

Professor David Peimer | The Crucible by Arthur Miller The Group Mind Medieval and Modern

- Okay, so, hi. Lauren, thank you very much for your help, again, with the slides, as usual, and everything, and to Judy and everyone, and hi, everybody, and hope you're well, from a freezing cold, very dark, rain, drizzling Liverpool land. So, hope you're well. And today, going to look at, just to dive right in, look at Arthur Miller's "The Crucible," specifically, going into more depth in terms of a couple of ideas around the group mind, mass hysteria, mediaeval and modern.

And the context is, I know that Trudy has been looking at the 1500s, 1600s, in terms of the historical spine of what we do here in Lockdown University. So, that's the one context, but it's linking a contemporary playwright, 20th century playwright, with that period. And then the second real focus for today is, what, if any, is the contemporary resonance of Arthur Miller's remarkable play for us today? And, I mean, and in some ways, it's fairly obvious, but I think in other ways, it's interesting to tease out some of the ideas of Miller, and talking about mass hysteria, talking about the group mind, and how he shows how it can function in a play, based on, you know, the historical event.

But obviously he's fictionalising and changing it completely. So, and as I go through it, some of the resonances we will pick up, obviously, but it's not only about America or specific countries in the world, I think it's much more, you know, global in this way. Part of the huge tension between democracy and authoritarian, that we're all living through right now, or at least let's say the beginnings of that perhaps eternal conflict or long-lasting conflict. And what Miller's play shows us and what we can glean in order to help us understand our own times a little bit more perhaps, because obviously as everyone knows, Miller's using it to reflect on the House of Un-American Activities in the post-war period in the early fifties.

But it's nevertheless historically and in human society and human culture, it goes way beyond it as a searing insight and expression of mass hysteria and how that works to, in a sense take over or colonise the mind and how it makes individuals conform to the group think, to the group mind rather than support their own individual independent thinking, their own independent way of seeing the world and how so many can be so quickly seduced into what some may see as the alluring quality of group think, why they need it, why they want it, and how these cycles, you know, constantly repeat themselves at different periods in human history, in different cultures.

I really believe it goes way back to earliest written recordings of the ancient Greek theatre and before that, Egyptians and many, many others all the way through to our period. And it is alluring and I think it's enticing, I think it's comforting and what it offers the individual as sort of payback when they sacrifice the individuality for and replace their own mind and their own thinking with group think and the group mind. And the mediaeval and modern context is, of course he's writing about Salem in the late 1600s, but he's writing about also the 1950s in America. And I believe the metaphor in the image as we've said, you know, it resonates and echoes in our times now and at other times. And I think once getting a sense of it, we start to get a sense of how theatre can reflect these shifts in human society, these fault lines and when they occur,

where you can recognise the fault lines 'cause they're always there and when they rise up like small or large volcanoes or earthquakes, they rise up and fall at different times.

And theatres majesty or richness, I believe, is to really capture it at various times so we can have an understanding and perhaps try ways of redirecting, re-shifting when a fault line emerges. Okay, so that's the reason for looking at "The Crucible" in Arthur Miller. I'm not really going to look at his other plays, I'm only going to touch briefly on his life and primarily focus on this one remarkable play, which I really believe is by far his best written, most complete piece of theatre. And he acknowledged it himself as have many others. It's just so well constructed. The characters, the story, the attempt to write language, you know, sort of, I suppose slightly similar to how we imagine people spoke in those times to give it a bit of distance, which can often enable us, as a metaphor, to reflect more on our immediate times.

One of the two, and this is, of course Salem happened in 1692, as we know. So it locates it in that period as a metaphor. It's interesting that I think in the play, I would argue that the characters come to believe, not all of them, but quite a few, come to believe that witches are real. And that's a crucial moment in the shift when the fault line happens in a society, it cracks and the crack opens and it comes through. People actually believe it. They believe witchcraft is real. They believe this is concrete realities, witches, witchcraft in this case, it's the young woman and others and so on. Of course there are some who don't believe it in the play.

Some were doing it for money, some were doing it for other reasons, you know, and based on the historical evidence, that's clear as well. Some were doing it for money, some, you know, various reasons. But when the majority take over and actually believe in this, that's when it's frightening and that's when it's time to wake up and not only to get a little scared, but more take note and decide what to do about it, really in a society. And you know, it's not only the words populism happening in many countries around the world, it's more than that. It's a mass addiction, a mass hysteria. And I don't mean it in the convention or the cliched sense of the word hysterical, but the real meaning of hysteria, which is a kind of mass addiction to sacrifice one's own mind for the group think, the group mind.

It's interesting that after the war, many playwrights tried to deal with this 'cause obviously they saw it with the rise of Nazism and Fascism, particularly in Germany, but also in Italy, Japan and elsewhere. So playwrights in the fifties, sixties, going through to the seventies, took this on as a major theme. One of the main ones was Eugene Ionesco, ex Romanian, but lived in France for quite a while and wrote this remarkable play called "Rhinoceros," which has performed still many, many places all over the world. And without going into the details, 'cause it's quite a bit of a complicated plot, but in essence what happens is that ordinary people, not just leaders, ordinary people start to believe that rhinoceroses are running around everywhere in the town they live in. That rhinoceros is invading here, invading there.

And as they start to believe it, they become transformed to be a rhinoceros themselves. So as they subscribe to the mindless, fairly idiotic authority of the rhinoceros, they then transform their

human bodies and become rhinoceros themselves. There's a lot of satire obviously and comedy in the play, but it's got a chilling effect when you watch it and when you read it 'cause it's an intensity and how they metamorphous into such mass conformity.

