Drama

Fourth year- the second semester

The 3rd lecture: د.ليلى باطوق

The doctor commented on the presentations of the students:

-You have listed Arthur Miller’s stage plays and you were commenting on four of them. Miller was really famous for four plays: ‘The Crucible’, ‘All My Sons’, ‘A View from the Bridge’ and ‘Death of a Salesman’. ‘Death of a Salesman’ was written in 1949. It is after ‘All MY Sons’ (1947).

So, he has written different kinds of plays: Radio plays, television plays, and stage plays. You mentioned a large number of stage plays in which you have tackled all themes and topics related to the society of America at that time. Most of the themes are similar to the ones discussed by his contemporaries. And ‘The Crucible’ is the play that we are going to tackle. It is different in topic. It is different in its nature from the other plays but it is common with the other plays in the sense that it is discussing a certain idea or a certain event that happened in America. It was not a contemporary event; it was a 17th century event but in indirect way he made this event parallel to something that happened during his lifetime which is the McCarthyism that we have discusses last time.

-You have mention very brief idea of the plot of the play. What is the main idea of the play? (Lying, accusing others, hypocrisy, witchcraft, magic). The play raised suspect and excitement in you as a reader. The opening of the play was clear. There is a sick girl and we as readers do not know the real reason of her sickness although it is said by one character (her cousin **Abigail**), but the people think something else.

From the beginning the idea of witchcraft is very clear, but there is suspicion about it (Is it really witchcraft?!!). The father of the sick child does not believe that and does not really want to believe in that. He is like denying this confession. He does not want it to be real a witchcraft that was spelled on his daughter. The idea of **witchcraft** is very important in the play.

Last time I asked the third group to concentrate on the idea of Salem in Massachusetts and the kind of life, their cultures and their common ideas. When you are talking about witchcraft, what are you going to talk about? (Guilt by association)>>>> One person is guilty the others are also guilty. Everybody is going to be punished for the guilt or the sin of one person. This theme (guilt by association) is a very important topic in the play. It is related to the main theme which is witchcraft.

-You concentrate on the opening part of the play. It is not act I. it is before act I. It is entitled **‘An Overture’**. ‘An overture’ means an introduction. It is like a preface/ it is like an introduction. The playwright is using a unique technique here by introducing everything in details to make it clear for the audience. Is it like stage direction? The stage direction might mean that the character for example is coming forward or backward on stage, is leaving the room right and so on. It is giving you some explanation of what is happening. And here this overture is very important part of the play because the playwright here is explaining to the reader what is going to happen or what are the things that are related to the events that you are going to read about or watch. So, this overture is very important because it tells us something in details about the characters that we are going to meet. The portion that you have read about **Reverend Parris**, did not tell us some information about this man? It is talking about characters that are related to the events. In the opening of the play, you will see the sick girl lying on the bed and a man praying on her body. Before starting reading act I, we understand that this man is her father. And the playwright is going us some characteristics about this father. He is not a wise man and his wife is dead. We know that the mother of this girl is dead because we have known something about her father. You will notice it is not only in the overture that you have details and explanation of information related to the characters but even through the act when a new character is introduced, you have a paragraph about this character (his features, his characteristics, his physical appearance, his behavior and his way of thinking). This is a technique used by Arthur Miller to make things clear for the reader although you will have to guess through reading. Through his conversation in act I, we will understand that he was not really worried about the health of his daughter.

-You are explaining the relationship the characters. You are having the characters that are in relation together. You have to understand the relationship between these three characters. You get the characters: the **Proctors Family** (husband, wife) and **Abigail** who is from **Parris family** but she is mentioned here because of the relationship with this couple.

The play has a lot of characters. When you read, it becomes difficult to follow who is this person because most of the characters are husband and wife and we have many families.

-Abigail here is mentioned twice because she is from the family of Parris but because of the strong relation with Proctors, she was mentioned there. These are the characters related to Parris: his daughter the sick one, his slave **Tituba** who has an important role in the play and his niece Abigail. **Mary Warren** is the servant of the Proctors. Maybe you are mentioning Mary Warren here because she is a friend of Abigail. I think it should have been mentioned before because you will notice that every family has a servant and these servants are young girls. They have played a role in sometimes giving the secret of the house they are working for and they have a great role in the issue of witchcraft.

A student: **Reverend Hale** is called in to Salem to examine Parris’s daughter Betty. Hale is a committed Christian and hater of witchcraft. **Judge Danforth** is the deputy governor of Massachusetts and the presiding judge at the witch trials and he is honest man.

The doctor: So, these two characters are related to the **witch trial** (the trial scenes in the court). So, these people are going to guide the trial scene. They are related to the trials and investigations.

