

Death of an Expert Witness Study Guide

Death of an Expert Witness by P. D. James

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Plot Summary

Death of an Expert Witness by P. D. James takes place in Chevisham, England, sometime in the late twentieth century. Dr. Edwin Lorrimer (the "expert witness") is murdered in his workspace at Hoggatt's Lab, a forensic crime lab. Further on in the book, a middle-aged woman, Stella Mawson, is also murdered by the same man, Dr. Kerrison. Commander Adam Dalgliesh, a Scotland Yard Detective, using the few clues available, must eliminate numerous persons with the motive to kill Lorrimer to finally bag his man.

Scotland Yard is called in on the murder because of the conflict of interest. Because Dr. Lorrimer is not well-liked and is even hated by some, the list of those Lorrimer has insulted or alienated is quite long, although several, such as Kerrison, Bradley, Mawson, and Howarth particularly hate Lorrimer. One must add to the fact that many of the potential suspects are either police officers or forensic scientists, and the difficulty of solving the crime is greatly increased as these types of professionals know everything about criminal investigations and thus would leave very few clues or evidence. It takes painstaking work to gather the paucity of clues and fit them together to pin the murders on Dr. Kerrison, a seemingly gentle, kind man who would be incapable of murder. Kerrison, though, is as ferocious as a mother bear protecting her cubs when he feels his children are threatened by Dr. Lorrimer's intent to inform Kerrison's ex-wife of Kerrison's affair with Domenica Schofield.

There are several very minor subplots that run through the main story—one is that of Angela Foley and Stella Mawson needing the money to purchase the cottage in which they live. Another subplot is the relationship between Inspector Doyle and his wife, who wants him to quit police work and move to the city and work in her father's business. A third sub-plot is the life and relationships of Domenica Schofield.



Book 1, A Call to Murder, Chapter 1-5

Book 1, A Call to Murder, Chapter 1-5 Summary

Dr. Kerrison is being summoned to a murder scene. A young woman has been strangled in a clunch field. Dr. Kerrison is the forensic pathologist and his biggest concern is not waking up his daughter Nell as he prepares to go to the murder scene. Doc Kerrison believes he has achieved nothing in his life, which is full of uncertainty and anxiety. Kerrison is in the middle of a divorce and fighting for custody of his two children. As Kerrison is driving towards the scene, he thinks about the senior biologist Lorrimer, who rarely misses a homicide.

Eleanor Kerrison, nicknamed Nell, sits on the top step to await her father's return. Nell believes her dad does not love her and only tolerates her because it means being able to keep custody of William. Nell takes a small wax figure that represents Dr. Lorrimer and heats it over a candle to destroy it, cursing Lorrimer and all of Hoggart's lab, much in the way one would use the rites of voodoo.

Maxim Howarth, the newly-appointed Director of the Forensic Science Laboratory, is at the scene at the clunch field, which surprises Dr. Kerrison, who discusses the particulars of the case and the probable cause of death with the detectives and crime lab personnel. Howarth wishes he had not said he would be here and at the postmortem in the morning. Howarth is surprised to see Dr. Lorrimer cross himself and feels unsettled about Lorrimer. Howarth's sister Domenica had been involved in a sexual relationship with Lorrimer. Howarth has never resented any of Domenic's previous lovers but feels upset about this one. Howarth wonders if Dr. Lorrimer has written Domenica any love letters.

The men at the murder scene discuss what the murderer might be doing at this moment. As they wrap up the crime scene investigation, Howarth thinks to himself how much he hates Dr. Lorrimer, who always messes up everything, and that neither Howarth's death or Lorrimer's will end the jealousy and rage Howarth feels.

Susan Bradley wakes up to breast-feed their new baby. Her husband, Cliff, enters the nursery, and they talk as she breast-feeds. Cliff is deeply intimidated by Dr. Lorrimer, Cliff's supervisor at the forensic lab. He is afraid of losing his job and thinks to possibly resign before that happens. Susan convinces him to stay with the job and thinks to herself that maybe Mr. Middlemass would put in a good word for Cliff.

Brenda Pridmore, the new Clerical Officer/Receptionist at Hoggatt's Laboratory, is having breakfast with her parents and talking enthusiastically about her new job and the things Dr. Lorrimer is teaching her. Lorrimer has been encouraging her to consider a career in biology. Neither one of her parents is happy about Brenda's new job, but Brenda herself is quite enthralled. Brenda's mother says that at least Brenda is not going to London where she would be subject to all sorts of danger.



Book 1, A Call to Murder, Chapter 1-5 Analysis

Probably one of the most important literary techniques in a detective novel is foreshadowing; however, much of the foreshadowing is only obvious by the end of the book. P.D. James gives plenty of clues as to the outcome of the main plot, so the reader should not be totally in the dark by the end of the book. It is difficult to know how effective the clues are when looking back from the end and knowing the outcome. Many detective novels are written in first person, so the reader is only privy to the information that the detective who is narrating the story has. Because the novel is narrated in third person, the reader actually has more information than the detectives, and as such may figure out who the murderer is before the detectives do. And yet in this novel, James misleads the reader so often that the reader is likely to be left in the dark to the same degree that the detectives are. Of course, part of the joy of a good murder mystery is the readers pitting their skills to follow the correct trail versus the author's ability to deceive the reader (and characters) until the climatic moment of revelation as to who is the murderer.

Some of the more important pieces of foreshadowing in Chapter 1 are in order of occurrence: (1) Dr. Kerrison's feelings of being a failure both in his personal and professional life (2) Dr. Kerrison's tendency to have a set routine and habits (3) Dr. Kerrison's concern about returning home before his daughter wakes.

Chapter two is devoted to Dr. Kerrison's daughter, Eleanor, nicknamed Nell, and is from her point of view. Nell is sixteen, and is at the very least tightly-strung and possibly even emotionally disturbed, as evidenced by the voodoo-type doll, which Eleanor uses to curse Dr. Lorrimer. It is briefly mentioned that part of the cursing has to do with Dr. Lorrimer's treatment of Nell and her brother when they visit the lab earlier that day to await their father. The entire scene between Eleanor and Dr. Lorrimer is not revealed until later in the book. Eleanor's resentment about the lab is also tied in to the fact that her mother deserts the family both because she is having an affair with a biologist at the lab and because she is unhappy with the demands of Dr. Kerrison's job. Though Eleanor has emotional problems, she is still quite astute and perceptive, noticing that her father loves her brother William more than Eleanor. Her thoughts about death and murder are somewhat sophisticated for a young teen.

The murder in chapter three that Dr. Kerrison is reviewing has only a minor part in the entire story. The main purposes of discussing this murder are to offer insight about how a murder investigation takes place, to introduce several main characters, and to reveal the dynamics between some of them. One of the main themes of the story is also mentioned in this chapter: "There was no privacy for the dead" (p. 24).

Inspector Doyle, who is in charge of the investigation, is overjoyed at the opportunity to finally be in charge of a murder investigation. The relationship between Howarth and Lorrimer is revealed through the thoughts of Howarth and can be basically summed up as Howarth despising Dr. Lorrimer, not only because of Lorrimer's abrasive personality but also because Lorrimer is having an affair with Howarth's sister. The affair arouses



much jealousy on the part of Howarth, though Howarth realizes the jealousy is absurd. Later in the story, when the readers learn more about the history of Howarth and his half-sister Domenica, the jealousy becomes more understandable. One of the ways the author misleads the read in this chapter is when she inserts a vitriolic series of thoughts about Lorrimer by Howarth, the sum of which is that Howarth would love to see Lorrimer's dead body.

Chapter four introduces one of the possible Lorrimer murder suspects, Cliff Bradley, whose supervisor is Dr. Lorrimer. Lorrimer, a perfectionist and technically-perfect investigator, believes Bradley is incompetent and holds a position in the lab that is beyond Bradley's technical abilities. Lorrimer gives Bradley a poor evaluation, which begins a cycle of mistakes made by Bradley, which seems to be spiraling Bradley to an eventual dismissal. The more Lorrimer berates Bradley, the more nervous Bradley becomes, which in turn, causes him to make more mistakes. The Bradley's are somewhat in debt and desperately need the money Cliff's job brings, especially with a new baby in the home. Taken altogether, these facts give Bradley a clear motive for murdering Lorrimer.

There are two subtle foreshadowing details that are not evident until the reader finishes the novel: one is the mention of Susan Bradley's mother's expected arrival for dinner that evening, and the other is Susan Bradley deciding to call Mr. Middlemass at the lab and requesting his intervention in Cliff's relationship with Lorrimer.

Chapter five introduces a young woman, Brenda Pridmore, who is new in a job as clerk/receptionist at Hoggart's Lab. Pridmore serves as a foil both to the depredation and horror of the murders and to the sordid lives of a number of the characters. With her young, innocent personality and upbringing in a stable, loving home, she is the opposite of several other main characters. Brenda's fascination for the process of crime investigation, particularly that of murder, may lead the reader to believe that eventually, Pridmore, too, will become as inured to the gruesome task of finding a murderer as are the rest of the lab personnel and police. However, Brenda's intense response both times that she views a murder victim's corpse suggests that she may be able to remain innocent despite her job at a forensics lab.



Book 1: A Call to Murder, Chapter 6-10

Book 1: A Call to Murder, Chapter 6-10 Summary

Stella Mawson (who Angela calls "Star") and Angela Foley live together in Chevisham. Stella is a writer and is considerably older than Angela, who Stella had hired several years earlier to help Stella type. The women want to buy their home but have not been able to gather enough funds. Angela's cousin, Dr. Lorrimer, could afford to lend Angela the money, but she knows he won't. She recently asks him to lend her 500 pounds, which is far less than they need for the cottage, but he refuses her request. The money in Dr. Lorrimer's bank account is an inheritance from his and Angela's grandmother. Dr. Lorrimer intends to will the money to Angela. The two women talk about ways of coming up with the money. Stella mentions that if her heart gives out, Angela would have the money from Stella's life insurance policy. The two discuss Dr. Lorrimer again and how he can't have spent any of the thirty-thousand pounds he inherited from his grandmother. Angela muses on the possibility of Lorrimer dying in time for them to buy the cottage, to which Stella replies that "life isn't as convenient as that," and Angela says "Death isn't" (p 52).

Brenda Pridmore is at her job at Hoggatts Lab and working with her supervisor, Inspector Blakelock. She logs in evidence bags. Brenda discusses many of the details of the new murder case and is somewhat disturbed. Blakelock tells her that she needs to learn to be more detached. Brenda thinks back about Dr. Lorrimer teaching about forensic biology. He gets her interested in biology and what can be learned under a microscope.

Brenda often asks Blakelock questions as she works. Brenda thinks about the fact that the scientist, who was a prosecution witness in the trial for Blakelock's child's death, fell apart on the witness stand and essentially lost the case, wherein the defendant was not convicted.

At the closure of a meeting of the senior scientists at the lab, Director Howarth watches as Angela Foley, his personal secretary, cleans up the conference room. Howarth is relieved he made it through the autopsy without embarrassing himself. He is amazed at how emotionally immune Dr. Kerrison seems to the entire process. Howarth has a conference with Dr. Lorrimer concerning Cliff Bradley's work evaluation, which Howarth intends to dispute. Howarth suggests to Lorrimer that he practice being a better supervisor. Lorrimer replies with a spiteful remark. The two men's verbal sparring is interrupted when Domenica bursts into the office. Lorrimer leaves abruptly and the two siblings discuss Lorrimer briefly.

Paul Middlemass is supervisor of the Document Examination Room. Middlemass feels quite confident and is generally a content man, both with his job and in his personal life. Middlemass receives a phone call from Susan Bradley, wife of lab biologist Cliff Bradley. Susan works for Middlemass for a couple years. Susan asks Middlemass to intervene



on Cliff's behalf with Dr. Lorrimer. Middlemass agrees and when he sees Lorrimer tells him to lay off Cliff Bradley. Lorrimer is incensed that Middlemass interferes. Middlemass says that Lorrimer's supervisory techniques helped push his wife's cousin into depression and suicide. The two men exchange insults and Middlemass bloodies Lorrimer's nose with a punch. Middlemass gets Lorrimer's blood on Middlemass' lab coat. The cleaning woman, Mrs. Bidwell, witnesses the last part of the exchange.

Detective-Inspector Doyle drives up to his home, musing about the house and money he had put into it, certain it would be a good investment. He also thinks of his wife, who perhaps isn't a good investment, and he wonders if perhaps she would tire of the isolation in the country and leave him for the city. Doyle, and his wife, Maureen, begin arguing as soon as he enters the home. She wants to go to village concert, but he replies that he must work. She brings up the job offer by her dad in the city, to which Doyle responds with an emphatic no.

Book 1: A Call to Murder, Chapter 6-10 Analysis

Up to chapter six, the author has introduced three characters who would like to see Lorrimer dead: Maxim Howarth, Cliff Bradley (and possibly his wife, Susan), and Nell Kerrison. Now the reader is introduced to two more possible murder suspects, Angela Foley and Stella Mawson. At this point, though Dr. Lorrimer is alive and well, it is fairly likely that most readers have already predicted that his death will be the murder upon which most of the book is based. That, of course, is not the "mystery," nor is it in most murder mystery stories; the mystery is a matter of who the murderer is. The reader probably at this point dismisses most of these characters as too obvious to be the criminal; otherwise, where is the twist that gives the revelation/climax its punch? Yet, as the novel unfolds, a number of false trails and innuendos continue to implicate most of these characters as a suspect after the not-so-loved Dr. Lorrimer is killed.

It is not explicitly stated anywhere in the story as to what is the relationship between Stella and Angela. That they share a home and desire to purchase the home together suggests that they are possibly more than friends. As the reader sees more of the two's interaction, it seems quite likely they are lovers, or at the very least, intensely involved emotionally, whether it is an actual sexual relationship or not. The main relevance to the story is for two reasons: Angela's grandmother disinherits her because she is living with another woman and has not married, and it is revealed very late in the book that Stella was married to Lorrimer a number of years ago. Angela does not know of Stella's marriage.

The author gives the reader a fairly strong clue as to when Lorrimer's murder will take place when the two women mention that they have five days to reply to their landlord's solicitor and Stella says, "Anything can happen in five days" (p. 52).

One rather sad, but ironic, foreshadowing is found in a statement by Stella when she speaks of her weak heart and the life insurance money which would go to Angela if she dies. Stella is later murdered, though it's made to look like a suicide by the same



character who murders Dr. Lorrimer. The investigator tries to gain Angela's cooperation by telling her that Stella's life insurance does not cover suicide and unless they can prove Stella's death is murder, Angela will receive no money. Angela insists she does not care about the insurance money.

