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Mao II is a novel which was written by Don DeLillo and published by the Scribner on 20/06/1991. The 265-page text is the tenth novel by this award winning author. It gives a story of Bill Gray, an eccentric novelist who leads an extra-ordinary life. After a successful completion of his two novels, he finds himself in a limbo when he deliberately opts to incomplete his third book. He does this believing that its exposure to the masses will be of no benefit, but ruin his agenda for writing it. However, this does not come to be, since he abandons his solitude lifestyle and accepts to join the band wagon. His story is used by the author to establish continuity and give a clear presentation on the addressed thematic concerns. This paper gives a critical analysis of the power of the crowds as the major theme of this novel.

The Theme of the Power of the Masses

In his life as the protagonist, Bill faces a dilemma of struggle between himself and the rest of the society. After successfully writing two novels, he finds it so challenging to complete, publish and circulate his third one. He does not want this book to be in contact with the masses because he believes that it will harm in a way. Thus, he chooses to lead a secluded life not to be interfered with by the rest of the society. Under the support of his dedicated assistance, he manages to detach himself from the crowds for a very long time. In fact, Scot believes that the release of this new novel will compromise the personal traits of this celebrated author. As readers, we find it quite ironical for the author insinuates that the exposure of his novel to the readers would be detrimental. Such a book should only be published for the readers who are expected to read and use it to comprehend and transform the society.

However, Bill does not win this battle because he soon finds himself exposed to the rest of the world. At the beginning, he interacts with Karen Janney, a close accomplice of his trusted aid, Scott. In deed, his interactions with this flamboyant lady change his attitude towards life. As the story unfolds, Bill comes out of his cocoon and accepts to socialize with the masses. His interactions with Brita open a new page in his life. Apart from accepting to be photographed, he accompanies this photojournalist to London to advocate for the imprisoned colleague in Beirut. This inspires him to travel to Lebanon and Cyprus before meeting his tragic death en route to Beirut. Evidently, these circumstances show a continued war between Bill and the rest of the people. Although he was initially skeptical about joining other people, he later loses the war and accepts to be a team player. This is a very interesting experience which proves that a person's destiny can be determined by the masses. Had it not been for the influences and pressure from his acquaintances, Bill would have died in seclusion. This would make him more desperate than coming out and joining other people in the pursuit of changing the society. Through this, the masses emerge victorious over Bill who was trying to take his own direction.

The power of the masses can not be compared to any individual. Despite living in his own world, Bill could not overcome the urge to participate in the liberation of the oppressed. He is convinced that if the "Stories have no point if they don't absorb our terror." Despite his weird lifestyle and reserved personality, he realizes that he loses a lot. As an influential writer, he is convinced that it is his responsibility to sensitize the society. However, with his isolation, he can not be felt. Finally, he comes out and traverses the

different parts of the world to fight for the imprisoned and kidnapped comrades. This is a clear indication that he could not make any progress had he not changed his mind. However, this did not occur accidentally, but due to the pressure from far-sighted people like Charles. The masses are so powerful. They managed to pull him out of his den and inspired him to fight a noble war that eventually led to his death.

As the author explains, the 'future belongs to the masses.' Collectivism plays a significant role in determining the shape of the society. Any oppression, to which they may be subjected, is actively condemned.

Everyone is ready to fight for the sake of the society. With the obsolescence of the writers, terrorism has risen up to replace it. In order to assert their position, the Maoists resort to kidnapping innocent citizens. Even if it is not the best thing to do, they opt to engage in such acts in order to create fear and be part of the destiny shapers. This was a technique used by the author to foreshadow the terrorist activities in the contemporary society. True to his prediction, terrorism later became a global crisis which wrecks havoc today.

In fact, it has deteriorated the relationship between the United States of America (USA) as the rest of the world. As a result of the dissatisfaction, a large section of the society has resorted to terrorism. Outlawed terrorist groups such as the Maoists have been formed to fight for the rights of their members. They have taken over from the writers. In fact, Bill believes that they have lost the war to the terrorists. Thus, he says, "I used to think it was possible for an artist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory." In deed, they engage in evil acts such as kidnapping which do not auger well to many people. Thus, people

like Abu Rashid and George Haddad do not shy from kidnapping innocent writers.

Actually, the rising up of terrorism has been termed as “ raids on consciousness.” It seeks to transform the culture from being dominated by the writers. This is an ideology which really influences a lot of people. Besides, it creates a platform through which the masses can air their grievances. To the insurgents, terrorism is the ultimate way through which they can participate in the liberation of their people. Therefore, the Maoists want to exploit their deteriorating relationships with the ruling class to influence the masses. For example, they believe that it is the only language which the west understands. Meaning, they can not use any dialogue because no one would listen to them. Through such initiatives, they engage in activities which provoke the west to react and respond to their plights. This situation enables the author to demonstrate that the masses have some power to control the society.

