

His Bloody Project Study Guide

His Bloody Project by Graeme MacCrae Burnet

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Plot Summary

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His Bloody Project by Graeme Macrae Burnet is a pseudo-historical crime novel that analyzes the crimes of a seventeen-year-old Scottish crofter's son named Roderick Macrae, Roddy. Much of the book consists of Roddy's personal account of the events leading up to the crime as well as the crime itself.

Roddy's account begins by explaining he lives with his father, John "Black Macrae" and Roddy's sister Jetta. The Macraes are crofters as are the majority of the citizens in their village known as Culduie. Roddy tells of a long-lasting feud between the Mackenzie and Macrae families that is only elongated by Roddy's killing a sheep that fell into the mud and suffered a broken leg. Eventually, the Mackenzie patriarch, Lachlan Mackenzie became the village's constable. This allowed Lachlan to further his vendetta against the Macraes. For example, Lachlan reduced the size of the family's croft and limited their access to the fertilizer, sea-ware.

One day, on the way home from mandatory work put upon Roddy by Lachlan, he found Lachlan having sex with Jetta. He brushed this encounter off and continued on. Eventually, Roddy became friends with Lachlan's daughter, Flora, causing Roddy to fall in love with her. At the yearly village Gathering, Roddy drunkenly admitted these feelings to Flora, and Roddy learned that the feelings were not mutual. This caused Roddy to go to the inn to get even more drunk, where he was eventually assaulted by Lachlan.

Not long after, Roddy returned home to find that eviction papers have been served to his family thanks to Lachlan Mackenzie. In his anger, John Macrae admitted that he knew that Jetta was pregnant and demanded to know who was responsible. Roddy explained that Lachlan Mackenzie was the father, which caused John to assault his daughter. Roddy stopped his father, and the sibling retreated to the barn. It is here that Roddy decided to murder Lachlan Broad. Once at the Mackenzie home, Roddy finds Flora, who he killed and possibly sexually assaulted. Once her brother Donnie entered, Roddy killed him as well. Lachlan finally arrived and a struggle ensued, which ended in Lachlan's death. After the murders, Roddy's neighbors hide Roddy until the proper authorities arrived. The reader later learns that during this period, Jetta hung herself.

The majority of the rest of the book consists of court documents and reports of the happenings within the courtroom. Roddy's advocate, Andrew Sinclair attempted to claim that Roddy was insane at the time of the crime. After a variety of character witnesses, psychological "experts," and medical officers testified, Roddy is found guilty of the murders and sentenced to hanging. Before his hanging, Roddy wrote a letter to his father, which never reached him, as he died before it arrived. After a failed petition, Roddy was hung.



Preface - Statements by Residents of Culduie

Summary

The novel opens with a preface narrated by the author. He explains that the book consists of documents related to the case of Rodrick Macrae, a seventeen-year-old convicted of triple homicide, who lived in Culduie, Ross-shire, located in the Scottish Highlands. The author goes on to say that the majority of the work is made up of Roderick Macrae's own written account of the events leading up to the crime that he wrote while awaiting trial. The author makes note that the account is unusual, as it has high literary merit, especially since it came from the mind of an uneducated peasant farmer. The author notes that the document's authorship is debatable for this reason. The author ends by explaining that it is not the point of the novel to convince the reader of Roderick's innocence or guilt, but instead to have the reader come to their own conclusion regarding the crime.

The next section of the novel consists of oral personal statements from witnesses and those close to the individuals involved in the murder. The first is from Carmina Murchison, also known as Carmina Smoke. She explains that she knew Roddy as a young boy and did not think that he had the type of mind to commit the murders. She explains that on the day of the murder she spoke to Roddy about the weather while Roddy held farming tools. Roddy explained that he was going to speak to Lachlan "Broad" Mackenzie. On his return, Smoke noticed that he was covered in blood. She took him inside and her husband, Kenneth, went to the Mackenzie property and found multiple corpses.

The next statement is that of Kenneth Murchison, Smoke. He explains that after he found the bodies, he confined Roddy in order to protect him from the angry mob of Mackenzie family members. He admits that Roddy was a queer boy, but not particularly violent.

The third statement is that of Reverend James Galbraith, a reverend of Culduie. He explains that he is not surprised that Roddy committed the murders, because the church's sermons fell on Roddy's deaf ears. He states that Roddy's father, John "Black" Macrae, was a religious man but not an intelligent one, who began going to church after his wife's untimely death.

The final two statements are by William Gilles, Roddy's schoolmaster, and Peter Mackenzie, the brother of Lachlan Mackenzie, one of the murder victims. William explains that Roddy was very intelligent, but solitary. He recollects that he once spoke to John Macrae about having Roddy continue his education, but the conversation did not go well. Peter Mackenzie explains that Roddy and his otherworldly sister were wicked and mistreated animals. He theorizes that Roddy once set fire to a Mackenzie



owned barn. He ends his statement by admitting that he was not in town during the time of the crime.

Analysis

The novel begins by making the reader question whether the work is actually fiction or not. It seems like the author is speaking to the reader genuinely by starting that the book consists of documents that the author actually found. The question remains throughout the entire work, as the author never explicitly calls the contents of the book fiction.

With the prologue, the novel breaks the crime novel motif of the reader being told whether the accused is guilty or not. Usually, in crime novels, the reader sees the investigation to completion, meaning that the authorities eventually convict the right person and prove their guilty. The author explains that this book will not do that. Consequently, Roddy Macrae is ambiguous. The reader is not told how to view Roddy, as they do not know whether he is a cold-blooded killer or not. This idea of having the reader make up their minds about Roddy's innocence is only furthered by the fact that Roddy's own account of the events leading up to the murders. Depending on how the reader sees Roddy, it can be argued that he is an unreliable narrator, regardless of the fact that he later states that he is guilty of the crimes. As hinted at later, it is very possible that Roddy is not in his right mind, only furthering his unreliability.

Roddy is an unreliable narrator. In Carmina's eyes, he is innocent and in Peter's he is guilty. At this point, the reader is not told that there was a feud between the Mackenzies and the Macraes which probably influenced Peter Mackenzie's evaluation of Roddy's character. Roddy's character is made even more complicated through the articulate nature of his writing, as the author notes in the preface, and William Giles' explanation that he was a very gifted student. This opens up possibilities that Roddy did not actually write the account or that he is unusually intelligent.

The Statements section of the novel intentionally gives little information regarding the crime. While it is implied that one of the three murder victims in the patriarch, Lachlan Mackenzie, the statements do not reveal the identities of the other two victims. In fact, the reader does not become privy to these identities until the end of "The Account of Roderick Macrae" section. This essentially implies that Roddy could have killed any of the Mackenzie family members. However, the "Statements" section makes it clear that Peter Mackenzie was not murdered, as he gave a statement after the murder took place.

Discussion Question 1

What is the connotation of John Macrae's nickname, "Black Macrae?"



Discussion Question 2

How does Roddy's unreliability affect your perception of this section?

Discussion Question 3

What possible motives for the crime are revealed in the "Statements" chapter?

