

An Element of the Puritan Social Order : An Analysis of the themes of ‘Danger of Ideology’ and ‘Reputation and Integrity’ as reflected in Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953)

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Abstract:

“The Crucible” written by the author Arthur Miller holds various themes that can be analyzed individually to determine the effects of these themes on society. This study described the themes of the danger of ideology, integrity, and reputation based on the character development and characteristics in the play. These analysis of theme can be impactful regarding the determination and importance of certain factors in our daily social life. This study has been conducted regarding the issue of finding components that can affect human behavior based on social issues such as ideology, integrity, and reputation. This study has used a cultural criticism theory in order to find the relevance of the components in the daily social life of an individual. It has been found that ideology can be effective in both good and bad ways depending on its adaption. It can also pose a threat of danger in terms of improper implementation. The reputation and integrity of people are the most important factors in terms of surviving in the society. A lack of reputation or integrity can decrease the social position of a person by a significant amount. Miller has covered various social themes in his play “The Crucible” that can be important regarding the evaluation of social factors that significantly affect the social life of an individual.

Keywords: *Ideology, Integrity, Reputation, Danger of Ideology, The Crucible, Arthur Miller*

Introduction

Arthur Miller is a playwright born in the country of America in the year 1915 and famous for his plays written in a satirical format on political issues. He is the writer of the play “The Crucible” made in the form of an allegory based on the political situation in the country of America after the happenings of World War II. Miller wrote the play “*The*

Crucible” alongside with *Salem witch trials* for the reason of standing in with the government of the US regarding the “*Witch Hunt*” for the communists. The early success of the career of Miller has come from various plays including “*Death of a Salesman*”, “*All my Sons*” and most popularly “*The Crucible*”. The five years of marriage with Marilyn Monroe affected Miller in the development of his later plays, including the final play of his life “*Finishing the Picture*”. Between the years 1936 to 2004, Miller has written 37 stage-based plays including “*Death of a Salesman*”, “*All my Sons*”, and “*The Crucible*” which got the most amount of popularity based on that period. In the play “*All my sons*” Miller has applied the theme of *mortal integrity versus money and family* as a framework to build his plot. On the other hand, his “*Death of a Salesman*” uses the themes of contradiction, denial, and the quest to properly frame the play. These themes have played a significant role in boosting the thought-provoking scenarios in the play and provided various contradictory questions for the viewers to solve based on the current timeline.

The researcher aims to explore the theme of danger, based on ideology, integrity, and reputation with reference to the Puritan social order and norms which are depicted, affecting the individual lives, , adversely, in Arthur Miller’s “*The Crucible*”.

An ideology can be summarized as a rigid set of different beliefs that tries to define the thinking of an individual or a group of people (Therborn,65). However, there is no presence of a proper ideology that can be adopted by people without any complication.

As per the play, in the theocracy of the Puritans in the region of Massachusetts, there is the presence of a government that has been run by an authority driven by religion with the belief of the Devil would do anything and everything to demolish the Puritans (Eliade, 126). As a reason for the government being run by men driven by religious beliefs, Puritans think that every action taken by the government would be decided for their good or sanctioned by heaven itself. This can be forecasted as a great example of the danger of idealism based on the impact of the religion-driven government in the play. On the other hand, any objection, obligation, question, obstruction or resist the decisions of the government is considered as an overthrow and humiliation towards the god by the government and other Puritans despite the fact of the decision being destructive, ludicrous, and ill-informed (Gale, 56). Based on the line by John Proctor :“*IGod anymore*” (34).It can be seen the corruption and mistreatment of the government that can be considered as an example of the danger of ideology (Miller, 67). Governments fueled by ideologies of the same categories fall into the

trap of tyranny and corruption in most amount of cases without the realization of getting on the bad side. The government in the play “The Crucible” also portrays a character of a similar government destroyed by the danger of a corrupted ideology.

