A READING OF ARTHUR MILLER'S *THE CRUCIBLE* IN THE LIGHT OF JEAN BAUDRILLARD'S DISCOURSE ON SIMULATION

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Özet

Bu makalede, Arthur Miller'ın Cadı Kazanı (The Crucible) oyunundaki genç kızların büyülenmiş olma durumlarının, pekçok Miller eleştirmeninin bakış açısıyla görüldüğü gibi yalnızca bir grup kötü fikirli, ahlaksız genç kızın rol yapması veya çıldırma hali olmadığı öne sürülmektedir. Sözü edilen genç kızlar ne yalancıdırlar, ne de rol yapmaktadırlar, yalnızca mükemmel bir taklit (simülasyon) sergilemektedirler. Bu varsayım, kızların niyet ve kişisel hedefleri ne olursa olsun, başlarından geçtiğini iddia ettikleri şeyi gördüklerini, hissettiklerini, böyle bir deneyim yaşadıklarını ve dolayısıyla daha sonra büyülenmenin doğru işaretlerini sergileyebildiklerini ima eder. Ayrıca, taklitçiler yetişkin değildirler ve içinde bulundukları toplumun katı ahlak kurallarının sonucu olarak kötülüğe yönelmişlerdir. Oyundaki bağnaz toplumun dayattığı gerçeklikleri altüst etmek ve kontrolleri altına almak için kendi yeni gerçekliklerini üretmeleri de doğaldır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Arthur Miller, Cadı Kazanı, Simülasyon, Taklit, Simulacra, Baudrillard, Cadı

Abstract

The *condition of the girls' bewitchment in The Crucible is not a mere pretence or psychotic dissimulation by a bunch of wicked minded, lecherous young girls as seen by many of Miller's scholars. The girls are neither liars nor pretenders but rather perfect simulators. This assumption implies that these girls, regardless of their intentions and personal agendas, have seen, felt and experienced, what they claim to have encountered and consequently produced the right symptoms of bewitchment. Significantly, the simulators are minors and young girls who are demonized by a society controlled by stringent moral codes. It becomes quite normal for those girls to produce new realities of their own to displace, or colonize the current realities established by the puritan society of Salem.*

Keywords: Arthur Miller, Crucible, Simulation, Simulacra, Baudrillard, Witch

Critical commentary on *The Crucible* falls within several interrelated thematic categories. The first among these categories is the frequent critical emphasis on the association between McCarthyism and the Salem witch-hunt where some critics questioned the validity of the analogy and attacked Miller's liberal dismissal of anti-communism.[1] Another related category examines the nature and authenticity of the Puritan world Miller portrays in the play. Herbert Blau, David Levin and Gary Arnold maintained that the Puritanism of the drama reflected Miller's alteration of its tenets to suit his liberal perspective.[2] Other critics not only have questioned the authenticity of the play, but also attacked it as lacking in quality. Walter Kerr, Joseph Shipley and Robert Warshow have condemned *The Crucible* for its artificial and perfunctory plot, inexpressive characters, and obvious themes. [3] Other critics such as Alice Griffin, and Albert Hunt empathized with Proctor and his human ordeal and highlighted his heroism.[4] Several more critics have focused their attention on contrasting Proctor's

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[1] Both Bentley and Warshow chide Miller for his fuzzy-minded liberalism. Eric Bentley, for instance, assaults Miller's liberal dismissal of anti-communism and asserts that though "people are being persecuted on quite chimerical grounds; communism is not merely a chimera" (1968: 63). Warshow derogatively indicates that "Miller has nothing to say about the Salem trials and makes only the flimsiest pretense that he has. *The Crucible* was written to say something about Alger Hiss and Owen Lattimore, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, Senator McCarthy, the actors who have lost their jobs on radio and television, in short the whole complex that is spoken of, with a certain lowering of the voice, as the 'present atmosphere'"(1962: 196).

