
Analysis Of The Common Theme In The Most Dangerous Game And The Lottery

In most of today's societies, we treat life as the most precious thing to hold on to. We all participate in numerous ways to keep us entertained in ways that also distract us from our regular lives; and a large part of our lives is to have fun. However, the themes of "The Lottery" and "The Most Dangerous Game" take the concept of games to a whole new level. One theme that "The lottery" and "The Most Dangerous Game" have in common is the desensitized view of the value of human life. In this way, the authors attempt to highlight how desensitized we really are to this type of behavior. Although both stories show desensitization of murder, the antagonists have different motives. In "The Lottery", the story does not directly say why they would start killing one random person per year. However, in Patrick Shields' article "Arbitrary condemnation and sanctioned violence in Shirley Jackson's 'the lottery'" there are a couple of ways to look at the story. Shields suggests one of the ways to look at it is that the author did not directly specify any motive to the reader. He also suggests that Shirley Jackson's possible intention could have been to allow the reader to evaluate the story and come up with the reason and their own background that they can relate. Another way to look at the story, according to Shields' article is that the drawing is a ritual cleansing and the community believes that is in their best interest to perform it. Some proof to back this up would be the attitude of the mayor to even allow this kind of killing as acceptable and nothing out of the ordinary. When someone kills someone outside of the drawing, it would be considered murder and punished accordingly to their societal rules. If the murder occurred only as a result of the drawing, then it is a ritual and therefore less heinous.

In "The Most Dangerous Game", the motive that the story gives the reader would be revealed by General Zaroff towards the middle of the story. Zaroff explains to Rainsford his passion for hunting and that he has been hunting for his entire life. His reasoning was that he was hunting for so long and a wide variety of dangerous animals like cheetahs and buffalos, he began to realize that he was getting bored of hunting normal animals. So, Zaroff decided to "invent a new animal" (Connell). His plan was to hold stranded people who crashed there captive and would later set them into the wilderness on his island to hunt them down. There are also a couple possible reasons according to Terry Thompson's article "A Tale of Two Centuries: Richard Connell's 'The Most Dangerous Game'" explaining Zaroff's motive. The reason that Terry Thompson stated was that it could have the underlying representation of the Darwinism theory of "change, adaption, natural selection and extinction" (Thompson). There is actually a quote from Zaroff himself in the story where he states that "Life is for the strong" (Connell). This is a very similar point of view as Darwin with his saying of "Survival of the fittest". In "The Most

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Dangerous Game”, Zaroff sees humans as a new animal that he can hunt which has reasoning unlike any other animal. This is also the result of his motives to increase his enjoyment in hunting. He says that the animal he wants to hunt must have the ability to reason rather than just animalistic instincts. This is mostly because he was hunting when he was a young child and hunted so much all throughout his life. As mentioned before, he also follows a similar saying to Darwin’s “Survival of the fittest” when he says that “Life is for the strong”. He has no remorse for taking the lives of other innocent humans as he would just treat his murderous ways as just a game to amuse him for the rest of his days.

Although both stories show desensitization of the characters, the antagonists have different game-like methods to carry out their heinous acts. In “The Lottery”, every year on June 27th the mayor of the town gathers everyone into the square and they do a drawing where everyone draws a piece of paper from an old black box and the “winner” would be stoned to death. In “The Most Dangerous Game”, Zaroff traps washed up people on his island (known as ship Trap Island) and then proceeds to challenge them to a game. The game is that he would let them loose in the wilderness and hunt them down “...armed only with a pistol of the smallest caliber and range” (Connell). If the victim could avoid Zaroff for three days, the victim would win. If the victim fails to do so and gets caught by Zaroff, then the victim would be shot and killed. Both stories have elements of chance, where the victims are left to chance to “survive the drawing or the hunting, neither story give the victims the option of “opting out” of the game.

In “The Lottery”, when a “winner” is declared, the winner is then stoned to death. However, before Tessie is stoned to death, Mr. Summers tells the rest of the community 'All right, folks ... Let's finish quickly" with a seemingly uncaring, and an unempathetic tone. According to Shield's article “Arbitrary condemnation and sanctioned violence in Shirley Jackson's 'the lottery'”, there are a few reasons for the lack of remorse for the death of a fellow member of their society. The first possible reason would be that this has gone on for a long time. Evidence of this shows when readers consider that the characters were raised with the tradition of the drawing from a young age, so they would not question its morality along with the fact that the drawing has been going on for multiple generations. This could also explain why there is no hesitation of going through with the stoning on command by Mr. Summers. Another reason why they would treat this kind of situation nonchalantly would be that Shirley Jackson could be trying to point out the pointless violence in the communities' life and that our lives are subject to chance just like how the victim is chosen through a community wide raffle. One more thing to notice is that there seems to be no real caring relationships among other families which may contribute to their lack of empathy towards murdered citizens, because of there being no real sign of the family of the murdered being in shock for very long when in this case, the only time any of Tessie's family members showed any concern is at the end when Mrs. Hutchinson said this: 'It isn't fair, it isn't right”.

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In conclusion, both authors took the approach to present their themes with games among their characters. They each were trying to make their points by intriguing the readers with an ironic, light-hearted behavior of a game with a dreadful premise. The stories can also be treated as a sort of shock test, to test our societies on how desensitized we all are to certain practices that end with this specific outcome. It forces us to think that if we can't be our best selves, how we can say we have the power to take away another human's life.

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