

Original Research Article

Disillusionment of Althusserism and Rebellious Individualism

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a comparative study of two dramatic works of Henrik Ibsen's "An Enemy of the people", written in 1882, and Akbar Radi's "The Savior in the Damp Morning" written in 1986. It is an attempt at elaborating Althusser's clarification of the term 'Ideology' as the disillusionment when the individualistic features are considered. This refers to the opposition which exists between how the ideological discourse functions and what an individual member of a society intends to establish. Rebelliousness is one of the significantly controversial characteristics of individualism which is regarded as its chaotic expression which can disrupt and rebuild the current ideology. In both Althusserism and Individualism, the subject holds the ideology that has been implicitly or explicitly defined due to the fact that the subject is exposed to as well as involved with it. Since the subject is the performer of certain acts and the conveyor of certain thoughts, the social relation which is constructed is determined according to the overall production or benefit for all those who are involved within the community. The ideology of social relation discredits the attempts of subjects at revealing self-governing and self-determining ideas which lead to disillusionment. This comparative study is, by and large, displaying the way two dramatists, who belong to completely distinct cultures and societies, presented the ideologies of their time and the true nature of invisible power discourses.

Introduction

The critical assumption of considering literature as the canon has been always confirmed. The imaginary world of fictional characters displays a "repository of ideology" by which the relationship of individuals to the reality of their existence and others is revealed (Margolies, 1994, p. 30). The repository plays a determining role in building socially anticipated definitions which contributes to interpellation of a certain way of thinking as if the structure of the social life can be pre-determined even before an individual, who is a subject, hails. "The effects of pre-given structures" practically "demonstrate the procedure that the subject recognizes his/her relation to reality" and subsequently the subject confirms its "ideological position" (Sadjadi & Ahmadirad, 2018, p. 206). In addition, this procedure appears to be both conscious and unconscious so that when it is perceived in literary works, it reverberates its existence in the society. The meaning of an institution or what Margolies (1994) referred to as a "complex mechanism" which can produce "lived experiences" can lead to the realization as well as the discovery of the accurate picture of the society (p.30). Becoming a form of science, literature transforms itself into an ideology which possesses the capability of portraying the society or the community through which the thinking criteria and living principles are observed. This is what Althusser sought out: to present literature in a significantly "mediated relation to the real conditions of existence" (Margolies, 1994, p. 34). Literature is, in fact, based on Althusser's extrapolation, the political philosophy that explains the relation of power to the ideology and vice versa (Althusser, 1971, p.15). The connection existing among philosophy, politics, literature and culture is arguably and intellectually meaningful which verifies the magnitude of ideological consciousness.

The present research endeavors to critically analyze Dr. Stockman's and Mr. Shaigan's attitude and status as they transform from individuals who had attained self-perception into the subjects, who are forced to act in accordance with the socially defined elements and conditions.

Henrik Ibsen and Akbar Radi

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), best known as the father of the modern drama, because of his influence on other dramatists, his innovation and development in drama, introduced "the plays which covered sharp social topics stigmatizing the political values of the leading class" (Gokaj & Velaj, 2013, p. 676). Ibsen's strength in his plays is presented by an observation which is psychologically intense and divulging. Moreover, he has applied revolutionary and philosophical concepts in order to explore the depth of human nature and thought, in general (Ahmed & Wani, 2018, p. 52). Ordinary people are portrayed so that their concerns and lives are tangibly and perceptibly noted, which leads to the term of realistic drama for which he is well known despite the fact that his early plays were significantly and ideally romantic. Ibsen, furthermore, introduced a type of play called a "thesis play", a type of "well-made play", attempting to teach a moral lesson (Cassady, 1975, p. 251). There are elements of social diseases that can disintegrate the communities and the hypocritical attitudes which are followed by false resolutions. Gokaj and Velaj (2013) commented that the language is "so carefully in close social circles and wraps around itself the consciousness of guilt, dress after dress, insisting between false ownership, false indignation and discreet hypocrisy" (P. 677). He has prudently attacked "the hypocrisy of society and the brutality of personal pride, negative traits of the time" especially when and where the society has been declining (p. 677). The writers, then, ironically pointed at the concept of marriage in Ibsen's plays as the only social behaviour which one can identify as appropriately conducted (P. 679). Within the constitution of marriage, Ibsen's portrayal of women is beyond the understanding of gender issues. The women in his plays, are socio-politically and culturally presented in a way that they were "unwomanly women" (Ahmad & Wani, 2018, p. 53).

