

A value-driven life in the detective novel *Death of the Nile* by Agatha Christie

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Abstract: With a growing, aggressive attitude among people worldwide, there is a need for individuals to come together and promote values that will prevent the decline of humanity. Literature has a long-standing role as a vehicle for promoting values and showcasing the future of those who disregard the law or the values that serve as a compass guiding people's actions and decisions. Through this research, we will follow the fate of the four main characters in *Death on the Nile* by Agatha Christie, to see which life will have a better ending, a value-driven or a deviant one. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, including comparative analysis and ethical and psychological interpretation. In summary, every individual displays a behavioral dissimulation under the pretence of being value-driven, but the underlying motives are revealed through actions and private contexts.

Keywords: *values, mask, aggressive attitude, compass, literature.*

**They preach the gospel of good to fill their own storehouses.
For them, value is not a moral compass, but a lever.**

From the beginning of the human race, communication and interaction have always been protected by a set of norms. The way people talked, acted, and behaved in a specific context was guided by some rules the community imposed and accepted to survive and thrive in the society they had built. Cristina Bicchieri highlights the community's importance in strengthening a social norm. Implementing it as conduct rule that will withstand the changes of the society in time. People respect them because they fear the punishment, "beliefs...more ingrained as time goes on...people will comply with it...they expect us to comply...reciprocate we strenghten the norm" (Bicchieri 2006: 23).

Edgar R. Eslit mentions Proverbs 22:6 as a key towards children's education. "Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it" (King James Version: 573). The verse encourages parents and teachers to shape a child's character using ethical and moral values from a young age. Learning how to use moral values in their daily

interactions, the children's lives will be a blessing not only for their parents but also for the entire community. Some places around the world that struggle with financial problems see the need for both parents from the same household to have a place of work. For example, the Labor Force Status of Families in Australia from 2025, 73% of the families that have minors under 14 state that both parents are employed. With a contemporary mindset that both parents feel the need to work, they are missing the time in which they should teach their children important values and skills for their life.

Literature was and is an important tool in influencing, manipulating and controlling society's mindset and behavior through the values it promotes. A study was done to check if a steady rise in divorce rates in the American society was in some way linked to the literature people read. Milton Albrecht concluded that "literature reflects common cultural values" (Albrecht 1956). The value system of a society evolves when a value is practiced by a part of the population, or they are accepting it as democracy allows. With that being said not only values can be introduced into a society but they risk establishing something less desirable. This can only be controlled by the society's level of education and priorities.

By 1938 as crime rates started to increase, the American society started to demand answers from the educational system as the high payments didn't match the results they were offering. People had questions because the statistics recorded 1 criminal from 37 people from the group age from 16 to 23. They condemned the system for failing "to awake the deepest inner sympathies" and were ready to share a part of the responsibility in educating the younger generations (Frederick 1940).

English literature started to be taught from early childhood up to university levels as Dr. Henry Howard believed that teaching children "at the plastic stage" gives adults an upper hand in controlling their behavior that might lead in a wrong direction later. Moreover reading about value driven lives will help in developing a great character and form a set of principles that will guide a person's way of thinking and acting. Additionally Louise Rosenblatt uses the term "crystallization" for the influence literature has on people as it strengthens the beliefs and their attitudes regarding the perception on life. Nowadays, an great impact could have the readings about real people that sacrificed their lives for great causes and for the good of others. When parents and teachers surround their subject of teaching with

acts of nobility and examples of courage and responsibility, these values will bring fruit later in life. Furthermore the teachings will nurture the spiritual aspect, morality and reducing the criminal thoughts. As a confirmation of what has been said Percival Chubb encourages to “give them the companionship of the great...duty, love...courage...honor, justice and freedom” because everyone must grow upon stories that inspire them to do noble things (Frederick 1940).

Although the research title highlights someone striving to benefit others, a truly value-driven life is rare. Analyzing another angle of the modern world, society remarks a shift from moral values to the ego, as people began to care more about themselves, their own benefits, their present. One of the reasons could be the lack of education through literature that promotes moral values. People would rather feed on “corrupted by secularism” literature, as T. S. Eliot said (Pantic 2006: 404). Around the world, avid readers live on literature that evokes emotions for their gratification. This type of book's plot is interactive and engaging, but it promotes a carefree life and does not always offer solutions for real-life challenges. Steiner said “some men who...administered Auschwitz had been trained to read Shakespeare and Goethe...” (Steiner 1960). Therefore, a person can be an avid reader but end up like another intelligent criminal; it is not a matter of what you read but how you read and perceive the characters. Robert Mulholland in his book *Shaped by the Word* states two types of reading: informative and formative. The difference between these two is the impact upon a person's character. The informative method allows readers to grasp the meaning of the text, and to collect all the information he can for his intellectual growth. In the meanwhile the formative reading is about letting the text shape a person's mindset, help him grow and become a better self . Mulholland said that literature “has the power to transform me...my willingness to change” (Mulholland 2002: 63). This way literature used correctly can be a great tool for personal development, acquiring values that make a person valuable and lead a blessed life. To be said, all the values taught by parents and teachers or vices learned at home or from society will shape the reader's approach to a specific text. The following question requires an urgent answer from the readers, are you going to condemn the vices presented in a book or accept them?