Another play "Andorra" written by the wonderful Swiss writer, Swiss playwright, Max Frisch in the 1960s is about how all the city folk of Andorra, fictional Andorra in the play, they have everybody in the city is covered with masks, you know, you can't see their face, you can't see their body, but you have the Jew sniffer, and how these police and other characters move around and can sniff out who is the Jew although the face and the body is completely masked on stage. So you cannot see a face here.

And I mean there's no physical feature, but it's how the Jew is sniffed out amongst the multitudes of the city of Andorra. It's obviously a fiction, it's a satire and it's a searing theatrical way of investigating mass hysteria, mass belief in group think, and obviously a reflection on the Nazi and times of insane levels of conformity. But that playwrights were very aware of all of this kind of thing and have been, I'm going to mention at the end, you know, go back to the ancient Greeks, "Antigone" and others, of what happens when group think takes over and when, as I say, the fault line surges through the crack, society covered flimsily but then it cracks through the membrane. Okay, I want to play just one or two things.

I'm sure many people know the story of "The Crucible." And I'm going to show an interview with Arthur Miller, which I think is quite brilliant and insightful. It's him talking about specifically about "The Crucible". And I think it's an amazing interview with him. But before that, this is here, a couple of scholars talking about the play and I think their comments are quite insightful.

*Video clip plays.*

- Suddenly writing "The Crucible" wasn't just the next dramatic venture, it was an urgent piece of political and social commitment to him.

- [Narrator] Once home, Miller abandoned his earlier work, skipped three pages in his thin brown notebook, and wrote the first lines of what would become "The Crucible."

- Uncle, the rumour of witchcraft is all about, I think you best go down and deny it yourself. The parlours packed with people, sir, I'll sit with her.

- And what shall I say to them? That my daughter and my niece, I discovered dancing like heathen in the forest?

- When the play starts, Reverend Paris, one of the Puritan ministers in a community is concerned. He's troubled because his daughter lies in what seems to be a state of suspension, some type of unconscious state. And he thinks she's sick, but he also fears she's possessed.

- Uncle, we did dance, let you tell them. I confess it and I'll be whipped if I must be. But they're speaking of witchcraft, Betty's not witched.

- Abigail, I cannot go before the congregation when I know you have not opened with me. What did you do with her in the forest?

- We did dance uncle. And when you leaped out of the bush so suddenly Betty was frightened and then she fainted and there's the whole of it.

- They're afraid they're going to go to hell for dancing and doing what they did in the woods, which is very much the devil's work. And so they are afraid that they're going to be punished, probably maybe even killed because if they are accused of being witches, they might get hung.

- Betty, wake up, Betty, Betty.

- You cannot evade me Abigail. Did your cousin drink any of the brew in that kettle?

- She never drank it.

- Did you drink it?

- No sir.

- Did Tituba ask you to drink it?

- She tried, but I refused.

- Why are you concealing? Have you sold yourself to Lucifer?

- I never sold myself. I'm a good girl. I'm a proper girl. She made me do it. She made Betty do it.

- When it becomes evident to them that they are caught and that they may be punished for what they have done, they become terribly fearful. They begin to lie.

- I want to open myself. I want the light of God. I want the sweet love of Jesus. I dance 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 Osburn with the devil. I saw Bridget Bishop with the devil. I saw George Jacobs with the devil. I saw Goody Howe how with the devil.

- She speaks, she speaks, glory to God. It is broken, they are free.

- I saw Martha Bellows with the devil. I saw Goody Sibber with the devil.

- All hell breaks loose. Once the floodgates are opened, there's no turning back.

- I saw Alice Barrow with the devil.

- Let the marshal bring irons.

- I saw Goody Hawkins with the devil. I saw Goody Pike with the devil. I saw Goody Booth with the devil.

- [Narrator] In 17th century Salem, Arthur Miller believed he'd found the perfect metaphor for the witch hunts of the McCarthy era. In both, reason gave way to hysteria and all moral weight was seated to the accuser.

*Clip ends.*

- Okay, I wanted to show that because I think these little clips from the early production, the first production and these comments by the scholars and the actress, I think hit the nail on the head. You know, when mass hysteria takes over from reason, when in a way blind, blind, monolithic, and almost monolithic faith takes over from rationality instead of, you know, the eternal tension between the two, it opens the mind to believing the lie. The mere fact that it's called a lie means, and then it's believed is extraordinary.

It's a leap of the human imagination that to convince oneself, I don't think it takes much convincing to believe in it. And once that is set in and belief rules over, you know, whether it's logic or thinking or rationality or even just scepticism as a human characteristic, scepticism goes out the window and then it becomes, I guess in contemporary jargon, fundamentalist. And then it's all very hard to challenge and shift. And that's what for me, fascinatingly ultimately explores really in the play. I'm not going into the other themes of Proctor and you know, him having the affair, you know, et cetera.

Rather focusing on all of this at the moment and how it links to the period, you know, they were looking at in the mediaeval and post mediaeval times and our period. So mass hysteria, what is it? I think that it's often where there's a common fear. She says at the beginning of the play that there is a rumour going round of witches. It's just a rumour, that's enough. Plant a seed, plant a hint, which presses a button going way back in the community, in the culture, religious belief and in their value system, not only their religious belief, presses a culture, the human propensity to believe in, you know, strange things, mysterious things, we can't rationally explain.

And of course there are many, many, many, you know, which remain an eternal mystery. So it's very easy for superstition to kick in and believe in witches and witchcraft coming from a fear of that which we cannot understand without faith. And that spirals into a panic. Look at all the accusations. You know, this one's the devil. This one is the devil, this one working with the devil, this one, this one, this one. It just starts to take over and it becomes overwhelmingly powerful

when the momentum just happens amongst a human group. You see the same in "rhinoceros", the same in "Andorra". You know, it starts to take on a momentum of its own.