At the beginning of this novel, the author gives a story of the mass wedding presided by the Most Reverend Moon Sun Myung of the Unification Church. The Yankee held event brought a number of youngish and young couples drawn from different locations in New York. According to the author, this was a colorful event which was attended by a lot of people. The huge attendance of such an event indicates that the crowds can be united for a noble course. Initially, no one could imagine that such an event could attract such a huge crowd. It was an indication of the things to come. Scott says, “ People trudging along wide streets, pushing carts or riding bikes, crowd after crowd in the long lens of the camera so they seem even closer together than they

really are, totally jampacked, and I think of how they merge with the future.” The coming together of large number of people meant that they would be united in many activities they would be undertaking. Moreover, I gave them an identity. Because of this, they would be able to speak in one voice especially during crises. Of course, it was so inspiring since it united people like Bill, Scott and Karen. As a former member of the Unification Church, Karen knew what it meant to be closer to great minds like Bill and Scott. She had also been

Despite the fact that the leaders would not be so much revered while still alive, things changed immediately after their death. As Don exclaims, the masses had formed a tendency of celebrating their leaders after their death. This was commonly done using their photos. Evidently, the death of a leader would be a uniting factor in this community. After the death of Ayatollah, thousands of people were brought together to mourn him. As a good ruler who dedicated his life to the service of his people, Ayatollah was greatly missed. This is why a lot of people decided to attend his funeral to accord him their last respect. However, this is one incident that that author uses to shed more light on this theme. It indicates that the death of a leader could be used as a unifying factor. Truly, “ A portrait doesn’t begin to mean anything until is the subject dead. This is the whole point.” As already highlighted, such gatherings could not only be used to prove the power of the masses, but to symbolize identity. Such an identity would be instrumental in inspiring the crowd to be united and work as a team.

The power of the masses is personified in individual leaders. As the rulers of the land, the leaders have an opportunity to exert global control. They can

make important decisions which really influence the entire population. One example of such leaders is Mao Tse Tung. As a popular chairman, he is portrayed as the driving force behind the masses. His exemplary leadership skills enable him to make the masses participate in the shaping of the history of the land. Thus, during his reign, China became recognized for making admirable transformations. Despite his authority, he would not have achieved much progress had he been detached from the masses just like Bill had tried, but failed. Without the involvement of the masses, nothing much can be realized. Mao Chairman demonstrates how cooperation with the crowd can be an important strategy in the determination of the future of the state. Had he been detached from the masses, he would not have been a popular “ part of the rich history of China” (Carter, Peter, 2007).

As the story unfolds, it appears that the contributions of the masses are useful in bringing people together to address their social issues. This, as the author examines, brings hope to the people. The kind of optimism realized from such unity is healthy because it brings solace to otherwise disillusioned population. As explained earlier, the terrorists used such an opportunity to speak to their perceived aggressors. Had it not been for their attention grabbing acts, they would not have been listened to by the oppressive west. Thus, even if they might have done a lot of activities which were not approved by the ordinary population, it is right to say that they managed to influence the people to rally behind them as they fought for their rights. The other incident which can be used to illustrate this theme is the personification of the dead. The people have resorted into immortalizing their heroes after their death. For instance, after greatly contributing to the

development of the nation, Khomeini dies. However, no one had recognized him as a good leader while still alive. He only manages to attract the admiration of the masses when his photograph is produced during his funeral. This indicates how the masses can be instrumental in determining the fate of a person. They are the ones to determine whether a leader should be famous while still alive or after death. However, such endorsements are initiated by individuals of great potential. In this case, the photojournalist manages to provoke emotional response from the crowd, who feel empathetic and sympathetic with the dead Khomeini whose success is posthumously celebrated.

In order to develop his story, Don uses irony as a stylistic device. Assertions such as “ In societies reduced to blur and glut, terror is the only meaningful act. There's too much everything, more things and messages and meanings that we can use in ten thousand lifetimes” depicts the use of this stylistic device in the novel. There is a very big irony revolving around individuals and the masses. To begin with, Bill acts in a manner that confuses the readers. As a writer, he is supposed to rely on the third party as his audience. However, through the influence of Scott, he decides to hide his book. While aware that the book should reach the readers, he opts to live in cognate fearing that the exposure of the novel would compromise his personality. However, as the events unfold, he later emerges and actively participates in the liberation struggles. As Duvall, John examines, ‘ it is quite ironical that Bill, who had distanced himself from the crowd later, dies because of his involvement with them” (Pp. 78-79). Another irony is witnessed when the masses decide, not to celebrate their leaders while still

alive, but posthumously. This is what happens to leaders such as Khomeini whose successes could only be realized, not in his personality, but in his photo. Thus, thousands of people gather during his funeral merely because they admire his portrait. This is contrary to what should be expected in a real life situation. Instead of showing their love for the dead, the crowd would have rewarded these leaders while they were still alive. It is so ironical to do that.

Conclusively, Mao II is a brilliant novel. Despite its realism complexities, it presents a clear picture of what happens in the contemporary American society. As a result of the use of irony, Don manages to clearly bring out the theme of the masses. The contributions of people like Bill, Karen, Chairman Mao, Brita, Charles and Khomeini justifies how the masses can be influential in shaping the destiny of the society. In deed, Mao II is an invaluable book which can be so resourceful in the understanding of the post-modern and contemporary society.

Works Cited

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