

## **The Hidden Hands of Evil In Miller's "The Crucible"**

**Assistant instructor**

**Alaa' Muzahem Abdulrazaq**

**AL-ANBAR UNIVERSITY**

**COLLEGE DEPARTMENT FOR WOMEN- LANGUAGE  
EDUCATION**

### **Abstract**

This study deals with the rigid society that oppresses innocent people in Miller's *The Crucible*. It exposes the hidden hands of evil in the American society in the seventeenth century in a place called Salem. Although these hidden hands are practiced by prominent and active figures of society (like judges) who are masked by purity legality of justice, they oppress the innocent people of being in relation with the witch.

There are different factors that made Salem's society rigid especially with ordinary people; most prominent is the authority of the court that gives judges the right to impose the ideas on others relegating all kinds evidence in the cases. Besides, Salem's society depends on rumours and conspiracies instead of facts. Another influential factor in Salem's society is dehumanization which is regarded as a new philosophy for betraying people in order to make him/her shut off his/her mouth in front of oppression.

This study reveals the human's inability to face evil which is stronger than him. *The Crucible* reveals such an idea of the seventeenth century in the sense of modern time. That is to say, society does not change in spite of the changes of life and its requirements.

### ***The hidden hands of evil in The Crucible***

**As a matter of fact, *The crucible* is based on historical events, and the author focuses on the moral lesson which can be derived from such modern events rather than the event itself. Miller attacks the society which uses rumours and conspiracies instead of facts to accuse innocent people of being in relation with the witch.<sup>1</sup>**

***The crucible* was produced and published in 1953. Its action took place in a small puritan village in the colony of Massachusetts in 1692. It deals with the American society of the seventeenth century, although it lacks the spirit of insight of the earlier plays. It is related to the modern man's society, and problems. It attacks the unjust**

investigation of Senator Joseph McCarthy and House Committee on American Activities.<sup>2</sup>

*The crucible* tries to prove that evil is built on rumours , that is to say the history of the American in 1950 depended on rumours in which innocents melt, although they differ from each other . In the society of Salem after all the trials are like a crucible in which metals are heated. Salem's society has appeared to be a nice society without sufferings in the beginning. Although the people are searching for a purer society , what Salem's people actually produce is a less pure society because of the evils that many people have inflicted up on each other.<sup>3</sup>

In *The crucible* Miller's aim is to show the effects of the atmosphere of terror which was inspired by the conspiracy in America in 1950. Because Miller has a strong insight and a wide imagination, he makes use of *The crucible* as a mirror of the twentieth century. So, he Speaks about the evils of the twentieth century because he realizes that a dehumanizing influence can occur in any period .<sup>4</sup> In contrast to modern society *The crucible* is very disturbing .It is the obvious breakdown in Salem's social order led to the tragedy which saw twenty innocent people hung on the accusation of witchcraft ; Miller uses hysteria to introduce personality flaws in vulnerable characters. Every hint of a rumour is not even doubted and people are compelled to believe it. The people in this play are so self obsessed that they make up the rumours to make others look bad or at least worse than themselves.<sup>5</sup>

"An Overture", the first act, which Miller calls, explains the central idea about the society of Salem and it introduces the main characters. Dramatic purposes required characters to join into one, like numbers of girls involves in "crying-out". *The crucible* begins when a group of girls are dancing in the forest at midnight trying to conjure up the dead but their game turns to be a danger threatening the whole society. The girls pretend to be under the spell of witches who have communicated with the Devils. They start to accuse the innocent and well-known people of the village of witchcraft. The girls

hysterically realize that they have found scapegoats who will absolve their own guilt and so the snowball starts. The leader of the girls , Abigail ,starts to accuse many to achieve her ultimate goal to get rid of her lover's wife, Elizabeth, by including her in the list of the accused.<sup>6</sup>

