

And Then There Were None Book Report

The main character in Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* is the recently retired judge, Mr. Justice Wargrave, an elderly man who often appears sleepy because his eyes are only half open. Christie describes him as having "that frog-like face, that tortoise-like neck, that hunched-up attitude - yes, and those pale shrewd little eyes." He frequently takes charge of the group, summarizing their position as if he were in court, and leading them to take actions for their protection, such as locking up dangerous items. From his manuscript of confession at the end, the reader learns that Justice Wargrave is sadistic and cruel. Since his childhood, he has enjoyed tormenting and killing other creatures, including insects and other animals. Finally, on Indian Island, he has chosen to kill human beings. However, Justice Wargrave's appetite for killing is tempered by a strong sense of justice. Even when he kills insects, he chooses those that are dangerous in some way, such as wasps. He is also a passionate fan of detective fiction. When he learns that he has incurable cancer, he begins planning the perfect crime, which he bases on the rhyme, "Ten Little Indians." Wargrave's confession, which he placed in a bottle and threw in the sea, explains how he chose his victims. He states that he gathered rumors and gossip -- such as the story of Armstrong's drunken killing of a patient on the operating table -- then watched each person as the voice on the gramophone record set forth the accusations. To his great satisfaction, they all showed signs of guilt. He then feels certain that he is dispensing justice.

It is difficult to determine who is the second most important character in this book because there are so many other characters who are equally important. However, I believe it is reasonable to name the pseudo-owner of the island, "U.N. Owen" or "Unknown," in this position. The reader -- along with most of the characters -- does not know until the latter part of the book that Owen is a non-existent person who was created by Wargrave. Until then, the characters move from identifying the people, most of them named Owen, who supposedly invited them to

the island, to recognizing that Owen is not the real name (as a result of Wargrave's comments), and then to realizing that Owen is actually one of them (again, as a result of Wargrave). U.N. Owen is male in some cases and female in others, and because the names for the initials U.N. are spelled out (e.g. Una Nancy), it is not readily apparent to the other characters that there is something strange about them. Whether male or female, U.N. Owen seems to be just beyond reach as the guests and servants are murdered one by one.

And Then There Were None is set on an island about a mile from the coast of Devon, England. Its name is "Indian Island" because the portion of it that faces land resembles the profile of an Indian (Native American). The island is rocky and desolate, and Vera Claythorne, a young schoolmistress, thinks that there is "something sinister about it. She shivered faintly." The house, which faces south and has round windows, is modern and well-appointed. It is "an exciting house -- a house that lived up to expectation!" After the death of Anthony Marston, an attractive "Norse god" figure, the brightness and cheerfulness of the house seem to make the situation worse. The little mainland town across from it is called Sticklehaven; this is the town the guests try to heliograph later in the book. The sea around Indian Island is often choppy, with large swells, and when there is a storm it is even worse. Fred Narracott states, when he is taking most of the guests to the island, that sometimes it is cut off from the shore for a week at a time.

The book begins with the arrival of eight people drawn in different ways to Indian Island. When they arrive, they learn their host and hostess are not there, but there are two servants, Mr. and Mrs. Rogers, making a total of ten people on the island. The significance of the number 10 is brought forth when Vera Claythorne reads the poem "Ten Little Indians" in her room, and when the guests notice ten china Indians on the dining table. They are having coffee in the drawing room when a loud voice begins to accuse each of them with murder. The Voice is found to be a

phonograph record, but in the meantime, its words have struck home with each of the guests and the two servants. Justice Wargrave quickly takes charge, starting an inquiry into their situation. He points out that someone tricked them into coming to the island.

After the inquiry, most of the guests defend themselves against the accusations. A short time later, Anthony Marston dies when he begins to drink his second whiskey and soda. Astonished and chilled, the others are even more frightened when the doctor states that Marston died due to cyanide in his drink. The rest of the guests go to bed and lock their doors, and the servant, Rogers, notices that there are only nine china Indians now.

The next morning, Rogers finds his wife dead in her bed. A search of the island reveals no others present, which means that the killer must be one of the eight people left. Later, when General Macarthur does not come to lunch, Dr. Armstrong discovers that the old General's head has been smashed by a "life preserver" (a short, weighted club). After this discovery, Wargrave leads another discussion during which he concludes that they should not trust each other.

When the guests come down for breakfast the next day, the fire is not lit, there is no food, and Rogers is nowhere to be found. The men look for him and find him in the woodshed, where he was killed with an ax while chopping wood. Vera Claythorne becomes hysterical, pointing out the similarities between the murders up to that time and the "Ten Little Indians" poem. The guests talk about the accusations against them and their suspicions about the murderer. After breakfast, while Emily Brent, an elderly and self-righteous spinster, remains alone in the dining room, everyone else discusses whether she might be the killer, motivated by religious mania. When they return to question her, they find her dead. Someone has injected her with poison, and there is a bee in the room, just like the poem states.

Now there are five of them left. They sit watching each other suspiciously, and only one leaves the group at a time. Vera makes afternoon tea while the rest watch her to ensure she does not poison it. Afterward, she goes up to her room, thinking about the little boy who drowned on her watch. She becomes increasingly panicked until a wet hand (a large piece of seaweed) touches her on the shoulder. She screams, and the men come running. When they go back downstairs, they find the judge dead, shot in the head.