The danger of ideology can be summarized as the drawbacks each particular ideology holds within. The impact of these drawbacks can be different and affect different parties related to that particular ideology. Every ideology holds certain kinds of drawbacks based on its nature (Plamenatz, 113). In the play “The Crucible” Miller has described the danger related to a certain ideology in the world of Puritans. This danger related to any kind of ideology can affect both parties consisting of the carriers of the ideology and believers of the ideology. In this play, the government driven by religious beliefs is the carrier of the ideology and Puritans are the believers of the ideology (Miller, 65). The government in the play believes that through their religious beliefs in god, they cannot be wrong in their path, therefore each of their taken decisions and implemented actions must be correct. The theory of cultural criticism enables a platform to challenge various narratives that are dominant and provide exposure to hidden assumptions, as the quote “*Ifinger points!*” (23) The aforementioned line is stated by Reverend Hale also exposes the danger of ideology within the play (Therborn, 62). Based on the cultural criticism of “The Crucible” it can be seen that the involvement of superiority in the government by the name of god influenced the people in the government system to misinterpret their ideology. On the other hand, the Puritans suffered from a misinterpreted ideology driven by religious and cultural beliefs that have not been broken based on the trust in god. Based on this scenario it can be seen that both the people in the government and Puritans have suffered from the danger of ideology through misuse and misinterpretation. This portrays John Proctor, exposing that a constructive ideology can be effective towards the demolition of danger set by a particular ideology (Gale, 43). In this scenario, vengeance among the children has weakened the root of the danger of ideology followed by the government driven by religious beliefs. Based on the dominant ideology of the people related to the government, the Puritans were considered as the people through the form of creatures, the Devil would do anything to destroy them. Governance in the play had a set ideology of implementing dominance over the Puritans that showed the danger of carrying an ideology. Based on the theory of cultural criticism, the values and beliefs of the government show that the dominant ideology within the government affected the Puritans negatively that has been demolished in the later part in the play. Apart from that,

the implementation of this criticism based on a cultural view also exposes that the government has been represented as the supreme authority of society.

As a result, based on the dominant ideology there was no objection, question, or obstruction to the taken decision or action by the government. This also posed a danger towards the puritan by demolishing the platform to come back and protest due to their ideology of beliefs. Miller successfully portrayed the imagery of ideology and its impact on society alongside the danger it poses on the social platform. Various ideologies in society impacts the results in the social platforms to act differently which has been also portrayed by Miller in his play “The Crucible”. Apart from that, the people related to the government also used the narrow-minded sentiment of the court to use it in their selfish favor. The nature possessed by the society shown by Miller is theocratic and is full of ideologies of laws of morality and the state. The core matters of concern of the public is the sin along with the status possessed the soul of an individual. There has been a scarcity of place in the case of deviation from the norms of society. There has been a representation of threat in the matter of those individuals who personal life has not been confirmed to the initiated moral laws. It has been portrayed within this play that the activities of the people who do not have moral rules resemble with the activity of the Satan. The trails of the witch have been considered as final expression possessed by intolerance that comes under ideology. The entire deviants of society have been branded by the trials with taints of the worship of devil and hence, necessitate their eradication from community.

Reputation can be summarized as a belief or opinion anyone holds about something or someone (Barclay, 17). It can be also explained by the entire character or quality based on the viewing perception of general people. Reputation can be assigned with various components to set a proper designation of something or someone regarding their reputation in the society (Eccles, 104). In simple words, reputation is a way of perceiving someone based on their characteristics. In the play written by Arthur Miller, the characters of the play are significantly connected with their reputation based on their characteristics and the perception of society towards them. Reputation in this plays the role of a significant factor regarding the responsibility of decisions or actions taken by the characters. As a reason for being centred towards the infamous “*Salem witch trials*”, in this play reputation plays as a nefarious force designing the place of people based on the allegations and social power in the platform of society. Accusations related to any unsocial work such as witchcraft can be a major threat to

