Symbol of Economy and Culture in Capitalism in Its Late Period—Analysis of Miller in Catch-22

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Abstract. This article analyzes the character of Miller by applying the post-modern social and cultural theory proposed by Fredric James. This article also points out the obvious feature of late Capitalism shown within lines through the depicting and analyzing of the characters. It also reveals the writer of Catch-22’s intention of exposing the essence of post-industrial American society and its value to the public by creating the character of Miller.

Introduction

Catch-22 was written by Joseph Heller and was published in 1961. This work appeals to the public and catches the eyeballs of readers and critics since it was created. It is even regarded as the brilliant masterpiece of American post-modernism and black humor. Through the author’s study, many critics conducted their study on the novel within the circle of the following aspects like black humor, ridicule, post-modernism and the corruption of American Army. As far as the analysis of the characters is concerned, most of the attention has been directed to the protagonist while analysis of other characters is little. No deep imploration has been conducted into the inner heart of other main characters, let alone using theoretic framework of post-modernism. This paper intends to study this works from a new angle by analyzing the character of Miller, applying the post-modern social and cultural theory of Fredric James. This paper also intends to reveal the essence of economy and culture in late period of Capitalist society.

Analysis of the Character of Miller

Like other characters in the novel, the image of Miller is kind of “plain”. The author depicts his appearance in a molecule way when he first appears in the novel, emphasizing that he owns a face of “honesty, never cunning, never cheating”. Miller also appears to be an enthusiastic patriot, often doing favors to others. He offers to pilot the plane by volunteering in front of the leader showing his patriotism. But he cursed the protagonist for his reluctance to pilot too many flights. All in all, the writer Heller points out at the very beginning of the novel: Miller’s core ethnic principle is to maximize the interests and benefits. That is his final goal and highest standard.

As the spokesman of the interests of capitalism, Miller will reveal his true face by taking off the mask of fake kindness as long as his root interests will be influenced. He transformed from an honest and patriotic intellectual with enthusiasm and warm-heartedness to a greedy monster thirsty for interests without humanism and the consideration of righteousness.

Also as the spokesman of economy in late capitalism period, Miller makes economic interests superior to national interests by applying the logic in Catch-22. In Chapter 24 in this novel, when Miller’s 4 German planes were sent to Great Britain for purchase and flew back, they were imprisoned by American army. Miller scolded them harshly: “Are we in Russia right now?” “No, we have to withdraw the 4 planes and make them right here.” American part answered. “When did the American government apply the policy of withdrawing personal property? How shameful you are! It is ridiculous for you to come up with such an idea.” (Heller: 284)

Miller uses the excuse that personal property of capitalism can’t be intruded, and therefore he takes the conclusion for granted that the way or method of grabbing personal property also should be legal and never be scolded and questioned. Since the way of grabbing the personal property is
right and saint, then using German planes to make money for the Cindigar Union is legal and moral. Therefore, although in World War II Germany and USA are two sides in conflict, Miller never believes that he is wrong by making a deal with Germans. “Yes, we are fighting. But Germany is also one member with good reputation in our Union. As our stockholders, we have the responsibility to protect them and their rights. Maybe it is they who evoke the war, maybe it is also they who murder millions of people, but what they have paid off is more direct than our other allied forces and nations.” (Heller: 287) Miller’s logic coincides with the logic in Catch-22 incidentally. Through Catch-22, Miller succeeds in making the interests of capitalism over the national interests.

Miller’s spokesman identity is also embodied through another aspect of setting up the Cindigar Organization. In Chapter 7 in the novel, the author Heller has pointed out that Miller will set up such an economic organization. In Miller’s eyes, his Cindigar Union Organization is just like “market”: “Where there is a market, there will be many things for you to do”, “and everyone will be a stockholder and has his own share” (Heller: 71). In this novel Miller’s market has already broken the bounder of region and nation. Miller’s deal spreads all over the European continent except Russia. His giant fleet in the air fills all over the whole blue sky. In his market, everything that he thinks will bring about benefits and interests to him will be merchandized. When he realized that he can make benefits by making deal with Germans, he signs the contract with German immediately. Obviously, Miller’s market has spread over to every corner. Where he can make money, there will be Miller’s market. Not only grain product, but also one quarter bed cloth, the bridge for bombing, even the equipment, installation and staff in American army can be merchandized. It can be concluded that Miller’s Cindigar Union Organization has the typical globalized and merchandized feature in late capitalism period.

