

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd: A Discussion

Agatha Mary Clarissa Christie or Lady Mallowan (1890 –1976) was an English writer known for her sixty-six detective novels and fourteen short story collections, particularly those revolving around fictional detectives, Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple.

She was born into a wealthy upper-middle-class family in Torquay, Devon. She served in a Devon hospital during World War I acquiring a good knowledge of poisons which would later feature in many of her novels, short stories, and plays. She was initially an unsuccessful writer with six consecutive rejections, but this changed when *The Mysterious Affairs at Styles* was published in 1920, featuring Hercule Poirot. Following her second marriage in 1930 to an archaeologist, she often used her first-hand knowledge of her husband's profession in her fiction. During World War II, she worked as a pharmacy assistant at University College Hospital, London , updating her knowledge of toxins while contributing to the war effort.

Christie's works come third in the rankings of the world's most-widely published books, behind only the works of Shakespeare and the Bible. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was voted the best crime novel ever by 600 writers of the Crime Writers' Association on 15 September, 2015, coinciding with her 125th birthday. *And Then There Were None* was named the "World's Favourite Christie" in a vote sponsored by the author's estate. Most of her books and short stories have been adapted for television, radio, video games and comics, and more than 30 feature films have been based on her work

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd is first published in June 1926 in the United Kingdom. The plotline goes thus: Poirot retires to a village near the home of a friend, Roger Ackroyd. In King's Abbot, wealthy widow Mrs Ferrars unexpectedly commits suicide, which distresses her fiancé, widower Roger Ackroyd. At dinner that evening in Ackroyd's home of Fernly Park, his guests include his sister-in-law, Mrs Cecil Ackroyd and her daughter Flora, big-game hunter Major Blunt, Ackroyd's personal secretary, Geoffrey Raymond, and Dr James Sheppard, whom Ackroyd invited earlier that day. During dinner, Flora announces her engagement to Ackroyd's stepson, Ralph Paton. After dinner, Ackroyd reveals to Sheppard in his study that Mrs Ferrars had confided in him she was being blackmailed over her murder of her husband. He then asks Sheppard to leave, wishing to read a letter from Mrs Ferrars that arrives in the post, containing her suicide note. Once home, Sheppard receives a call from Parker, Ackroyd's butler, claiming

that Ackroyd is dead. Upon returning to Fernly Park, Parker denies making such a call, yet he, Sheppard, Raymond and Blunt find Ackroyd dead in his study, stabbed to death with a weapon from his collection.

Hercule Poirot, living in the village, comes out of retirement at Flora's request. She does not believe Paton killed Ackroyd, despite him disappearing and police finding his footprints on the study's window. Poirot learns a few important facts on the case: all in the household, except parlour maid Ursula Bourne, have alibis for the murder; while Raymond and Blunt heard Ackroyd talking to someone after Sheppard left, Flora was the last to see him that evening. Sheppard met a stranger on his way home, at Fernly Park's gates; Ackroyd met a representative of a dictaphone company a few days earlier; Parker recalls seeing a chair that had been in an odd position in the study when the body was found, that has since returned to its original position; the letter from Mrs Ferrars has disappeared since the murder. Poirot asks Sheppard for the exact time he met his stranger. He later finds a goose quill and a scrap of starched cambric in the summer house, and a ring with the inscription "From R" in the backyard.

Raymond and Mrs Ackroyd later reveal they are in debt, but Ackroyd's will which he had done before death resolves this as they stood to gain from his will. Flora admits she never saw her uncle after dinner; she was actually taking money from his bedroom. Her revelation throws doubts on everyone's alibis, and leaves Raymond and Blunt as the last people to hear Ackroyd alive. Blunt reveals he is secretly in love with Flora. Poirot calls a second meeting, adding Parker, the butler, Miss Russell, the housekeeper, and Ralph Paton, whom he had found. He reveals that the goose quill is a heroin holder belonging to Miss Russell's illegitimate son, the stranger whom Sheppard met on the night of the murder. He also informs all that Ursula secretly married Paton, as the ring he found was hers; it was discarded after Paton chastised her for informing his uncle of this fact, which had led to the termination of her employment. Poirot then proceeds to inform all that he knows about the killer's identity, confirmed by a telegram received during the meeting. He does not reveal the name; instead he issues a warning to the killer. When Poirot is alone with Sheppard, he reveals that he knows him to be Ackroyd's killer.