Vocabulary

crofter, convoluted, kinsmen, zealous



The Account of Roderick Macrae pp. 1-57

Summary

Roddy explains that he is writing an account of the events leading up to the crime on the behest of his advocate. Roddy states that he committed his crimes to deliver his father from tribulations. He explains the nature of the village of Culduie. Culduie is a small town made up of nine houses and next to the town of Aird-Dubh. He then he explains the layout of his house, which consists of two rooms, an elevated living quarter for animals and one of the family. Roddy then attempts to explain why the Macraes and Mackenzies hate each other, but confesses that he does not know the cause of the feud, as the catalyst took place long ago. He theorizes that, at one point, he accidentally destroyed some of the Mackenzie crops while flying a kite, which did not help the families' relationship.

Roddy goes on a tangent about his mother and father. Apparently, Roddy's mother was the very beautiful sister of two brothers who happened to be on a boat with Roddy's father, John. In 1850, the boat encountered a storm that killed both of the brothers. Eventually, John married Roddy's mother and had Roddy, Jetta, and twins. Jetta and Roddy became inseparable, but drifted apart after their mother's death (she died in childbirth), which caused Jetta to become very superstitious. Jetta and Roddy were made fun of in class due to their father being the Black Macrae. One day, William Giles asked Roddy what he was going to do after school, and Roddy explained that he was required to work on the croft.

Sometime in the future, Roddy was tasked with watching the village's sheep. Roddy was stung by a bee, so he walked over to a waterfall to wash his wound. While he was doing this, a sheep became stuck in mud. Eventually, Roddy pulled the sheep out, but its leg was broken. Roddy decided to kill the sheep by picking up a peat iron and bashing its head in. Only after he did this did Roddy realize that the sheep belonged to Lachlan Broad. After the corpse was discovered, John Macrae, Lachlan Mackenzie, and the constable, Finlayson, met to discuss the matter. Mackenzie wanted Roddy to be punished, but the group eventually decided that the Macrae family would pay the Mackenzies a shilling a week until the market value of the sheep was payed off. Roddy then explains that some sort of professional came in and inspected Roddy's body and mind.

Roddy then recollects on the time that William Giles came to John Macrae to discuss the possibility of continuing Roddy's education. During this conversation, John stated that Roddy would not be educated because he did not want Roddy to become someone like William. Even after William offers Roddy a scholarship, John states that Roddy will stay at the croft and help his family.



Roddy's narrative then shifts to an instance when Roddy was employed at the laird's house within the hunting party. Here, he met Archibald Ross. Right when the hunting party was about to fire at a deer, Roddy leapt out at the deer and scared the animal away. The laird then asked that Roddy not be employed at the estate ever again.

Analysis

The major theme that emerges in this section is that of economic inequality. At the beginning of the section, Roddy explains that his home was basically a hovel and not only housed his family, but the family's livestock as well. The livestock is a metaphor of sorts for the difference between the upper and lower classes within Culduie. It seems like the upper-class treats the lower-class similarly to how the lower-class treats its livestock, as almost non-human. This is a stark contrast from the Big House, belonging to the laird. The Big House is extravagant and large and most likely built from funds garnered by the work of the poor citizens of Culduie. This makes it very clear that the citizens of Culduie and the surrounding area do not really see the product of their hard work, as it is evident that the vast majority of the profit goes to the laird and factor. The existence of Aird-Dubh also further demonstrates the class system in the book's culture. Aird-Dubh represents that even within the lower-class, subsections exist. This is evident by the people of Culduie's revulsion towards people of Aird-Dubh.

This section also contains Roddy's first act of violence. In the "Statements" section, Peter Mackenzie explains that Roddy and his sister would abuse animals. This chapter reveals that the incident that he is referring to may be the one involving the sheep with the broken leg. Due to the fact that Roddy is the narrator of this section, it is unclear whether he actually felt remorse after he killed the sheep or felt nothing or pleasure, signs of a future killer. However, if Roddy did not feel remorse for the sheep, it seemingly contradicts Roddy's actions when he is working for the hunting party. If he did not care for animals, he would not have tried to stop the hunters from killing the deer.

Anti-intellectualism is also showcased in this section. When William Giles attempts to speak to Roddy's father about continuing his education, he seems rather offended. He does not want Roddy to become anything other than a croft worker. In modern society, parents generally want to see their children climb up the economic and class ladder and living a better life than they did. However, this section makes it clear that 19th century Scotland did not hold these ideals. Roddy is simply expected to work on the croft just like his father and grandfather did. Essentially, family conformity is expected.

This section also sets up the details of how the society works within the context of the novel. Essentially, four different classes are shown. These classes are the working class (like Roddy), the constable, the factor, and the laird. This seems to mirror a rather feudalistic system. Essentially, the workers are allowed to live on the land as long as they bring profit to the factor and the laird. However, the land does not belong to these workers, meaning that they can be evicted at any time. This means that the laird has almost complete control of the livelihood of the workers.



The Big House acts as a symbol for the laird's class, due to its extravagance, which is unobtainable to the characters of lower classes. A second symbol in this section is Glasgow. Roddy briefly lies to Archibald regarding his aspirations to move to Glasgow. This city represents straying from the norm, as people of Roddy's class do not do this. Instead, they just inherit their father's profession. Finally, names act as a symbol in this section and throughout the novel. Here, names represent status, and due to the fact that Roddy and Jetta are related to the "Black Macrae" they are thought of as lesser.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Lachlan seem to want physical harm to come to Roddy?

Discussion Question 2

Why would John Macrae not want his son to be educated?

Discussion Question 3

Is Roddy's killing of the sheep a sign of his possible madness?

Vocabulary

laird, factor, croft, ghillie, tribulations



The Account of Roderick Macrae pp. 58-113

Summary

Not long after the sheep incident, Lachlan Mackenzie visited the factor, the man whose authority sits between the constable and the laird. Due to this meeting, Finlayson lost his post as the constable and an election was held. Lachlan ran for the office and won. After this victory, Lachlan visited the Macrae household and explained that the size of their croft was going to be reduced because due to Roddy's mother's death, the family had one less member. Another reason given for the reduction was that John was behind on rent (like almost every one of the villagers). He then commanded that the Mackenzies call him Constable or Constable Mackenzie.

Lachlan began walking around the village with a notebook while taking notes. Based on these notes, he decided that all able residents of Culduie had to donate ten days of their time to improve the infrastructure of the village. During the days in which Roddy worked on this project, Lachlan's brothers, who were his deputies, walked around barking orders. During one of these days Roddy returned home to acquire food and found Lachlan having sex with Roddy's sister, Jetta. Lachlan explained that a man's needs must be fulfilled, especially after the death of Roddy's mother. Roddy did not tell his father about this incident.

Sometime later, Roddy ran into Flora Mackenzie, Lachlan's daughter. Flora brought Roddy a cup of milk and Roddy showed her the baby bird that he had saved. Jetta explained that Lachlan would give Roddy a thrashing if he found out that they were spending time with each other. When Roddy returned home, Jetta explained that Roddy should stay away from Flora, and exclaimed "Is Jetta not enough for you any longer?" (78).

