Brook

Instructor Name

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Title: The crucible

Arthur Miller’s play *The Crucible* is a theatrical interpretation of the events surrounding the 1692 Salem witch trials. Salem, Massachusetts is a Puritan town in which religion plays a deep role. The term crucible refers to a metallic container that is used to heat something under high temperature. In the context of Miller’s play, it is used to signify a trial or a severe test. The witch trials in Salem are a result of the paranoia, hatred, turmoil, and hysteria among a people severely tested under pressure. The pressure causes the community to tear itself apart from corruption, hypocrisy, hysteria, and ignorance. An analysis of the play reflects the way a quiet Salem community could fall prey to their fears, ignorance, and hysteria and blame all their internal sicknesses on witchcraft.

The people living in Salem in 1692 were Puritans who have a considerably black-and-white view of evil and good. However, their simplistic notions also create an internalized hypocrisy within their society, which Miller demonstrates at various instances in his play. Characters who seem to be battling the work of the devil act seemingly act like devils themselves. The haste and ruthlessness in which people treat the suspected witches, in an attempt to purify their town, is the opposite of piety, and wreaking havoc in the town. The paranoia and chaos which erupts as a result puts the town into a crucible which leads to their internalized hypocrisy manifesting itself. The character Revered Hale describes the situation as “there are orphans wandering from house to house; abandoned cattle bellow on the highroads, the stink of rotting crops hangs everywhere, and no man knows when the harlots’ cry will end his life - and you wonder yet if rebellion’s spoke?” (Miller 130). Attempts to preserve puritan morality by the courts lead to the arrest and execution of suspected witches on basis of false accusations and lies alone. It is ironic to see a community disintegrating just as the power of its courts increase.

As the accusations of witchcraft spreads in Salem’s society, it leads to a massive buildup of hysteria that eventually grows bigger than the few sane voices left in the community. The hysteric people of the town are quick to accept any poor women, slaves, or beggars as practitioners of witchcraft upon the first accusation. The fact that some witches confess in hope of avoiding the death penalty, or that the confessions could have been coerced, or the accusers could be lying is ignored. For instance, when Abigail is questioned she quickly accuses Tituba of witchcraft to avoid any punishment. How hysteria affected individuals can also be seen from the way Danforth reacts to the petition that testifies the accused women to be of good character. He sees it as “a moving plot to topple Christ in the country!” (Miller 98), seeing anyone challenging the court’s decision to be involved themselves. Analyzing these reactions makes it clear that hysteria was twisting the perceptions of reality of the people of Salem, even those who are otherwise seen as reasonable.

The corrupt motives of Salem’s puritans often stay hidden behind their Puritan faith. This is observed from the way they treat John Proctor. Proctor’s virtue are seen as a satanic attempt to save the condemned. To expose Abigail and her follower’s deceit, he reveals his own adulterous affairs, yet even that was of no avail against the determination of the condemners. Ultimately, the whole town was involved in the hanging and desecration of the innocent, without questioning their own motives or the rationality behind their motives. In the end, Proctor, also chooses to die rather than provide a false confession that disgraces him in life. As he says, “How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!” (Miller 143). Despite his virtuous act, the corrupt motives of the accusers lead to the death of those who would not succumb to the corruption of their town fellows.

To conclude, Miller’s play attributes Salem’s condition to a number of underlying causes. Besides religious conviction, a number of factors such as the Puritan’s corruption, the manipulation and dispersion of mass hysteria, and the manifestation of the people’s internalized hypocrisy influence the actions and thoughts of the people. Ultimately, these lead to the condemnation and death of the virtuous and the innocent. In the end, it is ironic that those who claim to follow God, allow themselves to be driven by fears, hysteria, paranoia, and hypocrisy.

# Works Cited

Miller, Arthur. *The Crucible: A Play in Four Acts*. New York, NY: Viking Press, 1953. Web. <https://esprdg.cscmonavenir.ca/files/2013/10/21078735-The-Crucible-Arthur-Miller-2hmdzot.pdf>.