

“Fear of the unexplained can cause people to act irrationally and maliciously.” Compare how Year of Wonders and The Crucible explore this idea.

The fear of the unknown carried among individuals often results in brutal human actions, in which people will act holistically to compensate their fear and alleviate their stress. The tragic play The Crucible by Arthur Miller and the historical novel Year of Wonders by Geraldine Brooks, both texts explore that depending on one’s position, greed and preservation of life and power, individuals often act maliciously to counter-balance their fear, resulting in adverse impacts to both individuals and the community itself. Miller’s allegorical play parallels the 20th century McCarthy communist witch0hunt, alluding to the notion that regardless of the period of time, it is of human nature that one’s fear of the unexplained often breeds irrational actions and mass hysteria, sowing that history often repeats itself. While in times of crisis, both the powerful and the powerless may act diabolically to suit their own agenda and exploit on other’s power to satisfy their greed, both Miller and Brooks offer hope to a repressive society, accentuating that there are also other people who overcome their own fear and benefits the individuals and community in various ways.

In the repressive, patriarchal society of both Salem and Eyam, the authority who retains legitimate power often act inconsiderately to overcome their own fear, resulting in detrimental impacts to the vulnerable people in the society. In The Crucible, Miller explores the flaws of leadership arising from one’s fear by highlighting the flawed jurisdiction of the theocratic court. Judge Danforth’s preoccupation with self-preservation, daring to “hang thousands that rise against God”, shows the sinister side of human nature which leads to the death of the countless innocents among the isolated Salem. The authority’s fear of “witch-craft” in Salem is the catalyst that drives on people’s actions, thus allowing other powerless people who sees this as an opportunity to exploit the authoritative power for their own personal gain. While Judge Danforth place a large emphasis on rooting out evil to cease his own fear, Brooks shows that when people who have legitimate power experience fear, their actions often destroy the social fabric and leads to massive destruction in the community. In contrast to Judge Danforth who has a direct physical impact over the lives of the community, Colonel Bradford’s actions was completely overpowered by his own fear. In fearing that he will be infected by the Plague, Bradford sees himself as “having a chance” to retain his power nad position by flying off the Plague-ridden Eyam. This unreasonable and selfish action has not only destroyed the unity of the community, but moreover it breeds more fear amongst the powerless, particularly coercing the religious people to view the Plague as “God’s punishment” and thus commit further irrational acts. Hence both Miller and Brooks show that when authorities are dominated by their own fear, their actions will often have adverse impacts on the community and lives of individuals.

Alongside with the authority whose actions are directed by their own fear, some powerless individuals see this as an opportunity to combine their fear and greed to exploit on the authority’s power for their own personal and financial gain. Miller highlights the flaws o the human actions that can arise when the powerless exploit on the fear of the community. In The Crucible, as a lower-class servant with a low reputation in the society, Abigail manipulates Danforth’s jurisdiction by giving false condemnation. Her hatred towards Elizabeth and her excessive desire to win Proctor coerces her to abuse Danforth’s power and accuse Elizabeth that “she has sent out the evil spirit”. Abigail further plays on Danforth’s fear of God by threatening Danforth that “think you’re so mighty that you can turn against God’s wits”, thus showing the absolute manipulative nature that some powerless people can have over the community in crisis. While Abigail have managed to succeed in her own personal gain during the witch-trial, Jos Bont in Year of Wonders creates more fear on people for his own financial gain. Unlike Abigail who is able to kill from a distance, Jos builds on more

fear when he is desperate for more money as a grave digger, hence starting to bury people alive when his desire did not accomplish. Hence, both Miller and Brooks elucidate that while it is of human nature that people are confronted by the fear of the unknown, some individuals with no legitimate power see this as an opportunity to accomplish their desire.