Later in the season, Lachlan Mackenzie approached Roddy and John as they were harvesting sea-ware from the shore to fertilize their crops. Lachlan explained that they must have permission from the constable to do this and decided that the Macrae's must either ask for permission, put the sea-ware back, or be fined. John decided to put the sea-ware back and not ask for permission. The narrative then shifts to the future, where Roddy's Advocate, Andrew Sinclair asked Roddy whether he was in his right mind or coerced before committing the murders. Roddy stated that neither of these were the case. Sinclair then asks Roddy whether it is possible that an insane person not be aware of their insanity. Here, fines represent a way of keeping the current class system. Fines and debts keep the lower-class people poor, therefore stopping them from elevating their class status.

A few days after their last meeting, Flora and Roddy met again. Together, they walked to a neighboring village to drop off some eggs. While on this walk, Roddy discusses the



possibility of God being a myth, like the deities of ancient civilizations. On the way home, Roddy spied Flora walking home for the Mackenzie house. Flora then lied to her father by telling him that she went to the Smokes' home. That night, Roddy snuck out and tried to see Flora through the windows of the Mackenzies' home. He was unable to see her, but instead saw her invalid grandmother, who pointed at him, causing Roddy to flee. At a later meeting, Flora suggested that she wanted to leave Culduie. Flustered, Roddy misspoke, suggesting that she should stay in Culduie and marry him.

Analysis

This section implies that Lachlan Mackenzie had some sort of sexual relationship with Roddy's mother. However, the only evidence that the reader is provided about this is Lachlan's rather barbed words. Roddy also never speaks of this again. This also opens up some interesting possibilities regarding the parentage of the Mackenzie children. Depending on when and if Lachlan Mackenzie had an affair with Roddy's mother, any of the children could be fathered by Lachlan. It is also unclear what characters know about the affair (if Lachlan's words are actually true). The reader is also never informed of how the relationship between Jetta and Lachlan actually began. Based on Jetta's attitude toward Roddy speaking with Flora, it seems that Jetta does not like the Mackenzie family. It is possible that it is due to Flora not wanting Roddy to get involved with her relationship with Lachlan. The final implication is that it is possible that the relationship between Jetta and Lachlan is not consensual, and that Jetta is actually raped. Unfortunately, this is not clarified either.

It is also implied that Andrew Sinclair is going to attempt to use the insanity defense during Roddy's trial. However, we are never told whether Roddy is actually insane. It almost seems like Andrew is attempting to coax Roddy towards thinking that he is insane, as it would make the defense much more straightforward. This behavior is very unethical for an advocate and contradicts many of the prior witness statements and the statements in the trial sections of the novel. Andrew's statements regarding the nature of insanity and whether an insane person can know that they are insane, further expands the novel's theme of insanity. If Roddy cannot tell whether he is insane or not, his statements regarding committing the crimes under his own volition are invalidated due to his mental status. Roddy's attempt at seeing Flora through her home's windows also do not lend credence to the idea that Roddy is completely sane, as this is behavior generally associated with stalkers.

In this section, it is made very clear that many of Lachlan's actions as constable have the simple purpose of furthering his agenda against the Macrae family. It is never explained whether other families are receiving the same treatment from Lachlan Mackenzie, but it is implied that it is not the case. After the Macraes are threatened due to the sea-ware, a later sentence suggests that many of the other families continued using the seaware. While the other families could have asked permission regarding the use of the sea-ware, John Macrae seems to think that this is not the case. Also, as land is a symbol of the Macrae's future survival, the reduction of the croft reduces the family's chances of survival, foreshadowing their eventual fate.



Discussion Question 1

What does Roddy's comments about God say about his character?

Discussion Question 2

What is the meaning of Jetta's question "Is Jetta not enough for you any longer" (78)?

Discussion Question 3

Why would Flora want to leave Culduie?

Vocabulary

covertly, imbecile, sowens, limpets, fervour



The Account of Roderick Macrae pp. 114-157

Summary

Later, the village's yearly gathering took place. Jetta went to the gathering to sell shawls. Roddy met up with Archibald, who brought him to a tavern and got him drunk for the first time. Jetta saw this and warned Roddy about their father's reaction. Archibald bought one of Jetta's shawls because he found Jetta attractive and promptly throws the shawl into the bushes. After Roddy told Archibald about his feelings toward Flora, they sought out Flora and her friend. Roddy went off with Flora and, while still drunk, told her that he wants to marry her. Roddy then got an erection causing Jetta to slap him. After his rejection, Archibald and Roddy returned to the tavern. After Roddy danced for a while, Lachlan began to harass him. Lachlan eventually punched Roddy in the face. The next morning Roddy woke up in a ditch and returned home.

The narrative then shifts to Roddy's recollection of a man named Thompson appearing at the jail, examining him, and reading his pages. Thompson explained that he could fool Andrew Sinclair, but not him. The tangent then ends, and Roddy explains that his father did not speak to him the next day after the gathering. He decided that he wanted to run away to Canada. After he left, he eventually ran into Archibald who bought him a garron. Eventually, Roddy decided to return home. On his return, he found Reverend Galbraith at his home, explaining that his father received a letter of eviction. During this exchange, the Reverend told Roddy that he was a discredit to his father.

In his anger, John Macrae revealed that he knows that Jetta is pregnant. After he asked who was responsible, Roddy blurted out that it was Lachlan Mackenzie. John then attacked Jetta, breaking her nose, but was eventually stopped by Roddy. Jetta retreated to the barn holding a rope. Roddy explained that none of the misfortunes would have happened if Lachlan did not exist.

The next day, Roddy decided to kill Lachlan. On his way to the Mackenzie home, Roddy found a croman and a flaughter. After he spoke to Carmina Smoke, he continued on to Lachlan's house. In the house, he found Flora. He explained to Flora that he was here to kill his father. When Flora attempted to flee, Roddy struck her in the leg with the flaughter, breaking her leg. He then crushed her skull. Afterwards, Donnie Mackenzie entered the home. In fear that he was going to raise the alarm, Roddy struck Donny in the head, killing him. Lachlan then appeared, shocked at the violence in the house. After a struggle, Roddy crushes Lachlan's head.



Analysis

The final section of this chapter further expands on the idea that Andrew Sinclair will attempt to use the insanity defense during Roddy's trial. Andrew seems to bring Thompson to Roddy's cell in order to evaluate his sanity. This is clear through Thompson's questions to Andrew regarding whether Roddy seems dangerous or unstable. Regardless of Andrew's intentions, Thompson does not seem likely to play into Andrew's plan.

Jetta's behavior in this section foreshadows her fate, which is not revealed in this section/chapter. After he fight with her father, Jetta sits at the barn holding a rope. It is very clear that this rope is the one that Jetta hangs herself with sometime after her conversation with Roddy. It is implied that Roddy realizes what the rope alludes to, but he does not explicitly state it.

This section also brings up an enormous inconsistency between many of the later medical reports and court documents and Roddy's account of the events. According to the later documents, Flora's genitals have been clearly mutilated before her body is found. In Roddy's account, he does nothing to Flora's genitals. However, he does lift up her skirt in order to see the condition of her leg. This could either mean that Roddy is lying regarding his crimes or that Flora was sexually assaulted either before or after the murder took place.

