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RHETORICAL STRUCTURE AND READER MANIPULATION IN AGATHA CHRISTIE'S *MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS*

MARC ALEXANDER
University of Glasgow
m.alexander@englang.arts.gla.ac.uk

1. Introduction

The rhetorical structure of persuasive narratives has not been investigated to the same extent as other styles of rhetorical analysis, such as those in politics, classical studies or education. However, explicitly manipulative stretches of narrative text are frequently found in detective fiction, a stylistic sub-genre which delights in consciously and unequivocally playing manipulative 'games' with its readers. Issues arise, however, when attempting to apply rhetorical theories to lengthy extracts of narrative, as opposed to the tighter, more overtly pared discourse of politics. This article focuses on the analysis of the monologue which makes up the dénouement of Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, in the process introducing an adaptation of Mann and Thompson's (1987) Rhetorical Structure Theory for lengthy narrative extracts.

The basis for featuring narrative persuasion in the following analysis is straightforward with regards to the text-type chosen. Although detective fiction is rarely studied as a core genre of manipulative writing, its nature is such that it requires information presented within the detective-story construct to overtly deceive and manipulate a reader with respect to the 'solution' of the text; of detective fiction itself, Peter Brooks says of such novels that they are "pursued both for the solution of enigmas and their prolongation in suspense, in the pleasure of

the text: the best possible case of plot for plot's sake" (1984:170). For example, over the many novels and short stories Agatha Christie wrote[1], there is often a similar structure: a murder is committed, the detective is called in (or is frequently already present), the detective analyses the evidence, interviews witnesses and suspects, and then almost always reveals the eventual solution in a dénouement with the interested parties and suspects present. Finally, the murderer often confesses in the presence of all the assembled witnesses that the detective was correct, giving background information and endorsement to the detective's reasoning. The murderer is usually in awe of the detective for working out the 'impossible' solution, as indeed the reader is intended to be[2]. A key point for this article is that Christie, although scrupulous with the placement of such clues, fully intends the reader to be in the dark until the detective points the way, and a great deal of the pleasure to be found in reading the stories is derived from this final dénouement.

The analysis carried out below is of a persuasive monologue within one of these dénouements. It is one in which Christie's famous detective Hercule Poirot attempts to persuade both the characters present and (more importantly) the reader of the inescapable correctness of his solution. The defining aspect of detective fiction in the Christie mould, so to speak, has always been that the detective uses his intellect (Poirot's "little grey cells") to arrive at a solution, rather than finding compelling proof and building a case on it (such as a 'smoking gun'). Therefore her detectives, and Poirot in particular, find themselves attempting to convince a reader and the other characters present of the truth of an often complex and sometimes outlandish solution. They need to convince the reader, and convince them well, through the sheer force of their argument. These stories are therefore ideal examples of texts to be analysed through a study of rhetorical structure, and in particular by the use of Rhetorical Structure Theory.

2. Rhetorical Structure Theory

The term *rhetoric* is often used to mean persuasive techniques found in non-literary texts. Although the most obvious uses of rhetoric are within the fields of politics or oratory or even education, it is nonetheless also frequently found within literature. Cockcroft and Cockcroft (2005:5) describe "the techniques by which prose writers, dramatists and poets seek to convince or persuade us of the imaginative truth... of their discourse". With particular reference to detective fiction, the linguistic choices made seek to persuade a reader of not only the truth of what happened, but also the likelihood of various occurrences and of the guilt of possible suspects, well-founded or not. Rhetoric, therefore, is "a *persuasive* dialogue and as such can be described as a *controlled* interaction" (*ibid* 5, italics in original).

When it comes to the analysis of the rhetorical structure of a stretch of text, it is generally valuable to separate each "move" within it. Each stretch of text with a particular intent can be given a label depending on its function within the overall rhetorical text. These moves can perhaps be described as independent steps leading to an overall technique of persuasion, as distinguished from Swales' (1990) 'generic' moves; Anna Mauranen (1993) was one of the first to suggest a distinction between such generic moves and 'rhetorical' moves, which have less to do with compulsory parts of a text which is attempting to fit into a genre and more to do with the strategy of a writer when constructing arguments. To describe the rhetorical moves of detective fiction, I use Rhetorical Structure Theory (hereafter RST –see Mann and Thompson 1987; 1988–), which provides a flexible set of descriptive terms with which to label various parts of a discourse based on their organisation and rhetorical intent.