[2] Levin contends that "the fault lies in Mr. Miller's understanding of the period; its consequences damage his play as 'essential' history, as moral instruction, and as art" (1955:524). Blau in his critique of Miller's treatment of the Salem witch-hunt criticizes Miller for wanting "the puritan community without puritan premises or puritan institutions" (1964:92). Arnold, too, maintains that the play "defies serious respect by failing to project itself imaginatively into a past in which witchcraft did have a dreadful spiritual credibility" (1996:16).

[3] For instance Kerr maintains that Miller in *the Crucible* "seems to be taking a step backward into mechanical parable, into the sort of play which lives not in the warmth of humbly observed human souls but in the ideological heat of polemic" (1953:12). Shipley, on the other hand, believes that "the play is not so much a creation of dramatic art as a concoction of the author's contriving mind" (1953:26). And Warshow sees the relationship between Proctor and Abigail as a "retreat into easy theatricality that does not explain anything in theatrical terms" (1962:114).

[4] Alice Griffin, for instance believes that the play achieves its tragic status as a result of Proctor's "intensified awareness triggered by his ruthless chastisement by fire" (1996:68). She adds that, through "suffering, Proctor arrives at the realization that he is responsible both to himself and to his community. In this way his defeat by death is a victory" (68). Albert Hunt observes that *The Crucible* meets the criteria of a Sophoclean tragedy because of Proctor's triumph over his guilt of adultery with Abbey and his attaining a high level of consciousness that profits his society. He further confirms that Proctor is so real because he stands at the heart of all the complex tensions of the Salem

heroism with Abigail's and the other girls' wickedness that led to mass hysteria in the community.[5] Other critics have linked the hysteria spawned by the unconstrained irrationality to the language Miller uses to define character and to signify the perversion of the social, moral, political, and legal dimensions of Salem. As a result, those critics have commended the play on the merit of its language and the speech of its characters.[6]

As the catastrophes that befell the people in Salem were initially triggered by the young girls' hysterical cries of bewitchment, a number of Miller's scholars viewed Abigail and her cohorts as malicious and vindictive girls driven by their cruelty and personal interests.[7] One of the reasons, I believe, behind the animosity of the critics towards the

community. He is totally involved in the tragedy socially, intellectually, emotionally and morally. As a result, "his death becomes, more than a pointlessly heroic gesture, a rediscovery of his own goodness" (1960:14).

[5] Iska Alter and Thomas Porter see Abigail as evil incarnate whose ultimate aim is to sacrifice everyone to her whims and id based desires. In the same vein, more critics such as Penelope Curtis, Stephen Fender, William McGill and Madline Douglas, have seen in Abigail an instigator of mass hysteria and have assumed this to be the main theme of the play. Curtis, for instance, maintains that "the most interesting feature of *The Crucible* is that it is so impressively a play about evil forces that generate mass hysteria, despite the fact that it seems to be a play discrediting belief in such forces" (1956:45). Fender equally believes that the play is a cogent statement about the destructive tensions of our own world released through the creation of hysteria and paranoia. He sees Mary Warren's failure to recant as a "dramatic representation of hysteria at its summit" (1967:88). McGill argues that "mass hysteria created by Abigail and her cohorts devastates all attempts at maintaining a rational community" (1981:261). Douglas further adds that the mass hysteria created by the girls has triggered moral absolutism in the judges and placed them "in league with the devil" (1972:62).

[6] Curtis argues that the speech of Miller's characters has the "saltiness, the physicality, of a life lived close to the soil and the waste; it is enriched, too, by a literary influence that has likewise been assimilated into daily life: the Bible partly mediated by a seventeenth-century sermon convention. From both, it draws a quality of passion" (1956:48). Stephen Marino, Edmund Morgan, A.P. Foulkes and, Fender believe that language in *The Crucible* has been perverted and deprived of its moral referents by the girls and other community members as they bear false witness. Fender insists that the language of the play is devoid of any religious referents as the Salem community lacks the required religious ethics and values. However, he adds, "Proctor finally demolishes their phony language and painfully reconstructs a halting, by his honest way of speaking in which words are once again related to their lexis" (1967:88).