In chapter seven, the reader sees another reason for Brenda Pridmore's presence in the story: her inexperience as a novice at her job at the crime lab gives the author an opportunity to educate the reader about some aspects of forensic crime investigation through Brenda's education at her new job. Some of the questions she asks other lab workers are probably ones a reader would want to know also in order to understand the unfolding of the story.

Brenda's memory about Blakelock's deceased daughter foreshadows a situation further in the novel. Dr. Kerrison's son, William, is hit by a car driven by Domenica Schofield, which sets off a series of confrontations that result in the revelation of the identity of Dr. Lorrimer's killer.

P.D. James, like any skilled mystery writer, wastes very little on superfluous detail. Although there is considerable detail, most of that detail contains tiny clues or inferences which, when added together, give all the information necessary for a very astute reader to solve the crime, perhaps sooner than the "hero" of our story, Scotland Yard Commander Dalgliesh. However, for the average reader, the clues are only comprehensible upon reviewing them after the revelation of the murderer's identification and the motives for the crime. An example of such a clue is on page 59 when Howarth thinks back to the autopsy Dr. Kerrison performs in such a perfunctory manner and recalls Dr. Kerrison's conducting of the procedure: "...pity would be as irrelevant as disgust." Howarth is both fascinated and horrified that Dr. Kerrison seems so detached from the visceral effects of a murder—both at the crime scene and later during the autopsy. When Dalgliesh figures out that Kerrison is the murderer of both Dr. Lorrimer and Stella Mawson, there are many such subtle hints as the one quoted above that a reader could remember and think, ah, yes, death and murder is such a mundane occurrence for Dr. Kerrison in his position as forensic pathologist that the line between investigating a murder and perpetuating a murder might be easy to cross.

Even the simple statement Howarth makes to his sister on page 63 can have several underlying meanings: "I don't want him in my lab." "Him," refers to Dr. Lorrimer, and on the surface, this statement seems to merely be about the recent heated exchange between Lorrimer and Howarth before Domenica interrupts. Yet, once Lorrimer is murdered at the beginning of Book 2, that simple statement assumes layers of possibility. One such possibility is a clue pointing to Howarth as the possible murderer. Another possibility is the author's intention to mislead the reader.

P.D. James gives the reader yet another suspect to add to the list for consideration: Paul Middlemass. Of course, the fact that he and Lorrimer argue and even come to blows would rule him out by most readers because Middlemass would be too obvious as the suspect. But still, this is part of the "agreement" between the author and reader: The author will try to fool the reader, who will try to out-think the author. This



understood, yet unstated, pact between reader and author can cause the reader to get caught up in a cycle of interpretation that leads back to the place the reader started: nowhere. The only way the truly talented mystery writer could make such an obvious leap between the scene between Lorrimer and Middlemass and the murderer turning out to be Middlemass is some ingenious twist of facts that would put such a spin on the entire story that the reader would not feel cheated. Otherwise, when the most obvious suspect turns out to actually be the killer, the reader is liable to throw the completed book across the room and swear off any further books by the same author. Fortunately, P. D. James is one of those talented mystery writers and as such, the reader can feel secure in knowing that all will be clear and logical, and not easily solvable, by the end of the book.

Two clues that come up later during the investigation are Middlemass's lab coat, which is splattered with Dr. Lorrimer's blood, and the statement by Mrs. Bidwell that she will not be putting out any clean lab coats until the next day. The coat becomes conspicuous in its absence during the investigation. The reader should pay attention to the description of the coat, which is not standard issue, but were passed on to Middlemass by his father, who was a dentist. Mrs. Bidwell's routine is closely questioned later by Commander Dalgliesh when he is trying to establish the time of the murder.

Most of the argument between Doyle and his wife foreshadows several future scenes, one in which Doyle picks up a woman for a one-night sexual tryst and Doyle's resignation as a detective with a subsequent move back to the city and a despised job working for his wife's father in a furniture store.



Book 2: Death in a White Coat, Chapters 1-5

Book 2: Death in a White Coat, Chapters 1-5 Summary

Brenda Pridmore and Inspector Blakelock arrive at Hoggatt's Lab an hour before any other personnel. Brenda asks questions of Blakelock about procedures and policy. Brenda is surprised Mrs. Bidwell, the cleaning woman, has not yet arrived. A phone call interrupts their routine; it is Dr. Lorrimer's father, who states that his son did not come home the previous night. Brenda and Blakelock discuss the security of the lab and Blakelock says that Lorrimer could still be up in his lab office, though all the doors had been properly locked. Brenda volunteers to go check Lorrimer's office.

Brenda arrives back down to the reception area, unable to speak. Blakelock runs upstairs as Brenda collapses in a chair, unable to function for the moment. Within minutes, many of the staff are congregated in the lobby. Blakelock comes downstairs, and Howarth questions him. Blakelock replies that Lorrimer is upstairs, murdered. Howarth orders Blakelock to keep everyone confined to the lobby while he runs upstairs to check for himself.

In a London hospital, Adam Dalgliesh, a Scotland Yard Commander, is speaking with his boss, who is confined to the hospital after surgery. Dalgliesh is preparing to fly to Chevisham and begin the investigation of Lorrimer's murder. Dalgliesh is the main investigator for each of James' books. Dalgliesh and his supervisor, Freeborn, have a long discussion, all the topics at least peripherally related to the crime Dalgliesh is to investigate. Freeborn gives Dalgliesh a quick run-down of the history of the lab. Freeborn also tells Dalgliesh what Freeborn knows of Dr. Lorrimer, the most important fact being that Lorrimer applied for the Director of the Lab position in competition with Howarth. Dalgliesh says the staff at Hoggatt's is sequestered, and each is writing an accounting of their last twenty-four hours. Dalgliesh takes his leave of his supervisor and goes and boards the helicopter.

In Hoggatt's Library, the staff members write down their recent activities. They are then handed to various police officers who then leave to verify the statements. Junior staff members are dismissed as soon as their alibis are established; however, senior staff and all those who were first on the scene that morning are retained, awaiting the arrival of Dalgliesh and his partner. Most of those in the library seem fairly unaffected by the recent murder. One exception is Cliff Bradley, who seems both nervous and indignant that others are chatting and laughing. Bradley asks Middlemass if he believes Bradley is the murderer. Middlemass does not say, but does admit that Susan Bradley called him the day before. Middlemass lies about the content of the phone call. Bradley and Middlemass both admit to each other that their alibis do not cover the entire time of when the murder was possibly carried out.



Commander Dalgliesh and his current partner, Detective-Inspector Massingham, are on board a helicopter enroute to Chevisham to assume command of the investigation of Lorrimer's murder. As they are flying, Dalgliesh covertly studies Massingham's face and thinks about the young man's background and what brought him, the son of a peer of the realm, into police work. Dalgliesh has worked with Massingham one other time and has thought highly of the man's competence.

As the two men land, they are greeted by Superintendent Mercer of the local C.I.D., Director Howarth, and Dr. Kerrison. Dalgliesh makes a brief appraisal of the latter two men, having met Mercer on several other occasions at police conferences. Massingham is happy to be in the country air and excited to be taking on the work of finding a murderer.

Howarth escorts Dalgliesh and Massingham into the lab, while explaining pertinent information. Dalgliesh examines Dr. Lorrimer's body while questioning Dr. Kerrison as to the particulars of cause and time of death. Dalgliesh verifies with Kerrison that it is likely Lorrimer is struck with the now blood-covered mallet sitting on the table. The mallet is lying there as a piece of evidence in another case. Howarth and Dalgliesh talk over the known particulars of the case: Brenda Pridmore found the body; the cleaning lady did not come in as usual that morning; the mallet had no prints on it except the ones of the owner; and, that Lorrimer's notebook is lying open on the table. Mercer confirms arrangements for police guards and the packaging of evidence to go the Scotland Yard, then takes his leave of Dalgliesh, knowing his part is now over in the investigation.

Book 2: Death in a White Coat, Chapters 1-5 Analysis

The reader probably has no doubt when Dr. Lorrimer's father rings the lab, that Brenda will find the murdered body of Lorrimer upstairs in the biology lab. The author has set up the possibility of such an occurrence too clearly. For the murder victim to be any other than Lorrimer would be a violation of trust between reader and author and the reader would rebel that the author does not follow the "rules of the game." Too many people in book one have expressed antipathy to Lorrimer to allow any other than he to be a cold corpse upstairs.

Notice how the author begins the day discussing the mundane routine of the reception office; this routine, so staid and uninteresting, provides a sharp contrast to the discovery of a bloody, dead corpse upstairs. The routine is so matter of fact, that it initially lessens the dramatic impact of the murder. Another way the murder is less of an emotional impact to most is because of the unpleasant personality of Dr. Lorrimer. Interestingly, one of the few who held Lorrimer in high regard, Brenda, is the one to find him. None of the employees openly rejoice at Lorrimer's death; after all, having an unpleasant personality is not cause for capital punishment, but most of the employees are not sad to their core at the situation—other than the mere fact that murder, a despicable crime, has been committed, and right here in a lab dedicated to helping bring to justice those who commit such a crime. The irony of this last fact is not lost on the reader and most likely on most of the characters.



Two important occurrences that the reader should note are the rather lengthy discussion Brenda and Blakelock have about the locks and security system of the lab. The reader may at first wonder why so much print is devoted to such an uninteresting subject, but later the question of locks and keys become crucial to naming suspects and to understanding just how all the locks are secure when Blakelock arrives but how no one besides the dead corpse seems to be in the building. A second fact to note is that Howarth goes up to the lab where Lorrimer's body lies, telling everyone else to remain in the lobby. An astute reader would notice that fact and wonder why he did not ask for at least one other person to accompany him, so as to allay any suspicion as to why he went upstairs alone.

Chapter two contains a wealth of background information about several of the primary characters in this drama, particularly Howarth and Lorrimer. Howarth is hired as Director principally for his managerial skills, as he has no firsthand experience in forensic crime, his field of interest being physics, at which he is quite good. Freeborn affirms what the reader already knows about Lorrimer: he is "[o]bsessional, edgy, and uncomfortable to be with" (p. 93). This confirmation from an objective observer makes the reader even more unsympathetic to Lorrimer as a murder victim. In fact, it may even foreshadow a sympathetic leaning towards the perpetrator. Most of the possible suspects to whom the reader has already been introduced are more likeable and perhaps have somewhat reasonable justifications to hate Lorrimer. Yet, is murder ever justified, no matter how compelling the reason? Most readers might say "yes" to this question when considering the murder of Lorrimer. Where the murderer (Dr. Kerrison) loses the readers' sympathy is in his callous murder of Stella Mawson, who certainly did not deserve to be killed, even considering the reason she approached Dr. Kerrison.

If there were any doubts as to how most of the staff feels about Lorrimer, the scene in the library certainly demonstrates their feelings about the recently deceased. Though by no means does a festive air prevail, neither does a somber air of the kind that usually surrounds such a tragedy. Only one character, Cliff Bradley, seems notably upset, but this is tinged with such nervousness that the reader must wonder what Bradley may know or be hiding. Certainly Bradley's animosity and dislike of Lorrimer is established in earlier chapters, but why he is indignant about some of the staff's laughter as they chat is a mystery that the reader assumes will be solved later. Bradley's nervousness is not out of character as far as the reader has seen up to this point. However, this nervousness turns out to be foreshadowing an important fact about Bradley from the night before. Quite near the end of the book, the reader learns that Bradley was actually in the lab after the murder and had viewed Lorrimer's corpse, though he is not guilty of the actual crime.

An interesting topic of discussion among the staff as they wait for Commander Dalgliesh to arrive is rules of evidence and how juries are difficult to convince unless an expert witness can testify unequivocally. Most evidence can only be statistically graded; for example, it is a ninety percent likelihood that a particular sand sample matches that found on a criminal's shoes. Juries want to know that there is no doubt whatsoever that a piece of evidence matches a crime scene. Brenda Pridmore cannot understand the staff carrying on such a discussion when Dr. Lorrimer lies upstairs dead, knowing that



Lorrimer's crime scene will be as objectively dissected by another lab as any others that Lorrimer participated in himself while still alive. Another interesting aspect of this discussion is that this again alludes to the fact that Lorrimer failed to help convict a hit and run driver when he was unable to convince a jury that his forensic work was solid.

The main purpose of this chapter seems to be to introduce the reader to Detective-Inspector Massingham. Because this is the sixth book in a series featuring Dalgliesh, P.D. James assumes the readers have prior knowledge of Dalgliesh, thus it is only necessary to bring the readers up to speed on the character of Massingham. He is revealed through an interior monologue by Dalgliesh and the reader can assume the information is probably accurate and objective. If Dalgliesh is happy with Massingham's work as a detective, then the man is probably competent. Though Dalgliesh seems to hold no negative feelings towards Massingham at this point, by the end of the novel, Dalgliesh expresses the wish to be away from his company—not because of any serious errors made by Massingham, but because the two men's interpersonal attitudes differ considerably. The fact that this is the second time that Massingham has partnered with Dalgliesh makes the reader wonder if P. D. James is working him into the series as a recurring character.

One thing to note about Dr. Kerrison is that Dalgliesh mentions that Kerrison has a look in his eyes that is "uncomfortably close to defeat." Of course, later when it is revealed that Dr. Kerrison is the murderer, a reader can look back at phrases such as this and know that perhaps James is offering more clues as to the identity of the murderer than it seemed at first read.

There are several important points in chapter five, which will cause some difficulty in solving this crime. The fact that the locks all appear to have been in place when Blakelock arrives that morning suggests an inside job or some other means of exit for the killer. At this point, the irony of Dr. Kerrison discussing probable time and means of death is quite ironic, albeit, an irony lost on the readers since they do not yet know that Kerrison is the murderer. One other important fact, and one which remains a mystery until the final few pages of the novel, is who calls Mrs. Bidwell, the cleaning woman, and tells her to go to help Mrs. Schofield that morning instead of going to the lab as Mrs. Bidwell normally does.



Book 2, Death in a White Coat, Chapters 6-10

Book 2, Death in a White Coat, Chapters 6-10 Summary

Dalgliesh begins his interviewing by talking to Claire Easterbrook, the next senior biologist after Dr. Lorrimer. Easterbrook and Dalgliesh do not get off to a very amicable start, but Dalgliesh does learn from her that someone probably tore a page out of Dr. Lorrimer's notebook, although it's uncertain at this point what is written on the missing page. Easterbrook gives a somewhat technical explanation of what Dr. Lorrimer was probably doing in the lab the night before. Dalgliesh questions Claire about Dr. Lorrimer as a person, at which she basically says the same as what the reader already knows: he was "solitary, perfectionist, obsessional." Easterbrook also mentions that Lorrimer has been cultivating a friendship with Brenda Pridmore, by answering her many questions about lab procedure and biology in general.

