

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Research

Literature is the artistic work of spoken or written words which meanings are formed to express an artistic and emotional appeal. Literature is generally categorized as a work of fiction in the form of literary works. However, according to Eagleton (2011), this distinction between "fiction" and "nonfiction" in literary works is debatable. He states that literature is defined as the peculiar ways in which language is used, not by whether it is imaginative or fictional. From a formalist's perspective, the language used in literary works is viewed as a collection of deviations from what is usual. It is seen as a form of organized linguistic violence perpetrated against ordinary and common speech (Jakobson, 1987). Unlike the "ordinary" or "common" language that we typically use, literature is a "special" form of language. The overall impact regarding what is conveyed in literary works is thought to be influenced by its truthfulness and practical applicability. Literature explains the function of a text or thistle in a social setting, as well as how they relate to and differ from their surroundings, with their behaviors, potential uses, and surrounding customs (Ellis, 2022). Therefore, even though literature is generally a work of fiction, it has an influential impact on society.

One of the works of literature is a novel, which is a fictional book-length prose narrative. However, an exception to this definition mentioned by Truman Capote in MacKay (2010) is that a novel sometimes does not need to even be called

“fictional”. This does not mean that a novel is not a work of fiction, but as a fiction, it still portrays character and action with a certain amount of realism. MacKay (2010) explains this in her analogy between a novel and a horse. When a novel or a horse is broken down into their constituent parts, in this case, four legs, forty teeth, or forty thousand words, the huge immense of historical, social, cultural, and emotional value of what is tried to depict is lost. Therefore, to analyze this immense, the elements in novels are analyzed through literary criticism.

To apply the study of literary criticism, the researcher analyzes a novel entitled “Absent in the Spring”. The novel was published in 1944 by the Collins publisher, written by Agatha Christie under the alias of Mary Westmacott. It is among Agatha Christie's most unexpected and illuminating works since it is distinctive from most of her works which generally are about traditional mystery. The novel talks about the story of Joan Scudamore who thinks that she has a good social life, as a good mother and a good wife until she realizes the fact that those thoughts are not true. Joan Scudamore is returning from a visit to her daughter in Iraq to London when she finds herself unexpectedly alone and stranded in an isolated rest stop due to flooding of the railway tracks. This unexpected solitude forces Joan to evaluate her life for the first time and confront many of her personal truths.

Agatha Christie, who was born in Torquay in 1890, went on to become and is now the best-selling novelist of all time. More than one billion copies of her works have been sold worldwide, including one billion copies in translation. She is best recognized for her 66 detective novels, 14 collections of short stories, and The

Mousetrap, the longest-running play in the world. She has won several awards such as the Anthony Award for Best Series of the Century, Best First Novel, Best Contemporary Novel, and many more. Though the novel "Absent in the Spring" is not among her famous traditional mystery novels, she describes the book as "*the one book that has satisfied me completely - the book I always wanted to write.*"

The novel consists of social phenomena which can be investigated through literary criticism. Literature, like sociology, is primarily focused on how society affects people, how they adapt to it, and how they want to alter it (Laurenson & Swingewood, 1972). Swingewood provides three principles in the sociology of literature which are social documents, mirror of the author, and historical documents. This research is focused on the first principle, which is social documents. This first principle considers literary works as cultural artifacts that may be utilized to understand a social reality at the time. The approach of sociology to literature is specifically theorized using the theory of social exchange.

The social exchange theory proposed by Homans (1968) is predicated on the notion that people intentionally initiate and nurture connections that maximize gains or benefits and minimize costs. According to this theory, there is a certain amount of give-and-take in each social relationship and the value of the benefits in the costs within them which determine whether or not one chooses to continue that relation. The choice of whether and how much to exchange is made by two or more social exchange actors. Each actor has something to offer the other. However, these actors are typically seen as rational, emotionless individuals. For this reason, Lawler & Thye (1999) investigate whether social exchange theory might

incorporate emotions. They argue that emotions reach and permeate social exchange context, process, and outcomes.

