

WESTERN SELF IMAGES IN AGATHA CHRISTIE'S *DEATH ON THE NILE*: A POSTCOLONIAL READING

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*Every human society possesses a
Mythology which is inherited,
transmitted and diversified by literature.*

Northrop Frye, *Words with Power*

Abstract:

This study is an extension of another study of mine analyzing the delineation of the Orient and oriental in Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile* from the vantage point of Edward W. Said's critique of Orientalism. The mentioned study concerning the western images of the Orient and oriental in *Death on the Nile* concludes with the ideas that Christie, in the portrayal of the Orient and oriental in her novel, relied on the stereotypical deep-seated prejudices about the Orient and oriental, and that as Christie reflected them via her own cultural bias and her western perspective, and as she took into account western norms in the identification of the oriental, her novel is an orientalist discourse reinforcing the negative and false image of the Orient. The central aim of the present paper is to study the reflection of the European characters in the novel in order to provide a contrastive analysis of Christie's depiction of both eastern and western characters and thus to argue that whereas Christie is concerned to bring to the fore the negative qualities of eastern people rather than the positive ones, the other way round is true in the depiction of western characters. The main action in *Death on the Nile* rests on the relationships, greediness, efforts to acquire money and gains, hatred, jealousies, vices and murders of the western characters; however, as this study highlights, Christie does not reflect them in such a negative way that she adopted in the projection of eastern characters, all of whom she employed as background characters. The paper also indicates that the construction of the western self images in *Death on the Nile* has been achieved by means of a detour through the 'Other', i.e. easterners in the novel has a significant role in the westerner's self-defining since they are always categorized as the 'Other' of the westerner. Christie drew her western characters with the positive qualities opposed to the negative ones attached to her eastern characters. The study concludes that in Christie's portrayal of western characters, her tolerance toward them in spite of their having the worst kinds of frauds and her construction of western self-images by detouring the 'Other' are the indications of her orientalism other than but also supportive of those presented in my study aforementioned and dealing with western image of the Orient and oriental in *Death on the Nile*.

Key words: *Death on the Nile*, Agatha Christie, Orientalism, the Projection of the Westerner through Western Eyes.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper, which is an extension of another study of mine, concerns the construction of western self images and their representation in Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*. The mentioned work, "Western Image of the Orient and Oriental in Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*: A Postcolonial Reading"¹ examines, as the title refers, the representation of the Orient and oriental people, values, concepts and so on from the perspective of Edward W. Said's critique of Orientalism. As it is generally known, Said's *Orientalism* (1978) stimulated the interest in Orientalism and exploration of the orientalist attitudes, motivation and tendencies in the colonial discourse and thus initiated a new field in literary theory and criticism which has been called Postcolonial Criticism/ Postcolonial Studies. The study mentioned indicates that in the portrayal of the East and her eastern characters, Christie adopting an orientalist attitude defined the eastern world and people by means of a number of recurrent images and clichés about them. It has also been observed in that study that Christie portrayed her eastern characters through her western perspective and the criteria that belonged to the western world. Besides, Christie attributed the negative qualities as opposed to the positive ones attached to westerners; therefore, her novel made the Orient the 'Other' of the Occident and the oriental people the 'Other' of the occidental people as a result of its hierarchal metaphorization. It has been concluded, in the mentioned study, that *Death on the Nile* is an orientalist discourse because it created a negative and false image of the East and eastern, and thus, it must have reinforced such clichés about the East in the western world and contributed to the discursive formation of the East and easterner.

The present paper is about the portrayal of the western characters in Christie's same novel, *Death on the Nile*. The essential purpose of this paper is to detect Christie's attitude to her western characters in the novel. What motivates this scrutiny is the idea that it is the western characters that have the negative qualities at worst, namely, greediness, ambition, revengefulness etc.; however, it is the eastern characters that were drawn negatively in the novel. In other words, Christie drew her western characters favourably despite their defects, frauds and falsities. She is observed to be even more tolerant towards some of them. Another motivation behind this study is the idea of the construction of the 'Self' by means of a detour of the 'Other' – a way of the identification of the western self in Orientalism. It can be asserted that, in Christie's novel, the easterner has exactly a significant role in the westerner's formation of his own self image, i.e. his self-definition as the easterner is always and simultaneously considered the 'Other'; and besides, Christie defined her western characters by means of the positive qualities

¹ See (Zengin, 2016, pp. 837-866).

such as rational, civilized, honest, industrious, intelligent, virtuous, sophisticated and etc. as opposed to the negative qualities that she attributed to the eastern characters such as irrational, backward, dishonest, lazy, stupid, degenerate, uncultivated and etc. By so doing, she dichotomizes the world into two as eastern and western and she marginalizes the eastern and centers the western. This is exactly another indication of her orientalism. It is this quality of the oriental discourses that has been highlighted in Said's *Orientalism* (1978). In his pivotal work, Said shows how discourses, values, patterns and knowledge actually constructed the so-called facts about the Orient. The Orient and oriental were generated throughout centuries out of the western culture and its discourses. Turner (1994) points out that Said's book has put forward the fact that "[o]ver the years this classical approach to orientalism has largely shaped what people understand by the notion of 'Otherness', and the problem of the 'Other' in human cultures has been taken up first of all by feminism, by black studies and more recently by postmodernism" (p.4).

