

The Adaptation of Clues in Agatha Christie's Poirot



David Suchet as Poirot and Hugh Fraser as Captain Hastings inspecting a Clue in the adaptation of *The Mysterious affair at Styles* (37:38)

Janet Render, 3960773

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First Supervisor: Prof. Dr. D.A. Pascoe

Second Supervisor: Dr. R.G.J.L. Supheert

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Introduction

The novels of Agatha Christie have puzzled and entertained generations of readers ever since the publication of her first detective novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920). Millions of readers all over the world have joined Hercule Poirot on his cases, using their *little grey cells* in a fashion similar to his in order to solve the crimes that came on his path. Several film and television adaptations of Christie's books have been made since, and several actors have been cast as Hercule Poirot. The most famous of whom is probably David Suchet, who starred in the ITV series *Agatha Christie's Poirot*. Starting in 1989, this series produced a total of 70 episodes and its final production, the adaptation of *Curtain*, was broadcast last November 2013 (IMDB).

Fans of the detective genre will agree that clues are a vital aspect of a good detective story, whether it takes the shape of a novel, series or film. Clues not only enable the detective to discover the identity of the culprit, but in most cases they also allow the viewer or reader to think along with the detective and decide on a suspect to solve the case.

This research paper will focus on the adaptation of clues from novel to screen. Concentrating on Christie's novels *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case* and the corresponding episodes from the ITV's series *Agatha Christie's Poirot*, this research paper will aim to explain what adaptation techniques are used when it comes to the adaptations of clues in detective fiction. These novels were selected because they are known for their intricate plots and unexpected outcomes and, because of this, clues were vital for the plots to be plausible. By looking at the main clues in the selected novels and the way in which they have been adapted to the screen, it will be possible to compare the clues to see what the differences and similarities are between the main clues in the novels and their adaptations in

the series. With this information an analysis can be made of the way in which the nature of the clue in Agatha Christie's Poirot novels changes when they are adapted to the screen.

Although there has been a considerable amount of research on the adaptation of classic English novels such as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Wuthering Heights* or *Dracula* to film, for example discussed in Bardwell's work *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel* or *The Literature/Film Reader: Issues of Adaptation* edited by J. M. Welsh and P. Lev, research on the adaptation of detective fiction has been surprisingly neglected. The critical framework for this paper will consequently be constructed from sources that can be divided into three different categories which will be brought together in order to create a foundation for a discussion. The first category consists of research that is written on detective fiction in general, with a focus on the vitality of clues and the nature of the clue. One of the most important works on this literary device is Moretti's chapter "Clues" in his work *Signs Taken for Wonders*, in which he describes both the function and the nature of the clue in the detective genre. He states that clues are not facts but rather rhetorical figures, and that they "are more often metonymies: associations by contiguity (related to the past), for which the detective must furnish the missing term. The clue is, therefore, that particular element of the story in which the link between signifier and signified is altered" (146).

The second category is formed by research that focusses on the writing of Agatha Christie and her use of clues within her novels. For example, Cathy Cook claims in *The Agatha Christie Miscellany* that "[clues and red herrings] were Agatha Christie's greatest plot device for misleading and confusing the reader. The key to solving the murder is to determine what is a real clue and what is a worthless clue or red herring" (36). Cook also states that "[t]he most obvious and consistent plot device is that [she] does not reveal the whole truth until the end of the book, keeping the reader hooked and absorbed until the end. Until that final piece of the jigsaw is in place, the whole picture isn't revealed" (38), which shows that

most of Christie's clues only can be recognized as such in hindsight, when the revelation has already been done. Even though this concealment of clues is typical for Christie's Poirot novels, it is also a defining feature for the Detective genre in general and one of the elements that construct the nature of the Clue. Therefore, the adaptation of this concealment from novel to screen will be part of the analysis of the novels.

The third category consists of important introductory works on the topic of adaptation. The choice to use specifically introductory works was made because this essay does not aim to elaborate on theories of adaptation techniques but instead focuses on their practical use. An example could be found in Linda Hutcheon's work, *A Theory of Adaptation*, when discussing the technique 'telling to showing'. She writes that "[w]hen we work [...] from the telling to the showing mode, especially from print to performance, a definitional problem potentially arises [...]; it is up to the director and actors to actualize the text and to interpret and then recreate it, thereby in a sense adapting it for the stage" (39). She then continues with the claim that "[i]n the move from telling to showing, a performance adaptation must dramatize: description, narration, and represented thoughts must be transcoded into speech, actions, sounds, and visual images. Conflicts and ideological differences between characters must be made visible and audible" (40). Narration is an important element in Christie's novels and the narrative is also where most of the clues can be found. It is therefore crucial that the adaptors find a way to visualize the clues that are hidden in the narrative, without giving them away.

The aim of this research paper is to discover what techniques are used to adapt the clues from the verbal world of the detective novel to the visual world of the screen. Clues are the key element in every detective story and provide the ability to solve the puzzle of the crime, both for the detective and the reader or viewer. Looking at the adaptation of clues is relevant because detective fiction is a popular genre that has not yet been explored in the field of adaptation studies, and in the last years a new interest in (re-)adapting several classic

detective novels, for example the popular BBC series *Sherlock*, or the ITV series *Endeavour*, can be noticed. By analysing how the nature of the clue changes when detective fiction is adapted to the screen, we could gain a better understanding of detective series and the techniques used in new adaptations of old detective classics.

The first chapter of this essay will be dedicated to inform the reader about the nature of the Clue, focussing on the work of Moretti. Chapter two and three will respectively be dedicated to *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*. Each chapter will discuss the main clues in the novel, how these clues were adapted in the ITV series, and finally compare the clues in the novel to the clues in the adaptations. The final chapter will summarise the findings of this research and offer a conclusion to the research question asked in the introductory chapter of the thesis. If necessary, suggestions may be made for further research.

Chapter 1: The Nature of the Clue

A clue, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is “[a] ball of thread, employed to guide any one in ‘threading’ his way into or out of a labyrinth or maze; hence, in many more or less figurative applications, a fact, circumstance of principle which, being taken hold of and followed up, leads through a maze, perplexity, difficulty, intricate investigation, etc.” (*OED online*). Fervent readers of detective fiction might be surprised to find that this is the definition of the word ‘clue’. The clue as a ball of thread reminds one of the story of the Greek hero Theseus, who after he killed the Minotaur in king Minos’ labyrinth, was only able to find his way back to the entrance again without getting lost by following the red thread that Ariadne had given him. This definition of a clue is not only applicable to the myth of Theseus, it also applies to classic detectives as Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. The exit of the labyrinth or the solution to the puzzle can only be found by taking hold of and following the clue, while taking a wrong turn or not picking it up at all could lead to getting lost.