Mrs. Bidwell is entering the lab as Dr. Lorrimer is being carried out. She makes a comment about his lack of popularity. Dalgliesh questions her about it. Mrs. Bidwell discusses the call she received that morning telling her not to go to the lab. Dalgliesh then asks Mrs. Bidwell to walk him through her morning routine. They go through the labs and they spend quite a bit of time in the restrooms as Mrs. Bidwell explains her cleaning routine. Dalgliesh notices a window above the laboratories in the restroom and climbs on a stool to look out. He figures a slender person could conceivably make it to the ground that way. The last thing Dalgliesh learns from Mrs. Bidwell is that Middlemass' lab coat which has Lorrimer's blood on it has disappeared.

Director Howarth's office is sparsely decorated, though it has intricate scrollwork and finish carpentry on the walls and ceiling. Director Howarth is meticulous, and Mrs. Bidwell states that there is rarely much to clean, except the dusting and vacuuming. Bidwell compares Howarth's neatness to that of the excessively sloppiness of the previous director.

Mrs. Bidwell tells Dalgliesh of her own alibi, that of attending the village concert. She does mention that she notices one person leave the concert early and asks Dalgliesh if she wants her to call that person in. Dalgliesh declines and releases Mrs. Bidwell to go home. Dalgliesh muses on the fact that all the people in this lab would be somewhat knowledgeable of how the investigation would be conducted and that among those in the library sits the murderer, or at least the murderer is known by most of those in the library.

The detectives decide to assume that the call to Mrs. Bidwell telling her to go to Mrs. Schofield's house instead of the lab and the murder are related. They come up with several theories to find the connection but cannot know for sure without more



information. The detectives do not yet know what to make of the missing lab coat, nor do they know how much of Bidwell's relating of the fight between Lorrimer and Middlemass is accurate. Dalgliesh gives Massingham several tasks to do, including recovering the remains of the vomit in the restroom sink. Dalgliesh then readies himself to begin talking to various lab personnel.

Dalgliesh is trying to establish an accurate picture of the security and key situation at the lab. Director Howarth gives a detailed description of the security protocol for the lab, such as who possesses keys and what the keys unlock, and the alarm system. Dalgliesh shows Howarth the keys in Lorrimer's pouch and learns that the smallest key opens the door to the Wren chapel, although Howarth does not know why Lorrimer would have that key. Dalgliesh also questions Howarth about Lorrimer's notebook and what Lorrimer might be doing in the lab the night before. Howarth cannot give any definite answers to the questions about Lorrimer's activities, but Howarth does mention that Lorrimer came into Howarth's office and used a book that Howarth had left on his desk the day before. Howarth knows this because the book was back in the library on its shelf this morning, so Lorrimer must have replaced it there.

Dalgliesh questions Howarth as to his whereabouts the night before. Howarth relates that he was at the village concert but left before it ended because the air was stuffy. Howarth went from the concert to sit on a tombstone in the church graveyard, at which time he noticed a man dressed in a hobbyhorse cavorting around the graves. After witnessing the rest of the dancing troupe go inside, Howarth walked home, arriving at about ten. Dalgliesh asks Howarth about Lorrimer as a person, and Howarth "coldly" says he does not know him outside the lab.

Book 2, Death in a White Coat, Chapters 6-10 Analysis

Other than in this brief chapter, Claire Easterbrook is barely mentioned in the rest of the story, though here she provides one piece of crucial information, that being the probable page missing from Lorrimer's notebook. Much further along in the book, the readers learn what happened to the page and what is written on, which is the name of several doctors, one of whom is likely to be the man that Dr. Kerrison's wife ran off with several months prior to the time of the murder. Quite near the end of the story, it is revealed that Lorrimer intends to expose Kerrison's affair with Domenica Schofield to Kerrison's almost-ex-wife, with whom Kerrison is involved in a custody battle for their two children. Lorrimer's motive seems to be an irrational hatred of Kerrison because of Kerrison's involvement with Domenica, who rejects Lorrimer after a brief affair with him. The reader eventually learns that Dr. Lorrimer has nurtured an obsession for Domenica, far beyond any emotional involvement she had for him. Lorrimer had hopes of her becoming his wife. Dr. Kerrison, on the other hand, is far more practical about the potential of a long-term relationship with Domenica for Kerrison, which succinctly put is "none."

Although Claire Easterbrook suggests that Dr. Lorrimer had some sort of romantic interest in Brenda Pridmore, it is clear later in the book that the relationship is that of a mentor. This is clear both by the things the two do when together and that he leaves



Brenda one thousand pounds in his will and specifies she might use the money to purchase books to further her education in the field of biology.

Mrs. Bidwell is a wealth of information for Dalglish, which is to be expected since often the cleaning person/servant is the one most aware of the pulse of a company, or in this case, lab. Often cleaning persons (or servants) are ignored as if they do not exist. Sometimes this is a case of snobbery, sometimes, just that those whom these blue collar people serve are so immersed in the "importance" of what they are doing, that they do not take the time to make a connection to someone who is "just the janitor." The thing about being "invisible," though, is that people talk around servants/janitors as if they did not exist. Many famous detective characters (such as Holmes, Poirot, Dalglish) understand the value of questioning the servants. Dalglish's understanding of the dynamics of a workplace means Mrs. Bidwell is one of the first persons he questions.

Several important clues are found in this chapter. The fact that Mrs. Bidwell thoroughly cleans the restrooms each evening tells Dalglish that the vomit he smells on the edge of one sink drain could be very important. The readers later learn that Cliff Bradley was indeed inside the lab and viewed Dr. Lorrimer's corpse, at which time he then goes into the restroom and vomits. When forensics analyzes the trace of vomit, they are able to trace it back to Bradley.

A second important clue is the open window, which could be the means of exiting the building for the killer. As it turns out, that is exactly how the killer, Dr. Kerrison, escapes. This fact is not revealed until the final few pages of the book. The third clue that Mrs. Bidwell reveals is that of the missing lab coat. Again, in the final pages of the book, the readers learn that Dr. Kerrison wears the coat when he climbs out the window in order to keep any particles from his clothing from being left on the window. The six brass buttons, though, remain after Kerrison burns the coat, and his daughter, Nell, retrieves them and makes a necklace of them. Though the coat cannot be used as evidence against Kerrison, the necklace is quite sufficient in and of itself.

Very little happens in chapter eight that seems relevant to the investigation. It is a short chapter and is mostly taken up a detailed description of Director Howarth's office and a comparison of Howarth with the former director. The meat of the chapter, as far as moving the investigation along, is found in the few lines where Mrs. Bidwell talks of the village concert and who may or may not have been there.

Possibly one reason for this chapter is purely one of pacing. The author is pacing the novel to build suspense and create many dead end trails. The fact that there is so much description devoted to Howarth's office is both a breathing space for the reader and perhaps a ploy to throw the reader off the trail of the real killer. Some readers may think that there must be something important about Howarth and the office if so much space is devoted to describing it. They are incorrect to think so.

One phenomenon that Dalglish mentions in chapter nine is that of a witness embellishing an account when s/he really has only sketchy details or does not witness



the entire scene. This may be the case with Mrs. Bidwell's recounting of the fight between Middlemass and Lorrimer the day before. Mrs. Bidwell only came into the room after Middlemass has punched Lorrimer. Anything that occurred to cause the fight is pure speculation on her part, though she strives to offer her opinion as fact. Here is a bit of dramatic irony as the readers know more than both Mrs. Bidwell and Inspector-Detective Dalgliesh as to the particulars of the fight between the two men.

Interestingly, Dalgliesh speculates about Dr. Kerrison being the murderer and how Kerrison could have altered the time of death by as much as an hour without casting suspicion upon himself, since the state of rigor mortis is inaccurate as a means of establishing time of death, except were the death was very recent. Since the readers do not have much more information at this point about the possible murderer, the irony is lost on them as Dalgliesh first speculations of a possible murderer is indeed of the actually one, Dr. Kerrison. This speculation could be considered a bit of foreshadowing.

Solving the mystery surrounding keys and what was locked or not the night before is critical to solving this murder mystery. So far, every person interviewed asserts that the outer doors to the lab are locked properly when Lorrimer is killed and then again in the morning when Blakelock opens the building for the start of the day. If these facts are indeed correct, then the killer is either admitted to the lab by Lorrimer, i. e., Lorrimer knows his killer, or the killer uses Lorrimer's keys to leave and lock up the night before and somehow slips them back into the Lorrimer's pants pocket on Lorrimer's corpse in the morning. At the very end of the story, the readers learn that Kerrison did indeed slip the keys inside Lorrimer's pocket that next day as Kerrison bends over Lorrimer to examine him in his official role as coroner. The fatal mistake as far as that is concerned is that Lorrimer carries his keys in a pouch inside his pocket and not loose in his pocket.

It is interesting that Howarth is so cold at the very end when he says he does not know anything about Lorrimer personally, when Howarth has gotten into arguments with his sister, Domenica, about her dating the man. Also note that P. D. James has not let Howarth off the hook as far as being a suspect, since Howarth is alone from the time he leaves the village concert until he arrives at home about ten and talks to Domenica. This is the period of time in which it is most likely Lorrimer is killed.



Book 2: Death in a White Coat, Chapters 11-15

Book 2: Death in a White Coat, Chapters 11-15 Summary

Brenda Pridmore is answering Dalgliesh's questions. She is open and honest, and it's obvious she still generally trust others of the human race. She chatters through information about her daily routine, finding Lorrimer's body, and a bit about Lorrimer himself. At the end, she makes as if to add one further piece of information, but refrains to do so at the moment. Dalgliesh releases her to go about her day.

Dalgliesh conducts his interview with Angela Foley, which takes place in the Director's office at the lab. Though she is not hostile, she is reserved and does not offer more than the specific question asks. Angela relates the events as they occurred upon her arrival at the lab that morning. She and Blakelock check the keys in the safe, in response to Director Howarth's request. She says she stayed with Lorrimer's father, along with her friend, Stella Mawson, after going there to tell the old man news of his son's death.

Inspector Blakelock submits to Dalgliesh's interview standing at attention, responding in the precise language of a trained police officer. Blakelock recounts the time of arriving at the lab and then finding Lorrimer's body after Brenda had come downstairs obviously distraught. Blakelock describes his activities of the night before, the protocol of who is allowed to stay in the lab after hours without his staying also, the encounter between Dr. Lorrimer and Nan Kerrison the day before when Lorrimer forced Nan and her brother William out of the lab. Dalgliesh carefully questions Blakelock about the keys and the incident when Blakelock and Foley go to check on the keys in the Director's office that morning.

Dalgliesh opens the questioning of Paul Middlemass with the obvious: a request for an accounting of the fight between Middlemass and Lorrimer the day before. Middlemass tells part of the truth but leaves the phone call from Susan Bradley out of the recounting. Middlemass makes the encounter with Lorrimer solely about his wife's nephew, Peter Ennalls, who commits suicide while working under Lorrimer at another lab.

Dalgliesh next questions Middlemass's whereabouts of the night before, to which Middlemass explains about his role as the hobbyhorse in the halftime entertainment. Middlemass has some time at which none can attest to his whereabouts. Dalgliesh has Middlemass go into great detail about his activities at the village concert and the physical layout of the building where they concert is held. Dalgliesh questions Middlemass about the missing lab coat that belonged to his deceased father.

Dalgliesh's interview of Cliff Bradley is full of Bradley's denials of knowledge about any aspect of the crime. The interview does nothing to further the investigation and both



Dalgliesh and Massingham are glad to let Bradley go and sniffle somewhere else. Some tire tracks have been found with two disparate tires on the rear, which should make it fairly easy to trace the tracks to the car.

Book 2: Death in a White Coat, Chapters 11-15 Analysis

There are three points in chapter eleven that foreshadow future events: one is the fact that Pridmore is the first person to speak warmly of Dr. Lorrimer. Later, as the contents of Lorrimer's will is revealed, the reader learns that Dr. Lorrimer obviously returns that warmth as he leaves Brenda a thousand pounds. The second thing to note is that Brenda informs Dalgliesh that she handed Lorrimer a hand-addressed envelope, which was addressed in all caps. The detectives later search and find the envelope at Lorrimer's home. Finally, Brenda's last statement is the intimation that she knows something else but that it is something she heard when she should not have. Dalgliesh asks Pridmore to trust him with the information, but she does not at this point, although later after talking with her mother about whether she should talk or not, she does tell the detective.

Dalgliesh takes an immediate, visceral dislike to Angela Foley and is surprised to feel this way. He cannot pinpoint why, but is able to conceal his feelings from her. Perhaps she senses something from him, which could be the reason she is so reserved. It is barely mentioned in the entire story, but the whole village knows of Angela's living arrangement and may believe/suspect she is involved in a lesbian relationship with Stella Mawson. Dalgliesh may have an unconscious prejudice for this reason.

The fact that Angela is Lorrimer's cousin and may stand to inherit from him naturally puts her on the rather long list of suspects. Here, also, is a case of dramatic irony, because the reader knows that Angela tries to borrow money from Lorrimer for a trip and that he refuses. Additionally, she and Stella wish to purchase the cottage in which they reside but do not have the funds; a thirty-thousand pound inheritance would go a long way towards that purchase. Dalgliesh does not yet know these facts, so the dramatic irony lies in the fact that the reader does.

One other point that the reader will connect to a later event is the fact that Stella Mawson goes to stay with Angela Foley at the Lorrimer home. Stella rummages through Lorrimer's desk, searching for the will to learn if Angela inherits. Stella finds a letter implicating Dr. Kerrison as the murderer and takes this letter and later uses it to attempt to blackmail Kerrison, who responds by murdering Stella.

There's much information in this chapter, although most of it has already been revealed. Blakelock's reiteration of it merely puts a stamp of authenticity on the information because of his seeming to be a reliable witness. If there is anyone the reader probably does not suspect as the murderer from among the lab personnel, it is Inspector Blakelock. Intuition becomes fact by the end of the novel when the final revelations keeps Blakelock firmly on the side of the good and honorable.



Blakelock, like several other persons interviewed, mentions that Lorrimer had not been himself lately, as though he was under some stress. This is an important clue that clearly ties in to why Lorrimer is murdered, and it all has to do with both Lorrimer's and Kerrison's sexual involvement with Domenica Schofield.