Cultures are as old as the birth of the human race. They have a specific set of values that form a sense of community specifically created for the human's protection and society's prosperity. Values are the compass that guides a person's moral conduct and their behaviour in society and at home. From Western English-speaking countries, values like democracy, individualism, tolerance, and leisure time and those centred on the individual, made their way into other European cultures. Northern European societies emphasize equality, feminine values, and national loyalty. In contrast, East Asian cultures emphasize the need for education, collectivism and respect for the group, while Latin American and Arab societies tend to place greater importance on respect for authority.

Detective literature flourished in the 20th century, despite some historians condemning this genre. The interwar period came with depression, conflicts, and death. As a result, the whole world was negatively affected. For the first time, detective writers presented the public with a type of literature according to their preferences. Which is a fictive world full of puzzles, mysteries and adventure in which the evil are punished and the good are flourishing. When London was under attack, the detective novels fostered optimism among hiding civilians. As Howard Haycraft said, "detective fiction consistently dominated requests in the 'raid' libraries of the shelters" (Fillingim 2007: 6).

The archaeological sites represented so vividly in the detective novel find their roots in Christie's passion for archaeology. As her husband travelled a lot to the Middle East for his archaeological expeditions, Christie went to help him with recording the works, illustrating the findings, restoring cultural objects and managing everyday activities. Using her experiences, she managed to create a perfect depiction of the Egyptian settings, the land of mystery and romance.

Although the background picture amazes readers, Christie focuses more on vices than on the Westerners values highlighting the society's moral challenges in the 20th century but also satisfying the readers with punishing the evil at the end. The novel *Death on the Nile* causes a lot of controversy regarding the number of criminals that are presented in the plot. This research is going to demonstrate why there are multiple criminals and what pushed them to commit the crimes "you were too clever for us, Monsieur Poirot" (Christie 2011: 258). Also it aims to examine how the moral

decisions made by the main characters in *Death on the Nile* by Agatha Christie shape the outcomes of their lives, highlighting the consequences of living by moral values or selfish motives.

The novel was structured in a way that kept readers engaged in the plot intriguing them to make guesses and use their critical thinking until the resolution when they get a different ending as the one they have expected by “delivering thrills of a traditional mystery story” (Ratu, Wuntu, Mauker 2024). Critical thinking skills when used wisely can help people manage their daily challenges while keeping them focused on what’s important. Also Christie uses the classical detective fiction formula, her intricate way of narrating a story, criminal psychology and its analysis to maintain audience’s curiosity.

According to Ratu N., Wuntu C., Maukar M., there are some steps in creating a great detective novel like Christie’s. The Detective Formula that starts with a perfect crime scene, no evidence left except the letter J on the wall that points to one of the suspects “a big wavering letter J” that either was made by the victim that supposedly did it before death as one of her fingers was covered in a dark red substance, or was made by the killer to confuse the investigation. From here it can be deduced that the killer was a novice. The crime was done in a way so the killer won’t miss his victim “the pistol, was held close against her head...she was asleep” (Christie:137-138). Every suspect had an alibi. Next step from the Detective formula is to accuse someone wrongly. In this novel we can see a lot of people that were interrogated as suspects, but one of them is the maid that was helping Linnet dress, and take care of everything her lady needed “I was on the deck below. My cabin, it was on the other side of the boat” (Christie 2011:157). The third step is the superiority of the detective compared to the police in terms of intelligence and the power of deduction. The police are presented as slow, and dim-witted while the detective is highly intelligent and effective. The next step is about unexpected events that are introduced to confuse the audience and take their attention from the real criminal. A few examples being the string of pearls and the killing of Louise Bourget. The string of pearls indicated the killing was done for money, by a woman, which in the case of this novel the killing was done by a man with all indicators pointing to a woman. The final step is about justice and the mystery is explained in detail. In the novel one of the criminals is arrested while the other took her

life. The fact that two killers worked together even from the beginning of the story to make it like a perfect crime. They were not aware that in a closed environment, as the boat, there was a slim chance they could escape from getting caught.