The typical detective story generally consists of two key elements: a murder and an investigation. The murder itself is not visible in the novel, it always occurs offstage. Readers know that a murder has been committed because they are confronted with the result of this crime: a corpse. However, it is interesting to note that the product, the corpse, is of little or no interest to the reader. What he is interested in is the process, the events leading up to the murder, the way in which it was committed and most importantly the person who committed it. The detective novel is completely dedicated to the investigation of this process, in order to reconstruct the event of the murder. In his essay “The Typology of Detective Fiction”, Todorov argues that a whodunit essentially contains two stories: “the first – the story of the crime - tells ‘what really happened’, whereas the second – the story of the investigation – explains ‘how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it’” (537).

The two stories in detective fiction are closely linked to the two aspects of literary works isolated by the Russian Formalists. In his essay, Todorov discusses how they distinguished “the *fable* (story) from the *subject* (plot) of a narrative: the story is what has happened in life, the plot is the way the author presents it to us. [...] In the story, there is no inversion in time, actions follow their natural order; in the plot the author can present results before their causes, the end before the beginning” (537-538). According to Todorov, the two stories, or “fable” and “subject”, tend to be separated in a whodunit. He argues that “[t]he first story, that of the crime, ends before the second begins” (536). It must be noted, however, that in general the investigation in the novel starts after a murder has been committed, not every plot starts with a crime or a corpse. Some of Christie’s plots do, for example the Miss Marple novel *The Body in the Library* (1942) where the body of a young woman is found in the library in the first chapter of the book. However, generally there are several chapters that lead up to the murder, for example in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1921) and *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926). These chapters do not belong to the story of the murder, nor do they belong to the story of the investigation. Instead, they are a part of the subject and their purpose is mainly to introduce the reader to the characters and setting of the plot. There are also novels in which the two stories run parallel, which occurs for example in Christie’s *Death on the Nile* (1937) and *The ABC Murders* (1936). In both novels the first murder has not yet been solved when a second and third one occurs during the investigation of the first. Even though there might be an overlap in time between the story of the crime and the story of the investigation, the crime is committed offstage, out of the readers’ sight. This is why Todorov argues that the first story is “absent but real” (539), for the audience is presented with proof – the corpse as the product of the crime - that a murder has indeed been committed, but the two people who were present during the crime remain silent. The victim cannot speak because he has been murdered and the creator of the first story, the murderer, chooses to

remain silent because he does not want to give himself away. The story of the investigation then aims to reconstruct the story of the crime, the process leading up to the product. Even though these two stories together make the plot of the whodunit, according to Todorov they have nothing in common (539).

Moretti disagrees with this statement and claims that the story of the crime and the story of the investigation do have a common point: clues. He writes in his article “The Slaughterhouse of Literature”, that clues have “an incredible central position, where the past is suddenly in touch with the present; a hinge that joins the two halves together, turning the story into something more than the sum of its parts: a structure” (218). Clues connect the story of the investigation, “the present”, with the story of the crime, “the past”, in the same way that the red thread connected the entrance of the labyrinth with Theseus because, similar to the Greek hero, “detective fiction’s object is to *return to the beginning*” (Moretti in “Clues” 137). By retelling the first story during the second story, the plot can return to the beginning, the corpse, and the detective novel comes full circle; the investigation began with a murder, and ends with the solution of the mystery surrounding that murder. Because of this, Moretti argues that “[d]etective fiction’s ending is its end indeed: its solution in the true sense. The *fabula* [first story] narrated by the detective in his reconstruction of the facts brings us back to the beginning; that is, it abolishes narration” (Clues 148). The purpose of the narrative, the second story, is to reconstruct the first story, the story of the murder. When this goal is reached in the denouement at the end of the plot, the narrative becomes superfluous since the audience is now aware of the first story.

Not only the plot returns to its beginning as Moretti argues that readers of detective fiction also return to their starting point when the plot comes full circle: “One reads only with the purpose of remaining as one already is: innocent” (Clues 138). The question of innocence and guilt in readers of detective fiction is further examined by W. H. Auden in his article “The

Guilty Vicarage". He argues that people read detective fiction because everyone has certain desires to resist. Even if one succeeds in resisting them, having these desires causes a feeling of sin and guilt. Consequently, one searches for a way to redeem oneself and regain a feeling of innocence. Auden argues that Detective Fiction serves as a way of escaping this sense of guilt, and is appealing to the audience because "[t]he phantasy [. . .] which the detective story addict indulges in is the phantasy of being restored to [...] a state of innocence [...]. The driving force behind this daydream is the feeling of guilt, the cause of which is unknown to the dreamer" (411- 412). When the criminal is declared guilty at the end of the detective novel, all characters, including the reader, are consequently declared not guilty and thus return to the state they were in before everything was disrupted by the murder: innocence.

Not only do clues have the structural function of providing a link between past and present, subject and fable or crime and investigation, they also have a narrative function since they contain an encrypted reference to the identity of the murderer. The reason they can refer to the killer's identity is because, as Moretti argues, "[i]t is, in fact, something irreducibly personal that betrays the individual: traces, signs that only he could have left behind" (Clues 135). These personal traces are the clues for both the detective and the reader. Even though readers of detective fiction might describe clues as facts, Moretti argues against this. He claims that clues are *not* facts but rather

verbal procedures – more exactly, *rhetorical figures*. [...] As is to be expected, clues are more often metonymies: associations by contiguity (related to the past), for which the detective must furnish the missing term. The clue is, therefore, that particular element of the story in which the link between signifier and signified is altered. It is a signifier that always has several signifieds and thus produces *numerous* suspicions (Clues 145-146).

The production of numerous suspicions by one clue can easily lead the reader astray to a dead end. A clue in itself is thus not necessarily enough to provide information about the identity of the murderer. Take for example, the clue of a footprint found on the crime scene. In itself, it does not tell the who the murderer is. It can link to which shoe made the print, but the clue depends on who wore the shoe, which does not necessarily have to be the owner, since it could be anyone with access to the item. It is therefore the detective's job to discover which person can be linked to the clue, and whether this clue indicates who the murderer is, or is merely a red herring. In other words, it is by the *interpretation* of the clues that the story of the crime can be reconstructed. Bayard proposes that "the clue is less a sign already present than a sign *that is constituted after the fact in the movement of interpretation*, which, by proposing a definitive meaning, ranks the givens and builds a plausible textual structure backwards. In this way, the clue does not so much predate the interpretation as become its product" (69). It is thus by interpretation of the clue that the correct link between signifier and signified can be found and restored in order to rewrite the subject or the story of the crime. Interpretation is what leads the detective from the clue to the murderer, and it is this talent that separates him from other people. Everyone has access to the same clues, the same signifiers, but only the detective is smart enough to draw the right conclusions, find the correct signified and solve the puzzle.

