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English III

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*The Crucible* and McCarthyism Common Theme Paper

Several Societies have laid in ruins and regret from a cause of a person’s or group’s selfish aim. Germany suffered from Hitler’s selfish acts to expand his country, to get revenge and to massacre all Jews. The Trojan war killed thousands just because one man wanted to expand his empire and because his brother wanted the most beautiful girl in the world as the legend has it. Many have used fear such as Isis now controlling the middle east with fear. Then In 1952, an author named Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible* as an allegory to the corruptness of McCarthyism. *The Crucible* is a work of fiction that has characters who use witchcraft accusations to get what they want and the other is real life where the fear of Communism ran everything in the United States. Joseph McCarthy used this fear to his advantage. These situations have many parallels as both societies get devastated from the actions the society took because of these people. Both *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller and McCarthyism illustrate the common theme when people use fear and suspicion as a weapon to accomplish a selfish ambition, they will ruin the society they are a part of.

Joseph McCarthy lead a crusade that turned into one of the biggest witch hunts in American history just to get to a certain political position. During the Cold War, America was fighting the Communist enemies overseas. Therefore, any person that was or got accused of being associated with Communism was immediately struck down. Joseph McCarthy used this supersticion of Communism to his advantage when it came to running for Republican Senate. The document, Joseph McCarthy,shows his selfish ways when it states, “... in 1946, McCarthy again sought the Republican Senate nomination… McCarthy harped on La Follette’s war time isolation… and falsely accused him of financial irregularities” (Joseph McCarthy). McCarthy ruined La Follete’s chance to get the nomination by lying about his financial status and connected it to something that was perceived as horrible. He didn’t just lie about La Follete, when it came time to face his opponent McMurray, he also lied as the document says, “McCarthy branded McMurray as ‘communistically inclined’... he won 70 of 71 counties” (Joseph McCarthy). The counties feared having a Senator that was “comministically inclined” and McCarthy knew if he used this fear to cause suspicion within these counties, it would be an easy win for him. He ruined McMurray’s future aspirations of becoming anything else especially in the government as from now on he would be branded as an evil communist even though he is not. Herblock’s History shows that President Harry Truman realized McCarthy’s tactics and was opposed to them when it states, “... President Harry Truman spoke against ‘scaremongers and hatemongers’ who ‘are trying to create fear and suspicion among us by the use of slander, unproven accusations, and just plain lies’”(“Herblock’s History”). Even with Truman’s resistance to these lies, McCarthy still succeeded in spite of these lies because he knew he could use the amount of fear and suspicion America had to his advantage. He furthers his selfish agenda by compiling a list of several communists. This is shown in the article, McCarthyismwhen it states:

 McCarthy claimed in a 1950 speech to have compiled a list of 205 Communists who had infiltrated  the U.S. State Department; upon later investigation he was unable to provide the names of or evidence against any of them. In 1953 he became chair of the Senate’s Government Committee on Operations and head of its subcommittee on investigation, a position of power that allowed him to further carry out his campaign against supposed communist espionage. (“McCarthyism”)

McCarthy was unable to provide sufficient evidence but even though there was no proof, he still advanced his position through the fear of other Americans by telling them that he had a list of 205 communists. He then was the head of a committee to expose and destroy this so called Communist espionage. The American people that were tricked by McCarthy’s accusations mirror most of the characters from *The Crucible* that believe any accusations thrown their way. Abigail and her girl pack headlined most of these accusations as all they wanted was personal gain and to follow Abigail.