Euripides, the great ancient Greek playwright used to, had this wonderful phrase in one of his plays, "When you put on the harness of necessity, you ride the horse and there's no going back." In other words, when you put on the harness on a horse then, and you start to ride it of necessity, the horse will start to ride you. You won't necessarily just be the jockey. And it's always that tension. Do I control the horse of my destiny, of my choice in life, or does the horse start to control me?

In this case, the horse is group think coming from fear, going into panic and avoiding or evading, shall we say, facts, evading even just common sense, never mind logic. Interestingly, the contemporary sociologists from New Zealand and elsewhere have started to explore social network and social media websites and social media itself as a contemporary form of kind of opening door to global mass hysteria. And it's fascinating to read, some of these very contemporary, written in the last few years, links of the psychology and sociology of mass hysteria and how these movements develop with social media and how it gets to the emotion and faith and all these qualities that I'm mentioning here, to help if you like, not create, but how to articulate and how to infiltrate, you know, the individual mind and millions of minds into a kind of global mass hysteria or global mass swelling of certain beliefs and values.

I'm not sure I fully subscribe to it, but I think I can begin to see how social media can absolutely be harnessed. And once one is on that horse, it's so powerful, you know, regardless of age, I think, depending on different times in humans' lives. It's a very powerful and very intelligent, I think understanding of a link between the two. But it requires humans who can understand how to use it in order to effectively have it like that. Of course during the, you know, during the thirties and forties, the Nazis and Goebbels and others mastered the technique of the radio and film and later television, et cetera. So in our times it's social media. It's obvious the technological medium is there for it. Okay, and they have linked, the psychologists link it, the sociologists have linked it, to Arthur Miller's play "The Crucible."

And that's the fascinating part as well for me. They use Miller's play about Salem as an example to show how it can work in social media. For Freud, what is a mass movement? 'Cause I do adhere to quite a lot of the beliefs of Mr. Freud and I've found they're very illuminating to enrich insights for me into theatre and I just guess, you know, human condition. A mass, for him is a temporary entity that joins together for moments in time in a culture. And as this idea from Gustave Le Bon, excuse my pronunciation, who was the first to come up with the phrase, "the group mind" and Le Bon and Freud, Freud argued that when an individual subscribes to be part of the mass, there's a sense of power that individual gets.

Not only when you look at the January the sixth riots and many others of the insurrection, but when you look at Brexit in England, you know, in many places, South Africa, many, many places, a sense of power by joining with a group with a mass belief, which is faith-based, not

fact-based, which is driven by passion, passionate intensity. You know, as W.B. Yeats said, you know, the best are driven by an intensity, or the worst are driven by an intensity and the best act or conviction. So it's Freud arguing that there's a sense of power for the individual because through the group think I can belong to something greater than myself. It's an idea, it's a god, it's a military, it's a religion, whatever, it's a belief, it's a value, it's nationalism, whatever it is, the Fatherland, a belief greater, purer, better.

So therefore I feel I'm powerfully connected to that through the group. So my power increases and this power allows me to turn pulses, which normally I wouldn't be able to if I was a mere individual because the group as sanctioned, whole lot of impulses that I can act on and these feelings of power come with a feeling of security 'cause I'm part of a group. Hey, the whole group believes in this, we'll do it. The group believes in blowing up people for a religious belief. The group believes in slaughtering people for a political aim or whatever else it might be. Hey, then I'm absolved of moral or just human responsibility and I have security because the group has sanctioned it. It's okay. So there's no shame attached because shame is conscience and shame would threaten it.

But no, I'm given power and I'm given security and I can evade the trap of shame. And of course there's safety at numbers is a more practical thing. So the loss of personality, and I think this is really what Arthur Miller really is exploring and you know, I can't say if you definitely read Freud or not, but it helps me get a deeper insight into really what Miller really was taking on. Not just a metaphor, you know, for the House of Un-American Activities at the time, the McCarthy era. So the loss of personality leads to the individual obviously identifying with a mass. And Freud argued that there were two types of masses.

The one is pretty short-lived with a kind of rapid transient interest, which we could call trends or fashion. But then the other which is much more dangerous and much more threatening, is more permanent, and rises and falls when I would argue, when fault lines occur in a society. And that's enduring. And we have the classic examples in religious institutions. The church, if you like, the military, where the individual absolutely abrogates individual responsibility. The group says, we are responsibility, we are responsible for you. We will give you the power, we'll give you the gun, the bullets. We will train you how to kill, we will train you how to kill or be killed. We will train you how to become the priest or this or that, the church or any religious institution. And so we sanction various forms of behaviour which are permanent and enduring in Freud's term. In Freud's beautiful phrase.

These two, the church and the military, have waves on the long swell of the sea. Beautiful image. The ego gets a sense of how they can identify with its own ego ideal in Freud's terms. And what's the ideal? The ideal is what the group is giving. I can be a soldier, I can be a military, I can have a certain sense of physical expression in the world and power and security 'cause it all gives me that. And I can do things which might be taboo if I was an individual on my own, you know, so these are the institutions aside that Freud argues already have group think and the group mind and don't tolerate dissent and don't tolerate shame and being shamed. Once

one subscribes to belonging to one of these well accepted groups. But one, it's not a big step to then extrapolate the group think into witchcraft and witches and the lie and mass hysteria of other kinds, whether it's witches in the 15, 1600s, or whether it's in Salem and witchcraft or whether it's other kinds of strange phenomena that are believed in. It's not a huge leap because it's the same mechanisms in operation in human nature and in Freud's term, it's the ego or every ego has their ideal.

