



**BOOK REVIEW OF *THE MURDER OF*
ROGER ACKROYD
WRITTEN BY AGATHA CHRISTIE**

A FINAL PROJECT

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PRONOUNCEMENT

The writer states truthfully that this project is compiled by me without taking the result from other research in any university, in S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree and in diploma. In Addition, the writer ascertains that I do not take the material from other publications or someone's work except for the references mentioned in bibliography.

Semarang, June 2015

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MOTTO AND DEDICATION

Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.

(Albert Einstein)

What others think about you is none of your business.

(Jack Canfield)

*This final project is dedicated to my beloved mother and my friends
for their love, motivation, support, and expectation.*

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The writer realizes that the final project is still far from perfect. The writer, therefore, will be glad to receive any constructive criticism and recommendations to make this final project better.

Finally, the writer expects that this final project will be useful to the reader who wishes to learn something about explicit and implicit meaning in the novel and this book review.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Literature consists of universal thoughts of human interest. It is presented in words reflecting daily life. It helps us understand human sentiments and human problems. By reading literature, one learns to feel what others feel about certain things. Literary work is a kind of writing art that illustrates social life and characters of every person. It can also be defined as the result of writer's inspiration and creativity. The writer gets inspiration and creativity from their life's experience or their environment.

Knowledge feeds our minds, literature feeds our hearts. Someone learns to comprehend what others feel. One also learns to appreciate what others appreciate. In this way, our capacity feeling and appreciation increase. One gets wealthier through literary experiences. This entire awareness may also be obtained through reading textbooks on every subject, but literature makes stronger and deeper impression. What one learns and feels through literature remains longer.

Prose, poetry and drama are categories of literary works. Those categories consist of two genres, fiction and nonfiction. Novel is one of the fiction categories of literary works. Novel has more attractive than other literary works because it tells the story about human life that may happen in the reality. That reason makes the readers easy to understand the story in a novel.

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd is one of the best known detective novels which is written by Agatha Christie. The writer chooses this novel because the

story is very interesting. This is the story of crime in an unexpected ending. It is full of suspense and suspicion. The mystery that is encircling all of the characters in the novel makes it more interesting. The way Agatha Christie, the author, makes the narrator of the story as the real murderer, surprises the reader. Those reasons make the writer interested to analyze this novel.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The writer's purposes of the writing are:

1. To describe theme of the novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.
2. To reveal strengths and weaknesses of the novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

1.3 Agatha Christie and Her Works

Agatha Christie was born in Torquay, Devon 1890 to Clarissa Margaret Boehmer and a wealthy American stockbroker. She was an English writer of crime and romantic novels. She was best recalled for her detective stories including the two diverse characters of Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot. Agatha Christie began to write in 1920, after the end of the First World War. *Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920) was her first story. This highlighted her soon to be a famous detective, Hercule Poirot, who was illustrated as a Belgian refugee from the Great War at the time

Agatha Christie had over 40 novels featuring the pride and flawless Hercule Poirot. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is one of her masterpieces. It was the source of some controversies when it was published. The novel broke the rules of detective fictions. The civilized outrage that was followed by publication of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* in 1926 showed the serious violation of the rules considered. She also wrote romance novels like *Unfinished Portrait* (1934) and *A Daughter's Daughter* (1952) under the name of Mary Westmacott.

Agatha Christie got the ideas for some of her murder methods from her work in the pharmacy of the University College London, during the Second World War. After the war, her books continued to grow in international popularity. In 1952, her play *The Mousetrap* was debuted at the Ambassador's Theatre in London and was performed without a break ever since. Her success led to her being honored in the New Year's honor list. In 1971, she was appointed Dame Commander of the British Empire. She died in 1976 aged 85.

2. SUMMARY

The story was narrated by Dr James Sheppard, who lived with her sister, Caroline, in the village of King's Abbot. The story began with the death of a widow, Mrs Ferrars, who committed suicide by taking an overdose of Veronal. Dr Sheppard and Caroline recounted the relationship between Mrs Ferrars and Roger Ackroyd,

who was also a rich widower. They also knew that Mrs Ferrars and Roger Ackroyd's planning to marry as soon as Mrs Ferrars' mourning period was over.

