

Murder: in the name of justice



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ He choked — choked badly. His face contorted, turned purple. He gasped for breath — then slid down off his chair, the glass falling from his hand” (Christie 74). So begins Justice Wargrave’s murderous machinations on Soldier Island. In the novel *And Then There Were None*, Justice Wargrave’s sociopathic tendencies allow him to have several personalities. His Id is active when he plans the murders of ten strangers, his Superego is strongest when he is fighting for justice and the sanctity of the law, and his Ego is in play while he is around other guests, putting on a “ normal” facade. These identities shape him to be the perfect character to commit the murders flawlessly and without remorse.

The Id is characteristically “ the psychic force that motivates the tendency to seek immediate gratification of any impulse” (Schacter 481). This is an adequate description of Justice Wargrave’s murderous tendencies, which were active even when he was a child. After his vile plot was complete, he put a message in a bottle to describe his background and to truly explain how clever he was. In the letter, he admits: “ I was born with other traits besides my romantic fantasy. I have a definite sadistic delight in seeing or causing death. I remember experiments with wasps—with various garden pests... From an early age I knew very strongly the lust to kill” (285). While he talks of justice and upholding the law, his deeper, darker, and truer thoughts consist of gaining pleasure from ending life. He mentions that he has always wanted to commit a murder. These thoughts are not typical in the average person’s day-to-day life. He has a unique connection to the Id within him in which he is comfortable indulging its desires and dark fantasies. According to psychology, everyone has some part of an Id

influencing their thoughts and actions, which could almost make Justice Wargrave a bit more relatable to readers. However, the way his mind functions differs markedly from the minds of the vast majority. Most would never follow through on horrifying thoughts of murder. Because of his rare psyche, he is a cruel and heartless character to anyone who does not commiserate with him.

The Superego "... can be thought of as a type of conscience that punishes misbehavior with feelings of guilt" (Reber). This side of Justice Wargrave is witnessed when he makes judgements and upholds the law under any circumstance. His entire fascination with his murderous plot was to bring people to justice who normally could not be proven guilty. He disapproves of the nine hidden criminals escaping fate so easily. One of the ways he punishes their misbehavior is by playing mind games to bring out past guilt. At the commencement of their stay on the island, a recording is played throughout the mansion informing all guests of one another's misdeeds. Their reactions are telling of their past crimes and the guilt that followed: "The voice had stopped. There was a moment's petrified silence and then a resounding crash!... At the same moment, from somewhere outside the room there came a scream and the sound of a thud" (48). Some guests react to the shocking accusations more calmly than fainting or dropping a tea tray, but nonetheless, every guest is affected by the fear that their murky pasts may be discovered. In the midst of this chaos, the Judge once again relies on his Superego to explain that he was falsely accused: "' Nevertheless, on the evidence, he was certainly guilty... I did my duty and nothing more. I passed sentence on a rightly convicted murder'" (65). Wargrave is accused of

sending an innocent man to death, but he defends himself by saying that the primary judgement was correct and that the man was indeed guilty. With the aid of his Superego, he has the power to take control of a turbulent situation and bring about the righteousness of the law unto a room full of felons.

The Ego “ attempts to mediate between id and reality” (Freud 110). This is precisely what the other guests see from Justice Wargrave during their stay. That is to say they see the mask he wears in their presence to bury any and all suspicion. He is mindful of the fact that if any part of the Id festering inside of him leaks through the careful concealment, the original plan will fall through. Because the stakes are high in this particular operation, he knows he needs to tread carefully and be manipulative in order to succeed. On one such occasion, he endeavors to take over a crazed situation with seemingly reasonable suggestions. While other guests scramble to discover information about their host, Mr. Owen, Justice Wargrave enters with a calming, resolute voice and the start of a solution: ““ We are all his guests. I think it would be profitable if each one of us were to explain exactly how that came about”” (57). Immediately, a sense of security and hope spreads through the party as their focus shifts from their present trepidation to actively working toward a resolution. With the sheer complexity of his mind and the full extent of his knowledge, Justice Wargrave effortlessly manipulates a crowd of strangers to change their mindsets, bettering his chances at succeeding without a hint of suspicion. His ego, in the psychological sense, helps the id’s ambitions become reality in a way that satisfies the needs of both the Id and the Superego.

Throughout the enigmatic life of Justice Wargrave, he has been self-aware. At a young age, he yearned to commit a murder. He has known that his thoughts are unique and that, if shared with others, they could lead him to a miserable future of isolation. Caution was crucial to his survival and success. By separating himself into three personalities working together; the Id looking for primal satisfaction, the Superego staying true to the law, and the Ego mediating between them and finding the best solution, he became an unsuspected but completely unstoppable force that could literally get away with murder. Not one of the guests on the island could compare to his vast abilities, and he knew that not one of them had a chance of staying alive. Carefully planning every miniscule step in the process and annihilating the criminals one by one, he is delighted with the final product and it satisfies every abnormal need he had previously felt. Even today, sociopaths walk among billions of people without being discovered. Their dark genius may never be understood by anyone who cannot identify with their rare situation. These people and Justice Wargrave have the power to take control of others in many instances without their conscious knowledge. With her acute understanding of sociopathic behavior, Christie creates the profoundly credible character of Justice Wargrave, a calculating and bitter executioner.

Works Cited Christie, Agatha. *And Then There Were None*. New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 1940. Schacter, Daniel. *Psychology*. 2nd ed., Worth Publishers, 2009. Reber, Arthur S. *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*. 4th ed., Penguin Books, 2009. Freud, Sigmund. *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1990.