[7] A positive, remark about Abigail is timidly pronounced by Auslander. Auslander, taking his queue from Mary Daly (1978) who argues that medieval and renaissance Europe used the witch hunt to break the spirits of strong women, suggests that Abigail belongs to the group of strong women who's "assertion of her sexuality in Miller's play

girls in *The Crucible* is the influence of the negative view the original Salem girls have received.[8] Abigail is seen as basically motivated by her desire to supplant Elizabeth in Proctor's bed. Elizabeth Frayn maintains that the encounter between Proctor and Abigail in which he threatens to expose her if she does not free his wife shows Abigail's "perverted motives accusing indiscriminately as she has been accused of looseness. At times she psychotically believes in her own inventions of witchcraft" (1999:95).

Frayn, like many other critics, stops short of diagnosing the girls' condition of bewitchment as a case of simulation that colonizes and displaces the real and the conventional truth.[9] Simulation is the other of representation. Representation recognizes the distinction between the real and its copy. It works on the basis that there is a distinction between signifier and signified. In classical terms there is an absolute distinction between the word 'witch' and what that word represents. Similarly, common sense tells us that there is a clear and necessary distinction between an image of a witch and a real witch. Simulation, by contrast, short-circuits such distinctions. Saturated by images of witches acquired from African and Indian popular culture narrated to them by Tituba and other slaves,[10] for the girls the real becomes unthinkable without the copy. In other words, simulation involves the disturbing idea that the copy is not a copy of

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certainly marks her as inassimilable into the patriarchal family as it is represented there" (1987:28).

[8] Julian Franklyn suggests that the children engaged in a conscious fraud. "The girls found themselves mistresses of a gratifying situation whereby they held the whole adult world of their environment at their mercy, and they were too glad to wield the power thus conferred upon them" (1971:60). Russell Hope Robbins agrees that the "vicious girls knew exactly what they were doing." Their testimony was given in "a state of utter delinquency, causing death without rhyme or reason, for sport" (1988:435). Ronald Seth condemns the accusers and abhors the idea that the judges "could accept the charades of naughty boys and girls and taking the figments of their childish fantasy worlds as acceptable truths, could send old women and men to their deaths on the gallows" (1969:180). Samuel Eliot Morison blames the girls for their wickedness and suggests that "a good spanking administered to the younger girls, and lovers provided for the older ones" might have resolved the conflict in the town (1956:259).

[9] Chadwick Hansen argues that the "possessed" girls were afflicted because of their belief in the devil and his powers. In explaining the girls' odd behavior, Hansen rests his assumptions on modern medical and psychiatric knowledge and concludes that the fits and contortions were genuine and that the "afflicted were suffering from hysteria." He eventually concludes that the behavior of the victims was "not fraudulent but pathological." The girls were hysterical in the clinical rather than the popular sense (1969:168-85). Marion L. Starkey maintains that the accusing girls suffered from hysteria brought on by the tensions of Calvinism and the absence of legitimate outlets for their "natural high spirits." She describes one of the young accusers, Mercy Lewis, as a "young paranoid" (1973:127).

[10] For details of the nature of folk tales about witchcraft available to the young girls of Salem, see Bernard Rosenthal's (1998) "Tituba's Story".

something real, but only of another copy. The witches of the mind, which are copies of the witches of the folk tales, become far more real than any one can hope to produce, they turn in the mind of the girls into real people such as Elizabeth and Proctor among others in *The Crucible*.

Accordingly, I want to argue that the accusers' condition of bewitchment is not a mere pretence or psychotic dissimulation by a bunch of wicked minded, lecherous young girls. The girls are not liars and pretenders but rather perfect simulators. This assumption implies that these girls, regardless of their intentions and personal agendas have seen, felt and experienced, what they claim to have encountered and consequently acted and behaved as bewitched and viewed their victims as real witches. The physical signs they have exhibited in the courtroom are signs of what Baudrillard terms the 'hyperreal'.