A long chapter fourteen holds quite a bit of detail, but not a lot of information that proves relevant to the murder. The first several pages contain Middlemass' recitation of his fight with Lorrimer. The reader must wonder why he lies to protect Susan Bradley. Had Middlemass once loved her? His motives may be noble, but as Dalgliesh thinks to himself, Middlemass may change his mind when confronted with a hard copy of his statement to sign. After all, perjury is not viewed favorably anywhere, but particularly in a place dedicated to convicting criminals.

Possibly because of Middlemass's fight with Lorrimer the day Lorrimer is murdered, Dalgliesh has him go into an inordinate amount of detail about the fight, his whereabouts of the night before, and even a description of the bloodied labcoat. This piece of information about the labcoat is one of the most damning to Dr. Kerrison's innocence. The "Royal Army Dental Corps" buttons are quite distinctive, and it turns out that Nell wears them around her neck on a string. This is revealed near the end of the story.

About the most useful piece of information in this chapter is the finding of the tire tracks. The car, it turns out, belongs to an Inspector Doyle of the local police force. Though Doyle is ultimately cleared of the murder, his career with the police force is effectively over, and he resigns his position to move back to the city and take a position in his father-in-law's business. It is a move he dreads and the reader probably wonders if he will last.

The detectives feel equal parts pity and disgust for Bradley's person. He seems too nervous and fearful to perpetuate a murder; however, in Dalgliesh's experience, even the most timid of person can kill another human being given a strong enough motive; hence, Bradley remains on the list of suspects.



Book Three: An Experimental Man, Chapters 1-4

Book Three: An Experimental Man, Chapters 1-4 Summary

Dr. Lorrimer and his elderly father shared Postmill Cottage. Inspectors Dalgliesh and Massingham intend to both interview the elderly Lorrimer and search Postmill Cottage for any useful evidence. The first person they meet outside the cottage is Winifred Swaffield, the country rector's wife, who is watching after Mr. Lorrimer. She gives the two men a brief run-down of Mr. Lorrimer's condition. Mrs. Swaffield talks non-stop about what the village believes happened, Angela Foley being there earlier, Mr. Lorrimer's lack of emotional affect, and a bit about the father and son and their tendency toward being reclusive.

Mr. Lorrimer talks as if his son is alive, and yet also seems to be aware that he is dead. Mr. Lorrimer tells the detectives that Stella Mawson rummaged through the upstairs earlier in the day. Mr. Lorrimer tells the detectives that his son has no friends, no phone calls, no social activities and lives for his work. Then Mr. Lorrimer remembers a woman called the prior week. Since his son was in the bath, Mr. Lorrimer answered the call. The woman left a message, with some numbers at the end. Mr. Lorrimer only recalls the last four numbers: 1840. After describing the woman's voice, Mr. Lorrimer breaks down crying and asks who will care for him now.

The two detectives begin their initial survey of Dr. Lorrimer's room. The most striking thing about the room is the four hundred or so books lining the walls. Looking at some of the titles sends the two into a philosophical discussion. The first go-through of the room reveals nothing that seems useful until Dalgliesh unlocks the only secured drawer in the desk and finds a number of letters, some erotic, written to Domenica. The letters are emotionally turbulent, immature, and obviously written by someone who cannot accept the end of a love affair. The detectives also find a will giving Dr. Lorrimer's father and Angela Foley the sum of his property. As the men are discussing the letters, Dalgliesh receives a call saying that a solicitor wants to talk to Dalgliesh and that a witness has been found—a rider on a bus that goes through the village.

The witness, Alfred Goddard can only say that the runner was most likely a man and not real old. He was wearing some sort of coat that seemed to flap in the breeze. The two employees on the bus are interviewed and say they saw nothing, but since they were on the lower deck, it is unlikely they would. Both the driver and conductor say they noticed a woman standing inside the bus stop shelter. They cannot give much of a description, but say she wore a scarf and some sort of long coat.



Mr. Bidwell, the man who had taken the call for his wife telling her to go to Mrs. Schofield's home instead of the lab that morning, is interviewed. Mr. Bidwell says the woman told Mrs. Bidwell to go to Leamings (Mrs. Schofield's home).

Dalgliesh and Massingham visit Major Hunt, Dr. Lorrimer's solicitor (lawyer). Dalgliesh questions Hunt both as to Dr. Lorrimer as a person and the contents of Dr. Lorrimer's will. To the first question, Hunt claims little knowledge of Dr. Lorrimer as a person, having had minimal contact with the man. Next, Major Hunt goes over the content of Dr. Lorrimer's latest will, which had only been signed and executed the week before. This will, unlike the last one, leaves Angela Foley completely out of an inheritance. Dr. Lorrimer mentions to Major Hunt when he signs the new will that it is a temporary measure because Lorrimer intends to marry, although Lorrimer does not say the name of the woman he intends to marry. Hunt explains how Dr. Lorrimer comes to inherit from his paternal grandmother: she despises her daughter, Angela Foley's mother, and really does not like her son, Dr. Lorrimer's father, so left her money to Dr. Lorrimer, her grandson. When Angela is orphaned at an early age, the grandmother declines to have anything to do with the child, allowing her to be raised by an orphanage. The chapter ends with Major Hunt on the phone, telling Angela Foley and old Mr. Lorrimer the terms of Dr. Lorrimer's new will.

Book Three: An Experimental Man, Chapters 1-4 Analysis

At first, it seems that Mr. Lorrimer is going to be no help whatsoever. He emphatically states that his son has no enemies, no social life, and few phone calls, but then he remembers about a call last week. The woman sounds excited and she gives Mr. Lorrimer a message to pass on to his son. The meaning of this message is not clear until very late in the book. The numbers and something about the candles being burned down are the extent of the message. The reader later learns that the woman is referring to the numbers in the lab chapel that are a code to tell Domenica Schofield's lover the date and time to meet her for sex in the chapel. The reader learns in the next chapter that Dr. Lorrimer and Domenica had been lovers, but she jilts him and is now involved with Dr. Kerrison, a fact that is not revealed until late in the book. Somehow, though, Dr. Lorrimer figures out that Domenica and Kerrison are meeting for sex in the chapel, as she had previously done so with Dr. Lorrimer. Dr. Lorrimer is ragingly jealous. It is later revealed that Dr. Lorrimer threatens Dr. Kerrison with telling Kerrison's estranged wife about Kerrison's affair with Domenica. This revelation could threaten Dr. Kerrison's suit for child custody in the divorce: Here's a motive for murder, and indeed, a murder occurs.

The way that Dr. Lorrimer learns who Domenica is now seeing is that the phone call about the numbers in the chapel gives Lorrimer the date and time at which Domenica and her current lover are to meet (Domenica used the same system of setting up liaisons with Dr. Lorrimer when they were involved). All Dr. Lorrimer has to do is wait near the chapel to see who meets Domenica there; he does so and discovers Dr.



Kerrison's involvement with Domenica. Dr. Lorrimer is still in love with Domenica and had fantasies about marrying her.

At first glance, Dr. Lorrimer seems to be a compulsively neat, unemotional, intellectual man...until the discovery of the letters written to Domenica Schofield. These letters reveal a man haunted by a love he no longer has and unwilling to let the ex-lover fade into memory. After a few brief lines quoted from the letters, it is clear to the reader that Dr. Lorrimer is/was emotionally disturbed, not perhaps truly pathologically, but at least it is obvious the poor man might have benefited by some temporary therapy to help him overcome being rejected by the woman he loves. Sadly, he gets no help, and this obsession with Domenica is directly related to his murder because had Dr. Lorrimer not been jealous of Dr. Kerrison and threatened to tell Kerrison's estranged wife about Kerrison's affair, then Kerrison would not have decided to murder Dr. Lorrimer.

Though both sets of interviews, that with Mr. Goddard and that with Mr. Bidwell, seem to be fairly worthless, they each actually give pieces of the puzzle that later make sense. First, Mr. Goddard did actually see a runner—Dr. Kerrison after he climbs out of the window and flees the scene of the murder he has just committed. Since the drivers knows for certain that the bus is on time that night, then the time of the murder is not pinpointed fairly closely, although, the detectives have not yet realized that fact.

Mr. Bidwell cannot say as to whether the female caller said Mrs. Bidwell was to "go" or "come" to Mrs. Schofield's house, but since Mr. Bidwell related it the first time as "go," it is more probable that the female caller says, "go." This is significant because if Mrs. Schofield had actually called Mrs. Bidwell, she would have requested Mrs. Bidwell "come" to her house, not "go" to her house. This seemingly insignificant difference would tell the detectives that someone other than Mrs. Schofield made the call.

Similar to Dalgliesh inquiries among the lab personnel about Dr. Lorrimer as a person, Major Hunt also has little to offer on the subject. By this point, the reader knows that Dr. Lorrimer is very reserved and not particularly liked. The change in the will foreshadows a piece of information that is revealed very late in the book, which has little bearing on the murder, but is a bit "sensationalist"—Dr. Lorrimer was once married to Angela Foley's roommate (possible lover?), Stella Mawson. It was a brief relationship and one in which Dr. Lorrimer treated Mawson very badly. It was annulled on the grounds on non-consummation. It is later revealed that neither Angela nor Stella knows that Dr. Lorrimer changed his will recently. The revelation of the change of will leads almost directly to the murder of Stella Mawson in that she becomes desperate enough for the money to purchase the cottage that she attempts to blackmail Dr. Kerrison now that she knows no money is forthcoming from Dr. Lorrimer's estate.



Book Three: An Experimental Man, Chapters 5-8

Book Three: An Experimental Man, Chapters 5-8 Summary

The next stop on Dalgliesh's investigation trail is to speak with Domenica Schofield at the home she shares with her half-brother, Maxim Howarth. Domenica is knock-dead gorgeous, an artist, and a widow as of eighteen months earlier. She is neither openly hostile nor particularly warm to the two detectives. She admits to an affair with Dr. Lorrimer, which she ended two months prior to his death. In response to the question as to where she met with Dr. Lorrimer, she says they had sex in the car. She does not deny the letters which Dalgliesh brings with him and says Dr. Lorrimer was childish and whiney about the end of the affair. She became bored with Dr. Lorrimer in all ways.

Maxim Howarth thinks back to when he first felt responsible for seeing to Domenica's well being. His father basically foisted responsibility of his eight-month-old sister on the nine-year-old Maxim. The father relegated them to the care of nannies and boarding school, and when he was killed by a taxi in Italy, neither of them grieved overly much. Howarth also flashes back to the scene of Domenica's husband's death and the conversation between the two men.

Brenda is arguing with her mother, who is unhappy about Brenda inheriting a thousand pounds from Dr. Lorrimer. Mrs. Pridmore is worried about gossip. As the two females are arguing, Brenda brings up an argument she overhears between Dr. Lorrimer and Angela Foley when Foley asks Dr. Lorrimer to borrow some money. Lorrimer refuses and mentions something about changing his will. Brenda's mother insists that she relate the incident to Commander Dalgliesh.

Commander Dalgliesh is musing in his room, thinking over the day and the last interview with Dr. Henry Kerrison. Massingham and Dalgliesh visit Kerrison at his home late in the evening with the children and housekeeper asleep. Dalgliesh questions Kerrison about the run-in Kerrison's daughter Nell has with Dr. Lorrimer that morning. Kerrison answers the questions quietly but appears distracted.

After thinking back over the interview with Dr. Kerrison, Dalgliesh reviews the entire case up to this point. No lab tests have returned, the lab coat is not yet found, and the car belonging to the tire tracks not traced. Dalgliesh has discovered plenty of possible motives throughout his interviews, but very little solid evidence. He decides to call it a day.



Book Three: An Experimental Man, Chapters 5-8 Analysis

Domenica obviously does not want to talk to the detectives. What is not obvious is why. By the end of the chapter, most readers would conclude that she is not the murderer—for why murder someone who is not even in one's life anymore—she does not complain that Dr. Lorrimer stalked her or abused her in any way. If she is not the murderer, then why does she lie about where she used to meet Dr. Lorrimer for sex? Perhaps it is just a natural rebellion to authority or the belief that it's none of their business. Or she may be protecting her brother, Maxim, because she met Dr. Lorrimer in the chapel on the grounds of the lab, which would probably outrage some of the more conservative members of the community, imagining a sexual liaison occurring inside a church. Or she may be protecting the man with whom she is now having an affair, Dr. Kerrison, and if that is the case, does she somehow suspect him of killing her ex-lover?

The purpose of chapter six is unclear, especially by the end of the book when the reader learns that neither Howarth nor his sister are involved in either the murder of Lorrimer or Mawson. Though it does give insight into the personality of both siblings, it is rather peripheral to the main story line. Actually, the life of these two might even be considered a sub-plot. If so, the climax may have been reached in this chapter when it is subtly hinted at the possibility that Maxim Howarth feels "trapped" into a life-long relationship taking care of his sister. The suggestion, however, is so faint that it could be argued otherwise.

The most important thing about chapter seven is Brenda's admission to eavesdropping on an argument between Dr. Lorrimer and Angela Foley. The author makes one point intentionally vague in Brenda's recounting of the exchange between the two cousins: Does Dr. Lorrimer tell Angela he has already changed his will or that he intends to change his will? In a case of dramatic irony, the reader already knows the answer to that because of the discussion in an earlier chapter between Angela Foley and Stella Mawson. However, that conversation, found in chapter six of Book One, is a bit ambiguous as Angela thinks to herself that "one day she would tell Star [Stella Mawson], the moment when it was right to tell her" (p. 49). In the meantime, before that day arrives, Foley prevaricates, merely suggesting that Dr. Lorrimer hinted at the possibility that he may someday change his will. Again, this is not cut and dried, so it is still unclear if Dr. Lorrimer outright tells Foley he changed his will.

Brenda's mother insists that Brenda relate the conversation/argument between Lorrimer and Foley to Inspector Dalgliesh, who happens to conveniently be driving up to the home at that moment. This piece of information which Brenda leaves out in the first interview is now being revealed; thus, the reader no longer has to wonder about the reference in Book 2, chapter eleven to something Brenda knows, but is not yet comfortable revealing. The foreshadowing has played itself out.

These last few minutes of Dalgliesh's days is a mixture of reviewing some of the day's work and brief moments of nostalgia wherein Dalgliesh enjoys the sound of crickets and



rainfall. It is a quiet, peaceful few minutes contrasting to the hectic day of interviewing both cooperative and hostile witnesses. This chapter's main purpose is probably to serve as a breather for the reader to process the large amount of information thrown at them since the discovery of Lorrimer's body. Names and relationships need to be sorted and understood, and perhaps it is not too early to make a first tentative guess as to the killer's identity, although, it does not appear that even the redoubtable Dalgliesh has any inkling yet as to who he will ultimately cuff and remand to jail for trial.