RST operates by "describing how each individual component of a text contributes to the communicative goals of the text as a whole" (Bateman and Delin 2006:588). Originally intended to be a natural-language generation tool, RST breaks down a discourse into "units" (usually numbered) and then concerns itself mainly with the establishment and description of RST relations between such units. For example, take the following from *And Then There Were None*:

> They know, therefore, that one of the ten people on the island was not a murderer in any sense of the word, and it follows, paradoxically, that that person must logically be *the* murderer. (Christie 2003:315)

The first unit (*They know, therefore… any sense of the word*) is related to the second unit (*and it follows… be* the *murderer*) by means of an 'evidence' tie between the first unit and second unit. That is to say, the first unit functions as the evidence for the second unit. The relations, units and direction of effect are all decided by the analyst. Each relation has a series of definitional 'applicability conditions' which dictate what each unit in the tie must consist of, in addition to what the combination must consist of and the effect achieved on the hearer/reader (Bateman and Delin 2006:590).

Furthermore, in RST, moves can be considered as hierarchical – parts of the discourse can be subordinated to other stretches to show complex relations, although this can result in the hierarchy imposing an artificial structure on the description (Taboada and Mann 2006:431). RST can be used "to capture the underlying structure of texts" (Taboada and Mann 2006:429), and when employed, it "can be a significant aid toward understanding how the text achieves the effects that it does" (Bateman and Delin 2006:588)[3].

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1.1 An Adaptation of RST

As previously stated, the current work employs an adaptation of RST which, although using many of RST's basic principles, differs in its diagrammatic conventions. It is a modification of the system employed in Alexander (2004), which used a similar convention for representing rhetorical moves, and although necessarily few theoretical justifications were given in that work for the changes made to the theory, the discussion below intends to integrate such modifications within RST as a whole. "Classical RST" (as it is called in, amongst others, Taboada and Mann 2006:426) has a unique method of diagramming a text and the rhetorical moves within that text, and relies on labels being attached to 'ties' between moves. That is to say, the move itself has no rhetorical function, but instead is only given a function *with respect to another part of the text*. Each tie therefore has a label, not each move. An example of Classical RST's tie and label system is shown below:
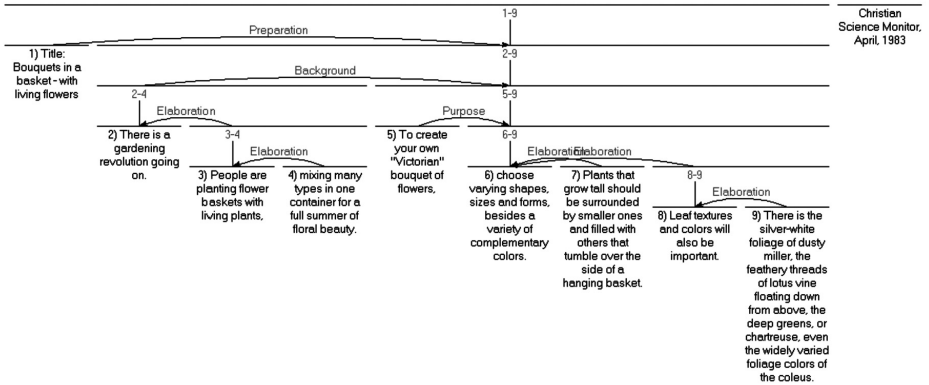
FIGURE 1 – An example RST diagram ('Bouquets') from http://www.sfu.ca/rst/images/bouquets.gif[4]