As a matter of fact, the play is pregnant with references that attribute the girls' tendency towards generating images without origins to their situatedness, ethnicity, social and cultural background. Significantly, the bewitched are minors and young girls who are demonized by a society controlled by stringent moral codes: Betty Parris is the little daughter of the town's clergyman, whose Christianity is nothing more than a continual preaching about the horrors of hell; Tituba is an oppressed black slave homesick for Barbados;[11] Abigail, Parris's niece, is a young girl sexually and emotionally abused and abandoned by her married ex-employer; Mary Warren is a poor servant in the house of a bully and an adulterer. It is in fact quite normal for those girls to simulate new realities of their own to displace or colonize the current realities established by the puritan society of Salem.

Foulkes rightly maintains that Miller from the onset of the play presents "a society which possessed a tenuous and uneasy relationship to realities of various kinds" (1983:98). This precarious relationship with realities where signs have no fixed signifieds is the very core of simulation in *The Crucible*.

At the beginning of the play, Abigail, Tituba, Mary Warren and the other girls deny that there is any witchcraft attached to their dance in the forest. Of course, we know that Abigail is lying when she denies witchcraft being part of their festive activity in the woods because she and the other girls in fact attempt trafficking with the devil *á la* Barbados style under the influence of Tituba: Abigail drinks blood in her attempt to have Elizabeth Proctor killed. However, Abigail's initial denial can be seen as evidence on Baudrillard's assumption that in simulation reality is impossible. For Baudrillard

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[11] Tituba's identity, ethnicity and color have been the subject of many critical essays and books. In the original judicial records she is believed to be of West Indies origin. Many narratives of the period describe her as Indian. However, in later literary texts including Miller's *The Crucible* Tituba's identity changes from Indian to a Negro. Among the interesting essays that examine this metamorphosis in the identity of Tituba are Chadwick Hansen's (1974) and Veta Smith Tucker's (2000).

"simulation collapses the poles of the true and the false into one another where the imaginary conceals that reality no more exists outside than inside the limits of the artificial parameter" (1997:14). Since there is no reality to embark on, then the real and the unreal acquire the same status and the process of simulation is inaugurated. Initially it emerges that Abigail's fabrication of a different reality is motivated, among other things, by her concern about her name, which is a major sign, a virtual entity that stands above and beyond the temporality of whipping and lashing. When Parris confronts her with the gossip circulating in town about her present state of unemployment, Abigail indignantly defends the virtual sign that represents her physical reality by collapsing the true and the false in a rhetoric that acquires a reality of its own:

> Abigail: My name is good in the village! I will not have it said my name is soiled! (I, 21)

As the girls find themselves cast in a position where they have no other choice but to confess to witchcraft under their initial witnessing of Tituba's torture, they perfect their roles and internalize them with great spontaneity to the extent that they become so real. It is no coincidence that Miller accentuates Abigail's tenuous hold on reality in one of her dialogues with Proctor. She tells Proctor: "I cannot sleep for dreamin'; I cannot dream but wake and walk about the house as though I'd find you comin' through some door" (I, 29). Abigail's tendency, from the very beginning of the play, to believe in and sustain non-conventional forms of reality paves the way for her simulations. Her attempts at enlisting the help of spirits to keep Proctor's love for her, and later her own confession to seeing Proctor in her dreams as if real say a lot about her dialogue with conventional reality. As a result, I find it very simplistic to dismiss the girls as liars and pretenders. In fact, they are sheer simulators because simulation, in Baudrillard's words, "no longer needs to be rational, it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational" (2).

Though the theocracy in Salem is partly responsible for the creation of the new reality[12], it is Abigail and the other girls who prove beyond doubt that a fictitious reality becomes as authentic as a conventional one. In fact, I highly doubt, that after the initial cries of Tituba followed by Abigail's and the other girls' confessions that the girls perceive of themselves as liars or pretenders. The amazing thing about simulation is that it obliterates the lines between fact and fiction. This collusion of fact and fiction or reality and virtual reality is seen in the sudden awakening of Betty Parris and Ann Putnam, and