*The Crucible* took place in the non fictional location of Salem, Massachusetts and was inspired by the Salem Witch Trials and the era Arthur Miller lived in. The fictional story in many ways can be compared to McCarthyism as several of the characters use other’s fears and suspicions against their own society to gain personal joy and goals. The most prominent character that destroys the society is Abigail Williams. John Proctor had cheated on his wife with her and now wants to cut ties. The play shows Abigail's personal objective when her cousin, Betty says, “You drank a charm to kill John Proctor’s wife! You drank a charm to kill Goody Proctor!” (Miller 148).  Her motive is seen as she wants Goody Proctor or Elizabeth Proctor to die so that she can have John Proctor for herself and because of her hatred towards Elizabeth. Abigail is possibly the only one that has been involved in witchcraft which shows her true character and proves she is a horrible, selfish, hypocritical person. When she gets confronted for her devilish ways, she pleads guilty, begs for forgiveness and falsely accuses others to divert attention away from her. Abigail starts the destruction when she states, “I want the sweet love of Jesus! I saw him; I wrote in his book; I go back to Jesus, I kiss his hand. I saw Sarah Good with the Devil! I saw Goody Osborn with the devil! I saw Bridget Bishop with the devil” (162). In this moment, she just doesn’t accuse those in the quote, she accuses a total of six people. Arthur Miller uses repetitive word choice by saying “Jesus” and “I” numerous times so that Abigail can be emphasized as a noble character that is now going down a holy path. He also writes Abigail’s lines in a positive connotation to trick the others by lying about seeing people with the devil when in reality she is actually ruining other people’s lives just to get herself out of trouble and to continue her egocentric path that ruins Salem. She is not the only one to destroy others. Goody Putnam accuses Rebecca Nurse of killing her seven unborn babies for jealous reasons. Rebecca Nurse symbolizes the most noble character in the play and many believe she would never be able to have this villainy behavior. She is so noble that Hale states, “Believe me Mr.Nurse, if Rebecca Nurse be tainted, then nothing’s left to stop the whole green world from burning… The court will send her home, I know it” (174). At this point of the story, Rebecca is in jail because of the selfish behavior of Goody Putnam. Hale says “the whole green world” which in this case, green symbolizes fertility, harmony, and safeness. This statement foreshadows that Salem’s green, safe world will soon burn and that Rebecca Nurse will be one of the characters that suffers injustice. In the play Abigail accuses Elizabeth of using a voodoo doll to attempt to kill her, therefore moving the plot forward with John having to save her. Proctor takes Mary Warren to the court and compels her to tell the truth about the doll and Abigail. When Mary starts to tell the truth, Abigail and her pack of girls make it seem as if Mary is performing witchcraft right then and there. Abigail goes crazy and says, “The wings! Her wings are spreading! Mary, please, don’t, don’t-” (196). Abigail and her pack put the fear of death in Mary by doing these actions making her blame John of witchcraft and undermining the court. This leads to John, a very respected man in town, being thrown in jail. Once again, Abigail uses fear and people’s suspicion of witchcraft to destroy lives in her society. She knows that anyone, especially Judge Danforth, will believe anything she says. These actions from Abigail, the girls, and Putman will lead to devastation and same goes for the United States as McCarthyism will take away people’s livelihood.

The destruction of McCarthyism would show it’s face since several people had lost their way of life, jobs, and friends. This careless destruction was illustrated in several political cartoons during the time period. One cartoon titled “It’s Okay-We’re hunting Communists” presents two men from the ‘Committee of Un-American Activities’  plowing through a crowd of people running them over with a car with no care for the people around them (Block). This demonstrates the careless acts by people under McCarthyism and how they had no care for other people, just themselves. The car symbolizes the people involved with McCarthyism and the people on the street symbolize the American citizens that are losing jobs because of the destruction that the reckless car causes. It also shows that the hunt was over-dramatic and blown out of proportion like the Salem witch trials. The hunt for Communists was so blown out of proportion that it caused the economy to fall. The article, McCarthyism*,* emphasizes the loss of jobs and lives when it states, “By the time that repression sputtered to an end in the late 1950s, thousands of men and women had lost their jobs, hundreds had been deported or sent to prison, and two-Ethel and Julius Rosenberg-had been executed” (Schrecker). McCarthyism had killed two human beings, a devastation hard to overcome, caused by selfish, out of control acts by people associated with McCarthyism. People were so terrified it caused innocent people to lose their jobs or careers, and livelihood as a lot got deported and sent to prison. This fear and suspicion all started when McCarthy started to wield people’s fears and suspicions as a weapon to get into higher positions. He was so selfish that he went to the extent of ruining innocent people’s lives and causing an economic failure for many families. The United States would soon see this madness as McCarthy stepped over a line and accused his own United States Army. His trial would be televised publicly and the government would censor McCarthy live on television to show his actions were wrong and to stop this catastrophe. McCarthy lived a quiet, boring life after he left the political scene and he obviously had demons haunting him. The article, “Joseph McCarthy” shows his battle with regret and inner-demons when it says, “Never known for his sobriety, that same year on May 9, at age 48, one of the most feared figures in American history consciously and deliberately drank himself to death” (“Joseph McCarthy”). McCarthy’s selfish ambition didn’t just ruin his society, it ruined him too. This also shows that others that knew about this corruption but did nothing and were also filled with regret as any human would be. It is obvious that his own selfishness ruined him as he wanted to drown his sorrows in alcohol until he would face his death because of the horrors he caused. They were so horrific that Arthur Miller compared the Salem Witch Trials to it. The society in *The Crucible* would face similar but far worse consequences as several people would be hanged for lies and a people’s selfish needs.

