

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Research

Of all the elements that make up a story, plot holds the greatest significance. The plot contains events that are connected to characters, conflict, and story development. In *How to Analyze Fiction*, William Kenney emphasizes that plot goes beyond simply arranging events chronologically, it reveals their causal connections as well. According to the book, plot reveals events in terms of both their time sequence and their relationships of cause and effect (Kenney, 1966, p. 14). This view is echoed by Klarer, who describes plot as the coherent interaction of multiple thematic strands in a text, leading to a meaningful change in the circumstances established at the narrative's outset. Klarer describes plot as a logical connection between various thematic aspects of the text that causes a shift from the initial condition established at the outset of the story (Klarer, 1999, p. 15). A plot is not a random event but rather a series of events connected by logical cause and effect, forming an organized narrative. With the plot, readers can understand the writer's message in a story. An interesting plot will certainly invite readers to continue reading the story. For this reason, authors are required to build the plot in such a way as to attract readers' interest.

Surprise, also known as a plot twist, is a crucial part of a plot. It makes a story unpredictable and more engaging and less boring. Readers will be intrigued by what happens in a plot after discovering the surprise. *Filmmaker's Dictionary* defines a plot twist as a moment when events change suddenly and new information is added. This provides a different

perspective than before. For example, a criminal and a detective are siblings separated from each other since childhood (Singleton & Conrad, 2000).

In a detective story, the author is required to create an interesting plot by inserting surprises for the readers. Detective story writers also present clear and plausible cause and effect, accompanied by plot tension that makes readers want to keep reading. Readers are increasingly curious about the various kinds of mysteries presented by the author. One of the famous female mystery writers, Agatha Christie, has created a variety of popular mystery novels, including *Nemesis* (1971), *Towards Zero* (1944), *And Then There Were None* (1939), *The A.B.C. Murders* (1936), *Death on the Nile* (1937), *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), and many more. However, the writer will focus on discussing Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*.

Written by Agatha Christie in 1934, *Murder on the Orient Express* is widely regarded as one of her most successful and beloved mystery novels. The plot revolves around a murder mystery unfolding on the Orient Express train. Hercule Poirot, the famous Belgian detective in Agatha Christie's universe, is drawn into the investigation. He agrees to take on the case at the urging of his friend M. Bouc, who serves as the director of the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits and someone who had once served alongside Poirot in the Belgian police. While investigating, Poirot learns that this murder case has a connection to the kidnapping of a little girl a few years ago. After the evidence is obtained, Poirot discovers a surprising fact about the suspect in the case. This case ends with an unexpected plot and an unusual resolution for a detective story in general. Because of its status as one of Agatha Christie's most iconic works, *Murder on the Orient Express* has been adapted for the screen on multiple occasions. The first adaptation became an award winner in 1974 and won a total of nine awards as well as sixteen additional nominations in 1975. In 2001, the movie was remade for TV, and in 2004, it was

broadcasted on BBC Radio 4. Not only in movies, but the novel even managed to get a PC game adaptation in 2006. In 2007 and 2010, the novel got another TV movie adaptation, but it emphasized the religious and moral themes of the story. The last adaptation was in 2017, with the launch of the 20th Century Fox feature film directed by Kenneth Branagh, who also played Hercule Poirot and featured several famous actors.

The writer's interest in a plot is the reason the writer chose to discuss it in this study. Plot is a structure in a story that can influence the reader's impression of a story. The writer chose *Murder on the Orient Express* because the writer quite enjoys the detective mystery genre, including the works of Agatha Christie. The writer wants to observe how a famous detective novel writer, Agatha Christie, builds a surprise in her novel that makes her fans really enjoy her novel.