Having outlined the nature and essence of the Clue, it should be noted that they appear in many shapes and forms in detective fiction, especially in Christie's work: footprints, a fragment of overheard dialogue, certain behaviour by one of the characters or even the way something is written in the narrative. Clues are everywhere and everyone is a possible suspect. Not only does Christie's work display the endless possibilities in variations of the embodiment of clues, but as Bayard states it also "clearly exposes the plural nature of the clue and its infinitely malleable character" (69).

Chapter 2: The Narrative as a Clue in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd was first published in 1926 and is well known for its unexpected outcome and ingenious plot. In the prologue of his work *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?* Pierre Bayard wrote: “[t]hough the novel instantly established Agatha Christie’s celebrity, its publication was not unanimously acclaimed. Several reviews at the time [...] suggested that [...] the novelist had violated the tacit pact between the author of a detective novel and her public – that she had, in fact, cheated” (vii). The novel received high praise and severe criticism that were both caused by the same factor: Christie’s use of an unreliable narrator who, as the final chapters of the novel reveal, turned out to be the murderer of Roger Ackroyd. This plot device, combined with the genre’s demand for fair play had an interesting result: the narrative did more than merely *describing* clues, it *contained* them and even became a clue in itself.

The novel is narrated by the character of Dr. James Sheppard, who fulfils several important roles in the novel that are interesting to examine more closely because of the expectations the audience tends to have of them. They offer an explanation to why most readers of the novel are shocked to discover that Sheppard is the murderer and why they were blinded to any clues pointing in his direction.

Firstly, Dr. Sheppard is the narrator of the plot and the only character in the novel whose thoughts the reader is directly able to follow. Bayard has argued that readers tend to be blinded with regards to the possible guilt of Sheppard because they forget that “the narrator is also a character, therefore a possible liar, and therefore a possible murderer” (53). He also argues that Sheppard’s position as the narrator of the story makes him “invisible to the reader while still in plain view” (34). W.H. Auden argues in “The Guilty Vicarage”, that “[t]he problem for the writer is to conceal [the murderer’s] demonic pride from the other characters

and from the reader, since, if a person has this pride, it tends to appear in everything he says and does” (409). In the case of Dr. Sheppard, his demonic pride is concealed by the absence of his personal thoughts and feelings in his narrative. When we compare Sheppard as a narrator to Hastings, who narrated several of Poirot’s cases, the difference is striking. As Bayard wrote:

[i]n the case of Hastings, all the narrator’s thoughts are revealed, but to no effect since Hastings is innocent and does not understand anything that is going on. [...] The case of Sheppard is different, since he can never express his real feelings, yet the form of the narration compels him to do so (35).

Eventually it is the absence of Sheppard’s personal thoughts in his narrative that convinces Poirot that he killed Ackroyd because of the contrast with the transparent Hastings.

Sheppard’s second role in the novel is that of the Watson-Character: an observant but naïve character who assists the detective with his investigation but is not clever enough to solve the crimes on his own. He closely follows the detective and faithfully records everything, and often he takes on the role of the narrator of the detective story. Similar to the detective, the Watson-Character is automatically cleared from suspicion and the reader tends to take his innocence for granted. It could be argued that a trustworthy and innocent Watson was one of the unwritten rules of the detective genre, until Christie broke it. Heta Pyrhönen argued in an essay on genre in narratives that “Sheppard manipulates our assumptions about a ‘Watson’, for readers assume that despite this figure’s limited mental capacities, his moral trustworthiness vouches for his reliability as a narrator as regards the facts of the case. Accordingly, Sheppard’s feigned frankness enlists confidence” (117). Bayard writes that the function of the Watson-Character is “likely to fool the reader” and that the protection of Sheppard’s identity as a murderer is even greater because “Sheppard is continually associated with Hastings” (31-32). The association of Sheppard with both Watson and Captain Hastings

is a subtle manipulation of the reader that is woven throughout the novel, for example when Sheppard himself remarks that he “played Watson to [Poirot’s] Sherlock” (Christie 124). Poirot adds to this idea by comparing Sheppard to his old friend and former companion Hastings, the Christie-equivalent of Watson who appeared in former Poirot novels. He remarks to Sheppard that he “must have indeed been sent from the good God to replace my friend Hastings [. . .] I observe that you do not quit my side” (Christie 81). These subtle remarks guide the reader to make false assumptions about Sheppard’s personality and liability. These subconscious assumptions and comparisons cause a shock when the reader discovers that this time Poirot’s assistant was in fact an antitype of the Watson-Character: the murderer.

Sheppard’s third role was assigned by his profession: similar to Watson, he was a doctor. This profession, specifically being a village doctor, comes with a lot of responsibilities and demands a certain amount of trust from the patients. Stephen Knight argues in “Done from Within – Agatha Christie’s World”, that Sheppard “is a doctor, the very man to be trusted with the individual’s bodily secrets and hope of increasingly secular society” (113). This disguise by function is another reason why the reader is blinded to the idea of Sheppard as the possible murderer of Roger Ackroyd. It is interesting to note that the reader can also use Sheppard’s profession as an explanation for the lack of his personality in the narrative, since a doctor would be used to writing reports in an analytical and impersonal style. Knight makes an interesting argument when he claims that “[e]ven in his deviant state, Shepherd retains aspects of a doctor’s proper morality. [. . .] The murderer keeps a record without lies: his last fidelity is to the truth of literature, that medium which the readers themselves trust in for comfort” (114). However, even though Sheppard may not distort any facts or tell lies, he does lie by omitting relevant facts and clues from his narrative. Other than that, his narrative is filled with double-edged discourse which, as Bayard argues, “is in the service of a larger

strategy that consists, of course, of telling nothing but the truth, though not the whole truth – far from it” (49).

The adaptation of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* for the ITV series was written by Clive Exton, who had worked as an adaptor for most of the episodes of the first six seasons. He is responsible for the adaptation of fourteen short stories and seven novels including *Hercule Poirot's Christmas*, *The ABC Murders* and *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. After the adaptation of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* he adapted *Murder in Mesopotamia*, which was the last adaptation he wrote for the series (IMDB). An important concept for Exton in his work was the family unit. In the 2007 documentary *Super Sleuths* about Poirot, he explains: “I do think, for a television series, you need a basic family unit, whether it's a family or not; people who interact with each other. Also, it is very useful, for a not very clever writer like me, to have somebody for Poirot to confide in” (5:55-6:17). The family unit Exton brought into the Poirot series consisted of Poirot, Hastings, Miss Lemon and inspector Japp, all of whom were present in almost every episode from the first season to the sixth. Exton's ideas about a family unit becomes clear in the adaptation of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* when he decides to add inspector Japp, who did not make an appearance in the novel. His choice for Japp is understandable because he could not have added Hastings, whose absence is a vital part of the plot, nor Miss Lemon because Poirot is retired in this story and does therefore not need a secretary. Given that this adaptation was the first episode of season eight to be broadcast after a hiatus of four years, from March 1996 to January 2000 (IMDB), Poirot's retirement in the adaptation provided an explanation for his temporal absence from the screen and is therefore more emphasized in the adaptation than it was in the novel.