Sheppard was Mrs Ferrars' blackmailer and murdered Ackroyd to stop him knowing this; he suspected her suicide note would mention this fact, and so he took it after the murder. He then used a dictaphone Ackroyd had, to make it appear he was still alive when he departed, before

looping back to the study's window to plant Paton's footprints. Poirot had noted an inconsistency in the time he mentioned for the meeting at the gates. As he wanted to be on the scene when Ackroyd's body was found, he asked a patient earlier in the day to call him some time after the murder, so as to have an excuse for returning to Fernly Park; Poirot's telegram confirmed this. When no-one was around in the study, Sheppard removed the dictaphone, and returned the chair that concealed it from view to its original place. Poirot tells Sheppard that all this information will be reported to the police in the morning. Dr Sheppard continues writing his report on Poirot's investigation (the novel itself), admitting his guilt and wishing his account was that of Poirot's failure to solve Ackroyd's murder. The novel's epilogue serves as his suicide note.

So, the novel is narrated by Dr. James Sheppard, a physician in the town of King's Abbott. The story begins with the death of Mrs. Ferrars, who overdosed on Veronal, a sleeping medication. Most of the people, including Dr. Sheppard's gossip-loving sister, Caroline, believes that her husband was poisoned by Mrs Ferrars a year before. Caroline now speculates that Mrs. Ferrars has committed suicide with Veronal over the guilt. So, Veronal is an important thing in the storyline.

Another important thing is Mrs Ferrars' letter. Although she didn't tell Roger Ackroyd who the blackmailer was, he had a feeling she left a message for him before her death. During his meeting with Dr. Sheppard, Ackroyd's secretary, Parker arrives with the evening mail, which contains a letter from the late Mrs. Ferrars. Ackroyd begins to read it out loud. In it, Mrs. Ferrars announces she will name her blackmailer and asks Ackroyd to seek revenge on her blackmailer. Ackroyd refuses to read the name of the blackmailer with Sheppard present. This is sustained for the Thriller element in the story.

Dr. Sheppard leaves Fernly Park, Ackroyd's home, but on his walk back bumps into a stranger who asks for directions to the estate. At home, Dr. Sheppard and Caroline are about to go to bed when the phone rings. He explains to Caroline that Parker has called from Fernly Park to tell him that Ackroyd has been murdered. Dr. Sheppard rushes over, but when he gets there Parker denies making the phone call. Nonetheless, they break into Ackroyd's locked study and find him murdered in his chair. Sheppard's account of the stranger is another important thing.

Next, the timing of the murder is important. Because Flora claims to have wished her uncle goodnight at 9:45 pm and Dr. Sheppard is convinced that Ackroyd had been dead at least a half

hour when he found the body at 10:30, the police are convinced that the murder was committed between 9:45 and 10:00 pm. Although all members of Ackroyd's household stood to gain financially from his death, Ralph especially inherited the bulk of his uncle's fortune. After they have determined that Ralph recently was in a great deal of debt, they suspect him all the more.

Although the police are convinced it is Ralph, Poirot's thorough investigation leaves him unconvinced. He is fixated on the phone call to Dr. Sheppard, which the police trace, and determine came from the King's Abbot train station, not Fernly Park, and the position of a grandfather chair in Ackroyd's office, which had been moved into the center of the room when Dr. Sheppard and Parker found the body. In the course of his investigation, Poirot discovers a goose quill and a piece of cambric in the summerhouse on the Fernly Park grounds, as well as a wedding ring inscribed "From R" in a goldfish pond on the grounds.

