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The manifestations of evil in George Bernard Shaw's the doctor's dilemma

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Abstract

This study examines the evil and Machiavellian actions in the health institution in The Doctor's Dilemma and how man is exploited in the merciless hands of the nefarious doctors via comparative qualitative research methods. As a result, the Shavian solution for the play is adherence to socialism. In conclusion, because of the enormous influence of the environment on the characters, Shaw intentionally shows that morality is a dilemma and thus the reader sees no way of resolving this moral dilemma where even some of the good characters are affected by the environment.

Keywords: Machiavellianism, Prevalent Evil, Medical, Degeneration.

Las manifestaciones del mal en el dilema del doctor George Bernard Shaw

Resumen

Este estudio examina las acciones malvadas y maquiavélicas en la institución de salud en *The Doctor's Dilemma* y cómo se explota al hombre en las manos despiadadas de los médicos nefastos a través de métodos comparativos de investigación cualitativa. Como resultado, la solución de Shaw para la obra es la adhesión al socialismo. En conclusión, debido a la enorme influencia del entorno en los personajes, Shaw muestra intencionalmente que la moralidad es un dilema y, por lo tanto, el lector no ve ninguna forma de resolver este dilema moral donde incluso algunos de los buenos personajes se ven afectados por el entorno.

Palabras clave: maquiavelismo, mal prevalente, médico, degeneración.

1. INTRODUCTION

The word Machiavellianism has been derived from the name of the Italian historian and writer Niccolo Machiavelli, whose *Il Principe* (*The Prince*) published in 1513 is one of his famous books. By exploring this book, Machiavelli emphasized many debatable issues concerning the methods of taking advantage of opportunities regardless of principles. Prince Machiavelli explained that the end justifies the means (PAULSON, 2007). The principle The end justifies the means can be explained as doing anything whatsoever that is needed to obtain the result one seeks for, despite the methods adopted

whether these methods are good or evil, kind or cruel, legal or illegal, democratic or dictatorial, truthful or false, and fair or foul. Machiavelli in *The Prince* shows another significant principle which is to learn how not to be good and how to have this mindset when one needs to resort to: it is necessary for a prince who wishes to maintain himself to learn how not to be good and to use this knowledge or not to use it according to necessity (BONDANELLA, 2005).

Thus, Machiavelli's ideas are important to understand the essence of evil in modern society. People have raised many questions and debated many issues about the human evil phenomenon as well as its origin. BENNETT (1997) raised questions about the person who perpetrated a nefarious immoral deed saying that how can we explain that spontaneous attraction to evil, present even from our earliest years, which sometimes leads us to perform acts that we abhor and know to be wrong.

The depiction of evil and nefarious characters is as old as English literature. The first English epic *Beowulf* depicts the evil characters represented by Grendel and his mother who had the habit of sucking the human blood— especially the blood of the innocent. GWARA (2008) interprets Grendel's evil by writing Grendel is undeniably malicious, but they do not imagine him as God's enemy. This evidently shows the everlasting conflict between good and evil. The origin of the nefarious and immoral characters dates back to the English medieval morality plays. Furthermore, Social defects were quite noticeable in the Victorian Period and that was due to the

emergence of nefarious people seeking interests by illegal and immoral means (HARRIS, 2001).

TILAK (1963) writes that most of Shaw's prefaces were elaborated and his plays were quite long. TILAK (1963) proceeds to say that Shaw wrote satirical writings for achieving reform in people. By doing so, Shaw unveils the absurdities and abuses of the practices and institutions of contemporary society (MORAN, 2006). Thus, Shaw's characters suffer terribly by their over articulateness (HARRIS, 2013). They are true to the time in which Shaw portrayed in his plays. As REDDY (2012) observes, Shaw, highlighted issues that are associated with human life. His works raised significant questions that are centered on humans' lives. REDDY (2012) identifies differences between Shaw's plays and the prefaces by saying that in a specific mode, the prefaces proved the thing by which he could flay the public conscience, while the play was the vehicle by which he conveyed the thing. One of the questions Shaw raised in the medical profession during his lifetime.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study is mainly concerned with the exploration of the evil elements in George Bernard Shaw's play *The Doctor's Dilemma*. As a distinctive characteristic of Shaw's plays, they reflect certain intellectual discussion and projection of ideas that are revealed by characters that are able to plainly express feelings and thoughts

together, being able to discuss social and moral issues freely. Nefarious actions take considerable dimensions in the play – commercial, political, capitalistic, and social– that affect man, thinking of different manifestations and forms.

These actions represent the subject matter of literary experts, especially the dramatists as the writing of plays is strongly connected with human character and human life than any other form of art. Shaw's view of evil is that it is a significant feature of human behavior, for the word, according to Concise Oxford English Dictionary, is defined as great wickedness and depravity if it is a noun but as extremely wicked and immoral when it is an adjective. Since it has a direct influence on the lives of humans, in many of Shaw's plays evil is heavily presented, analyzed, studied, and debated. Therefore, the study examines the evil and Machiavellian actions in the world of health institutions and how man is exploited in the merciless hands of the nefarious doctors.