Flora's death is also framed in a way to parallel Roddy's first act of violence. In both the sheep incident and Flora's murder, the victim's leg is broken and Roddy crushes the victims' skull in order to put them out of their misery. In a way, Roddy is treating Flora, a person that he seems to like, just like he would treat an animal. Technically, Roddy did not need to kill Flora or Donnie Mackenzie, but did so anyway in order to complete his goal of murdering Lachlan. This demonstrates Roddy's oddly morbid determination towards the murder of Lachlan Mackenzie.

Roddy's recollection of the events of the crime are also told in an odd way. At no point does Roddy seem to feel bad or fear anything during the crime. He simply systematically murders three people and calmly walks away. It is very possible that this is a sign of Roddy's insanity, as most people would react differently after murdering three people. However, this calmness could just be the result of Roddy's calm recollection.

Discussion Question 1

At what point does Roddy decide to kill Lachlan Mackenzie?

Discussion Question 2

What could have tipped John Macrae off that Jetta was pregnant?



Discussion Question 3

Is it possible that Roddy did not mean to kill Donny Mackenzie?

Vocabulary

garron, flaughter, croman, guffaw, caman



Medical Reports - Extract from 'Travels in the Border-lands of Lunacy'

Summary

The medical reports chapter consists of documented medical reports written by Charles MacLennan and J.D. Gilchrist. The two doctors came to the conclusion that Lachlan Mackenzie's cause of death was the blows to his head which spilled brain onto the floor. Flora's cause of death was the blow to the back of her head. The doctors also noted the bruising and lacerations near her genitals. Donald Mackenzie's cause of death was either the crushing of his skull or the fall that resulted after Roddy struck him.

The "Extract from 'Travels in the Border-lands of Lunacy'" chapter consists of an extract from a book with the aforementioned title written by J. Bruce Thompson, one of the professionals that visited Roddy in prison. In the book, Thompson recalls the time that he went to Inverness to meet Andrew Sinclair in order to determine Roddy's sanity. Thompson theorized that Andrew's friendly behavior towards Roddy was due to his inexperience in his field. In his examination, Thompson determined that Roddy's cranium was misshapen like many prisoners. HE then asked Andrew about Roddy's family, and Andrew informed him that Jetta hung herself in the barn after Roddy left. Thompson decided that he and Andrew would visit Culduie the next day in order to determine whether "the well" is poisoned. Before he left he asked Roddy about the injuries to Flora's genitals, and Roddy explained that he does not remember inflicting them.

After the two arrived at Culduie they spoke to the Smokes. They informed the two men that Roddy would sometimes talk to himself and stop when approached. They also explained that they occasionally caught Roddy looking at their daughter through the house windows. The men then spoke to John Macrae, whom Thompson describes as a "homunculus" and a "poor specimen" of a man. Macrae explained that he does not have a daughter that Roddy did not experience hallucinations, and that Roddy did not speak to him about killing Lachlan. Lastly, they visited Mrs. Mackenzie who was working as is nothing happened and explained that she still has mouths to feed.

Analysis

One of the biggest revelations in this section is the type of injuries that Flora sustained to her genital region. According to Charles MacLennan and J.D. Gilchrist, there were visible bruising and lacerations to her genitals. However, this reveal also brings further questions about who exactly inflicted these wounds on Flora. It is possible that the lacerations were inflicted by either the flaughter or the croman, however the doctors do not note any other laceration injuries on the other victims who were killed with the same weapon. The mystery still remains regarding whether Roddy is lying about remembering



the sexual assault or whether Flora was assaulted before or after her death. Even though it is not noted, it is quite possible that Mr. Smoke actually committed the assault, as he was the last person with Flora's corpse before the authorities arrived.

This chapter also deals with the very controversial pseudo-science known as eugenics. Eugenics was the theory that hereditary and physical features had some sort of bearing on personality and other characteristics. The type of eugenics that Thompson uses in his book and in the trial is that one can supposedly determine whether someone is likely to become a criminal through their physical features and background. Thompson furthers his theory by insisting that he and Andrew Sinclair travel to Culduie to determine whether the well is poisoned. This metaphor suggests that if his family and neighbors fit the determiners for the criminal class, Roddy would as well. However, it must be noted that he makes the distinction that just because someone fits his criteria for the so called criminal class, it does not mean that the individual is insane. It seems like Sinclair believes that Thompson's views of the Culduie people will help his insanity case, but this will not be the case.

Discussion Question 1

Does Andrew seem to truly believe that Roddy is insane?

Discussion Question 2

What does Thompson mean when he refers to John Macrae as a "homonculus?"

Discussion Question 3

What implies that Roddy knew that Jetta was going to kill herself?

Vocabulary

lacerations, pigeon-chested, pubis, conducive, menial



The Trial: First Day

Summary

The “Trial” section of the book consists of court reports written by William Kay. According to Kay, barriers had to be erected to fend off mobs who wanted to hurt Roddy. When Roddy entered the court room, many people were surprised, as they expected a monster and not a boy. The Lord Justice then informed the jury to not acknowledge the “memoir.” Roddy then pleaded not guilty to his charges. The first two witnesses were Dr. Charles Maclennan and Carmina Smoke. Maclennan identified the croman and flaughter as weapons that could have caused the injuries inflicted on the Mackenzies. Carmina Smoke explained that he was carrying these tools while walking to the Mackenzie property. She also mentioned that Roddy would sometimes talk to himself.

The next three witnesses were Mr. Smoke, Lachlan’s brother, Aenas and William Giles. Smoke informed the jury that he found Lachlan’s corpse face down with brain matter exposed. Flora’s body was set on a table with her genitals mutilated (he also mentioned that all the corpses were still warm). Smoke admitted that he did not like Lachlan, as he was a bully, but gave him credit, as the town’s infrastructure improved while he was constable. When asked about the reduction of the Macrae croft, Smoke declared that it was not fair, as crofts were not usually reduced in this way. Aenas Mackenzie entered into a tirade about Roddy, stating that he was the village idiot. William Giles repeated his previously stated lines about Roddy’s gifted nature but also mentioned that he was very quiet.

Analysis

The beginning of this section makes it very clear that Roddy initially has the cards stacked against him. The public is so outraged that the police had to erect safety measures in order to avoid some sort of incident. As Roddy’s jury is made up of individuals from the same population, it is very possible that the jurors feel the same way about Roddy. However, this outrage seems to die down when the public sees that Roddy is not some sort of monster, but a boy, seemingly not capable of the crimes that he is accused of. It also must be noted that the flaughter and croman act as symbols in this section. As Roddy is part of an agricultural-based class, his murder weapons reflect this.

It is unclear whether the testimony in this chapter actually hurts or helps Andrew Sinclair’s insanity defense. The testimony regarding Roddy’s tendency to talk to himself when alone makes him seem unstable, but it is not clear whether this is a sign of insanity or not. Smokes’ statements regarding the unusual reduction of the Macrae croft could also make the jury more sympathetic towards Roddy, as it becomes clear that his family was treated very unfairly. Aenas Mackenzie’s testimony seems to point towards



Roddy being aware of his actions, as Mackenzie suggests that Roddy was just a dumb and bad person. While the testimony in this section does not prove whether Roddy was insane or not, it leads into the next sections evidence, which is definitely more damning.

Discussion Question 1

Why would the onlookers expect a monster to walk through the doors?

