

And Then There Were None

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COM 372

In examination of Agatha Christie's written work And Then There Were None and the film translation of the same name by director Rene Clair, it is evident that Clair employed a traditional approach. By definition, a traditional film translation retains the primary elements of the source, such as plot and settings, with certain details changed as deemed necessary by the filmmaker.

The film version of And Then There Were None employs several slight and two major differences from the novel on which it was based. The first of the slight differences lies in the character names. Several of the characters retain their names from the novel, while others are given name changes for largely inexplicable reasons. One possible reason for the change in the name of the novel's antagonist Justice Lawrence Wargrave to Judge Francis Quinncannon was merely to better suit the character to its actor, Irishman Barry Fitzgerald. Such a change is quite minor and alters the reception of the film in no significant way.

While these name alterations offer no real change to the story, two major persons of the story are given overhauls in character. The first is of the film's hero Philip Lombard. In the novel, Lombard is a shady character who stands accused of leaving over twenty natives to their deaths, an accusation he confirms with no regret. Ultimately, he is shot by the last of the Indian Island victims, without any redemption to his character. This character in the film retains the same attitude as the novel's Lombard, with one major exception. The Philip Lombard of the film is, in fact, not even Philip Lombard but Charles Morley, a friend of the late

Lombard. This is done to redeem or exonerate the character of any wrongdoing and in effect place him into the role of hero for the film, a role absent from the novel.

The other figure that undergoes a complete overhaul in character is that of Vera Claythorne. The novel's Claythorne is held morally responsible in the death by drowning of a child formerly in her care. Throughout the course of the novel, her guilt becomes more and more evident, as she eventually reveals internally that she deliberately let the child swim out too far to be saved for her own personal gain. If the child were to die, her lover would inherit the child's fortune and in the mind of Claythorne, they would live happily ever after. The lover is the only one aware of Claythorne's malicious plot and leaves her. Claythorne remains afflicted by both her guilt in the child's death and the loss of her love. At the climax of the novel, her guilt completely takes her over and she hangs herself in a noose conveniently provided by the mastermind of Indian Island.

The Vera Claythorne of the film is a vastly different character, at least in terms of guilt and motive. The film Claythorne is accused of the murder of her sister's fiancé in a crime of passion. She maintains her innocence throughout, and reveals to Lombard the true story which confirms that innocence. The innocence of Claythorne's character is a necessity to establish her as both a victim and the heroine of Indian Island. This is imperative to the ending of the film, the second of the major differences between the novel and the film.

The ending of the novel leaves the ten guests of Indian Island dead, with no explanation, at least to the authorities, as to how it was achieved. An epilogue to the novel reveals the motives and means by which the mastermind put his plan to hold the victims responsible for their crimes against the innocent. The film, in contrast, begins its conclusion with the revelation of the killer to our heroine, Vera Claythorne. She is told by the mastermind that if she were not to hang herself, she would be held responsible for the deaths of the others as the last living person on the island. Convinced he has persuaded Claythorne to hang herself, the mastermind poisons himself, his perfect plot a success. Just prior to his death, he is greeted by Lombard, whom was believed to have been shot by Claythorne. Lombard and Claythorne remain as the two survivors who, together, would be capable of proving their innocence and the guilt of the mastermind. The two walk hand in hand out of the house, survivors of a weekend of death and newly in love.

This ending is vastly different and changes the mystery exuded by the novel. With the alteration of characters to give the audience a hero and a heroine, they are given some one to 'root for', so to speak. As these two characters are revealed as not guilty fairly early on, it is possible for the audience to identify with them in their plight. The film also points to the possible love interest between the two at several points, most notably in the first shot of the two characters, further cementing the audience's interest in the well-being of the duo.

Additionally, the cohesion of the ending of Christie's novel **in** contingent on the concept that the accused were morally responsible for the deaths indicated. The mastermind behind the deaths was obsessed with the concept of perfect human justice, holding those responsible for crimes above the law. In the novel, those who died were responsible in one way or another, cementing the motive of the mastermind. This was negated in the film, as Claythorne was revealed to be innocent and the man presenting himself as Lombard was not Lombard at all, but an innocent man. The mastermind's plot was presented as flawed in the film, not the perfect, unsolvable crime of the novel. This was arguably done to perpetuate the 'Hollywood' ending that was instrumental in the reception of a film.

Though the differences between Christie's novel and Clair's film of And Then There Were None are both slight and significant, the both ultimately provide for a positive experience on the part of the reader or viewer. While small changes like name alterations have little effect, the change in ending modifies the overall message of the novel. Negating the concept of human justice may adversely affect the power of the novel's ending, but the film holds together as a suspenseful and enjoyable work. The differences may change the message, but do not alter the enjoyment on behalf of the spectator.

Works Cited

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