

Fear: The Secret Instigator Behind Human Behavior

Out of the whole world there is nothing more poisonous and detrimental to the human psyche than the overbearing weight of fear. The concept of how fear and human behavior play hand in hand can be difficult to convey. However, the award-winning mystery novelist Agatha Christie does it effortlessly. Born in England, Christie grew up with a thirst for knowledge. She was a known book devourer, despite not having a formal education. Although she loved books, Christie became frustrated at the rudimentary themes, and easily guessed outcomes of mystery novels at that time. It was then that Christie's sister challenged her to write her first novel (Napierkowski and Stanley). One of her most popular novels, "And Then There Were None," focuses on ten main characters and the elusive "Soldier Island." It is a great mystery as to who owns this island, and the characters cannot help but fantasize about it. Shortly after receiving invitations to the island, they discover it is nothing like they imagined. As the guests settle into their new mansion, a mysterious voice begins listing off heinous accusations about each person. Although they deny the allegations, the guests' guilt shines through as they begin to die off one by one. The guests soon realize that these deaths are no accident. The characters' honorable facades begin to crumble as they fight for their lives against an unknown killer. In her novel "And Then There Were None," *Agatha Christie* illustrates the way fear affects humans through conflict between characters and unknown forces, and various objects that symbolize the events taking place.

To begin with, Christie demonstrates the way fear affects humans through conflict between characters and unknown forces. For instance, literary critic Wendy Perkins exemplifies this theme by stating, "The guilty feelings of some of the group are quickly displaced, however,

by the overwhelming desire to save themselves. When they all determine that the murderer must be one of them, they turn on each other. During this process their animalistic natures emerge. As they observe each other, they find they have "reverted to more bestial types" (Perkins). This indicates how Christie uses the characters' struggles against an unknown killer to demonstrate how fear effects humans mentally. The fear of death causes each character to revert to animalistic tendencies. Since they have no control over the situation, the fear of this unknown force effects them in such a way that they lose their traditionally human traits, such as logic, and empathy. Consequently, they begin to resemble animals and begin to partake in acts of self-preservation. Secondly, in the novel there is a big dispute occurring about Lombard's revolver. The characters are fearful of the gun because they assume that it may have been used in the killings. Lombard claims that it went missing and had later been returned to his room where he found it in the cabinet. The guests begin to suspect Lombard as the killer, and he becomes very defensive. When Blore asks to borrow the revolver for protection on his way through the woods, Lombard makes it very clear no one can touch it. This is when Christie writes, "*And therefore, will I lend you my revolver? Answer, no, I will not!* Not quite so simple as that thank you" 'Feeding time at the Zoo! The animals are very regular in their habits!' (Christie 251). This communicates the how characters fear for their lives, also effects the way they interact with one another. The characters that were once quite friendly with each other, are now completely changed. They themselves see this, and they compare themselves to hungry animals in a zoo, accusing each other left and right. The juxtaposition of the character's once polite demeanors to their inability to get along and their anxiety, is meant to demonstrate how overarching fear can affect how someone functions and their personality. In addition to this, one of the guests Vera

struggles to maintain her sanity as she is faced with protecting herself or possibly killing an innocent person. Vera makes her decision and ends up shooting Lombard, because they are the only two people left on the island and she thinks he is the murderer. To exemplify Vera's feelings Christie writes, "At last it was over. There was no more fear- No more stealing of her nerves... She was alone on the island Alone with nine dead bodies.... But what did that matter? *She* was alive....She sat there-exquisitely happy- exquisitely at peace.... No more fear..." (Christie 265). This exhibits how unknown fear can affect people's values as well. Normally shooting another person would cause alarm, panic, and regret. However, Vera feels none of these emotions and disturbingly pleased about what she has done. Vera had become so fearful for her own life; she no longer had any regard for anything or anyone else. Her goal became self-preservation, and she didn't care who she had to step on to get there. The fear of the unknown killer weighed on her until she finally lost all logic, morality, and feelings. This use of conflict throughout the novel demonstrates how Christie explains the connection between fear and human behavior.