On the whole the relation between the 'Self' and the 'Other' has been an area of investigation for not only the critics of Orientalism but also the critics engaged in Postcolonial Studies. Frantz Fanon (2008), in his *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) remarks that it is "characteristic pairings" such as "Good-Evil, Beauty-Ugliness, White-Black" (p. 141) which is at work in the identification of human beings. Whiteness is the connotation of "beauty and virtue" and it is usually associated with the civilized and human (p. 31) while "the black man is the symbol of the Evil and Ugliness" (139). "A Negro [...] is wicked, sloppy, malicious, and instinctual. Everything that is the opposite of these Negro modes of behavior is white" (2008, pp. 148-149). Therefore "in the collective unconscious, black= ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality. In other words, he is Negro who is immoral" (2008, p. 149). Suggesting the colonial situation, Ashcroft and et al. (2002) state that "[t]he Other can, of course, only be constructed out of the archive of "the self", yet the self must also articulate the Other as inescapably different. Otherness can thus only be produced by a continual process of [...] repetition and displacement" (p. 102). So it is clear that it is a requirement for the self to create its Other – an Other different from its own self but familiar enough to maintain the control over the Other. Said (1979) argues that the diversity between the Orient and Occident was based on the binary oppositions: "The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal" (p. 40). Said (1979) also argues that "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (pp. 1-2). Owing to its other, the West was able to not only define itself but also strengthened its identity and sovereignty by way of "setting itself off against

the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said, 1979, p. 3).

The nature of the division between the Self and the Other may be clarified by means of Lacanian psychoanalytical perspective. According to Lacan's influential theory of the "mirror-stage", the division between the Self and Other occurs when the baby between the ages of 6 and 18 months identifies itself with its mirror-image. This stage, Lacan argues, constitutes a significant moment in the construction of the Self. According to Lacan, in order to exist, one needs an Other's recognition of him. But this means, as Homer (2005) suggests, that "our image, which is equal to ourselves, is mediated by the gaze of the other. The other, then, becomes the guarantor of ourselves. We are at once dependent on the other as the guarantor of our own existence and a bitter rival to that same other" (p. 26). Referring to the colonial context in the world's history, Jean-Paul Sartre (1963) states in his widely read "Preface" to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) "the European has only been able to become a man through creating slaves and monsters" (p. 26). The general consensus of the anti-orientalist and anti-colonial discourse is that the figure of the Other was projected on the eastern, primitive, uncivilized and savage and the European identity was built up through contrasts such as the occidental vs. the oriental and the civilized vs. the uncivilized. What we conclude from the theories given is that the relation between the Self and the Other is compulsory in the formation of the Western Self, and in order to keep his Self up, the Self continuously needs the Other, and that in this relation the West has a privileged position as the western norms are granted as criteria.

1. THE REPRESENTATION OF THE WESTERN CHARACTERS IN *DEATH ON THE NILE*

This section of the study is an account of who is who in *Death on the Nile* and it engages with what qualities Christie drew her European characters, three of whom are the major ones. This part would constitute neither the detailed analyses of the western characters nor a comparative analysis of eastern and western characters in the novel; rather the aim is to show through what qualities Christie drew European characters and in what manner she reflects them in the novel. In so doing, the part deals with the detection of Christie's attitude toward the characterization of her western characters. Christie's depiction of the oriental people was detected in my previous work. The difference in the attitude of the novelist to these two peoples is thought to help to detect the orientalist line of the novel.

Among many different ways in the othering process is the exclusion of the people who are to be marginalized. In this context, in *Death on the Nile*², it can be observed that Christie employed her eastern characters not as the main characters but only as minor, more precisely, background characters despite the novel's oriental setting. Christie seems not only to have excluded the eastern people from the main action of her novel, most of which take place in Egypt, but also to have disregarded the individuality of the eastern people by reflecting them not as individuals having particular qualities like every one of us in real life but rather as ones having almost the same qualities, which makes them mass. This may be attributable to individualism's being regarded as a significant component of western identity. As Herzfeld (2002) suggests "[i]ndividualism has long been a stereotype of European identity" and in the works exploring European society and culture "the conventional self-view of Europeans as autonomous selves possessing discrete property and distinctive properties appears as a fundamental assumption" (p. 139). The disregard for the individuality of the oriental people is also a means of the reduction of them to types having stereotypical qualities. In contrast with her attitude toward the eastern characters, i.e. her employment of them as minor characters, Christie chose the main characters among the western ones. Other than Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, there are American Linnet Ridgeway (Doyle), British Simon Doyle and Franco-American Jacqueline de Bellefort, who were employed as the major characters. Needless to say, the other western characters who are not the central characters all engage in the main action in the plot. Therefore it would not be wrong to say that Christie constructs the image of the 'Other' in her novel by putting her western characters in the centre and eastern characters at the societal margin and so the easterner is represented as the Other. This is an indispensable feature of the orientalist discourses, which results in their losing objectivity and strengthening the catchwords (combined with both the eastern and western people). Said (1979) points out that Orientalist discourses usually polarize "the distinction – the Oriental becomes more Oriental, the Westerner more Western – and the limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies" (p. 46). In this sense, Christie's novel cannot be regarded as an exception. By means of the marginalization of her Egyptian characters, Christie not only distances but objectifies them, which is a situation in which every eastern person automatically becomes the Other. Whereas Christie takes into account the individuation of each European character, she classifies eastern characters under one group, which does not let them to construct their individualization and to be known by their particular qualities. The

² (Christie, 2001). (All the subsequent references to the novel will be to this edition and only page numbers will be given in parentheses following the quotations in the main text.)

construction of the individualization and having identities is a great privilege that only the western characters enjoy in the novel.