Linnet Ridgeway is one of the main characters in the novel of American origin and the first one to appear in the book. The author presents Linnet as a modest, wealthy girl envied by everyone, as she possesses both beauty and wealth, which, for some, seems unfair “golden hair, straight autocratic features, lovely shape” (Christie 2011: 8). Despite her privileges, Linnet seeks genuine connections and cherishes every friendship she has, even if the other person is not as rich or beautiful as she is. When she falls in love “I like him enormously” (Christie 2011: 25), her desire for personal happiness influences her decisions, leading her to marry her best friend’s fiancé. The plot thus shifts, suggesting that Linnet’s actions, driven by her need for love and fulfillment, cast her as the story’s perceived villain, overshadowing her previously held values.

The character that has drawn the most attention and sympathy from readers is Jacqueline de Bellefort, of Franco-American origin. In contrast to Linnet’s image, Jacqueline is inferior in terms of looks and wealth. The author presents her as a proud person who never took advantage of her wealthy friend, even when she was at her lowest “she’s not a sponge. I’ve wanted to help her...proud as the devil” (Christie 2011: 13). The plot continues showcasing Jacqueline as the victim, whom everyone tries to help. She plays this role so well that no one could guess that she was the mastermind behind the intricate web she had woven. In her case, love was also the reason for her greediness. Simon Doyle gave her purpose, and because they were going to be separated for their crimes, this led her to take her life. Jacqueline is the picture of the modern girl in search of love, giving everything and investing in a relationship but forgetting about herself.

Characters that want to commit a crime act based on a fantasy. In Jacqueline’s case was the wish to be together with Simon but money was a problem. Maimuhan suggests that as Jacqueline grew up in a broken home, she felt the need of a father that could be there for her, care and protect her. Simon fit that profile. He played the role of a father figure, she thought if she could solve the money problem, she could be with Simon forever. From there her mindset changes and jealousy against Linnet’s wealth was born,

that was the trigger. She felt responsible for their relationship, something a man should worry about “I want you to give the job to Simon...he knows all about estates” (Christie 2011: 16). Throughout the novel Jacqueline goes through three stages of victimology: victim, suspect and perpetrator.

Simon Doyle is a mysterious figure in the novel. The author describes him physically through Linnet’s eyes “tall, broad-shouldered young man with very dark blue eyes, crisply curly brown hair, a square chin, and a boyish, appealing, simple smile” (Christie 2011: 24) and morally through Jacqueline’s eyes “incredibly simple and boyish and utterly adorable” (Christie 2011: 16). The author depicts him as the villain and sinner all throughout the novel, as he took advantage of both women who loved him. Moreover, he can be viewed as unwise, since he acted cowardly by not making Jacqueline reconsider her evil plot. Doyle let himself be led by greed so deeply that he committed homicide. In the end, his fate was life in prison.

At first Simon gives the impression of a playboy “he clearly thought that she was wonderful” (Christie 2011: 16). Along the novel he plays the role of a caring husband until he strikes and kills Linnet, though as Poirot sees Simon as a bad actor, he couldn’t hide his feelings. In the novel it has to be noticed that Simon calls Jacqueline, Jackie, all along the novel, showing his true feelings. This type of criminal acts on command out of love, he was waiting for Jacqueline’s command, they were understanding each other just looking in each other’s eyes. A puppet that waits for his master’s instructions, showing that he wasn’t the dominant figure in that relationship.

The famous Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot, who was pulled into the drama by accident, is the fourth main character. The readers see him as an incorruptible detective. Linnet and Simon gave him money to deal with Jacqueline, but he refused and acted in humanity’s interest by fighting for the truth. At first, he falls into Jacqueline’s web, believing she was the victim and showing patience, sympathy, and grace towards her. He’s the only character that doesn’t have an ulterior motive and leads a virtuous life. In the midst of lies, Poirot encourages readers to believe that humanity isn’t a lost cause by showing great compassion and empathy towards the victims.

Analysing these four characters in the light of moral values, a question arises. Is a person born with values? According to Christianity and psychologists like Alfred Adler and Sigmund Freud, no one is born with

moral values. Even from a young age they tend to develop egocentric traits and are quicker to acquire negative characteristics than moral values.

What is the compass that helps people determine if values or vices lead their behaviour? Considering the European context, Judeo-Christian values which stem from The Holy Bible are the foundation of society and the core of the moral values that guide people correctly in how they behave and act. It is a moral code that binds societies together, guides people in behaving with compassion, love and acceptance, without leaving anyone behind.

Even if the life situations contributed to the split personalities of some of the characters, their behaviour cannot be overlooked.

Linnet, Jacqueline and Simon represent the vast majority of the European population. As many manipulate values to get favours, but don't actually have them ingrained in their lives. In the end, they're faced with a tragic end, two of them lost their lives, and another ended up in prison, solely due to their wish to use deviant methods to acquire what wasn't theirs to begin with. Contrary to what can be said about Poirot, he knew that you cannot play with the law. The detective had dealt with criminals every day, and he realized that a value-driven life guarantees a peaceful existence

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