Exton's adaptation of *the Murder of Roger Ackroyd* made two major changes with regards to the roles that Dr. Sheppard fulfils in the novel. Firstly, Sheppard's role as the direct narrator of the story has been omitted and, as a result, the narrative itself is no longer a clue.

At the beginning of the episode the audience is told that the story they are about to hear is a narrative written by a murderer. However, since it is Poirot who then reads the narrative to the audience, the author's identity remains unknown until the end of the episode. It is interesting to note, however, that despite this anonymity of the author, the narrative in the adaptation is more personal than Sheppard's manuscript in the novel. In this episode Poirot discovers Sheppard's writing after he has committed suicide, whereas in the novel Poirot reads the manuscript that Sheppard wrote during his investigation in order to look for information or clues he might have missed. When he has finished reading, he tells Sheppard that he has written a "very meticulous and accurate account" and that he has "recorded all the facts faithfully and exactly – though you have shown yourself becomingly reticent as to your own share in them. [...] I may say that it has helped me considerably" (Christie 198). As stated earlier, it is the *lack* of Sheppard's personal thoughts and feelings in his narrative that is a clue about his identity as the murderer.

The narrative in the adaptation appears to be the opposite of Sheppard's writing in the novel. For example, he describes Fernley Park as a "truly ostentatious house" (7:10) paid for with Ackroyd's "ill-gotten gains" (7:37). Mrs Cecil Ackroyd and her daughter Flora are described as "vultures eagerly awaiting [Ackroyd's] demise" (7:56), and in addition the murderer claims that the local police are a "constant source of harmless amusement" (27:47). By making these changes in the tone of the narrative, Exton created a contrast between the behaviour of the actual murderer and the tone of his writing, thus manipulating the audience into believing that Sheppard could not be the author. In the novel, the reader finds it difficult to believe that the doctor who narrated the story of the investigation could be the murderer, while in the episode the audience struggles to believe that the cruel and arrogant person who wrote the narrative and is known to be the murderer of Roger Ackroyd could be the same

person as the loyal and trusted Dr. Sheppard. Similar to the readers of the novel, the viewers of the episode are being manipulated into making assumptions about the murderer.

The adaptation achieves this manipulation in a manner opposed to that in the novel: readers of the novel know that they are reading a narrative that has been written by Dr. Sheppard but are unaware that he is the murderer of Roger Ackroyd whereas the audience watching the adaptation is aware that the narrative is the work of a murderer but they do not know who he or she is. The manipulation of the readers is not just caused by the tone of the narrative, it is also influenced by the assumptions made when one encounters a typical format: in this case a detective novel that is presented as a first person narrative from the perspective of the Watson-Character. However, the idea of creating novelty within a set format created difficulties for the adaptor. Since the typical format of detective series on television is a third person point of view rather than the first person narrative of Christie's novel, Exton was facing a dilemma: he could either use the format of the novel and leave in the unreliable narrator but, since the format would be different than usual, he would risk making the puzzle too easy to solve. His second option was to adapt the story to the third person perspective, which was common for detective series, and consequently lose the shock of the unreliable narrator that the novel was famous for. Exton chose the second option and wrote the plot in a different perspective which indeed resulted in the loss of the unreliable narrator.

Apart from being a clue in itself the narrative also contained several important clues some of which were ambiguous comments that were buried in the narrator's words. Two of the main examples are brought to the reader's attention by Sheppard himself when he writes the epilogue to his story. For example, when Sheppard leaves Ackroyd after their discussion about Mrs. Ferrars' letter and mentions that he "hesitated with my hand on the door handle, looking back and wondering if there was anything I had left undone" (Christie 39), omitting the fact that he had just stabbed Ackroyd in the neck and installed the dictaphone to provide

himself with an alibi. Sheppard withholds another piece of important information when Ackroyd's body has been discovered and Parker is sent away to phone the police. He tells the reader that he "did what little had to be don" (Christie 43). Readers can discard this as a professional comment, while Sheppard actually verbally conceals that he uses this time to hide the dictaphone in his bag, as can be seen in figure 1



Figure 1: dictaphone on the table (1:33:15)



Figure 2: removal of the dictaphone (1:33:19)

and 2, and to push back the chair that kept it out of sight. These clues are interesting because it is their *lack* of information that makes them valuable to the reader and it could even be argued that these two phrases are the most vital clues with regards to the identity of the



Figure 3: Ackroyd's departure (22:01)

murderer in the novel. Since the adaptation was not presented as a first person narrative however, these verbal clues have vanished together with the duplicitous discourse of Sheppard's words. Even though most of the literal

clues were not included in the adaptation, there is one specific clue that Exton cleverly adapted to the screen. In the novel, much attention is paid to the time of various events occurring on the evening of Ackroyd's death. For example, Sheppard mentions the exact time

he left Ackroyd's study, the time he left through the front gate and the time of the phone call. Later on the reader finds out about the whereabouts of the other inhabitants of Ackroyd's house between nine

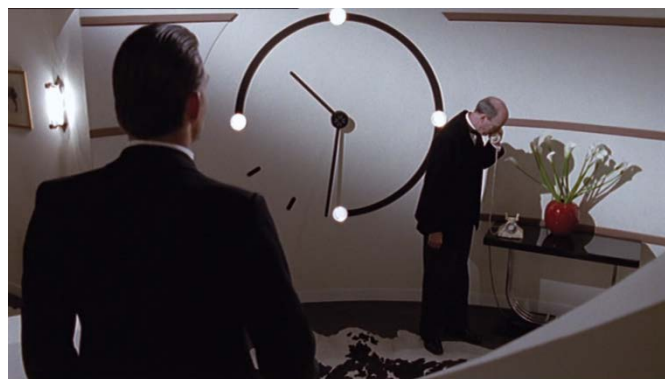


Figure 4: Parker phones the police (26:38)

p.m., the time of Sheppard's departure from Ackroyd's house, and ten-thirty p.m., the time when Ackroyd's body is found. In the episode, this emphasis on time is created in an interesting, visual way. An enormous clock has been placed in the middle of the hallway of Ackroyd's house and several characters are shown to walk past it on the evening of Ackroyd's murder, as shown in figure 3. The time is literally a matter in the background, see figure 4, but it will definitely be noticed by the attentive viewer since a clock that appears six times within a time frame of six minutes cannot be a coincidence, especially not in an adaptation of a Christie novel.