Another thing that attracts one's attention about the polarization of eastern and western people in the novel is Christie's depiction of eastern people as lower class people and westerners as the middle and upper class people. It is known that there has always been a lower class or a working class in England's social life in every era in England's history. There was such a stratum of society in the time in which the novel was written. The time in which the novel was written is almost the same period with that which is reflected in the novel. Despite the presence of the lower class in England, there are only two short references to this class, one of which is at the very beginning and the other of which is at the very end of the novel. At the beginning of the book, Mr. Burnaby, "the landlord of the Three Crowns" and his friend who is "a lean seedy-looking man" appear when they first see Linnet (pp. 9-10). At the end of the novel Mr. Burnaby appears once again to take pity on Linnet and only to forget her death and get involved with his chores along with his friend (p. 416). Except for in the scenes indicated, neither these two characters nor any other character coming from the lower class (re)appear in the novel. So all of Christie's western characters come from the middle classes; most of her characters are wealthy and noble. The depiction of the middle class people so much in the novel gives one the idea that English people all have the nobility and prosperity. Christie does not reflect the lower class in western society whereas she makes all of her eastern characters either servants, stewards or vendors and beggars. If we recall the role and power of discourse in the construction of reality in Foucault's view, Christie's is a way of othering the oriental people and thus creating a textual reality about them. Making an indispensable relation between knowledge and power, Foucault (1980) defends the idea that all knowledge is produced within diverse institutions which represent the authority and power; therefore there is exactly a relationship between the hegemonic forces and knowledge. This means that no knowledge is not contaminated, not innocent and not implicated in the misrepresentations, which even appear to be objective. So knowledge comes to us through discourses. Knowledge is fabricated, accumulated, consolidated and circulated in the discursive process. Christie's making easterners the Other has, of course, another dimension. She creates the western Self through this Other. In this sense, *Death on the Nile* may be thought to have contributed to the discursive formation of both the Other and the Self; therefore, it is an orientalist discourse.

European superiority is so obvious in the novel that although some of the western characters appearing in the novel are drawn as people having negative qualities, their defects are not put forth in the way Christie does for the non-western characters. This gives the reader the idea that Christie's

cultural bias must have been effective on her mode of presenting her characters in the novel. In *Death on the Nile* a number of western characters, some of whom are actually either villains or thieves, are brought together. But what is significant here is that Christie's reflecting them as if there was nothing disturbing in their personalities, and in their present and past behaviours and manners. She reflects all of them favourably.

Other than Linnet, Simon and Jacqueline, there are the upper-class English and American people, some of them are tourists. Among them are one Italian spy disguised himself as an archaeologist (Signor Guido Richetti), one secret service officer (Colonel Race), one drunken novelist (Mrs. Otterbourne) and her daughter (Rosalie), one disguised Marxist aristocrat (Lord Dawlish but known as Ferguson), a rich American woman (Miss Van Schuyler) with her niece (Cornelia Robson) and her nurse (Miss Bowers), a not so rich English woman (Mrs. Allerton) and her son, a so-called writer (Tim Allerton) (they are actually jewel thieves), an Austrian doctor (Dr. Bessner), an American businessman (Andrew Pennington), a British lawyer (Mr. Carmichael's nephew Jim Fanthorp) and Linnet's maid (Louise Bourget). It appears that all of these western characters assembled on the Nile steamer for the purpose of holiday and sightseeing in the exotic country, Egypt. But some of them are in disguise.

To begin with, Jacqueline and her ex-fiancé Simon are there to kill Linnet Ridgeway (Doyle), who is now Simon's wife. It is obvious that Simon being jobless and penniless was encouraged by his fiancée Jacqueline to marry the rich heiress Linnet, which was a part of their plot against Linnet. Their ingenious plan was that after they will murder Linnet, Simon will be inherited from Linnet; Jacqueline and Simon will reunite. By this way Jacqueline, whose family has been impoverished lately, would have wealth and at the same time, retain the man she desires. As can be seen, all these disguised aims and their acts are also disgusting and outrageous because their hatred toward Linnet and their greediness reach a maximum that they can murder her. They are pretending, which is also dishonesty. Their plot seems to be both cruel and crooked enough when the intimacy between Linnet and Jackie is considered. Jacqueline is also an old schoolmate of Linnet's; they went to the same school in Paris when Jackie's family was rich (p. 15). Apart from these, Jacqueline seems to have the temptation of evil in her; we know that she is warned by Poirot to resist this feeling and to get rid of her feeling of revenge. Poirot tells her: "Do not open your heart to evil" (p. 46) because Poirot thinks that due to such motives Jacqueline shows herself up in all the places Linnet and Simon go. It can be assumed that though Jacqueline plays the role of a jilted lover, the motive behind her act of plotting against Linnet is evil. She is a villain. She always shows herself as the desperate victim of a tragic triple love story. Christie drew Jackie as so tragic and proud a character that the reader may easily

admire her. Despite all the evil and criminal acts of these two western characters, Jacqueline and Simon, Christie drew them as ingenious. Poirot sees their criminal deed as a work of ingenuity. His remarks about the murder give the murderer(s)' attributes: "This is a crime that needed audacity, swift and faultless execution, courage, indifference to danger, and resourceful, calculating brain" (p. 189). Richard York (2007) indicates the ingenuity of the murderers' conspiracy as such:

The criminal couple Simon and Jacqueline create the false impression that they have parted, whereas their relationship has continued although Simon has married the victim Linnet [...] Jacqueline, apparently inspired by a profound and almost insane malevolence, stalks Simon and Linnet in their honeymoon trip on a Nile steamer. This seems to break out into direct violence when, as it seems, she makes a hysterical scene while drunk and shoots Simon. But this is precisely what seems to prove her innocence; she is ushered to her cabin and given a morphine injection by a kindly nurse. It is at this point that Linnet is murdered, so that Jackie has a perfect alibi; a false act of violence masks a real one (p. 31).

Their scheme is really an elaborate one in which the criminal Simon pretends to have a fake bleeding wound, which enables him to get rid of the doubts. However, these qualities not only constitute the diversity between the western and eastern but also show Christie's construction of European identities. What is bitter about their intelligence is that they used it in order to create a cruel and illegal act.

Needless to say, Poirot is drawn as an intelligent and energetic detective in the novel as he has been drawn in all Hercule Poirot novels. Though Poirot is fat, he is drawn as energetic and quick when he chases the murderer whom he has not seen. In the scene in which Mrs. Otterbourne is shot dead, Poirot makes "a catlike jump for the door and the deck" (p. 329) in order to catch the murderer. In *Death on the Nile*, the scheme is so intelligently designed that it requires the presence of a very intelligent detective to be solved. As intellectual achievement is regarded an important component of European identity, which is an orientalist assumption, Poirot is assigned to the investigation immediately after the first murder is committed (there are three murders in the book). Though the murders are committed in a steamer and the authority is supposed to be the captain, the captain withdraws himself from the investigation because he does not know what to do upon the first murder, i.e. Linnet's murder; and Poirot automatically takes charge of the case. In the scene what else takes our attention is that the captain's voice is not heard rather his speech is transmitted by Race, which is a revelation and confirmation of the captain's inability to solve the case (pp. 194-195). Poirot's involvement with the investigation without considering his profit makes him an admirable character. In his personality

the image of the western detective “who serves society with a completely selfless and uncompromising dedication” (Bartell, 1997, p. 185) is idealized. He is the embodiment of an idealized bureaucrat. Bartell (1997) comments on the detective character in Agatha Christie’s novels as in the following: “While others are driven toward a ruthlessly competitive aggrandizement of the self, the detective is one who has found the inner resources to balance a highly refined sense of self-worth against an equally developed sense of professional idealism (pp. 185-186). Deducing from every little detail and considering them one by one, evaluating all his former but wrong way of thinking on the crimes, and finally making necessary and logical connections between every act of each character, Poirot with his sharp intellect and his power of recollection ends the investigation triumphantly. He says that he has grasped the whole thing through the end of his investigation, which is a sign of his being proud of his intelligence. He says: “I like an audience, I must confess. I am vain, you see. I am puffed up with conceit. I like to say, ‘See how clever is Hercule Poirot!’” (pp. 199-200). He then proves Simon and Jacqueline conspirators. By means of his investigation, Tim and his mother turn out to be thieves, Joanna Southwood their accomplice and Louise Bourgeot a bribe-taker. In conclusion, it can be said that Poirot is presented as the embodiment of wisdom and intelligence, which are believed to be, by orientalists, distinctive qualities in European identity.

Other than the two western characters (Simon and Jackie), Linnet can be claimed to have some sort of wickedness because she steals her close friend’s fiancé, which is immoral. She is as malevolent as Jackie because it is probable that she has thought she deserves having Simon more than Jackie does. Despite her tyranny and deception, Linnet is introduced as a charming, rich and benevolent woman by Christie, which, to some extent, disguises Linnet’s vices. Linnet is described as “a girl with golden hair and [...] straight autocratic features with a lovely shape, – a girl such as was seldom seen [...] With a quick imperative step” (p. 9), “eager, alive and dynamic (p. 12) and “with bright golden hair and an eager confident face” (pp. 17-18). At the beginning of the novel, it is also implied that she is not likeable. In her chat with a friend of hers, Joanna Southwood (later on in the novel the reader learns that she is the accomplice of the Allertons, the jewel thieves), it is revealed that Linnet is not liked by the people living in that district because she forces them to move another part of the city. Though Linnet says that she tries to persuade them to move because their life conditions would be better there, it is understood that she does this for the sake of her own luxury. She is actually despotic to them. Calling the poor’s houses “some dreadful insanitary old cottages” she tries to have them “pulled down and the people moved” just because “those cottages would have overlooked [her] new swimming pool” (p. 28). Her despotism is revealed in the following part of the chat but in a sympathetic manner:

'But you're being quite high-handed about it, I presume.'
'My dear Joanna, it's to their advantage really.'
'Yes, dear. I'm sure it is. Compulsory benefit.'
Linnet frowned. Joanna laughed.
'Come now, you are a tyrant, admit it. A beneficent tyrant if you like!'
'I'm not the least bit of a tyrant' (p. 29).