The hero of the play, John Proctor, is unlike the other Miller's characters especially when he used reason and faith to face his false society. He is Elizabeth's husband and Abigail's ex-lover . He is a farmer in Salem. He serves as the voice of reason and justice in *The crucible* . He becomes the tragic hero of the tale. His true dilemma is not that which has stemmed from his relation with Abigail but it is the dilemma of his contact with the devils. It is a sign of his morality that does not feel himself adequate to place himself as a martyr for the cause of justice when he has given the choice to save himself at the end of the play. He is feared and respected by the people of Salem and is capable of being kind and tender, especially with women. The force of evil creates unrecognized victims from ordinary men and women.<sup>7</sup>

The oppression of society is depicted by the judges , the judges in *The crucible* are evil. This society deals with the human who is not a saint , not even an ordained minister fortified by a theological training , but just a man trying to understand and translate the dictates of his conscience .<sup>8</sup> He has been the victim of the absence of justice on the one hand and the choice between death and life without honour on the other.<sup>9</sup> Danforth's attitudes , unlike his victims, have not been entirely laid to earth. He does not allow Procter to bring a lawyer to urge the court on his behalf and he is incapable of seeing Abigail's hypocrisy, even when Procter accuses Abigail of lechery. Danforth sides with her to protect his power.

Procter:[breathless agony] It is a whore !

Danforth: you charge.....?

Abigail: Mr.Danforth ,he is lying!

Procter: Mark her! Now she'll suck a scream to stab me with, but\_

**Danforth: You will prove this. This will not pass!**

**Procter:[trembling , his life collapsing about him]:**

**I have Known her.<sup>10</sup> ( Act:3,p.648)**

The puritan life in Salem is rigid and Somber allowing little person to break the monotony and strict work ethics that dominate the knit society . Miller establishes that the isolation of the puritan society created a rigid social system, fear and confusion which are evident conditions before and during witchcraft. That is to say, the rigid system did not allow for any variation in life style and it has destroyed twenty innocent characters .<sup>11</sup>

The isolation of the puritan society is the same of Procter's isolation within society and rising above it is one of the principles that make the tragedy yield its strongest irony. The sinner is less sinful and less criminal than the religious and judicial superior because he has integrity and has a high inner morality by which he lives and for which he is preparing to die. It is his name which he cannot sell "How may I live without my name ?I have given you my soul; leave me my name!" (Act:4,p660). He feels a responsibility to the world and he dies in honour of that wider responsibility .

Parris is continually with fears that others conspire against him. He knows the truth that Abigail is lying about the dancing and the witchcraft and considers it as an attack upon justice court and a personal attack on him. He symbolizes the particular quality of moral repression and paranoia that characterizes the trials.<sup>12</sup>

Reverend Parris, Abigail's uncle and the father of the girls who were with Abigail in the wood, is the corrupted because he uses witchcraft as a means to consolidate his " undemocratic" conduct in the church.<sup>13</sup>

Parris displays more evils in himself. He is the instrument of condemnation and death on the girls testimony . He sees the enormity of his involvement in human suffering ; a fact which is supported by Putnam's advice to him after discovering the girls misdeed:

**Putnam: Let you take hold here. Wait for no one to change you/**

**Declare it yourself. You have discovered witchcraft .**

**Parris: In my house Thomas? They will topple me with this. They will**

**Make of it a.....**

**Putnam: Now look you sir . let strike moral dangerous more serious**

**than to those who accepted it than to those who fought it or were victimized by it .(Act:1,p613)**

**Evil has hidden hands ,we see that law becomes a tool in the hands of Danforth and Hathorne. Both of them committed the gravest wrongs against people in the court of the public welfare. According to the action of the play , the characters are divided into three groups: (a) The accusers : (Parris ,Putnam ,and Abigail) (b)The accused (John Procter, The Nurses, and the Corry) (c) The persecutors who are out of conflict but represent the political system (Deputy Governor Danforth , Judge,Hathorne and Reverened Hale)evidence counts for nothing in their court because the judges believe only in what they want to believe .<sup>14</sup>**

