from scratch. This technique makes the readers to be intrigued until the end, where 'it all fits in' (Christie 2014: 311). The murderers follow the same steps throughout all the detections, from denial to acceptance. Overall, this method is called traditional detecting, in which clues and intuition make an important contribution to the whole investigation.

Despite Poirot's professionalism, he does only take cases that hold his attention. In the novel *Death on the Nile*, Poirot was enjoying his holidays, therefore, he could have opted for not delving into the crime. Maybe because of meeting the characters (Simon and Jackie) before the voyage in the Karnak, or due to Linnet's petitions, the detective gets interested in the case.

Readers focalise the story through Poirot's and the narrator's eyes at any rate. We are expected 'to play the same game as Poirot' (Xu 2009: 98). There will not be other situation in which the crime could be solved without his help and guidance. According to Xu (2009: 99), Poirot is 'a symbol of order and reason'; therefore, his research will be

the core of all the novels. This detective brings justice when death takes over the place. He can also be considered some sort of a popular figure because:

The image is archetypal—the warrior knight, the tough cowboy, the intrepid explorer—he is the representative of Man, and yet more than a man, he is the focus of morality, the mythic hero. He is the controlled centre surrounded by chaos, and an effective reading must involve identification with this mediator of action, truth, and finally pleasure and relief through closure. (Munt 1994: 1)

Believable detectives normally work next to a companion, referred to as a sidekick. Captain Arthur Hastings is the most memorable assistant associated with Poirot. Even though this character (and narrator) does not make an appearance in *Death on the Nile*, Colonel Race takes his place. Race acts as a friend of the leading detective and his guidance is extremely important throughout the investigation. Race plays an important role in putting to paper the investigation's path. At one point in the novel, he writes a script where specific details and all worthy data is collected, from time of the death, to the possible course of the events to finally pros and cons of each suspect. Consequently, we are given a text within other text (metaliterature). Readers have all the crime scene written down on paper. This visual aid helps readers achieve full comprehension of the text and also clarifies the events. Poirot does not reveal his thoughts until he is completely sure, therefore, thanks to Race, the reader can get involved in the course of events in a clearer outline.

This kind of relationship and collaboration has been previously seen in other detectives' counterparts such as Watson to Holmes. A sidekick is necessary and convenient since he functions 'not as a reporter to the viewer but rather as a social interface to the detective' (Krawczyk-Żywko 2015: 142). In this sense, Race serves as a mediator between different life worlds — the lives of the 'real' characters and the 'real' readers.

However, whenever a little clue matches the possible circumstances, Race does not go further than that. Therefore, Poirot's help is even more decisive since his mental schema of the actions is wider. He concentrates on the veracity of the incidents whilst Race seems to believe the first thing he sees. This is largely due to the fact that

sidekicks 'should never be more interesting or complex than the main detective' (Kwei Quartey 2014: para.1).

#### **4. *DEATH ON THE NILE'S PLOT***

While having a pleasant dinner, detective Hercule Poirot notices a happy couple, Jacqueline de Bellefort (referred to as Jackie from this point onwards) and her fiancé Simon Doyle, enjoying a good dance. They split up after Jackie takes Simon to meet Linnet Ridgeway, a wealthy businesswoman who captivates the young man. The new couple decides to marry and celebrate their honeymoon on a cruise through Cairo. They travel in the 'Karnak', but they are not alone, in fact, some big names such as Tim Fanthrop (Linnet's solicitor), Andrew Pennington (Linnet's American trustee) or Dr. Bessner are present in the cruise's list. Nevertheless, the plot entirely focuses on this love triangle story (Jackie - Simon - Linnet). The newlywed couple feel uncomfortable after they are told that Jackie will be in the same trip as them. Linnet starts feeling stalked and requests Poirot's help to persuade Jackie to get distance from her. After this talk, Poirot feels anyone could be a potential criminal and focuses on Linnet as the target.

Several episodes of misfortunes (such as a boulder falling from a cliff) direct the reader's attention towards Jackie's desire for revenge. After all, a series of crimes follow on, resulting in three murders (Linnet's, Louise's and Mr. Otterbourne's). Jackie finds herself in the middle of the events, even more in Linnet's death (being the cause a shot in the head) but she has a solid alibi. However, the other two murders completely surprise the reader, having not a clue about whom could have committed them.

Notwithstanding false testimony, witnesses and evidences, Poirot and Colonel Race (both professional colleagues) join efforts to solve the crime. Once the book comes to an end, the real murders are caught in action. Thanks to previous investigations in the hands of the aforementioned detectives, Jackie and Simon confess. They do not hesitate to confirm the killing of Linnet (the central murdering) and the other two people on the boat. The way they committed the crimes was incredibly organised. In fact, Jackie designed the plan and Simon carried out most of the action,

even though he was 'injured' in the leg due to a shot that Jackie perpetuated — nevertheless, this only added to their alibi, making the course of events even more complicated. The motifs for the murders are not detailed but the readership can guess they had to do mainly with Linnet's inheritance. The killings of the other two innocent people were executed just because they had information that could frame Jackie and Simon altogether.