Discussion Question 2

Does Aenas Mackenzie seem like a biased witness?

Discussion Question 3

Could talking to oneself be normal behavior in Culduie?

Vocabulary

proceedings, empanelled, impeccably, dissipated



The Trial: Second Day

Summary

The first two witnesses of the second day were John Macrae and Allan Cruikshank, the factor of Culduie. During Macrae's testimony he did not make eye contact with his son. Macrae conceded that the reduction of his croft, and the restrictions on sea-ware were justified. When asked about Roddy's character, he elaborated that violence was not in his character, regardless of the fact that he beat Roddy almost weekly. Allan Cruikshank shed some light on events leading up to the crime. According to the testimony, the Macraes came to him to complain about Lachlan. At an inn, Allan told Lachlan about this. Eventually, Macrae was recalled and explained that he went to Allan to learn more about the regulations that Lachlan was enforcing. Allan was then recalled and admitted that he met with Lachlan three days before the crimes, and Lachlan petitioned for the Macraes' eviction.

The next three witnesses were Reverend Galbraith, Archibald Ross, and Flora's friend, Ishbel. Galbraith stated that John Macrae was a church elder and that Roddy stopped going to church after the death of his mother. Galbraith then labeled Roddy as wicked and enslaved to the devil. Archibald recalled the hunting incident. The biggest focus of his testimony was on the day of the gathering, where Archibald recalled that Roddy was weeping after his failed advances towards Flora. When Ishbel testified, she revealed that Archibald made lude advances towards her and that Roddy did the same thing to Flora (and implied that Roddy put his hands-on Flora).

The last witness of the day was Hector Monroe, the medical officer and Inverness Gaol. He informed that jury that Roddy was in good health but suffered from scurvy. Apparently, there was no evidence to suggest that Roddy was under any delusions. Andrew Sinclair then asked him difficult questions about criminal psychology, a field that Monroe stated that he was an expert in. He could not answer these questions. After Monroe's testimony, the public seemed divided about Roddy's guilt.

Analysis

The testimony that is given in this section seems to damn Roddy to the gallows. Reverend Galbraith does not seem to imply that Roddy is insane, but suggests that he is just an evil person, which certainly hurts Sinclair's insanity strategy. Even more damning is Monroe's testimony regarding the results of his examination of Roddy during his time in Inverness Gaol. According to Monroe, Roddy did not seem to be under any sort of delusions. To counter this, Andrew Sinclair utilizes a strategy in order to discredit Monroe's qualifications and succeeds. However, the use of this strategy seems to foreshadow the later testimony given by Thompson that all but hangs Roddy.



This section also adds to the motif of Roddy as an unreliable narrator. According to Roddy's account of the events leading up to the crime, he did not put his hands on Flora during their talk on the day of the Gathering. There are a few possibilities that could explain this inconsistency. The first is that Roddy was not telling the whole truth regarding the incident on the day of the Gathering. Another possible explanation is that Isabel is purposefully lying in order to take revenge on her friend's murderer. Regardless of the actual explanation, one of the characters is being unreliable.

This chapter also gives the reader more information regarding the factor of Culduie, Allan Cruikshank. Allan's testimony implies that he knew full well that Lachlan had some sort of vendetta against the Macrae family; they even socialized together at the local inn. This reveals that Allan had an active part in the vendetta that led Roddy to murder three people.

Discussion Question 1

Could John Macrae's tendency to beat his son drive Roddy to violent behavior?

Discussion Question 2

Who seems more honest about the events at the Gathering, Roddy or Archibald Ross?

Discussion Question 3

What is the nature of Lachlan Mackenzie and Alan Cruikshank's relationship?

Vocabulary

pantomime, Gaelic, reprimanded, constitutes, consultation



The Trial: Third Day - Epilogue

Summary

The main witness that testified on the third day was Thompson, the author of *Travels in the Border-lands of Lunacy*. Thompson testified that it is possible to identify someone who has the hereditary traits associated with the so called “criminal class.” He informed the jury that the people of Culduie were small and of poor stock, probably due to long-term interbreeding. When asked about Roddy’s sanity, he explained that there is no evidence that Roddy was insane, however, when pressed, he conceded that it was possible that he suffered from “mania without delirium,” making him not responsible for his actions. Thompson went on to theorize that it is very possible that due to Flora’s genital mutilation, Roddy’s motive was revenge against Flora and not her father.

On the first day of deliberation, the jury did not reach a verdict. When they announced this, two people had to be ejected from the gallery. On the next day, the jury found Roddy guilty on all charges, and the judge sentenced him to be hung. In the Epilogue, the author added that Andrew Sinclair petitioned the judge to consider the evidence of Roddy’s account of the murders, but was declined. Before his death, Roddy wrote a letter to his father, telling him not to feel bad about his fate. John never received this letter, as he was found dead in his chair by Carmina Smoke. Roddy was eventually hung.

Analysis

This section is where Andrew Sinclair’s insanity strategy falls apart. Earlier in the trial, Sinclair used Monroe’s lack of qualifications and knowledge to discredit his testimony regarding Roddy’s state of mind. The stock that Sinclair puts in these qualifications hurts him when Thompson testifies, as Thompson has many qualifications and extensive knowledge about criminal psychology and criminal anthropology. Thompson explains that even though he may have come from the criminal class, Roddy was probably still aware of his actions. It seems like Thompson was Sinclair’s last hope, but Thompson’s refusal to go along with Sinclair’s narrative all but ends the insanity defense. However, a glimmer of hope is seen once Thompson admits that Roddy could have been suffering from “mania without delirium,” but this is clearly not successful in helping Roddy’s predicament.

Thompson’s alternative narrative also further muddles Roddy’s unreliability. According to Thompson’s reasoning, it is quite possible that Roddy did kill three people in order to take revenge on Flora instead of Lachlan. If this is true, Roddy’s entire recollection is a lie and may have fooled not only the reader, but his advocate as well. Roddy may have decided to state that Lachlan’s vendetta led him to commit the crime in order to make him more sympathetic, as it would seem that he committed the crimes to avenge the



tribulations that were forced upon his family. The end of the novel leaves this unclear, forcing the reader to come to their own conclusions.

Discussion Question 1

What does Thompson and Andrew Sinclair mean when they state mania without delirium?

Discussion Question 2

Is it a coincidence that John Macrae died when he did?

Discussion Question 3

Why did the Lord Justice not approve the petition regarding Roddy's account?

Vocabulary

delirium, indisputable, dissembling



Characters

Roderick Macrae

Rodrick or Roddy Macrae is a young 17-year-old Culduie boy and the author of the account of his crimes that makes up much of this book. Through his written narrative, Roddy seems much more articulate than he should be due to his impoverished and relatively uneducated circumstances. Roddy seems rather obsessive about a variety of things, from the tribulations that Lachlan Mackenzie put upon his father (leading to the novel's crime) to Flora Mackenzie (leading to him looking for her through her windows at night).

However, the book does not make it clear whether Roddy is within his right mind, as Andrew Sinclair suggests that during the time of the murders, Roddy was suffering some sort of bout of psychosis. Roddy's written account of the events does not make this clear, as the source of the narrative points towards Roddy being a very unreliable narrator. Another point that suggests that Roddy is an unreliable narrator is the fact that per the autopsy of Flora Mackenzie, she was sexually assaulted, and Roddy has no remembrance of this part of the crime (and it does not show up in his account of the events).

