

ENGLISH: *TWELVE ANGRY MEN*

Reginald Rose vindicates rather than destroys our belief in the jury system as a means of securing justice.” Do you agree?

Reginald Rose’s *Twelve Angry Men* explores the notion of reasonable doubt within America’s justice system by characterising twelve jurors as archetypes of American society in the 1950s. Throughout the play, Rose constructs a vivid relationship between twelve strangers, challenging their prejudices and personal biases in order to come to a united agreement. By focusing on the dynamics of group behaviour, he provides an insight on the flaws within the justice system and how it is these flaws which ultimately enhance the jury process in order to achieve the fairest outcome. In doing so, Reginald Rose vindicates rather than destroys our belief in the jury system as a means of securing justice. This is evident in Juror 11’s motivation to achieve justice compared to Juror 10, Juror 8’s ability “to stand alone against the ridicule of others” as well as Juror 3’s intimidation towards Juror 2 which serves as a barrier towards achieving justice.

Rose constructs Juror 10 as an archetype for the increasing fear in an affluent American society. Juror 10 represents the narrow-minded perspectives Americans had after the Cold War, fearing a change in power and an influx in the number of immigrants. Such values are demonstrated in the play where Juror 10 describes the defendant as “one of them”. He supports this heightened vein by claiming that “that are against us, they hate us, they are out to destroy us.” Upon hearing this, the audience are obliged to consider the fact that the defendant does not have a fair trial because of the clear prejudices against those from “slum backgrounds”. Nevertheless, Rose doesn’t intend to destroy our belief in the jury system and contrasts Juror 10’s personality by articulately characterising Juror 11 as an archetype for the change occurring in America. The fact that Juror 11 is an immigrant himself indicates that he has experienced much injustice in the past, and doesn’t want the same to occur for the defendant. When Juror 11 corrects Juror 10 by saying “He doesn’t even speak good English” this emphasises Juror 10’s fear of being powerless, and he displays this weakness in his verbal diatribe. Hence, Rose juxtapositions two archetypes of American society in order to demonstrate to audiences that although the presence of prejudice can act as a flaw within the jury system, it is the contrast in personalities of jurors which vindicates our belief in the jury system as a means for securing justice.

Juror 8 is presented as a defender of justice, who deliberates the case in a logical and reasonable manner in an attempt to “separate the facts from the fancy”. It is important to note that although Rose characterises Juror 8 as a charismatic and likeable person, as Juror 9 points out, he still “stand(s) alone against the ridicule of others.” When the Foreman called for an initial vote, there were 10 votes for “guilty” compared to Juror 8’s lone vote of “not guilty”. His response of “it is not easy for me to raise my hand and send a boy off to die” instils a sense of faith in the audience for the judicial system. In constructing Juror 8 as a lone wolf, it demonstrates to audiences that morals, values and a determination to seek justice will always override quick and rash decisions. Although such a rapid response for the defendant’s execution is formed, Rose ensures that the audience is never left to experience a lack of belief for the jury system. Rose uses Juror 8 to secure a sense of justice, ultimately proving to be effective when Jurors 9 and 5 respectively, “gave him (their) support” and hence, vindicating the system.

Rose ensures that although there are various characters such as Juror 10, Juror 11 and Juror 8 who assert a significant amount of power and are quite influential in the deliberation, there are also less opinionated jurors such as Juror 2 who become the victims of intimidation disheartening our belief in the jurors to voice their opinions to secure justice. It can be said that whilst Juror 2 is intimidated easily and is afraid to speak out, Juror 3 is the bully and is the source of such intimidation. This is clear when Juror 3 asks Juror 2, “what did you think of (the jury process)?” and Juror 2 responds that “I thought it was quite interesting.” Juror 3 proceeds to completely dismiss this comment, and rather focuses himself and how it is his experiences of “having (sat) on a jury before” which will enhance the jury process. The audience is exposed to Juror 3’s intimidation when “Juror

2 looks nervously at Juror 3 and proceeds to the washroom.” As the washroom is representative of a location where jurors can remove themselves from difficult situations, Rose forces the audience to sense flaws within the judicial system where it is the powerless which serve as a barrier towards securing justice. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Juror 2 does change his vote to “not guilty” before Juror 3. This proves that although Juror 2 can be intimidated easily, his desire to achieve justice outweighs his fear of those in greater power such as Juror 3. Hence, Rose demonstrates that although at times it may seem that the flaws within the jury system obstructs the path to justice, morals, values and determination will be prioritised in order to achieve the fairest outcome. Rose vindicates the jury system by proving that those who are powerless become significant figures in overriding those who seem to have a higher authority.

It is evident that by providing contrasting archetypes from American society in the 1950s, Rose vindicates rather than destroys our belief in the jury system as a means of securing justice. He explores the dynamics of group behaviour by demonstrating that there is always one person, in this case, Juror 8, who has the ability “to stand alone against the ridicule of others”. One’s motivation to achieve justice differs from person to person. Similarly the effect of intimidation only works to a certain extent depending on the strength of a character’s morals. Rose always ensures that there are people on either ends of the scale through the articulate characterisation of the jurors. Hence, although the flaws within the system are present in the audience’s mind, Rose ensures that our belief in the system is never destroyed and that justice will always be achieved.