One of the most striking changes in the episode occurs in the pre-final and final scene, "Poirot's little reunion" (Christie 196) and the murderer's confession. Firstly, the reunion-scene does not take place in Poirot's cottage but in Ackroyd's office in the factory. Similar to the novel, Caroline is not allowed to be present at the meeting, but in the adaptation she insists on driving Sheppard to the factory and waits in the car. While Poirot reviews the facts of the case with the suspects present in the office, Caroline reaches in the glove compartment of the car for a bag of sweets and when she puts it back she notices a gun and a journal. The audience recognises this journal and its writing from the opening scene of the episode, indicating that either Caroline or Sheppard is the murderer of Roger Ackroyd. It seems however that Caroline finds both the journal and the gun by accident, which makes it unlikely for her to be the killer. At the same time it is unlikely that Sheppard, if he is indeed the

murderer, would leave a gun and the incriminating report of his deeds in a car with his incredibly nosy and inquisitive sister. This becomes more unlikely when one takes the sly, calculating and careful nature of the murderer into account. It could be said that Sheppard had already hidden his journal and the gun in the glove compartment because he did not foresee that Caroline would be driving him, but if this were the case it would have been more logical for Sheppard to insist on driving to the factory alone and forcing his sister to stay home. Apart from a little protest, it seems to the audience that Sheppard did not try to stop his sister from driving him. When Caroline notices that the others are leaving the factory, she puts the gun and the journal in her handbag and then enters the factory to go to the office where Poirot, Japp and Sheppard are still gathered. Because of the content of her purse, the audience might be inclined to believe her to be the murderer, which is interesting because this reminds one of Bayard's hypothesis that it was in fact Caroline Sheppard who killed Roger Ackroyd (128).

Secondly it is interesting to note that in the adaptation it is not Poirot who reconstructs the crime and rewrites the *subject*, but Dr. Sheppard. Even though he speaks about the murderer in the third person, as his story progresses it seems as if his mask comes off and his identity as the murderer is revealed. His expression and tone become more bitter and aggressive with a cynical tone that resembles the narrative the audience heard Poirot read and he is no longer the calm, neutral character he was during the episode. At the end of his reconstruction and confession of the blackmail and murder of both Ackroyd and Parker there is a moment of silence. Caroline, who in the meantime had entered the room and heard her brother's confession, opens her purse and tells him that she found his journal. She holds her purse open to him, thus giving him the opportunity to take the gun and make his way out. With this gesture, the adaptation shows the relationship between brother and sister as Bayard described it, how "Sheppard and his sister are entirely devoted to one another and will do

anything to protect each other” (133). Not, as he hypothesized, by Caroline killing Ackroyd, but by helping her brother escape.

Thirdly and perhaps most strikingly, the final scene of the episode is an ultimate display of the gratuitous violence that marked the adaptation. This excessive violence started to become clear when a second murder was committed, which did not occur in the novel:

Parker, the butler, gets run over by a car after a night in the pub.

It is interesting that Exton



Figure 5: the actual murder of Roger Ackroyd (1:28:47)

chose to add this murder,

especially when one considers

that the butler is one of the clichés of the detective genre. He has the perfect position to blackmail his employer because of his awareness of the family secrets and because of his profession he has access to every room in the house which gives him an easy opportunity to commit a murder. In the adaptation inspector Davis mentions early on that “It is either [Ralph Paton] or the butler” (37:07). However, in Exton’s adaptation the butler is not the cliché but he is instead one of the characters who are murdered in a dramatic way. Not only does the car hit Parker, it drives back over the body and then forward again, as if to flatten the cliché of the butler together with Parker’s body. In his confession Sheppard explained that he needed to kill Parker because he knew too much. Parker’s omniscient position became fatal.

Another gratuitously violent moment in the adaptation occurs during Sheppard’s confession, when the audience is shown flashbacks of Ackroyd’s murder. In the novel it is merely stated that Ackroyd was stabbed in the neck, but a detailed description of the murder is lacking. However, in the episode the audience is shown how Sheppard gets behind Ackroyd,

there is the sound of a knife being pulled and Sheppard's shadow holding the knife is shown on the wall next to Ackroyd. The music intensifies and the sound of the knife cutting through flesh can be heard while there is a close-up of the knife entering Ackroyd's neck, see figure 5, while he shouts and produces gurgling sounds. As Sheppard's confession continues, the audience is given another shot of Ackroyd, the knife in his neck, blood spilling on the floor,



Figure 6: Roger Ackroyd is dying (1:30:22)

his body shaking while he continues to make gurgling noises, an expression of pain and terror on his face as shown in figure 6. Even for a murder the violence seems shockingly out of place. It could be argued that this change in the

amount of violence was made to appeal to a modern audience, but it remains striking that an adaptation with such an eye for detail about the buildings and fashion of the Christie-era, combined with Suchet's detailed impersonation of Poirot changes one of the key characteristics of Christie's novels: clean murders and a general lack of gore and violence. This cleanness is, for example, illustrated in the novel by the description of Ackroyd's corpse: "[h]is head had fallen sideways, and clearly visible, just below the collar of his coat, was a shining piece of twisted metalwork" (43).

After the revelation of the identity of the murderer to the audience, Sheppard runs out of the office with the gun Caroline handed to him. What follows is a scene in the factory that bears more resemblance to a Western than a Whodunit. Japp and Poirot run after Sheppard through the factory. Blindly shooting at them he continues to miss, while Japp counts the bullets he is firing. Standing on top of a staircase with only one bullet left, Sheppard desperately looks around before he puts the gun against his head, in plain view of Japp, Poirot

and his sister Caroline. He pulls the trigger and falls down from the platform. The journal he held in his hand falls open on the ground next to his body and is picked up by Poirot.

Although it could be argued that a modern audience requires more action than Sheppard's low-profile suicide in the novel, Exton's choices in the adaptation of the final scene seem unnecessarily over the top and do not add anything to the plot with the possible exception that the gratification of the audience that the arrogant and cruel murderer has now died a gruesome, un-Christie-like, death.