Book 4: Hanged by the Neck, Chapters 1-5

Book 4: Hanged by the Neck, Chapters 1-5 Summary

Dalgliesh and Massingham drive to Sprogg's Cottage where Angela Foley and Stella Mawson live. Foley is not home, but Mawson invites the men in and is congenial and seemingly open to answering anything they ask. Stella Mawson gives an accounting of the whereabouts of the both of them on the night of the murder and explains a little about the relationship (or lack thereof) between Angela and her cousin, Dr. Lorrimer. Angela arrives and Dalgliesh questions her about the will; Angela seems indifferent to the terms of the will. Angela says she does not like Lorrimer and was even a little afraid of him, similar to Cliff Bradley. Stella adds that Bradley probably reminds Lorrimer of himself when Lorrimer was younger and gives an explanation about that.

Brenda Pridmore oversleeps and arrives late to Hoggatt's. She is told to go see Director Howarth. Howarth informs Brenda that she is to work in his section for the day. Howarth and Brenda briefly discuss Lorrimer and his leaving her money and why. They also compare the process of scientific research to that of murder detective work. Brenda begins going through files to find any that mention the numbers eighteen or forty burned candles.

At the home of Dr. Kerrison, Dalgliesh and Massingham encounter Nell and her brother outside. Nell asks if they are there to question her and William, but Dalgliesh says they want to talk to their housekeeper, Miss Willard. Dalgliesh has a brief, somewhat philosophical conversation with Nell, who strongly defends her father as not a murderer.

The interview with Miss Willard covers both Dr. Kerrison's whereabouts the night of the murder and Miss Willard's relationship with Dr. Lorrimer, with whom she rides to church every Sunday to a neighboring village. Miss Willard seems sincerely in her belief that Dr. Kerrison could never murder anyone and she does say she heard him on the phone at about nine p.m. on the night of the murder. As far as riding with Dr. Lorrimer to church, she insists that they engage in very little conversation on the ride. She also states that Lorrimer seems to have gone through a "dark night of the soul" wherein he stops going to church for about six months.

Dalgliesh and Massingham arrive at Cliff Bradley's house after the lab analysis of the vomit points to Cliff. Bradley meets the two men at the door and acknowledges that he knows why they are there. Bradley explains the vomit: He arrives at the lab asks for a moment of Dr. Lorrimer's time, to which Lorrimer reluctantly agrees. Cliff asks about the poor rating Lorrimer gives Cliff. Lorrimer is very harsh and insulting about Cliff's abilities as a forensic biologist. Cliff leaves and goes to the restroom and vomits in the sink, waits to pull himself together, goes back to speak to Lorrimer again, and finds him dead. Cliff is terrified and leaves immediately.



Howarth blames himself somewhat for not seeing how close to the edge Cliff is. Dalgliesh decides at this point to suspend looking through any more of the thousands of records that has the numbers eighteen or forty in them. Just as Dalgliesh decides to take a walk to the chapel, he is informed that the tire tracks are matched to a car driven by Inspector Doyle of the local police station.

Book 4: Hanged by the Neck, Chapters 1-5 Analysis

Stella Mawson seems cooperative and truthful, but the reader and Dalgliesh both learn later that she leaves out a fairly important piece of information—that she was briefly married to Dr. Lorrimer. Angela Foley does not even know this. At this point, Dalgliesh suspects both Angela and Stella of not being entirely truthful. He believes Angela is lying about the will and whether Dr. Lorrimer informed her about the change he makes. Part of Dalgliesh's belief in about Angela's lying is based on what Brenda Pridmore relates to him about the encounter she overhears between Angela and Dr. Lorrimer. Additionally, Dalgliesh suspects Angela's aunt did not make the statements about Dr. Lorrimer practicing for court appearances. When the reader and Dalgliesh learn that Stella was married to Dr. Lorrimer, both he and the reader can then slide another piece of the puzzle into place and know how Stella knew the information she offers in the interview in this chapter.

The most important occurrence in chapter two is that Dalgliesh has a number of people searching past cases for the numbers eighteen or forty, when it is later revealed these numbers have nothing to do with crime whatsoever; they are the means that Domenica sets up sexual liaisons with lovers in the chapel. As it turns out, these numbers are not really significant to solving the crime, nor are they directly related to the crimes except in the sense that Lorrimer knows Domenica's code and when he learns that she is meeting someone else at the chapel, he waits and sees who it is, which turns out to be Dr. Kerrison. Lorrimer then sets out to blackmail Kerrison into ending the affair with Domenica. This leads to Kerrison killing Lorrimer. As is often the case in murder, some one incident or emotion which seems insignificant can be the catalyst to murder. The second point to note in this chapter is that Sergeant Underhill realizes the significance of knowing what each suspect has for dinner the night of the murder because it can be directly tied to the analysis of the vomit found in the laboratory sink.

Several things in the first part of chapter three are important clues to tying Dr. Kerrison into the murder of Dr. Lorrimer. First is in the description of his encounter with Nell when Dalgliesh notices that there is a leather thong around her neck. In chapter five of book five, it is revealed that the thong holds six polished brass buttons—ones that come off the missing lab coat. The second significant clue in the beginning of this chapter is that Nell has a bonfire burning out back. Massingham, in examining the fire, finds no evidence that there is anything amiss, but later the readers learn that Dr. Kerrison has burned the lab coat on the fire pit the night of the murder. Probably Nell picked up the buttons as she went out the next day to continue burning junk from one of the sheds on the property. This small error on Dr. Kerrison's part, i.e., leaving the buttons there to be found may be the evidence which is most damaging.



The interview with Miss Willard seems fairly straightforward, although, the readers later learn that Dr. Kerrison subtly influences Miss Willard to "believe" she hears him on the phone at about nine p.m. on the night of the murders. Of course, she does not actually hear him as he is busy murdering Dr. Lorrimer at about this time.

A second piece of information which is explained later is the fact that Miss Willard mentions that Dr. Lorrimer gives up church for about six months, and then when he returns to attending church he no longer takes the sacraments (communion). The period of time in which Dr. Lorrimer quits church coincides to the time during which he is sexually involved with Domenica Schofield. Perhaps when he returns to church, he no longer feels worthy of taking communion.

Three pieces of the puzzle are now in place—who had vomited in the sink, who the man is that the bus rider sees running away from the lab the night of the murder, and finally, who calls Mrs. Bidwell and telling her to go to Mrs. Schofield's house the next morning after the murder. Susan Bradley admits to calling Mrs. Bidwell so Cliff could get to the lab early in the morning and clean the sink in the restroom. It seems likely Dalglish does not believe Bradley is guilty of murder because he does not advise him about obtaining a lawyer before letting Bradley tell his story.

A very subtle clue is offered in this chapter; so subtle as to almost be missed except by the most astute reader. Cliff notes, "It was a strange sort of interview. I sensed that he [Lorrimer] was impatient and anxious to get rid of me" (p. 276). Of course, it is not obvious at this point, but it is later revealed that Lorrimer is expecting Dr. Kerrison. Another subtlety about Cliff's account of his conversation is his account of Lorrimer's excoriating attack, some of which is obviously not apropos to a supervisor-employee interview...especially when Lorrimer brings up the topic of marriage and Cliff's failings there, which is actually rather inaccurate. Was this a dress rehearsal for the next person Dr. Lorrimer is expecting? Perhaps Lorrimer in his rabid hatred for Dr. Kerrison and knowing Kerrison would be shortly arriving, becomes confused and almost trancelike says things to Cliff Bradley that Dr. Lorrimer intends to say to Kerrison.

Chapter five could have been eliminated with very little impact on the rest of the story. The fact that the tire tracks have been traced is another carrot dangled in front of Dalglish's face, offering a possible end to the investigation. The next chapter reveals why Doyle was in the area of the lab that evening, and at the same time, eliminates the tracks as a useful clue pointing towards a murderer.



Book 4: Hanged by the Neck, Chapters 6-9

Book 4: Hanged by the Neck, Chapters 6-9 Summary

Dalgliesh interviews Doyle to learn that Doyle was parked at the lab on the night of the murder, having picked up a woman at a crossroads and had sex with her in the car at the lab. Doyle gives what little information he learns of the woman and also mentions that he is resigning his job with the police force.

Angela wants to start looking for a new home, since she and Stella cannot afford to buy the one they are in presently. Stella says it will be alright, that her publisher has money for her. Stella shows Angela a letter she found while looking on Dr. Lorrimer's desk for the will back when she and Angela were staying with the old Mr. Lorrimer until the parson's wife arrived. Angela is appalled that Stella has the letter and wants to give it to the detectives as it may be a clue. Angela suddenly realizes that Stella probably knows who Dr. Lorrimer's killer is. Stella puts on her coat and says she has to go out for a while. Angela has a feeling of panic and practically begs her not to leave, to no avail.

Dalgliesh and Massingham visit Mrs. Meakin, the woman Doyle says he picked up the night of the murder. Mrs. Meakin confirms Doyle's story completely, so they now officially eliminate Doyle as a suspect. Massingham states that they now know who the murderer is. Dalgliesh agrees, but adds that they have no proof, not even enough evidence for a search warrant.

Brenda Pridmore and Blakelock have worked late, and as Brenda starts home, she finds that both her tires are flat. As Blakelock has already driven away, she re-parks her bike in the shed and heads for home on foot, deciding to cut through the new lab construction site, which will reduce her trek home by several miles. Walking through the dark with partly-constructed walls looming around her is the perfect stimulus to an overactive imagination, which Brenda's certainly qualifies. With only the tiny beam of her flashlight, she almost falls into a pit and then stumbles, and loses her light as an owl comes swooping out of the dark. Terrified, she makes for the light of the chapel, seeking sanctuary from all the evil that prowls the night. Sadly, evil precedes her into the chapel as she pushes through the door to discover Stella Mawson's body swinging from a rafter. Before fainting, Brenda manages to give the chapel bell's rope three tugs.

Book 4: Hanged by the Neck, Chapters 6-9 Analysis

Once Dalgliesh locates the woman with whom Doyle has a sexual liaison and interviews her in chapter eight, Inspector Doyle is pretty much in the clear. The reader probably feels some empathy for the man, who on a moment of impulse in an unhappy marriage, picks up someone one night and is caught. At least he isn't caught in the act of murder.



Several issues that have arisen during the investigation are addressed in this chapter. First is the fact that Angela suddenly realizes that there must be some reason Stella knows that Dr. Lorrimer used to practice for court cases with his mother. Stella brushes off Angela's questions about this, but it is later revealed that the reason Stella knows this fact is because she was once married to Dr. Lorrimer, a fact that Angela does not know. A second issue is that old Mr. Lorrimer insists to Dalgliesh that Stella was upstairs rummaging through Dr. Lorrimer's desk, but Stella denies it to Dalgliesh when asked. Obviously she was and even pocketed a piece of paper that could be valuable evidence as to identify of Lorrimer's killer. Stella takes this piece of paper with her as she goes out. Later, the reader learns she is going to meet Dr. Kerrison at the lab chapel. Angela's almost frantic begging Stella not to leave foreshadows Stella's murder.

Just as P.D. James devoted the first third of the book creating a suspect list chapter by chapter, she now eliminates suspects chapter by chapter. The fact that the two detectives think they know the identity of the killer may surprise some, especially those who are not veteran murder-mystery readers. At this point, if the reader went back chapter by chapter from the beginning and made a little chart, most would probably finger Dr. Kerrison.

Score two for Brenda Pridmore. The reader can only wonder why P.D. James chooses the most innocent of the characters to be the first on the scene of two separate murders. Perhaps the foulness of murder needs the contrast of innocence as if to say that everything in the world is not dark and sordid. Of course, at this point, Stella Mawson's death might prove to be a suicide, but most readers probably strongly suspect another murder has occurred—and most likely the same person has killed Stella Mawson that killed Dr. Lorrimer. If the readers remember the scene between Stella and Angela in chapter seven, they probably make a fairly clear connection between the paper Stella removes from Dr. Lorrimer's desk and places in her coat pocket, her leaving for a walk when dinner is waiting on the stove, and Angela guessing that Stella likely knows who Dr. Lorrimer's killer is. Really astute readers may guess that Stella intends to meet the killer and engage in a bit of blackmail, but this projection would have to be made on fairly slim evidence.



Book 4: Hanged by the Neck, Chapters 10-13

Book 4: Hanged by the Neck, Chapters 10-13 Summary

Dalgliesh and Massingham are sitting in a car in the spot where Inspector Doyle parks for his liaison with Mrs. Meakins. The two men just begin to talk about the case when they hear the three rings of the chapel bell that Brenda just rang.

The two detectives rush a mile and a half in their car to come as close to the chapel as possible. When they open the door, they spy Stella Mawson's dangling body. In concert, they remove her and begin resuscitation, only to realize she is quite deceased. They hear a moan and Dalgliesh finds an incoherent Brenda Pridmore, who states that the murderer was waiting for her in the new lab. Dalgliesh searches the chapel and finds no humans, but does discover the answer to the mysterious eighteen and forty numbers, which are on the hymn board, along with the numbers twenty-nine and ten.

While Massingham takes a sedated Brenda Pridmore home, Dalgliesh searches through the chapel for any further clues. He finds four hairs on a seat cushion and gets them into an evidence envelope. He studies Stella Mawson's face and thinks she does not seem at peace. Massingham returns after calling Howarth, who is one his way, Dr. Kerrison, who is in a meeting, Middlemass and Blakelock, who are not home.

The coroner arrives and pronounces Stella Mawson dead, estimates that it is about two hours since death, and says he cannot guess as to whether it is murder or suicide until the autopsy. The coroner leaves and Howarth and Domenica arrive. Dalgliesh informs them of this new development and asks their whereabouts for the evening and how many keys to the chapel there are. Domenica lays a bombshell on the detective when she tells him that Dr. Lorrimer and Stella Mawson were a married couple for a couple years, though the marriage was never consummated and then was annulled.

Angela Foley arrives, learns of Stella's death and runs screaming out the chapel after the mortuary's gurney. Massingham catches up to her and takes her home, where the doctor gives her a sedative. When Massingham arrives back at the chapel, Dalgliesh states that Stella's death is a murder.

Book 4: Hanged by the Neck, Chapters 10-13 Analysis

This chapter serves as a brief interlude—a sort of "calm before the storm," the storm being the discovery of another probable murder.