And how they can then if you like, hook on, you know, or jump on the horse of their ego ideal and ride it, you know, to go to Euripides you know? And of course every group has its leader, whether it's religious leader or whether it's military leader or whether it's the witches or whoever. And the herd instinct we all know about and the primal horde. And there's a feeling of triumph that Freud talks about, which is interesting because I sense it when I watch the actors, and I've seen this play many times and I sense it when I read it. Whether Miller's conscious or intuitive doesn't matter. There's a feeling of triumph when the ego collides with the ego ideal, a feeling of triumph when the individual belief of what they want to be coincides with what the group is offering. I can dress in a certain way, I can walk in a certain way, I can be proud, have status, I can feel strong, I can feel more secure.

All of these things come in. All I have to do is say it's okay, give up my individuality, conform and in come the values, and I have all these other things. And a feeling of self triumph comes in. And then of course, if it's a threatened to take it away, big time, I'm going to fight maybe to the death to keep it and to hold onto it. I ain't going to give in because it gives me all these extra things and I've got a place in society or at least in my group or community, so I'm not going to give that up easily. Okay, so these are I think, some of the ideas of of group think, group mind and mass hysteria and where I think Freud comes in to help us and move on with this remarkable play. I want to show a short extract here.

And this is from a quite a contemporary production done, I think it was five, six, 2015, six years ago in New York City by a wonderfully interesting Dutch director. And you'll see it's set, he set "The Crucible" in a school classroom with school kids to make it even more contemporary.

*Video clip plays.*

- "The Crucible" is Arthur Miller's 1953 play that takes place during the Salem Witch trials. And it's really about what happens when mass hysteria takes over. "The Crucible" is produced all the time. I'm sure you saw it in high school or you were in it in high school because it's a classic, it's one of Arthur Miller's masterpieces. This production of "The Crucible" is different from any other "Crucible" I've ever seen or you've probably ever seen. Avant garde director, Ivo van Hove, took "The Crucible" and just stripped away all of the period piece of it, all of the 1690s garb and put it in a schoolroom with very contemporary yet non-descript costumes, which makes it feel really timeless. So you're really looking at the essence of the story.

- The great thing about this production, because it's sort of stripped back, it allows you to really

hear what the characters are saying and what their motives are and what their morals are. And it seems like this is very much just about people. And I think between Miller's writing and Ivo's interpretation of it, it's actually quite an eye-opening production.

- Arthur Miller wrote this, they say, because it was a response to the McCarthy era, the naming of names. And this is very evident in this production and it's chilling to watch. This is an opportunity to see one of Arthur Miller's great masterpieces performed by a wonderful cast in an intense, dark, gripping production.

*Clip ends.*

- Okay, I mean that's the blurb, that's the PR for the production by this wonderful Dutch director. He's fantastic. Visual, contemporary, very physical performances. And he strips everything out of the production and he puts all the actors who are, they are not the age of school kids. They are older, much older, they're in their twenties and so on, thirties. But he puts all the characters in a contemporary school environment. And it has many resonances I think for us today 'cause the school itself is also, let's be honest, about group think often.

You know, how to subscribe. What is the school, what is the image it wants to project? What is that school compared to another school? You know, this one may push more physical prowess in sports. This one may push more intellectual or academic or sciences or the arts or humanity, et cetera, et cetera, a group think. And what happens when they are, school kids kind of step out into the margins or a little bit different, what happens to them and their teacher and so on. These are all, I guess they're not as earth shattering as the global movements of fascism versus democracy but they're happening on an individual level. And you know, I think we can see it happening through the metaphor of Miller's play. Okay, it's a very interesting, very contemporary production. This last one I want to show here. This one now is an interview with Arthur Miller about his play. We'll touch on some points afterwards.

*Video clip plays*

- You see there's a circular logic that goes on on these occasions. The assumption is is that there's an exterior threat. In the case of the Puritan New England, it was from the devil. The devil existed as a person and as he does in America today for a lot of people. And he lived among the Indians, who were just beyond the settlement of the white people. And he ruled the Indians, in effect. And the settlement, in fact, had been attacked, as well as having attacked Indians in the past, in the past century. Every few years there was a skirmish or battle, problems. And as a result of the internal decay inside that community, which had a lot of different causes, they began seizing upon the idea that this was all being stirred up by secret forces, namely the ones from hell because the settlement itself was devoted to God and righteousness and goodness, charity, mercy, and the devil hated all that.

So he was generating conflict among them for which they had no explanation normally. And

when that started to move, that idea that there were adherence of the devil living in the village, the next question was, who are they and what do we do with them? Well, in the Bible it says in the book of Saul, "thou shall not suffer a witch to live." Well that's all they needed. And so they went around looking for witches. Now what happened was, of course, that all this expressed the sociological and political turmoil that had predated the whole discovery of the witchcraft and now they could attribute to their opponents allegiance to the devil and kill 'em or imprison them or so on. Now, you couldn't doubt the existence of a plot lest you'd be charged with trying to enhance the plot. So if you couldn't, if you couldn't doubt the plot and still be a Christian, there was no way to oppose it and something similar was happening in the fifties here.

If you got up and said, you know, I don't think that the communists are the ones who are causing the water supply to go bad, the people say, what's the matter with that guy? And God forbid you had a government job, you'd be out on the sidewalk quick. The point was, there was no way to gather a position to this lunacy without being incriminated. So it's a circular logic you see. Now it destroyed Salem. There was land in Salem that was never purchased for over a hundred years afterwards 'cause people felt there was a curse on it. And it, I was interested in the thing because the process was so much the same, the psychological and social process. And my hope was that you could get some wider viewpoint about it by looking at it in a different age. Because the same thing was happening, had happened and was at time in Sweden, England, France, other places and some of the best minds of the era, including the great legal expert, Coke, Lord Coke, who wrote the basic rules of evidence, he said there was no question that the state had a right to rule, to uproot these people and that normal rules of legal engagement could be suspended.

