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Essay type Questions Discussed

Q. What is the mystery do you find in the novel, 'The Murder of Roger Ackroyd'?

Ans. - I think the most important mysterious element in the novel, 'The Murder of Roger Ackroyd' is prevalent in the art of bold plotting with special reference to the character of Dr. Sheppard, the narrator of the story.

Dr. Sheppard is a friend of the protagonist, Roger Ackroyd. His appearance at the very beginning of the novel convinces all of us a reliable man and he is able to retain it even to the last moment of the novel. He is serious-minded and a manly person. Christie invokes the evaluative connotations of male-dominated literature in this way, but takes them to a deliberately exaggerated degree when, in chapter two, Sheppard wonders if Mrs. Ferrars left a suicide note, and so incriminated him. He decides she has done, because he knows how women cannot resist stardom, even in suicide. However, the narrator himself is the murderer of Roger Ackroyd and this is the mystery. So, in this way, a murderer develops from a normal, responsible professional man.

Opportunity, greed and moral uncertainty led him to blackmail Mrs. Ferrars, then press her to suicide and finally kill Ackroyd to hide his original deeds from proper behaviour. Yet, the villainy is never represented solely in terms of greed and as a result Sheppard's crime is not as far from the family murderer. Sheppard has broken a bond of great weight to his friend and patient, betraying him



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While playing the role of a faithful man, Money from Mrs. Ferrars is involved in this breach of morality. The quest for more money and wealth is one of the central features of crime in Christie. Christie's plots show how easily people can be deceived by those who only ~~to act~~ play the role of actors and this betrayal always takes the form of murder.

• Even in his deviant state, Sheppard retains aspects of a doctor's proper morality. As he proudly says at the end ~~but~~ there is no falsehood in his narrative, there are some omissions. His description of events in Ackroyd's study at the time of the murder is ambiguous but it is distinctly clarified at the end of the novel by the detective, Hercule Poirot. When finally confronted by Poirot, Dr. Sheppard takes venereal as Mrs. Ferrars committed suicide.



**⊙ Analyze or comment upon the character of Dr. Sheppard.

Ans. → * Same as the above question no. - 01



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Essay-type Questions - Discussed

Q. 8) The clues in the novel, 'The Murder of Roger Ackroyd'?

Ans. - In chapter 1, Dr. Sheppard and his sister Caroline discuss the death of Mrs. Ferrars. Dr. Sheppard tries to convince us that Caroline is wrong about Mrs. Ferrars poisoning her husband before he reveals to us that Mrs. Ferrars died of an overdose of veronal, which she possibly took on purpose. At the end of the chapter 1, it is known that the doctor (Dr. Sheppard) is an unreliable narrator who seeks to withhold the truth from everyone, not only from his sister Caroline. We, the readers, are flattered into thinking we are in the doctor's confidence.

In chapter 2, there is an important syntactical clue. In discussing Mrs. Ferrars, he says, "When had I last seen her? Not for over a week. Her manner then had been normal enough considering well considering everything." This is a huge clue that the doctor is hiding very significant information from us as well as from Caroline. We should guess why the doctor of the woman who just died did not actually know the cause of her death or he was pretending.

Chapter 3 introduces Hercule Poirot to the cast of characters of this novel. In chapter 3, Dr. Sheppard says that he received a legacy about a year ago and that he lost it in financial speculation of a type that Poirot associates with his gullible friend Hastings. We don't find any other evidence of the doctor's character flaw except this — his confession that he is greedy. The reference to Captain Hastings is another distraction from the point.



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• Then we might have wondered about the clever omission the doctor practices in the chapter 4: "The letter had been brought in at 20 minutes to 9. It was just ten minutes to nine when I left him, the letter still unread. I ~~hesitated~~ hesitated with my hand on the door handle, looking back and wondering if there was anything I had left undone. I could think of nothing. With a shake of the head I passed out and closed the door behind me?"

• Finally, the author of the novel provides us a conclusive clue before Poirot convinces all the suspects. In chapter 23, when he tells Caroline and James that he (Dr. Sheppard) knows who did the deed, he ~~refuses~~ refuses to allow Caroline to come to his house to see him unmask the killer. He gives the clumsy excuse that the killer will be there, and he does not want her to see - but he allows many other innocent people to come too.

• Towards the end, Dr. Sheppard said that he left the Ackroyd house at exactly 9, hearing the church clock strike. But then he took a full ten minutes to walk a distance that could be covered in two or three minutes easily. From that discrepancy, Poirot notes that two facts contains the key to identify of the murderer: the fact that there was a telephone call to the doctor to tell him of the death



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Roger Ackroyd, and the fact that the high-backed grandfather chair had been pulled out from the wall to obscure the table by the window in the study where Roger Ackroyd died, and nobody confessed to moving it out or moving it back in place.

