

What do the texts suggest about human behaviour in crisis?

Both Eyam and Salem face crisis which challenge individuals to lead their community and restore it, and some are able to eventually subdue the delirium. However, both *Year of Wonders* and *The Crucible* contend that the darker, selfish side of human nature is often revealed in crisis, where the majority will attempt to save their own skin, allowing the situation to devolve into hysteria. As crisis causes wrong and right to become blurred, people's true intentions are revealed, as they realise they are able to manipulate the situation to favour their own agendas. For others, the crisis upends their whole belief system, as they resort to misguided views as they have nothing left to trust. Through all of these varied responses to crisis, Miller and Brooks agree that all selfish, misguided reactions only deepen the social unrest caused by crisis, and further the mass hysteria that plagued both Eyam and Salem.

Miller and Brooks detail that when the cause of a crisis cannot be logically, or scientifically found, people panic and become willing to accept any explanation that will affirm their beliefs. This response to crisis manifests itself as a mob in *Year of Wonders* who found a scapegoat in Anys Gowdie, an outsider in the community, in a frightening display of vengeful and unjust lynching without any sort of trial. Their firm, collective opinion that she was the witch who brought Plague to Eyam never falters, and the men being 'transfixed by Anys' when she announces she has 'seen [their] wives with the [devil]' affirms the ridiculous lengths the mob will take to their belief that Anys had 'lain with the devil'. While this mob in Eyam was caused by the crisis, as the community tried to make sense of the plague that was afflicting them, it is institutionalised in Salem, with the 'entire contention of the state' hinging on whether 'the voice of heaven is speaking through the children'. Danforth's admission here, when the court is being challenged by Mary Warren's testimony, reveals the state had relied too heavily on the claims of the girls and did not consider enough evidence, lending weight to Miller's view that neither did the US with regards to McCarthyism. Furthermore, Hale's frustration towards 'no man know[ing] when a harlot's cry will end his life' shortly before Proctor is executed, highlights the social upheaval the dogmatic faith in the girl's claims has caused, with the slanderous term 'harlot' criticising the undeserved respect they have in the court. It is evident that Salem's court attempts to make sense of witchcraft, an impossible task, and grasps for a source of information through the girls, until realising they are lost in a rabbit hole built on perjury. This adherence to superstition in Salem's court is comparable to the Eyam mob's apportioning of blame for their suffering and grievance onto scapegoats who they believe caused the Plague, and both Miller and Brooks depict communities that fall deeper into hysteria as a result of it.

Both texts depict people who seek to save themselves at the peril of others, and are able to go unpunished during the height of the crisis. *The Crucible's* Abigail Williams, while initially acting out of fear, uses the crisis as a cover to achieve a personal vendetta, to 'take [Elizabeth's] place' by having her executed for witchcraft. While this malevolence is not apparent initially, her directions to be "rising, staring as though inspired" as she 'open[s] herself' and admits to witchcraft reveals she has realised that the court will believe everything she says as long as she continues to affirm their belief that 'witchcraft is all about'. She continues this charade, and Danforth's admission that 'the entire contention of the state... is that the voice of heaven is speaking through [Abigail]' confirms that she has taken control of the court and they have played right into her hands. Abigail takes further advantage of this control by accusing Elizabeth, on the basis of 'hard proof' - 'a poppet' in her possession, which was actually given to her by Abigail (with Mary Warren the courier). Dramatic irony, in which the audience is aware that Abigail has staged the poppet and accused Elizabeth unfairly, whilst Cheever, the voice of the court arrests Elizabeth, is used by Miller to expose the legal system's loss of logic during crisis, and the dangerous power Abigail is afforded due to it. Through the progression of Abigail's social influence throughout the crisis combined with her malicious nature, Miller warns against narrow-minded binary thinking, suggesting that no one source should

be considered pure and Godly and hence never questioned, as such power will kickstart a disaster as it did in Salem. While Salem's crisis was a product of 'common vengeance' and stemmed from within, Eyam's plague was brought upon them, and was more powerful than any could overcome. Hence, Year of Wonders' characters were rarely purely sinister as Abigail was, and most only acted to survive.