That night, Blore, the ex-Scotland Yard man, hears a noise that he believes to be Armstrong. He sees a man leaving the house, then he wakes up Lombard and Vera. Blore and Lombard go out to confront Armstrong, but cannot find him. At breakfast the next morning, they try to decide if Armstrong has been murdered or if he is the killer. Vera interprets the poem, which says "a red herring swallowed him," as meaning that Armstrong is hiding and only faked his disappearance. They use a mirror to heliograph their plea for help, SOS, to the mainland. Blore returns to the house for lunch while the other two stay outside. A loud noise causes them to run up to the house, where they find Blore dead, his head crushed by the marble clock that was in Vera's room. Now they feel sure the killer is Armstrong, but they soon notice his drowned body washed up on the rocks.

Only Lombard and Vera are left, each believing the other to be the killer, and Lombard has a revolver. Vera suggests that they retrieve Armstrong's body, which gives her a chance to get the revolver. She shoots Lombard, then returns to her room in the house. Someone has thoughtfully left a rope with a noose hanging from a big hook in the ceiling. With a sense of inevitability, she climbs on the chair, puts her head in the noose and kicks away the chair.

The next day, men from Sticklehaven are finally able to reach the island. They find the ten dead bodies and are puzzled about what happened. Sir Thomas Legge and Inspector Maine

discuss the case. At the very end, a manuscript in a bottle, which was found by a boater, provides the information about the identity of the murderer -- Justice Wargrave -- and why he killed the other nine people.

This book is often considered to be Christie's masterpiece, and I agree with that evaluation, for several reasons. First, I did not notice most of the clues, so the solution of the mystery was surprising to me. I have read some mysteries (even some by Christie) in which I recognize the killer by the middle of the book. Second, I liked the weaving together of the characters' points of view. Sometimes books with more than one point of view are confusing, but in *And Then There Were None*, the point of view shifts drew me further into the story. Therefore they had a positive rather than a negative effect. Third, Christie is known for using nursery rhymes and poetry as inspiration for many of her books, and that worked particularly well in this case. I especially appreciated the "red herring" clue! Fourth, the establishment of an atmosphere of mystery and the build-up of tension are unexcelled. Indian Island is described as a desolate, spooky place, which the guests notice that immediately upon their arrival. As each person is murdered, the tension increases; in the end, Vera Claythorne is so emotionally off-balance that she murders Lombard, then hangs herself. Finally, *And Then There Were None* is the finest example I have ever read of the "locked room"-type mystery. Agatha Christie wrote several of this type (e.g. *Cards on the Table*, *Death in the Air*), but this is the best. I believe it set the bar very high for any future "locked room" stories as well. I would recommend *And Then There Were None* to any friend who loves mysteries or well-written novels in general.

If I were going to make a movie of *And Then There Were None*, I would begin by casting Jack Nicholson in the role of Justice Wargrave. This choice is based on his ability to produce an evil countenance, with the "malevolent" glances attributed to Wargrave, and his general acting

skills. For the part of Dr. Armstrong, I would choose Michael Caine (he might need to be a little younger than he is now). He is an excellent actor, in my opinion, who can play a wide variety of parts, and I believe he looks as if he could be a doctor. I would cast Johnny Depp as Philip Lombard. He is attractive and has previously played parts in which he had to be suave, confident, and daring. He is also a great character actor. For Emily Brent, I see Maggie Smith in my mind's eye. The most important thing about Miss Brent is her disapproving, self-righteous attitude, and I have seen Maggie Smith play that type of part before. Kate Winslet would be my choice for Vera Claythorne. I can visualize her as a schoolmistress, but also I believe she could look as if she were in a trance for Vera's final hanging scene. For the part of Anthony Marston, I would cast Orlando Bloom. He has (in my opinion) the "Norse god" type of good looks and coloring, and I have seen him play over-confident and self-satisfied parts in the past. I believe Christopher Plummer would make a good General Macarthur. He has the abrupt, no-nonsense attitude of a general, but he could also portray Macarthur's depression and apathy. I would cast John Goodman as Blore, because he can be bluff and hearty. I also believe he could successfully produce a suspicious attitude. Finally, for Mr. and Mrs. Rogers, I would cast Bill Nighy and Meryl Streep. Bill Nighy looks like a butler, in my opinion, and he is such a good character actor he could portray anyone successfully. The same is true for Meryl Streep. In her career, she has won awards for playing widely varying types of women.

I did not notice the clues to the mystery when I first read this book, but looking back, I could recognize at least a few. The first clue was the fact that Wargrave's letter of invitation did not come from someone named Owen; instead, he stated that it came from a real person named Constance Culmington. While ruminating near the beginning he tells himself that Constance was "the sort of woman who *would* buy an island and surround herself with mystery!" He wants to

make sure his story is believable in case someone there knows Constance herself, implying that he is aware his invitation is false. A second early clue is the phonograph recording, which addresses the "prisoners at the bar" and accuses them of murder in the same language that would be used in a court of law. Third, Justice Wargrave uses his judicial skills at summing up cases to summarize their situation -- his way -- at key points in the story. For example, after the recording is played, he leads the group to discover that they were all brought to the island under different pretexts. When Macarthur is found dead, Wargrave suggests that the killer must be one of them. Finally, in the epilogue, the Inspector states that Vera, Macarthur, and Wargrave were innocent, but in fact Vera and Macarthur confessed, so only Wargrave was innocent. Therefore, he is the murderer.