

The murder of roger ackroyd



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

it (a Hercule Poirot mystery) is one of Agatha Christie's most shrewdly plotted novels. The novel begins with the murder of Roger Ackroyd, a wealthy man living in the village of King's Abbot. A number of characters have the opportunity and motive to kill him. Christie presents numerous clues but still manages to completely surprise us at the end of the novel. Dr. Sheppard, the narrator of the novel, uses the puzzle metaphor to describe the mystery of Ackroyd's murder: It was rather like a jigsaw puzzle to which everyone contributed their own little piece of knowledge or discovery.

But their task ended there. To Poirot alone belongs the renown of fitting those pieces into their correct place. (164) The clue-puzzle mystery is Agatha Christie's specialty, and the surprising plot twist her forte. Christie is cunning in her use of misdirection. The red herrings that characterize her plots make these stories realistic and convincing. All the suspects in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* exhibit some form of suspicious behavior. Poirot tells them, "Each one of you has something to hide" (154). These secrets complicate the plot and take us down numerous blind alleys.

Christie is cunning in her use of misdirection. Hercule Poirot's eccentricities cause characters to underestimate his talent as a detective. Dr. Sheppard and his sister initially mistake him for a retired barber. Poirot always succeeds in solving crimes but rarely looks as if he will. He admits using old-fashioned methods, yet these methods produce results. His favourite line is: "I work only with the little gray cells" (261). Poirot is far ahead of both readers and characters in recognizing the significance of minor clues.

Like his predecessor, Sherlock Holmes, Poirot uses superior reasoning ability to interpret clues and solve cases. The action of the novel is presented through the eyes of Dr. Sheppard, an unreliable narrator. The narrative voice is a masterful touch in the novel, fully appreciated upon a second reading of it. Christie knows that readers will be reminded of another famous doctor/narrator when reading this novel. Like Dr Watson, Sheppard acts as an assistant to a brilliant detective and documents the case he witnesses. The Murder of Roger Ackroyd takes place in a charming English village.

The crime occurs in Ackroyd's manor house, an enclosed world complete with butlers and old-fashioned traditions. Christie was one of the first mystery novelists to locate crimes in English country houses (Knight 2004, 89). As in all her novels, the cozy setting offsets the horrible crime. The end of the novel in which all suspects are gathered together for the revelation of the mystery is vintage Christie. The least likely suspect surprises even the shrewdest reader. If you love an intellectual challenge, an ingeniously plotted novel, and a cozy English manor-house setting