

AGATHA CHRISTIE AND WORSHIPING FALSE GODS

Jacqueline Wilson on Self-Examination

Ever since the publication of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, which is generally thought to be the first murder mystery ever published, murder mysteries have captivated mankind with their details of extreme acts of violence, secrecy, and gore. They not only help us escape the monotony of our daily lives, giving us an adrenaline rush we otherwise would not have, but they also give us a safe space to study, explore, and question our own human nature. No one grows up planning to be a murderer, and while some murders are premeditated, it is doubtful that anyone dreams about planning a successful murder in the same way one would dream about being a parent, going sky diving, or having a successful nursing career. In other words, being a murderer is never on someone's bucket list, yet people still murder. Most fictional murder mystery stories, when well done, allow us to safely ponder all this while also calling us to question the virtue within our own heart, and become vigilant over the growth of our moral compasses and souls. Through the murderous character of Jacqueline de Bellefort in her novel *Death on the Nile*, Agatha Christie encourages us to examine the state of our souls and keep vigilant over our own moral growth so that we do not become like the murderous characters who both fascinate and disgust us.

In the beginning of Christie's *Death on the Nile* Jacqueline de Bellefort, despite her flaw of being "as proud as the devil," seems an unlikely person to murder Linnet Ridgeway.¹ In chapter one, Ridgeway describes de Bellefort saying, "That's my oldest friend, Jacqueline de Bellefort. We were together at a convent in Paris."² In addition to being Ridgeway's closest friend and growing up going to a religious school, she is also described as devoted to earning an honest living, "She's not a sponge. I've wanted to help her, but she won't let me."³ Furthermore, each time someone doubts Jacqueline, the reader is assured in numerous instances that the doubter is being ridiculous. For instance, phrases such as, "I can trust Jacqueline's taste," "I'm really not afraid of Jackie doing any melodramatic shooting stuff..." and "After all, one could trust Jackie — " are littered throughout the novel by those who are close with her.^{4 5 6} Further still, after murdering Ridgeway, Jacqueline admits, "Linnet was my best friend, and I never dreamed that anything would ever come between us."⁷ When her lover Simon Doyle confessed to fantasizing about marrying Linnet for her money only for her to die shortly after their imagined

¹ Agatha Christie, *Death on the Nile: A Hercule Poirot Mystery* (1937; repr., Vancouver: UBC, 2013), 6.

² Christie, *Death on the Nile*, 5.

³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 325.

marriage, Jacqueline so forcefully insisted “it was an awful idea,” that he “shut up about it.”⁸ ⁹ So how does a seemingly honest, hardworking woman — a woman much like the average reader — come to murder her longtime best friend? That is the brilliance of Christie’s novel. While it is unclear how de Bellefort’s relationship evolved so that she became so obsessed with Doyle, or what her psychological issues were that made her susceptible to obsession, she is warned about her unhealthy relationship and the potential evil outcomes of it. Detective Hercule Poirot, who cannot prove, but suspects what is going on between de Bellefort, Linnet, and Simon, advises de Bellefort privately:

“Mademoiselle, I beseech you, do not do what you are doing.”

“Leave dear Linnet alone, you mean!”

“It is deeper than that. Do not open your heart to evil . . . because — if you do — evil will come . . . Yes, very surely evil will come . . . It will enter in and make its home within you, and after a little while it will no longer be possible to drive it out.”¹⁰

Of course, as Christians, we believe that Christ can redeem even the most fallen sinners — the serial rapists, murderers, and so on — but the point remains that if one opens their heart even a little to evil, it will come, and

⁸ Christie, *Death on the Nile*, 326.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 326.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

once it is there, it is difficult to drive out. In fact, according to Matthew 12:45, evil can beget evil: “Then it goes and brings along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there.”¹¹ It appears that this is exactly what happened in Jacqueline de Bellefort’s heart. She admits to Poirot that after committing the crime murder became easy; “I might do it again . . . I’m not a safe person any longer . . . It’s so dreadfully easy — killing people. And you begin to feel that it doesn’t matter . . . that it’s only *you* that matters!”¹² From the moment Jacqueline prioritized her relationship with Simon over the good of her soul, she was on a slippery slope. Such is the way with all sin.

At the end of the novel, Jacqueline shares her true motive for killing Linnet: She loves Simon more than God and life itself. (The motive is not what it appeared to be earlier in the novel). After she had told Simon that his fantasy marriage to murder was an “awful idea,” she discovers that he secretly intended to go through with the plan anyway; “Then one day, I found him reading up all about arsenic . . . I realized that he’d never pull it off . . . So I had to come into it, too, to look after him . . .”¹³ The detective, Hercule Poirot, offers his perspective, “She herself had not coveted Linnet Ridgeway’s money, but she had loved Simon Doyle, had loved him beyond reason and beyond rectitude and beyond pity.”¹⁴ In other words,

¹¹ Matt. 12:45 (NRSV).

¹² Christie, *Death on the Nile*, 323.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 326.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 326.

she had made him her god. He became her heart's top priority.

Jacqueline de Bellefort did not originally plan on becoming a murderer, in fact, she might have even been described as "a good person" up until that point. Any time anyone puts any person or thing above God, they risk losing their souls. From this fictional story, and from our fascination with murder mysteries in general, we learn how important it is to examine our consciences daily. We learn that we must consider the moments in our day where we chose to put something or someone before God and why we did so. Was it because we, like Jacqueline, feared the loss of a loved one? Was it because like Simon, we desired money over goodness? Or was it for some other reason? When we are aware of our weaknesses, we must then go to God with them. As Christians we must take hope that with God, falling into the slippery slope of evil is preventable. When we are honest with God about our weaknesses, when we ask Him to forgive us when we fall, He will give us the grace and strength to allow Him into our hearts. When we repent of our sin, He changes us and invites us to the path not of the sinner, but of Sainthood.

"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

Bibliography

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Christie, Agatha. *Death on the Nile: A Hercule Poirot Mystery*. 1937; repr., Vancouver: UBC, 2013.