During the period of investigation, Poirot is of the opinion that everybody around Linnet has a reason to kill her. For example, Fleetwood, whom Linnet's maid, Marie planned to marry, hates Linnet because it is Linnet who made inquiries about the man and caused him to turn out to be a married man with three children (p. 17). Fleetwood works in *SS Karnak* as a mechanic and is suspected to be Linnet's murderer having enough reason to kill her. Andrew Pennington, who is Linnet's American trustee, has reasons to kill Linnet, too. During the investigation, it turns out to be Pennington is on board to defraud Linnet. Mr. Carmichael, upon informed by Linnet about her marriage, sends his nephew Fanthorp to Egypt to board the cruise ship, where Linnet and Simon are on board. Fanthorp explains Poirot that he is on board to prevent Pennington from deceiving Linnet. His uncle Carmichael suspected Pennington to be a crook due to "several small incidents" (p. 350). Pennington also confesses that he has defrauded Linnet due to the Wall Street (p. 361). Poirot tells that Pennington has the motive and will to kill her (p. 359) though he gives up this idea later on. Lord Dawlish disguised as a common man called Ferguson is a Marxist, who hates capitalism and the rich like Linnet. As Poirot explains to the American celebrity Miss van Schuyler, Ferguson does not "use his title because of his advanced ideas" (p. 179). He is "young Lord Dawlish. Rolling in money, of course, he became a communist when he was at Oxford" (p. 345). For this reason he is seen as a potential murderer by Poirot. Though he does not know Linnet personally, he is among the people who dislike Linnet owing to her social stratum that she belongs to. Besides, Linnet's father is known to have caused poor Cornelia's father bankruptcy (p. 339). For this reason, at first, Cornelia is thought to be the convict.

Among the defects of the western characters are Mrs. Otterbourne's drunkenness and Miss Van Schuyler's kleptomania, which are disguised at first. Mrs. Allerton, who is "a kleptomaniac old lady after Linnet's pearls", Mrs. Otterbourne, who is "a dipsomaniac of sex stories", "the communist lord", "a colonial agitator in 'mongrel blood', whom Colonel Race is seeking on his "imperial duty", "dependent Cornelia" (Rowland, 2001, pp. 73-74) are all projected by the narrator without any negative critique on them. The old rich lady, Van Schuyler's kleptomania comes out when she steals the false necklace thinking that it is original, which was actually stolen and replaced by a fake one by Tim. Race's promising Cornelia that they would keep her mother's kleptomania as a secret can also be seen as one of the

favourable attitudes of the author to her western characters. Cornelia is relieved by Race with the assurance of not getting out such a scandalous event in New York (pp. 381-382). Cornelia revealed as impoverished by Linnet's capitalist father is first called in the novel "black slave" (p. 127), but this status of the girl is changed later on. She comes to the position to be "able to choose between two suitors, a communist lord and a neo-Freudian Austrian, Dr. Bessner" (Rowland, 2001, p. 74). Likewise, the wanted political criminal, Ferguson, who is "a man with five or six cold-blooded murders to his credit" and described by Race as "one of the cleverest paid agitators that ever existed" (p. 163) is forgiven by Colonel Race. Dr. Bessner was drawn as a character for whom all other characters have respect; he is held in high esteem by a great majority of characters. He is depicted as an expert in his profession who receives appreciations from even Poirot, who is a skillful detective. Marie Van Schuyler's changing her attitude toward Ferguson after learning that he is a lord and her consent upon Cornelia and the lord's marriage is an indication of the hypocrisy of the upper-class people in the western world. Miss Van Schuyler's manner towards Ferguson is seen when Ferguson tells the lady of his wish to marry Cornelia. Miss Van Schuyler tells him that he must be out of her senses and therefore, she looks down on him and behaves him as if he were "an odd sort of beetle" (p.342). She disagrees with Ferguson on the idea of marriage because according to her, their marriage is quite unacceptable when considering their social status. He is "below [Cornelia] socially" (p. 344). Upon Poirot's deciphering Ferguson's real name Miss Van Schuyler's face seems to be "a battleground of contradictory emotions" (p. 345) and on her face, there become "conflicting expressions that succeeded each other" (p. 346), which is a sign of Van Schuyler's upper-class hypocrisy. But it should be noted that Cornelia does not accept Ferguson's proposal. Thinking that Dr. Bessner would be a better match for her, Cornelia accepts the doctor's proposal (p. 413).