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[12] Cotton Mather, a highly esteemed Puritan cleric and the first historian of Salem witchcraft, maintained that an "army of devils is horribly broke in upon the place which is the center…of our English settlements" (2003:15). Robert Calef, a Mather's contemporary, maintained that Mather and other fellow clerics had "encouraged the witch mania as part of an effort to drive the people of Massachusetts back to the church" (1866:83). Vernon L. Parrington laid the blame on Puritanism as a way of life. He saw Massachusetts as a stifling environment "with every unfamiliar idea likely to be seized upon as evidence of the devil's wiles" (1927:86).

in their spontaneous participation in the chorus of confessions, though they were not under any threat by Abigail or others. As a matter of fact, Abigail does not perceive of herself as liar and pretender; and most likely she believes in every single word she utters while uttering it. In her dialogues with Parris, Proctor, and the judges one discerns her genuineness. Her heart-felt idiom is not a mere pretence that leaves the principle of reality intact. It conveys another truth that she lives and experiences. In her defense of her name against the insinuations that it is soiled, Abigail, correctly and insightfully, describes Elizabeth Proctor as "a bitter woman, a lying, cold, sniveling woman" (I, 21). In fact, Abigail's description of Elizabeth as "lying" makes sense only towards the end of the play when Elizabeth's lie, ironically acquitting Abigail and Proctor of fornication, leads to Proctor's death and confirms beyond doubt the opinion of the judges about the accusers' sincerity. This gist from the playwright about the true nature of Abigail's utterances shows that there is to Abigail more than meets the eyes of most of her critics, and confirms beyond doubt how the simulacrum cancels the conventional boundaries between the real and the imaginary or the truth and the false.

Although the virtual reality created by Abigail comes for a short while under fire by Proctor and Mary Warren during the latter's attempt at recanting, Abigail and the other girls succeed in neutralizing Mary and turn the situation to their advantage when the judges refuse to take Mary's claim of faking bewitchment as truthful.

> Parris: But you did turn cold, did you not? I myself picked you up many times, and your skin were icy. Mr. Danforth, you-
> Danforth: I saw that many times.
> Proctor: She only pretended to faint, Your Excellency. They're all marvelous pretenders.
> Hathorne: Then can she pretend to faint now? (III, 95)

Mary's drastic failure to produce signs of bewitchment upon the request of the judges proves to the court that she is a liar at her moment of conventional truth. Why is this? Baudrillard clearly tells us that the logic of simulation has nothing to do with the logic of facts and the order of reason. Baudrillard believes that "the impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real is of the same order as the impossibility of staging illusion. Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible" (19). The reader and the audience who approach the play with a conventional sense of reality in mind denounce Mary for her cowardice and may condemn her for not pretending to show signs of bewitchment, the way she and the other girls supposedly did before. In fact, Mary's failure to pretend bewitchment validates the idea that simulation operates at a totally different scale where illusion becomes impossible. Mary Warren and the other girls are simply generating models of a real without origin or reality.

The genuineness and passion with which Mary Warren recounts, to Proctor and Elizabeth, her earlier experience in court tells a lot about a model of reality she and the other girls have taken for the truth regardless of the damage they have caused:

> Mary Warren: […] and I feel a misty coldness climbin' up my back, and the skin on my skull begin to creep, and I feel a clamp round my neck and I cannot breath air; and then- [*entranced*]- I hear a voice, a screamin' voice, and it were my voice- and all at once I remembered everything she done to me (II, 57).

As a result of her authentically felt experience of bewitchment, Mary Warren fails to return to the reality principle and hold to it by the unmasking of pretense. In court, and under the simulated cries of her peers, she reverts to the virtual model of reality and accuses John Proctor of being an agent to Lucifer. Her accusation of Proctor confirms, in Baudrillard's words, that simulation "no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational" (2). Warren's failure to fake signs of bewitchment upon the request of the court vigorously proclaims the collapse of traditional reality.