The police, meanwhile, have tracked down the stranger who approached Fernly Park the night of the murder. They arrest a man named Charles Kent, whom Dr. Sheppard confirms was the stranger.

Meanwhile, Poirot determines that Flora lied about wishing her uncle goodnight at 9:45 on the night of the murder – instead, she had snuck up to his bedroom to steal money to settle some debts of her own, and had to pretend she was merely wishing Ackroyd goodnight to avoid suspicion. In the course of her confession, Major Blunt's secret love for Flora is revealed when he tries to take the blame for her crime. Poirot convinces Major Blunt to be honest with Flora about his love for her – he assures her that Flora and Ralph Paton are not really in love, but merely engaged for convenience's sake. This is how gradually the plotline of the detective novel gets unfolded or simplified.

Poirot asks for a meeting with Miss Russell, Ackroyd's housekeeper. He gets her to admit about her son she bore out of wedlock many years before, and that he owns the goose quill, for snorting heroin, that they found in the summerhouse. There she met him before dinner on the night of the murder after he contacted her; she insists he cannot be the murderer.

Soon, Flora and Major Blunt are engaged, and Poirot traces the owner of the gold ring to Ursula Bourne. After placing a fake notice in the newspaper that the police captured Ralph Paton, Bourne seeks out Poirot and confesses to having married Ralph in secret months before. They

met around 9:30 in the summerhouse and fought about his announced engagement to Flora Ackroyd .Ralph agreed to the engagement hoping it would mean his uncle would discharge his debts.

Poirot summons all the suspects to his home once again and reveals all these discoveries. He further reveals that he has determined Ackroyd purchased a dictaphone the week before and that is what Raymond and Blunt heard when they assumed Ackroyd was talking to someone at 9:30. He then reveals Ralph Paton, who Dr. Sheppard had been hiding by pretending he was a patient in a local asylum. Once Poirot determined what Sheppard had done, he got Ralph out. Ralph admits that he fought with Ursula in the summerhouse, then walked around, frustrated. He does not have an alibi for the time of the murder. Poirot announces that it's simple: for Ralph to be exonerated, the real murderer must come forward. He claims to know the identity of the real murderer, and explains he will bring the truth to the police the next morning.

He discharges the group, but asks Dr. Sheppard to stay behind. In a stunning plot twist, Poirot reveals that it is Dr. Sheppard who is the murderer. Sheppard stabbed Ackroyd before leaving him that night, programmed the Dictaphone to go off at 9:30 and provide him with an alibi, then snuck around the side of the house, crawled into Ackroyd's study, locked it from the inside, and planted the footprints with Ralph's shoes in the mud. He hid Ralph so that the police would find him more suspicious. He murdered Ackroyd because it was he, Dr. Sheppard, who was Mrs. Ferrars' blackmailer, and he knew if Ackroyd found it out he would be ruined.

Faced with the knowledge that Poirot will go to the police in the morning, and hoping that Poirot can keep the truth from his sister Caroline, Dr. Sheppard goes home and prepares to kill himself with an overdose of Veronal. Again, Veronal! This is how Poirot solved the case.

Now take a note of the characters.

Dr. James Sheppard

The novel's narrator is a physician in the town of King's Abbott. He serves as a companion-chronicler to Hercule Poirot, the brilliant detective who will eventually crack the very complicated case. Although Sheppard appears to be a genial, straightforward character, his

complicity in the mystery will prove one of the great plot-twists of all time. Ultimately, Dr. Sheppard is revealed to be a shrewd, duplicitous, detached villain.

Caroline Sheppard

Dr. Sheppard's older spinster sister is a voracious gossip who uses a network of servants as informants to gather all sorts of information on anyone who piques her interest. She is not satisfied unless she knows about all the goings-on in the place, and usually interjects her opinions on things, especially when unprovoked. Agatha Christie later admitted that Caroline served as a model for her famous Miss Marple character, the spinster detective who pokes her nose in everyone else's business.