Dr James Sheppard was invited for dinner in Fernly Park, Roger Ackroyd's house. There, he met Ackroyd's niece, Flora who told him that she had been engaged to Ralph Patton, Ackroyd's stepson. After dinner, Ackroyd invited Dr James Sheppard to his room and revealed a secret about Mrs. Ferrars to him. Dr James Sheppard went back home, and later, he received a phone call from Parker, Ackroyd's butler, saying that Ackroyd had been murdered. He had been stabbed with a dagger at the back of his neck.

Hercule Poirot, a famous detective, took up the case with the help of Dr James Sheppard. First clues indicated Ralph Paton, Acroyd's stepson, as the culprit, because he was the beneficiaries of his will. Then, many people related to Ackroyd became the suspect due to their weak alibi. Investigating and suspicion were blamed on all Ackroyd's family alternately. Hercule Poirot was pleased as, one by one, the people revealed their different secrets. As Hercule Poirot unraveled the case, many secrets about love and money, came out about each member of the household. Hercule Poirot had confidence that Ralph was innocent because he found out that Ralph had strong alibi.

Hercule Poirot explained his investigation about the case. He explained how the Dictaphone at Roger Ackroyd's room worked and explained the connection between the Dictaphone and the murder. By analyzing the events and people's alibi since the night of the murder, Hercule Poirot uncovered the truth

that Dr. James Sheppard was the murderer. He was medically trained, so he knew the cause of Mr. Ferrars' death. Dr Sheppard knew that Mrs. Ferrars poisoned her husband, so he blackmailed her. Unfortunately, Mrs. Ferrars had committed suicide by taking an overdose of Veronal. Before committing suicide, she wrote a letter to Roger Ackroyd in which she was telling him about the person who had blackmailed her. Roger Ackroyd was having secret conversation with Dr. James Sheppard when the letter came. Finally, Roger Ackroyd found out that Dr. James Sheppard was the person who had blackmailed Mrs. Ferrars through Mrs. Ferrars' suicide letter. James had to silence Roger Ackroyd, so he killed him.

Dr. James Sheppard loves his sister so much, so he decides to take Hercule Poirot's advice to commit suicide, because it was the only way to save his sister, Caroline, from the disgrace of finding out that he was a murderer. In the last story, Dr. James Sheppard committed suicide by taking veronal, the drugs that Mrs. Ferrars used to kill herself.

3. REVIEW OF THE BOOK

In this chapter, the writer presents the themes, the strengths and the weaknesses of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

3.1 The Theme of the Novel

Theme of a story is whatever general idea or insight the entire story reveals. Theme is what the story is about. In a story, theme is the center, the moving force,

and the principle of unity (Kennedy, 1991: 144). Usually, theme is an idea about life or society problems that author wants to share with the readers through her works.

3.1.1 Major Theme

The writer finds that the major theme of the novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is the murder of Roger Ackroyd that was stabbed with a dagger in his room when he was reading the letter from his fiancé. A number of people related to Roger Ackroyd have the opportunity and motive to kill him, moreover his stepson who is the beneficiary of his will. The story shows intelligence of the culprit that is almost as great as the detective. The culprit, Dr. James Sheppard is a smart person. He is highly intelligent and able to understand deeply people's words and action, so he knows how to manipulate them. He is really good at lying, so people do not realize that he is trying to cover up his crime. On the other hand, there is a great detective, Hercule Poirot, who cannot be fooled by Dr. Sheppard's alibi. By investigating the case, he relies on his observation and logic to prove that Dr. Sheppard is the culprit.

3.1.2 Minor Theme

The minor themes of the novel are greediness and blackmail. Money makes Dr. Sheppard become a greedy man. He authorizes anything to make money, even he has to blackmail Mrs. Ferrars, a rich widow. His action leads him to hide his behavior, then provokes him to do another crime. He kills Roger Ackroyd, his

friend, who gets a letter from Mrs. Ferrars in which she tells Roger Ackroyd about everything, because Dr Sheppard has to keep him silent. Greediness also makes Flora, Ackroyd's niece, lie that she has stolen his uncle's money, and keeps silent when Ursula Bourne, Ackroyd's maid, is accused.