When the Karnak arrives to its final destination, both culprits must go to jail but on the spur of the moment Simon is shot by Jackie (for real this time), and she commits suicide without premeditation. The end of the trip marks the end of the case and clarifies having too much in life does not do good to people.

## **5. PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOUR FOR LINNET'S AND JACQUELINE'S ARCHETYPES**

Women's roles changed at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the apparition of the flapper or the 'modern woman', women started to emerge as main characters. Flappers were a generation of women that made their appearance during the 1920s in Europe. They broke away with the 'Angel in the House' stereotype, rebelling against previous attached roles. Bobbing their hair or wearing short skirts were only some of their characteristics. Female work force started to be needed because of the shortage of men caused by the First World War. Thus, women started to have more opportunities and left aside their role as housekeepers. As a result, those stereotypes were inscribed in literature.

Vipond (1981: 119) states that Christie's characters are stereotypes formed by typical characteristics attached to those assumptions plus 'a touch of real humanity'. In this sense, there are accurate and permanent depictions about each character and their surroundings. In *Death on the Nile*, readers come across two ambivalent figures: the flapper and the evil maiden as mentioned in earlier sections.

The flapper imagery is closely related to the archetype Linnet performs. This woman becomes the breadwinner once she is married — she has the intelligence and the monetary advantage for this to happen — something unusual in the 'Roaring Twenties'. Hence, women are no longer considered objects but subjects who gained power and

recognition. Another reason why Linnet symbolises a flapper is her wealth. With the rise of the new consuming economy of the twenties, she could be understood as a 'modern-urban woman represented by beauty, transgression, and sexuality, in direct opposition to the housewife and mother' (Morales 2017: 94). In addition, flappers are inclined to be carefree:

In defiance of Prohibition, they *freely took lovers* [emphasis added] and jobs. Posture and motion were important elements of the flapper persona. [...] [Another] common element of the flapper style was the tendency to misuse clothing and *accessories* [emphasis added]—a way of thumbing noses at high fashion and polite society. (Breward et al 2005: 88)

Linnet is marked as the target on this basis due to her betrayal. Therefore, not only does Jackie's jealousy play a role in Linnet's death but also society. Linnet caused huge upheaval among other citizens, who mainly claimed it was no fair for a woman to have it all. Her successful, lavish life is an indication, hence, that she will be the victim.

Contrary to Linnet's sense of modernity, performed by her bourgeoisie lifestyle, Jackie resembles ordinary women from the bottom of society. She is presented in the first chapters as a sweet, infatuated person. Despite the elaboration of these crimes of passion, Jackie does not totally deviate from the maiden archetype although it could seem the contrary. As MasterClass (2019) points out, Jackie incorporates many features of the damsel in distress. She falls in love with the 'heroe' up to the point that she would kill for him. This woman is also able to fool other people with her charms, so as not to be found guilty. She is also very emotional, and the main cause for committing these murders was love and devotion to her partner.

In light of the above, it is clear these females seek power for entirely different reasons of their own interest. Either keeping the love of her life next to her again or just enjoying and living a happy marital life, both characters represent two different social discourses — starting with the preconceived idea of murderer - victim.

## 5.1. EXTERNAL DESCRIPTIONS

This action-packed novel corroborates Linnet's and Jackie's unique personalities. Characters are presented by third parties and this influences how the reader reacts to

them. All the background readers get to know is given partially by other characters in the novel or by an omniscient narrator, giving no chance to the women to introduce themselves. Their lack of agency results in an incapability to totally comprehend their inner feelings. In any case, if there is only one thing that remains fixed are females' archetypes — under all circumstances is Linnet a representative of the flapper and Jackie of the evil maiden respectively.

The first contact with both women clarifies the latter statement. Compare their first apparition in the novel. Linnet is described as 'a girl with golden hair and straight autocratic features — a girl with a lovely shape — a girl such as was seldom seen in Malton-under-Wode' (Christie 2014: 3). She is a woman to be idolized, self-sufficient and irresistible to both men and women. Her monetary condition helps create this imagery, and therefore adds to the idea of the New Woman (allowed greater freedom) which boomed during the XX century. She enjoys good mental and physical attributes too. On the contrary, Jackie's initial presentation is portrayed as 'a small slender *creature* [emphasis added] with a mop of dark hair' (Christie 2014: 11). It goes without saying that the latter description is far more negative than the first one, up to the point of comparing Jackie with almost an animal — a 'creature' (11). Jackie may seem a powerless and emotional woman in need of a male's rescuing. Nevertheless, her passive character is just a revamp of that of an assassin.