Chapter 3: Absence of Clues in *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*

On November 13th 2013 the ITV series *Agatha Christie's Poirot* came, after a quarter of a century, to an end with the broadcasting of its final episode: an adaptation of *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*. David Suchet had played the famous Belgian detective since the first episode in 1989 came out and the series have successfully adapted every novel and short story that Christie wrote about Poirot. She wrote the final Poirot novel during the Second World War, together with the final Miss Marple novel and both manuscripts were locked away in a safe, intended to be published after her death. However, in 1975 Christie decided to publish *Curtain* after all, after her publishers asked her to release a new novel for the Christmas sales (Osborne 235).

The plot is set at the same country house where Hercule Poirot made his debut in Christie's novels: Styles Court. Poirot is now old and crippled with arthritis, he has to be pushed around in a wheelchair and suffers from heart palpitations. He asks Hastings, who is now a grizzled widower, in a letter to join him at Styles because he needs his help in solving one last case. Poirot tells him that he has finally come across the perfect murderer, one who works in ways so subtle that he cannot be linked to the crimes he commits. This murderer is amongst the guests at Styles but Poirot refuses to tell Hastings who he is and simply refers to him as "X". Even though Poirot is convinced that the murderer will make another victim during his stay at Styles, he does not know who this victim could be and therefore, since he himself is confined to a wheelchair, Hastings will have to be his eyes, ears and limbs and report everything he notices to Poirot. However, in *Curtain* "X" is not the only murderer. At the end of the novel the reader is presented with a revolutionary solution which is almost as shocking as the end of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*: Hercule Poirot, the detective, has himself become a murderer.

The clues that reveal the identity of X and prepare the reader for Poirot becoming a murderer mostly have a psychological and emotional nature, even more so than in Christie's other novels. This is mostly because of the method of the murderer, X, who will prove to be Poirot's biggest and final challenge. Even though he never holds a gun or handles a poison X is responsible for almost every murder or attempted murder that occurs in the novel. Poirot writes in the epilogue to Hastings that Norton is "the perfect criminal, [...] who had invented such a technique that *he could never be convicted of crime*" (Christie 169). He then continues to explain that Norton's actions were modelled after Iago, the villain in Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello*. "Iago is the perfect murderer. The deaths of Desdemona, of Cassio – indeed of Othello himself – are all Iago's crimes, planned by him, carried out by him. And *he* remains outside the circle, untouched by suspicion" (Christie 169). Indeed, at first sight the various deaths and attempted murders that the plot of *Curtain* contains appear to be committed by anyone but Norton who, like Iago, remains untouched by suspicion.

Because of Norton's subtle yet powerful manipulation that he uses to move others to commit a murder, there is nothing that links him to the various cases and there are no clues that pointed in his direction. Moretti writes that "[t]he perfect crime – the nightmare of detective fiction - is the featureless, deindividualized crime that anyone could have committed because at this point everyone is the same" (135), because the murderer does not stand out as an individual amongst the group. Norton fits this description, for he perfectly blends in with the crowd and is on friendly terms with every person staying at Styles. It is interesting to note, however, that although Moretti argues that the perfect crime is the nightmare of detective fiction, Poirot writes about Norton in the epilogue as if he is a dream come true. He states for example that "I saw that I had come across at last, at the end of my career, the perfect criminal, [...]. It was amazing" (Christie 169). He even goes to the extent of saying that Norton's method is "the perfection of the art of murder" (Christie 169). However, because he

is the perfect criminal he leaves no clues. Norton does not leave clues for Poirot, but Agatha Christie does leave clues for the readers of *Curtain*, mainly through Norton's manipulation of the two characters Christie's audience knows so well: Poirot and Hastings.

Even though Captain Hastings does not appear in every Poirot-novel or short story, Christie's readers would be familiar enough with his character and habits to be able to notice when something is wrong. In the epilogue of the novel Poirot explains Norton's method of manipulation to Hastings, and he describes how "X knew the exact word, the exact phrase, the intonation even to suggest and to bring cumulative pressure on a weak spot! [...] It was done without the victim ever suspecting. [...] *You* should know, Hastings – for it happened to you..." (Christie 170). Indeed, the main clue for the reader about the identity of X was the way in which Hastings was manipulated into murdering Allerton, a womanizer who was flirting with his daughter Judith. Because readers would be familiar with the character of Hastings and his typical Watson-like traits of reliability and honesty, they would notice changes in Hastings' behaviour on the night he attempted to murder Allerton, even if they did not pick up on the seriousness of his intentions. Poirot put it well when he said: "whatever I might not know about other people did not apply to you. *You* are not a murderer, Hastings! [...] You, my good, my honest, my oh so honourable Hastings – so kindly, so conscientious – so innocent!" (Christie 179). Even though the reader might have been familiar with the idea of an unreliable narrator ever since *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, he would know that it is not in Hastings' nature to commit such a crime. Even Hastings himself displays surprise about his plans the next day: "I saw now, clearly and sanely, how overwrought and wrong-headed I had been. Melodramatic, lost to all sense of proportion. I had actually made up my mind to kill another human being. [...] I must have been mad last night!" (Christie 112). This temporal fit of "madness" should have informed the reader about the method of the murderer, and directed him towards the man who kept mentioning Allerton and his flirtations to Hastings: Norton.

The screenplay for *Curtain* was written by Kevin Elyot, who has adapted three Poirot novels for the series: *Five Little Pigs*, *Death on the Nile* and *Curtain*. He has also written six adaptations for the ITV series *Agatha Christie's Miss Marple* and in 2005 he wrote a stage play for Christie's novel *And Then There Were None* (Coveney). His obituary in *The Guardian* mentions that although his stage play had mixed results, his adaptations for the television series were loved by the audience (Coveney). According to his obituary, Elyot's "real subject was the longing for love and remembrance of loves lost" (Coveney), a theme that fits in with that of the three Poirot novels that Elyot adapted for the Poirot TV-series. The adaptation of *Curtain* in particular displays the remembrance of loves lost, especially for the character Hastings who mourns the death of his late wife as well as Poirot's death in the final chapters. However, the novel is not merely about the loss of loved ones, it also has a remarkable air of melancholy, the remembrance of ghosts of the past and Hastings' longing for 'the good old days', elements which Elyot included in his screenplay. Similar to the other episodes of *Agatha Christie's Poirot*, this adaptation has been filmed in a third person perspective instead of a Hastings' first person perspective. However, despite this change the audience still