Overall, Roddy's motives seem well intentioned (or at least he thinks they are well intentioned) but is easily led astray by people like Archibald Ross, who leads him to drink. Essentially, the reader asks the reader to determine whether they, themselves, believe Roddy is sane and whether his actions were justified.

John "Black" Macrae

John "Black" Macrae is the father of Jetta and Roderick Macrae and seemingly the motive for Roddy's murderous actions. The book makes it very clear that John is not particularly intelligent and is rather anti-intellectual partially due to his impoverished origins.

He met Roddy's mother after serving on a boat with her two brothers who were eventually lost due to a shipwreck. After she died in childbirth, he became very religious as a coping mechanism. This seems to have also led him to be abusive towards Roddy. Regardless of the fact that he participates in the feud between himself and Lachlan Mackenzie, he is distraught after Roddy's crime and eventually commits suicide.

Jetta Macrae

Jetta Macrae is Roddy's older sister. After her mother's death, she took up many of the household duties that needed to be filled. She also picked up her mother's superstitious nature. As a young girl, she was very close to her brother, but as they got older, they



grew a part. According to Roddy's narrative, Jetta is seen having sex with Lachlan Mackenzie in the Macrae house and later becomes pregnant. Eventually, John Macrae finds out about this and after Roddy leaves to see Lachlan Mackenzie, she hangs herself.

Lachlan Broad Mackenzie

Lachlan Broad Mackenzie is the head of the Mackenzie household and rival to John Macrae. It is unclear why Lachlan has such a problem with the Macrae household, but it is implied that the feud began well before either of them were of adult age. After Lachlan becomes Constable, he seems to create a vendetta against Roddy's family, eventually having them evicted. After Roddy witnesses Lachlan having sex with Jetta, he implies that he often had sex with Roddy's mother as well (this is not confirmed in any other part of the book). After a struggle, Lachlan is eventually bludgeoned to death by Roddy.

Flora Mackenzie

Flora Mackenzie is Lachlan Broad's daughter and Roddy's love interest. While Flora and Roddy grow close, they never enter an actual romantic relationship. It is possible that Flora simply toys with Roddy as he seems much more interested in her than she does him and does not let him know that until their meeting during the Gathering. Roddy is also distraught when Flora reveals that she may be leaving Culduie. She is killed by Roddy along with her father and her brother Donald.

Donald Mackenzie

Donald Mackenzie is the younger brother of Flora and son of Lachlan Mackenzie. Not much is known about Donald other than that he is murdered at the hands of Roddy along with Lachlan and Flora.

Andrew Sinclair

Andrew Sinclair is the primary defense counsel to Roddy. Throughout the investigation and trial, Sinclair tries his best to prove that Roddy was suffering from a bout of insanity during the period in which he committed his crime. It is unclear whether he believes this or used the defense to simply try and win his case.

Archibald Ross

Archibald Ross is a higher-class member of the ghillie near Culduie. Archibald gives Roddy his first drink and encourages him to pursue Flora during the gathering. He seems rather indifferent about most things and does not really move the trial along when he testifies during the trial.



James Bruce Thomson

James Bruce Thomson is the author of *Travels in the Border-Lands of Lunacy* and an expert in criminal psychology. He goes along with Andrew Sinclair to Culduie in order to investigate Roddy's origins. Sinclair initially believes that Thomson's expert opinions will help him prove that Roddy was insane, but during the trial, Thomson puts forth the opposite opinion.

Hector Monroe

Hector Monroe is the general practitioner of Inverness Gaol and is one of the first people to inspect Roddy. Monroe concludes that Roddy was articulate and not clearly insane. His expertise is put into doubt after Roddy's defense determines that he is not knowledgeable about the literature regarding criminal psychology or the field itself.



Symbols and Symbolism

Flaughter and Croman

The author uses the flaughter and croman as Roddy's murder weapons to assert that his class status instigated the murder. Throughout the novel, experts like Thomson argue that impoverished individuals are predisposed to criminal behavior, and non-coincidentally, the majority of these impoverished people are in economic classes that rely on agricultural work that requires the use of flaughters and cromans for survival. Many of the tribulations that Roddy states led to the murder are related to this agricultural work, such as the instance when Lachlan Broad forced John and Roddy to return the sea-ware to the shore. While the argument that Roddy's agricultural-based class led to the murders is very arguable, the use of the agricultural tools as weapons is clearly intentional.

The Big House

The Big House that belongs to Lord Middleton is used to represent the vast economic disparity that exists in the village of Culduie and the surrounding region. Lord Middleton's home is incredibly ornate, and it is implied that it is only ornate thanks to the work of the agricultural workers such as the Macrae family. Regardless of this vast wealth that Lord Middleton clearly gains through this work, hardly any of it ends up in the pockets of the individuals actually doing the work. In fact, no one even argues against this status quo as it has been ingrained in the regional culture. The Big House is the symbol of this wealth, but in turn, also a symbol of the unfair economic privileges that belong to the upper-class of the region.

Livestock

The author uses the livestock that appears in the novel to symbolize the attitude of the higher-classes that lower-class workers are essentially cattle to them. The clearest example of this is when Thomson repeatedly refers to the people of Culduie as being "of poor physical stock." This type of language is generally used by both classes in reference to the qualities of livestock, such as the sheep that Roddy bludgeons to death after it injures its leg. This intentional use of language further emphasizes the view that the agricultural-class is seen as simply a way to make money for the upper-class aristocracy. Since the lower-class and upper-class both, in a way, treat their cattle in the same way (tending to their needs with the end-goal of some sort of profit), the symbolism is even more clear.



Land

The novel uses the symbol of land to represent the means of survival for the lower-class workers of Culduie. This is shown through a very clear connection between the state of land and the state of future survival. Any time something happens to their land, such as parcel reduction, like what happens to the Macraes) or a poor harvest, the workers worry for their future existence. With this in mind, when Lachlan Mackenzie and the factor reduce the parcel of the Macrae's land, they are indirectly threatening their survival.

Glasgow

The novel uses the city of Glasgow to represent the stray from the norm of inheriting familial economic class. This is shown in two specific instances. The first is when William Giles recommends that Roddy study in Glasgow in order to become something other than a crofter. This is not looked well upon by John Macrae and William's recommendation is not heeded. The second instance when this occurs is when Roddy lies to Archibald about what he intends to do in the future. At the Gathering, he informs him that he wants to go to Glasgow to pursue his fortune (which is a lie) and Archibald passes this information to Flora. Essentially, Glasgow represents aspirations that are rather unusual for the son of a crofter.

Aird-Dubh

The village of Aird-Dubh is used to represent that class stigma even exists within the lower-classes. While the actual village of Aird-Dubh hardly appears in the novel, it is mentioned as the home of unintelligent poor people. However, it is important to note that these remarks are coming from other impoverished people, who the upper-class stigmatizes. Essentially, the people of Culduie are performing the same type of discrimination that the upper-class individuals are performing towards them, demonstrating that class discrimination does not just occur within the upper echelons of a class-system.