Linnet takes Jackie's man, but she is not seen as a traitor but as a leader yet. She 'was used to being looked at, to being admired, to being the centre of the stage wherever she went' (Christie 2014: 48). In fact, female bodies are 'look[ed] through, rather than at' (Garber 1992: 187). They are not examined carefully so that you can make a decision about them; they are presented quickly. Consequently, it is easier to fall into stereotypes if there is no major study concerning them.

There are certain literary techniques that help the writer manipulate the way a reader interprets a work. For instance, most of the assumptions created towards those main characters have to do with the point of view the story is narrated from. Making use of a third person narration gives the author the position of an omniscient narrator. An all-knowing narrator does not give characters a direct voice, and as a consequence, labelling and making certain hypotheses is commonly found. Because of that, it is

harder to examine or to explore a character in its full potential — readers only see one side of the story.

In a nutshell, women are their looks in this novel. Gender stereotyping is easier observable in the fiction because women's words are reproduced by an omniscient narrator. Females seem puppets of what society expects from girls. On account of this, a fixed image about each woman is created in our mind. Wealth is normally associated with ego fixation; thus, if the focus is put on Linnet, glamour and freedom seem to be her main qualities; fear or uncomfortability are not expected as one of the possible feelings. Jackie allows for a better study. When we look through her, we see a suffering woman but when we look at her, we see astuteness, revenge, '[she has] brains' (Christie 2014: 76). Hence, both characters are more complex than they seemed at first sight.

The novel's mood changes after Linnet is found dead. The story has mainly been concentrated on praising her, her social status and her intellectual ability to make money (even though a huge part of it has been inherited). After Linnet's death, Jackie becomes the focal point.

But if the analysis of the female goes beyond what is written, Jackie has always been the protagonist. Is it possible that readers assumed the wealthy woman should be the main character? Jackie has never remained in the shadows, nonetheless. She is an interesting woman who widely engages with other characters, — such as Linnet or Simon, but most profoundly with Poirot.

As previously mentioned, descriptions are not static. Linnet is no longer winning after fear takes over her due to incessant intimidations on the part of her former friend; Linnet becomes the subject who seeks help due to Jackie's coercion to the married couple. This woman feels under persecution and even violated. However, Linnet's restlessness arises Jackie's ego. She feels Linnet should take her own medicine since 'she's never denied herself anything. When she saw Simon she wanted him — and she just took him' (Christie 2014: 76).

After all, Jackie's behaviour raises an important question, is she conditioned by her past? The fact that she has been previously in touch with death when she stuck a pen knife into someone could make us speculate about her aggressive behaviour that ends

up in obsession or mania. The last chapters of the book portray the other side of Jackie. Expectations are reversed; from a warm woman, who suffered her breakdown in silence, to a cold-blooded murderer. Like a woman in a masquerade (Peach 2006), she is capable of confusing the reader about her mental state and her actions. Even though we see her in the face, we do not really identify her, and some emotions and actions are deeply hidden (e.g. she is the least-likely person readers would have thought of as the murderer). Firstly, it would be too obvious, and secondly, her alibi appeared to be not misleading. Therefore, Jackie's character can be called a round one since it has several dimensions, layers within it. Her personality is complex. As mentioned before, she is two-faced, dissimilar identities create her inner nature — frivolous or charming. On the contrary, Linnet's soul lacks depth, which makes her a flat character by definition. Apart from her lavish life, wealth and physical attractiveness, readers do not get to know her further than that. At the same time, she still serves a specific purpose on the story, in fact, her murdering triggers a host of events. If it were not for her death, it would have been impossible to get to know Jackie's personality and hidden plans with Simon. We would not have noticed Jackie and Simon planned to spend their life together after all. Jackie would still be seen as a fragile, jealous woman and not a potential murderer, therefore, the rest of the characters ought not to have felt compassion and pity for her after the breakup. Jackie's complexity requires her to be present all the time.

As a result, death could have been attributed to Linnet due to her simplicity, as far as character's profundity is concerned. However, Linnet's end is not random whatsoever. It has not been used as an escape, but as a gateway to having Simon and Jackie reunited again.

All in all, even though Agatha Christie sees evil everywhere, she opts for having female villains coming from the lower classes, more likely to experience 'everyday struggles' (Simková (2019: 215). Seldom is crime carried out by the upper crust whose quality of life is not to be degraded. But curiously in this novel, rivalry does not come between sexes but within sexes (females), conceived as an alternative to breaking away from the maiden archetype with fragility and sensitiveness as major, cultural and personal attributes.



## 5.2. MARRIAGE

Society has multiple views on marriage, and literature is a sphere that also contains this ambivalence. Taking place in 1930s, it could be understood why marriage is seen in *Death on the Nile* as a cultural norm. Mostly based on convenience, marriages lacked love and couples wanting to settle down and live together. Divorce was not as socially acceptable as it currently is, so women remained nothing but 'slaves' to their husbands during the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This situation was more favourable, however, with the apparition of the flapper woman as analysed in previous sections.