The Essence of Economy and Culture in Late Period of Capitalist Society

As mentioned above, in the microscope world of the novel Catch-22, the superficial ruler is the American political group of officials, but actually the real rulers are people like Miller. They represent the economic group of capitalism, making their interests superior to the interests of political groups and even national interests. Miller trickily applied the invisible power in Catch-22 in making his economic group the real ruling group in the whole society. Meanwhile, he advocates his slogan “Everyone has his share as shareholders”, not only attracting the service of common soldiers, but also veteran or even high status officials. In order to make benefits, these people in Miller’s group spare no efforts to help Miller to become the real ruler behind the mask by permitting his behaviors even they are illegal or guilty. In Chapter 24, Miller easily persuaded the plane in one island to serve for him and ask another plane to go to Solomon Island for another business. One general once said to Miller: “You should know that I could do everything for you if I could buy a Polish sausage.” It indicates that Miller’s economic side of interests surpasses other sides of interests. Therefore, with the immersion pace of his market, his “reigning area” also expands. “Miller’s planes become something quite popular to people and they have privileges to go to everywhere.” (Heller: 285)

Miller promises that everyone will be the shareholder and has his share, also he casts the economic interests as lure. This leads people to his monopoly in volunteer. Besides the things above Miller also spreads his control over people’s minds and ideas step by step. As mentioned in the previous part, he makes his economic interests legal, superior to national interests, by apply the logic in Catch-22. He also uses the influence of media and advertisement, luring people to the path of his own value. Miller branded his fleet of finance with the name “M&M Colorful Cake Company”, making such kind of special planes all over the sky. The planes he sent to Europe and North America flies with 2 long ribbons with advertisement slogans. He also rents the 2 ribbons to other companies. He often leaves places in the air advertisement mainly for advocating a general. He also buys the rights for ads in some commercial program mainly for advocating himself. Fredric James points out: “The obvious feature of late Capitalism period is the change of relationships between signans and designatum compared with early Capitalism period. The late period lacks signams and makes it a spontaneous and irrelevant Utopian state.”
In the novel, Miller applies the ad media in strengthening his monopoly status and makes people be assimilated by him voluntarily. In Chapter 35 in the novel, when Miller knows that the Captain has admitted others substituting Miller in the task of flight, he went to the Captain to persuade him, making sure that he knows that he is indispensable to the flight. (Heller: 421) Even Miller’s leaders shall listen to his voice and follow his thinking and ideas. The most serious and ridiculous thing is that even when Miller commits the big mistake by bombing his own flying fleets and causing great casualties, Miller can make everything perfect with money just as if nothing happened at all. In Chapter 22 in the novel, people like Joseph are so surprised to find out that Miller is the Mayor and even the vice governor. In the remote and underdeveloped areas, we can say, that Miller is just like God. Miller suggests that the stature of his face with moustache can be seen everywhere to show his highest status. From the sentences which have been mentioned above, it can be concluded that the monopoly of Capitalism with the symbol of Miller has immersed into every part of life, not only politically but also culturally and socially.

Summary

The author Keller uses his special writing way of ridicule and black humor to describe such a character: a humble clerk in charge of meals in the cafeteria, speculated with a certain special method. He not only becomes the ruler of economic parts of the empire but also stands over the national interests by accumulating funds and spreading the market. Meanwhile, he also uses cultural signs to make himself be everywhere and turn himself into someone like God. Miller’s life experience seems to be so funny and ridiculous but reveals the essence of the late Capitalism period. It also provides instructive meaning to further studies about Capitalism and its different periods.

References


