

Hello and welcome to the last module of Unit 2 of Popular

Literature, Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

Here, we are going to discuss the narrative and the themes in the

text. I'm Palia Pandit and this is the outline of your module.

We are going to discuss the narrative and narrator in detail

in this module, and we're also going to discuss the themes in

*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* as part of this module.

The learning outcomes of this particular module are:

at the end of this module, the learner will be able to

evaluate the text as detective fiction, examine

the role of the narrator, and illustrate the themes

with reference to context. So let's begin.

We have as the narrator of this text Dr. James Sheppard, who

seems to be quite faithful to all the characters in the text.

He appears as a friend to the family of Ackroyd's, to Ralph

Paton, to Ursula Bourne, even to Hercule Poirot. However, in the

end, it is revealed that it is Dr. James Sheppard who

murders Roger Ackroyd for obvious reasons. And what are

his reasons? We know that Roger Ackroyd was an industrialist,

who everyone envied.

We know that Mrs. Ferrars was someone he wanted to marry;

and it was Mrs Ferrars also who had murdered her husband. Since

James Shepherd was a doctor, he was generally called

for investigating murders or investigating unnatural deaths.

That's when he finds that Ashley Ferrars was actually poisoned

by someone and that someone was Mrs Ferrars. The moment he finds

that out, he starts blackmailing Mrs Ferrars for money, and Mrs

Ferrars wants to reveal this to

Roger Ackroyd and have this person punished. But just before

Roger Ackroyd reads this in her last letter, he is murdered by

Dr James Sheppard. Dr Sheppard as a narrator leaves

details out of the narrative quite conveniently. He wants the

reader to believe in him totally, and therefore we don't

come to know when this particular person has met Ralph

Paton and rehabilitated him in an asylum just because he wants

him (Ralph) to be the prime suspect. We don't know that he was the one

carrying the dictaphone, that he was the one taking the Tunisian

dagger out of the silver table.

And therefore with all these things in mind, we see that

Agatha Christie has introduced a subversion in the notion of an

unbiased, honest character or an honest narrator, which we find

otherwise in all the novels.

We have a tendency as readers to believe whatever is told to us by the narrator. However, in this particular novel we cannot trust Dr James Sheppard, because he is the criminal and he twists everything, including the narrative to his favor.

Now let us look at the themes in The Murder of Roger Ackroyd one by one. We have the victory of truth, the truth prevailing towards the end of this particular novel.

We have Flora Ackroyd approaching Hercule Poirot in his retirement, to pursue this case and Hercule Poirot agrees on the condition that he will go to the root of this case.

And whatever the truth shall be, will have to be accepted by all the characters. Flora Ackroyd agrees to this, and we find that evidence by evidence, it is Hercule Poirot who solves this murder case and finds Dr James Sheppard as the murderer of Roger Ackroyd and of course indirectly of Mrs Ferrars.

We have a detailed understanding of the criminal mind when we read this particular novel, because the narrator of the novel, is none other than Dr James Sheppard, the murderer of Roger Ackroyd. The psychology of the criminal, that is, Dr James Sheppard is being laid out to us by the

author in a very detailed manner. We see how a particular person who is a criminal can twist the details to suit his or her convenience.

We also see that many characters, in fact most characters who are suspects, have secrets and alibis to their favor. We have Flora Ackroyd stealing the money from Roger Ackroyd. However, this is not mentioned in the beginning of the case. We have Ralph Paton who has married Ursula Bourne, but that marriage is kept secret. We have Raymond who also wants to have some property to his name, but never reveals this to anyone before the investigation actually begins.

And most importantly, we have Dr James Sheppard mentioning a legacy that he was supposed to receive but did not receive because of some unavoidable circumstances. So keeping these important alibis in mind, we have to know that, alibis are part of

a murder mystery and Agatha Christie has treated them all very well. We have the theme of trust and betrayal in The Murder of Roger Ackroyd. We have Dr James Sheppard being trusted by the entire family of Ackroyd's without any question.

We have Flora Ackroyd who trust Dr James Sheppard with the

news of her engagement. We have Caroline Dr Shepherd's own sister who trusts him with everything she comes to know from the town. We have Ralph Paton expressing himself quite openly and we have Roger Ackroyd himself, his closest friend, who tells him about everything that goes on in his life and goes on in the life of Mrs Ferrars and eventually you have Dr Sheppard betraying all these characters and becoming the mastermind behind the murder and all the other small crimes that he commits to achieve his end.

We'll have a look at some of the other themes, minor themes in this text. We have importance to social class being given as part of this text, especially by Roger Ackroyd. This can be portrayed or this can be studied in context to Ursula Bourne's marriage to Ralph Paton. The moment Ursula Bourne learns of the engagement of Ralph Paton with Flora Ackroyd, we have Ursula Bourne approaching Roger Ackroyd telling him about the secret marriage with Ralph Paton.

However, Roger Ackroyd is in disapproval of this marriage. He wants to convey it to Ursula Bourne, also to Ralph Paton that this kind of intermingling of social classes is not acceptable to that part

of the society and to that era of the society.

There is also this small town life that is being portrayed in this particular novel. We have Caroline, the sister of Dr James Sheppard, collecting gossip from all possible people just by staying in her house. She has the vendors telling her what's going on in the town. She goes out once in a while to know who meets whom and unfortunately or fortunately she reveals all these details to Dr James Sheppard who incorporates this in his plan of murder, and in his plan of gaining something by committing crimes.

We have the exceptional power of observation and deduction by Hercule Poirot. Now a detective is a person who notices things that normal or ordinary people do not detect quite easily, and therefore the entry of Hercule Poirot is such that he starts detecting small, small details which we generally as readers, and possibly the characters in the novel do not notice quite easily. He notices that there is this particular position of the chair that is changed and he knows whom to approach to clarify this detail, he knows that it is Parker who will know the exact position of the chair because Parker knows job too

well. When he finds the gold ring in the goldfish pond, he knows that it must be thrown by someone who has been jilted in love. And then he finds this jilted lover in Ursula Bourne. That is when he publishes the paragraph in paper, to confirm the news of Ursula Bourne getting married to Ralph Paton. And lastly, we have the freedom of action taken by Hercule Poirot. Hercule Poirot as a detective and as a character in Agatha Christie's novels, investigating the case. We have him taking small liberties to bigger freedom in deciding how the case should proceed. We have him making friends with Colonel Melrose who seems to be from a previous series of this particular book and we have him have his own way to this entire case. There is one inspector who particularly does not like him and that is inspector Raglan and every time Hercule Poirot has a head start in the case, it is inspector Raglan who is envious of him. That's just because Hercule Poirot is quite a famous detective and has been found in many novels of Agatha Christie, just as in The Murder of Roger Ackroyd. With this we actually come to the end of this module

and it is to be remembered that when you read The Murder  
of Roger Ackroyd, you have to keep in mind  
that you have to notice small changes, small dialogues which  
otherwise seem quite harmless, but they are actually  
clues that will help you as readers solve the murder case  
of Roger Ackroyd. So when you read The Murder of Roger Ackroyd  
you will not understand how Hercule Poirot solves this case in the first  
reading, in a systematic manner, unless you read it twice.  
Therefore, my advice to you is read The Murder of Roger Ackroyd once  
and that read it again to find the clues  
yourself. That will lead you to know who the murderer is  
right in the middle of the text. Thank you one and all  
and good luck.