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How Did Arthur Miller Teach A Lesson To The Communities Of His Time?

On January 22, 1953, Arthur Miller, a famous playwright, performed “The Crucible”, a historical fictional play known around the USA. This play sets the setting in Salem, Massachusetts, during the Salem Witch Trials. Characters in this play face internal and external conflicts while defending themselves from the court. Although it entertained audiences who watched “The Crucible”, Arthur Miller didn’t write the play to entertain audiences. He wanted to teach a lesson to the people during his time, when the Red Scare was going on. He wanted to show what the people of his time were doing wrong. *“In the 20th century, artists and scientists alike continued to be fascinated by the Salem witch trials. Playwright Arthur Miller resurrected the tale with his 1953 play The Crucible, using the trials as an allegory for the McCarthyism paranoia in the 1950s, (Jess Blumberg, Oct 23, 2007)”*. **In Arthur Miller’s play, “The Crucible”, he compares the ethics of the communities of the 1690s to the 1950s by using scapegoats, the Salem Witch Trials, and mass hysteria to teach a lesson to the people that a community has the potential to abuse it’s power and can cause harm.**

The community can use their power and scapegoat other people, usually for a silly reason, or sometimes for no reason. This can be abusive because someone could get executed or in very big trouble for something they never did. An example is in “The Crucible”, pg.22, RC, Act II, when *“That bloody mongrel Walcott charge her. Y’see, he buy a pig of my wife four or five year ago, and the pig died soon after. So he come dancin’ in for his money back. So my Martha, she says to him, “Walcott, if you haven’t the wit to feed a pig properly, you’ll not live to own many,” she says. Now he goes to court and claims that from that day to this he cannot keep a pig alive for more than four weeks because my Martha bewitch*

them with her books!,"(22). Apparently, Walcott scapegoated Martha just because he could not keep a pig alive. This is shown as a problem because Martha read books because she wanted to, not because she did witchcraft. Walcott may have been terrible at raising pigs, so maybe that is why he could not keep a pig alive for more than 4 weeks. However, Walcott did not believe that and he blamed Martha for his problems. Usually, people don't know the truth about their problems. Walcott didn't believe that he was terrible at raising pigs, or if there was a disease in the pigs. Women at that time were known as people who work at home, helping out with the house, and not intelligent. That's another reason Walcott blamed her for his problems. Later in the play, Martha was in jail because she was accused of witchcraft and didn't confess. Communities of this time period were so paranoid at their time, so they made a "confess or die" method. Based on scapegoats, the community did harm to the people because of scapegoats. If someone was accused of witchcraft, then obviously they did witchcraft. This is why Arthur Miller wanted to teach a lesson. He secretly taught the part of his lesson using this part of the play. Neel Burton, M.D., also explains about scapegoating by stating, "*A good example of a scapegoat is Marie Antoinette, Queen of Louis XVI of France, whom the French people called L'Autre-chienne - a pun playing Autrichienne(austrian woman) and Autre chienne(other b*t*h) - and accused of being profligate and promiscuous. When Marie Antoinette came to France to marry the then heir to the throne, the country had already been near bankrupted by the reckless spending of Louis XV, and the young foreign princess quickly became the target of the people's mounting ire*". This is an example of scapegoating. Some people will blame others for a reason that is not proven. Sometimes people will blame others just for a way to get out of something. Communities can abuse their power by blaming people for a reason that is not smart, false, not proven, or even for no reason. This can cause harm because in the Salem Witch Trials, people got hung due to the community abusing their power. Arthur Miller wanted to teach a lesson because during his time, people were scapegoating others of being a communist. Even he was scapegoated as a communist! He wanted to teach a lesson using scapegoating because people during his

time, before, and even now are being scapegoated. Some examples include muslims(terrorists), blacks(criminals), and hispanics(drug dealers). So, he demonstrated that anyone can be scapegoated usually for a bad reason, no reason, powerless, immigrant, etc. He also taught his lesson using the Salem Witch Trials.