Character Analysis

Hercule Poirot

At first glance, Hercule Poirot is a comical little man with an egg-shaped head, a trademark moustache, a large ego, and an appreciation of fine tailoring. Yet behind his rather silly appearance and fussy attitude lies a methodical, logical, brilliant mind. When Poirot brings his "little grey cells" to bear on a mystery, one may rest assured it will be solved. Retired from the police and now from private practice, Poirot takes the case of Roger Ackroyd's murder out of kindness toward Ackroyd's young niece, who begs him to help find the real killer. But once committed to the task, he is relentless and unemotional in pursuing the truth, even when it means revealing secrets others would prefer remain hidden.

Dr. Sheppard

Dr. Sheppard is the narrator of the story, as well as the physician of the village of King's Abbott—a role that makes him privy to many secrets and fears of the village residents. A bachelor, he shares a house with his sister Caroline Sheppard, who considers it her role to look after him. The role of narrator is not unlike the role of physician. People are conditioned to trust both and to take their presence for granted. Dr. Sheppard exploits these impulses, proving to be an unethical doctor as well as an unreliable narrator. Although he keeps his own personality out of the narrative for many chapters, after he is revealed as the murderer, he is shown to be arrogant, pitiless, and cowardly.



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Roger Ackroyd

Roger Ackroyd is described as a pillar of the community and a man who had many friends. After his wife died, he raised her son Ralph as his own, though his love life became a subject of village gossip. A wealthy man, he had a reputation among his family for being stingy and controlling with money. Ackroyd's murder is precipitated by his engagement to the wealthy widow Mrs. Ferrars. Unbeknownst to Ackroyd, she was responsible for her widowed state by poisoning her drunkard husband. Mrs. Ferrars has been under strain from being blackmailed for her crime. She confesses her deed to Ackroyd and names her blackmailer.

Ralph Paton

Captain Ralph Paton was raised by Roger Ackroyd after his mother, Ackroyd's wife, died from alcoholism. He is a wild young man with a tendency to get into debt and make poor moral choices. However, he is good looking and charming, so people are forgiving of his admittedly problematic personality. Before the action of the novel begins, Ralph has secretly married Ursula Bourne, Roger Ackroyd's parlourmaid. But he has also agreed to marry Flora Ackroyd because Ackroyd promised to pay off his significant debts if he does. When his stepfather is found murdered, Ralph Paton goes into hiding over concerns his many secrets will make him look guilty. He is the prime suspect in the murder until Hercule Poirot clears his name.

Flora Ackroyd

Flora Ackroyd is the young niece of Roger Ackroyd and is adept at projecting a conventional good-girl image. However, in truth she is a thief and a liar, though her faults are minor and excused somewhat because they result from Roger Ackroyd's miserly micromanagement of the family's finances. Thus, when her uncle suggests she marry Ralph Paton, she agrees, not for love but because the marriage would give her more freedom than she currently has living in her uncle's household. Flora's need for money prompts her to steal 40 pounds from her uncle on the evening of the murder. However, as she makes her way from Ackroyd's bedroom with the stolen cash, she runs into Parker, the butler, and so pretends to be just exiting her uncle's study. This lie establishes an incorrect time of death for Ackroyd, setting an obstacle in the path of Hercule Poirot's investigation.

Caroline Sheppard

Dr. Sheppard's sister and housemate, Caroline Sheppard is the lead gossip of King's Abbott and a capable practitioner of gossip-related arts. Not only is she an expert at learning people's secrets, from the mundane to the dramatic, she can combine the many scraps of information she receives and arrive, almost by magic, at the truth (or something quite close to it). She employs a network of servants and other ladies for most of her gossip needs but isn't above pumping her brother, Hercule Poirot, or anyone else she has contact with for information. Caroline's function in the novel is less about her personality, though she does provide a humor missing from the other characters. Her love of gossip provides a way to keep information flowing among the characters and from the pages of the novel to the reader. However, when she turns her instinctive understanding of human nature on her brother, the result is insightful.



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Themes

Secrets Breed Secrets

The novel begins and ends with secrets. The first event in the narrative is the suicide of Mrs. Ferrars—a suicide prompted by her secrets. She was guilty of murdering her husband and was being blackmailed by someone who discovered her unpunished crime. Ralph Paton is secretly engaged to Flora and even more secretly married to Ursula Bourne. Flora secretly stole money from her uncle. Miss Russell keeps her illegitimate son, Charles Kent, a secret. Parker hides the fact that he previously blackmailed an employer and was considering blackmailing Ackroyd as well. Major Blunt is secretly in love with Flora. Yet Dr. Sheppard keeps the biggest secret of all: concealing his guilt from the reader as well as from Hercule Poirot and the police. However, only some of these secrets are relevant to the murder of Roger Ackroyd. But because people are keeping so many secrets, their deliberate concealment—which sometimes includes lying—poses formidable obstacles to Poirot's search for the truth.