As we will discuss, there are a number of features of this analysis type and this style of display which advise some modification for its use in this article. Firstly, long stretches of text become highly unwieldy when presented in a left-to-right manner. The eighteen rhetorical moves analysed as part of this article would, if presented in this form, take five to six pages of A4 paper side-by-side to view at a readable resolution. Secondly, it becomes very difficult in long analyses to see relations between the most important parts of text (which are usually surrounded by secondary

or follow-up rhetorical moves). Relations between these major moves require long ties which do not easily show the location of such major moves alongside the nesting of subordinates. Thirdly, RST was originally developed as a theory for use in computational linguistics, and so it necessarily restricted itself to a relatively small closed hierarchical set of relations –between 24 (Mann and Thompson 1988) and 30– (Taboada and Mann 2006). While such a restricted set is desirable and highly useful in computational terms, for stylistic analyses it can result in simplification where none is necessary (for example, an analysis below uses the *ad hoc* move label "Task" to describe what Classical RST would call a preparation move, although preparation is not an adequate description of the move from a persuasive/manipulative standpoint). Similarly, while having a hierarchical series of relations is valuable for the purposes of text generation and computer analysis, the current analyses allow the rhetorical moves of the discourse itself to dictate the hierarchical structure of the text. RST generally assumes each "move" is constituted by an independent clause, which is a rule not followed in this article, and RST theorists do admit this rule "misses the fine detail" of texts and can result, alongside the hierarchical rule, in "questionable combinations" (Taboada and Mann 2006:429-431).

Finally, RST also incorporates theories of coherence into its model of text structure. Taboada and Mann (2006:431) state that the "RST definition of coherence of text involves finding an intended role in the text for every unit. Negatively, coherence is the absence of non-sequiturs." While this is likely to be appropriate, say, for political rhetoric (where a reasonable assumption may be made that, due to limited space and limited attention span, every statement must carry its own rhetorical thrust and must serve a persuasive function), fictional rhetoric does not necessarily fit these conditions. As just one example, despite it being argued above that Christie subordinates her narratives to the plot, there are within many narratives some elements of background colour which serve no formal "role" but instead contribute to the reader's *experience* of a text. Also, professional writers –those who write towards a certain length of novel or short story for a living– usually have few reasons for providing information with no rhetorical role. As such, in literary and other narrative analyses of rhetorical structure of the type undertaken here (which does not concern itself with discourse coherence), we may abandon the requirement for no non-sequiturs.

These alterations do not, by any means, cover all of RST. Its major features –nuclearity, hierarchy, discourse "moves" and so on– are all here followed, and the relations used in the later analyses are all loosely based on RST move types, following RST methodology. The most obvious difference employed remains in the diagrammatic representation of the texts analysed. There have, in fact, been a number of differing representations of RST proposed over the years, and William

Mann, one of the creators of RST, has stated that there is "no theoretical reason to assume that trees are the only possible representation of discourse structure and of coherence relations" (Taboada and Mann 2006:435).

Alexander (2004:16; 2006) used a simplification of RST diagrams for the purposes of detailed analyses of the rhetorical move structure of certain texts. For the above reasons above, particularly the unwieldy length of an RST tree diagram of a relatively long stretch of text, rhetorical moves were described in a table with one column showing the move content and the other showing the move structure of the text, with indentations indicating the subordination of various moves to one another. I add in this article the typographical assistance of showing moves either with a large initial capital letter (for main moves, or *nuclei* in RST terminology, eg Task) or with no large initial capital and leading full stops indicating the level of subordination (for subordinate moves, eg. QUESTION). Overall, the major difference between this and classical RST diagramming is the assignment of a particular label to discourse moves independently of their ties to other parts of the text.

RST's requirement of giving discourse moves a label only with respect to another part of the text is useful mainly at a less-detailed level than the analyses required here. RST proposes to give an analysis of an entire short text, whereas the current work aims only to give analyses of various rhetorical *stretches* of a much longer text (and so there exists extra discourse to which ties will, of course, lead). A tabular system is appropriate as such stretches often contain between one and five main moves (that is, one to five main rhetorical thrusts) and therefore a system of subordination firstly shows the relationship of any move to its rhetorical parent in a clear manner without the need for repeated ties, and secondly the labels themselves clearly describe the 'direction' of the rhetorical move (so a *preparation* move must prepare a move after itself, and an *elaboration* move must elaborate a move before itself, for example). The need for the start and end points of relations to be explicitly stated is thus removed; a move subordinated (and thus indented in the table) has a relation to its antecedent, while moves at the same level of subordination (despite any nested subordinates below them) have relations to one another and their antecedent shown by the labels used in the description. The advantages of showing rhetorical moves in a table are thus obvious; they can be diagrammed in an easier fashion to read and they can show the relations between main moves (called *nuclei* in RST) more easily. With regard to the labelling itself, the analysis here follows the original 24 analysis types, mostly functionally through semantic or pragmatic criteria based on a reading of the text as a whole (from Mann and Thompson 1988; for a fuller discussion of RST labelling methodology and reliability, see Taboada and Mann 2006:438ff).