To the same extent Linnet and Jackie differ in personality, they also do in how they conceive marriage. Jackie opts for a traditional way of living (for the 1930s period) which consisted in believing in marital status as 'the goal and destiny of all womankind' (Vipond 1981: 120). In the first chapters of the book she constantly portrays her strong desire to marry Simon. She shows devotion for merging with her fiancé, up to the point of contemplating death as a unique escape providing she does not achieve this? marrying him:

Linnet, I shall *die* if I can't marry him! I shall die! I shall die! I shall *die*...!"

'Don't be ridiculous, Jackie'.

'I shall die, I tell you! I'm crazy about him. He's crazy about me. We can't live without each other.'

'Darling, you *have* got it badly!'

'I know. It's awful, isn't it? This love business gets hold of you and you can't do anything about it.' (Christie, 2014: 13)

Her eagerness could also relate to her personality; she is weaker than Linnet, at least economically and socially speaking. Jackie is more sentimental and dependent on her partner. Needless to say, her position resembles the ordinary assumption towards marriage for the epoch, adding that 'it always seems to have a very sobering effect on people' (Christie 2014: 15).

Even though Linnet's thoughts towards marriage are not explicit, we can consider her as a business-minded woman; therefore, the housekeeper role does not match her expectations in life. She breaks away with the 'Angel in the House' imagery, a widespread belief of wives as devoted and submissive to their husbands. Linnet has

power for herself and economic self-sufficiency. In fact, she is the jobholder, and decides whether to hire Simon or not (before marrying).

Marriage has been identified as a compromise that nestles people in the social ladder, either at the top or at the bottom (Simon's undisclosed desire to be with Linnet). Nevertheless, Linnet seems not to worry about the last statement since she is already at the top and marrying Simon would not lower her social status — in fact, the only beneficiary of this union would be him. At the same time, it is striking to notice the appropriation of her husband's surname, a symbol of patriarchy. From that point onwards, she is no longer Linnet Ridgeway but Doyle. However, she is still known as the affluent and brilliant woman she is, not as the 'spouse of' Simon.

Linnet's persona embodies a free spirit who follows her instinct and stays by the side of the man she loves, Simon. Their marriage and, so their love, is characterised by incongruities. While Linnet really feels passion for Simon and decides to marry him, he does so because of greed. Simon is hungry for power, recognition and money. Simon's relation towards Jackie suffers its ups and downs, but at end of the novel, it reflects their love and a mutual understanding that Linnet had not achieved with him. Having committed the crime together means trusting each other until their last days.

What is more, can Agatha Christie be appealing to her own life? As discussed by Vipond (1981: 122-123) as an upper-middle class woman, Christie was intended to follow the conventional pattern of life for women. Curiously, she was not able due to an external barrier, the failure of her first marriage, and secondly her becoming a best-selling author. This series of events gave her recognition, as well as an income. In this sense, she could relate herself to Linnet up to a point, prosperous as far as work is concerned but unsuccessful within personal relations. Christie's and Linnet's personal lives experienced a common ground. They both were income-producer women (either by writing or by making businesses) but their love affairs were not promising. Either because of infidelities or greed, the author's and protagonist's unhappy marriages are somehow similar.

In conclusion, the marriage institution was based on male dominance and women's social isolation. Marital ties as such relegated women to a second place in

society. It had the ability to suppress women either physically or metaphorically. For all that, the aftermath marriage has on this novel is death, since 'financial disputes [...] substantially raised the level of tensions in marriages' (Liker, Jeffrey and Elder Jr 1982: 26). Simon and Linnet did not experience economic instability, but his right to inherit her fortune put an end to Linnet's life. Linnet's affluence was the trigger that accelerated Simon's avarice undoubtedly.

### 5.3 SOCIAL STATUS. MONEY

Characters are inserted into one category or another because of their class and social status. However, as expressed by Bernthal, individuals are never fully developed, no matter the length of the text, they only 'reveal an exaggeration that is familiar and resonant' (2015: 15). This is, characters are archetypes and they show what the author is interested in proving. Both female protagonists seem to have been closely analysed and their surroundings explained but, in fact, we know little about where they do come from, essential to take sides in the story or to be able to understand why a character acts the way it does.

The new woman prospers outside the domestic sphere. Linnet exploits her social status at the height of her life. Because of that, she causes admiration among her community and makes people 'stared with round bucolic eyes and slightly open mouths' (Christie 2014: 3). Her status goes hand-in-hand with material possessions, actually, one of the most distinctive features that distinguishes both females is Linnet's willingness to have goods and chattels. Linnet enjoys all types of sophisticated assets from Rolls-Royce cars to special jewels. Since Christie 'presents women, particularly those whose femininity is conventionally attractive, in terms of vestments and accessories' (Bernthal 2015: 136), the apparition of pearls in the novel will be a clue towards the murder as they are stolen from the murdering scene. Therefore, with reference to the last item, such jewels become the centre of the trouble. They act as a symbolic artefact, both for luxury and for death.

