

Mob mentality in "year of wonders" and "the crucible"

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



Mob mentality is a common cause of yielding to social pressures or norms, meaning that individual behavior and decision making can be influenced by the presence of others.

Miller constructs an image of Salem, Massachusetts perched on the edge of the dark and barbaric unknown with the looming forest on one side, which was filled with menacing "Indians" waiting to strike, and the stormy, cold Atlantic sea on the other side. This obvious segregation from other areas causes lack of other opinions within the area and influence only from the people in their social setting. Through this Miller carefully foregrounds through this foreboding setting a central concern in the play, being that people believe that their best chance of survival is what they know, and referring to mob mentality, what other people think. This is seen through a quote in Miller foreword being "in unity still lay the best promise of safety", suggesting that "unity" within this context can be seen as conformity and demonstration of the dangerous mob mentality that will soon occur in Salem. Due to this mob mentality may occur as they do not have very much influence from other people or sources. What they hear is what they think. This is also the same within the Year of wonders in Eyam, in which they are living in a place influenced by only people of their own thoughts. Eyam made the decision to voluntarily quarantine itself after its outbreak of the plague meaning that at this time it also was in a state of isolation, and all the crisis occurred within this central area. Likewise to *The Crucible*, Brooks demonstrated through this use of setting that the lack of communication in areas causes people to act irrationally, suggesting why people acted out in accusations. What was once a tight-knit community is now paranoid and

insane, with people accusing each other of dabbling in "witchcraft" and "spells" on a daily basis. This paranoid mob mentality can be seen in both texts to be a sign of what isolation in a physical setting may do to people, although the settings are not entirely that same. These settings do have a place of contrast, suggesting as to why escape from these settings occurs differently in both texts. Although they are both isolated, Anna in Year of Wonders still manages to escape the overwhelming mob physically, as Eyam is not surrounded by threats such as Indians in Salem. John Proctor and Elizabeth did not give into the mob mentality mentally, but were ultimately unable to escape due to lack of any chance of removing themselves from the situation.

The portrayed religious setting in the text suggests being one of the sources of the mob mentality. Both Year of wonders and the Crucible are set during eras where religion dominated within peoples lives, and strong Puritan ideals are evident in both texts. This is also highly influenced by leaders within both texts, in which their religious beliefs and ideals are usually followed by the rest of their respective towns. Salem in The Crucible is seen as a highly Puritan community, which creates a restrictive environment for its people. Due to the churches control over the community and Reverend Parris' insecure leadership, tension and occurrence of mob mentality is present. Originally he denies the claim of witchcraft, but then entirely fuels the situation and the town along with it. As religion is such an important part in people's lives during this era, they are repressed to believe what religious figures believe such as Parris. However within Year of Wonders Mompellion's strong leadership and stereotype breaking puritan values keep Eyam from

falling into a complete state of insanity during the outbreak of the plague. Physically the sense of hope, through images of richness and Spring, Brooks has suggested a greater anticipation in the belief that mob mentality will be overcome. The use of this imagery can be explained by the changes of religious mindset at the time and the hope that "old-fashioned" Puritan values are being pushed out to welcome more open-minded religion. Mompellion is a demonstration of these new values which he held during Eyam's isolation, and can be seen through his intention to discourage the use of stocks in the town, in which Anna states that "even Reverend Stanley seldom called for sinners to be stocked, and Mr. Mompellion had actively discouraged it". Through this it is seen that Brooks intended to display an open religious character, in order to display that this type of person may cause mob mentality to decrease. Although Mompellion is a flawed character, his motives still lie within good for his people. Mompellion is focused on God's love, not the fundamental principles of religion like Parris, which displays an insight into the ultimate outcomes of mob mentality and the difference in hope that the texts display.

Along with these physical settings, social setting within the plays and way people react in these settings also plays a part in joining in with mob mentality. Throughout both the texts gossip thrives within the town, and creates an environment within the social realms. In the Crucible, the results of this gossip results in many unthinkable acts, which the reader seems to be motivated by personal gain. Through the girls following Abigail in the accusations trials it can be seen as an act of mob mentality. Abigail instills fear into the girls by stating she will bring them a "pointy reckoning" if they

go against her claims. Through this it is seen that fear is a part of a need to join along in these situations, which the people feel as though they want to keep their own reputation rather than speak their mind. This gossip and accusations causes characters in the text to carry out irrational mob minded decisions, although some characters still remain abundant to this. In the crucible, John Proctor remains with a steady head relating to the trails and accusations, and attempts to mend his own sins through confessing adultery. Use of a flawed "hero" like Proctor was used by Miller to suggest the importance of standing to ones morals in a pack driven situation, allegorically being the cold war. Like the Crucible, Year of Wonders also displays an ugly side to society. These horrible actions are displayed within the mob attack on Mem and Anys Gowdie, where "Cries of 'whore' and 'jade' and 'fornicator' were coming now from every twisted mouth, as the mob surged at Anys where she knelt beside her aunt, leaping upon her and clawing at her flesh." The use of these mob attacks suggests the extent of disgrace that not having one's own mind can cause.