Research on social exchange within literary criticism remains notably sparse. There has not been any literary study that relates emotions with social exchange using Lawler & Thye's (1999) theory. However, Fithroni (2017) finds that when the social exchange theory is applied to interpersonal relationships in the novel, the character's relationship is satisfying, stable, and interdependent. This research can be expanded by the use of the social exchange theory of emotions within a sociological approach. Regarding this, as Lawler & Thye (1999) state about power and status having roles in social exchange, Natasha (2020) shows that "respect" may be used to resolve social issues in "The Notebook" novel. This adds to Nešković (2012) who aims to use the theory of social exchange in the analysis of power dynamics in the classic Chinese novel *Jin Ping Mei*. The novel is filled with detailed accounts of social exchange, including the trading of precious items and money, favors, and helpful knowledge. Each of the three dyadic relationships is uniquely influenced by the power dynamics that exist within them.

The phenomena of social exchange exist in the novel "Absent in the Spring", as quoted below:

Well, she'd been a good wife to him, hadn't she? She'd always put his interests first ... Wait – had she?  
 Rodney, his eyes pleading with her ... sad eyes. Always sad eyes.  
 Rodney saying, 'How was I to know I'd hate the office so?' looking at her gravely, asking, 'How do you know that I'll be happy?'  
 Rodney pleading for the life he wanted, the life of a farmer.. (Page 110).

In this quote, the narrator questions whether Joan is a good wife for Rodney, reenacting all the flashbacks that show how Joan has been treating her husband and children. The emotions of “sad eyes” that the narrator says may indicate a problem in Joan and Rodney’s relationship. The sad eyes of Rodney can be compared with the joy he shows when Joan leaves him for Iraq: “*Why hadn’t he waited to see the train pull out?*” (Page 36). This is an example of how emotion affects social exchange context. When Joan leaves, Rodney expresses his joy, but when Joan is with him, he hides his joy. In the context of social exchange, Rodney hides his true positive emotion to fulfill the emotion norm. In the process of social exchange, it is shown that Joan signals the sad emotion from her husband. In the outcome of social exchange, Joan attributes to the reason why Rodney shows those emotions which finally reveals that Joan and Rodney’s relationship is not doing well. According to Lawler & Thye (1999), this phenomenon happens because Joan fails to achieve the dyadic level of emotional exchange. Joan forces Rodney to become a lawyer while he wants to be a farmer because she thinks that being a lawyer has more social status than is commonly perceived in 20th-century British society. The phenomenon of social exchange also appears in the relationship between Joan and her servant, Edna the Cook as shown below:

‘Always being told when a thing’s wrong, Ma’am, and never a word of praise when it’s right – well, it takes the heart out of you.’ She had answered coldly, ‘Surely you realize, Cook, that if nothing is said it is because everything is all right and perfectly satisfactory.’ ‘And apparently you resent the fact?’ ‘It’s not that, Ma’am, but I think we’d best say no more about it and I’ll leave at the end of my month.’ (Page 67)

The social exchange phenomenon between Joan and The Cook is influenced by the power or status condition in 20th-century British society. Edna the Cook has lower power and status than Joan, hence causing her opinion to be underestimated. She wants to hear more praise from Joan when she does a good job but never actually hears it from Joan. She ends up quitting the Job which turns out to be influenced by her personal problems with her husband. According to Lawler & Thye (1999), the social cohesion between Joan and Edna is ended because of the influence of power or status condition and Edna's bad mood that influences her decision-making.

Much remains to be unraveled concerning the portrayal of emotions, social exchange, and social relations within the novel "Absent in the Spring". The characters in the novel interact with one another, hence building relationships that affect their social exchange relation. Their relationships are affected by emotions which have roles in the exchange context which includes emotion norms and power or status condition, exchange process which includes emotion signals and cognitive adjustments, and exchange outcome which includes social attributions and social cohesions. Based on the intrinsic elements in the novel, these aspects are seen through the point of view of the society in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. Therefore, the researcher has entitled the research "**Social Exchange in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Britain as portrayed in Agatha Christie's *Absent in the Spring*: Sociological Approach**".

## 1.2. Identification of the problem

Numerous issues are noted to be identified in “Absent in the Spring” novel by Agatha Christie. Psychological and social issues that exist in the novel’s story are various. These issues are based on the character’s psychological behavior, as well as how they socially interact with other characters. Additionally, the issues of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Britain depicted in the novel are numerous and extensive. These issues are identified through the portrayal of the characters in the novel, which include:

1. Social deviation in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as portrayed in “Absent in the Spring” by Agatha Christie
2. The fragmentation of domestic labor in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as reflected in “Absent in the Spring” by Agatha Christie
3. Juvenile delinquency in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as reflected in “Absent in the Spring” by Agatha Christie
4. The factors that influence the endurance of social exchange relations in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as portrayed in “Absent in the Spring” novel by Agatha Christie
5. The aspects of social exchange context toward emotion in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as portrayed in Agatha Christie’s “Absent in the Spring”
6. The aspects of social exchange process toward emotion in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as portrayed in Agatha Christie’s “Absent in the Spring”
7. The aspects of social exchange outcome toward emotion in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as portrayed in Agatha Christie’s “Absent in the Spring”

### 1.3. Limitation of the Problem

As seen in the list of problems stated above, the psychological and sociological issues in the novel are numerous and extensive. This occurs as the result of the richness of the intrinsic elements that Agatha Christie employed in her works. If all of the issues are discussed, more time must be taken, and a wider theoretical framework should be applied. Moreover, the phenomenon of social exchange in the 20<sup>th</sup> century-British society is evidently abundant. Therefore, the researcher does the analysis based on what is perceived in the novel specifically, regarding the phenomenon of social exchange in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain. The phenomenon is based on the theory of Lawler & Thye (1999) who adds emotion to the social exchange theory. By this, the research is taken up to the sociological perspective rather than focusing on emotions as a psychological approach. Moreover, the researcher makes some limitations regarding the characters in the novel, which revolves around the main character only. For these reasons, the researcher limits the problems to discussing the aspects of social exchange towards emotion that are portrayed in the novel, which are:

1. The aspects of social exchange context toward emotion in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as portrayed in Agatha Christie's "Absent in the Spring"
2. The aspects of social exchange process toward emotion in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as portrayed in Agatha Christie's "Absent in the Spring"
3. The aspects of social exchange outcome toward emotion in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as portrayed in Agatha Christie's "Absent in the Spring"



#### **1.4. Formulation of the Problem**

According to the limitation of problems, the research is focused on resolving the following questions:

1. What are the aspects of social exchange context toward emotion in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as portrayed in Agatha Christie's "Absent in the Spring"?
2. What are the aspects of social exchange process toward emotion in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as portrayed in Agatha Christie's "Absent in the Spring"?
3. What are the aspects of social exchange outcome toward emotion in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as portrayed in Agatha Christie's "Absent in the Spring"?

#### **1.5. Objective of the Research**

Based on the research questions above, this research aims to achieve three objectives, namely:

1. To reveal the aspects of social exchange context toward emotion in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as portrayed in Agatha Christie's "Absent in the Spring"
2. To figure out the aspects of social exchange process toward emotion in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as portrayed in Agatha Christie's "Absent in the Spring"
3. To find out the aspects of social exchange outcome toward emotion in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain as portrayed in Agatha Christie's "Absent in the Spring"

#### **1.6. Significance of the Research**

This research aims to achieve several objectives, each of which is anticipated to yield significant outcomes, including:

## **1. Theoretical Significance**

This research is hoped to enhance the understanding of the theories employed in this research, aiming to contribute depth and nuance to existing theoretical knowledge. Theoretically, this research is expected to fulfill several intentions. First, the theory of social exchange and emotion can be effectively implemented and comprehended based on the context of this research. Second, the aspects of social exchange context, process, and outcome toward emotion can be well comprehended by the reader. This research is anticipated to serve as a significant benchmark for future scholars, offering valuable insights and references, particularly given the limited analysis of this topic within existing literature.

## **2. Practical Significance**

This research is also intended to be practically beneficial for the readers and the researcher performing the study. First, this research adds to a better understanding of the English language and literature, particularly in the context of sociology. Second, this study is expected to contribute to the researcher's understanding of social processes that occur in the realm of fiction. This study also offers some advice to readers who want to learn more about the social exchange theory and emotions in literary works and will adopt the theory in future research.

### 1.7. Definition of Key Terms

- Sociological Approach** : Sociology is the scientific study of social interactions, including their variety, manifestations, and influences. Sociology analyzes social activity in terms of how it affects social behavior rather than in terms of economics, politics, religion, or ethics. The sociological approach analyzes literature as a social product and that the ideas and emotions it expresses are influenced by the cultural life that society creates.
- Social Exchange** : Social exchange theory treats social life as involving a series of sequential exchanges between two or more parties. The benefit and harm given by a specific actor in society affect the quality of social exchange.
- Emotion's Role** : Emotion is a neurologically and cognitively based, comparatively fleeting good or negative evaluative state. Emotions are internal states that an actor cannot fully control. Emotions have roles in the aspects of social exchange context, exchange process, and exchange outcomes.