Hysteria In The Crucible Essay, Research Paper

Hysteria

Many occasions of mass chaos and ultimate breakdown of society directly

result from hysteria. Hysteria means total loss of control of what seems rational and

righteous. If a community falls into such a state, the results can be devastating. The

Puritan society possesses the perfect conditions for such an event. In Arthur

Miller s play, The Crucible, hysteria plays a key role as the main theme. It portrays

as the main theme because it often becomes the atmosphere of the play and the main

motivator of the character s actions.

First, hysteria seems to take on as the atmosphere of the play, not to

mention that the whole play portrays a hysterical mood. In all four acts of the play

hysteria, in some way, comes out. In act one, hysteria prevails towards the end of

the play when Mrs. Putnam and the others prosecute Tituba. At the beginning of

the prosecution Tituba swears she has never seen nor been in contact with the devil.

As they beat her and tell her if she does not confess then she will be hanged, she

suddenly changes her mind and in a hysterical burst shouts, And then he come one

stormy night to me and say, Look! I have white people belong to me. And I look

and there was Goody Good…Aye, sir, and Goody Osborne. (p.44). Then more

hysteria takes over the scene as Abigail stands and says, I want to open myself! I

want the light of God; I want the sweet love of Jesus! I danced for the Devil; 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 Osborne with the Devil! I saw Bridget Bishop with the

devil. (p.45). Then the whole scene erupts into one big hysterical mess as Betty

awakes to shout out her sightings of the devil. The girls continue to shout out

random names of the townspeople as the curtain falls, leaving the audience in a total

chaotic atmosphere.

The other reason hysteria acts as a main theme is because it causes all of the

other events in the play. Each time someone acts hysterical, other people become

nervous and hysterical. In act three, Abigail begins the hysteria and chaos by

pretending to suddenly feel a cold wind and see a black bird in the air. She claims it

is Mary Warren and she feels her spirit in her. This of course puts Mary in a state

of shock. Mary then cries out, Let me go Mr. Proctor, I cannot, I cannot. (p.101).

Mr. Proctor then shouts at Abigail, How do you call heaven! Whore!

Whore! (p.101). Then Proctor tries to ruin Abigail by confessing to his sin of

adultery. He fails at doing so and afterwards Abigail starts up again with the black

bird thing. This time Abigail s hysteria sparks all the other girls to side with her

and act as if they see the bird as well. Now Mary becomes totally hysterical

pleading for Abigail to stop. Finally Mary breaks down and pointing at Proctor

says, You re the Devil s man! The whole scene erupts and the judges become

hysterical and believe Mary. The scene ends with the jailing of Proctor.

In conclusion, hysteria seems as the main concept though out the play.

Miller deeply conveys this in every act and shows its devastating effects. He gives

the play a hysterical atmosphere and mood in order to stress the theme even more.

Just the fact of hanging people for witchcraft comes off as a lunacrest idea in

today s courts. Overall, Miller deeply stresses hysteria in the play so the reader will

be more aware of its presence in our history and in every day society as well.