On the contrary, over and above the *social stratum*, maidens have been linked to vulnerability and purity. This notion gains more weight if we think of Jackie as a

sufferer who seeks revenge up to the point of committing a killing. Plus, her low status has a slight connection to the idea of personal revenge. If it were Linnet who had wanted revenge, she could have had someone doing it for her. In Jackie's case it is not so easy. Jackie is known to be a woman of strong feelings, usually ruled by them. Her suffering has been caused by a close friend, therefore, revenge is taken personally. It is a common response of the human spirit and it caused Jackie great pleasure since there were no signs of remorse in any of the chapters. Seeing her offender suffer was her main intention.

Jackie wants to cause Linnet the same pain she experienced. Not only did she lose a friend but also her partner — it is comprehensible of her taking action by her own. Nevertheless, due to this hierarchical difference between the females, readers can more easily take sides with the neediest; in this case Jackie.

Last but not least, wealth also explains characters' divergence. Jackie's low class aligns with her monetary condition. There are no possessions symbolising this woman. Linnet enjoys a lavish lifestyle out of Jackie's reach. Jackie is aware of her economic restrictions. At the same time, both the lack of a modest amount of money or the abundance of it also connects them since they are capable of boarding a cruise down the Nile. Money seems to be a symbol that unites Simon and Jackie; afterall, the crime is committed because of Simon's greed for it. However, this distances Linnet and her husband. It could be directly linked to her impersonation of a new woman. Capital is essential to keep a family together but remember this was a period in which women pushed barriers in the economic sphere. Thus, females were able to earn their own money due to factory work, resulting in an unprecedented expansion of personal freedom. This construct widens Jackie's dependence on Simon versus Linnet's autonomy respectively.

#### **5.4 REVENGE AS A FATAL TOOL**

One of the topics that remain visible throughout Christie's novels is revenge. In this particular book, two women struggle with it. Vengeance is more satisfying if a love betrayal is involved, therefore, after a series of jealousies, it is expected by the reader

that no remorse will be present. Plotting a revenge involves time and effort equally, not difficult if mixing a man of action and the planning brain, Simon and Jackie jointly (Christie 2014).

The main reason why trust is lost is Linnet's marriage to Simon, formerly Jackie's partner. It symbolises the breakup of a key friendship rule (honesty). Jackie's actions are driven by love, since this woman is not capable of figuring out a world where Simon is not in. As uttered by Gale, 'revenge is a classic motive for murder, and it is a theme that is closely aligned with hatred' (2017: 8). Abuse of loyalty brings friendship to an end after all boundaries have been surpassed. Therefore, the tension between the women allow us to rename their relationship as mortal.

Peach (2006: 115) discusses the way tenacious stereotypes end up simulating a masquerade, which relates certain behaviours to one gender or the other. The crime is committed both by a woman and a man, however, the story seems to leave clues to incriminate the woman. The murdering object, the gun, is considered 'an *article de luxe*' (Christie 2014: 216) which confirms the latter statement both because of the item and the rest of material collected around the crime scene. The gun was covered by a handkerchief that belonged to one of the women of the cruise, so it adds to the idea that a woman is to be found guilty.

At the same time, this object could also relate to the social class; hence, at first glance the crime was supposed to have been committed by a middle or upper-class person. First to be in the spotlight were Andrew Pennington, Linnet's American trustee, or Fleetwood, an ex-lover of one of Linnet's maids.

While the novel goes on, having a woman committing the crime is no longer crystal clear, thus, doubts about the real murderer arise. When the reader gets to know that Simon and Jackie were in charge of this tragedy, the reason behind it becomes clear. It could have been related to passion, but in the end, it clearly had to do with the inheritance of Linnet's money — in fact, Jackie adds Simon 'didn't want Linnet. He thought her good-looking but terribly bossy, and he hated bossy women! The whole thing embarrassed him frightfully. But he did like the thought of her money...' (Christie 2014: 363-364). Simon should be the rightful heir, reason why he 'does away with his

rich wife, inherits her money, *and in due course will marry his old love*' (Christie 2014: 356). As it is, the central idea for murder to happen does not concentrate anymore on passion or motherhood, as in other Christie's novels.

Stepping aside from the man for one moment, it is curious how the female villain is represented. Descriptions towards Jackie do not deviate from reality, considering her to be a 'probably extremely neurotic. Unbalanced, hysterical, all that' (Hoffman 2012: 75). She is always overthinking, and she is of an unpredictable nature. In any case, such manipulative behaviour could be accepted or, at least understood, because of the romantic component. It is easier to take sides with Jackie if we comprehend how she was left with neither best friend nor partner. This sense of solitude may also appeal to the female readership. In the end, conventional wisdom portrays women as the most likely gender to suffer from love breakups.