Cook says that the judge in my place says we give everybody the right to defend himself, but witchcraft is an invisible crime. So by its nature we can't possibly call up witnesses. So the circle is complete, you see, all you need is a real good accusation and you're dead. Meantime, the structure of the state begins to collapse because the reason ended in the thing ended in Salem was that pretty soon, well, it took like about two years. Most people began to fear for their lives because so many of their friends were already either in jail or being tried or were hanged. So when the fear got so widespread, they began not to cooperate anymore.

And finally, the witch hunters, the judges and so on, who had invested their reputations in this and themselves, I'm convinced no longer believed it, in order to keep the thing going, they wanted to go to the next village, start it all up again, and the farmers in the next village wouldn't let them in. They stopped them on the road 'cause they'd seen what happened in Salem, that was Andover. And once they acted, then the thing just unravelled. The spell was broken. So it's a, the play is played all over the world and in various parts of the world. It's got different connotations, but on the whole, it fits anywhere.

*Clip ends.*

- I love his attitude at the end. You know, there's such an ironic sort of stuff for women. Kind of,

there's such a wisdom in he's speaking about it and obviously speaking about it at a much later stage of his life. You know, reflecting back to when he wrote it, I'm sure everybody knows, I don't want to go back into it, the story of his own experience with the McCarthy era and the witch hunt of the McCarthy period and what he went through. He was threatened with prison, he was threatened with, you know, took his passport away. Marilyn Monroe, his wife at the time, she was also threatened. Anyway, all of these things I'm sure we know.

What I'm interested really is looking at how, what we can get glean today about witchcraft and how it works. It may not be called witchcraft, it's called other things of course, but it's the same fundamental, you know, principles in a human society. A couple of phrases that I like that Arthur Miller uses is he talks about an exterior threat at there, an exterior threat is the other, obviously, and the citizen, the foreigner, the alien. You know, we've looked at often Shylock the Jew or Barabbas in "The Jew of Malta" and others. You know, the other, the external threat may come from within the culture, you know, often does, you know, it's created from within or it can be created from without. Obviously it's what hit the users and so on.

But in our times, you know, Brexit and many other things, it's created the foreigner and the rage and the fear and the insecurity is linked with the person inside who becomes the pariah inside. And of course is the external threat is manufactured in that way to be an external threat. So that's necessary for this, for the triggering of the fault line of mass hysteria. The other thing which I really like that he mentions is how it's invisible. You know, you can't see witchcraft, it's like, it's invisible like the wind. You know it's there if you believe in it, but you can't see it. So it requires a leap of faith to believe in it.

And it's that quality of faith and belief which becomes so dogmatic that one refuses or denies existence of any scepticism, any questioning even, or any other way of thinking and believing in the lie, or believing in the propaganda or believing this is the way, this is the light, this is the key idea, this is the meaning. And when that happens, it becomes pretty scary, I believe. And then the other point he talks about towards the end of the interview, how the spell is broken. So the spell first comes out from the woodwork, you know, it's always there. It's the boogie in the night, it's the monster, et cetera. The spell comes out and the majority become spellbound in the true many of that word believing in the spell, believing in witchcraft and what that means in his case for Salem, using the metaphor of the devil.

But the devil has many, many clothes, as we all know, may just be a foreigner, may be a, you know, somebody with different hair coloured nose. Somebody wears orange shirts or green shirts. So the spell is necessary, which is part of the mass hysteria, part of the mass belief in the deception, in the lie, in the propaganda of the times, whatever it may be. And the power of it to infiltrate the mind for, you know, as Freud would say, because what's the payoff for the individual? They feel powerful, they feel strong, they feel secure, and they're allowed to do things they would normally be allowed to do because they subscribe to the group think the way that all the Rhinoceros think in that group or all the Jew sniffers think in the play "Andorra," you know, they know how to sniff it out.

It's an amazing image of Max Frisch, the playwright, you know, you can sniff it out. It's such fundamental superstition belief, but where the idea has become so concretized in the human imagination of the individuals. And that's what I like about talking about the invisible and the spell, because they really do take over and colonise the mind. Hitler once said, in an interaction with Krupp we all know the Krupp Industrial Works, you know, "of course I'm not going to nationalise the banks. I don't need to, I nationalised the mind." And I find that an amazing, he said it in one of the interviews in the early mid thirties, I think of 34, 35, that's 34. And it's an understanding of the power of how you can really infiltrate and take over and what you have to offer individuals in return, of course.

So just a few other comments about Salem and the play for me is that it's, of course, about the McCarthy era and you know, the old story of the individual standing up against the group, the individual not even standing up against but just questioning, just disagreeing, or just having a doubt even is not allowed. You know, it goes to that level of extremity, the belief and the faith. And that is when it flips into hysteria for me and takes on a mass quality. And it's of course, it's written against where whether the backdrop of persecution and of these, you know, of the witches and so on. But what's interesting is that the villain are not, I don't think the villains are actually the individual witches so much in the play.

The real villain is an idea which fuels the character's fear, panic, insecurity, and so on. The real villain is the power of the idea. And that's extraordinary, you know, in a sense under insight of Miller's, in human society and the human condition, how we will latch onto an idea. And that is it, you know, the vaccines, are the work of the devil incarnate, the vaccines are not and so on. And between the two, there can be no discourse of any vaguely educated kind. So it's how the idea becomes so, so powerful. And that for me is an extraordinary insight because we see so many other movements of mass hysteria, called it fascism from the left or the right, wherever in the world the mass conformity takes over and everybody starts to think like a rhinoceros and behave like a rhinoceros. And if, and you know, if I can jump in metaphors for the moment, you know, all it needs is the Pied Piper.