**The Devil in Danforth is indeed larger than ordinary life . Miller believes that " the necessity of the Devil may be evident as a weapon, a weapon designed and used time and time again in every age to wipe men in to a surrender to a particular character or church state" (Act : 1,pp 610\_611).We see that Parris holds a great enmity against Procter because the latter is critical about the false holiness that parris attributes to himself .Parris does not hesitate to be with the accusers because he is afraid of Procter's influence on people.<sup>15</sup>**

**Both Procter and Danforth represent man in society of everywhere and at all times . In *The Crucible* Miller depicts society fights man who says 'No' to the law and 'Yes' to his inner directing conscience. This idea supported by Hale's speech with Procter:**

**Hale:** Procter ,I cannot think God be provoked so grandly  
 by such a petty cause. The jails are packed \_our greatest  
 judges sit in Salem now \_and hangin's promised.  
 Man ,we must look to cause proportionate. Were there  
 Murder done, perhaps ,and never brought to light?  
 Abomination? Some secret blasphemy that stinks to Heaven?  
 Think on cause , man, and let you help me to discover it.

.....

.....

...

I shall pray God open up our eyes. (Act:2,p.623)

*The Crucible* draws a parallel between seventeenth - century Americans and those conducted by a committee of the United states congress two and a half centuries later. The continuing strength of Miller's play stems from his insight into how those who experienced the agonies of the 1692 people who learnt to know'' who they were'' and it is this process that Miller dramatizes for a generation that had not learnt that essential truth. But possibly Miller's greatest achievement in *The Crucible* is its dramatization of the *fact* of evil . As Dennis has explained: " In American Literature , probably more than in any other , there have always been influences at work to minimize the fact of evil ".<sup>16</sup> Miller, he argued was the first American dramatist to recognize the fact of evil at work in society : The declaration of Independence may be said to have made evil an un American activity and American authors 'have generally been quicker to recognize evils than to recognize evil'.<sup>17</sup>

Miller dramatized evil at work in society, the society of the twentieth century as much as that of the seventeenth century, and it was not surprising that in 1957 he was tried for contempt by the congress and found guilty on two counts ,though his convictions were

quashed the following year if only on a technicality. This shows a certain acceptance of the loss of innocence as an inevitable state of man.<sup>18</sup>

The cruel society is prepared to torture all innocent people who would not confess. They were naked , and forced to sit legged-cross. Long pins were driven to the innocent people to locate the Devil's mark. The methods of torture included starvation ,denial of sleeping and being forced into positions of cramp especially with their neck tied to their heels. Some tortures were damaging physically and mentally . Society in *The Crucible* is also characterized by New sins which were being created monthly "and" the sin of public terror is that it divests man of conscience of himself. The individual in Salem is in a great need for a community whose essence is human with friend with whom he shares common goals and beliefs .<sup>19</sup>

Miller tries to trace the way in which self interest corrupts the process of justice . He wants to explain that it is not the society of *The Crucible* but there are also many societies like Salem in which the innocent people fall under pressures which order them to be dishonest and confused in front of justice to save their lives .Proctor becomes a tragic innocent character because he refuses this order which means losing his good name and betraying all those who refuse to confess. He is reluctant to confess wrong sins , but at the same time he is sure that he cannot name the confederates and join the accusers. Proctor has made fateful decision which costs him his soul and refuse to have the confusion publicized.<sup>20</sup>

Thomas Putnam , one of the wealthiest landowners in Salem is a vindictive, bitter man who has held long standing grudges against many citizens of Salem. He pushes his daughter to charge George Jacobs with witchcraft , for he is executed for murder . His land will be opened if Putnam is to purchase . As a matter of fact , his daughter ,Ruth , is the one who initiates the hysteria since she has been sent by her mother to communicate with her dead sisters with the help of the Negress slave Tituba , Paris's servant.<sup>21</sup>