Throughout this study, it has been tried to be maintained that Christie adopted a favourable manner in the enunciation of western characters in *Death on the Nile*. To elaborate this idea, some other instances from the novel may be referred: Rosalie and Tim's decision to marry may be considered to be a device in the novel to compensate for Tim's frauds. Despite Tim's confession to Rosalie that he is a thief, he is tolerated by her. Though his expression "I'm a thief, not a murderer" (p. 193) sounds a confession, it is obvious that it is taken as a yield, upon which he is forgiven for his theft. Poirot also tolerates Tim. An analogy between Van Schuyler's changing attitude to Ferguson and Poirot's tolerating Tim can be made here. Tim is given a chance to compensate for his theft as he says to Rosalie: "When I return the box to Poirot the real string [Linnet's pearl necklace] will be in it. What a damned fool I've been!" (p. 376). Poirot also approves of

their marriage (p. 379) just like Mrs. Allerton (p. 378). This is a clear instance showing Christie's sympathy and toleration to her western characters. The reader also knows that Tim introduces himself as a writer. The following description reveals that Tim was supposed to be a writer but then he turns out to be a writer who has not written anything (!): "Threatened by consumption some years ago, he had never displayed a really robust physique. He was popularly supposed 'to write,' but it was understood among his friends that inquiries as to literary output were not encouraged" (p. 34). What is important for our purpose here is Christie's giving alibis for his unsuccessfulness. One of the alibis is that he was about to get caught to tuberculosis, which caused him not robust and healthy enough and the other his indecisiveness. With a character like Louise Bourgeot, the reader actually sees another defect of the western world: bribery. Race and Poirot find Louise's dead body (hers is the second murder in the novel) under the bed in her cabin. She is found holding tightly "the corner of a thousand- franc note" (p. 308) in her hand. They understand that the girl knew who Linnet's murderer is and blackmailing him with her knowledge. Louise is also the embodiment of greed in the novel – as Linnet, Simon and Jacqueline are – because she is not satisfied with what Simon gives him. As she wants more, she is killed by Jacqueline. The agent Guido Richetti, who disguises him as an archeologist, is told to be a "very dangerous agitator, a man who is killed more than once" as Race tells the others. He is even considered to have killed Linnet just because Linnet once opened and read his telegraph mistakenly (p. 384).

In western business world, which is represented by British Mr. Charmichael, Fanthorp and American Pennington in the novel, what the reader sees, through Pennington, is nothing more than illicit competition. He tries to snatch the money that is not actually his.

Apart from the characters assembled on the Nile steamer, there appear some other western characters in the novel in whose descriptions Christie seems to have adopted a sympathetic and favourable manner, too. They are an American woman, Joanna Southwood, Mrs. Robson, Cornelia's mother and Lord Windlesham, Linnet's ex-boyfriend, who is supposed to marry Linnet. Joanna, who is Linnet's close friend, is actually a jewel thief conspiring with the Allertons. Providing the fake jewels to be substituted for the original ones, Joanna works with Tim and his mother in the jewel robberies described as "Society Robberies" (p. 366). Mrs. Robson is Miss Van Schuyler's rich cousin and she appears in the scene in which she becomes happy when Miss Marie Van Schuyler invites her daughter, Cornelia to the Egypt trip – a trip Cornelia's parents can never afford and Cornelia can have only in her dreams. The scene is an instance showing Christie's depiction of the distinction between the social classes in western world. When Cornelia and her mother express their gratitude to Van

Schuyler, Van Schuyler inclines “her head in a satisfied fashion at this correct attitude on the part of the poor relations” (p. 42). Christie does not even say any negative thing about the social distinction depending on money, let alone criticize it. She does not criticize the old lady’s nourishing her egoism, either. This scene therefore includes an approval of the diversity in social classes in western world, which actually depends on wealth and nobility. Lord Windlesham’s weakness i.e. his wish of marrying Linnet for her money is given in an ambivalent manner. Christie does not criticize the lord even if it is obvious that their marriage depends on money. Rather she tolerates this western character’s weakness for money by means of creating a rich match for him i.e. Linnet. The narrator says:

How amazingly suitable the whole thing was! It was certainly advisable that he should marry money, but not such a matter of necessity that he could regard himself as forced to put his own feelings on one side. And he loved Linnet. He would have wanted to marry her even if she had been practically penniless, instead of one of the richest girls in England. Only, fortunately, she was one of the richest girls in England...(p.18).

Jacqueline’s parents are not flawless like the other western characters in the novel. As Linnet tells Joanna, Jackie’s father eloped with another woman when he was married to Jackie’s mother, who then lost the family’s fortune during the economic crisis (p. 15). Despite the defects in the family, Christie adopts a neutral position in the characterization and delineation of these characters; she depicts them as if there were nothing disturbing in their cases.

Jealousy, like greed, is seen as a general trait of the western people rather than a personal one because almost everyone in the novel is jealous of each other. To give a few instances would suffice here. Seeing Linnet Rosalie becomes jealous of her because of her beauty and wealth. She says that it is unfair. It is also known that Tim envies Simon calling him “lucky devil” because he has found a fancy heiress who “hasn’t got adenoids and flat feet” (p. 58). It has also been revealed that Linnet and Jackie envy each other because one has wealth and the other has a handsome fiancé respectively. Joanna is jealous of her rich friend Linnet and tries to steal her pearl necklace.