Figure 9: Hastings' expression (41:24)

gains insight in Hastings' thoughts and feelings as they are shown rather than described. As Linda Hutcheon wrote in *A Theory of Adaptation*: "[w]hen we work [...] from the telling to the showing mode, especially from print to performance, a definitional problem potentially arises [...]; it is up to the director and actors to actualize the text and to interpret and then recreate it, thereby in a sense adapting it for the stage" (39). She then continues with the claim

that “[i]n the move from telling to showing, a performance adaptation must dramatize: description, narration, and represented thoughts must be transcoded into speech, actions, sounds, and visual images. Conflicts and ideological differences between characters must be made visible and audible” (40). In the novel the reader knows Hastings’ thoughts and plans to murder Allerton because they are written out, whereas in the episode one can only strongly suspect his bad intentions because both his strange behaviour and cold, distant look (see figure 9) bring this sensation across to them. The gravity and importance of the scene is emphasized by visual and audial effects. The lighting creates an image which bears resemblance to a black-and-white movie, especially with the lightning occasionally flashing through the windows. While the music rises in a crescendo, creating a tense atmosphere. During his Hastings’ brief visit to Poirot on this night the music becomes mellow and peaceful again, only to swell once he has left him and takes his position in his chair again. As the music intensifies even more and reaches its climax, the screen fades to black and the next shot is an anti-climactic view of Hastings (see figure 10), waking up in the same chair, both drinks still untouched. The sun shining through the windows combined with the song of birds in the background illustrates the averted disaster and shows the audience that Hastings’ attempt has failed.

Not only is there a dark atmosphere surrounding Hastings on the night of his attempted murder, the general feeling of both the novel and its adaptation is dark and gloomy. The plot is set at the same location as Poirot’s first case: Styles Court, a mansion in the fictitious town Styles St. Mary, Essex. Similar to the plot of a



Figure 10: Hastings wakes up (41:48)

detective novel going back to its beginning, Poirot and Hastings return to the place where their adventures first started in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. The element of returning to the place where it all began, combined with the grave realisation that this will be Poirot's final case due to his health, brings a tone of melancholy and sentiment to the novel. Charles Osborne wrote in *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*, that

Curtain is a sad, muted and nostalgic book. Sad, in that Poirot dies, and apparently without having brought the murderer to justice; muted, in that the inhabitants of Styles [...] are, with one or two exceptions, people who are old or disappointed or embittered; nostalgic, in that Hastings is continually aware of the wheel having come full circle, of Poirot and himself ending their long and productive collaboration in the house in which they had begun it (236).

However, even though the setting is the same, time has left its mark and Styles Court is no longer wealthy and welcoming, but rather former glory, a memory of the past. Even though the new owners have modernized it and transformed it into a guest home, it is still haunted by that first murder that was



Figure 7: Styles Court in *Mysterious Affair at Styles* (06:23)

committed in the house all those years ago. Hastings mentions for example that “[Styles] was never a happy house. It isn’t now. Everyone here is unhappy” (Christie 71). Later in the novel, when reflecting on his intentions to murder Allerton he writes that “[a]fterwards, thinking it over, I am inclined to put something down to the atmosphere of Styles itself. Evil imaginings came easily to the mind there. There was, too, not only the past, but a sinister present. The shadow of murder and a murderer haunted the house” (Christie 100).

The dark, nostalgic atmosphere of the book is also brought into the adaptation. The setting is autumnal – the novel was set in the spring - which contributes to a general sense of coldness both outside and inside the house. It is interesting that in the adaptation of *Curtain* a different house was used to portray Styles Court than in the adaptation of *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, see figure 7 and 8. Regardless of the reason for this change, the second Styles is bigger, consequently making the guests look smaller. Because of the large rooms it is difficult to light the whole house, and most scenes inside are dark, in poorly lit rooms. The gloomy lighting in the evening and during the night literally and figuratively casts a shadow on Styles and its ghosts from the past. Not only are the emotions of the novel conveyed through visuals and use of lighting, the soundtrack for the episode, Chopin's 'Raindrop Prelude' (Op. 28 No.15) brings an eerie, melancholic feeling to the adaptation, especially when it is played during Poirot's death scene.



Figure 8: Styles Court in *Curtain* (01:18)

With the plot of *Curtain* Agatha Christie broke another unwritten rule of the whodunit genre when she let her famous detective become a murderer himself. However, it could also be argued that the novel in fact adheres to the rules of the genre because the detective is the one character in the novel who is least likely to and least suspected to have committed the murder. Bayard elaborates on this and claims that Poirot, “[a]s the mythic figure of the investigator, [...] is the most unlikely suspect among all the characters, since he is proscribed from killing by his function” (115). Even though his profession makes him the least likely suspect, his personality does not. In fact, the detective is the character in the whodunit who bears most resemblance to the murderer because of a character trait they share: they are both

individuals who stand out from the group. According to Moretti, however, their difference is that

[t]he detective abandons the individualistic ethic voluntarily, but still retains the memory of it. For this reason he can “understand” the criminal (and, when necessary enact criminal deeds): potentially, he too was a criminal. In the figures of detective and criminal, a single renunciation, a sole sacrifice, is enacted, in different ways (142).

In *Curtain*, Christie shows us Poirot’s individuality and capability of being a murderer. By becoming a criminal himself however, he must sacrifice his principles, his morals and his religious beliefs.

The plot is cleverly constructed in such a way that Poirot had no choice but to commit the murder. Since the law stood powerless against the actual murderer, Norton, because he left no clues, the only way for Poirot to stop him would be to either wait for him to make a

mistake or to kill him in order to prevent him from making more victims. Thus Poirot was faced with a horrible dilemma: either save his beloved friend Hastings, his daughter Judith and other innocent people by killing Norton and consequently betraying his beliefs and morals, or risking these lives and remaining true to the law and his religion. In the epilogue of the novel Poirot wrote to Hastings that

Perhaps it is because I have been too self-righteous, too conscious of rectitude that this terrible dilemma had to come to me. For you see, Hastings, there are two sides to it. It is my work in life to save the innocent – to *prevent* murder – and this – this is the only way I can do it! Make no mistake, X could not be touched by the law. He was safe. By no ingenuity that I could think of could he be defeated any other way (Christie 170-171).

Thus the only way for Poirot to follow his calling of preventing murder was to paradoxically betray this same calling by killing the murderer. That was the sacrifice Poirot had to make and the price he had to pay for his individuality.

Similar to Norton, Poirot does not leave any physical evidence when committing a murder. There is only one clue that could link Poirot to the murder of Norton: the fact that he was shot in the exact centre of his forehead, because of Poirot's obsession with order and symmetry. Unlike Norton, however, he deliberately leaves clues for Hastings to indicate his plans. In the epilogue, Poirot explains that he intended to kill Norton at Styles from the beginning, and that he had tried to provide Hastings with clues in order to prepare him for that revelation, mostly through ambiguous comments. Apart from these deliberate clues, however, he also provided Hastings and the reader with clues that he might not have been aware of: through his behaviour.