## 1.2 Identification of the Problem

*Murder on the Orient Express* is one of Agatha Christie's novels in the detective mystery genre. This novel has an interesting plot because it has surprises in it. Although it is classified under the category of mystery, the plot of the novel is fairly easy to comprehend due to the systematic presentation of the story by Christie in terms of exposition, conflict, complication, climax, and conclusion. All clues and incidents unfold systematically by virtue of the investigation conducted by Poirot so that the readers can easily discern the unfolding of the mystery. Agatha Christie builds the plot in such a way that the novel is not boring. Christie brings real-life conflicts that become the mode of murder so that readers can relate to the story. Additionally, for a resolution in a detective novel, the ending of *Murder on the Orient Express* stands out as highly unusual within the conventions of detective fiction. This study explores how Christie constructs and creates a compelling surprise in *Murder on the Orient Express*. The study

also seeks to examine how Agatha Christie crafted the element of surprise in the novel.

### 1.3 Review of Related Literature

In this research, the primary literary work under examination is Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*. Several studies focus specifically on Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, but the others employ sociological, feminist, or psychological approaches, emphasizing external thematic concerns rather than internal plot construction. The first one is an article written by Ganti Sri Venkata Sai Prerna entitled "An Analysis of the Nail-Biting Thriller' *Murder on the Orient Express*." She researched the social, legal, and cultural aspects of the novel. This aspect is described as an unusual way of describing the jury system. This article also explains the weakness of the law because the guilty person is not given the appropriate punishment for the crime she or he committed, and it also questions the morality of murder. In her research too, she shows how Agatha breaks down cultural and language barriers and combines them perfectly with a little humor (Prerna, 2021). On the other hand, the writer's study does not deal with moral or social implications but instead focuses on the internal structure of the plot and how it creates surprise through formalism.

Next is research written by Tira Aprilivia entitled "Women As Perpetrators Of Crime In *Murder On The Orient Express And Out*." The research she conducted focused on women's involvement in crime. She uses a literary sociology approach to examine the social conditions in the two novels and is supported by Showalter's gynocriticism to reveal the views of Christie and Kirino as female writers in depicting women involved in crime. She also uses general tension theory from Robert Agnew and Lisa Broidy to examine the causes of women committing crimes. The results he got showed that women committed crimes in groups and carried out manipulative actions. Apart from that, losing someone, hatred, revenge, violence, and economic factors are the

causes of women committing crimes (Aprillivia, 2019). Her research emphasizes social motivation and gender representation. Unlike hers, the present study excludes sociological aspects and concentrates solely on the narrative technique used to generate surprise within the story's structure through a formalist approach.

The last study reviewed is Nur Muhammad Saiful Rijal Romadhoni's thesis "*Trauma in Agatha Christie's Murder on the Orient Express*." This work examines the trauma portrayed in Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, seeking to determine the symptoms of trauma affecting the characters and their origins. Employing a psychological approach based on trauma theory, the research concludes that the characters display three main symptoms (avoidance, re-experiencing, and arousal) and attributes the trauma to two sources, the abduction of Daisy Armstrong and corruption in the courtroom (Romadhoni, 2021). While Romadhoni focuses on psychological causes and effects, this research focuses on how Agatha Christie's manipulation of plot structure evokes surprise and maintains narrative tension.

There are several studies that discuss the same topic as this study, which is surprise or plot twist. One relevant prior research is Muna Wahida Dzulhija's undergraduate thesis entitled "Reader Response Analysis on the Plot Twist of Flannery O'Connor's Good Country People." This study investigates how male and female readers respond to the plot twist in Flannery O'Connor's short story "Good Country People." In her research, Dzulhija uses the literary criticism and reader response approach from Wolfgang Iser as her theory. The results of the study indicate that variations in readers' responses were shaped by their personal comprehension during the reading process, their background and prior knowledge, as well as their individual habits and life experiences. Female participants described the plot twist as surprising and noted that it enhanced the overall appeal and interest of the story. While male readers had the opposite

response. They found the plot twist interesting but were not surprised by the ending and even did not realize the plot twist in the story. (Dzulhija, 2019). This study emphasizes reader perception and interpretation, placing its focus on external responses rather than on how the text structurally produces surprise. Unlike Dzulhija's study, which focuses on readers' reactions, this study does not analyze external responses but rather examines how the text itself structurally produces surprise, using a formalist approach.

