

How do the authors of 'The Crucible' and 'Year of Wonders' explore the effect of fear on communities?

The impact of fear on the 1600's society is explored to a great extent by Geraldine Brooks and Arthur Miller in the novel 'Year of Wonders' and the play 'The Crucible'. The author of Year of Wonders and playwright of 'The Crucible' demonstrate how both externally and internally provoked fear can implement on the community. Both Brooks and Miller denote that a time of chaos and crisis can bring out what is best and worst in human nature. Whilst fear is conveyed to become the root of the accusations causing divisions in the community and the loss of faith in both the seventeenth century societies, on the brighter side, the positive response of fear is portrayed as communities are shown to unite and individuals display heroic characteristics in the two texts.

Year of Wonders shows how a bubonic plague can take a town hostage, both literally and figuratively, in a similar way to the outbreak of the internally sourced witchcraft trials in 'The Crucible', causing accusations of witchery. In Year of Wonders the terror spread by the disease exposes the dark side of the town demonstrating how irrationality can overtake decency. The villager's readiness to believe in the devil as the architect of the plague allows them to give reason to the spread of such a bubonic disease. When fear turns to rage, the impulse to blame quickly follows, causing the murderous attack on the Gowdie women. This tendency to blame others is conveyed through the character of Anna who understands that the communities *"hurts [are] so raw and fear [is] so great that [they] would lash out at anyone."* Likewise, in The Crucible, when Betty Parris refuses to wake, the general response is to look for "unnatural causes". The girls begin to falsely accuse others of "compacting" with the devil, to protect themselves from the punishment of dancing in the woods. Such dangerous accusation is fuelled by widespread belief in the devil. The desire to lay blame becomes strong, allowing *"long-held hatred of neighbours [to] be now openly expressed and vengeance taken."* It becomes obvious, that in both texts, those that are accused of witchcraft represent the 'other' and differ to the general society in one way or another. In Year of Wonders, the Gowdies are accused due to the susceptibility of charms and potions, whilst in The Crucible, outsiders are believed to have compacted with the devil, due to differences such as being a black slave, single woman or having an interest in books. Therefore, parallels can be drawn in the way societies turn to 'unnatural causes' to give reason to the crises, they are forced to face, and use this as an opportunity to display their darkest side through accusations of the innocent.

Both texts also highlight how the immense fear caused by tragedies such as the deadly plague and the hysteria caused by the cries of witchery result in divisions of the communities belonging to the towns of Eyam and Salem. In Year of Wonders, Anna describes fear as taking *"each of us differently"*, causing fragmentation of the society. This results in the close-knit community of Eyam to move in different directions and quarantine. Whilst some characters turn to the extremities of religion, such as John Gordon, who flagellates to *"allay God's wrath"* others such as Elinor and Anna explore the power of herbs and potions. Trepidation is also shown to drive the Bradfords, to abandoning the town, and results in Andrew Merrick's withdrawal from the village. Whilst fear starts the division within the community of Eyam, the already existing divisions are shown to exacerbate due to the terror caused by witchcraft in 'The Crucible'. Parris initially fears the presence of factions opposing his appointment, which eventually become stronger due to the fear of witchcraft. Further fragmentation occurs in 'The Crucible' due to the differences in beliefs and priorities. Whilst wealth and reputation stand above all for Parris and Putnam, Danforth's agenda is to protect the court and the theocracy it serves. Due to fear of the loss of the courts credibility Danforth becomes stubborn, which blinds him to the fraud being perpetrated by Abigail and the girls. On the other hand, the division leads to another group, which are known as the truthful characters that are able to see past

the pretence of the young girls. These characters including Proctor, Rebecca Nurse and Martha Corey are forced to confront their fears, allowing them to develop strong personalities. Large divisions also occur in 'The Crucible' due to the accusations that occur of the scapegoats. Therefore, differences can be drawn in the reasons of division within the communities of Eyam and Salem. Whilst the fear of an externally sourced crises causes some characters to quarantine in Year of Wonders, in hope of decreasing the spread of the plague, it is observed that fear is not the reason behind the fragmentation of the village of Salem. The differences within villagers and 'long held hatred' between neighbours causes the destruction of the village. Hence, whilst fear causes townsfolk to act in certain ways in both texts, unlike in 'Year of Wonders' fear is not the root to the divisions in the town of Salem, in 'The Crucible'.