A perplexing mystery has now been solved in this short chapter when Dalgliesh finds the numbers 29, 10, 18, and 40 on the hymn board of the chapel. It is later revealed to be a code that Domenica Schofield leaves lovers, designating the date and time of the next sexual liaison. Though this is Pridmore's second witness to murder, she has not lost her innocence and is as disconcerted by the finding of Stella Mawson's body as she is by that of Dr. Lorrimer's. Again, the contrast between the sordidness of murder and blackmail (which is why Mawson dangles from a rope) and Pridmore's innocence is striking.

Now that the book is close to complete, P.D. James is breaking the steps down to the final denouement by short chapters with only one or two significant facts or actions in each chapter. This chapter is mostly full of Dalgliesh's reflections as he waits with the dead Stella Mawson for Massingham to return. Dalgliesh wonders about the details of Domenica meeting Dr. Lorrimer here for sex and about the fact that when one is alive, thoughts of the finality of death is not considered.

The previous-hidden hostility between Dalgliesh and Domenica is now out in the open. She is sarcastic and uncooperative, though she does inform Dalgliesh of Stella's prior marriage to Lorrimer.

If there was any doubt before as to the intensity of the relationship between Stella Mawson and Angela Foley, the scene in this chapter when Foley learns of Mawson's death probably answers the question to all but the most literal readers. Here, ironically, is now the means of Angela being able to purchase the cottage the two women want so badly as she is the recipient of Mawson's life insurance policy—as long as it is certain Mawson is murdered and did not commit suicide, as the policy has a suicide exemption.

Massingham informs Dalgliesh that neither Brenda nor Angela will be able to talk to the detectives before the next day; however, the implication is that the detectives already know who the murderer is for both Dr. Lorrimer's and Stella Mawson's murder. Many astute readers have probably also figured the gentle Dr. Kerrison.



Book 5: The Clunch Pit, Chapters 1-5

Book 5: The Clunch Pit, Chapters 1-5 Summary

At Brenda Pridmore's home, Dalgliesh and Massingham interview her about the events of the night before. They ask her if the chair was upright or knocked over and if the light was on. She is certain the chair was on its side and the light was on. There is not much more information they need, but Dalgliesh takes an extra moment to listen to Brenda talk about her tentative plans for the future.

Dalgliesh and Massingham are with Angela Foley at her home. They question Angela and give her two pieces of information of which she is not aware: One, that Stella's insurance has a suicide clause, and two, that Stella had been married to Dr. Lorrimer for two years. They get Angela to admit that Stella goes out the night of Dr. Lorrimer's murder, but that Stella went out most nights.

Massingham has Claire Easterbrook examining two hairs to give an opinion as to whether they came from the same person. She says she will not be able to say definitively on just two hairs, but after examination says they probably do not come from the same person, but probably both came from males.

At Angela Foley's home, Angela is holding the sword and has Inspector Doyle cornered and accuses him of Stella's murder. He asks on what basis and she points him to a note that Stella removes from Dr. Lorrimer's desk at home the day after his murder. The note implicates Doyle in a scheme to substitute marijuana that is to be burned and then selling the drug for personal profit. Doyle insists the note is written by his wife.

Dalgliesh and Massingham are on their way to Dr. Kerrison's home. As they approach the house, William runs out and they slam on their brakes, but Domenica, who is right behind them, clips their bumper and then William, who flies into a haystack. After ascertaining that William is unharmed, they walk towards the house, Massingham carrying William. Nell comes out and is both scared and irate in that she had asked Miss Willard to watch William while Nell washes her hair. Inside the home, Nell turns on Miss Willard and vehemently orders her to pack her bags and leave at once. Miss Willard responds a cruel statement; that Dr. Kerrison and Domenica were having an affair. When Massingham confirms this statement, Nell jerks off the leather thong around her neck and flings the buttons across the room while screaming that she thought her daddy (Dr. Kerrison) had done it (killed Lorrimer) because Lorrimer had been so mean to her and William. There are a couple more heated words between Miss Willard and Nell, and then Massingham leads Nell and William out of the room. After confirming that Miss Willard did not hear Dr. Kerrison make a phone call the night of Dr. Lorrimer's murder, the two detectives leave to confront Kerrison.

Dalgliesh approaches Kerrison, who seems almost relieved to see him arrive. Dr. Kerrison makes a full confession, saying that the murder of Dr. Lorrimer was a chance



on-the-spot thing; however, that of Stella Mawson is premeditated. Dr. Kerrison seems to feel little remorse for the death of Lorrimer, but does seem sorry that he kills Mawson.

Book 5: The Clunch Pit, Chapters 1-5 Analysis

This chapter offers little in the way of clues as to the identity of Mawson's killer and actually casts a tiny bit of doubt as to whether she actually was murdered because had she committed suicide it's likely she would have left the light on and knocked the chair over in her leap to death. Dalgliesh and Brenda speculate that maybe the killer left the light on and knocked the chair over to make it appear a suicide.

The reader sees again the type of man the hero, Dalgliesh, is apart from being a brilliant detective, when he chooses to reseat himself and listen to Brenda for a few more moments, though he is anxious to carry on with the investigation. Massingham speculates about what others at Scotland Yard would think of this middle-aged, childless detective taking time out from an intense investigation to listen to a teen worrying about her future. Even more telling about Massingham is that he expresses to himself that he wishes Brenda had asked Massingham's opinion. This is indicative of Massingham's increasing respect for Dalgliesh.

Angela does not seem particularly upset at either revelation from Dalgliesh, i.e., the suicide clause and the previous marriage between Stella and Dr. Lorrimer. Part of it may be that she is still in shock over Stella's death and part of it may be that she just can't imagine caring about living in the cottage now with Stella dead.

After the two detectives leave at Angela's request, she makes a brief phone call and then removes the razor sharp sword from the wall. This foreshadows Angela's decision to kill the person she thinks is responsible for Stella's death.

As the "noose tightens" on the killer's identity, the chapters become more and more specific, with one important clue being explored and dropped into place in each chapter. The two males to whom the hairs belong are Dr. Lorrimer and Dr. Kerrison, both of whom had sex at different times in the chapel with Domenica Schofield. These are the hairs Dalgliesh finds in the chapel on the night Stella Mawson is murdered. These two hairs point to a motive, not to the actual fact of the murder.

Angela does not believe Doyle is guilty of Lorrimer's murder, but does believe he kills Stella. Angela assumes Stella meets with Doyle the night of her murder to blackmail him for money. Doyle, entirely aware that Angela can end his life in a rather messy, painful fashion, offers sound logic as to why he did not kill Stella: He was at work during the time she died. After convincing Angela of the truth of his alibi, they discuss who could have killed Stella. Doyle excuses himself to give Dalgliesh a call, but comes back saying the two Scotland Yard detectives were unavailable as they were on the way to the clunch pit.

The climax of the story, (i.e., when Nell flings the button necklace across the room and blurts out the incriminating evidence) is heart wrenching to see the pain in Nell's words



and actions. Nell, who is convinced that her daddy loves William but not her, finally believes that her daddy demonstrates his love by killing Dr. Lorrimer because of the way Lorrimer treats William and Nell on the morning of Lorrimer's murder. Nell now feels betrayed because she thinks it is because of Domenica (the "other woman") that her dad kills Lorrimer. In actuality, Nell is right in that her dad kills Lorrimer out of love for both his children, but not for the reason Nell believes. Kerrison kills Lorrimer because Lorrimer is going to contact Kerrison's wife with information about his affair with Domenica. This could result in Dr. Kerrison losing custody of his children. Had Dr. Kerrison not killed Stella Mawson, he might have gotten off with a verdict of manslaughter because he kills in the heat of passion in wanting to protect his children. What could he possibly have been thinking when he decides to kill Stella Mawson? She certainly has no interest in seeing Dr. Kerrison punished for killing Lorrimer, a man she detests. Perhaps the old saying that anyone who murders is insane has some truth to it and the ability to murder once maybe makes it easier to murder a second time.

Sadly and ironically, Nell may never know that the way her father really expresses his love is by making a full confession so she won't have to testify against him in court.



Characters

Dr. Kerrison

Dr. Kerrison is a pathologist, serving on an as-needed basis for the local police department. He wishes to receive an appointment as the "Home Office Pathologist," which would give him security and prestige. Kerrison is almost forty-five, in the middle of a divorce and child-custody battle, and is worried that he will be let go as the forensic pathologist if they hire someone else as the home office pathologist. He believes his work as a forensic pathologist is the only thing at which he excels. Kerrison is viewed as a very capable and careful pathologist who always holds up well on the witness stand in court cases.

Kerrison dotes on his two children, particularly his youngest, William, who is about four. His oldest daughter, Eleanor (Nell), a young teen, is somewhat emotionally disturbed and difficult to handle. Dr. Kerrison believes he commits two murders for the sake of his children.

Kerrison is having an affair with Domenica Schofield, the affair being the fulcrum point that levers Kerrison into committing murder. Had Kerrison not been involved with Domenica, there would have been no need to protect this fact and hence no murder.

Kerrison's motivation in carrying out the two murders on the surface seems noble—that of protecting his children from an ex-wife Kerrison believes is insane. But, one would have to wonder who really is insane if Kerrison believes the murder of two persons is justifiable for almost any reason.

Dr. Edwin Lorrimer

The senior forensic biologist at Hoggatt's Lab, he is Dr. Kerrison's first murder victim. Lorrimer is not well-liked as he tends to keep to himself except in an official capacity. He is a perfectionist, both for himself and those he supervises. If he believes one of those under him is incompetent, or just not up to his standards of perfection, he rides that person so intensely that they usually end up quitting or becoming a nervous wreck. He causes Susan Bradley's nephew such distress that she believes it contributed to the nephew's suicide. Now, Lorrimer is visiting the same sort of contempt and over-supervision on Clifford Bradley that he does on Susan's nephew.

He actually is somewhat responsible for his own murder as he intends to ruin Dr. Kerrison's life and calls Kerrison in to tell him so one evening when Lorrimer is working late at the lab. Had Dr. Kerrison ended his murderous acts right after killing Lorrimer, Kerrison may have gotten off either on a plea of temporary insanity or manslaughter. Very few people—perhaps Lorrimer's dad and Brenda Pridmore, seem much affected by Lorrimer's death.



Though Dr. Lorrimer only appears alive in the first book, his presence pervades the entire novel. In most murder mysteries, the antagonist is usually the murderer(s), in a sense Dr. Lorrimer can be seen as an antagonist, but he does not battle the protagonist, Adam Dalgliesh, but rather Lorrimer is the "villain" in the lives of a number of other characters, including Angela Foley, Stella Mawson, Dr. Kerrison, Cliff Bradley, and Paul Middlemass.

Commander Adam Dalgliesh

The "hero" or protagonist of the story, Dalgliesh appears in fourteen other P.D. James mystery novels. Because this book is the sixth in a series, the reader is not given a great deal of information about Dalgliesh, the assumption being that the information is presented in previous volumes. Dalgliesh appears to be somewhat attractive, as the women seem to notice him favorably. In this novel, he is a widower whose wife dies in childbirth many years before; the child also dies.

Dalgliesh, as befits a protagonist and hero, is reliable, intelligent, and honest. His integrity as a police officer is of the highest level. Though he does not have the wit and charm of, say, Sherlock Holmes, he possesses an earthy compassion for and keen insight into members of the human race. His investigations are conducted in a painstaking manner, missing very little in the way of clues.

Maxim Howarth

The newly-appointed Director of Hoggatt's Forensic Science Laboratory, Howarth is not a biologist himself, but rather a physicist of some renown. He accepts the Directorship for a change from his previous career path. He is independently wealthy and works in order to have a purpose. Howarth meets the police at the scene of the first murder in the book, the "Clunch Pit murder," and regrets both saying he would do so and attending the autopsy the next day.

When Howarth is a pre-teen, his stepmother dies when her daughter, Domenica, is still a toddler. Howarth's father, for all practical purposes, deserts the two children to a nanny, and puts Howarth in charge of "protecting" Domenica, a charge he still to this day takes quite seriously. At times it seems to be implied that he sometimes feels a little burdened with this responsibility, though he probably is just as much to blame for the enmeshed relationship between him and Domenica as is she.

Domenica Schofield

Maxim Howarth's younger, half sister who at the present time is staying with her brother. She is a widow from about eighteen months previously, and one wonders if her behavior has anything to do with the circumstances of her becoming a widow. She is driving the car when she has an accident in which her husband is killed.



Domenica is quite self absorbed, and even though she has lovers, she feels little to no emotional connection with the men. Domenica is central to the story in that her previous lover, Dr. Lorrimer, is so full of jealousy and hatred towards her present lover, Dr. Kerrison, that Lorrimer decides to ruin Kerrison's life. Inspector Dalgliesh takes an instant dislike to Domenica the first time he meets her, the possible reason being her self absorption.

Eleanor (Nell) Kerrison

Dr. Kerrison's oldest child is emotionally disturbed, both as a result of her mother deserting them as well as the tumultuous relationship between her mother and father before her mother left. Nell plays a pivotal role in the story, ultimately being the one to reveal her father as the murderer, albeit not intentionally.

Nell is very fond of and protective of her brother, William, even though she believes their father loves him more than her. Nell ultimately and inadvertently betrays her father to Inspector Dalgliesh when she loses her temper in a fit of anger at Miss Willard.

William Kerrison

The young son of Dr. Kerrison; his role is seemingly slight, but it is his being hit by a car that results in such emotional trauma to Nell that she inadvertently incriminates her father in Lorrimer's murder.

Miss Willard

The housekeeper for the Kerrison household, she is pretentious, lazy, a has-been, whose father in an earlier time was the rector for the chapel that sits on Hoggatt's grounds. She is quite antagonistic towards Nell, possibly because she sees Nell as competition for Dr. Kerrison's affections with Miss Willard. Her character is somewhat like that of Blanche Dubois in Tennessee Williams' play *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Angela Foley

The secretary to the Director of Hoggatt's Lab, Maxim Howarth, Angela is a private sort of person who lives with another woman, Stella Mawson, in their own little world. Angela is also Dr. Lorrimer's first cousin and once was the recipient of most of Lorrimer's estate. Angela is raised in foster homes after her mother died when Angela was five. Her maternal grandmother refuses to have anything to do with Angela because of the grandmother's enmity towards her daughter, Angela's mother. This enmity causes the grandmother to omit Angela from her will, leaving her entire estate to her grandson (Angela's cousin), Dr. Lorrimer.



Angela is describe as an "unusual-looking girl with a heart-shaped face and a wide, exceedingly high forehead...[with] baby fine [hair], the color of ripe grain." She has almost no affect, and is reserved.

It is implied several times, but never actually directly stated that Angela and Stella Mawson are involved in a lesbian relationship.