3. RESULTS

In many of Shaw's plays that deal with evil as a subject matter, Shaw intends to show the documentary and automatic reflection of serious practices caused by modern society. The practice of exploitative doctors in *The Doctor's Dilemma* is a vivid example of the immoral means of obtaining money from the poor patients and such doctors are shown as characters who are unable to adhere to the

moral ideals and values. In terms of the naturalistic approach, Shaw in the play highlights capitalistic evils that are destructive and dangerous to the soul and body of the man. Shaw generates his observations in life which he genuinely and truly depicts, relying on his understanding of human nature. The play is concerned with genuine ideals, moral values, and evil exploitation.

Besides, it is obvious to see that Shaw in the play put the audience or the society as a condemned and convicted entity that intensifies the unpleasantness of this play. In the play, the evil characters are left with no punishment because they are not held guilty or convicted. However, the spectators are ones who will give their judgments about the evil characters and who will identify their behaviors. The play reflects that the value of human life is useless when it becomes diseased and under the mercy of an exploitive doctor and how the individual's action and character are determined by circumstances related to the economy.

The play reveals a scandalous fact about the capitalistic society, especially the healthcare system in which the economical evils plague. One of Shaw's goals in the playwriting is to change the lives of the individuals positively, and this is the main target of such a dramatist in life. BAKER (2002) writes that positive change in practices of humans as well as in institutions comes from the change of humans themselves. In other words, the truest feelings of selflessness, prevalence of moral sense, and empowering and lifting the spirits of the poor all lead to the social and moral reform. As a result, as Fisher

explains, George Bernard Shaw uses the stage as a platform for a social, political, and religious argument (FISHER, 2001).

The evil which has been treated in Shaw's drama is closely connected with people at the present time. Actually, Shaw's dealing with evil is different from other playwrights', but evil is similar throughout ages because humans have similitude in actions and experiences despite time and place. In many of the world countries, the medical system is usually labeled by corruption and exploitation where patients are only numbers in the lists of the greedy doctors who are void of the moral values that deter them from crushing the lives of powerless individuals.

Thus, Shaw was quite intelligent in selecting a sensitive issue represented by the medical system which has become a significant issue since the 20th century. Shaw chose a recurrent theme in order to create empathy where the reader enters, through imagination, the motives and feelings of the author. Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma* indicates his universality where it appeals to all readers of all times. The play shows an aspect of the decline of moral values and religious faith that contribute to urging demonic intentions by exploitative people. Sir Patrick is shown in the play as being a priest or preacher trying to pacify Dr. Ridgeon's evil spirit and to suppress his devilish desire, preventing him from victimizing the helpless bodies and souls of patients:

Sir Patrick. Colly: when you live in an age that runs to pictures and statues and plays and brass bands because its men and women are not good enough to comfort its poor aching soul, you should thank

Providence that you belong to a profession which is a high and great profession because its business is to heal and mend men and women. Ridgeon. In short, as a member of a high and great profession, I am to kill my patient. Sir Patrick. Dont talk wicked nonsense. You cannot kill him. But you can leave him on the other hand (SHAW, 2014).

Dr. Ridgeon's main pursuit in the play is the lure for money. He represents the main dilemma in the play who has been knighted recently. He has discovered a new cure for tuberculosis, which is considered revolutionary. However, this cure can also be made to cure ten patients due to the private medical profession with medical practice and staff that are limited. Dr. Ridgeon has only chosen ten patients out of fifty and he considers them to deserve his new cure. The problem is that he meets a young beautiful woman Jennifer Dubedat whose husband Louis Dubedat is suffering from tuberculosis, a damaged left lung. At first, he promises her to treat her husband, but then another man appears to desperately need a cure from tuberculosis as well. This man is Dr. Ridgeon's medical colleague and that would further complicate the situation in the paly and Louis's condition. Shaw deliberately puts Dr. Ridgeon's morality at stake. He is in a position of whether to treat the husband of a beautiful woman and let his colleague die or to cure his colleague and let the husband of Mrs. Dubedat die instead. The Dilemma in the play is the moral dilemma, especially in the life of the health system where materialism is the sole criterion in dealing with people. Before starting the events of the play, Shaw prepares the reader to be familiar with Dr. Ridgeon.

In the play, Dr. Ridgeon is described as a god by Sir Patrick. It is obvious to notice that this metaphoric description is used to indicate that Dr. Ridgeon has the ability to determine who is going to live by his cure and who is going to die without it. By showing this, Shaw reveals the horrible situation of the medical practitioner and how the lives of helpless people are cheap in the hands of their doctors due to the monopoly of the medical cure that leads the doctors to seek their personal interests by nefarious and Machiavellian means. Dr. Ridgeon is shown to be a man of dishonor. By being presented in selecting the patients he will cure, Dr. Ridgeon plays the role of executioner, jury, and judge simultaneously, having the ability to prolong the life of patients or to end it immediately.