The idea of the spinster is posed after the crime is committed partially by Jackie. 'When single women characters are employed as villains and victims, however, [their] depictions become far more negative' (Hoffman 2012: 72). Spinsterhood was a curse for women, if taking into account the period (1930s). Her loneliness could have been a motif to create such thwarted plans. Despite her alliance with Simon, Jackie still had to tolerate with Simon and Linnet's love (even if fake), which increased her desire for revenge. However, their vengeance was just a temporary pleasure as all protagonists ended dead. It makes the reader think twice about revenge and its effects, including a moral. Love is a torment and a formidable threat, and it 'can be a very frightening thing. That is why most great love stories are tragedies' (Christie 2014: 372).

At the same time, the final scene of the novel resembles Shakespearean's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* (1595) with Jackie and Simon as replicas of the previous characters. In this case, jail is the suppressing factor; it prevents lovers from fulfilling their relationship once the nuisance (Linnet) is non-existent. This explicit correlation makes the readership look at questions through a different lens, more specifically, why love does remain the gist for happiness and if it is not obtained in this world, it should be found in another one.

In order to facilitate the understanding of the aforementioned data, a short summary is given. Table 1 shows the attributes that correspond to each woman's archetype. It offers a better grasp of the differences between the women in terms of opposite adjectives in a visually appealing format.

Table 1: Outline of the main characteristics of both females.

	<b>LINNET</b>	<b>JACKIE</b>
<b>ARCHETYPE</b>	Flapper/modern woman	Evil maiden
<b>DIRECT CHARACTERIZATION</b>	Adored Charming	Rejected Emotional
<b>VIEWS ON MATRIMONY</b>	Unnecessary but married	Essential but single
<b>SOCIAL POSITION. WEALTH</b>	Upper-class Independent	Lower class Dependent
<b>VENGEANCE</b>	Victim	Troublemaker

## **6. SIMILARITIES MAKE FEMALE PROTAGONISTS MORE DISTANT**

The brightest aspect in Agatha Christie's novels were, undoubtedly, her characters. Linnet's and Jackie's personalities are equally fascinating in the novel. Although the features that distinguish them, discussed above, seem to outnumber those that make them alike, it is certain those women share common qualities.

To start with, the focus will be put on their background. The protagonists come from a convent in Paris and they have a close, firm friendship (at least in the first chapters). Later on, there is more information given towards their relatives. It has been never contemplated the idea whether these women came from a close-knit family; however, it is worth mentioning their economic situation. From page one onwards, it has been clearly stated that Linnet's wealth has been inherited from his maternal grandfather; albeit Jackie's father was a French Count but their money was lost as a consequence of the Wall Street crash. Subsequently, been brought up identically does not guarantee same results. From that point onwards, stereotypes are formed, and they go hand-in-hand with unforeseen clues that contribute to this symbolism.

Pearls appear to be an apt metaphor capable of encapsulating both characters (Linnet's pearl necklace and Jackie's pearl handled pistol). Taking into account that Linnet dies first, her pearls are stolen and replaced by a counterfeit necklace, accompanied by the pearl handled murder weapon, it is evident to identify pearls with murders.

Other possessions that might catch some attention are vehicles. Each first character's appearance is on their corresponding car. Linnet's Rolls-Royce is luxurious, contrary to Jackie's car which breaks down every five minutes. Vehicles are symbols of 'physical as well as [...] intellectual mobility' (Peach 2006: 113). Hence, this adds to the idea of Linnet as a boss (business-minded) versus Jackie's inferiority. Their belongings make even more explicit how their worlds are not alike. Curiously, both women end the book dead, therefore, their cycle of life is once again identical. Despite their huge differences, both women's life end in the trip because of a gunshot — caused by Simon in Linnet's case and by Jackie herself in respect of her own suicide.

At the same time, if there is an only attribute that stands out for each of them, in terms of emotions, it would be restlessness. Strong if vulnerable, Linnet fears Jackie up to the point of feeling being 'the subject [...] of an intolerable persecution' (Christie 2014: 62). Thus, the rich girl is unable have all the spheres of her life always under control. She feels paralysed by the panic Jackie causes on her. Jackie, on her part, has few conversations with Poirot too, but each time she talks with him, it is Simon who is relevant in the conversation and her long-standing need to have him back. He is her Achilles' heel and '[her] world' (Christie 2014: 76). In a nutshell, the main source of concern are people themselves — Jackie gets stuck in Linnet's head with the same intensity Simon gets in Jackie's.



## 7. CONCLUSION

Stereotypes are a fixed entity, especially for women. Throughout centuries females have been assigned certain roles and behaviours by society. This statement remains clear in the novel *Death on the Nile* (1937) by Agatha Christie where the two female characters are confronted. In order to totally comprehend each character's representation, a profound study concerning the social, economic and personal sphere of each woman has been conducted.