Everybody dances to the little tune and we'll all happily jump off the cliff and sacrifice kill ourselves. So it's what we might call today fanaticism or becoming the fanatic. And that's originally from the word, the meaning of it is a fan, you know, the word fanatic has become colloquialized and often look, you know, frowned upon. But the original comes from just being a fan and how that just doesn't need much pushing to go further into the step of mass hysteria. You know, it can be the apologising, the self hating, you know, et cetera. So all of this is how the groups revolve in this sense, the conflict.

The other thing I want to mention is that Arthur Miller speaks a lot about how the Great Depression was such a pivotal moment in his family's life 'cause you know, he was, they were okay financially, but the Great Depression threw everything out the window. And he said, "what people talk about that is a golden period where people came together, they helped support each

other and this and that." He says, "nonsense. It was a period where people were, you know, highly competitive, you know, get whatever potatoes, get whatever bits and pieces of money or a job or whatever you could get, grab it, you know, it's not a time of the so-called, you know, all the masses come together and so on." Or other types of so-called golden eras, moments of great shift, which I call great fault lines, in a society when the crack really opens in the fault line. The Great Depression, and it surges through and all sorts of prejudices, hatreds, fears, insecurities come screaming out, you know, because the genie is let out of the bottle. It's always there, let it out and out it comes so powerfully.

And that's what I think his play exposes and it's in that opening line, there is a rumour of witchcraft, witches going around. He understands it right from the beginning of the play. There's a rumour about a lie. There's a rumour that these foreigners, there's a rumour of Jews, of Christians, of Muslim, whoever, of Blacks, of people who wear green shirts or there is a rumour going around and it starts to press the buttons. And of course we can link it to tough economic times, tough social times. Of course that's obvious, you know, especially the rise of the Nazis and so on. But many other times, you know that it's happening here in the image of Salem as a metaphor for McCarthy period, not only economically driven, I think.

So Arthur Miller is very aware of these great times of historical change, like the Great Depression and other times in American and global history, I would argue, I think that he is a, in a sense, and at the end of it, you know, it's fascinating because Arthur Miller said, when he defended himself at the actual McCarthy hearing and he says, "because it's my name, how can I live without my name?" You know, it's echo Shylock, you take everything from me. What do you leave me with? You take my religion, you take my property, you take my goods, you take everything. I'm not even, I'm nothing anymore, you know? How can you leave me without my name? I think that Arthur Miller is, as he said, you know, a certain kind of Jewish writer. He spoke about the influence of his father.

He said, of course, I'm Jewish writer and I inherited from my father the attitude of being American more than being Jewish. And I think he was playing with that conflict in himself in his writing. What does that mean for us today? We know assimilate, not assimilate, pariah, et cetera, understanding, being marginal, all those things which are pretty clear to everybody. But what's really, really important is that these times, in our times, when we sense the cracks opening, when we sense these big changes, prejudices resurfacing, I think what happens, it's really worthwhile and to our advantage to remember how it can happen so quickly, these changes and what is in the payback, what is in it for people who subscribe to it? And what has to happen for people who stand up against it and where do they go?

And it goes way back to the ancient play of "Antigone", you know, the ancient Greek pledge. All she does is stand up against Creon who's the king of the Greek city state. And Creon says, "if somebody does something wrong or goes against my laws, then they cannot have a normal burial." And he dumps Antigone's body outside the city walls on the surface of the dirt and says, "nobody, and especially Antigone and his sister, can go out and bury." And part of the religious

belief is that it's vital that you bury the person. She's not allowed to.

She goes out, she buries her brother, pays the price. And Creon, the uncle, the king, has her executed simply for disobeying his law. Doesn't want to, he hates himself for it and he self destructs, but she has to be sacrificed for the law, for the rule to be maintained, for his rule to be maintained. So even a ridiculous rule, even a ridiculous lie, a ridiculous set of beliefs that come in, have to be maintained, have to be held onto and they will fight to do it. And it's fascinating here. He talks about that Salem almost implodes. And you watch it, you see it on stage, you see this community, he says for a hundred years you couldn't buy up land there. You see the culture, you see the small community of Salem implode before your eyes on stage.

The same happens in "Rhinoceros," Ionesco play. The same in "Andorra," the other play I mentioned, Frisch's play, and it implodes from within. It doesn't implode because of outside armies attacking it. And that I think is the ultimate, perhaps scary thought, not only of so-called great civil wars and how they can destroy a nation, but how things start to eat away from within. And that's the time to become very aware and careful. It's the crucible itself, as we all know. The actual meaning of it is that if for Arthur Miller was that it's a time of test, severe test. It's a container in which metals or other substances are subjected to very high temperatures. So put a metal through at very high temperature and see what will happen.

So put values, put beliefs, put ideas of a culture at, into very high temperature in a crucible and see what will happen to the culture. Will it implode? Will it survive? Will it manage to overcome it? Will it take time? What's going to happen? And I think this is, the meaning of the very word crucible as he intended it, is an absolutely spot on title, which for me just absolutely resonates so powerfully today. You know, how much of our principles will we sacrifice for group think, how much won't we? We are all eternally caught in Antigone's trap and in part of the characters of "The Crucible." And we, you know, do this every day in our daily lives in work and in communities, families, wherever. It's a constant playoff between the two.

But we are aware of it. And I think the problem is that he alludes to is that when we start to believe in all of this and it becomes the reality, that's where it flips into danger territory. And I think that's what he shows. That's the circular journey he talks about in the play and how he so brilliantly shows it. And it's called witchcraft. It's called the work of the devil. As we all know, the devil has many, many clothes, has many costumes, has many appearances from right inside our very souls to whoever we meet in different parts of our lives. Okay, so thank you very much everybody. That's a little bit about Arthur Miller and witchcraft, mediaeval and modern.