It is not surprising, too, that Abigail, the chief simulator turns out in the words of Parris to be a thief. "Tonight I discovered my – my strong box is broke into…thirty-one pounds is gone" (IV, 111). Parris believes that Abigail has run away in fear of her life after the Andover incidents have taken place, where rioters in the town have over thrown the court. This turn of events symbolically shows that simulation robs away conventional meanings and their values, and leaves reality penniless and confused. Abigail's sudden disappearance is not a sign of the sterility of the simulacra, but rather it is a cautious step taken by the simulacra to protect itself against the onslaught of conventionality.

The theocracy developed in Salem prevents the authorities from accepting the simulacrum as unreal. On the contrary, they believe in its authentic reality and thus they become, in Baudrillard's terms, "like the army doctors who dealt with the simulator as a real patient and dismissed him from the army" (19). They did so not because they believe in a third order or any order of simulacra, but because they want to preserve their conventional understanding and perception of the traditional order of reality where signs have fixed meaning. Hale and Parris defend conventional reality with Don Quixotean zeal:

> Proctor: How may such a woman (Rebecca Nurse) murder children?
> Hale: Man, remember, until an hour before the devil fell, God thought him beautiful in heaven (II, 68).
> Proctor: Excellency, does it not strike upon you that so many of these women have lived so long with such upright reputation, and-
> Parris: Do you read the Gospel, Mr. Proctor?
> Proctor: I read the Gospel.
> Parris: I think not, or you should surely know that Cain were an upright man, and yet he did kill Abel (III, 83).

What Hale and Parris in essence are saying is that the dictates of the girls, about even the most respectable people in town, can be true because the bible sets examples of previously righteous people and angels turning evil. This strict adherence to the

Cartesian truth blinds the authorities' vision to the power of simulation. Though at some point in the drama Hale declares that the girls are pretenders, he fails to unmask them, simply because the girls are not pretenders, they are simulators; and he, like the rest of the theocracy in Salem opts to stick to the tenets of conventional reality that sees things in terms of false and truth. Hale's misunderstanding of simulation as lies and pretence reflect his conventional understanding of the signs. He apparently fails to grasp that the simulacrum is a reality on its own right: a reality that does not mask the absence of truth or reality, but rather as a truth of its own with no connection or relation to a model.

Incidentally, Proctor towards the end of the play intuitively realizes that the simulacrum is a force in action and that this force is capable of mediating or supplanting conventional reality. When Danforth asks him in court whether he will confess himself or not, he militantly responds with "God is dead!"(III, 105) Proctor's significant response mourns the death of Cartesian and conventional realities and opens his eyes to the terrific potential of the hyperreal. From this moment on Proctor begins to simulate his grand death through sacrificing his physical existence for his name.

In conclusion, the power of simulation and the fecundity of the sign make their presence all through the play. At the beginning, Reverend John Hale pompously announces that he can distinguish precisely between diabolical and merely sinful actions; in the last act the remorseful Hale tries desperately to persuade innocent convicts to confess falsely in order to avoid execution. The orthodox court, moreover, will not believe that Abigail Williams, who has falsely confessed to witchcraft, falsely denied adultery, and falsely cried out upon "witches" is a "whore"; but it is convinced that proctor, who has told the truth about both his adultery and his innocence of witchcraft, is a witch. Why is this? Simply, because the authorities in Salem, have taken the girls' signs of bewitchment for real not because the authorities believe in the power of simulation but because they want to maintain their hold on conventional reality where signs have fixed meaning. As a result the challenge of simulation is never admitted by power. Baudrillard tells us that the "established order can do nothing against simulation because the law is a simulacrum of the second order, whereas simulation is of the third order, beyond true and false, beyond equivalences, beyond rational distinctions upon which the whole of the social and power depend" (21). As simulation collapses the real with the imaginary, the true with the false, it does not provide equivalents for the real, nor does it reproduce it. And because the real cannot isolate or identify simulation, we can no longer isolate or define the real itself. Thus *The Crucible* ushers in a postmodern era in which the hermeneutics of depth have been replaced by the play of surfaces, and the simulacrum has superseded the origin. Accordingly in the play conventional reality and truth give way to the virtual reality manufactured by the girls where magical thinking and incantations replace rational argument, thoughtful analysis, and careful research and investigation.

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