Next, Christie's reveals how fear effects humans with various objects throughout the novel that symbolize the events occurring. The first symbolic object we are introduced to is a creepy children's nursery rhyme about the deaths of little soldier boys. This poem is framed in the rooms of each of the house guests. Critic Jennifer Bouchard and Agatha Christie comment on this stating, "The poem "Ten Little Indians" plays an important role in the novel. The story is set on Indian Island and the murders mirror the deaths in the poem" (Bouchard and Christie). Christie uses the poem to symbolize what is yet to come. The characters soon figure out that the poem is not just an average nursery rhyme, and they become incredibly paranoid. The fear the poem

instills causes the characters to become obsessed with how each person will die. They avidly avoid certain objects and places they think spell out death. Therefore, using the poem to show how sensitive humans are to the mere suggestion of death. The fact that a children's poem can have such an impact shows that fear truly runs people's lives and engulfs them. On another note, two of the houseguests Vera and Mr. Rogers realize that after each guest dies, one of the mysterious soldier boy figurines on the table disappear. They begin to wonder if there is a correlation between the deaths and the disappearing figurines. To emphasize this epiphany Christie writes, "You're quite right, Rogers. Look for yourself. *There are only seven....*" (Christie 146). This shows how Christie employs the use of porcelain soldier figurines disappearing to represent the deaths of each character. This is representative of how all of the characters' fears, will inevitably lead to their own demise. They are porcelain dolls, easily breakable and manipulated. For example, at the end of the novel fear has affected Vera so much so that she willingly complies to the suggestion of hanging herself. The porcelain soldier dolls show how each character is being manipulated by a bigger force, the killer. The murderer breaks each doll as they die to symbolize his power over them that he gained by activating fear. Christie conveys another example of this when the guests are settling into the mansion. Suddenly, a gramophone is turned on and starts yelling out accusations against the guests. Christie describes this sound by writing, "Into the silence came The Voice. Without warning, inhuman, penetrating.... '*Ladies and gentleman! Silence please!*'"(Christie 46). Christie uses this all knowing, incredibly deafening voice, to symbolize all of the guest's guilt. Although they won't admit it, the guests know deep down that they have done terrible deeds, and this accusatory voice brings those deeds to light. The unexpected nature of this verbal attack leaves the guests shocked and scared. They fear that

someone has found out their secrets and become incredibly more defensive in order to keep them under wraps. Christie employs the gramophone to show how fear can bring out a person's guilt and cause them to be in denial. Therefore, through various objects symbolizing major events in the novel, Christie communicates the effects fear have on one's conscience.

Overall, Christie exhibits how fear effects humans through conflict between characters and unknown forces, and objects that symbolize the events taking place. Throughout the novel, Christie employs the use of an unknown force targeting the characters to show how each guest's personality changes due to fear. She also invokes the use of symbolic objects, that cause each character fear, in order to demonstrate how this fear effects their daily life. By communicating this, Christie warns that no matter what a person may be up against, fear is their worst enemy. Fear causes humans to crumble into a hollow shell of what they were and breaks them down to their most primal tendencies. The fear weighs down on a person until they lose all sense of logical thinking. This explains why Vera is so easily manipulated into hanging herself. She cannot think straight and has been wore down to the point where she cannot separate her fear and guilt, from reality. This message is also present in today's world. There is a constant threat of numerous disasters readily available on the news, television, and smartphones. Often this can be very overwhelming for the public, and they begin to act on self-preservation, like in the novel. This can lead to panic, hysteria, and conflict with others. This serves as an example to readers, that when faced with adversity humans are primarily driven by their fear. Furthermore, explaining the importance of separating fear driven animalistic tendencies, from logical thinking. All in order to avoid the adverse effects that fear can have on the human psyche.

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