The title of the book already gives a quick glimpse at the plot, though the focus of this thesis is stating the archetypes attached to each protagonist — the flapper and the evil maiden, impersonated by Linnet and Jackie respectively. Despite few similitudes, it is notorious that both characters belong to different worlds either in terms of money or social class for instance. Therefore, Linnet and Jackie act as foils to each other. Consequently, their contrasting personalities help establish their set of values.

Linnet is an example to follow; she lives a happy life with her husband and her businesses. Jackie is the one to blame; this hard-boiled woman has lost what she most cares about (her partner) and her revenge will take place even if it goes against one of her close friends. Their division becomes even clearer and sharpened when it comes to marriage. The archetype Jackie is given makes her view on love romanticised, needed, as the last stage of happiness whereas Linnet represents a modern woman who leaves that personal sphere onto a second place.

Jackie's and Linnet's divergence leads to a fatal outcome. The role of Hercule Poirot as detective is crucial to solve the crime that is yet to come. However, he can be seen as a 'gentleman who engages in detection as a hobby, taking only cases that interest him' (Brownson 2014: 61). Only after various requests for help, Poirot decides to intervene in the case.

Thus, it comes as a no surprise to find a female villain (Jackie), who is nothing but unstable. Her dependent attitude towards Simon hastened her desire to have him back as soon as possible. This power-hungry egomaniac man manipulates her former partner so as to finally reach his goal (taking power over her current wife's money).

Even if their alliance is diabolical, Jackie's nature makes the reader empathise with her due to the romantic component.

Making use of certain strategies such as the balance of round and flat characters, an omniscient narrator together with deep psychological undercurrents, the work is clearly enriched. Giving more prominence to round characters permit a global view of Jackie. In any case, this vision is produced by a third person narrator, therefore, characters are treated as puppets, without voice (agency). In this sense, their representation is altered, main reason why each character is tied to an archetype.

As it is, before reading a novel there are certain stereotypes that remain immovable, even though they might be subject to random variation. The invisibility and characterization of women was so gradual that for a long time it passed unmentioned. However, this work emphasizes the idea that clichés are still present. Nevertheless, this paper is not supposed to provide the last word on those categorisations since it would be practical to have a look at men's models too.

## 8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 'Archetype' (2020), in *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, Springfield, Massachusetts. [Viewed 25 May 2020]. Available from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/archetype>
- 'Stereotype' (2020), in *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, Springfield, Massachusetts. [Viewed 25 May 2020]. Available from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stereotype>
- Bernthal, J.C., (2015). *A Queer Approach to Agatha Christie, 1920-1952*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Exeter. pp. 7-32, 135-145. [Viewed 15 April 2020]. Available from: <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/18196/BernthalJ.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>
- Breward, C., Eicher, J.B., Major, J.S., Tortora, P., (2005). Flappers. *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion* edited by Valerie Steele [online], vol. 2, Thomson Corporation. pp. 88-89. [Viewed 28 May 2020]. Available from: <http://www.encyclopedias.biz/dw/Encyclopedia%20of%20Clothing%20and%20Fashion-Vol2.pdf>
- Brownson, C., (2014). The English Classic. *The Figure of the Detective. A Literary History and Analysis* [online]. North Carolina: McFarland & Company. pp. 58-65. [Viewed 6 April 2020]. Available from: <https://books.google.es/books?id=j5udAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=es#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- Christie, A., (2014). *Death on the Nile*. Croydon: HarperCollinsPublishers.
- Gale (ed.), (2017). Revenge. *A Study Guide for Agatha Christie's "Wasps' Nest"* [online]. Cengage Learning - Gale. [Viewed 30 May 2020]. Available from: [https://books.google.es/books?id=C\\_XPDAAAQBAJ&pg=PT14&lpg=PT14&dq=Revenge+is+a+classic+motive+for+murder+agatha+christie&source=bl&ots=m3czqL3Hm3&sig=ACfU3U3CavJjzB0KUGRpswkQ0ml7J6uwg&hl=es-419&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj3-OrvldzpAhVoDWMBHb\\_rBh8Q6AEwAHoECAYQAQ#v=onepage&q=Revenge%20is%20a%20classic%20motive%20for%20murder%20agatha%20christie&f=false](https://books.google.es/books?id=C_XPDAAAQBAJ&pg=PT14&lpg=PT14&dq=Revenge+is+a+classic+motive+for+murder+agatha+christie&source=bl&ots=m3czqL3Hm3&sig=ACfU3U3CavJjzB0KUGRpswkQ0ml7J6uwg&hl=es-419&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj3-OrvldzpAhVoDWMBHb_rBh8Q6AEwAHoECAYQAQ#v=onepage&q=Revenge%20is%20a%20classic%20motive%20for%20murder%20agatha%20christie&f=false)
- Garber, M., (1992). Cherchez la Femme: Cross-Dressing in Detective Fiction. *Vested Interest. Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety* [online]. New York: Routledge. pp.