Fines and Rent

The novel uses the fines and rent that are imposed on the citizens of Culduie and the surrounding villages as a way of keeping the villagers both in line and poor. This is most likely done as insuring that the villagers remain poor insures that the upper-class remains rich. The most notable example of this is when the factor informs his constables that not enough fines are being issues to the villages. This forces the villagers to work harder to pay the fines while remaining impoverished. This symbol clearly reflects the theme of economic disparity.



Canada

The novel uses the county of Canada to symbolize that the type of economic disparity that takes place in Culduie is not specific to the village. When Roddy speaks with Archibald, Archibald explains that he may move to Canada with his cousin, but later explains that Canada is in not much a better state than Culduie. While Archibald is not as low-class as Roddy, he is not as upper-class as Lord Middleton or the factor. Therefore, his remark about Canada implies that nothing will change if he moves there, implying a lack of class-mobility within the country.

Names

The novel uses the concept of names in order to symbolize familial status and occupation. For example, when characters learn that Roddy's last name is Macrae, they immediately understand that he is a crofter and related to the "Black Macrae." Similar information is gained when people learn that Flora is a Mackenzie. This also explains John Macrae's aversion to letting Roddy leave for Glasgow because his name designates that he is a crofter. This is usual for lower-class agricultural families during the 19th century.

Hunting

The novel uses hunting to symbolize upper-class status within communities. This is very clear during the instance when Roddy is accompanying the hunting party belonging to Lord Middleton. All of the hunters seem to be individuals of high-class, while the non-hunters of the group seem to be lower-class (like Roddy). This is a traditional sign of status and can be seen in a variety of different locations such as the American South, where the hunting of foxes is considered an activity for the higher-class members of the community. Essentially, the roles within the hunting party demonstrate the class distinctions within places like Culduie.



Settings

Culduie

Culduie is the main setting of the novel and the home of the vast majority of the characters within Roddy's narrative, including the Macraes, Mckenzie's, and the Smokes. Culduie is a very impoverished village in the Scottish Highlands. As the village is not directly connected to any urban centers, the village relies on agriculture to fuel its economy. This economy directly benefits the village's laird (lord), who controls the city through an almost feudal system of tenant farming. The people of Culduie are known to be unintelligent, inbred hicks who amount to nothing other than farming.

Inverness Gaol

Inverness Gaol is the place in which Roddy is imprisoned after he is apprehended for his crimes. Roddy's cell within the gaol is described as a very dank and small room with very little inside other than a chamberpot. Little detail is given about Inverness other than the details about Roddy's cell.

The Courtroom

The courtroom is where most of "The Trial" section of the narrative takes place. While little detail is given about the courtroom, the reader is told that it includes a gallery for spectators to watch the trial, a bench area where the jury views the trial, an elevated desk where the judge presides, and tables and chairs for the prosecution and defense teams.

The Mackenzie Residence

The Mackenzie home is where the murder of Flora, Lachlan, and Donald Mackenzie occurs. While the house could be considered a hovel, it is not in as much of a state of disrepair as the Macrae family home. The only given details about the house are that it contains a bed, where Lachlan's invalid mother lays, a table, and beds for Lachlan and his children.

The Macrae Residence

The Macrae family home is the home of John, Roddy, and Jetta Macrae. The home is in an intense state of disrepair and smells like dung. When the house is visited by Roddy's defense lawyer, he explains that the home also contains a section for the farm animals, explaining the smell. The home is the setting in which most of the interactions between

John and Roddy take place and is also the location where Roddy discovers Lachlan having sex with his sister.



Themes and Motifs

Class and Economic Inequality

Macrae uses the theme of class and economic inequality in order to show how disadvantaged those in lower economic classes are within a variety of aspects. This is primarily done by the use of Roddy Macrae, the main character of the novel, who is certainly on the lower tier of the class system in his society. The author implies that many of the tribulations that Roddy and his family go to are due to his economic place in society.

The most obvious sign of this theme is that the Macrae family is constantly taken advantage of by those who are higher up in the class system. The person that probably takes advantage of the Macraes (and families like them) are Lord Middleton and those associated with him. Throughout the novel, it becomes very clear that Lord Middleton is making a tidy profit off those who work on his land. However, none of this profit seems to be passed down to those working the crofts. There are many instances in which characters like John Macrae are unable to pay one shilling a week (like when John Macrae had to pay Lachlan Mackenzie for the sheep that Roddy killed). This forces the poor family into a cycle of always being impoverished.

Even individuals in slightly higher positions than the Macraes take advantage of their lower class neighbors. For example, a bit through Roddy's recollection of the events, Lachlan Mackenzie becomes the constable of the factor's lands. While it is never directly stated that Lachlan became more prosperous through his appointment, but it is implied several times that the Mackenzie family has more money than the Macraes. This appointment also puts Lachlan Mackenzie at a higher social (rather than economic) class than the Macraes. He uses this social class to further his vendetta against the Macraes by drowning them with fines.

This concept of class is some engrained in the novel's character's mindset that even those who are supposed to be impartial show their bias against those of the lower class. The two clearest examples of this are Thomson and the Lord Justices. Thomson almost constantly implies that those of lower class tend to have a more criminal nature due to their mental status and inbreeding. The Lord Justices also show similar bias when they simply let people like Thomson make assertions like this. This may not be these characters' faults, but the way that it is engrained into society is very clear.

Family Conformity

The theme of family conformity is used to show the novel's family attitudes towards class and behavior-based conformity. While this theme is much less apparent than the theme of class and economic inequality, it is still an important part of the narrative.



This theme first appears rather early in the book when in his statement, William Giles explains that he spoke to John Macrae about the possible continuation of Roddy's education. Macrae reacts very poorly to this and gets incredibly defensive. When Macrae is confronted with the idea that Roddy could become a schoolmaster like him, he becomes rather sarcastic with William. Macrae goes on to explain that Roddy will not become anything of the sort, because Roddy must become a crofter like his father. This implies that this type of class immobility and family conformity is just expected in the society.

This is quite different than modern cultures, as parents generally want their children to lead a better life than they did. However, family conformity is much stricter in Culduie than contemporary societies. It is possible that this is so because economic and social mobility are much less possible in the narrative of the story than in the aforementioned contemporary societies. However, it must be noted that in many cases, children needed to continue their fathers' work in order to ensure the survival of the family.

Unreliable Narrator

The author uses the unreliable narrators in the novel to question the nature of history and remembrance. These unreliable narrators are telling their portions of the narratives in their perspective through documents which, while sometimes official, may not be truthful.

The most prominent example of this is Roddy's accounts of the murders and the events leading up to them. While reading this section, the reader does not know that inconsistencies exist between this retelling and the evidence that is later presented in the trial. For example, during the trial, it is revealed that Flora Mackenzie was sexually assaulted (before or after her death). This makes the jury believe that Roddy sexually assaulted Flora, but this act does not appear in Roddy's recollection of the events. This brings up possibilities, that Roddy lied and did rape Flora, or that her genitals were wounded prior to the discovery of the body.