Unfortunately for all secret-keepers, Poirot is adept at ferreting out concealed information. Poirot's investigation is hindered by the commitment of the characters to keep their skeletons in the closet, but Poirot perseveres. When he first takes the case, he states, "Everyone ... has something to hide" (Chapter 7). Yet later he observes "it is not easy to hide things from Hercule Poirot." After spending time and effort hunting down answers to questions unrelated to the murder, Poirot finally gives a handful of people the opportunity to come clean. "Each one of you has something to hide" he says to those assembled (Chapter 12). One by one, the characters give up their secrets or have them revealed by Poirot.

Not only do the characters keep secrets, large and small, but secrets seem to breed secrets. Mrs. Ackroyd secretly attempted to find out the terms of Roger Ackroyd's will but only because, she says, he was secretive about money in the first place: "In dear Roger's place, I should have not objected to revealing the provisions of my will. But men are so secretive. One is forced to adopt little subterfuges" (Chapter 14). Mrs. Ferrars's secret crime leads to Dr. Sheppard's secret crime, and Dr. Sheppard commits suicide partly because he wants to keep his guilty secret from his sister Caroline.

The Price of Truth

Although Hercule Poirot is interested in bringing the guilty to justice, he is even more a seeker of truth. When he is on a case, his pursuit of the truth is relentless and single minded. Poirot rather comically compares himself to a hound following a scent to describe this aspect of his personality: "The good dog, he does not leave the scent" (Chapter 7). And he isn't after truth just because it is his job, or for the satisfaction of solving a puzzle, although these are certainly among his motivations. He finds the truth beautiful, elevating it to a work of art rather than something more akin to scientific knowledge. In Chapter 12 Poirot tells Flora quite seriously, "I mean to arrive at the truth. The truth, however ugly in itself, is always curious and beautiful to the seeker after it."

Hercule Poirot might love the truth beyond all else, but the novel demonstrates truth has a dangerous side. If one discovers the truth, one might regret it. Poirot tells Flora that in the end she may wish she had left the case to the police rather than bring him into the matter—implying the police are inept and will be unsuccessful. When she insists she does want the truth, he responds ominously, hoping she "will not regret those words." The characters also seem to agree generally that women in particular need to be shielded from the truth. The police suggest delaying telling Flora her uncle is dead because she will be too upset to answer questions. Indeed, when they do tell her, she faints. In Chapter 10, Flora's mother prefers to believe Ackroyd's death was so dreadful she "can't help feeling that it must have been an accident of some kind." She doesn't want to think it could



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have been murder. And Dr. Sheppard commits suicide in part because he doesn't want Caroline to find out what really happened: "I should not like Caroline to know. She is fond of me, and then, too, she is proud."

Finally, the truth can be a weapon against the secretive and guilty. Once Poirot knows the truth, he uses it to force the murderer to confess and even encourage the murderer to end his own life. Gathering all the suspects together in Chapter 24, he announces, "Tomorrow the truth goes to Inspector Raglan." And when he confronts Dr. Sheppard with the whole truth, Dr. Sheppard sees, as Poirot puts it, there is only "one way out." Ultimately the truth Poirot discovers leads the way to justice.

Moral Weakness

Throughout the novel, individuals' moral failures and bad choices are blamed on weakness of character, or moral weakness. Ralph, known as a wild young man, has his poor life choices blamed on his mother passing down a moral weakness, a "victim of heredity. He had not inherited his mother's fatal propensity for drink, but nevertheless he had in him a strain of weakness." Flora, who knows Ralph well, refers to this weakness when she asks Hercule Poirot to investigate and clear Ralph of suspicion: "Ralph may be weak," she explains. "He may have done foolish things ... but he wouldn't murder anyone" (Chapter 7). In Chapter 17, Ralph's weakness is again the topic of conversation as Dr. Sheppard notes the young man's "weak nature ... But not a vicious one." Ultimately Ralph's weakness comes through in his relationships with money and with women. He is constantly in need of money, likely a result of poor self-discipline and self-indulgence. He decides to marry Flora to stay in his uncle's good graces (and his will). Poirot describes Ralph's pattern of poor decisions as a product of "innate weakness" and desire for "the easy, the immediate solution" (Chapter 22).

Ralph and his mother are not the only ones described as having weak character. As she admits to stealing her uncle's money, Flora also attributes both Ralph's and her own bad decisions to moral weakness. Indeed "that's what brought us together ... I understood him ... I'm the same underneath ... We're weak, miserable, despicable things" (Chapter 19).

Dr. Sheppard, too, shares this moral weakness, which leads to his becoming a blackmailer, then a murderer. Caroline brings up her brother's weakness when she tells Poirot the doctor is "weak as water, if I weren't about to look after him." Later in that chapter, Poirot poses a hypothetical situation revolving around this kind of moral weakness—describing it as a tendency to give in to temptation when one is placed in certain situations. He tells a little story about an ordinary man with no "murder in his heart" but with a "strain of weakness—deep down." If that man faced difficulties or came upon a secret, he might realize his opportunity to make a great deal of money and so become a blackmailer. Of course, Poirot's hypothetical story is not hypothetical at all: it is Dr. Sheppard's own story.
