Analysis Of Hysteria Of McCarthyism In The Crucible

Human experiences are built on the context of their time, influenced by the values of individuals and collective to dictate their judgements and actions. Arthur Miller's allegorical tragedy The Crucible (1953), explores the scenes of the 1692 Salem Witchtrials in Salem, Massachusetts, and was written to highlight the similarities with 1950's McCarthyism. Through the Crucible, Miller explores significant individual and collective experiences and ideas such as hysteria; uncontrollable excitement or disruption from normality, status and guilt, allowing him to present to the audience how relationships function within society. Miller does this through highlighting the anomalies, inconsistencies and paradoxes between experiences to allow the audience to consider what connects us and makes us uniquely human.

Miller shows how hysteria within a community will ultimately lead individuals to show their inherent nature and allows the audience to consider what makes them uniquely human. As Salem was a Christian Theocratic society, witchcraft was linked to the devil which resulted in mass hysteria within the community. During the 1950's, Miller experienced hysteria through the communist scare and the House Un-American ACtivities Committee (HUAC). Miller explores this through the changing characterisation of the Protagonist John Proctor, as seen through the authorial intrusions and dramatic irony to be; "kind of man, powerful of body, not easily led."As hysteria builds within the play, Miller shows its effects through Proctor, as he is wrongly convicted and hung for witchcraft, as seen through"(with a cry of his soul)... I have given you my soul, leave me my name," showing how Proctor will not sign his life away with his name, thus dying with integrity. Miller demonstrates the unique human characteristic of a soul and a name to comment on individuals changing integrity as it is likened to his own experiences during the era of McCarthyism where he was wrongly imprisoned much like Proctor.

Through the characterisation of Proctor, Miller shows individual human experiences and how a highly respected man is changed through ysteria, to allow the audience to ponder on their own kinesthetic and extrinsic relationships and to also consider what connects and makes them uniquely human.

Miller further explores the effect of hysteria on the individual and the collective through the need for representation and status within Salem through greed. Through authorial intrusions and the characterisation of Reverend Parris, Miller explores the need for individuals to have power and status within The Crucible which ultimately leads to their loss of power and reputation. The opening of The Crucible is significant as it provides a representation of the character of Parris. The audience is positioned to empathise with pArris as his daughter "lays inert on the bed," however we learn that he is only concerned about "golden candlesticks", material goods and his self representation within Salem. This is highlighted through"(to Abigail) just now as some respect has come to me in this parish, you compromise my very character," where Parris is fearing for reputation within Salem, showing how in times of mass hysteria, individuals prioritise their own needs rather than societies needs. Miller is able to explore how the unique human characteristic of greed leads individuals to prioritise their own betterment in times of hysteria, as seen through the characterisation or Parris. Furthermore, through Act IV, the audience sees Parris conversing with "witches" accused of witchcraft. However, through authorial notes and stage directions it is seen that Parris is there to protect himself as the building hysteria causes

him to fear for his position and his life as seen through “Do not kill people like him [Proctor], there is danger for me.” Through the characterisation of Parris, Miller comments on how greed and hysteria will lead individuals to remorse of their actions and allows the audience to consider their own relationships, and ponder on their own experiences of greed and shifting character.

Miller explores how hysteria can lead to guilt and remorse through Reverend Hale’s misjudgment of character and engagement with corrupt authority. Reverend Hale is characterised as being an overconfident witch hunter wanting to “duel with the devil.” Miller uses this anecdote to from the remorse of Hale where he was introduced as a confident witch hunter and voice of reason, but is later seen to not be so. As the trials progress, Hale realises that he has been deceived by teenage girls and is doubting his actions regarding his role in executing condemned “witches” and fleas Salem. Unlike Parris, Hale is back in Salem to admit and undo his wrongdoings and clear the “blood” from his head, as seen through the repeated blood motif; “there is blood on my head can you not see the blood on my head!” This exclamatory statement highlights the power of guilt on the individual and how it allows individuals to become more connected as a result, such as Hale and Proctors strengthened relationship. Through the end of the play, Hale is seen with the accused “witches” and tries to convince them to confess to witchcraft, even through they will be lying. This characterisation shows Hales remorse as he is trying to undo his actions and help those convicted and allows Miller to effectively comment on the power of guilt, as Hales realises his engagement with corrupt authority. Through Hale, Miller comments on the relationships between individuals and groups and positions the audience to do the same as well as extrapolate on their own times of misjudgement and collusion with corrupt authority, much like Miller did during McCarthyism.

Through the Crucible, Arthur Miller depicts the scenes of the 1692 Salem witch trials to comment on his own experiences in the 1950’s as well as to highlight the relationships individuals have within themselves and with others. Miller achieves this through his highlighting of the anomalies and inconsistencies within human behaviour within Salen. This allows the audience to question their own experiences through understanding the paradoxes within human relationships, as well as to ponder on what connects us and makes us uniquely human.