Stella Mawson

Angela Foley's roommate and possible lover, Stella is a writer, viewed as successful to the more discriminating reader, being more a literary writer than a popular fiction writer. Dr. Kerrison murders her when she attempts to blackmail him into loaning her enough money to purchase the cottage in which she and Angela live. Dr. Kerrison says, "[s]he was the gentlest, most reasonable of blackmailers" (p.358).

Brenda Pridmore

The clerk and receptionist at Hoggatt's Lab, Brenda is barely out of high school and fairly new to her job. She is cheerful, friendly, and comes from a good and loving home. She loves her job at Hoggatt's, although her parents are a bit skeptical about her working in a criminal investigation lab. Brenda is the one who discovers both the murder of Dr. Lorrimer and that of Stella Mawson. She serves as a means of enlightening the reader about some of the basics of forensics science through her questions to other experienced forensics workers and also serves as a foil upon which much of the sordidness of the lives of other characters is reflected.

Detective-Inspector the Honorable John Massingham

A very competent detective, though lacking empathy, he is Dalgliesh's partner in this volume. In subsequent volumes, he continues to partner with Dalgliesh until he leaves police service to join the House of Lords when his father dies; obviously he is of a privileged background, though not greatly wealthy. Massingham is a tad arrogant and sometimes judges harshly those whom he encounters in police work, victims as well as criminals. Dalgliesh wonders if this Massingham might achieve some distinction in a field far different from the chosen military careers of Massingham's ancestors. Dalgliesh sees the Massingham line as a series of "banal, non-entities," though he does express some optimism for his partner, John.

Mrs. Bidwell

Hoggatt Lab's cleaner, she is a gossip, friendly, observant, and tends to embellish a good story, though an honest person as far as thievery or anything like that.



Detective-Inspector Doyle

A man "made" for the work of investigating murders; his energy level is high and almost exuberant in the first murder scene of the young woman found in the clunch pit. Doyle has a slight run-in with Dr. Lorrimer that night and it's obvious the men do not like each other. Doyle drives parks his car on the lab property to have "anonymous sex" the night of Lorrimer's murder, which also places him on the rather long list of suspects.

Mrs. Sheffield

The rector's wife who is also available to sit with a distraught victim or victim's loved ones. She is friendly, cheerful, kind, and matronly.

Clifford Bradley

A biologist at Hoggatt's Lab, Clifford is an anxious, fearful man, made all the more nervous and incompetent by Dr. Lorrimer's intense scrutiny of every thing Clifford does in Clifford's performance of his duties at the lab. Dr. Lorrimer turns in a poor evaluation of Bradley's work, which adds fuel to Bradley's hatred of his supervisor, Lorrimer. Bradley is one of many on the list of suspects, and late in the book even admits to having seen the body of Lorrimer shortly after the man is murdered, although, Bradley does nothing about it.

Bradley's wife, who used to work under Paul Middlemass, is the driving force that keeps the marriage and Clifford together, perhaps mostly for the sake of their newborn girl, or maybe even out of love for Clifford.

Paul Middlemass

The Principal Scientific Officer Document Examiner, Middlemass is a competent professional, confident in his skills and happy in his marriage. He has an argument with Dr. Lorrimer the day Lorrimer is murdered over Lorrimer's treatment of Clifford Bradley. The argument ends with Middlemass punching Lorrimer in the nose.

Claire Easterbrook

A senior scientific officer, she works with Dr. Lorrimer at Hoggatt's Lab. She plays a minor role in the novel, only offers one significant clue, that of the fact that a page is torn out of Lorrimer's notebook.



Objects/Places

BUTTONS

The buttons on Paul Middlemass' lab coat are embossed with the symbol of the Dental Corps, in which his father, a dentist worked.

MALLET

The mallet which is laying on the table in Dr. Lorrimer's lab office; it is being examined to see whether dog or human blood stains it. Dr. Kerrison uses the mallet to murder Dr. Lorrimer.

EVIDENCE BAGS

Bags which detectives use for holding and preserving pieces of evidence from a crime scene or search scene.

LAB COAT

Paul Middlemass's lab coats were ones his father, a dentist, wore. Middlemass wears one of his dad's lab coats each day in his job as Principal Scientific Officer Document Examiner. On the day Middlemass punches Dr. Lorrimer, some of Lorrimer's blood gets on Middlemass's lab coat.

NUMBERS

These are numbers that slide onto a board in the Hoggatt's chapel and were used by Domenica Schofield to communicate a day and time to meet with a lover.

KEYS

There are several keys that are crucial in the murder investigation. First are the keys to the Hoggatt's Lab; next is the key to the chapel. It is in not knowing how the murderer escapes a locked lab that makes the question of keys important.

BALL

William Kerrison is chasing a ball on the day Domenica Schofield hits him in her Jaguar.



NOTEBOOK

Dr. Lorrimer always toted a notebook with him while working. On the night he is murdered, the murderer tears a page out of the notebook, which becomes an important clue.

WILL

Dr. Lorrimer's will is laying on his desk at home. The will leaves almost his entire estate to Angela Foley; however, unbeknown to Angela, Dr. Lorrimer has a new will that supersedes this one and cuts Foley out of any inheritance.

LEATHER THONG

Nell Kerrison has a leather thong around her neck. It is not until the last few pages of the book that the readers and Dalgliesh learn the thong holds the six buttons from Paul Middlemass' stained lab coat.

TIRE TRACKS

Tire tracks are found on Hoggatt Lab's grounds which are traced back to Inspector Doyle, making him briefly a major suspect in Lorrimer's murder. His alibi, however, pans out.

JAGUAR

Both Commander Dalgliesh and Domenica Schofield are partial to this automobile. Dalgliesh wonders how Schofield manages to secure one of the newest ones on the market when he is still waiting for his.

PHONE CALLS

There are several phone calls that provide clues, or muddy the waters of the investigation. One is the one that Dr. Lorrimer's father makes to him seconds before Lorrimer is murdered. The old man Lorrimer calls to complain of the TV not working. Another call from old Mr. Lorrimer to Dr. Lorrimer earlier that day was taken by Claire Easterbrook. She takes a message saying that Mr. Lorrimer is not going to stay overnight at a medical facility as planned. A third phone call is that Dr. Kerrison makes just after he murders Lorrimer while still at the scene of the crime. He calls the hospital in order to bolster an alibi. The final important phone call is the one that Susan Bradley makes to the Bidwell household to tell Mrs. Bidwell to go to Mrs. Schofield's home instead of to work the morning after Dr. Lorrimer's murder.



SILK CORD

The silk drapery cord is in a trunk in the Hoggatt Chapel, which Dr. Kerrison uses to strangle Stella Mawson and then to hang her from the rafters to make it appear a suicide.

LETTER AND NOTE

Stella Mawson takes a letter and note off Dr. Lorrimer's desk at his home. She plans to use the letter to blackmail Dr. Kerrison into lending her some money. The note is one written by Doyle's wife in an effort to expose the fact that he has been stealing cannabis that is scheduled for destruction and selling it. Angela Foley believes that Doyle kills Stella Mawson because Stella has that note in her possession. Foley is incorrect.

WORD

An antique sword hangs over Angela Foley's fireplace. She plans to use the sword to kill Inspector Doyle, who Foley believes kills Mawson. Doyle convinces her that he did not kill Mawson.

Social Concerns And Themes

Noted for her keen sociocultural perceptions, P. D. James once again addresses the issue of a child in search of identity. Sixteen-year-old Eleanor Kerrison, the victim of a broken home, seeks the affection of her father and resents all interference, especially an unlikable housekeeper/ companion. She is unaware of her father's indifference to her in preference to her brother, William, whose custody is his obsession. Dealing with the role of human passions in their various forms, James addresses the jealousy between the arrogant Edwin Lorrimer, the victim of an unknown murderer, and the newly appointed Director of the Forensic Science Laboratory, Maxim Howarth. She suggests an incestuous relationship between Maxim Howarth and his half-sister Domenica Schofield, a factor not to be ignored in Howarth's resentment of his sister's former lover, Lorrimer. The novel also treats of the tension between the perfectionist Lorrimer and his mediocre Scientific Officer Cliff Bradley.

James treats with classical delicacy the lesbian relationship between Stella Mawson, an enigmatic writer, and Angela Foley, the twenty-seven-yearold personal secretary to the Director of Hoggatt's Laboratory.

While necessarily the main purpose of the story is to find the murderer — to establish by facts who and how — James brings the reader face to face with the why, observing that more murders are provoked by love than by hate. Critics admire her "profound insight into sexual fears and needs," and with classical perception she examines the intricacies of human relationships. Her world so often deals with individuals who do not know a family bond, who are isolated physically as well as spiritually, the Dostoevskian humiliated and injured, seekers after justice in a world of blurred moral values and standards.



Techniques

As in all of James's works, place is very important. Here she takes the reader to an East Anglian village bordering the fens, where nature is as important as Hogatt's Forensic Laboratory, located in an old Palladian mansion. James places great importance on documenting her materials. Her own experience in hospitals and in police work are most helpful in describing the lab. She is personally interested in church and domestic Georgian architecture. The story is built around an old mansion and its artistically important but now abandoned Wren chapel, "an isolated building so small and perfect that it looked like an architect's model precisely set in a fabricated landscape, or an elegant ecclesiastical folly, justifying itself only by its classical purity . . ."

Plot is crucial in a detective story.

Some of James's novels tend to lag around the middle. *Death of an Expert Witness* moves rather steadily, although it too has its moments of frustration.

The author, however, charts her plots carefully, in a succession of scenes, a method she adopted from her first novel, and which she maintains. In his *New York Times* analysis of this book (1977), Newgate Callendar sees James as a novelist who uses the mystery story; who has deftness and a sense of poetry. James likes structural models, which is why she chose the detective story. She says that had she been a poet she would have chosen the sonnet. The use of a carefully controlled plot, keeping most readers in suspense until the end of the work, contributes largely to the success of this novel and James's other detective stories.



Themes

NO PRIVACY IN MURDER

This is the central theme of the book, and is perhaps true in any murder investigation, be it in fiction or "real" life. In order to find a murderer, detectives must ferret out all the minutiae of both the victim's life and the lives of friends, family, and suspects. As Commander Dalgliesh thinks to himself, "The victim was central to the mystery of his own death. He died because of what he was." (p. 92). Dalgliesh believes that getting to know the victim intimately is more crucial to solving the murder than is figuring out motive. In order to get to know the victim, privacy is sacrificed. An example of this is clearly seen when Dalgliesh and Massingham search Dr. Lorrimer's bedroom after the murder. They find some letters written by Lorrimer to Domenica Schofield. They are childish, obsessive, and often highly erotic writings—that of a man not willing to let go of a past lover. At one point after reading the letters, Dalgliesh thinks to himself that Dr. Lorrimer would probably prefer that his murder go unavenged if it would protect these letters from being seen by anyone.

Though Lorrimer is the clearest case of privacy violation, a number of other characters lose at least some of their privacy to the investigation. First, every person who works in the lab has to write an accounting of their previous twenty-four hours. After handing in their accounting, a police officer is sent to verify the content; hence, if someone lies, it will be found out. Inspector Doyle, a married man, has to eventually confess to picking up a woman on the street for a brief sexual liaison, in order to explain why his car is parked on Hoggatt's grounds the night of the murder; otherwise, he has no alibi. Stella Mawson's secret of having once been married to Dr. Lorrimer is revealed. The fact that Domenica Schofield meets her lovers in the chapel for sex is uncovered. There are a number of secrets that are revealed in the course of the investigation. Fortunately for those who have secrets, Dalgliesh is an honorable man and will not expose the secrets except when necessary.

THE INVESTIGATION OF MURDER IS NEVER AGREEABLE

This statement "The investigation of murder is never agreeable," (p. 152) is spoken by Dalgliesh in answer to a question by Brenda Pridmore. Time and time again throughout the investigation, Dalgliesh must endure anything from mild annoyance to outright hostility as he and Massingham gather the clues needed to find a murderer. The mild annoyance comes from such people as Claire Easterbrook, who is up to her eyeballs in work, especially now that Dr. Lorrimer is dead, and who does not want to take the time to answer the detectives' numerous questions, some of which seem frivolous or unnecessary to her. A little stronger response to the prying questions of the detective comes from Domenica Schofield, who is hostile and calls Dalgliesh insolent for asking where she and Dr. Lorrimer made love. Further on in the conversation with Schofield,



Dalgliesh asks another question and Mrs. Schofield replies, "Why the hell should you?" (p. 220) in a tone that could be taken for bantering, but Dalgliesh thinks he detects some underlying "defensive anger."

Even a fellow police officer, Inspector Doyle, is a bit difficult when Dalgliesh questions him about where he was driving on the night of Lorrimer's murder. Doyle responds that it is his business where he was, and Dalgliesh reminds him that that is not true in the investigation of a murder. Certainly it is not easy for one police officer to have to press another to reveal personal information, especially when it turns out that Doyle is cheating on his wife.

Interestingly, even reading the love letters written by a deceased man was not all that agreeable. Dalgliesh and Massingham are almost embarrassed for Dr. Lorrimer when the two detectives read the depths of Lorrimer's dysfunction regarding his response to Domenica Schofield rejecting him. Another time when the two detectives are uncomfortable during the investigation is when they interview Clifford Bradley about the vomit in the sink. Dalgliesh and Massingham feel a combination of disgust and pity for Bradley.

The entire scene at the Kerrison home near the end of the book when Massingham cruelly confirms that Nell's father and Domenica Schofield are having an affair—a revelation that causes Nell to become both hysterical and angry—is extremely disagreeable to the detectives. In fact, Domenica Schofield, who is there and seems to actually feel some empathy for Nell, says, "My God, yours is a filthy trade" (p. 348). Even the most jaded detective would regret having to visit such terrible pain upon a teenager (Nell) who worships her father.

Talking to people and forcing them to tell some of their most intimate secrets is a difficult and disagreeable job, one that Dalgliesh does not relish, but nevertheless does in order to bring a murderer to justice.

A MURDER VICTIM IS OFTEN NOT INNOCENT

There are three murder victims in *DEATH OF AN EXPERT WITNESS*. None of the three is a "totally innocent" victim. The first murder, and one that is only peripherally considered, is that of the young woman found in the clunch field. The young woman who is murdered has been involved with a man other than her husband—it's not explicit in the book as to whether she actually commits adultery, but she must have known her husband well enough to know that he would not approve of her behavior. Of course, flirting with a man who is not one's husband, or even adultery, is not deserving of the punishment of death, but the victim is not totally innocent.