A student: The story begins when reverend Samuel Paris discovers his daughter Betty, his niece Abigail William and their friends along with His slave Tituba, dancing in the woods around a fire and chanting. While dancing, they are caught by the local minister, Reverend Parris. One of the girls, Parris’s daughter Betty, falls into a coma-like state. A crowd gathers in the Parris home while rumors of witchcraft fill the town. Having sent for Reverend Hale, an expert on witchcraft, Parris questions Abigail Williams, the girls’ ringleader, about the events that took place in the forest. Abigail admits to doing nothing beyond “dancing.”Also, she talks to some of the other girls, telling them not to admit to anything. After that John Proctor enters and talks to Abigail alone. Unbeknownst to anyone else in the town, while working in Proctor’s home the previous year she engaged in an affair with him, which led to her being fired by his wife, Elizabeth. Abigail still desires Proctor, but he fends her off and tells her to end her foolishness with the girls. Betty wakes up and begins screaming. Much of the crowd rushes upstairs and gathers in her bedroom, arguing over whether she is bewitched. Reverend Hale arrives and examines Betty. Hale quizzes Abigail about the girls’ activities in the forest, grows suspicious of her behavior, and demands to speak to Tituba. After Parris and Hale interrogate her for a brief time, Tituba confesses to communing with the devil, and she hysterically accuses various townsfolk of consorting with the devil. Suddenly, Abigail joins her, confessing to having seen the devil conspiring and cavorting with other townspeople. Betty joins them in naming witches, and the crowd is thrown into an uproar.

The doctor: you summarized act one for us. Why is Parris worried about the spread of the knowledge that his daughter was engaged in witchcraft? His is worried about his reputation, why? Maybe they will be sympathized with.

A student: He has a strong belief that people in the town are against him. He was a merchant before becoming a priest.

The doctor: he is not worried about anything except to spread the idea of witchcraft. Why was he worried of this point in particular? Why is he worried that the community will know about that?

A student: it is because he was a religious man.

The doctor: the community is against dancing and witchcraft. These things were forbidden by the community. This is a very important point in the play. The setting of the play is 1692; it is in the 17th century of America at the time when witchcraft and dancing were forbidden.

So, he caught the girls dancing in the forest. He does not want that to spread. Any source of entertainment is forbidden in that town. What does this remind you of?

A Student: it is a puritan society. They are extremely religious people.

The doctor: Who are the puritans? Puritans are against of life of pleasure. Puritans moved to America. Before moving to America, these people were in England. In which period did these people exist in England? When was the Golden Age of drama? In the Elizabethan era. what happened to the Golden Age in drama in England? There was a decline in the theater because of the closure of the theaters. The puritans closed the theaters in England. The strict religious people at the end of the Elizabethan era in England closed the theater. They closed the theaters because theaters were a source of immorality. Everything immoral is related to theaters and drama at that time. What is the relationship to our play and to America? These puritans when they saw that England is no more a good place for them to live in because of the spread of drama, pleasure and entertainment, they wanted to seek another place where they can establish again their values and their morals. So, the first people who moved to America in the 17th century, these were the puritans and Salem in Massachusetts was the first colony that they have made their. So, they established that place according to their morals and religious beliefs. So, entertainment or pleasure was forbidden at that time. No novels were written at that time. And if any existed, people used to read them in secret. And there were no plays and no real drama; everything related to pleasure and entertainment was forbidden. Their idea is that people are only for work and religion. So, there concern is that people should work and should pray to God and attend sermons in the church. This is the kind of life that was in Salem at that time. For Parris, why is he worried about his reputation? His daughter is sick and people might sympathize with him. But he was worried because he was suspecting what kind of sickness she was suffering from. If it is as Abigail says that they were only dancing and when she saw her father she got afraid and that is why she fainted and it is like a reaction of that and if people know that his daughter was dancing, he will be accused of being immoral and his house is a place of immorality so he should not be chosen as a minister of the town. So, this would spoil his reputation and affect his position as a minister in the town. If it is proved that it is witchcraft, witchcraft was forbidden. It was considered as a sin and it was severely punished.

So, from the beginning, we know that the household of this character Parris is engaged in something that is going to be considered as a sin by the society. And that is why he was trying to secure his daughter and the health of his daughter only for his own only for his reputation. At the beginning of the play, we feel that he is a father who is worried about his daughter and he is praying for the health of his daughter but through the dialogue between him and his niece Abigail we understand that he was only a selfish man and he is worried about his own reputation and future.

A student: we have **the theme of life and deceit**. Most of the characters in The Crucible are lying – if not to other people, then to themselves. Abigail lies about her ability to see spirits, as do the other girls; Proctor is deceitful first for cheating on his wife and then for hiding it; and the judge and lieutenant governor and ministers lie to themselves and everybody else in saying that they serve the cause of God’s justice. The twist in the story is that by telling the truth (“I am not a witch”), you die, but you also gain your freedom – that is, you retain your standing with God, and you become a martyr.