Arthur Miller wanted to teach a lesson about how communities abuse their powers by using the Salem Witch Trials, which is all about Mass Hysteria and people scapegoating others for a bad reason. An example is in “The Crucible”, page 15, RC, Act I. *“Abigail: She comes to me every night to go and drink blood! Tituba: You beg me to conjure! She beg me make charm- Abigail: Don’t lie! She comes to me while I sleep; she’s always making me dream corruptions! Tituba: Why do you say that Abby? Abigail: Sometimes I wake and find myself standing in the open doorway and not a stitch on my body! I always hear her laughing in my sleep. I hear her singing Barbados songs and tempting me with- Tituba: Mister Reverend, I never- Hale: Tituba, I want you to wake [Betty]. Tituba: I have no power on [Betty], sir. Hale: You most certainly do, and you will free her from it now! When did you compact with the devil? Tituba: I don’t compact with no Devil! Parris: You will confess yourself or I will take you out and whip you to your death, Tituba! Putnam: This woman must be hanged! She must be taken and hanged!”*(15).

This quote shows how Arthur Miller taught a lesson. The reverend during the Puritan community had the most power, and in that time was Hale and Parris. Since Abigail was the niece of the reverend, she also had power. Hale and Parris wanted to force Tituba to confess or die just because Abigail said she compacted with the Devil, even with no proof. Tituba had no freedom of speech, since there was no constitution and that she was a slave. So, communities can abuse their power(people with most power are the threateners) and cause harm by making people “confess or die”, and the people who are getting threatened(who usually have little power) and forced to choose one: Lie and live with your name ruined, or die with truth. This explains Arthur Miller’s lesson because he wanted to explain that communities can cause harm with their powers. This part of “The Crucible” explains why(abuse of power). Another

example is again, by Jess Blumberg(Oct, 23, 2007), when he stated, *“In January of 1692, Reverend Parris' daughter Elizabeth, age 9, and niece Abigail Williams, age 11, started having "fits." They screamed, threw things, uttered peculiar sounds and contorted themselves into strange positions, and a local doctor blamed the supernatural. Another girl, Ann Putnam, age 11, experienced similar episodes. On February 29, under pressure from magistrates Jonathan Corwin and John Hathorne, the girls blamed three women for afflicting them: Tituba, the Parris' Caribbean slave; Sarah Good, a homeless beggar; and Sarah Osborne, an elderly impoverished woman. All three women were brought before the local magistrates and interrogated for several days, starting on March 1, 1692. Osborne claimed innocence, as did Good. But Tituba confessed, "The Devil came to me and bid me serve him." She described elaborate images of black dogs, red cats, yellow birds and a "black man" who wanted her to sign his book. She admitted that she signed the book and said there were several other witches looking to destroy the Puritans. All three women were put in jail. With the seed of paranoia planted, a stream of accusations followed for the next few months. Charges against Martha Corey, a loyal member of the Church in Salem Village, greatly concerned the community; if she could be a witch, then anyone could. Magistrates even questioned Sarah Good's 4-year-old daughter, Dorothy, and her timid answers were construed as a confession. The questioning got more serious in April when Deputy Governor Thomas Danforth and his assistants attended the hearings. Dozens of people from Salem and other Massachusetts villages were brought in for questioning”*. What could have happened to Abigail and Betty was that they could have gotten a mental sickness, but they blamed it on the three women, all because they were poor and powerless, and that it could be obvert to everyone that they could be witches. Arthur Miller decided to use the Salem Witch Trials because it was a terrible time and it repeated itself again, during the Red Scare/Menace, which was the time period during Arthur Miller’s time. He taught a lesson using the Salem Witch Trials because many pieces were in the Red Scare, and so his hidden message was in “The Crucible”. Communities, which in this case was Salem, abused their powers and forced anyone who

wouldn't confess to die. The person most portrayed as a leader was the reverend of Salem, which was Rev. Parris. His daughter and niece abused their power and blamed it on 3 powerless people, which the community sent them to jail. This ended up leading to more scapegoats, more hangings, and a mass hysteria.