Akbar Radi is one of the most influential contemporary Iranian playwrights who was born to a middle-class family in 1939. He majored in the social sciences and after his educational years, he began teaching playwriting in Tehran which had a significant effect in his point of view. It has been averred that Radi was influenced by Sadegh Hedayat, the well-known Iranian storywriter, Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian playwright and Anton Chekhov, the great Russian story writer and dramatist. Researches and those who are concerned with the Persian dramas believe that Radi had understood the people, their concerns and his era; and, for this reason his characterization is a reflection of the historical and cultural context (Nasrollahi, 2019, p. 153). Nasrollahi (2019) illuminated how Radi as a writer had been committed to present the detailed thoughts and movement of people of his time which can be vividly perceived by any readers (P. 158). This type of characterization according to Rahmani (2017) mirrors the way that the so-called open-minded people prefer in order to evade the public. This according to Rahmani (2017) could have possibly been due to lack of hope to the future since his depiction of decline in the society has been deeply established (Rahmani, 2017, p. 88). Radi's presentation of his time's issue is not simple. His technique is an amalgamation of the postmodern techniques of narrative which has made his works highly complicated. Abbasi Narinabad (2012) explored the stream of consciousness, intertextuality and symbolism of presentation in Radi's work. By examining the concept of narratology, the writer, after a comprehensive analysis, confirmed that Radi's postmodern techniques was to portray the people of his time in that social, historical and cultural discourse. Radi paid attention to the intricate Persian habits of conversation delineating his style of realism in his works. Haddadian and Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari (2018) investigated "the conversational repair" within the dramatic discourse of Radi's play 'Pellekan'(Staircase) and they described how Radi has adapted the everyday method of dialogue to utter meaning clearly and easily and the fact that the speaker within the Persian dramatic discourse, tended to correct himself/herself (p. 81).

The next section defines and elaborates the concepts and the methodology by which the analysis is conducted.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Althusser and Ideology

When it comes to Althusser, "the revisionist Marxist thinker", ideology is highlighted. Primarily put forward by Marx, it is one of the prominent concepts which exists in all discourses (Abrams, 2005, p. 191). It is regarded as an accepted "commonsense view of things presented by the power holder class" (Moramollu, 2016, p. 455). Marx's view of ideology was a system subordinating knowledge to the political goals within which the individuals take part unconsciously (Montag, 2003, p. 77). The structure which Marx elaborates defines different layers of society or strata which addresses distinct levels of forces. In this system the material life is to be developed and the forces and relations are fundamentally essential for production. This implies that the individuals depend on their productions socially, politically, intellectually, etc. which can determine their "class structure" (Bressler, 2007, p. 193). Marx's conception of ideology supports the ruling class in the society when this

class's exploitation is to be justified (Ferretter, 2006, pp. 18-19). In other words, Marxist's ideology signifies the relationship between the force and the material life of the individual. Althusser built another conception of the Marxist ideology as an "original and powerful modernist renewal of Marxism" (Rivkin and Rayan, 2004, p. 294). For Althusser, ideology goes beyond the economic system since it pinpoints the desire for power or possession which can be in any forms and categories (Althusser, 1971, pp. 145-146).

In fact, Althusser's structural Marxism emphasized the "economic determinacy" within a society. He calls it structural because he believes that the structure is supposed to be built based on its own time and necessities. According to Althusser's explanation, the dominant social structures strengthen their control in shaping human subjects by ideology and, until this moment, it is not about whether one follows Marxism or not since the production determines both the interest and the realm of activity and power. This is what we discern by focusing on the term state or nation within which the capitalistic slogan inserts its idea that people of the nation as the nations have the equal right. Althusser calls this system Repressive State Apparatus or RSA through which the power or forces are directed. Ideological State Apparatus or ISA is another definition referring to the thoughts or ideologies which must be internalized. This internalization resonates the concept of an unconscious phenomenon which produces itself through the process of "interpellation" or "hailing". (Althusser & Balibar, 1970, p. 58). This process, though might seem invisible, penetrates in the unwritten thoughts of the individuals leading them to display certain determined behaviour and activities. In this way ideology becomes "imaginary" whose followers includes all societies (Althusser, 1971, p. 123). In such societies, humans are subjects in a natural discourse implying that all values and beliefs define the reality of human's perceptions. Ideology in this sense, has an impact on the way of thinking about individual's education, nationality, sex and race and can establish sets of political ideas. Althusser's claim emphasizes the belief that the individuals who live based on a particular ideology, apply it to all practices of life. They must obey and act based on these ideas; otherwise, they are considered as non-conformists (Hawkes, 2003, p. 297).

In the same manner, he asserts that in ideology, individuals express the ways of their living and their condition of existence. In this sense it is the expression of the relationship between the individuals and their world, that is, the unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence (Althusser, 1969, p. 233). For this reason, ideology which is a set of discourses, helps an individual understand his/her experiences about the material reality of his/her existence in a complex set of forces and relations of production that consist of the capitalist mode of production. As it confirms itself as a subject, it suggests the idea what an "I" performs is an act of choice and decision. Hence, any "I" would work to build a community in order to maintain and protect their chosen discourse (Ferretter, 2006, pp. 77-78). Since ideology is a ubiquitous system: all men and women would definitely form, transform and respond to the conditions which exist in their surroundings. This process, addressed as "socialization" demands a system of beliefs, ideas and values through which the individuals find their place within it as subjects (Resch, 1992, p. 207). The point is that while we may believe that we are acting out of free will, in reality we are acted and moved by the system which implies that ideology is similar to a wide invisible web.