Shaw intelligently shows the love of possession in humans and how they use this desire to satisfy their desires at the expense of others. Having a monopolized practitioner or cure is only an example of the sinful and corrupted self that is not restricted by religious and moral means. Dr. Ridgeon is a consequence of a corrupted society, which is fed by the sources of nefariousness, exploitation, and wickedness. Dr. Ridgeon thinks that his cure is like ambrosia where he can give immortality to any human who takes it. Shaw in the preface debunks this view by saying that the public is also blamed for considering the doctor as a savior: Nobody thinks of the doctor except as a healer and savior...We think no more of the condition of a doctor attending a case than of the condition of a fireman at a fire (SHAW, 2014).

Shaw's distrust in the practice of the doctors is revealed in the demonic action of Dr. Ridgeon when he refuses to cure Louis. HOLROYD (2012) argues that whereas many cases of the treatment of the doctors had only psychological effects rather than physical ones and this is attributable to the blind trust that many Victorians and Edwardians had in competitive private doctors. Mrs. Dubedat is the type of woman who trusts blindly the medical practice of Dr. Ridgeon and believes in his ability to cure her husband. Shaw's alternative to the dilemma of the greed of the doctors is the governmental support to the English individual by providing adequate housing and conditions conducive to maintaining health and preventing disease. Unfortunately, HOLROYD (2012) writes, this social solution was considered too expensive by politicians. Shaw does not only blame individuals for the vicious actions they do. No one is faulty except society that is seen to be the villain that causes the emergence of unpleasant practices—exploitation and insatiable greed.

When the vice or the evil spread in a society, it becomes a contagion that infects a large segment of people in the same environment. GASSER (2007) writes that the contents of our subjective experience are typically infected by relations with the environment. As seen in the play, all the doctors are blamed for the illegal and immoral actions they show towards the patients. Dr. Ridgeon's selfishness is a result of that environment that made him seek wicked means to let Louis die in order to marry his wife later. There is a paradox in the play seen between Louis's wife Jennifer, the altruistic woman, and Dr. Ridgeon, the falsely honored doctor.

Dr. Ridgeon must be a model that other people can follow. The artist could be proved in the play to be honorable and the doctor is presented as an unhonored one who betrays trust and honesty in curing Louise. Shaw wants to say that the artist is the best curer for the illnesses of the soul who teaches lessons in morality and honor whereas the doctor who is supposed to treat the ill bodies, he destroys the physical bodies as well as the systems of morality and ethics. Instead of shaping society, the doctor is seen as an entity that erodes its ethical cohesion. Dr. Ridgeon's betrayal is represented by leaving Louis to be cured in the hands of Dr. Bonington, breaking his promise to Jennifer. He completely knows that Louis will die if he does not cure him and that what exactly wants.

Louis submits to the overpowering force of the disease. Lying on his deathbed, he tells Jennifer to marry after he dies and not to remain a widow. He also tells her not to wear clothes of mourning when he dies. When she is married, he tells her not to tell her new husband that she was married to him: If there is one thing I hate more than another, it is a widow. Promise me that you will never be a widow. Mrs. Dubedat. My dear, what do you mean? (SHAW, 2014).

It can be noted that Shaw presents the danger of being a widow in a nefarious and Machiavellian environment. When the powerless woman is left with no supporter, she will be a prey of exploitation, especially the sexual one. Louis seems to be Shaw's mouthpiece in this play warning implicitly his wife to remain a widow and to marry again as soon as possible after his death. The events of the play revolve around the wicked means of exploitation and the economic status is the

pivotal point of the play where the poor patients are left under the mercy of merciless doctors. Under such circumstances, the man comes to be a protector of the wife from poverty and from sexual exploitation in particular.

The dilemma in the play is not resolved but its solution has already been elucidated in the preface. Before the play opens, Shaw gives the solution for the dilemma to the private medicine, saying that the social solution of the medical problem, then, depends on that large, slowly advancing, pettishly resisted integration of society called generally Socialism (SHAW, 2014). Thus, the Shavian solution for the play is adherence to socialism. According to *The Guardian*, an instance of Shaw's support of socialism is his welcoming to William Beveridge, the founder of the National Health Service whose report on social insurance in 1942 Shaw welcomed as an installment of Fabian socialism that would help to integrate society. Our taxes were an investment in our health, and anyone who evaded such a tax would be seen as an enemy of the people. In a word, in this play, Shaw wanted to demonize capitalism throughout his satire to the healthcare system.

4. CONCLUSION

Machiavellianism is the dominant theme in Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*. Shaw deals with evil as an inherent part of human nature. This is vividly shown in nefarious characters who represent the health institution. The play reflects the ruthless exploitation of helpless

patients by nefarious doctors. In the play, Shaw emphasizes the significance of moral degeneration and the fragility of religious faith. To sum up, because of the enormous influence of the environment on the characters, Shaw intentionally shows that morality is a dilemma and thus the reader sees no way of resolving this moral dilemma where even some of the good characters are affected by the environment.

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