Hercule Poirot

Agatha Christie's famous character, Poirot appears in 33 novels and over 60 short stories. A retired Belgian detective, Poirot is small in stature but full of self-importance. He is a brilliant detective, relying on his own logic and critical thinking skills, rather than an obsession over physical facts and clues, in order to determine the truth of the crime. He treats everyone as a suspect, and takes no statement or allegation for granted. Instead, he painstakingly verifies all testimonies while privately forming his own hypotheses, only revealing the truth when he is sure of his suspicions.

Mrs. Ferrars

Although she never appears as a living character in the novel, Mrs. Ferrars, nonetheless, plays an important role in the plot. A nervous woman who, according to Caroline, couldn't stand her alcoholic husband, she poisoned him in order to escape from his abusiveness. However, the financial strain of being blackmailed for this crime, as well as the guilt over the crime itself, led her to kill herself, but not before asking her close companion Roger Ackroyd to avenge her against the blackmailer.

Roger Ackroyd

A genial widower, Ackroyd is the central figure in King's Abbott. A wealthy businessman, Ackroyd's influence as well as the intrigue surrounding his stepson, family, and himself, make him a constant subject of gossip and speculation. Sheppard describes Ackroyd as being a proper man, who believed heavily in society's rules for rightness as well as its class divisions. He is murdered at the beginning of the novel, providing the mystery that Poirot will so brilliantly solve.

Ralph Paton

Ackroyd's stepson, Paton is handsome and charming, but constantly getting into trouble with debts and financial obligations. His disappearance, as well as several major clues, including how well he stood to benefit from Ackroyd's death, make him the major suspect in the crime. He is described as having a "weak" character, which leads him to fall constantly into debt, and look for easy ways to discharge it, such as agreeing to marry Flora when he is already committed.

Mrs. Cecil Ackroyd

Mrs. Cecil Ackroyd was Ackroyd's sister-in-law. she and her daughter Flora came to live at Fernly Park after her husband, Ackroyd's brother died. Shallow and garrulous, Mrs. Ackroyd is prone to episodes of self-involved drama, and admits to falling into debt in an effort to sustain her upper class lifestyle. She complains of the difficulty of relying financially on her miserly brother-in-law.

Flora Ackroyd

Mrs. Ackroyd's daughter, Flora is young, fair, and beautiful. Like her mother, she is burdened by the strain of being financially dependent on her uncle, and longs for freedom from this frustrating reliance. Although she agrees to be engaged to her step-cousin Ralph Paton, she does so because she sees the opportunity for more independence and a new life, not out of love. She claims to have a weak character, particularly in matters related to money, just like Ralph, and she claims that an understanding of this mutual weakness brought them together.

Geoffrey Raymond

Ackroyd's young, charming secretary, Geoffrey Raymond is buoyant and debonair, maintaining a relaxed attitude throughout the investigation. Although Ackroyd's death upset him, he is nonetheless laid back and confident throughout the novel. He admits to being in a bit of debt, which the money he got from Ackroyd's will takes care of, but insists that he has an alibi for the time of the murder, and thus should not be considered a suspect.

Major Blunt

A big game hunter and old friend of Ackroyd, Blunt is taciturn and, when he does speak, speaks directly. Blunt's secret love for Flora Ackroyd seems out of character with his moderate, reserved personality, but his ultimate decision to express this love allows him to win her over in the end.

Miss Russell

Ackroyd's housekeeper, Miss Russell is efficient and with a proficiency that renders her intimidating to many of the characters she encounters, even those in a higher social class than she. Although she is reserved to the point of inaccessibility, she ultimately demonstrates emotion when confronted after her son, Charles Kent, faces suspicion for Ackroyd's murder. Miss Russell distanced herself from her son because she gave birth to him out of wedlock – although she provided for him financially, she refused to acknowledge him publicly for fear of what it would do to her reputation. Her respectability is of the utmost importance to her.

