

The crucible: conflict between john and elizabeth

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Arthur Miller was born in the year 1915 and grew up during the great depression. His father's business crashed during the great depression, this meant there was no money for Arthur Miller to exploit his great talent that was play writing. Fortunately through earning small amounts from odd jobs he was able to save up enough to go to university where he received several awards for his early plays. Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible* in the year 1952. He used the play as a way of criticizing the government for what is known as McCarthyism. McCarthyism is a communist witch hunt where anybody could be accused of being communist.

One of the many people to be accused was Arthur Miller; this is why the main themes of the play are justice and truth. Arthur Miller normally uses society and individuals as main themes for his plays this can also be seen in *The Crucible*. A good example of this is how all the other members of the puritan community look down on John Proctor for not being a regular church-goer. This is relevant today because it could be translated into a suppression of individuality and a pressure for people to fit into society. Another area it explores is the increase of tension and panic in a society.

The Crucible is set in a small puritan town where everybody knew each other and it was a very tight community. The despised local preacher called Parris stumbles across several of the village's girls performing a sinful dance including his own daughter Betty. While the girls are performing the dance with his slave Tituba, Betty falls into an unconscious state causing panic. The girls are accused of witchcraft. The girls admit to this but one of the girls called Abigail who had an affair with one of the central characters called

John Procter sees a chance to exploit the situation and claims there are more witches in the village.

Abigail still has feelings for John claims that his wife Elizabeth is a witch. John goes to court to appeal against this, he also tells the court about the affair he had with Abigail to ruin her credibility. The court gets Elizabeth to come in and confirm John's confessions but unfortunately she denies it to save his reputation. John is sentenced to be hung; Elizabeth who has survived so far due to her pregnancy tries to convince John to confess to witchcraft; however he chooses to die with his dignity rather than live without it.

The Salem witch trials was a real event and John , Abigail , Elizabeth and some other characters were real people however a lot of the story was written by Arthur Miller. The language of the play is accurate because it uses the correct accents and the characters would have been played by English actors because the modern American accent would not have developed yet. To show the fact that the characters live in a very religious community the characters often make references to the Bible this can be seen were Elizabeth describes Abigail's affect on the court as ' Parting the sea of Israel. This shows that the bible was part of their every day life. Before Act two starts the audience is aware of the tension between John and Elizabeth because of John's affair with Abigail. Despite having an affair with Abigail John still loves his wife and wants to protect her. A good example of this is were Abigail accuses Elizabeth of being sickly and John says ' You will say nothing of Elizabeth. ' Which show he wants to protect her over Abigail . The

tone he uses is angry and full of frustration which shows that he is frustrated and ashamed for having an affair.

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The setting of the scene makes the audience question John's commitment to Elizabeth, the scene is set eight days after Abigail told John that her actions are nothing to do with revealing that in fact there are no witches in the village and they were just dancing sinfully. This shows that John is withholding information from Elizabeth and the rest of the community and the audience is aware of this. The room that the scene is set in is described as long, dark with a low ceiling which could be a metaphor for John and Elizabeth's relationship.

It is also set in this way to create pressure and claustrophobia in the scene ahead which adds to the tension. In contrast to this Elizabeth can be heard singing to her children which paints a picture of a loving mother in the audience's minds and can create a sense of empathy with the character. It also gives the impression that John and Elizabeth were once a loving couple. The pattern of speech used by the characters increases the sense of tension because it is in short sharp snippets spoken rushed as if not to offend one another by speaking too long.

It is clear that Elizabeth is concerned why John is late and she decides to confront him about it. She expresses her worry by saying 'You come so late I thought you'd gone to Salem this afternoon.' John lies and says 'Why! I have no business in Salem.' Which the audience knows is untrue because he was

previously in Salem where he met Abigail, this shows that John feels he has to lie to Elizabeth and that it is easier than telling the truth. John then checks the stew and is displeased with its taste so he proceeds to add more seasoning.

