

"the 'yellow bird' spirit" – analysis of arthur miller's "the crucible" play essa...



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“ The ‘ Yellow Bird’ Spirit” – analysis of Arthur Miller’s “ The Crucible” play Essay Sample

One of the most vibrant, deep, and sagacious screenplays of the 21st century is Arthur Miller’s “ The Crucible.” Miller brilliantly comments on human morals, authority, and mass hysteria. He parallels the events of Salem in 1600’s to the blacklisting and the discrimination against those who were labeled as a “ communist” in America during the 1950’s. He proficiently shows how mass hysteria could sweep an entire community like a tsunami and erase all logical thought and rationality. Especially in the “ yellow bird” scene during Act III, he portrays how mass hysteria is achieved and the effects of such panic. Miller uses the dialogue, the stage directions, and the atmosphere, setting, and time period of the scene to acquire the desired mindless panic. Through his play, he manages to show how jealousy, frustration, and vulgar vengeance can transform a sound and tranquil town into own that is predominated by hysteria.

Miller uses the character’s dialogue to help to create the hysterical mood. On page 224, Abigail initially introduced the supposed “ yellow bird” spirit of Mary by saying, “ Why do you come, yellow bird?” Her ongoing “ conversation” with the “ yellow bird” quickly escalates out of control with the girls chiming in eagerly. Miller uses both Abigail and the group of girls to mock Mary. In an extended passage on page 224, it is evident the effect of this mimic:

Mary Warren. Abby you mustn’t!

Abigail and All the Girls. Abby, you mustn’t!

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Mary Warren. I'm here, I'm here!

Girls. I'm here! I'm here!

Mary Warren. Mr. Danforth!

Girls. Mr. Danforth!

Mary Warren. They're sporting! They-!

Girls. They're sporting!

Mary Warren. Stop it!!

Girls. Stop it!!

Mary begins to get hysterical by the girl's imitation of her. While it is obvious to the outside reader that the girls are only pretending, it truly affects the person that they are pretending to be. By only repeating exactly what Mary is saying, the girls affect her rational thought and make her emotionally unstable. Furthermore, the extent of the effect on Mary is great because it is not just one girl – it is Abigail, Mercy Lewis, Betty Paris, Susanna Walcott, among others – a large group chanting along with Abigail. Mary quickly becomes frantic and her panic-stricken state affects everyone. Danforth exclaims, completely baffled by the screaming girls: " Why can they only repeat you?" Even he, a character with a strong and powerful personality, is swayed and believes with absolute conviction in the girl's pretense. His rhetorical question helps progress the hysteria. He is the leading authority figure, and if he is that gullible, then who is not? The imaginary " yellow

bird", while not really alive, has come to life through the histrionic diction and dialogue that Miller chose. The powerful language of the scene deceitfully helps the hysteria set in.

In addition, the stage directions add to the dialogue by portraying raw physical emotional along with what is said. Abigail " gulps" as she first talks with the bird (224). The connotation of the word " gulp" implies that she is frightened and nervous of the bird's presence. By making her gulp, Miller lends an air of authenticity to Abigail's pretense - making her more believable to the other characters. Her gulp makes her fear seem real, instead of mere pretending. Also, Proctor is described using the adjective " frantically" - defined as " emotionally out of control." The actor portraying Proctor, in his subtle physical of being " frantic", should convey the fear, nervousness, and anxiety that Proctor is feeling, contributing to the ride of hysteria. Furthermore, one very distinct set of stage directions are those for Mary Warren. At first, when Abby first speaks of the yellow bird, Mary is merely " on her feet with a spring, and horrified, pleading" (224); she senses the danger and thus has risen, but has not yet panicked.