Another minor theme is blackmail. Dr Sheppard knows exactly how to use people's weaknesses to get what he wants. Whenever possible, he uses what he learns for financial gain. He blackmails Mrs. Ferrars because he is the only one who knows that Mrs. Ferrars poisoned his husband. The actions that he takes to cover up this blackmail highlight his deviousness. Dr. Sheppard has to make some ways of accounting for Mrs Ferrars's twenty thousand pounds. He lost most of the money in speculation, so he suppresses Mrs. Ferrars. Finally, Mrs. Ferrars takes a way out that Dr. Sheppard has not expected. Dr. Sheppard knows if Roger Ackroyd knows the truth, he will have no mercy on him, so he kills Roger Ackroyd when he is reading Mrs. Ferrars' letter.

3.2 The Strengths of the Novel

There are some points that make *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* interesting. Those are logical deduction, full of suspense and surprise, and interesting description of characterization.

3.2.1 Logical Deduction

The novel is so interesting because the story is reasonable. It leads the reader to think that the case is really unresolved because it seems there is no one can

commit the crime without people even realizing. The story is ingeniously intended to show all the necessary clues for solving the case, but the readers do not recognize the significance of the clues. Then, Agatha Christie shows the logical solution that makes the readers go back to the beginning and start to connect the clues and the crime. This logical deduction makes the story seem real and great. Logical deduction is the method of problem solving in a detective story to find the murderer.

3.2.2 Full of Suspense and Surprise

Suspense is the pleasurable anxiety we feel that heightens our attention to the story (Kennedy, 1991: 7). Suspense makes the readers curious about the outcome of events, and makes the readers ask what will happen next. Surprise, on the other hand, can be characterized as something unexpected that evokes an emotional reaction in your reader.

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd's Agatha Christie is full of suspense that makes the reader more interested to keep reading. The first suspense comes when Dr. Sheppard meets the stranger on the way home from Roger Ackroyd's house and then he receives a telephone call from Parker, Ackroyd's butler, saying that Roger Ackroyd has been murdered. Parker said that he does not call Dr. Sheppard, so it makes everybody wonder who the phone caller is. This is what the story is interesting. The murder makes the readers wonder who the killer is, how the

murderer kills Roger Ackroyd, when he does it, and why he kills him. In the next chapters, many people related to Roger Ackroyd are investigated that they have the opportunity and motive to kill Ackroyd. Some clues are presented, but it is still difficult to guess the culprit

The story is designed to present all the necessary clues for solving a crime but disguise these clues so that readers do not recognize their significance. With the help of the local doctor, James Sheppard, Hercule Poirot takes up the case. Many people related to Roger Ackroyd are suspected due to their weak alibi and motive to kill him. Ralph Paton, Ackroyd's stepson, becomes a major suspect, simply because of his inability to show his innocence. Footprints match Ralph's shoes, and unfortunately he disappears. Christie makes the readers wonder who the "bad guy" is and why they did but they don't usually guess the right person. At the end of the story, it is revealed that Dr. Sheppard is the murderer even though there is no clue that indicates Dr. Sheppard as a suspect.

3.2.3 Interesting Description of Characterization

The author uses interesting description in describing some characters. The writer thinks that Hercule Poirot, Caroline, and Flora Ackroyd are described most interestingly.

1. A Unique Man, Hercule Poirot

In the novel, the narrator says 'An egg-shaped head, partially covered with suspiciously black hair, two immense moustaches, and a pair of watchful eyes. It

was our mysterious neighbour, Mr Porrott' (Christie, 1985: 8). Based on the description, the writer thinks that it is interesting because readers can describe it clearly in their mind. The author chooses the words 'An egg- shaped head' instead of 'oval head' which makes it interesting. Caroline describes him as a retired hairdresser because of his moustache. She says that if the man was a hairdresser, he would have wavy hair - not straight. It means Hercule Poirot is a man with moustache and wavy hair.

2. A Curious Person, Caroline

Comparing the characters with anything that relate to their personalities is also used in describing character in this novel.

"If Caroline ever adopts a crest, I should certainly suggest a mongoose rampant. Caroline can do any amount of finding out by sitting placidly at home. When she goes out, it is not to gather in information, but to spread it. At that, too, she is amazingly expert" (Christie, 1985: 1)

Caroline is described like a mongoose, because she is a real gossip who gets information without doing many efforts. Like a mongoose that sniffs something odd, she forces his brother to tell her something he knows. She has tongue as sharp as her mind, and Dr. Sheppard cannot avoid not telling her.