The doctor: this theme is very important in the play. You are not going to see McCarthyism in this play. This word is not going to be mentioned in the play and there will be no mention of this Senator who was called McCarthy in the play but there is an indirect parallel between the idea of McCarthyism, the idea of communism and anti-communism with the idea of lies and deceit in this play related to witchcraft. Every character in the play is trying to defend himself or herself for not being a witch. Accusation in the play in the trial scenes will be whether you are a witch or not. If you are saying that you are not a witch, you have to give a name of a person of whom you know that that person is a witch. So, give names proving that you are not a witch and give names of witches. What happened during the time of Arthur Miller with the idea of communism and anti-communism? People were accused of being communist. They have to defend themselves that they are not communists. In order to be believed, you have to give names of people who are communists or just people who are sympathizing with communist. This is the relationship here; how critics are seeing these lies related to the accusations of witchcraft to the lies and accusations of communist activities at the time of Arthur Miller.

A student: the second theme is **theme of Respect and Reputation**. Reputation is extremely important in a town where social standing is tied to one’s ability to follow religious rules...

The doctor: you talked about Proctor and how he refused to give names of his neighbors. This is a very important issue in the play which reflects life at that time of the puritan in America (giving names of neighbors, minding someone else affairs as if there were spies everywhere). A neighbor would be afraid of his/her neighbor because if any problem is issued, their secrets are mentioned to that issue. So, the idea of giving names of others was common at that time. As you will see in the play, the girls themselves started giving names. We have a large number of people who have been accused of being witches (males and females). This is what happened at that time and what happened at the time of McCarthyism, communism and anti-communism. People were accused and in order to release themselves from this accusation, they have to give names of other people so that they will be released and the idea of evidence is very important here. Even in this play, all accusations were without evidence. There is no real evidence, just accused by others or their names were given by others. If there is evidence, it is not a real one but it is a prejudice. Envy/ hatred is very clear among the characters of the play. If somebody hated somebody, he will mention his name. For example, Abigail accused Elizabeth Proctor of being a witch. She was not a witch and she was not even involved with their dancing in the forest but she accused her of being a witch who is bewitching the young girls or herself. Just because she hates her, she wants to get revenge from her. There are many examples in the play of accusing others just of hatred and envy.

Some of the people who accused others, they accused others of being witches so that they will be imprisoned and it would be an opportunity for them to by their lands. It is the idea of taking the lands of others/ of grasping opportunities of taking lands of others. So, accusation of witchcraft was like an opportunity for them to get rid of owners of land in order to take their lands or to buy their lands.

While reading the play, make sure that you concentrate on the idea of evidence, on the idea of accusing others and giving names of other for different reasons. And all these reasons were not noble at all; they were related to hatred, envy and sometimes to hypocrisy. You have to pay attention to this while the characters and the plot of the play.

A student: the last theme is **Good vs. Evil**.

The entire village bases its belief system on the conflict between good vs. evil, or Satan vs. God. Over and over, as people are accused of witchcraft, this paradigm gets dragged out. When Tituba confesses, she claims she wants to be a good Christian now and stop hurting people. She must renounce the Devil. The world in The Crucible is clearly divided into these two sides; the good side and the evil side. Unfortunately, everybody’s confused about which side is actually good, and which side is actually evil. It may seem for us as readers that evil is winning; we see that evil people win and get what they want but the innocent people are dying one after another....

-You say that witchcraft in Africa is much advanced. Have you read ‘Othello’? Is there a mention of witchcraft in ‘Othello’ related to Africa? When Desdemona run away with Othello and the father discovered that/ when he accused Othello of casting witchcraft on his daughter, he did not have evidence. But just because he was black and he was from Africa, he said that being from Africa he must have used witchcraft because African people are known with witchcraft; they were famous for that. This idea is common among the western people, especially during the 16th and 17th centuries. Being from the East or being from Africa in particular, if there is an accusation related to witchcraft, it is going to be assigned to the person who is originally from Africa as in the case of Othello.

-You are saying that they use witchcraft as means to seek revenge. At the end of the first act, Abigail and tituba confess to witchcraft. Can we relate two these characters to the means to seek revenge? What about the servant Tituba? Was she seeking revenge on somebody? Maybe the relationship is not very direct in the play. During her conversation and dialogue with others, she says that people who are bewitched by Satan (bewitched people) become like slave to Satan; whatever Satan orders the person, he will do if not, this person will be punished as if in indirect way she was comparing her master Parris to Satan that if she refuses to do any of his orders, she will be punished although in her opinion, some of the orders should not be immediately done. But because she was a slave, she will be beaten if she refuses to do certain jobs. So, indirectly she was accusing the white masters of the city to Satan himself who is making use of the bewitched people as if they were slaves, either to follow them or they will be destroyed. So, indirectly it is like accusing her master of being a slave accuser or like Satan/ an evil person. This appears in her dialogue during the accusations and giving names of people. Indirectly all the names of masters that were given were abusing their servants. When Parris said to his niece why were you fired by the Proctors? Why were you dismissed? You were their servant. And it is one year now and nobody now wants to hire you, so why is that? What was her answer? Her answer was that because I do not agree to be a slave. All servants agree to be a slave. Because I refused to be a slave, she fired me and everybody knows that I am not the kind of that slave. Actually she was lying. That was not the real cause but again she was making use of this idea. Tituba in her indirect speech of accusation was referring to the idea of slavery and how masters are making use of their slaves and abusing them.