

Endless Night

1967

[N.B. This review contains PLOT SPOILERS for this novel, but not for other novels]

Now in her mid-70s Christie, with continuing creative energy, experiments with writing a different *genre*. *Endless Night* is not a whodunnit, nor one of her adventure stories, nor a Mary Westmacott 'romance' although the narrator tells us it *is* a love story. *Endless Night* is a psychological thriller, more in the mould of Patricia Highsmith, or Nordic noir, than a traditional Agatha Christie. Slowly, rather too slowly, the novel builds towards its grim ending. We know that all will end badly – the narrator keeps telling us so. Christie uses the quotation from William Blake's *Auguries of Innocence* to good effect:

*Some are born to Sweet Delight
Some are born to Endless Night*

We have no doubt that Michael Rogers, the narrator, a man in his early twenties, is born to Endless Night.

The plot of *Endless Night* is almost identical to one of Christie's earlier, and excellent whodunnits, and the narrative perspective is similar to that of another of her outstanding novels, so in exploring this new genre she reuses familiar materials. She also uses one of the story-telling techniques which she does so well: the plot twist near the end. There is mystery, of course, that keeps the reader guessing and intrigued: what is going on? What is going to happen? There are murders, and what could be thought of as a red-herrings: the behaviour of the gypsy woman, Mrs Lee; the possibility that members of Ellie's family, or the American lawyer that helps with her investments, are cheating Ellie and perhaps plotting something worse. There are indicators of what might be going on: Michael Rogers' mother's attitude towards her son; the ambivalent relationship between Michael Rogers and Ellie's 'friend' Greta. But these are not the clues of a whodunnit and there is no moment when the reader might stop to try and guess 'the solution'. There is no denouement. There is no detective. In short the story telling techniques are those of a thriller, not those of a detective story.

How successful a thriller is *Endless Night*? Christie, as almost always, can tell a good story. The prose is effortlessly fluid, the characters vivid. The ending, is well done and leaves the reader with a sense of evil. This novel is a long way from the 'cosy crime' for which Christie is famous. But the build up of the tension, although effective, is slow, and the story feels laboured and a little boring at times. The characters are perhaps too bland to make a really good thriller. There is not the complexity and tension in the way the characters interact that is present in, for example, Highsmith's *The Talented Mr Ripley*. Nor has it the richness of the original 1909 Nordic noir novel, Stein Riverton's *The Iron Chariot* which may possibly have inspired Christie's writing of this novel (see review of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* on this website). Had Christie experimented with this *genre* in the 1920s she may well have become one of the great psychological thriller writers. As it is she became one of the very greatest whodunnit writers. But one has to take one's hat off to her for trying something new at this stage in her life, and despite its being new for her, still managing to write a novel that is effective and enjoyable.

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