When he is served the stew and tasted it he compliments Elizabeth on the seasoning. This shows how troubled their relationship is because John would rather lie about the seasoning of the stew than tell her it was under seasoned. The couple begin to discuss the witch trials and Elizabeth asks John to go to court and explain to the court about Abigail's trickery. John dismisses this and says things like 'I'll think on it.' And the stage actions show him considering where or not to tell the court.

Elizabeth thinks he is trying to protect Abigail but really he doesn't want Elizabeth and himself to be accused of witchcraft. The couple begin to argue and use longer sentences to express their true feelings which break the tension that has been built up through out the scene. In this scene the couple are trying to avoid confrontation or trying to please one another we can see this from the stage directions where it says 'Holding back a full condemnation of her' and 'She doesn't want friction.' Act three is the most important scene involving John and Elizabeth.

John has gone to the court to confess about his affair with Abigail which will discredit her and prove her accusations of witchcraft false. To prove John's confession true Danforth the judge asks Elizabeth to be brought before the court who John claims can never tell a lie. This increases tension because if Elizabeth does lie it will be worse because John has put all his trust in Elizabeth's

confession. When Elizabeth goes into the room John and Abigail's backs are turned, this is so they can't give hints to Elizabeth but it also is a represent how Elizabeth is feeling about the two.

She thinks that John has turned his back on her. The tension is enhanced by Arthur Miller gives stage direction 'She glances at Proctor for a clue. ' and 'She turns to Abigail. ' This shows how Elizabeth is trouble over making the right decision. When she finally answers we can see that she is still trouble at her decision '(in agony) No sir'. With this Elizabeth has condemned many people however she has realized that she still loves John and will even lie , something that goes completely against her beliefs to save his reputation. It also shows that Elizabeth is not perfect and has begun to forgive John.

In the next scene John is about to be hung however Elizabeth has a chance to convince him to confess which will save his life but ruin his reputation. This instantly creates tension because it gives Elizabeth a chance to save John. The audience wants to see Elizabeth ask John to lie and confess to witch craft but the tension is prolonged because Elizabeth fails to give John a final answer. She puts the decision in his hands by saying 'do as you will. ' John wants Elizabeth to be part of the decision because he says 'would you give them such a lie. Showing that John respects her feelings and considers her to be his partner raising the tension even more because of the couples new found care for each other. We finally see her true feelings where she tells him 'and yet you've not confessed till now. That speaks goodness in you. ' and if she does not give an answer John will continue to deny the charges building more tension because the audience now fears for Johns life.

John and Elizabeth's relationship is still getting better however John still thinks of himself as 'a fraud' and a 'no good man'.

Elizabeth doesn't want John to think this, this is made clear when she says 'Do as you will, do as you will.' Which shows that she is giving him space so that he can prove to himself that he is a good man. John decides against confessing and by doing so he now feels he is worthy of Elizabeth. Elizabeth finally forgives John telling him her true feelings 'John I counted myself so poorly made, no honest love could come to me! Suspicion kissed you when I did; I never knew how to say my love. It was a cold house I kept.' This also shows that she has recognised her own failings.

Despite the fact that John is going to hang the audience now know they both recognise their love for each other which is signified by John's kiss 'he lifts her, and kisses her now with great passion.' Showing they are not afraid to love each other. The play shows us that it is dangerous not to speak your mind and that it can lead to great tragedies. It is also dangerous for society to put someone in a position where they cannot speak their mind. John and Elizabeth realized this and if they had talked about their feelings more then Elizabeth would not have had to lie.

We can also see the parallels the play shares with the McCarthy communist hunt. The death at the end is important because it was preventable the play also shows how lies and deceit can lead to pointless deaths. We can also see the pressure needed for people to talk about their true feelings, only when John was about to hang did the pair express their love for each other and in contrast to this when they were living a comfortable life before the trials

they were constantly wanting to please one another and not disrupt their normal everyday existence.