Because Poirot is a character with a distinct personality, the audience would notice it when something was different than normal. It could be argued that one of Poirot's well-known character traits is his strong self-control, which appears to be gone in *Curtain*. This becomes most apparent during the several occasions where he loses his temper with Hastings. The cause of their arguments is Hastings slow understanding of the clues Poirot provides him with, as well as his reluctance and selective reports when it comes to providing Poirot with all the information, no matter how insignificant it may seem, that he needs to stop the murderer. It is not new that Poirot mocks Hastings' naivety or his lack of perception, but in *Curtain* these comments are more intense and border on insults and verbal abuse, for example right after a discussion on looking through keyholes when Poirot coldly dismisses Hastings with biting sarcasm:

Go away. You are obstinate and extremely stupid and I wish that there were someone else, whom I could trust, but I suppose I shall have to put up with you and your absurd

ideas of fair play. Since you cannot use your grey cells as you do not possess them, at any rate us your eyes, your ears and your nose if need be in as far as the dictates of honour allow (Christie 63).

This severe change in Poirot's behaviour towards Hastings combined with his remarks that X must be stopped at all cost is an indication for the reader of the lengths Poirot is willing to go in order to prevent X from committing more crimes.

Apart from losing his temper, the audience of the adaptation is shown how Poirot is struggling to make a decision with regards to his dilemma. Consequentially, he comes across as tired, restless and even in doubt of himself, an emotional instability that could also be interpreted by the reader as insanity. This suggestion is emphasized in scenes where the audience sees Poirot all by himself, rocking back and forth in his wheelchair while he mumbles about revenge, stopping a demon regardless of the cost and asking for forgiveness whilst holding a rosary (see figure 11). Apart from creating an illusion of insanity, these scenes make Poirot's internal

struggle visible to the audience, providing them with another clue of what is to happen: Poirot the detective will become a

murderer. The climax of his inner conflict is shown to the



Figure 11: Poirot's struggle (43:43)

audience when Poirot is aiming the gun at Norton's forehead. At that point, he wakes up and smiles right back at him with a sense of triumph (see figure 12) when Poirot pulls the trigger and becomes a criminal by shooting the perfect murderer. It seems to be Norton's way of saying that, even though he pulls the trigger, Poirot did not win in his final case

because he had to become a criminal in order to serve Justice.



Figure 12 Norton's death (85:35)

Conclusion

Clues are one of the key elements in detective fiction, and thus a crucial part in the adaptation of detective novels. By looking into the adaptation of clues in the works of Agatha Christie, this paper aimed to contribute to a better understanding of modern adaptations of classic detective novels. Focussing on Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case* and comparing them to their adaptation in the ITV-series *Agatha Christie's Poirot*, this paper aimed to answer the question how the nature of the clue in Agatha Christie's Poirot novels changes when they are adapted from novel to screen.

The clue is a literary device that serves as a connection between the past and the present, the story of the murder and the story of the investigation, the murderer and the victim. They contain encrypted references to the identity of the murderer but are always ambiguous, since one clue can cast many suspicions and lead to various dead ends. It is the detective's task to correctly *interpret* the clues in order to unravel the mystery of the identity of the murderer. The detective story ends when the story of the murder has been reconstructed: a return to the beginning of the plot, restoring both society and people's innocence to the state they were in before the murder disrupted everything. Finally, although all clues have the same function in the plot, one should keep in mind that they have an infinitely malleable character and can take various shapes and forms.

In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* Christie surprised her readers with an unreliable narrator: Dr. Sheppard. Aside from being the narrator, he also was the Watson-Character and the murderer, a shocking outcome to many readers. To conceal his identity as the murderer, his narrative was very factual and impersonal, a great contrast with Hastings' transparent and personal writing. The narrative contained the main clues in this novel, mainly in Sheppard's style of writing, a discrepancy in time and various narrative gaps created by ambiguous

writing. These written, narrative-related clues proved a challenge for the adaptation, because the typical format for detective series is a third-person perspective rather than the first-person perspective that is more common in classic detective novels. By changing the perspective, most of the narrative-related clues were lost and the shock of the unreliable narrator was cut as well. However, the audience was still shocked because of the gratuitous violence in the adaptation: a second murder was added to the plot, there were violent flashbacks to the actual murder and the suicide at the end of the episode was considerably dramatized. Even though these changes can mostly be explained from a commercial point of view, they do not fit within Christie's typical style.

Christie's final Poirot novel *Curtain* shocked her readers again. This time, the detective became a murderer himself when he shot Norton, the other murderer in the novel. Norton was, according to Poirot, the perfect criminal because he left no evidence that linked him to his crimes. He manipulated people into committing a murder they would not have committed had he not been around. Even though the murderer did not leave clues for the detective, the main clue for the audience was the manipulation of a character they knew: Captain Hastings. Because Norton could not be linked to the murders he inspired, he was untouchable by law and thus Poirot's only option to stop him was to kill him in order to protect other possible victims, including Hastings. Poirot, always on the side of justice and strongly opposed to murder was now faced with this dilemma. His behaviour betrayed his struggles mainly through his verbally aggressive fights with Hastings and his doubtful, almost insecure manners, which prepared the reader for the solution. The psychological clues from the novel are transferred to the screen with the use of cinematic techniques of lighting and sound as well as the facial expressions of the actors. Together, they give the viewer the strong sense that something is wrong, which can lead him to unravel the method and identity of both murderers in Poirot's last case.

When comparing Agatha Christie's Poirot novels with their adaptations in the ITV-series *Agatha Christie's Poirot* there are notable changes. Although their ambiguous nature and their function as a link between past and present does not change, it is clear that some clues appear to be more adaptable than others. Clues that are buried in or are strongly related to the narrative, as seen in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, are very difficult to transfer to the screen, whereas psychological and behavioral clues, as seen in *Curtain*, are very adaptable because emotion can easily be converted through lighting, facial expressions and music, whereas the novel can only use words.

Most striking however is a factor that was initially not taken into account: the audience of the adaptation. Both adaptations displayed more violence than the novels, the adaptation of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* in particular, and a dramatization of the plot, which consequentially influenced the clues. A possible explanation for this could be the differences between the tastes and experiences of a modern audience and that of Christie's audience, a generation that was shocked by war.

Taken together, the findings based on these two novels seem to suggest that not all clues are equally adaptable and that therefore some clues have to be altered or cut when the screenplay for the adaptation is written. Although clues are a vital element of detective fiction, the audience always has to be taken into account since changes in the plot to appeal to the audience influence the clues that form the basic structure of the plot. Since this study was limited to two novels, it would be recommended to look at other Poirot-novels and their adaptations to draw more definite conclusions. It would also be recommended to look at the influence of differences in audience on modern adaptations of classic detective novels.

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