However, soon she is " turning on them all hysterically and stamping her feet" while screaming " Abby, stop it!" (224). When the yellow bird starts to take hold of the court due to Abigail's and the girl's vibrant and realistic acting, she becomes visibly affected by the girl's mockery and is forced vent out her frustration by physical means - " stamping her feet." Her discomposure worsens as the situation mounts towards the climax: she is " screaming it out at the top of her lungs, and raising her fists" and shrieking " Stop it!!" (224-225). A few moments later, Mary completely breaks down: "<https://assignbuster.com/the-yellow-bird-spirit-analysis-of-arthur-millers-the-crucible-play-essay-sample-essay-samples/>

Mary Warren, utterly confounded, and becoming overwhelmed by Abigail's - and the girl's - utter conviction, starts to whimper, hand half raised, powerless, and all the girls begin whimpering exactly as she does" (225). Mary, completely frustrated, and " powerless" to do anything to convince Danforth of her veracity, deteriorates from a sensible and honest girl to an emotionally disarranged one.

Near the end of the play, she is utterly dumbfounded and left flabbergasted by " Abigail and the girl's utter conviction" and she " as though infected, opens her mouth and screams with them" (226). Caught up in the girl's powerful and passionate presentment of her invisible bird-spirit, Mary loses rational sense and mistakenly allows herself to fall for Abigail's scheme. Drowned in nervous prostration, she realizes that she cannot win. In the end, through this gripping and anxiety-ridding sequence, everyone's rational sense breaks down along with Mary's. Mass hysteria, like the widespread and deadly epidemic, has taken afoot. Proctor exclaims that God is dead and " laughs insanely" (227), Hale quits the court, and Danforth is left " calling [Hale] in a fury (227)". Due to both a combination of the dialogue, and the powerful actions described in the stage directions, mass hysteria decapitated the court.

Furthermore, the setting, atmosphere, and time period of the story must also be examined. Arthur Miller deliberately set the stage in an environment of nervous tension - the entire town of Salem had already started to become delirious with the hunt for witchcraft. Many examples of this include the hysterical way that Goody Putnam jumped to " unnatural causes" for the death of her other babies, while the real reason could be something more

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natural - like her inability to take good care of herself while she was pregnant. In addition, the accusations against Rebecca Nurse, one of the most respectable and righteous people in the community, also shows the desperate and irrational times that the play is set in.

Moreover, it is immensely unusual for the court to trust Abigail Williams and the girls to such a large extent. Abigail is an unmarried, young girl and in the Puritan community; those in her situation would not have been placed in such high authority by the court. Her friend, Mary Warren, tells Proctor that she is an "official of the court." The idea that a young girl, barely of age, is an "official of the court" is laughable and shows the muddy circumstances surrounding the witchcraft accusations. In one instance, when Proctor confesses to having sinned with Abigail, Danforth had disposition not to believe him, even when it was plainly obvious that Abigail was false. Danforth says, "[Elizabeth] spoke nothing of lechery, and this man [Proctor] has lied!" (223).

Danforth actually wants to believe that the accusations of witchcraft were real; if it was all a fraud, he's, and many other people's, reputations would be at stake. In a subtle way, he encouraged the hysteria because it would help prove that witchcraft in Salem was real, therefore bolstering his reputation - he would be the hero that vanquished Lucifer. This was the setting of the town at the time of the "yellow bird": the community consumed by a mad desire to stamp out anything or anyone not purely Christian, a court dominated and manipulated by mere children, and a judge that was both gullible and biased. Mass hysteria is certainly easy to arise out of a situation such as this.

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"The Crucible", a great text, portrays how hysteria, confusion, and vengeance can lead to a manipulation of justice and unfair deaths. Due to the cunning of Abigail Williams, and the unreasonable reactions of the people to certain events, the rational and calm society that was Salem, Massachusetts quickly turned into one dominated by hysteria. In the yellow bird scene, Arthur Miller used the dialogue, stage direction, and the situation of the scene in to create an atmosphere of irrational panic and hysteria. Miller employs "The Crucible" to comment on McCarthyism and on the tendencies of human nature to follow the crowd, point fingers, and disregard common sense in times of tension.