Though the group represented in the novel is as a select one, the reader gets the idea that living among such people one may receive serious threats such as being a victim and a suspect. Suggesting the murder in Christie’s novel in general, Bartell (1997) claims that

[f]or a group that is not sure of its solidarity, the murder of one member by another is a grave threat to everyone [...] this threat is suggested by the fact that everyone immediately becomes a suspect as

well as potentially the next victim. Everyone [...] at the time of the murder has not only the opportunity to commit the murder but, as the detective discovers, each has had a motive (p. 185).

Moreover, these people can have guns and take them wherever they go. We know that Jacqueline has a pistol. Mrs. Otterbourne is killed with Pennington's gun. So it can be claimed that the western middle and upper-class characters in *Death on the Nile* have actually another identity – an identity disguised underneath their surface identities. Although they, if not all of them, have facades, they are still represented favourably by Christie.

In the depiction of the western characters in *Death on the Nile*, it is recognized that Christie dichotomizes the eastern and western characters as primitive and civilized by means of the reflection of the external appearances of her characters. While she is reflecting the oriental people as dirty and ragged, she is describing all the western characters with the exception of Ferguson, as neat and smart. For example, Poirot is drawn as a gentleman wearing “a white silk suit, carefully pressed, and a panama hat, and carried a highly ornamental fly whisk with a sham amber handle” (p. 52) and Rosalie is drawn as “a tall slim girl” and “the best-looking girl” in the Cataract Hotel in Assuan (p. 51). Linnet's external appearance has been referred in a previous part of the study. Needless to say, she was drawn as a glamorous and charismatic lady. Though threatened by an illness in the past, Tim is described as a handsome man. He is drawn as “a tall, thin young man, with dark hair”. And we are also told: “His mouth had a very sweet expression [...] he had long delicate hands” (p. 34). Simon Doyle is drawn as a handsome man having “the square shoulders, the bronzed face, the dark blue eyes, the rather childlike simplicity of the smile” as Poirot observes (p. 58). Jacqueline and Simon are defined as “[a] well-matched pair – tall broad-shouldered man, slender delicate girl” (p. 26) while they are dancing in Chez Ma Tante. The same kind of delineation goes for all the other western characters. Only Ferguson's clothes are told to be old and not many. But immediately after this explanation, the narrator tells that Ferguson's underclothes and handkerchiefs are of quality and neat (p. 295). It sounds as if the narrator wants to compensate for the former situation.

As a result it can be argued that in *Death on the Nile*, whereas Christie is concerned to bring to the fore the negative qualities of eastern people rather than the positive ones, the other way round is true for westerners. This may be the result of Christie's adopting her western perspective in the characterization of both the oriental and western people in the novel and considering the differences between them by taking the western values and mindset as criteria.

2. WESTERN SELF IMAGES IN *DEATH ON THE NILE*

This part mainly deals with the construction of the self images of the westerner in *Death on the Nile*. As it has been mentioned as the second important argument of this paper, Christie defines her western characters via a detour through the 'Other'. In its identification of the westerner, the novel relies much on its privileging the western-centric perspective as the norm, its articulation of differences between the East and West and the easterner and westerner, its creation of the 'Otherness' in respect of the Orient and oriental and thus its marginalization of the easterner as well as its centralization of the westerner. These are all the qualities of oriental discourses. Said argues that western world has become normative in the evaluation of the East and easterner and as the eastern world fails to conform to the standards of western world, it becomes the Other. In Said's analysis of Orientalism, as Turner (1994) suggests:

the crucial 'fact' about the orientalist discourse was that we know and talk about Orientals, while they neither comprehend themselves nor talk about us. In this language of difference, there were apparently no equivalent discourses of occidentalism. The society from which comparisons are to be made has a privileged possession of a set of essential features – rationality, progress, democratic institutions, economic development – in terms of which other societies are deficient and backward (pp. 21-22).

With respect to its reflection of the peripheral situation of the easterner and the central situation of the westerner, which is an inescapable result of the author's privileging Eurocentric norms as universal ones, *Death on the Nile* is an orientalist discourse. Christie first makes use of the western norms to evaluate and define the East and easterner, which is actually an act of categorizing the East and easterner. Then Christie, in a sense, criticizes the East and easterner because they do not fit western norms. While defining easterners as, for example, primitive, irrational and stupid, she defines her western characters as civilized, rational and wise, i.e. with the opposite qualities of the eastern people. Throughout the novel this way of defining the western is employed and many instances can be found. For example, when she employs the detective as a wise, intelligent character, Christie puts her western perspective into practice first and then she decides that any Egyptian including the captain cannot solve the case so she makes Poirot an authority. This is a Eurocentric attitude by which Christie creates an unintelligent, unwise, irrational and unscientific image of the East and then she creates an intelligent, wise, rational and scientific image of the West.

