

Compare how *The Crucible* and *The Dressmaker* explore the issues of victimisation and blame

Essay plan

Arguments	<i>The Crucible</i>	<i>The Dressmaker</i>
Argument 1: Outcasts are often victimised by others.	Giles Corey's death, victimised by society	Tilly being bullied by Stewart Pettyman
Argument 2: Characters often scapegoat others.	Abigail victimises Tituba, the "negro slave"	Beula victimise the McSwiney children, the "littlies"
Argument 3: The motivation behind the victimisation of others are presented differently.	Mary scapegoats others out of fear	The townspeople mistreat Molly just because she has Tilly unmarried.

Essay

Rosalie Ham's comedy-drama "*The Dressmaker*" and Arthur Miller's allegorical play "*The Crucible*" share a conceptual exploration of how societal pressures shape and condition human behaviour, notably the ways in which they lead individuals to exploit others and bring about sufferings. Despite the lack of geographical connection between Dungatar and Salem, the two texts are starkly similar, both explicating how non-conformists are victimised by society, though there is a greater emphasis on the victimisation of outcasts in the novel than there is in the play. Brooks and Miller also depict the tendency of opportunists to scapegoat others, foregrounding the motivations behind their relentless ostracism of outcasts. Their revelation of the ubiquity and universality of suffering, especially the pain experienced by the protagonists, enable them to establish their sardonic denouncement of communities that dismiss and normalise the maltreatment of the powerless, explicating the disproportionate impacts of hysteria on different demographics in societies that are divisive, corrupt and socially repressive.

By elucidating the ways in which outcasts are victimised in times of crisis, Ham and Miller propel the readership to sympathise with marginalised individuals of Dungatar and Salem. In Miller's play, oppression is institutionalised, as the court is vested with power to condemn those who deviate from the norms. Giles Corey's punishment, which is foreshadowed by Arthur Miller's comment on his fate – one that is "so remarkable and so different" from that of others, is one that would evoke indignation from the audience. The "great stones [that are placed] upon his chest until he pleads aye or nay," represent the societal pressures and the authority of the theocracy. This establishes Giles Corey as the victim of the archaic

values that pervade Salem and magnifies the amount of pain that Giles has to endure for being a “comical hero... who didn’t give a hoot for public opinion.” Tilly is also maltreated and oppressed by those around her due to her position as an outcast, a “illegitimate child” and a “bastard.” Her pain is often revealed through the fragmented flashbacks of her childhood where she is bullied and assaulted by others, establishing her as a victim of Dungatar’s banal mob mentality. The description of Stewart as “wet and smelled like wee” causes the audience to be repulsed by his characters, thus understanding the position that Tilly is in. Compounding this with her immense feeling of sickness as she “vomit[s] rose” while she is being sexually assaulted by him, Ham further vilifies Stewart for abusing his power over Tilly and criticises the rest of Dungatar for condoning his extreme violence towards Tilly. Although Tilly does exhibit the same heroic values as Giles Corey, it is difficult for the audience to not side with her, even after she burns Dungatar down, since she herself has suffered. The despairing undertones of Tilly and Giles’ plight enable Ham and Miller to establish a rapport between the characters and readers, denouncing the unjust and decaying nature of both Dungatar and Salem.

Ham and Millers also present the ways in which individuals use scapegoating as a means to victimise others, characterising some as opportunists. From the outset of the play, Abigail is portrayed as “a strikingly beautiful girl...with an endless capacity for dissembling” establishes the incongruity between Abigail’s physical appearance and her true character; this thereby characterises her as duplicitous and exploitative, foreshadowing her subsequent malevolence in the face of a crisis. This notion that hysteria can lead characters to deceive and harm others is further fortified by Abigail’s scapegoating of Tituba, the “Negro slave”. In *The Crucible*, Tituba represents women and people of the lower echelon of society who ultimately become victim to Abigail’s false accusations; her vulnerability has the effect of magnifying the exploitative and malevolent nature of Abigail and, to some extent, the broader Salem community in this time of crisis. Similarly to Tituba, the McSwineys also represent those of lower classes, as exemplified in the introduction to the “McSwineys’ yard ... beside the tip” and the homophonic connotation of their name – associating them with ‘swines.’ Farrat’s referral to the McSwiney children as “the littlies” seems to contradict Beula’s accusation of them for being “scoundrels” as it emphasises their young age and innocence. The “sweet saliva [that] spilled and coated their chin” further bolsters the portrayal of these children as innocent, insinuating that they are not capable of committing such a dishonest crime. This, coupled with Farrat’s questioning of Beula’s allegations, enables Ham to divulge Beula’s dishonesty, drawing the audience’s attention to her deliberate falsification of facts. Both authors, through the characterisation of subsidiary characters such as the McSwiney children and Tituba, place their emphasis on the vulnerability and innocence of these victims to display the injustice they experience. Ultimately, the two works serve as a critique of opportunism, challenging the readership the emulate the writers’ denouncement of the “open slather on outcasts” that Molly alludes to.

However, while characters in *The Crucible* are inclined to harm others out of fear, characters in *The Dressmaker* often victimise others out of personal bias and bigotry. Both Dungatar and Salem are portrayed as divided and detached, with a well-established social hierarchy and a constant atmosphere of violence cast over the play. An exemplification of this is Proctor’s threat of “whip[ing] Marry if [she] dares to leave [his] house”. The contrast between her reaction of “not resisting him” and his violent “shaking” highlights the power imbalance between the two characters, establishing the social structure of Salem as entrenched. The oppression that Mary has to endure is what drives her to transform from a

timid, intimidated girl into an arrogant girl who declares herself as “an official of the court” and scapegoat others, such as Sarah Good who “sleeps in ditches” and Goody Osburne “drunk and half-witted.” This enhances the notion that power can be ephemeral and individuals are likely to lean towards individualism if they are overly oppressed by societal norms, embodied by Mary Warren’s accusation of others. Mary Warren is good in nature as she does attempt to do what she believes as righteous by admitting that what Abigail and the girls do “[were] pretense” despite her extreme fear of Abigail. In contrast, the actions of those in *The Dressmaker* are often extreme in nature and manifest from personal judgement, making it difficult for the readers to sympathise with them. Ham renders antagonists caricatures of their true selves, hyperbolising their villainous features. Mr Almanac, who represents the judgemental and unforgiving Dungatar residents, is often antagonised and satirised by Ham, likened to a “crumpling question mark” and the “teats of a breeding bastards” in the narration. The townspeople ostracise Molly, not because they are severely pressured by the justice system in power like in *The Crucible*, but because “everyone needs somebody to hate.” They mistreat Molly because she does not conform to the norms embedded within their community, leaving her in a house that was “dank and smelled like possum piss.” The alliterative cliché “possum piss” helps Ham establish the poor state that she is left in and comedically criticise the harsh judgment and mistreatment of the townspeople towards Molly – one that leaves her “mad” and abandoned. To this end, both writers expound the reasons behind this detrimental response to crisis, though Miller’s focuses more on condemning the theocracy than the antagonists themselves.

Ultimately, both texts present a critique on the use of scapegoating as a means of self-preservation through the portrayal of their main and subsidiary characters. In addition, Miller and Brooks also seek to evoke sympathy from the readers towards those who are judged and ostracised respective communities, depicting how they are often harmed and exploited by others. However, *The Crucible* differs from *The Dressmaker* in that it focuses more on condemning the decaying justice system that governs Salem – one that represses individuals which leads to use of blame as a means to protect themselves.