Fear caused by externally and internally sourced crises also brings out the best in characters of Year of Wonders and The Crucible. Whilst the decision to enact a voluntary quarantine is the initial response to fear in Year of Wonders, Mompellion's leadership plays a major role in uniting the small town. Despite the differences that exist in religious faiths of the characters, and the fear of the spread of the disease, individuals begin to understand the need to be united at such a time of crises. With increasing loss of family members, the town of Eyam is left with no choice, but to unite as one family, assisting one another. This is seen in the way Anna confronts her fears, and enters the mine to help vulnerable Merry and when Elinor moves from house to house, checking on the wellbeing of her town members. Anna continues to display fortitude and determination when she endangers her own life to save Anys Gowdie from the depraved mob. Despite restrictions that her gender and class status impose on her, Anna's altruistic nature is crystallised when she delivers Mrs Bradford's illegitimate child and makes the profound decision to move to an unknown environment far from home, to raise the child. Hence, in Year of Wonders, the affection and protectiveness of the villagers towards each other intensifies during the time of crisis. In the village of Eyam "those with less somehow make a shift to share" despite the enormous burden entailed. Similarly, in The Crucible despite the fear of the consequences of his action, John Proctor confesses to his infidelity, making "a bell of [his] honour! ... rung[ing] the doom of [his] good name", in order to protect the innocent lives that are to be taken. Despite their fears, John Proctor, Gileys Corey and Francis Nurse continue to stand up against the court in hope of saving the lives of the vulnerable and bringing an end to the hysteria. Proctor is inspired by Rebecca Nurse's faith and eventually decides to follow her steps as he realises that he will "blacken all of them when this is nailed to the church the very day they hang for silence." Hence, in The Crucible the protagonist, John Proctor embodies the heroism of the townsfolk in overcoming the abhorrent effects of the pestilence. Both texts highlight the positive responses to fear caused by crises, through strong characters that display leadership and bravery.

Geraldine Brooks and Arthur Miller also explore how fear and difficulty can cause people's faith to undergo change. This can be seen when comparing the characters of *Michael Mompellion and John Proctor*. The faith these two personalities hold in god and society is tested through adversity. Proctor comes across as flawed from the beginning of the play, and then rises to claim his honesty at the end. This is obvious in the way he is unable to recite all his commandments at the beginning of the play, yet at the end sacrifices his life for the sake of religion. In contrast Mompellion begins the story as a good man, and then when Elinor dies he loses his faith in God which is obvious when "The book slip[s] through his fingers...and the Bible hit[s] the floor with a dull thud." His eventual affair with Anna presents Mompellion as much less idealistic than the way he began. His high ideals fall away and a baseness arises. The similarities between the two men's journeys are their crisis with God. Similarly, in Year of Wonders, Anna abandons her faith in God in an endeavour to find refuge in 'herb lore'. Brooks brings Anna's loss of religious beliefs to the forefront as is shown through the interior monologue "I have told Ahmed Bey that I cannot say I have faith anymore." Contrastingly, in

The Crucible Reverend Hales is shown to lose faith in the courts system of justice. The persecution of the innocent causes Hale to question the governing system in Salem and elements of his own faith. This is obvious when Hale decides to “denounce these proceedings,” and “quit this court!”. Thus, the internal and external crises in both texts causes faith to alter in the characters of both The Crucible and Year of Wonders.

Both texts demonstrate the effect of fear caused by external and internal crises, on the communities of Year of Wonders and The Crucible. Fear is shown to bring out both the worst and best in the villagers. Accusations of witchcraft are portrayed to be a by-product of the fear caused within the villagers. However, whilst fear is shown to cause fragmentation of the societies in both texts, it is also viewed as a uniting factor within groups, that allows positive villagers such as Anna and Mompellion in Year of Wonders and Proctor and Rebecca Nurse in ‘The Crucible’ to expose the good in human nature. Finally, the crisis with god and the society is also evident in both ‘Year of Wonders’ and ‘The Crucible’.