John Parker

Ackroyd's butler, Parker, is a professional and competent servant. Poirot suspects there is something corrupt about him, and eventually discovers that Parker blackmailed his former employer, and was snooping around for the means to blackmail Ackroyd, as well. Although Parker is greedy, Poirot nevertheless, considers him too cowardly to be Ackroyd's murderer.

Ursula Bourne

Born a "lady" but forced to make her own living when her parents could not provide for her, Ursula decided to become a parlor maid. Although it represented a kind of stepping down in class, it allowed her to support herself, and she knew she was a competent maid. After falling in love with Ralph Paton and secretly marrying him, Ursula was furious when he announced his engagement to Flora and is distraught when he disappears after his uncle's murder.

Charles Kent

Miss Ackroyd's disowned son, Kent shows signs of having been a strong, capable, smart man, but an addiction to alcohol and heroin has caused him to become a seedy, paranoid criminal. Although Miss Russell wants to believe he can recover from his addiction, he does not show any signs of being motivated to cure himself. He does not, however, reveal his mother's identity when questioned by the police, helping to preserve her reputation in town.

Inspector Raglan

The main inspector into Ackroyd's murder, Raglan immediately identifies Ralph as a potential suspect. Raglan's reticence to welcome Poirot onto the investigating team is softened only by Poirot's adept flattery. He is proud of his investigative method, although he lacks the critical thinking skills and brilliance that allow Poirot to analyze the many clues the crime provides.

Inspector Davis

The local police officer, Davis is the first one on the scene when Ackroyd is found murdered. He is self-important and blundering, and obsessed with physical clues that will ultimately not prove to be useful to solving the murder. His initial incompetence only serves to demonstrate the brilliance of Poirot.

Colonel Melrose

A local, Colonel Melrose is initially reluctant to believe in Ralph's guilt. He is fond of Ralph and unwilling to consider the possibility that Ralph could be the murderer. However, as the evidence against Ralph mounts, he hesitatingly begins to be convinced that Ralph is the killer.

Mr. Hammond

Roger Ackroyd and Mrs. Ferrars' lawyer, Mr. Hammond is a small, "dried up" man whom Dr. Sheppard describes as "having lawyer written all over him". However, he willingly provides Poirot with some key details about the terms of Ackroyd's will as well as the money Mrs. Ferrars was paying her blackmailer.

Elise Dale

The housemaid, Elise Dale is a simple, straightforward girl, and quickly dismissed by Poirot as a potential suspect.

Miss Gannett

A good friend of Caroline Sheppard, Miss Gannett is, like Caroline, a busybody and of gossiping nature, who adores speculating with Caroline about the crime.

Colonel Carter

A friend of Caroline and Dr. Sheppard, Colonel Carter is a somewhat pompous man who likes to exaggerate the details of his "exotic" and "impressive" past.

Mrs. Folliott

Ursula Bourne's sister, Mrs. Folliott, pretends to be her former employer in order to help Ursula get a job. A kind woman unused to lying, she becomes incredibly uncomfortable when Dr. Sheppard asks her about Ursula.

Now take note of certain issues.

The motif of secrecy

Halfway through Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Hercule Poirot—the Belgian detective who's been convinced to investigate the titular crime—tells the suspects, “Every one of you in this room is concealing something from me.” Poirot's claim is arguably the single most important sentence in the book, summing up Christie's belief that everyone—even nice, ordinary-seeming people—has a dark secret, and, furthermore, that everyone, under the right circumstances, is capable of committing a crime.

Poirot's intellect

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd doesn't just show that everybody has something to hide—it also suggests that, with a little intelligent detective work, people's secrets inevitably will be revealed. Through the character of Hercule Poirot, the Belgian detective who appears in many other Christie mysteries, *Roger Ackroyd* shows how an intelligent, rational person can use their “little grey cells” to solve even the most challenging of mysteries.

