

Ideologies in it's
raining in mango, the
good corn, and eva
luna



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

An Ideology is a system of ideas beliefs and attitudes. They can lead to motivated reasoning, the subconscious desire not to find the truth, but to defend the version of reality that makes us feel most validated. In truth, an ideology is an umbrella that encompasses various different philosophies, that cannot always be deemed either all true or all false at once. Consequently, depictions of ideologies in literary texts such as *It's Raining in Mango* by Thea Astley become complex and even contradictory, as they attempt to validate or invalidate whole belief systems such as gender stereotypes and religion. This Australian novel can be seen as a series of short stories that span four generations of the Laffey family, from when they move to Australia in the 1860's right through to what would have been Astley's present day in the 1980's. Through the various pivotal points in each character's life, different aspects of these societal ideologies can be seen. Among those are the commonly held perspectives of gender, and religion. *It's Raining in Mango* is aimed to demonstrate how women are subordinated in society, and how religion has an effect of preserving the patriarchal structure that allows for this subordination. The complexities in the depiction of ideologies become clear when compared with other literary texts that both complement and oppose them, such as *The Good Corn* by H. E. Bates and *Eva Luna* by Isabelle Allende.

Thea Astley's *It's Raining in Mango* is often described as having a recurring motif of family values. Often overlooked in this book, is how it deals with couples who do not have a family, and how people of different sexes deal with not being able to reproduce, or not wanting to be a parent. In *Mango*, Harry Laffey marries Clytie and their marriage for the next four years is

described as being blissful as far as Harry was concerned. However this so-called ' blissful' period consisted of two miscarriages and a child who dies of pneumonia in it's second year. These sadistic feelings on the part of Harry's character are to show that he is comfortable impregnating his wife as frequently as possible, but uncomfortable with having children, and is therefore accepting of these deaths. After the fourth pregnancy, this comes to an end: " A muddled operation left her childless and made further pregnancies impossible." His reaction is described as: " Harry felt his masculinity assaulted." He is not affected by the prospect of never having children, but has difficulty with his inability to impregnate his wife, as he feels it invalidates his masculinity. This focuses on societies expectation of a man to be promiscuous enough to impregnate women, but not necessarily uphold any responsibility to the child or mother following the pregnancy. No perspective is given from Clytie, and so the reader does not know of any feelings of self blame on her part. This depiction of masculinity shows a strong dependence on an ability to reproduce, an idea that is contradicted in *The Good Corn*, a short story by H. E. Bates. When Joe Mortimer became aware that his wife was not having children, his reaction was very different: " If there were no children there were no children, that was nature, that's how it was." Mr Mortimer seems to take a logical and mature stance, where he realises that there is nothing he can do other than accept it, and does not see the situation as having any bearing on his self image as a male. His wife, however, descends into depression and self hatred, seeing her sterility as an invalidation of her femininity. Therefore these two texts have converse depictions of societal values toward gender expectations of child bearing,

where one shows pressure to reproduce as only effecting females, whilst the other includes males.

An ideology targeted by It's Raining in Mango is the concept of religion, and it's role in influencing the commonly held beliefs within society, mainly those that affect perceived roles of women. Sylvia is a character Nadine meets while working at a brothel. She is described as intelligent and well read, and proves this when she references William Blake: " Prisons are built with stones of law, brothels with bricks of religion." The reiteration of her intelligence alone defies the stereotype of her profession, and challenges the notion what promiscuous women lack honour or morals. The reference itself, is is a proverb taken from the ' proverbs of hell' section in Blake's book, The Marriage of Hell & Heaven. His statement is used to suggest that criminals exist as a result of laws, and similarly, brothels only exist as a consequence of religion in suppressing people's natural urges and thus creating a need for prostitutes. It is blaming religion for a creating an evil by attempting to control something that was never evil in the first place. Sylvia describes her childhood and what led her into her profession, at the centre of her backstory is her father: " A two faced bully of a Christian always with a hand up the maid's skirts." Her relationship with her father can be seen as metaphorical of the role religion plays in society. It identifies the same hypocrisy that William Blake describes, where religion plays a role in promoting promiscuity while also condemning it, because her father is Christian but also described as perverted. This same idea is present in Eva Luna, where Eva goes to confession: " Do you touch yourself with your hands child?" This is an unwarranted question posed by a priest to Eva, who was so

young she did not understand it's meaning. The abrupt nature of the question makes it seem intrusive, and pedophilloic. Like Sylvia's father, the priest represents the authority of religion and it's role in Eva's life and how it contradicts itself by partaking in the same thing it deplors. Both texts recognise and attempt to describe the faults in religion as an ideology, and complement each other by representing it's role in the same oppressive way.

Thea Astley's novel makes bold statements toward Christianity, and it's role in the systematic subordination of women. Astley makes no attempt to conceal these statements, but instead has Jessica Olive, a strong female character, berate Father Madigan: " Those reverences for the simple dogmas the poor unfortunate sisters drummed into me at the behest of a male hierarchy." This is significant, as it shows how religion, an organised means of swaying the beliefs of the masses, supports the interests of the male gender over the female. Thus creating an efficient medium to prevent women from escaping their inequity. In *Eva Luna*, the indoctrination of women described by Jessica Olive is evident. In the convent, Consuelo is taught about God, but did not truly accept what she was taught: " she preferred a more joyful, maternal and compassionate God." When she asks if the Mother of God has any authority over God, she is dismissed by the nuns. Clearly, this character is rejecting the notion that a God should be a male dominant figure. The idea that Christianity is used as a tool to perpetuate subordination and assert dominance is evident in the name of the prison, " Santa Maria," described as being an overcrowded, psychologically damaging place where prisoners are left starved and diseased. This is metaphorical of Thea Astley's view of the effects of religion on society, as the oppressive

ideals of religion are likened to a prison. Consequently, they confine women, among other minorities, within a social structure that others them.