The following analysis, returning to the detective fiction construct introduced above, aims to show the utility of this style of narrative study, and to highlight some of the issues and benefits outlined in this section.

3. *Murder on the Orient Express*

Murder on the Orient Express (Christie 2001, 2004), is considered one of Christie's best and most famous works (not only because of its cinematic adaptations of varying quality, but also due to the brazen ingenuity of the plot). Twelve passengers, all close to a recent tragedy where a child was kidnapped, ransomed and murdered, converge on a train where Mr. Ratchett, the murderer of the child, is travelling. Planned thoroughly and carried out in the manner of a jury, they drug and kill him for what he has done. Pretending throughout not to know one another, the passengers all provide alibis for one another and attempt to present an alternative solution (involving a stranger entering the train) to the famous detective Hercule Poirot, coincidentally travelling on the same train and asked by the train owners to investigate the murder while the train is later stalled in a snowdrift. Needless to say, Poirot is not fooled by their attempts to construct an alternative.

Having every suspect be an equal murderer is by no means obvious to most readers, and the dénouement of the novel, wherein Poirot reviews the evidence and explains that "they were *all* in it" to a conference of the assembled passengers and train staff, must persuade both the fictional characters that the solution is correct and also demonstrate to the reader the truth of the sequence of events Poirot describes. It is therefore ideal for an RST analysis of the structural and rhetorical techniques employed by Christie, and such an analysis follows.

3.1 The Household

The early section of Poirot's monologue –where Poirot claims his fellow passengers must have once been in America, and worked in the Armstrong household (that is, the household of the child who was kidnapped and murdered)– is likely to surprise the reader. Why, it may be asked, should a collection of strangers coincidentally travelling together have also all been together many years previously? Although as the novel unfolds Poirot discovers that most of the passengers had Armstrong connections, this claim that they composed a household is so unlikely it takes the form of a rhetorical pattern:

> I agreed with him, but when this particular point came into my mind, I tried to
> imagine whether such an assembly were ever likely to be collected under any other

conditions. And the answer I made to myself was –only in America. In America there might be a household composed of just such varied nationalities– an Italian chauffeur, and English governess, a Swedish nurse, a French lady's-maid and so on. That led me to my scheme of "guessing" –that is, casting each person for a certain part in the Armstrong drama much as a producer casts a play. Well, that gave me an extremely interesting and satisfactory result. (Christie 2004: 378-9)

This pattern can therefore be diagrammed as follows:

…the company assembled was interesting because it was so varied	CLAIM 1
representing as it did all classes and nationalities.	.EVIDENCE
I agreed with him,	.EVALUATION
but when this particular point came into my mind I tried to imagine whether such an assembly were ever likely to be collected under any other conditions.	THEORY
And the answer I made to myself was—only in America.	CLAIM 2
In America there might be a household composed of just such varied nationalities—	.EVIDENCE
an Italian chauffeur,	..CONCRETE EXAMPLE
an English governess,	..CONCRETE EXAMPLE
a Swedish nurse,	..CONCRETE EXAMPLE
a French lady's-maid	..CONCRETE EXAMPLE
and so on.	...SERIES EXAMPLE
That led me to my scheme of "guessing"—	TASK
that is, casting each person for a certain part in the Armstrong drama	.EXPLANATION
much as a producer casts a play.	..SIMILE
Well, that gave me an extremely interesting and satisfactory result.	TASK EVALUATION

