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Period 2, English 3-4

A Review: The Day of the Jackal

The Day of the Jackal, written by Fredrick Forsyth, is a fictional novel that displays the author's brilliance by setting a mood and connecting you with the characters. The Day of the Jackal takes place in post World War II in France. The Jackal is a professional assassin, whose name is not revealed, who is hired by a French terrorist group to kill Charles de Gualle, the President of France. This terrorist group has had several failed attacks on the President, and the Jackal is their last hope.

The mood the author sets is exceptionally suspenseful. When Rodin, the leader of the terrorist group hears of the failed attacks, the reader can feel his frustration and hatred towards the French government. When Jean-Marie Bastien is vigorously preparing for the first assault on de Gualle, the reader can sense the tension in the air and the feeling of accomplishment when Bastien says, "That's it! One hundred and fifty bullets will have passed through the presidential car by the time it comes abreast of the van. By God we've got it." All this points to Fredrick Forsyth's amazing mood setting talent in this novel.

The reader feels at one with the many characters as they each take part in the many small ventures that give rise to the climax. In a scene where the Jackal is purchasing a fake identification card, the reader can tell that the man making the card is an expert. Not because it was mentioned, but because the man has such a large amount of information about I.D. cards to offer. This same writing talent that displays the characters with subtle suggestion instead of giving specific details is also shown when the Jackal goes to purchase his sniper rifle. It is not mentioned earlier, but the way the armorer talks about the mechanics involved with making a gun in which the Jackal described shows that he is one of the best in the business. Forsyth takes characterization to new level with the Jackal. The reader gets to know the Jackal with a detached understanding of him. Forsyth keeps him a mysterious being with no past and, as far as the rest of the characters in the book are concerned, no present. The reader gets to know the Jackal's meticulous personality and his great care for every slight detail. This machine like personality, added to the fact that no personal history beyond slight background was given, keeps the reader from caring about the Jackal's well being. One can feel a detached fondness to this character, and want him to succeed, but if, for instance, he was to die, one would feel no remorse.

Fredrick Forsyth has mastered some key literary elements in a way not thought possible before. This author, although not on the "classic book list," is one of the greatest writers of modern times and should, with out a doubt, be added to that list.