Rebellious Individualism

The other side of the argument which contributes to the analysis is the idea of rebellious individualism. This particular topic addresses how or when the individual acts against the established facts and accepted issues of the society in order to bring about some fundamental changes in the surrounding environment. With this reference, we look at the individualism as a social concept. Rebellious characteristics were dominant during the age of Romanticism and there are examples of characters in the literature of that era. Individualism has been looked at the same way reflecting the rise of subjectivity and the importance of self which had been an expression of alienation as well. However, these attributes are not limited to that age; for the psychological analysis of the individuals and the specific role each and every individual plays in the society can affect the total perspective or the prevalent notions. Dedovic-Atilla (2017) made a reference to the French Revolution as the strong source of this rebellious individualism because it reminded the people of getting liberated from the social oppression and tyranny (P. 28). In order to figure out how Althusserism and Individualism act and function within the district of literature, we must observe the sociological point of view and background of the literary work in that specific culture.

Given the mentioned ideas above, undoubtedly, one may refer to individualism as a term which is opposite to collectivism. The individualist culture, according to Gorodnichenko and Roland (2012) clarified this extreme opposition in this way that collectivism pursues the "embeddedness of individuals in larger groups" while individualism seeks "personal accomplishments" which can bring social status (p. 2). Gajda and Velaj (2017) followed, more or less, the same clarification by giving the country of Japan as the example of a collectivist country in where "socialization practices, cooperation, duty and compromise for the group" are emphasized (p. 190). They believe that collectivism is the root of harmony, innovation and

adaptation. They compared this culture with the Western culture which is “dominated by the individualistic values” (p. 190). This idea is a reminder of the established opposition of the West and the East in which the West is presented as superior to the East. However, considering the concept of ideology as the subjectively invisible thoughts might make it acceptable to follow certain rules or even to be exploited. While in their research, the writers attempted at comparing the concepts of imagination, inventiveness, incongruity, visualization and unconventionality etc., they disclosed the fact that collectivism was far more practical and beneficial in societies.

Here by collectivism, we can signify the term superstructure on which the whole system of the society depends. In this way, we can say that “the general process of social, political and intellectual life is conditioned by the mode of production of material life” (Parker, 1985, p. 58). Within this definition, the benefits and advantages must belong to the majority of the community and the ruling class can do the task of interpretation and formulation of what to come or to exist. In other words, they determine which type of dominance can function or determine the force in the society because, generally speaking, the economy can direct the political system. This can reflect the fact that the system is authorized in order to maintain and observe the workability of the sub-system elements as the delegators. “False consciousness” is what Parker (1985) refers to as the consequence of such communality by which deception takes place as a “veil” or an “illusory” phenomenon which is influential in determining the nature and types of connection and relationships among people due to the fact that life prescribes the consciousness (Parker, 1985, p. 65).

The next part of the current paper involves the analysis of Ibsen’s and Radi’s plays with regards to Althusser’s theory of ideology in social relation and the concept of individualism.

Discussion

“An enemy of the People” is a symbolic drama by Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) who is regarded as the father of modern drama. This drama adhering to psychological realism, is the portrayal of an idealist doctor who discovered the fact that water of the city had been contaminated. That incident suggests that people had been gradually, literally and figuratively poisoned and, in reality, visitors had been visiting a chemically dangerous place. This fact was revealed during the first act of the play where we see that some friends were gathering together addressing this issue with a great amount of optimism and determination along with the supportive expression of them as Dr. Stockman’s peer-journalist friends. The Mayor of the city, however, opposed both water obstruction and any legal actions against the current affairs and gradually made the others oppose his brother too; and, therefore the people of the city who were provoked, rioted against the doctor and his opinion up to the point of breaking his house windows and bringing up the idea of leaving the city in this family. The final words addressed Dr. Stockman as a man who stood alone (Ibsen, 2005, p.152). “The Savior in the Damp Morning” by Akbar Radi (1939-2007) is the story of an idealist dramatist as well who lives with his wife and their son is studying in France. He has been surrounded by some friends who have been effective and encouraging in his promotions and popularity among the writers, especially among the dramatists in the country. However, the political time was chaotically sensitive. Some of his works were castigated by certain political parties and the others created an idol of him in the mind of his revolutionary readers. This led to filtration and censorship of his works, his being abandoned by his supporters and wife, his being watched by the security system and his ultimate suicide. (Radi, 1398, p. 220).