Procter's wife ,Elizabeth, shares with John Procter a similarity in strict adherence to justice and moral principles. she is a woman who has great confidence in her own morality and ability to maintain a sense of rightness both internal and external , even when this principle conflicts with strict Christian doctrines. Her continual suspicions of her husband render their marriage tense .She is among the few characters that Miller does not comment upon outside the script , even her age is not mentioned. We know that she is often a sickly woman and that Abigail wishes her dead .like Linda, she is a good and kindly mother. She lacks real Christian charity, forgiveness , a touch of shown compassion to her tortured husband. She is uncomfortably arrested by Cheever and Herrick. Her life could be utterly dependent on her husband's faith in the marriage bond and his integrity . She has been inadequate, unresponsive. She has not matched her husband's goodness with her . What she can and must do for her husband is that she lets him go to an honourable and proud death.<sup>22</sup>

Proctor ensures a very important fact when he talks to Elizabeth .

Elizabeth:" The Devils loose in Salem Mr. Procter; we must discover where he's hiding!

Proctor: I'll whip the Devil out of you I am accused?(Act:2.p.619)

Proctor attacks this court and the whole system in the same way he attacks the trials because the court wants each person to be either with this court or must be counted against it , there is no way between them. Proctor struggles against repressive irrational and destructive abuse of society.<sup>23</sup>

Proctor at the end of the play faces the murderous community and goes to his death with self-confidence. He stands against the injustice of society with its false values and attitudes. The society of *The Crucible* suffers from selfish greed ,apathy and revenge. The characters come to many crossroad in their lives and they are forced to make sins in decisions. They face difficult and complex decisions about



what truth is and what is true to one's self, therefore; they must be respected because of their society's oppression.<sup>24</sup>

The court of Salem is seen suffering from ambiguity of evidence. This begins even before Hale arrives at Proctor's house, when, Elizabeth Proctor construes John's late arrival at home which is possible evidence that he may be guilty of additional indiscretion. This continues with Hale's misinterpretation of John Proctor's forgetfulness of one of the Ten Commandments and the evidence against Martha Corey, which deems her a witch for reading books. The most significant symbol of the ambiguity of evidence is in the second act and especially Mary Warren's puppet. Miller makes it clear that Proctor did not use the poppet as a charm against Abigail, its presence in the house attests to the conclusion.<sup>25</sup>

Miller shows in *The Crucible* how dangerous forms of mass behavior can be the evils of society. Different characters with their feelings have been dealt with in *The Crucible*. Through the characters who represent the hidden hands of evil in society, Miller wants to show what we do not like to see in society and in ourselves and how the innocent people become a part of the mob.<sup>26</sup>

### Conclusion

*The Crucible* deals with laws, which lead to order but not justice. The play can be regarded as a background of American society in both faces political and religious. The society in *The Crucible* is portrayed by blood drinking and dancing naked in the moonlight. This society is criticized itself. Good and evil; reason and faith have been replaced with fantasy, self doubt and irrationality. The fantasy of Salem becomes more credible and horrifying in a confused world where essential human freedoms continue to be rigorously denied.

Miller wants through the character of Proctor to show humanity's fight against evil and its passions. Proctor's death is useful both for his own personal redemption and for his society's. *The Crucible* is a complete, clear picture about the way of life in modern societies. It is not only a record of historical events in Salem but it is written also to

warn people against modern time. It shows how does a society ensure justice and fairness when it feels that its fundamental beliefs are under attack. So it shows the innocent people to uphold society's rules ,habits and values . And it shows good versus evil as they had immortal hard conflict for a long time.

## NOTES

1.E .Bradlee Watson and Benfield Pressey, *Contemporary Drama ;Fifteen plays ; American ,English and Irish European*.(New York : Charles Scribner's sons.1959), p. 484

2. Arthur Miller ,*Collected plays Vol. 1*(New York: The Viking University press ,1981), p. 40

3.Ibid.

