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“The Crucible” Essay

“Too many people undervalue what they are, and overvalue what they are not,” Malcolm Forbes said. Communities of the Red Scare and the Salem Witch Trials scapegoat others of being a communist, witch, or wizard, which is what they undervalue to have done, but then overvalue how clean they seem to be of sins. Hysteria also takes place in these communities, where they’d rather endorse a far-fetched cause for their physical illness than consider it is their mind powering over their body. Once more they refuse to believe they scapegoat, but where else would their anxiety come from? The fact that they scapegoated, when they said to have not? Regardless, there are some who remain silent and undervalue the impact they would make if they spoke up towards the ones who overvalue their power, like Judge Danforth and Senator McCarthy. These men had lacked the proof needed to rightfully testify the many accusations they made, so their power was instead based on how many they were able to accuse without it. Mainly, this is what arose during the Salem Witch Trials and the Red Scare, events that Arthur Miller compares in his play, “The Crucible.” In “The Crucible,” Reverend Parris finds a group of girls dancing in the forest, and among them are his niece Abigail and his daughter Betty. Knowing that they have sinned, the girls claim they were bewitched, and a court is established to testify their accusations. During the Red Scare, Communists were to blame for causing harm to

those who were not Communists. A court also held trials to testify Senator McCarthy's accusations. Through exploring the fear and uncertainty encountered by communities of the Red Scare and the Salem Witch Trials, Miller draws parallels between them that reveal human conditions of scapegoating, hysteria, and silence.

Scapegoating appears within the communities of Salem in 1692 and the Red Scare. In Arthur Miller's play, an instance of this is when Tituba admits to Reverend Hale, "No, no, don't hang Tituba! I tell him I don't desire to work for him [the Devil]... I do believe somebody else be witchin' these children... Man or woman. Was- was woman... And I look [next to the Devil]- and there was Goody Good... and- and Goody Osburn..." (13). Reverend Hale replies, "You have confessed yourself to witchcraft, and that speaks a wish to come to Heaven's side. And we will bless you, Tituba" (Miller 14). Tituba then says, relieved, "Oh, God bless you, Mr. Hale!" (Miller 14). To clarify, Tituba claims she saw witches Goody Good and Goody Osburn with the Devil after she admitted her sin of practicing witchcraft. This evidence shows that Tituba scapegoated these women out of uncertainty, only to relieve the guilt she feels from her sin because she feared being hanged. At the same time, Tituba inferred that Goody Good and Goody Osburn would suffer the same punishment as her for committing the same crime, even when both goodwives had not. Another situation of this is brought up from the Red Scare, as university student Andreanna Hughes explains, "The mindset of fear is influencing powerful people within the United States to use it to their advantage. Senator Joseph McCarthy was doing just that in winning the support of many U.S. citizens..." (Hughes, 2016). Interpreting this evidence, Senator McCarthy used his community's fear to gain support from them. This means that, being the powerful person he was, the fear he created came from scapegoating others he believed were

Communists. He seems to have relieved the guilt and uncertainty he feels for his scapegoating actions by associating with other powerful people on Communist relations, so he knew he was not the only one doing them but also thinking they are based off of existing reason to. Moreover, the community imitated McCarthy, as fear and uncertainty passed from one to another. This influence of power, or how many he was able to accuse with only explicit assumptions to back up against them, was displayed on his community and led to hysteria.

Hysteria can be recognized in the events of the Red Scare and the Salem Witch Trials. In “The Crucible,” Reverend Hale opposes Abigail in court by arguing, “I believe him! [John Proctor and his confession of committing lechery against his wife, even when she denied it to save him.] This girl [Abigail] has always struck me false!” (Miller 35). Abigail Williams suddenly exclaims, “Why do you come, yellow bird?... You cannot want to tear my face. Envy is a deadly sin, Mary” (Miller 35). In defense, Mary Warren pleads, “Abby, don’t do that!... I’m here! I’m here!” (Miller 35). Arthur Miller then describes what Abigail does as a result of this: “*Now mimicking the exact tone of Mary Warren’s cry: ‘I’m here, I’m here!’ [The rest of the girls who danced in the forest mimic her as well:] I’m here, I’m here!’*” (35). Judge Danforth then pounds into Mary, “Why can they only repeat you?... Mary Warren, do you witch her? I say to you, do you send your spirit out!” (Miller 35). This source shows that Abigail is scapegoating Mary of witchcraft by pretending that there is a yellow bird, or her spirit trying to attack her, even when she had screamed that she was ‘here’ in her own body. This is only so Abigail can evade the punishment she would have received if Reverend Hale continued to make his point that she is lying about the accusations, and are only for her to be the wife of John Proctor. However, Mary is anxious as Judge Danforth leans into her face, the court believes she is a