186-191. [Viewed 21 January 2020]. Available from: [https://books.google.es/books?](https://books.google.es/books?id=eeASHasS0oUC&printsec=frontcover&hl=es#v=onepage&q&f=false)

[id=eeASHasS0oUC&printsec=frontcover&hl=es#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.es/books?id=eeASHasS0oUC&printsec=frontcover&hl=es#v=onepage&q&f=false)

Havlíčková, A., (2005). Agatha Christie. *Agatha Christie and her Great Detective (based on Poirot Investigates and Hercule Poirot's Christmas, reflecting 1920s and 1930s)*. B.A. thesis, Masaryk University. pp. 9-19. [Viewed 16 January 2020]. Available from: [https://is.muni.cz/th/cwjlr/B.A.\\_Thesis.pdf](https://is.muni.cz/th/cwjlr/B.A._Thesis.pdf)

Hoffman, M., (2012). *Women Writing Women: Gender and Representation in British 'Golden Age' Crime Fiction*. Ph.D. thesis, University of St Andrews. pp. 72-81. [Viewed 17 February 2020]. Available from: <https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10023/11910/MeganHoffmanPhDThesis.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>

Krawczyk-Żywko, L., (2015). My Watson to Your Holmes: Rewriting the Sidekick. *Anglica. An International Journal of English Studies* [online]. **24**(1), 133-146. [Viewed 22 February 2020]. Available from: [https://www.academia.edu/17948171/\\_My\\_Watson\\_to\\_your\\_Holmes\\_Rewriting\\_the\\_Sidekick](https://www.academia.edu/17948171/_My_Watson_to_your_Holmes_Rewriting_the_Sidekick)

Kwei Quartey., (2014). Detectives and their Sidekicks: Five Things you should Know. [online]. *Kwei Quartey The Official Website*. [Viewed 26 May 2020]. Available from: <https://kweiquartey.com/detectives-and-their-sidekicksfive-things-you-should-know/>

Liker, J., Jeffrey, K. and Elder, Glen H., Jr., (1982). *Economic Hardship and Marital Relations in the 1930s* [online]. San Francisco: American Sociological Review. [Viewed 10 January 2020]. Available from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED228110.pdf>. [Viewed 10 January 2020].

MasterClass., (2019). Learn About the Maiden Archetype in Literature [online]. *MasterClass*. [Viewed 18 April 2020]. Available from: <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/learn-about-the-maiden-archetype-in-literature#what-is-the-maiden-archetype>>

Moraes, R.C., (2017). Femmes Fatales: Representation in the Movies and the Spectrum of Modernity. *Revista de Letras* [online]. **19**(25), 87-97.

- [Viewed 23 March 2020]. Available from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324907079\\_Femmes\\_fatales\\_representation\\_in\\_the\\_movies\\_and\\_the\\_spectrum\\_of\\_modernity](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324907079_Femmes_fatales_representation_in_the_movies_and_the_spectrum_of_modernity)
- Munt, S.R., (1994). Masculinity and masquerade or 'Is that a gun in your pocket?' *Mainstream women crime writers*. In: Routledge, ed. *Murder by the Book: Feminism and the Crime Novel*. London: Routledge. pp. 1-5.
- Peach, L., (2006). Assessing women's modernity. In: Boom, C, ed. *Masquerade, Crime and Fiction: Criminal Deceptions*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. pp. 111-117.
- Simková, E., (2019). *Agatha Christie's Female Villains*. Ph.D. thesis, University in Košice. [Viewed 18 March 2020]. Available from: <https://dspace.uzhnu.edu.ua/jspui/bitstream/lib/26412/1/Agatha%20Christie%e2%80%99s%20Female%20Villains.pdf>
- Veselská, M., (2014). *History, Development and Characteristics of British Detective Novel and the Significant Representatives of the Genre*. B.A. thesis, Palacky University Olomouc. pp. 5-7. [Viewed 19 March 2020]. Available from: [https://theses.cz/id/peh3v5/Bachelor\\_Thesis\\_-\\_Michaela\\_Veselsk.pdf](https://theses.cz/id/peh3v5/Bachelor_Thesis_-_Michaela_Veselsk.pdf)
- Vipond, M., (1981). Agatha Christie's Women. *The International Fiction Review* [online]. 8(2), 119-123. [Viewed 24 April 2020]. Available from: [https://www.academia.edu/7949977/Agatha\\_Christies\\_woman](https://www.academia.edu/7949977/Agatha_Christies_woman)
- Xu, X., (2009). The detectives in Agatha Christie's novels. *Asian Social Science*. [online]. 5(4), 96-99. [Viewed 25 January 2020]. Available from: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/cfe3/80ef156c40927dec1d2b4af0404780a6c57a.pdf>