Ibsen in the “An Enemy of the People” introduced a city in which tourists’ visiting plays an important role in the economy of its growth. The reason for such visiting is the Bath and some part of this water is used for domestic use. This reflects the idea that the life of many people, directly or indirectly depends on it. For this reason, although written hundred years ago, the play presents some timeless features related to the society, people and events. There are some common benefits in association with the Bath which sets forth an ideology that the mentioned place creates the concept of subject for each member of their society. In other words, productivity of the place ignites the thought of support of the whole system. That is why when Dr. Stockman revealed his decision on cessation of water consumption, he was unfavored. The same concept is, more or less, interpreted in Radi’s play which illustrates how the nature of dramatic work can provoke and stimulate individuals’ thinking and reasoning or, briefly speaking, the individuals’ mind regarding the system of life. The common theme of an individual finding an evil act within the system and seeking to awaken the consciousness of the whole society, in both plays, is highly realistic as well as symbolic. To clarify, the idea of majority versus minority creates a challenging situation through which the individual must face and convince the mass to go through the whole process of one’s recognition which, historically speaking, has been immensely difficult; for, the ideology which has been prevailing in the societies, assumed all people bound to one condition which has been the potential advantages for certain minorities who have been in power. What can be picked up

from Ibsen's and Radi's plays is that the discourse chosen for such communities is based on collectivism and productive materialism and the attitude of individuality is looked at unconformity.

Looking at the plays' art of characterization, it can be seen that the presentation of each individual is realistically detailed displaying them as neither heroic nor Dickensian. Khalaj (2002) confirmed this fact that Radi's characters are his realistic point of view toward the society with no exaggeration or understatement. (Khalaj, 2002, p. 160). The plays allow the readers to observe and analyze a variety of motives, interactions, emotions and traits which make the conflicts tangibly true and understandable. Dr. Stockman and Mr. Shaigan had chosen a professional life in connection with their jobs and they were primarily content with all events due to the fact that both might not have felt if they were required to make a point or bring about a change. Dr. Stockman has been the one in charge of water testing and the lab in the city whose mayor has been his brother. Being the brother of someone in power-kinship implies having been supported by people unconsciously and the power, here, is assumed to be the dominant force which regulates and organizes the material lives of all people of the community. This kinship is the infrastructure as well as the superstructure. In fact, the society in which Dr. Stockman lived, embodied the ideology which has influenced people's lives and thinking, leading to the creation of a reality, propagating that economic determinacy. Such a term seeks to reflect in what way Dr. Stockman, whose name is also suggestive, has been living under a certain type of determinism, having been put at a higher level of the society and the others being called the mass, or the common people, in a lower level.

Mr. Shaigan in Radi's play presented a similar disposition. He has developed the kinship through years of inscribing plays by help of a few companions whose significant roles in his publicity could not have been disregarded. This support and help have been by either acquiring the permit to publish the play or getting the plays published which, in either case, displays an ideological relationship among the aforementioned people. According to what Althusser defines, Mr. Shaigan and his friends have constructed a discourse in which their existence and functions are defined and explained which each one of them seeks. However, they exist and live in societies whose pillars are built by the middle class. In such societies, the discourse which was mentioned is contemptibly involved in the wealth and the support of those communities who are called bourgeoisie. This group has ameliorated their social, cultural and economical conditions in order to affect the power of politics of policies in the society, again, emphasizing the fact that it is the ruling class which dictates the ideas (Althusser, 1970, p. 139). Despite the fact that they sound undogmatic, they lack the capability of analyzing beyond what they possess which brings about their vulnerability and naiveté. Lack of individualized thinking brings about easy affectability by the mass or the communities which jeopardize the wholeness of the society.

Conclusion

Althusser's attempt at explaining the ideology of a social relation was compared in Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People" and Radi's "The Savior in the Damp Morning". The main characters of the plays presented themselves as individuals who recognized their thoughts and actions as the outcomes of their self-perceptive analyses. What we observed in them was that they were approved by their communities and societies as long as their ideology, which had been unconsciously self-accepted, maintained them as the subjects in their societies. Once their directions deviated from the social production and the prevalent ideology in the state (society), they were assailed with disdain and their decisions upon illuminating people was spurned. Driven into disillusionment, one ended his life and the other was left eliminated.

Discussions on theories concerned with ideology are vast and meaningful in terms of presenting the patterns of people's and the state's behaviour and the interactions existing among different groups and communities in the society. Understanding these patterns are essential and valuable in shaping discourses which are necessary in moving and developing the societies and straightening the path, objectives and the future of people in a country. Therefore, sociological studies as being associated with the social sciences and humanities are undoubtedly contributive and illuminative. Although this research was limited to the two mentioned well-known dramatists, the scope can go further to more plays in addition to applying and observing power theories, theories of social and ideology and discourse analysis.

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