The author uses other narrators that are unreliable as well, such as Thomson in his *Extracts from Travels in the Border-Lands of Lunacy*. In this section, Thomson makes several comments about both Roddy and the villagers of Culduie. However, these comments are most likely affected by the prior biases that he holds towards those of lower-class. Therefore, the states of those of Culduie, including John Macrae not be as bad as Thomson claims due to his bias.

Pseudoscience

The novel uses the theme of pseudoscience in order to show that justice is not always served due to faulty science. This phenomena is rife throughout history, as many people were convicted of crimes due to "evidence" gathered through scientific methods that would later be invalidated by science.



The science in question is that there is a “criminal class” that designates whether someone is more likely to commit a crime. This concept is put forth by Thomson both in *Travels in the Border-Lands of Lunacy* and during the trial. He insists that because Roddy was from of lower economic class, where according to him, inbreeding if common and intelligence is low, it is much more probable that he committed the murders and was sane while doing it. This thinking may be partially to blame for Roddy’s conviction and Roddy may have actually been insane.

Today, we know that when pseudoscience is used in court, it undermines the integrity of the justice system, which is why evidence garnering methods now go through a thorough process of investigation until it is taken seriously. The use of the strange pseudoscience of determining whether someone may be a criminal through home-location and the particular society he/she may have undermined Roddy’s chance of a fair trial.

Insanity

The author uses the theme of insanity to pose the question of whether an insane person can determine their own level of sanity. This question is brought up several times throughout the trial, as Roddy insists that he is sane, while Sinclair brings up that his insanity may be impeding him from identifying his insanity.

The idea of Roddy being insane is very possible, as murdering three people is a very extreme reaction to almost any tribulation. It is very clear that Roddy was upset that his family was being evicted, but murdering Lachlan Mackenzie does not solve any of these problems. However, Roddy does not acknowledge that this reaction was extreme, so it is very possible that he thought that it was an appropriate reaction.

The differences between Roddy’s recollection and the evidence of Flora’s sexual assault certainly does not make the question of Roddy’s sanity very clear. It is possible that his insanity caused him to rape Flora and he is lying about the rape’s occurrence. It is simply not clear, but this is intentional, as Macrae states in the beginning of the novel that he wants the reader to make their own minds up about Roddy.

Styles

Point of View

The point-of-view of His Bloody Project is peculiar. There are a variety of 1st-person narrators throughout the novel each with their own biases and thoughts about the case. The majority of the novel consists of the 1st-person narration of Roddy's accounts of the events leading up to the murders of the Mackenzies.

Language and Meaning

Just like there are multiple points-of-views in the novel, there are multiple different uses of language and meaning. The most prominent consistency within the different uses is the use of Scottish terms for people and objects instead of the traditional English term or spelling, such as "gaol" instead of "jail" and "laird" instead of "lord." Other different uses of language and meaning depend on the narrator. For example, Roddy tends to use more blunt language like "bash" due to his lower class, while characters like Tomson will use terms like "blunt-force trauma" due to his education.

Structure

The novel is separated into sections of documents. The only sections supposedly written by the author is the preface and epilogue. According to the author each other section is written by characters like Roddy in his account of the crime, Thomson from an excerpt from his book mentioning his investigation, and the reporter reporting the court happenings. Each of these sections shows a different perspective on the crime. These sections are labeled as "Statements," "The Account of Roderick Macrae," and "The Trial."



Quotes

I believe John Macrae to be a good and devout man, who did not deserve to be burdened with such noxious progeny.”

-- James Galbraith (Statements paragraph 9)

Importance: Galbraith's statements demonstrate that the community's views are quite split regarding Roddy Macrae.

I am writing this a the behest of my advocate, Mr. Andrew Sinclair, who since my incarceration here in Inverness has treated me with a degree of civility I in no way deserve. My life has been short and of little consequence.

-- Roddy Macrae (The Account of Roderick Macrae paragraph 1)

Importance: The above statement is used against Roddy in the trial, as it implies that Roddy realizes that he committed a crime.

Roderick Macrae is as wicked an individual as one could ever have the misfortune to meet. Even as a small boy there was a mean spirit about him, such as one would not credit in a child.

-- Peter Mackenzie (Statements paragraph 11)

Importance: Peter Mackenzie's words show that there is a consensus among the Mackenzie's (except for Flora) regarding Roddy.

In these parts it is not uncommon for grievenaces to be nursed long after their original source is forgotten.

-- Roddy Macrae (Account of Roderick Macrae paragraph 10)

Importance: This quote demonstrates the concept that grudges do not seem to disappear in the Culduie community. This is very similar to the nature of the feud between the Montagues and Capulets in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet.

We have no use for opportunities here...The boy is recquired to work on the croft and earn money for his family through his labor.

-- John Macrae (Account of Roderick Macrae paragraph 24)

Importance: The above statement demonstrates that the offspring of Culduie residents are expected to pick up the profession of their fathers.

When you're older you'll realize that a man has to satisfy his needs somewhere. Especially now that your dear mother is no longer with us.

-- Lachlan Mackenzie (Account of Roderick Macrae paragraph 34)

Importance: Lachlan Mackenzie's words imply that prior to her death, he was having



sex with Roddy's mother. This is not brought up again in the novel, so it cannot be confirmed.

Mr. Macrae, . . . when I became constable to these villages, I stated that observances of the regulations which govern our existence had fallen into a neglect which shamed us all.

-- Lachlan Mackenzie (Account of Roderick Macrae paragraph 39)

Importance: This is essentially Lachlan Mackenzie's excuse for using his position's power to harass the Macraes and drive them out of town.

I acted entirely alone and as I have no intention of denying anything, I have no need of the services of an advocate. I do not repent my actions and whatever happens now is a matter of indifference to me.

-- Roddy Macrae (Account of Roderick Macrae paragraph 50)

Importance: This is another statement that is used against Roddy during his trial. Here, it seems like Roddy states that he does not feel guilty about his actions.

I have rarely seen such a dismal specimen of the human race...The homunculus looked at us with some suspicion and shook his head.

-- James Bruce Thomson (Extract from Travels in the Border-Lands of Lunacy paragraph 23)

Importance: Thomson's words here shows the common bias regarding the poor that is seen throughout the novel. John Macrae suffered from many of the conditions that poor agricultural workers obtained in the 19th century. However, Thomson sees him as barely human.

There was a great deal of blood. Her skirts had been lifted up and the private parts had been mutilated.

-- Kenny Smoke (The Trial paragraph 14)

Importance: Kenny Smoke and much of the evidence implies that Roddy sexually assaulted Flora Mackenzie. However, Roddy does not remember this or write about it in his account of the events. This brings up the question whether Roddy actually did commit the sexual crime or if it was done by someone else.

He was no doubt the most gifted pupil I have taught.

-- William Giles (The Trial paragraph 17)

Importance: Here, William Giles forces the jury to question their thoughts of Roddy's criminality, as according to William Roddy seemed quite smart and good.

Roderick John Macrae, you have been found guilty by the verdict of the jury of the murders charged against you, a verdict which proceeds upon evidence which could leave no disinterested observer in any doubt.



-- Lord Justice-Clerk Lord Ardmillan (The Trial paragraph 53)

Importance: This quote by one of the judges explains the verdict of the trial. He also claims that no observant person would have come to the opposite verdict.