TABLE 1 – Rhetorical structure of the Armstrong household claim

The terminology describing each rhetorical "move" in the above table has been chosen with the intent of being self-evident. There are five main "moves', each signalled by a large initial capital letter and a black border (as opposed to the small capitals and grey borders of sub-moves). These are the claim of passenger variety (Claim 1), the Theory that the passengers could previously have been connected,

the claim of American employment as the only place such diverse people could assemble (Claim 2), the Task of fitting the passengers into the Armstrong household, and the Task Evaluation – and these moves, although not overtly signalled as what are here termed "main moves", form the rhetorical thrust of the argument. The only missing link is an implied one from earlier: that they were involved in the Armstrong case, and that if they were in *any* household together it would be in the Armstrong household in particular.

Three of the five main moves have supporting sub-moves, again signalled by initial full stops, no large capitals and grey borders. Firstly, the claim of the unusual variety of the passengers, originating from someone who is not the current speaker, is evidenced and is then evaluated positively by Poirot (who is considered an authority within the novel, and probably also by the reader) to give the effect that the claim is accepted. The second claim is more unusual and states that disparate passengers could have been employed in an American household. This is followed by exemplification of the wildly differing backgrounds and nationalities of the suspects. Here there is rhetorical force in the combination of listing and parallelism (what classical rhetoric terms *isocolon* and *synathroesmus*) in the concrete example moves –and by implying continuation by what I term a series example (terms like *and so on*, *etc, and others*)–. The penultimate main move has been labelled a "Task", that is, a procedure carried out to provide evidence or, as in this case, to lead to a conclusion. It is considered a main move as it is not subordinate to any of the previous moves. It supports the implicit claim that the passengers worked in the Armstrong household, but fitting them into the household itself is a major part of the top-level argument and it is not evidence as it highlights an obstacle to be overcome rather than results. The technique of presenting the task but not presenting the results means the reader is invited to fill in the evidence gap. As problem-solution patterns occur frequently in a discourse –see Hoey (2001) *inter alia*– readers expect a problem to be followed by a solution. They will therefore attempt to provide the solution themselves if it is relatively easy for them to do so.

3.2 The Sleeping Draught

This extract regards the sleeping draught Ratchett supposedly took on the night he was murdered.

> Then the valet. He said his master was in the habit of taking a sleeping draught when travelling by train. That might be true, but *would Ratchett have taken one last night*? The automatic under his pillow gave the lie to that statement. Ratchett intended to be on the alert last night. Whatever narcotic was administered to him must have been done so without his knowledge. By whom? Obviously by MacQueen or the valet. (Christie 2004: 379)

Then the valet.	SITUATION
He said his master was in the habit of taking a sleeping draught when travelling by train.	EVIDENCE
That might be true,	.APPARENT ACCEPTANCE
but *would Ratchett have taken one last night*?	.ACCEPTANCE QUERY
The automatic under his pillow gave the lie to that statement.	.REFUTATION FROM EVIDENCE
Ratchett intended to be on the alert last night.	.CONCLUSION FROM REFUTATION
Whatever narcotic was administered to him must have been done so without his knowledge.	CLAIM (FROM PREVIOUS)
By whom?	RHETORICAL QUERY
Obviously by MacQueen or the valet.	.CLAIM

TABLE 2 – Refutation of the sleeping draught claim

Here there are four main moves (again shown by large initial capitals and black borders): one establishing the situation, one discussing evidence, one making a claim and another making a claim through an answer to a rhetorical question. The evidence discussion follows an interesting pattern: there is an apparent acceptance of the valet's claim immediately followed by a questioning of the acceptance in this particular instance. The query is refuted by an evidence-move and a conclusion is reached from the refutation. This embedded conclusion is used as the evidence for a following claim at the top-level argument, which is followed by a rhetorical question setting up a final claim. The overall effect is to provide a clear structure from the refutation of previous evidence to a new claim and finally to another significant claim, and this final claim is emphasised by a rhetorical query.

