

**Prompt: Hysteria affects the communities of Eyam and Salem in different ways. Discuss.**

**Mark: 51/60**

Arthur Miller's play "The Crucible" and Geraldine Brook's novel "Year of Wonders" both determine the effects of fear in a closed setting. Both authors display different aspects of human nature in adversity; the need to find meaning, the urge to lay blame and the loss or enforcement of religious beliefs. The utilisation of closed, isolated communities allows Miller and Brooks to test individuals against hysteria, as well as to explore how individuals may contribute to communal responses.

In both "The Crucible" and "Year of Wonders", the first response communities have to crisis is to find meaning in their plight. Miller exploits Salem's eagerness to look for 'unnatural causes' when Betty falls ill. The community quickly concludes that it is the Devil's influence in Salem, and Abigail, knowing the town is desperate for 'clear signs', waits until hysteria peaks before confessing 'I never saw [The Devil]... Tituba... Tituba'. Tituba, being a black slave from Barbados, has little power to resist these accusations, and allows Miller to express the pressures of social class and their stereotypes. Similarly, in Eyam, the first to fall victim to superstition are the Gowdies, as they live on the fringe of society as 'widows', who 'meddle somehow in medicinals'. As hysteria peaks in both Salem and Eyam, knowing they have little power to resist accusations as members of the lowest rung of society, Tituba and Anys succumb to hysteria to give themselves an ascension of power. Anys used the town's own 'doubts and evil thoughts' to confess she is the 'devil's creature... I have seen your wives lie with him' and claim vengeance. Similarly, Tituba claims she called the Devil, however her claim is for survival, not vengeance. This mirrors 'The McCarthy Trials' Miller personally experienced in the 1950s, in which individuals were also pressured to give up the names of others for freedom and forgiveness. Miller's use of a historical play allows him to assert that humanity has not learnt from its mistakes, and that in adversity, 'long-held hatred of neighbours can be openly expressed, and vengeance taken.'

Both Miller and Brooks suggest that fear serves as a catalyst to test the faith of individuals. In 'Year of Wonders', Brooks allows us to experience Anna's discovery of the Plague as 'simply a thing in nature'. 'Dark and light... that was how I was taught to view the world' displays that Anna's Puritan views at the beginning of the book are already being questioned. Brooks' use of nature such as 'so it goes, a death and a birth both unlooked for and the description of the Plague sores as a 'piglet' suggests to the audience her view that the Plague is not sent by 'God nor the Devil', even before Anna discovers it herself. However, as villagers such as Kate Talbot indulge in spells from Anys' 'ghost', Anna is quick to dismiss them as she knows the community is 'so desperate and credulous' as a result of hysteria that 'they listen to these midnight whisperings'. This displays how humans readily succumb to superstition when in fear. Similarly, in Salem, Mary Warren 'thought [she] saw spirits' because the 'whole town cried spirits!'. Both Miller and Brooks assert that hysteria promotes suspicion, irrationality and in some cases, causes individuals to lose faith. Similarly to Anna, Reverend Hale is able to be 'rendered' by adversity, displayed when his 'hand shakes as if with a wound'. Contrastingly, John Proctor's faith is strengthened by his hysteria, whereas Michael Mompellion's beliefs crumbled. Crisis drove Proctor to cry 'God is dead!', and hence began his journey of his faith. His dilemma of 'what is John Proctor' leads him to the conclusion that 'God sees everything' and he states 'I confess to God!'. This enforces Proctor's strong faith not only to God, but to himself. On the other hand, hysteria drove Aphra to kill Elinor, which in turn causes Mompellion's faith to be 'broken'. This comparison allows the audience to infer that Miller mirrors himself in Proctor, and expresses that in times of hysteria, one must hold true to themselves.

In both Salem and Eyam, individuals' integrity are 'rendered' by communal fear. The confines of a year of crisis and fear allows Anna to reach her full potential and realise when she is free from the 'prison of our own election' that she is 'not Elinor... but Anna'. Anna's ability to break free from the social confines of the 1600s woman is reinforced by Brooks when Anna states she is 'Umm Jamee'; a new version of herself, a women 'rendered and made strong', where 'Michael Mompellion was broken by [their] shared ordeal'. Brooks explores here the strength of women in which she discovered in the Middle East as a reporter. Brooks implies that seemingly suppressed women in society may indeed be stronger than men, as suggested in her comparison between Mompellion and Anna. Miller also communicates his experiences through John Proctor and Rebecca Nurse. John Proctor, by discovering the value in integrity over lies, 'have his goodness now' implies Miller's own values of integrity. Nurse's ability to hold fast to her beliefs throughout the test allows Miller to argue that humanity should learn from history and stay true.

Miller and Brooks discuss the similar ways in which hysteria can influence both individuals and communities. They display the readiness for humans to seek supernatural meaning for their adversity as well as the need to eliminate the unknown, which includes outsiders such as the Gowdies and Tituba. Both authors also express the catalytical effects of fear on integrity, faith and strength, however Brooks focuses on the strength of women, whereas Miller supported the internal strength of any individual.