- [Paula] Do you want to take any questions?

Q&A and Comments:

Q: Yeah, thanks Paula. You use actual transcripts from the witch trials?

A: Yep, absolutely. Spot on. Thank you.

Q: Lawrence, wasn't this topic covered by Ibsen?

A: Yeah, in "An Enemy of the People," absolutely. Lawrence, I prefer Miller's play to Ibsen's, but that's taste. Tony, is any record of Miller having a friendship with Rhett? Very interesting, really interesting question. I don't know. I'll find out. Get back to you.

Q: Josie, what are your thoughts in the role being played by social media in how mass hysteria looks?

A: Well, I think that these sociologists are onto something because I think if the radio could help it and film and TV obviously help it, it's just technology being used. It in itself isn't a thing. I think that it absolutely can be used and is harnessed to help foster mass hysteria. You know, small little things become so huge, you know, it's like a text, a tweet, all things, small things, a phrase somebody wrote 10 years ago for 25, whatever. It can become so huge and magnified in the individual human mind. That's extraordinary power. Extraordinary power.

And there's something about being so concise in a tweet, in a phrase that just becomes so big. And if it's colourful or if it's a bit of a rich phrase, with language, then I think it, you know, people talk about it, you know, word of mouth, it goes on and on and on, et cetera. So I think it does have the ability to take over the mind, which is, it's such a shift, but I think it happen quite quickly actually. Quite scary.

Q: Sandy. Now we have QAnon, the dark web, thousands of people, Kennedy reappear, John Kennedy and Princess Diana.

A: Absolutely. I mean, you know, Elvis is going to come tomorrow. The scary thing is when you investigate these very fringe sort of things, ways of thinking, but when it starts to, as I said, to the fault line, when it starts to become more centred, coming more from the centre of power, that's when I think it starts to, you know, attention must be paid as Miller says, as the one character say in "Death of a Salesman."

Q: Joan Lesson, Joan, the bus driver told me that they aren't even, they aren't allowed to lie on the radio.

A: Okay, thanks. Says it all.

Q: Is not the PC hysteria more relevant than group think?

A: Well, as I said, whether it's from the left or the right, I think there's a subscribing to the group think more and more that is becoming more solidified and concentrated if you like. And you know, very hard for any other way of having discourse with that when it becomes so evangelical.

- Yolandi, thank you for the French phrase, great.

Q: Suzanne, half the American population doesn't believe that Biden is the legitimate president.

A: Scary, I think Trump has got what, 70, 80 million Twitter followers who still believe it was a lie. It's irrelevant what one thinks of Biden or what one even thinks of Trump as a president. That's irrelevant. It's the power of group think, it's the power of Salem and witchcraft, the devil. You know, it's, I mean, not these individuals are not the devil, but it's how this process works. How hysteria takes over.

Q: Mitzi talk about the attribution of power with group think. Also there's also the fear of being the victim of the group.

A: Great point, Mitzi, thank you. Yeah, 'cause if you don't subscribe even in school, you know, in a school class, if you don't subscribe to the group, you're alienated very quickly and you can be, in contemporary phrase, I suppose, bullied or made into a victim, whatever, you know, you're ostracised or marginalised in some way. Yeah, and what happens to those people? Yeah, "Lord of the Flies" and the group, the power of the group to bring everybody into conform and if and threatened if they don't or shamed if they don't.

Q: Sheila, why are the clips always, the clips unsynchronized?

A: Well, I guess we'll just, we'll try and improve some of the technical stuff, Sheila. Okay, thanks. I know we had a bit of a problem earlier with, you know, with getting it, but you know, this is early days of this technology. We've got to think back to, you know, 10 to 20, 15, 20 years after the Wright Brothers. It's early days of the aeroplane, early days of technology, what can we say? Irene, is there a video available of the production with Ben Whishaw? Yes, there is and I'll try and find it for you, Irene. That's the production, you know.

- Ciaran Hinds and Ben Whishaw, the one that I showed that brief PR piece, the contemporary one set in the school, I think five, six years ago, the production.

Q: Tommy, would you comment on any parallels of the "Lord of the Flies?"

A: I think absolutely Tommy, brilliant point. It's, that is absolutely an example of group think. And I think that Golding, the author, as you know any too well, is seeing it in a British, what the British called the public school, is actually private, the very elite, highly educated young British school boys and how they absolutely, in "Lord of the Flies", become totally part of group think and how that totally takes over as they established their little nation state on the island in "Lord of the Flies." And you get the example of the character who's the victim, character who steps out, the character's trying to be reasonable, rational, et cetera but group think takes over. It's a brilliant novel. And Peter Brooks brilliant film of it, I think lasts powerfully today. Thanks Tommy,

that's great.

Q: James, how do we distinguish between group think and support for popular social political movements? Aren't we inclined to describe political phenomena we like, dislike, as an irrational group or hysteria as opposed to our own, which may be.

A: Yeah, I mean, you know, I think that if there's, if the group allows scepticism, if it allows dissent, if it allows sort of Hyde Park corners, where people can speak their minds. If it allows theatre where people can speak their minds, you know, or journalists, novelists, whoever. If it allows the other, the foreigner, to exist without being violently attacked, without being imprisoned, if it allows anybody who dissents, let's call it in any way, then it's okay. There's always going to be a certain amount of group think, I agree with you. But I think when the margins of the dissenter become smaller and smaller and fewer and fewer and they're either imprisoned or they're so ostracised or so scared, they stop speaking or stop writing or stop proposing different things, that's when it becomes scary.

And whether it's in, and obviously in a democracy and in other countries as well. So I think it's when the margins shrink and people, the number of people over the minds become more and more terrified. That's "The Crucible." That's "Rhinoceroses" and these plays, what it shows. Rodney, Bion was a famous, yeah, he warned of the danger of group progression. Absolutely, yeah. Thank you.