Christie seems to have made use of the opposition between the western and eastern to create a western self image in her *Death on the Nile*. Throughout both my previous study dealing with the western representation

of the Orient and oriental and the present study dealing with the representation of the westerner by the western perspective and the western self images, numerous examples from *Death on the Nile* have been presented to indicate that Christie constituted the images of the eastern and western through the dichotomies. As a last example from the novel, the diversity between the two peoples, which is maintained by means of their attitudes to death, may be given to indicate how Christie defines eastern people with her western perspective and western norms and then how she defines westerners by means of what they are not. As it can be understood from Ferguson's reprimanding Cornelia, it is assumed that European people are very sensitive towards death while easterners are indifferent to death. Upon the third murder on the steamer, Cornelia says to Poirot "with sad earnestness":

"I'll never forget this trip as long as I live. Three deaths... It's just like living in a nightmare."
Ferguson overheard her. He said aggressively: "That's because you're overcivilized. You should look on death as the Oriental does. It's a mere incident-hardly noticeable."
"That's all very well," Cornelia said. "They're not educated, poor creatures."
"No, and a good thing too. Education has devitalized the white races (p. 337).

Although the scene contains the criticism of European civilization and their modes of thinking, it may be claimed to be the construction of European identity against the easterner. On one side the scene is making an irony of European people, by means of Ferguson's criticism, as they do not have a treatment of death akin to that of easterners, on the other, it fashions and reinforces the European identity by Cornelia's attitude toward death. At the end of the scene despite Ferguson, Cornelia does not go any change; she remains the same. She is reflected as sensitive to death (like all westerners); she is completely opposite to easterners who are reflected as indifferent to death. Here Christie draws a distinctive western identity. Drawing a certain line between the eastern and western people, Christie's novel seems to have taken part in shaping the European identity. With its reflections of both what being a westerner is and is not and what being an easterner is and is not, *Death on the Nile* is an orientalist text.

We may conclude from the above discussion that the novel's representation of the European self is marked by such characteristics as its both exploiting the existing dichotomy and creation of a dichotomy between the West and its Other, its delineation of the westerner as the Self and enunciation of otherness in terms of the easterner. Thus Christie creates a hierarchy between the easterner and westerner by which the westerner is recognized as superior to the easterner. In the novel excluding the negative qualities from himself and attributing them to the easterner is noticed to be

the westerner's primary way of defining himself. In this case the westerner defines himself with what he is not. Attributing the affirmative qualities to himself, the westerner exposes who he is. In either case the European Self constructs his image of the Self through a detour of the Other; and only by means of making the easterner the Other, the westerner becomes a subject.

3. CONCLUSION

First of all it should be noted that it has been no purpose of this study to devalue one of Christie's detective novels, *Death on the Nile*. Rather the aim is to apply a literary theory to a literary work and to share the findings with readers. Along with my aforementioned study dealing with the projection of the Orient and oriental, this study has attempted to analyze *Death on the Nile* from the perspective of critique of Orientalism. So the study argues that Christie's reflecting her European characters and values positively despite their defects such as greediness (both Simon Doyle and Jacqueline murdered Linnett for her great fortune, making calculations that her money would be inherited to Simon as he is her husband), theft (as can be seen in the case of Mrs. Allerton and her son Tim, who stole Linnet's pearl necklace), nymphomania (as can be observed in Mrs. Otterbourne, who reflects this side of hers especially in her obscene novels) may also be taken as proof enough for Christie's taking westerners' sides and reflecting them sympathetically and favourably despite their defects. The main concern of this study has been to show that though the main action in *Death on the Nile* rests on the relationships, greediness, efforts to acquire money and gains, hatred, jealousies, vices, murders of the western characters, Christie does not reflect her European characters in such a negative way that their frauds can be noticeable immediately. It has also been argued through the indication of Christie's western treatment to her European characters that Christie did not adopt the attitude she had towards her eastern characters. Putting western characters in the centre, she made them look more important, more valuable, more intelligent, more industrious and the like than the eastern characters having a peripheral situation. Thus Christie's attitude towards her western characters has three important results: 1. Her definition of western characters is maintained on the hierarchal metaforization, by which the westerner is made superior to the easterner by means of the attribution of positive qualities to the westerner and unfavorable ones to the easterner. 2. The dichotomy between the easterner and westerner is formed via her according a greater importance to western codes, norms, images and categories; thus the novel privileges the Eurocentric view as normative, and besides, as the easterner does not conform to western norms, he becomes the Other of the westerner. 3. The westerner defines himself with the qualities that the Other does not have; therefore the easterner is of vital importance for the constitution and definition of the western self, i.e. the westerner constructs his self and defines himself via the detour through the Other. Otherwise, that

is, in the absence of the Other, the Self would not be present. It should also be added that creating a discursive image of the western self in her text Christie actually proves how discursive the identities are and how literature may be an area of creating textual images. Having all these qualities, Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile* is an orientalist discourse that is thought to have contributed to the formation of the western Self over the eastern Other with its endorsement of the dichotomy between the westerner and easterner.

The final remark of the study would be slightly personal. If we recall the cultural fact that our worldviews, mindsets, interpretations and judgments are all preconditioned by whatever we have in our culture, the most important of which, is perhaps, our language, we can say that our value systems that are constructed by our language would be the first to affect not only the formation of our own self-images but also our viewing the others. Subsequently, we develop the habit of seeing the things by means of a set of ready-made interpretations and judgments instead of not accepting the things blindly which will lead us to see the differences in the cultures other than ours. Only by refraining from adopting the preconditioned ideas can we construct better relationships between cultures in both the East and West, and appreciate multi-culturalism in today's world.

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