The next research is entitled "Analysis of Plot Patterns In Building Surprise In The Film *Initiation Love*" by Anggita Sandra Lutfimia. In the research, Lutfimia aims to examine the plot patterns applied in the film "Initiation Love" and the surprises built into the film's plot. The research method used was descriptive qualitative analysis through documentation and observation. According to the analysis, the plot in the film follows a nonlinear pattern due to its non-chronological and disordered presentation of events. This allows the characters in the film to have more information than the audience, creating an element of surprise (Lutfimia, 2021). While both studies analyze the construction of surprise, this research differs by examining a written literary work, not a film, and by applying Kenney's theory of plot within the framework of formalism rather than narrative structure in cinema.

This study uses a formalist approach and the following are several studies that use the same approach. One relevant publication is the journal article "Analysis Of Formalism In The Poem *Aku* By Chairil Anwar" authored by Khoirunnisa and colleagues. The work examines the characteristics of formalism in Chairil Anwar's poem "*Aku*," specifically focusing on aspects such as meter, rhythm, rhyme patterns, and the application of figurative language. Utilizing a qualitative approach, textual analysis, and formalism theory, the research enhances understanding of Chairil Anwar's contributions to modern Indonesian poetry and introduces new

insights into approaches to poetry in Indonesian literary studies (Khoirunnusa et al., 2023). This study uses formalism to analyze intrinsic textual elements but is limited to poetry and does not engage with narrative plot or surprise. While this study employs the same theoretical foundation, the writer's research differs in its object and focus, as it applies formalism not to poetry but to the narrative structure and element of surprise in a detective novel.

Next is Muklis Devi Ana Pratiwi's thesis entitled "Formalism Analysis In *Cecilia Ahern's Novel Where The Rainbows End*." This investigation seeks to analyze the various plot types and structures depicted in Cecelia Ahern's novel *Where Rainbows End*. By applying a formalism framework, the research determines the ways in which plot elements are cohesively combined and interrelated. It analyzes plot structure using the five stages of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. While this research applies Formalism to a novel, it focuses on identifying plot types and overall structure rather than examining how surprise functions as a narrative strategy within the plot. Although both studies use the formalist approach and focus on plot, the present research goes further by exploring how the element of surprise functions within the plot's development. This research contributes to the writer's study because it uses formalism as an approach and the novel as the object.

Based on the review above, previous studies have examined surprise through reader response and narrative approaches, applied Formalism to poetry or general plot structures, and analyzed *Murder on the Orient Express* from sociological and psychological perspectives. However, none of these studies apply a Formalist approach specifically to analyze the mechanism of surprise within the plot structure of a detective novel. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by applying Kenney's theory of plot within a Formalist framework to examine how Agatha Christie structurally constructs surprise in *Murder on the Orient Express*.

#### 1.4 Research Question

This research will answer the questions:

1. What are the surprises in the novel *Murder on the Orient Express*?
2. How does Agatha Christie create those surprise elements through the plot structure of the novel?

#### 1.5 The Scope of Research

In this study, the writer focuses on one of the intrinsic elements of the novel, namely the plot, without discussing other aspects such as characters, setting, or theme. The analysis concentrates specifically on how the element of surprise is constructed and functions within the plot of *Murder on the Orient Express* by Agatha Christie. The writer chooses this focus because Christie is widely known for her mastery in unexpected twists and storylines. To support the analysis, this study applies Kenney's theory of plot and surprise. By using Kenney's explanation, the writer aims to identify how Agatha Christie organizes the events and delivers surprise.

#### 1.6 The Objective of Research

1. To find the surprises in the novel *Murder on the Orient Express*.
2. To analyze how Agatha Christie creates those surprise elements through the plot structure of the novel