3. An Elegant Lady, Flora Ackroyd

The selection of the words to describe Flora Ackroyd is very attractive. The author compares Flora with things that the readers can imagine it clearly.

"The first thing that strikes you about her is her extraordinary fairness. She has the real Scandinavian pale gold hair. Her eyes are blue - blue as the waters of a Norwegian fiord, and her skin is cream and roses. She has square, boyish shoulders and slight hips" (Christie, 1985: 14).

It is so interesting that the author describes Flora Ackroyd as the description above. The Author describes Flora's appearance with captivating words, like comparing her eyes' color to the waters of a Norwegian fiord and her pale gold hair to the real Scandinavian hair. Based on the description, the readers can describe Flora clearly as a beautiful girl.

Based on Caroline statement, 'Flora is like all these young girls nowadays, with no veneration for their betters and thinking they know best on every subject under the sun, I don't for a minute believe she'd kill even a chicken (Christie, 1985: 88), the readers know what Flora's nature. The description shows that Flora is an arrogant girl, but she has a soft heart because she cannot kill even a chicken.

3.3 The Weaknesses of the Novel

Apart from those strong points, The Murder of Roger Ackroyd also has some weak points. Those weak points are plot structure and point of view.

3.3.1 Plot Structure

Plot is the sequences of events of which a story is composed. The story begins with an exposition, the introduction brings out information that readers need to understand the events and understand what will happen next (Kennedy, 1991: 6). The Freytag pyramid is valuable in the analysis of plot structure. They are exposition, complication, climax, falling action, and resolution.

The writer considers that the plot structure of this novel is disorganized according to Freytag pyramid. The climax also comes at the three last chapters, so the structure becomes exposition, complication, climax, falling action, climax, and resolution. The story begins with the introduction of characters, Kings Abott, the place where the story takes place, and what happens before the story begins. Next, complication begins with the murder of Roger Ackroyd. Next chapters are more likely Hercule Poirot's investigation and stories in which one by one people related to Roger Ackroyd becomes a suspect. The three last chapters of this novel are similar to the summary of the whole chapters, so the readers can actually only read the three last chapters to know the book without reading it from the first chapter. The climax comes again when Hercule Poirot neglects all the suspected people and starts investigating those who seem innocent.

3.3.1 Point of View

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd uses first person point of view. Dr. Sheppard is the narrator of the story. The whole story is narrated through his eyes, so readers may think that he is more important than Hercule Poirot, Agatha Christie's famous detective. Based on the way Dr. Sheppard presents the story, readers will consider that he is a helpful man who will do the best to solve the case. He helps the detective and police to find the murder of his friend, Roger Ackroyd, but at the end of the story, he is the murderer. The narration makes readers wonder who the murderer is and guess some characters, except Dr. Sheppard as the murderer. Readers will never think that he is the culprit, but at the end of the story, they find

out that he is the murderer. Readers may feel disappointed because they find out that Dr. Sheppard is not a good person, but an expert liar. He acts like he is a good person to cover up his crime. It is like Dr. Sheppard who fools readers since the first chapter of the story.

4. CONCLUSION

This Novel, in general, tells about the murder of Roger Ackroyd that was stabbed with a dagger in his room when he was reading the letter from his fiancé. There are two ideas that appear in the novel briefly and give way to another minor theme, greediness and blackmail. The Detective, Hercule Poirot, finally takes the case of the murder of Roger Ackroyd and struggle against a clever and devious murderer. Hercule Poirot depends on observation and logic to make a conclusion. At the end of the story, it is known that Dr. James Sheppard, the narrator of the story, and the one who pretends to help Hercule Poirot to find the murderer is the real murderer.

This novel has strengths and weaknesses inside, but the weak points are covered by the strong points. The strengths of this novel are logical deduction, full of suspense, and interesting description of some characters. The author presents some clues, but still manages to completely surprise the reader at the end of novel. That is what makes this novel full of suspense. Meanwhile, one of weaknesses of this novel is the narrator as a bad character, but, actually, it does not make this novel bad. Dr. Sheppard is a character who is successful in swindling the reader. He is a character whom readers will hard to forget even though he is the murderer.

This novel is one of Agatha Christie's most interesting novels. Furthermore, I recommend this novel to those who love an intellectual challenge and an amazing surprise at the end of the story.

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