4.John . H. Ferres ,*Twentieth Century Interpretation of The Crucible : A collection of critical Essays* (New Jersey :Hall , Inc.,1972),p. 7 .

5. Thomas E. Porter ,*Myth and Modern American Drama* (Detroit : Wayne State University Press ,1969),p184

6. Watson and pressey .p484

7. *Classic Notes : The Crucible* ( Harvard : Harvard college press ,2012) , p 2.

8. Henry Banford Parkers , *The American Experience :An Introduction of the History and civilization of the American people (2<sup>nd</sup>)*,(New York : Alfred A. Knop ,1947),p76

9.Richard Hayes', *Hysteria and Ideology in "The Crucible" in twentieth century Interpretation of The Crucible: A collection of critical Essays* ,p.3

10.EdgarWhan,*literature:AnIntroduction*,(NewYork:McGrawhill Bookcompany,Inc.,1960)p661\_663.Subsequentreferences showing acts and pages numbers.

11. James Brodie ,*The Crucible* (London : Richard Caly ,The Chaucer Press Ltd. ,Co .1974),pp.47\_48.

12. Eric Mottram and Malcolm Bradbury , *United States and Latin American Literature* ( Hormones worth : Penguin Books Ltd. ,1971) ,p.138

13. Robert Warshow, *"The Liberate Conscience in The Crucible in Arthur Miller's in: A collection of Critical Essays*,eds.,Robert Corrigan , p.111.

14. Mottram,p.138.
15. E.R.Wood ,*The Crucible* (London: Heinemann Educational Books ,1967),pxvii.
16. *Classic Notes : The Crucible* ( Harvard : Harvard college press ,2012 .p 2.
17. Ibid .
18. Mottram,p.560.
19. James W. Douglass, "*Witch which is Which*" *Twentieth Century Interpretation of The Crucible*.(New Jersey :Prentice\_Hall Inc. 1972),pp101\_102.
- 20 .Ibid.
21. Ibid.
- 22 .Brodie.p.52
- 23.Ronald Hayman, *Arthur Miller* (London:Heinemann Educational Books ,1977),p.89
- 24 .Douglass,p.102
- 25 . *Classic Notes : The Crucible* ( Harvard : Harvard college press ,2012 .p 2.
- 26 .Ibid , p.20.

## الأيدي الخفية للشر في مسرحية ميلر " البوتقة "

م.م. آلاء مزاحم عبد الرزاق

### الملخص باللغة العربية:

هذه الموضوع يختص بدراسة المجتمع القاسي الذي يظلم الشعب البريء في مسرحية ميلر " البوتقة ". فهو يكشف عن الأيدي الخفية للشر في المجتمع الأمريكي في القرن السابع عشر في مكان يدعى " سالم ". بالرغم من إنها تتمثل بشخصيات بارزة في المجتمع (كالقضاة) الذين يختبئون خلف قناع نقاء وشرعية العدالة فهم يظلمون الناس الأبرياء على إنهم مرتبطون بالسحر .

العوامل التي جعلت من مجتمع " سالم " قاسيا عديدة ومن أبرزها سلطة المحكمة التي تعطي القضاة حق فرض إحكامهم على الآخرين إهمالا بكل الدلائل في كل القضايا ومعتمدين على الإشاعات والمؤامرات بدل عن الحقائق . ومن العوامل المؤثرة الأخرى تهيمش الانسانيه التي تعتبر فلسفه جديدة في خداع الناس جاعلة إياهم صامتين بوجه الظلم .

هذا الموضوع يكشف عن عدم قدرة الإنسان مجابهة الشر . " البوتقة " مسرحيه تكشف هذه أفكاره خلال القرن السابع عشر ولكن بالمعنى الحديث . هذا يعني ان المجتمع لم يتغير برغم متغيرات ومتطلبات الحياة .