witch, and the girls mimic everything she says. This is where she turns hysterical of the situation and, like Abigail, blames John Proctor to evade her punishment by crying out, “You're the Devil's man!” (Miller 36). Historian Christopher Klein marks another example of hysteria in the Red Scare as he explains, “During the investigative hearings, members of HUAC grilled the witnesses about their past and present associations with the Communist Party. [They were] aware that their answers could ruin their reputations and careers...” (Klein, 2016). Based on this information, many people were accused and brought in for deep questioning. This is after being the targets of scapegoaters, or the acclaimed “witnesses,” all so they could stay away from the blacklist. Therefore, this was what made them hysterical as to have scapegoated. The questioning was also difficult to answer to, as their responses could destroy their reputations and careers, so it was common for the accused to remain silent- even when they knew punishment was heading towards them.

Lastly, the human condition of silence is found within the communities of Salem and the Red Scare. Once Abigail and the girls mimic Mary, Arthur Miller’s play has John Proctor argue, “They’re pretending!... she [Mary] has signed a deposition, sir” (33). Judge Danforth then replies, “No no, I accept no depositions” (Miller 33). This evidence shows that when Abigail scapegoats Mary of witchcraft, John Proctor brings a deposition Mary signed, claiming it is false. In this certain accusation made by Abigail, the court refuses to be swayed as easily as they did the rest. This is because the community felt fear and uncertainty from the lack of proof of Abigail’s older accusations. Nevertheless, nothing is said since the court becomes uncertain of who to believe for the fact that there are witches in Salem, after Judge Danforth told off John Proctor. This is until Judge Danforth now questions him, “You are charging Abigail Williams

with a marvelous cool plot to murder, do you understand that?" (Miller 31). After framing the assumption that Abigail would not murder, Judge Danforth confirms that the deposition is indeed meaningless to him and that there are witches in Salem. This understanding is silently taken by the community, who then realize it is pointless to speak up like John Proctor attempted with actual proof. Therefore, just like Senator McCarthy, Judge Danforth's power from being able to accuse many stands true by only making explicit assumptions, which leaves his community with silence. "The New Yorker" magazine gathers primary sources of Arthur Miller, which shows an example of silence during the Red Scare: "The Crucible was an act of desperation; Miller was fearful of being identified as a covert Communist if he should protest too strongly... Miller found his subject while reading Charles W. Upham's 1867 two-volume study of the 1692 Salem witch trials, which shed light on the personal relationships behind the trials [and his era]" (Miller, 1996). Based on the text, Arthur Miller aimed to incorporate the foolishness of the time he was living in, the Red Scare, into "The Crucible." He meant for the play to be a protest, but he feared he would be labeled a Communist if its resemblance to his era would be identified too easily. This is why he thought it was best to remain silent and not hint the audience at all or excessively.

Arthur Miller reveals the harsh truth of how the body can be driven by the mind when fearful in times of the Salem Witch Trials and the Red Scare, which both communities face with hysteria, the act of remaining silent, and the use of scapegoating. This fear has consumed US citizens three prior times in history. Further parallels can actually be made between President Donald Trump, Judge Danforth from Salem, and Senator McCarthy of Wisconsin. In this perspective, Trump is pushing blame for the problems within the United States on others- alleged

Muslims and Mexicans. Then as now, many US citizens look to leaders who promise a method of keeping out an exterior threat. These leaders may even add on to what is already interpreted negatively by them, or entirely create convincing reasons as to why they should be considered that. Judge Danforth from Salem displays the same tone towards US citizens in “The Crucible,” who were longing to eliminate the witches and wizards in town. Senator McCarthy was able to bring in millions of US citizens with his lists of alleged Communists, and also did the same to keep them out. These men made these scapegoating attempts to ease the fear coming from their communities. One can conclude that, as lessons to our society, we should seek an explanation for these mistakes, whether they are caused psychologically or with intended purpose.

Works Cited

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