the reputation of any particular individual (Roast, 37). There has been the tremendous importance of reputation within theocratic Salem and no difference is present between the moralities that are private, as well as, public in it. The terror of guilt through association has been specifically pernicious in the environment where vital role has been played by reputation. The play has focused on the maintenance of the reputation of the public and it has been depicted that the fear must be present within the minds of townsfolk residing in Salem about the sins done by their companions. The terror must be present for these sins as they can taint the names of the townsfolk. The actions of several characters have been based on the aspiration of safeguarding their own reputations. The fear has been observed in the mind of Parris about expanding questionable actions of Abigail. In addition to that, terror has been noticed in the clues of the witchcraft surrounding the coma of the daughter. The central character, John Proctor, has sought for keeping the good name that he has from being deteriorated. *“We arethe law!”*(45). Apart from the allegation of witchcraft upon anyone can be a significant factor regarding the bankruptcy of their prestige in society. Based on the theory of cultural criticism, it can be said that an individual or a group of people in society is often judged by their works and reputation which provides them with a place in society based on their capacity. Any kind of allegation against any individual can significantly decrease the social position of any individual judged by the other people living in that same society. The decrease in the social position of each individual has an adverse impact on the reputation held by them within the society. It has been illustrated by the author that there has been a need of doing good deeds to increase the reputation within society by individuals. Moreover, there has been a requirement for following the ideologies in which both the moral and aesthetic rules are present. It is mandatory to follow the moral rules to be a good person in the eyes of others dwelling within same society. This was depicted by Danforth which can be taken as an example of a person who can be ignorant of the circumstances to maintain their reputation within the society (Woliver, 12). Apart from that, a better analysis of this quote also exposes that certain factors such as accepting the decision and actions of the court in this scenario can be important in determining anyone's reputation in society. Anyone against the actions and orders of the court is counted as a bad person showing the reputational influence on the characters within the play. Influences in the communal society and reputation also hold snowballing effects that can spread through various factors (Roast, 33). A reputation based on positive views can be reinforced a million times through the mouth-to-mouth policy. Apart from that, the seeming of proper concurrence on the matter can also reinforce the reputation based on positive views.

The term integrity can be summarized as a quality of containing strong moral principles and being honest towards the society (Barnard, 43). However, integrity can also be described as a path to depict own self based on moral principles and honesty. Integrity also reflects the ones approach towards own self by creating ideologies and limits (Storr, 417). In the play “The Crucible” it can be seen that people containing proper integrity within them are capable of accepting their mistakes. Through acceptance and a softer approach to their mistakes, characters within the play are able to defy their hysteria (Bloom, 139). A will to even die for the beliefs each character holds in the play has helped them to eradicate the fake base of the fear that feeds the root of the hysteria. Based on the analysis of the entire play it can be said that characters with integrity are willing to die with their beliefs and morality rather than losing their self-respect. It shows that Miller has interpreted the importance of integrity and the changes it can imply in society in a positive manner. Based on the words in the play, it can be seen that John is more concentrated regarding saving his integrity compared to losing his self-respect in the process of pleading (Ackerman, 112). It shows that securing integrity can significantly impact someone's view toward life and can build strong morals within the individual. Apart from that, based on the words :“*A manwhore's vengeance*” (47). In the play, it also shows that humans can feel helpless and full of grief in terms of losing their integrity to various factors (Bloom, 135). In this scenario, John Proctors feels the grief of losing his integrity on the occasion of an affair that broke him badly. There has been the presence of importance of integrity within the play and this has been achieved by the drama by shedding light on widespread devastation. Moreover, there has been a portrayal of corruption as well and this has been illustrated as the consequence possessed by abandoning integrity of individuals. The integrity has been abandoned in quest of the personal disputation, specifically those sustained by the repressive climate in society. The illustration of the Salem as the severely culture of Puritan permits audience for understanding the improvement of the society that have high restrictions. This improvement has been delineated within the accusatory environment possessed by witchcraft. The scene has been set by Miller for the audiences for understanding the great extent upto which the motivation of Proctor is occurred through integrity. It has been understood from the lines discussed above that there has been a key role of integrity within the lives of every individual present within society. The value of the people can be less without the absence of honesty within them. People are respected and have been valued by the presence of the honest behavior within them. The honest people can be ideal for others as their principles never hurt the soul of others.

Conclusion:

Based on the analysis of different themes within this study, it can be concluded that ideology, reputation, and integrity play a significant role in character development and analysis within this play. Miller has covered various themes in his play “The Crucible” that can be significant factors regarding the importance of social factors affecting the behaviour of the characters present in the play. Based on the analysis of the danger of ideology, it can be said that the government in the play has acquired a dominant ideology that believes the Puritans are the group of people that are being in the target of the Devil and the Devil would do anything and everything to demolish them. Based on the evaluation of reputation, it has been seen that in most of the play, the characters have a riot-full tendency to secure their reputation in society.

Apart from that, anyone against the court can harm their self-respect in the eyes of people based on the dominant ideology of the government. Moreover, the importance of integrity within the play is also directly connected to the reputation of the characters. In terms of losing their integrity within them, the characters are seen they get affected by a large amount of grief which proves the importance of the integrity theme in the play. The entire play has gone through various themes that have significantly impacted the allover direction of the play.

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