Law and Ethics

Over the course of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Agatha Christie draws an important distinction between the law—symbolized by Inspector Raglan, who is duty-bound to investigate Roger Ackroyd's murder and prosecute the killer in court—and ethics, symbolized by Hercule Poirot. From the beginning, Christie shows that Poirot marches to the beat of his own drum. He's motivated by a personal, philosophical interest in the case of his friend, Roger's murder.

Gossip in a small village/town

Like many mystery novels, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is set in a small, isolated community—the English village of King's Abbot—where everybody knows everybody else, and where the whole community knows when there's someone new in the surroundings. One of the most important features of small-town English life, as Christie depicts it, is the powerful force of gossip—the information, sometimes true, sometimes not, that gets passed from person to person in a small town.

Symbols

As with many mystery novels, there are relatively few symbols in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*; emphasis is, instead, placed on the literal, albeit initially unclear, significance of various pieces of evidence. One can refer to Mah Jong, the game and its accessories.

Many times in the book, Hercule Poirot claims that he solves his cases with the help of his “little grey cells.” Literally, Poirot is talking about his brainpower, the “grey matter” of the brain.

Clues of Murder

Details at the murder scene provide potential clues to what has happened:

- Mrs. Ferrars's letter is missing.
- There are footprints outside the window.
- The dagger is one from the small silver table.
- The window was open, but the door was locked from inside.
- Ackroyd's secretary said that he had heard Ackroyd talking to someone in his study at 9:30.

A time of death is approximated, according to the state of the body and this overheard conversation.

Poirot taking over the case

Former Belgian police detective, Hercule Poirot, now retired private detective, has moved into the village incognito to raise vegetable marrows, which are various types of squashes. But his peaceful retirement is about to be interrupted. Roger Ackroyd's niece, Flora Ackroyd, knows Poirot's true identity. The day after the murder she asks him to look into the situation. A new officer on the case, Inspector Raglan, believes the murderer is Ackroyd's stepson, to whom Flora is engaged (Ralph Paton), though the announcement has not yet been made. Flora believes in Ralph's innocence and wants Poirot to clear his name. Poirot agrees, warning her he will not stop until he gets the entire truth.

Poirot gets to work. He visits the crime scene and interviews Parker. He notices details the police have overlooked:

- The fire had burned very low, yet the window was open on a cool fall night.

- A chair had been moved away from its normal position, and then moved back by a person unknown.
- The phone call to Dr. Sheppard came from the train station, not Fernly. Poirot attaches great importance to the purpose of the phone call, but does not explain why.

Poirot also investigates the grounds, discovering a scrap of a white material and a small quill. He also discovers a woman's wedding ring with the inscription "From R., March 13th" thrown away in a goldfish pond. In the course of his perusal of the grounds, Poirot overhears Major Blunt and Flora talking. Blunt is in love with Flora, but her mind is on the large inheritance she's received from her uncle. Poirot reveals his presence and joins them, asking Blunt what he saw and heard the previous evening. Blunt says he also heard Ackroyd's voice coming from the study at 9:30 and saw a girl disappearing into the bushes outside the house.

The financial aspect of the case is developed. According to Ackroyd's will, the cook, the housekeeper Miss Russell, Geoffrey Raymond, Mrs. Ackroyd, and Flora get sums ranging from 50 pounds to 20,000 pounds. The bulk of the estate goes to Ralph, who has often been in need of money. In addition, it is discovered that 40 pounds have been stolen from Ackroyd's bedroom. Poirot admits Ralph seems a likely suspect but vows to keep investigating, for Flora's sake. One point in Ralph's favor is that Caroline saw him in the woods, talking to an unidentified girl. Caroline believes this girl may be able to give Ralph an alibi.