*The Crucible* opens up its aftermath in act four as it reveals the dark state that the society is in. The dusky condition is set when the stage directions state, “The place is in darkness but for the moonlight seeping through the bars… Marshal Herrick enters with a lantern. He is nearly drunk and heavy footed” (Miller 200). Marshal Herrick was once a man with integrity but now drinks his demons away from regret of sending so many people to hang even though he knows they are innocent. Herrick’s characterization alludes to McCarthy’s addiction to alcohol and could have even foreshadowed McCarthy’s own death as both of them drink to feel numb and to escape their guilt. It can be determined that Abigail and the girls have ruined this man as they have made him arrest several non guilty citizens because of their false claims. Salem is so lost in suspicion that the character, Cheever, compares the citizens to cows when he says, “There be so many cows wanderin’ the high roads, now their masters are in the jails, and much disagreement who they will belong to now”(202). Most people may think he is talking about real cows but this statement metaphorically corresponds to the citizens of Salem roaming like cows because they are so caught up in suspicion and fear of witchcraft and do not know what to do as some are now starting to second guess their government and these hangings. Abigail notices that her and the girls have gone to far and robs her uncle, Parris and leaves town. She knows she has committed felony level acts and is now fleeing to save her own life showing that she is still selfish with no integrity. The accusations take on a huge death toll and it is evident that the society has gone crazy when Danforth states, “Them that will not confess will hang, twelve are already executed; the names of these seven are given out, and the village expects to them die this morning” (204-205). A total of nineteen people will be dead by that morning he speaks of. Danforth is so caught up in fear that he is intolerant to any possibility that the accused are innocent. Abigail and the accusers knew of this intolerance and used it to kill people they disliked and, in return, ruining the society. Abigail ruins another prominent person in the story named Reverend Hale who is consumed with guilt. His guilt shows when he says, “I would save your husband’s life, for if he is taken I count myself his murderer” (206). Hale’s guilt overwhelms him and he feels accountable if John were to be hanged. All of this guilt and regret felt by these people all started with Abigail’s selfish nature when she drank blood and accused a ton of people of witchcraft that lead to chain reactions and several deaths. In the end of the story, the nicest, kindest, symbolic Rebecca gets hanged next to one of the most respected people in town, John Proctor. The killing of Rebecca symbolizes the killing of harmony and safeness of Salem because by hanging her, they prove that there is nothing to stop their green world from burning with regret and guilt. Abigail’s and Putnam's actions lead to the death of these two innocent, righteous characters and brought on grief throughout the town and ruined many lives like Elizabeth who is now a widow, and Hale who feels tremendous guilt. Many others show this grief, guilt, and burning regret that ruined Salem. In the actual history of the Salem Witch Trials, it is known that the people of the town felt so guilty they took a whole day to fast and beg for forgiveness once they realized what the town had truly done. People only ask for forgiveness when they have committed a wrong doing and it is clear that the whole town has done wrong to several people. The grief, regret, and guilt cripple this society as now everyone is the society feels this overwhelming need to be forgiven. In conclusion, this regret filled society could have never happened if Abigail was never selfish, trying to kill Elizabeth with witchcraft and used people’s suspicions against them. These issues all stemmed from people who had a dangerous, selfish agenda to accomplish a jealousy filled goal like Mrs.Putnam and Abigail Williams.

These two parallels both demonstrate that when selfish people have the power to use fear and people’s suspicions against them, that they will cripple their society if they choose the path to ruin people's lives to accomplish their own egocentric goal. They demonstrate this through consequences of Abigail’s, Mrs.Putnam’s, and McCarthy’s actions and show how a vain person will stop at nothing until they have what they desire. These two subject matters are perfect examples of how societies today get ruined. In today’s world, a huge group of terrorists called Isis threatens the whole world. They use fear to spread their message and utilize bombings and shootings to accomplish a radical, religious, self centered goal. They have destroyed Iraq and Syria, have killed thousands in the name of their God and will continue too until they are stopped. They destroy civilizations with no care for the people living there. They brought America’s spirits down with the attacks of September 9th, 2001 and do so in many other countries like France, Libya, and Spain. There is also a danger within small communities. There are numerous gangs in the world but they are most prominent in the United States. Gangs advance their selfish greed through crime. They rob people of their hard earned money, they kill anyone that gets in their way and they use tactics to put fear into citizens hearts. They do this with no care for others just like McCarthy and Abigail because they stop at nothing to accomplish their goal of rising in power, recognition, and getting money. They reside mostly in the “hoods” of states where poverty thrives and is why they have their greedy heart and kill for selfish reasons to get out of the “hood”. It is their own gang violence that contributes to the devastation of “hoods” but they are too blind to see that because they only care for themselves. Hopefully society can learn from Arthur Miller’s response to McCarthyism. Hopefully gang members realize their mistakes just like how the citizens of Salem and the United States government did. Hopefully in the future Isis will be stopped completely by force or by peace. Both the Salem Witch Trials and McCarthyism were stopped and the societies still live on today, just with a dark past. Hopefully society can stop these two major selfish ambitions before it becomes impossible to come back from the ruins left behind.

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