The second murder, that of Dr. Lorrimer, is fairly clear cut insofar as Dr. Lorrimer being partly the author of his own murder. First, deciding to ruin Dr. Kerrison's life solely because Kerrison is involved with Domenica Scholfield is totally unethical and even insane; then to call Dr. Kerrison into the lab at night when no one else is around to



inform Kerrison of his (Lorrimer's) intentions is like saying, "Please come and kill me." Clearly, Dr. Lorrimer is partially responsible for his own murder. In fact, it is possible that Lorrimer intends for Dr. Kerrison to kill him—to both put Lorrimer out of his obsessive misery and to make certain that Dr. Kerrison would not have Domenica Schofield.

The third murder, that of Stella Mawson, is another clear cut case of Mawson setting up her own murder, whether she intends to or not. Going to blackmail someone who may be desperate and having the object of the blackmail with her and then having Dr. Kerrison swear not to tell anyone is an open invitation to her own demise. Blackmail, no matter how gentle or reasonable, never includes an innocent victim.



Style

Point of View

Death of an Expert Witness includes several different points of view. The most frequently occurring point of view is the third-person subjective (or limited) point of view, moving among several different characters. Some of the characters who are presented through the third person subjective view are Dr. Kerrison, Nell Kerrison, Maxim Howarth, Angela Foley, Paul Middlemass, Adam Dalgliesh, John Massingham, Inspector Doyle, and Brenda Pridmore. This point of view works quite well in that the reader is privy to information that the detectives do not always have, which sets up a situation for dramatic irony, i.e., when the reader knows something that a character does not know, but the character needs to know. This point of view also allows the reader to understand a character in a more intimate way than would be possible with a third-person objective (or dramatic) view, where the narrator merely reports actions, conversations, and details of setting, but not interior thoughts and feelings of characters. Naturally, in a murder mystery, the third-person subjective narrator may or may not be reliable. Sometimes the reader knows because of previous events if a narrator is lying.

In addition to the third-person subjective point of view, P. D. James occasionally employs the third-person objective, which is an impersonal narrator. This narrator is employed mostly to give descriptions of setting and/or characters. Sometimes, however, the setting and character descriptions are narrated by one of the characters through his/her thoughts upon observing a scene or character.

Setting

Death of an Expert Witness takes place mostly in the village of Chevisham, England, although, one chapter takes place in a London Teaching Hospital when Commander Adam Dalgliesh visits his boss, Dr. Charles Freeborn, to apprise him of the details of the murder of Dr. Lorrimer.

Within the village of Chevisham, the setting moves from private homes to Hoggatt's Lab, depending on who Dalgliesh and Massingham are interviewing. The homes of Dr. Kerrison, Maxim Howarth, Dr. Lorrimer, Clifford Bradley, Brenda Pridmore, Angela Foley, and several other minor characters all are settings for different chapters. Almost all the chapters take place in just one setting.

The clunch field, where the first murder takes place, is an "arid scrubland between the two ends of town, litter-strewn and edged with sparse trees above a ditch...the ditch... [is] dank with nettles and sour with rotting rubbish" (p. 25). Though the first murder setting is not one in which Adam Dalgliesh is involved, it serves the purpose of setting a mood and making a statement about murder, any murder in general, but also specifically the ones that follow, that of Dr. Lorrimer and Stella Mawson. The veneer of



civilization and civility hides such places/people of which "arid scrubland...dank...sour" might serve as an analogy.

The Hoggatt's Lab is an interesting setting and one that is central to the entire novel. It is ironic that a murder takes place within the walls of a place that exists solely for the exposure of criminals and fighting crime. Howarth at one point says that "Hoggatt's had a heartbeat—all institutions did—but the pulse eluded him" (p. 58). Within the "breast" of Hoggatt's beats a heart of violence, hatred, and not a little rancor as exemplified by the insane jealousy of Dr. Lorrimer for Dr. Kerrison; the hatred of Howarth towards Dr. Lorrimer; the anger of Angela Foley towards Dr. Lorrimer when he refuses to share an inheritance that by rights should have also been partly Angela's; and the intimidation and fear Clifford Bradley feels for Dr. Lorrimer. However, contrasted to this is the even-tempered professionalism of Inspector Blakelock and the innocent wonder of Brenda Pridmore—hardly enough to counterbalance all the negativity of the place.

P.D. James takes great care in her descriptions of the various settings—homes, offices, the lab, the clunch field, and the chapel. Much of the description seems superfluous, but then most of the settings serve as additional information for the reader to understand the characters.

Language and Meaning

P.D. James is a highly-respected mystery writer. Part of the reason is because her books tend to be more literary than the pulp fiction kind of mystery novel. Because of this, the vocabulary is very specific and somewhat sophisticated, and many high school students probably need to have a dictionary handy if they want to understand each word. Coupled with the somewhat sophisticated vocabulary is the fact that James is an English author and therefore uses a number of words and spellings that are specific to British English versus American English. Neither the British terminology nor spelling variation should hinder the average reader.

There are very few technical terms (for example: electrophoresis) and again, it is not necessary to understand the terms in order to understand the process of the investigation. The medical terminology is for the most part understandable, but even the few words used that the average lay person might not know, does not hinder reading.

Structure

The book is divided into five books, each one with anywhere from five to fifteen chapters. The chapters vary considerably in length, most not more than ten or so pages and one chapter only a few paragraphs long.

The book titles are as follows:



Book 1: "A Call to Murder," which contains ten chapters, all set before the murder of Dr. Lorrimer and Stella Mawson. This first book gives some background on some of the key characters, especially those who are considered suspects after Lorrimer's murder.

Book 2: "Death in a White Coat," contains fifteen chapters and opens with the discovery of Dr. Lorrimer's corpse and contains the beginnings of the investigation by Commander Dalgliesh.

Book 3: "An Experimental Man," contains eight chapters and is the main "meat" of the investigations with many interviews, re-interviews, traveling from one setting to another, and gathering evidence to be sent off to the Scotland Yard crime lab. The end of chapter eight is the close of the first day of the murder investigation.

Book 4: "Hanged by the Neck," contains thirteen chapters, and as the title suggests, also is the book in which Stella Mawson is murdered. Most of these chapters are more intensive interviewing and putting together the pieces of the murder puzzle.

Book 5: "The Clunch Pit," is the shortest book with five chapters and contains both the climax and dénouement.



Quotes

"There was no privacy for the dead; the most one could hope for was a certain reverence." Book 1, Chap. 3, p. 24

"'Damn Lorrimer! Everything he touches goes wrong for me.' He felt a spasm of hatred so intense, so physical that it made him retch. If only Lorrimer's body were sprawled at the bottom of the clunch pit." Book 1, Chap. 3, p. 33

"'Inspector. Isn't death terrible?'

'Murder is. Death isn't; at least, no more than birth is. You couldn't have one without the other or there'd be no room for us all. I reckon I won't worry overmuch when my time comes.'" Book 1, Chap. 7, p. 53

"He knew that Hoggatt's had a heartbeat—all institutions did—but the pulse eluded him." Book 1, Chap. 8, p. 58

"'There's a very nasty atmosphere in this lab recently, and if a certain gentleman doesn't take hold of himself there'll be mischief done, you mark my words.'" Book 1, Chap. 9, p. 73

"'It's extraordinary, though, how well it works. You look at the jury, sitting there politely attentive, like children on their best behavior because they're visitors in an alien country and don't want to make fools of themselves or offend the natives. Yet how often do they come up with a verdict that's manifestly perverse having regard to the evidence?'" Book 2, Chap. 3, p. 102

"Death, thought Dalgliesh, obliterates family resemblance as it does personality; there is no affinity between the living and the dead." Book 3, Chap. 1, p. 182

"When murder comes in the window, privacy goes out the door." Book 3, Chap. 4, p. 207

"'That's how love ends, not with a bang, but a whimper.'

'Less a whimper than a cry of pain.'" Book 3, Chap. 5, p. 218

"'Then it could have been an enemy, someone with a grudge. Someone he'd given evidence against in the past. After all, he's probably well known in the witness box. Death of an expert witness.'" Book 3, Chap. 5, p. 221

"Murder was the least important factor in a murder investigation. He would gladly have exchanged the psychological subtleties of motive for a single, solid incontrovertible piece of physical evidence linking a suspect with a crime. " Book 3, Chap. 8, p. 238

"'I'm remembering what old George Greenall, the first detective-sergeant I worked under, told me....He said, "They'll tell you that the most destructive force in the world is



hate. Don't you believe it, lad. It's love. And if you want to make a detective you'd better learn to recognize it when you meet it." Book 4, Chap. 1, p. 251

"I was just thinking that detection must be like science. The detective formulates a theory, then tests it. If the facts he discovers fit, then the theory holds. If they don't, then he has to find another theory, another suspect.'

Dr. Howarth said drily:

'It's a reasonable analogy. But the temptation to select the right facts is probably greater. And the detective is experimenting with human beings. Their properties are complex and not susceptible to accurate analysis.'" Book 4, Chap. 2, p. 255

"If he's found guilty of murder, the judge will pass the statutory penalty, imprisonment for life. That means that he'll be in prison for a long time, perhaps ten years or more.'

'But that's silly. That won't put things right. It won't bring Dr. Lorrimer back.'

'It won't put anything right, but it isn't silly. Life is precious to nearly all of us. Even people who have little more than life want to live it to the last natural moment. No one has a right to take it away from them.'" Book 4, Chap. 3, p. 259

"By the age of five you've either learned that the world is good, and everything and everyone in it stretches out toward you with love. Or you know that you're a reject. No one ever unlearns that first lesson.'" Book 4, Chap. 7, p. 288

"There's more than one way of courting death." Book 4, Chap. 8, p. 296

"I suppose this is what murder does, changes people's lives and spoils them.'

'Changes, yes. But it needn't spoil. You're young and intelligent and brave, so you won't let it spoil yours.'" Book 5, Chap. 1, p. 328

"...life had taught him that the unforgivable was usually the most easily forgiven. It was possible to do police work honestly; there was, indeed, no other safe way to do it. But it wasn't possible to do it without giving pain." Book 5, Chap. 5, p. 349

"The case had broken; except that it was never the case that broke, only the people." Book 5, Chap. 5, p. 354

"It wasn't love, but it was in its own way a kind of loving and it was such peace. This is peace, too, knowing that there's nothing else I need do. There's an end of responsibility, an end of worry. A murderer sets himself aside from the whole of humanity forever. It's a kind of death. I'm like a dying man now, the problems are still there, but I'm moving away from them into a new dimension. I forfeited so many rights when I killed Stella Mawson, even the right to feel pain.'" Book 5, Chap. 5, p. 361

Adaptations

Death of an Expert Witness was a dramatic series on Mystery! a PBS television series presented by WGBHTV, Boston.

Sister Irma M. Kashuba, S.S.J.



Topics for Discussion

Do you think a detective has the right to make people reveal personal and potentially embarrassing information about their lives? Explain your answer.

Does Dr. Lorrimer deserve to die? Remember, he intends to ruin Dr. Kerrison and ensure that Kerrison loses custody of his kids—all because of Lorrimer's jealousy.

If you were on a jury in the trial of Dr. Kerrison, would you vote for life imprisonment? Explain your answer.

Who is the least likable character, in your opinion? Give examples of his or her behavior and/or personality that makes you feel this way.

Did you realize before the end of the book that Dr. Kerrison is the murderer? If so, what clues gave you this revelation? If not, who did you think was guilty and why?

Which detective do you feel most drawn to—Dalglish or Massingham? What about the one you choose do you like? What do you dislike about the other? Give examples from the book.

One of the themes in the book is that murder investigations are not agreeable. Would you want to be a detective in a homicide department? What part of the investigation in this book would have been most difficult for you to do? What part would have been interesting?

How could Massingham had done things differently at the end of the book when he cruelly confirmed the fact of Dr. Kerrison's affair with Domenica Schofield? Would a kinder approach have had the same effect, i.e., provided the final bit of evidence necessary to confirm Dr. Kerrison as the murderer?

Do you think Angela Foley should contest Dr. Lorrimer's will? Is it fair of Lorrimer to have written his cousin out of the will?



Related Titles

All of James's detective stories — with the exception of *Innocent Blood* (1980), which is not really a detective story — are united by the person of Adam Dalgliesh. He is less important in the two Cordelia Gray stories, *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1972) and *The Skull Beneath the Skin* (1982), although he figures in both, especially the first. Of the six stories united by Dalgliesh, the best after *Death of an Expert Witness* is probably *Shroud for a Nightingale* (1971) set in a nurses' home called Nightingale House at John Carpendar Hospital in Heatheringfield on the Sussex/ Hampshire border. The hospital milieu was familiar to James from her own experience, and the student nurse type from her training to work with juveniles. The murders of two student nurses open a web of intrigue which leads to an analysis of the problem of personal freedom and the power of action. The temptation to power and control is reminiscent of great classical novelists such as Balzac.

With careful probing done at personal risk, Dalgliesh learns what only the reader knows for certain, for life is more complex than facts and figures.

The Black Tower (1975) is set in a background that has always been of interest to James, the problem of the chronically ill, also the theme of her first two novels, *Cover Her Face* (1962) and *A Mind to Murder* (1963). It takes place at Toynton Grange, a monastic type nursing home built by the neurotic Wilfred Anstey in the Dorset countryside. This time Dalgliesh is not the official inspector. He has simply gone to pay a personal call to Father Baddeley, his father's former curate, whom he finds dead, or as he soon suspects, murdered. A series of "accidental" deaths confirm his suspicions, and he is lead into a dangerous predicament before the truth is clear to others. Criticized for its slow pace and melodramatic ending, *The Black Tower*, itself symbolic of the world of evil, is one of the finer Dalgliesh series. It tells the reader more about Dalgliesh personally than other works, since he is recovering from an illness himself, and it is marked by reminiscences of his own childhood.

In *Unnatural Causes* (1967), generally acknowledged as the least successful of the series, Dalgliesh is again an unofficial witness to a crime. He arrives at Monksmere Head just south of Dunwich to spend a ten-day autumn holiday with a spinster aunt. He is also contemplating marriage for himself.

The countryside is beautifully portrayed, and reveals P. D. James's own familiarity with the English land and seascape. Dalgliesh mentally follows the case along with the official Inspector Stanley Gerald Reckless; in fact, he does some unofficial investigating of his own. The technique is good, but the denouement is not as plausible as in the other novels and contains a good deal of heightened melodrama.

The person of Dalgliesh also dominates James's first two novels, *Cover Her Face* and *A Mind to Murder*. Here he became a distinctive type in crime investigation, with the moral overtones that contribute to making James's works, as she expresses it, "like twentieth-century morality plays; the values are basic and unambiguous."



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