3.3 The Time

The final extract used to discuss structure is this lengthy discussion of the murder's timing:

> And here let me say just a word or two about *times*. To my mind, the really interesting point about the dented watch was the place where it was found—in Ratchett's pyjama pocket, a singularly uncomfortable and unlikely place to keep one's watch, especially as there is a watch "hook" provided just by the head of the bed. I felt sure, therefore, that the watch had been deliberately placed in the pocket and faked. The crime, then, was not committed at a quarter-past one.
>
> Was it, then, committed earlier? To be exact, at twenty-three minutes to one? My friend M. Bouc advanced as an argument in favour of it the loud cry which awoke

me from sleep. But if Ratchett were heavily drugged *he could not have cried out*. If he had been capable of crying out he would have been capable of making some kind of a struggle to defend himself, and there were no signs of any such struggle.

I remembered that MacQueen had called attention, not once but twice (and the second time in a very blatant manner), to the fact that Ratchett could speak no French. I came to the conclusion that the whole business at twenty-three minutes to one was a comedy played for my benefit! Anyone might see through the watch business—it is a common enough device in detective stories. They assumed that I should see through it and that, pluming myself on my own cleverness, I would go on to assume that since Ratchett spoke no French the voice I heard at twenty-three minutes to one could not be his, and that Ratchett must be already dead. But I am convinced that at twenty-three minutes to one Ratchett was still lying in his drugged sleep.(Christie 2004: 380-1)

The rhetorical pattern here is as below:

And here let me say just a word or two about *times*.	SITUATION
To my mind, the really interesting point about the dented watch was the place where it was found—in Ratchett's pyjama pocket,	CIRCUMSTANCE
a singularly uncomfortable and unlikely place to keep one's watch,	.ELABORATION
especially as there is a watch "hook" provided just by the head of the bed.	..SUPPORT
I felt sure, therefore, that the watch had been deliberately placed in the pocket and faked.	.CLAIM
The crime, then, was not committed at a quarter-past one.	..CONCLUSION
Was it, then, committed earlier? To be exact, at twenty-three minutes to one?	RHETORICAL QUERY
My friend M. Bouc advanced as an argument in favour of it the loud cry which awoke me from sleep.	.SUPPORT
But if Ratchett were heavily drugged *he could not have cried out*.	..CLAIM
If he had been capable of crying out	...CONDITIONAL 1
he would have been capable of making some kind of a struggle to defend himself,	....CONDITIONAL 2
and there were no signs of any such struggle.	.....EVIDENCE
I remembered that MacQueen had called attention, not once but twice (and the second time in a very blatant manner), to the fact that Ratchett could speak no French.	..EVIDENCE
I came to the conclusion that the whole business at twenty-three minutes to one was a comedy played for my benefit!	...CONCLUSION

Anyone might see through the watch business –	CLAIM
it is a common enough device in detective stories.	.EVIDENCE
They assumed that I should see through it and that, pluming myself on my own cleverness, I would go on to assume that since Ratchett spoke no French the voice I heard at twenty-three minutes to one could not be his, and that Ratchett must be already dead.	..CLAIM
But I am convinced that at twenty-three minutes to one Ratchett was still lying in his drugged sleep.	...RADICAL CONCLUSION

TABLE 3 – The discussion of the time of the murder

Despite the length of this extract there are only four top-level moves: the introduction to the topic of time (Situation), the Circumstance of the placement of the watch (which leads to Poirot concluding the watch evidence was faked), the Rhetorical Query regarding the claim a loud cry showed the time of death (followed by a thorough and interestingly-structured refutation) and a final Claim summarising the previous evidence. The second main move with its associated sub-moves forms a circumstance-elaboration-support-claim-conclusion pattern, and is fairly straightforward. The circumstance of the watch's location is presented (as circumstance rather than evidence, as there is no claim preceding it) and followed by an elaboration (that it is not just an unusual place, but an uncomfortable one), support of the embedded claim in the elaboration that the pocket is an uncomfortable place to keep a watch (as there is an alternative), a claim that the watch evidence was faked, based on the elaboration, and a conclusion (which presupposes the claim is accurate).