Poirot's role: Secrets Are revealed

Poirot assembles Mrs. Ackroyd, Flora, Major Blunt, Raymond, and Dr. Sheppard and tells them he knows each one is hiding something. Over the next days, these characters begin to reveal to Poirot information they have withheld. Dr. Sheppard tells Poirot about Ralph's rendezvous in the woods, while Mrs. Ackroyd admits she rifled through his papers to see if she was in Ackroyd's will. She also reveals she is the one who left the top of the silver table open. Raymond reveals he had been badly in debt and the inheritance had come just in time. Blunt admits privately to Poirot he is in love with Flora. Flora admits she took the 40 pounds from her uncle's bedroom and lied about seeing her uncle in his study the night of the murder. This revelation, of course, ruins the alibis of several suspects and frustrates the police inspector.

Poirot also sniffs out other secrets. The evening of the murder, Miss Russell met someone secretly—perhaps on the grounds of Fernly. The quill found in the summerhouse is a type used for taking heroin. Parker had blackmailed a previous employer and was intrigued when he heard the word *blackmail* through Ackroyd's study door, when Ackroyd was meeting with Dr. Sheppard. Also, Poirot ascertains Ralph's boots are black, not brown, a fact he indicates is important, but refuses to explain.

Meanwhile, police in Liverpool have detained a man named Charles Kent, identified as the mysterious stranger Dr. Sheppard met the night of the murder. Poirot shows the quill he found in the summerhouse to Kent, who admits he was at Fernly the night of the murder. But he protests his innocence, giving a nearby pub as an alibi. A barmaid confirms his presence there. Then Miss Russell admits Kent is her illegitimate son, whom she met in the summerhouse the night of the murder, accounting for his presence near Ackroyd's home.

Poirot pursues the truth

Poirot arranges for an announcement to appear in the newspaper claiming Ralph Paton was arrested in Liverpool, where he had been preparing to escape to America. In response to this announcement, Ursula Bourne, Ackroyd's parlour maid, comes to see Poirot. She is distraught about Ralph's arrest. She explains she had been secretly married to Ralph, who had not wanted to go public until he was financially stable. He'd been in debt, and when Ackroyd told Ralph he would pay his debts if he agreed to marry Flora, Ralph agreed. Upset about the situation, Ursula met Ralph in the summerhouse the evening of the murder and argued with him.

Poirot arranges a gathering at his home and invites Dr. Sheppard, Ursula Bourne, Flora, Mrs. Ackroyd, Blunt, and Raymond. He begins to tell the story of the murder from his own perspective, as a detective. He amazes the company by revealing that Ackroyd had purchased a Dictaphone and suggesting it accounts for Ackroyd's voice heard at 9:30. He reveals the secret marriage of Ursula Bourne and Ralph and produces Ralph to the shock of those gathered. Ralph explains that Dr. Sheppard urged him to hide in a mental hospital rather than come forward and admit his secret marriage and money troubles.

Having presented the assembled group with these revelations, Poirot tells them he knows the identity of the murderer and plans to send it to the police in the morning. As the guests leave,

Poirot gestures for Dr. Sheppard to stay behind. He explains a few more facts of the case to the doctor, including some facts and discrepancies that drew his attention from the beginning. Then he accuses Dr. Sheppard of being the murderer. He tells the doctor there is only one way out and sends him home. Dr. Sheppard commits suicide. But, such an end is really not satisfying since the readers are not prepared to accept Dr. Sheppard as murderer!

Dr. Sheppard completes his manuscript—his written account of the investigation—and adds a chapter at the end in which he confesses his guilt. He mulls over the possible options for suicide and decides on a sleeping drug.

The following topics may be prepared for long answers:

1. Consider *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* as a detective novel.
2. How does Poirot solve the case of Roger Ackroyd?
3. Write a note on the portrait of Dr Sheppard.
4. Give a pen-picture of Hercule Poirot as in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

For semi-long answers, the following may be prepared:

1. What were the clues of Roger Ackroyd's murder?
2. Comment on the ending of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.
3. Write a short note and comment on the portrait of Caroline.
4. Comment on the role of Veronal in the novel.