Q: Alex, was there parallel in the spell that bedevilled the nuns of Loudun in France.

A: I don't know. I'll have to check. Thanks for that.

Q: Alan, do you think that societies are held together as cooperative organisations? In other words, the other side of the coin, the good side or the bad.

A: I think that every society, as Harari argues and many others, every society needs a set of myths or stories or beliefs. So we all agree we've got 10 oranges for 10 people, but should the leader have two oranges? And should the collector have only half an orange? Should the mother who's breastfeeding have two oranges and the leader maybe skip an orange that day? Should a baby have an extra orange or extra piece of orange? And should the older parent or brother, sister skip their piece of orange? You know, all these things as Harari talks about are the myths, stories and value systems we create. And once we have them all, you know, should we bury the dead, shouldn't we, should we honour, et cetera, et cetera. And then we subscribe to these ideas in order to have community, in order to have fundamentally functioning cooperative societies where there's more cooperation than selfish attack on it or authoritarianism.

And I think this is always in a constant tension. It's the Antigone story again, it's the individual and the group. You know, how much do we need to conform our individual principles to the

group? That's the eternal tension, which all theatre and literature captures. But it's again, when the margin of dissenters shrinks, that's, I think, the time where attention must be paid as Arthur Miller says.

- Ruth, thank you. Roma, again, thank you. Your debate, okay. To which attribute the ability of the adjacent town to Salem. Andover was the one that he mentioned, that Arthur Miller said it stopped when they tried to export it to Andover. But it took a hundred years for Salem, for people to be interested in buying land there. It imploded, but it was contained, I guess. And that's his warning, I guess, you know, in the metaphor.

- Lenore, Trump, I've spoken, I think about him and many others. Okay.

Q: Then another example of breaking the spell, isn't the play "12 Angry Men." Absolutely. Where one juror changes the mind of the others.

A: Great idea, thank you. You know, and the same with many of these other plays I've mentioned and often it's through I think, how theatre mobilises the human characteristic of shame. And the other characters are shamed into realising what's going on. And the spell is broken, as the McCarthy spell was broken finally, when the one lawyer in the McCarthy hearing said, "have you no decency left in man? He shamed him and shamed the society and things started to shift. Okay, thanks Rodney.

Q: Tony, I'm reminded of a film based around an American platoon soldier they accuse of being the weakest and being called, yep, so that everyone sees him as a living example of how not to be at all costs. So this scapegoating is to the benefit of the group?

A: Absolutely. The group needs the external threat, the group, or which may be internal often, the group needs internal external threat. The group needs the scapegoat, you know, often the Jew, but often many others as well obviously. "Lord of the Flies," you can identify the scapegoat and they need it in order to feel powerful, in order to feel right, in order to feel justified and avoid shame. Thank you, thanks.

Q: Lonnie. Richard, was "Lord of the Flies" the last?

A: No there are many others. Many more examples I can give you of "Rhinoceros" and many of the others, absolutely, which deal with a similar theme. James, briefly mentioned Brexit, one of the fault lines, the whole Brexit debates characterised by a distortion and demonization by both sides, yep. And it becomes tribal, polarising, absolutely. And in fact, you have to use these things when you're faced with a, you know, a black and white decision. Right or wrong, you know, left, this or that. You have to because it is a polarising thing, you know, and it's a way of, but the fault line is already there, is what I'm trying to say. And these things, whether it's called Brexit or anything else, it's when they are, when the genie's allowed out of the bottle and when it's put back in. The spell, you know, it's a spell that is created.

Q: Erica, Miller says the spell is broken when the next village doesn't allow them in, yep. Is there any way we can break the spell of anti-Semitism?

A: Erica, if I knew the answer, not only would I be a multi, multi-billionaire, but if I could, we could break the spell of anti-Semitism, you know, we would have a remarkable world. And if I knew the answer, it would be, you know, massive. Thanks, but it's a lovely question.

Q: Alex, a belief in the supernatural allows the fear of powerlessness to propagate.

A: Yep, absolutely it does.

Q: Laney, so what can we do to stop this hysteria?

A: Well, I mentioned some of the things here.

Woody and Gayle, Gayle, how are you? Hope you're okay. Woody Allen explored in "To Rome with Love" about group think. Yep, absolutely. Thanks for that. Francine, thanks for the yeah, for your comments related to the play. I read it in high school in the fifties, saw it on Broadway. I did not relate how different you think about it now. And it's pretty insightful of Miller at a young age, quite a young age to have this and to write about it.

Okay, Ralph, are universities becoming susceptible to group think? Yep, absolutely. Thelma, half of the American population believed, yeah. Trump again, yep. Lenora, Orwell, yeah great example. You know, we're all equal, but some are more equal than others. And then he uses the animals of course in "1984," "Animal Farm." And Ruth can't go into that now, at the end of the time. Caroline, thanks. Leanne looking to join a group to be included from loneliness.

They're becoming brainwashed as common. Yep, and including people who don't fit into other groups and belonging in groups, you know, may seek for others. But I think, you know, so long as the Hyde Park corners and the margins for dissenters are fairly big and actually not only are they allowed, but are they encouraged in a society? That I think is a sign of a strong society that has confidence in self-belief. It's when they start to shrink the margins of the dissenter again, that's the time to get scared or to do something.

Maron, what is the chance of society to survive unless it gets destroyed by people waking up? Whew, big question. And I think we've tried to look a little bit through looking at Miller's "The Crucible." Okay, thank you very much everybody, and really appreciate watching and your questions. And thanks so much on this Saturday and hope you have a great, great Saturday evening, wherever you are, and Sunday tomorrow.