During Arthur Miller's time, everyone was in a mass hysteria, worrying that communists will terrorize their country. So, they captured random people, forcing them to confess. This was similar to the Salem Witch Trials. As an example, Arthur Miller criticized the community of his time and their doings by Mass Hysteria. An example he used is in "The Crucible", pg. 39, RC, Act IV. "Hale: *Excellency, there are orphans wandering from house to house; abandoned cattle bellow on the highgrounds, 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? Better you should marvel how they do not burn your province!*" (39). The reason why all the trouble in Salem is happening is because the whole community has gone paranoid and is in mass hysteria. Due to this, most people in Salem have been sent to jail because they were accused of being a witch. This was terrible during the time it happened, so that is why Arthur Miller decided to incorporate it to criticize how the community is abusing their power. When there is a mass hysteria, mass amounts of people are paranoid that something is going to strike, such as McCarthyism. When there is a mass hysteria, the place with it is completely crazy. Arthur Miller wanted to criticize the communities of the 1690s to the 1950s and to teach a lesson using mass hysteria. Mass hysteria is one of the worst things that could happen in a country and no one will forget about it. Another example is by Neel Burton, MD, Mass Hysteria in America, last updated 17 Sep, 2017. "*In 1989, 150 children were attending a summer programme at a youth centre in Florida. Each day at noon, the children gathered in the dining hall to be served pre-packaged lunches. One day, a girl complained that her sandwich did not taste right. She felt nauseated, went to the toilet, and came back reporting that she had vomited. Almost immediately, other children began complaining of symptoms such as nausea, abdominal cramps, headaches, and tingling in*

the hands and feet. The supervisor announced that the food may be poisoned and that the children should stop eating. Within 40 minutes, 63 children were sick and more than 25 had vomited. The children were promptly sent to one of three hospitals, but every test performed on them was negative. Meal samples were analyzed but no bacteria or poisons could be found. Food processing and storing standards had been scrupulously maintained and no illness had been reported from any of the other 68 sites at which the pre-packaged lunches had been served. As in the case of the Orson Welles broadcast an atmosphere of tension and anxiety had been created, in this case, by the release two days earlier of a newspaper article reporting on management and financial problems at the youth centre. The children had no doubt picked up on the staff's anxiety, and this had made them particularly suggestible to the first girl's complaints. Once the figure of authority had announced that the food may be poisoned, the situation simply spiraled out of control. Mass hysteria is, thankfully, relatively uncommon, but it does give us an alarming insight into the human mind, and the ease with which it might be influenced and even manipulated by others".

This explains what Arthur Miller wanted to create the community of his time. Once a mass hysteria event starts, it can get out of hand. Just like in this article, when they thought the food was poisoned, other people thought that their school lunches were poisoned too, which led to a big stir. Arthur Miller's time period was during a mass hysteria, and it did get out of hand. When it gets out of hand, bad things can happen such as scapegoating, false confession, history repetition, and unfair punishment. With a hidden message, Arthur Miller can teach what we did wrong in America's past and what we shouldn't do to prevent another bitter event.

With "The Crucible", Arthur Miller was able to secretly criticize the communities wrongs of the 1690s to the 1950s by showing ethics with scapegoating, the Salem Witch trials, and mass hysteria . This is important to us because all of these 3 reasons can be dangerous. Scapegoating can lead to 'Confession Tapes', and people executed for no reason, or a reason without proof. The Salem Witch Trials was a heartbreaking period of time when a mass amount of scapegoated humans were executed for being a

witch, but the proof was usually silly. Mass Hysteria, like the Red Scare, can lead to scapegoats and people believing in lies, like in the Red Virus. With his lesson, it can possibly prevent people from doing things that can lead to another terrible pessimism event.

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