The persuasive structure of the remainder of this extract has a particularly interesting rhetorical structure. Firstly, the rhetorical device Poirot uses earlier (and throughout many of his appearances in print) returns, emphasising the alternative once the thin evidence of the watch has been discarded. The rhetorical question here is used to reinforce "an opinion already formed or forming" (Cockcroft and Cockcroft 2005:236). This is followed by what I term *support* –and not *evaluation*, as it does not arise from authority and this lack of evaluation foreshadows the claim that the evidence provided in the preceding support move is wrong. A conditional structure –if *x* then *y*, and not *y* thus not *x*– rhetorically presents evidence in a more varied manner than the simpler refutation structure above and, again, by omitting the final conclusion (that Ratchett had not cried out) Christie invites the reader to complete it themselves and so become more involved in the reasoning process, and more inclined to trust it as it is based on their own reasoning. We then return to more evidence at the same level as the earlier claim, being subordinate to the

support move as it follows from the circumstance of the loud cry which awoke Poirot from sleep. This unusual structure means two pieces of evidence are presented together, lending heavier support to the final conclusion that the cry was also a fake. Poirot then reinforces both conclusions by summarising: he places them in a causality structure, where the first claim (that the "watch business" is transparently false) is followed by charmingly self-referential evidence ('a common enough device in detective stories'), which in turn leads to the claim that once the watch evidence was rejected the loud cry evidence would also be taken to be false. This is all completed by what I term a 'radical conclusion', that is to say, a conclusion which does not follow from the previous evidence as it refutes a refutation. This rhetorical structure –reversing expectations after a carefully constructed argument– is a technique clearly used to add a measure of confusion (although not too much, as it is neatly planned) and generate more interest.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of the analysis above was twofold; firstly it aimed to demonstrate the use of persuasive rhetoric by detective fiction authors such as Agatha Christie, through examining an extract from one of her most famous novels. Secondly, as a linked but equally-important goal, it illustrates the RST adaptation introduced in Section 2 of this article, an adaptation which aims not to supplant but rather to supplement existing RST diagrammatic representations.

With regard to the first goal, of demonstrating rhetorical persuasion in Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, the act of convincing a reader of the logical and necessary truth of Hercule Poirot's arguments is by no means an easy one. Indeed, Poirot's exposition above relies on what I would informally term "tricks" designed how best to present information to a sceptical mind, or a mind which already has its own pet theory how the murder was committed. Nonetheless, his creator Agatha Christie is one of the greatest reader-manipulators to be found in the various genres of fiction; the puzzle-like quality of her plots invite the reader's engagement and scrutiny, and it is with such engagement that she still persuades a reader to follow a wrong path whilst maintaining at the conclusion of a story that the correct path was always the best-illuminated.

Turning to the second focus of this article, it has been shown that the re-representation of RST results in a tabular form can be usefully presented within the research article format, in a way which the more detailed diagrammatic method necessarily cannot. In general, therefore, it seems that using the pilot study presented here as a base would mean that this method could be pursued and refined to be used in further rhetorical analyses made within the broad field of

narrative studies. The most important limitation of the current study lies in the fact that certain representations have been lost, more specifically in the area of reverse-direction references. However, further experimentation may be able to provide a hybrid model, only using those compressed diagrammatic features necessary to present information not available in tabular form, and so further extend the cross-discipline utility of Rhetorical Structure Theory and its adaptations, extensions and derivations.

Notes

1. For admirable summaries of the over 100 novels, plays and short story collections Christie saw published, see Charles Osborne's *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie* (Osborne 1999), which is notably scrupulous in not revealing the solution of any of her plots. An excellent illustrated sourcebook for the early novels (before 1942) is Wagstaff and Poole's *Agatha Christie: A Reader's Companion* (2004), while good pointers to further criticism include Hark (1997) and Palmer (1991). Beehler (1988) contains a useful summary of Christie's presentation of "the illusion of truth", but again only from a pedagogical standpoint.

2. A more detailed, although dismissive, literary-historical summary of this plot structure is found in Grella (1970).

3. For more details of Classic RST, the most comprehensive works are Mann and Thompson (1988) and Taboada and Mann (2006), while Bateman and Delin (2006) offers a concise and accurate summary.

4. The print quality of this diagram is from the original, unfortunately intended more for viewing on the web than in print. Available RST packages (such as the one used to produce Figure 1 above) tend to have the same problem.

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