

# Abigail williams: villain or victim in arthur miller's the crucible

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



In the play, 'The Crucible' Miller's writing steers us, the audience, in a way that initially inclines us to believe she is presented as a villain. From the beginning of the play, Miller unquestionably presents Abigail as the villain. She is exhibited as a skillful liar, manipulative, dishonest; someone who is willing to go to great lengths to protect herself. Miller continues to sway us to view Abigail as a villainous character throughout the play. She is responsible for many deaths throughout the play, in fact she could have stopped the hysteria and ensuing madness many times if she just admitted the truth but she doesn't, hence, cementing her place as the ultimate villain. Any attempt to see her as a victim at the beginning of the play after the first innocent person is hanged but is absurd. While Miller cleverly hints that she may be in fact be a victim of a Puritan Society at times, there is never enough to see her as a real victim. Through his use of stage directions, dialogues and his characterization of Abigail he manages to evoke sympathy for her, perhaps showing that she was not always the complete villain we see her as.

The context in which the play is set is important to understand Abigail's intentions and motivations. They were in the time where the 'Salem folk believed that the virgin forest was the Devil's last preserve, his home base and the citadel of his final stand. To the best of their knowledge the American forest was the last place on earth that was not paying homage to God.' Puritans; where everything was strictly controlled and religious. Defining that there was no margin for mistakes, anyone suspicious of witchcraft would be hanged. How Abigail acts, can be seen as a result of the environment she grew up in where everyone around her was toxic, self-

absorbent and only cared about their reputation. This could be the main factor in her manipulative nature.

Initially in the play in Abigail is accused by Betty of witchcraft ' You drank a charm to kill John Proctor's wife! You drank a charm to kill Goody Proctor.' Her terrible nature and of nefarious behavior becomes immediately evident as she threatens the other girls, ' Let either of you breathe a word, or edge of a word, about the other things, and I will come to you... I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you!... I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down.' Abigail's actions and various threats not only intimidate the girls and force them to cooperate with her but they also lead to the deaths of nineteen innocent civilians later in the play.

Further, in the play, Abigail once again shows her dark and distrusting side as she claims to Paris, ' There be no blush about my name.... It's a bitter woman, lying cold, sniveling woman, and I will not work for such a woman!' Here we can see she believes that because of Elizabeth, she and John cannot be together as Abigail claims ' she hates me, she must for I would not be her slave'. It could be that since she is still young and Proctor took advantage of her giving her mixed feelings and leading her into curiosity hence making her lust towards him to make such decisions that lead to various consequences. She believes that John Proctor loves her and that he wants to be with her ' I look for John Proctor the took. Me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart! You loved me, John Proctor, and whatever sin it is, you love me yet!' She is deluded in her lust to see that he doesn't want to be with her as she clings onto him where he only used her for the excitement of

himself. Abigail could have intentionally said the word ' sin' to emphasize how bad of a thing Proctor did by ending their affair, making him appear as a villain.

Abigail hints that she is the victim as she confronts Proctor ' It's she put me out, you cannot pretend it was you. I saw your face when she put me out, and you loved me then and you do now!' Proctor continues to deny her claims as she continues to rant her delusional version of his love for her; ' And you must. You are no wintry man. I know you, John. I know you. She is weeping. I cannot sleep for dreamin' Miller uses stage direction to show that she is using herself and their affair as a leverage to trap him and make him feel guilty as ' She clutches him desperately.' The repetition of the phrase ' I know you' heightens the effect of her words, in which she is pleading him to change his mind. This suggests that she was taken advantage of by an older and married man, as he feels that what the townsfolk think of him is more important than the feeling of a 17-year-old orphan. This supports the idea that she is also a victim. But her use of their past affair reinforces the fact that she uses countless attempts of blackmail and play of emotions to make herself looked victimised where actually is a villain.

Abigail is looked down upon by the community as she was adopted child and has an affair with an older man; her uncle sees that ' it has troubled me that you are now seven months out of their house, and in all this time no other family has ever called for your service' this only resulted in her hatred towards the townsfolk and especially Elizabeth Proctor.

Miller presents Abigail as a vile girl as she manipulates the people around her in order to get out of the trouble she's in. She instantly turns from telling the truth about 'just dancing' in the woods to very manipulatively convincing everyone that it was Tituba that bewitched everyone there. Shifting all the blame to Tituba at the same time calling out names that were put into her mouth just like how McCarthyism is used as a leverage to keep her out of trouble and bring anyone down. This makes her seem like a terrible person as she does not stop the hangings after the first person was hanged.

Leading from the death of her parents and being abused by an older man; this has a major impact resulted in her terrible choices. Anyone would want to save themselves instead of admitting that they're wrong when anyone is willing to believe that they're innocent. This is what was most likely lead her from being looked down to rising in power by acting and using a fraud to accuse the rest of the townsfolk as witches.

In conclusion, Miller gives us sympathy towards her as well as warning the audience at the same time. Revealing that she was presented as a non-complex character at the start of the play as she breaks a few rules by going around dancing and later as the play builds up we see glimpses of her other nature evoking the truth that she is not as simple as she seems. Defining that she is a misguided youth with the nature of deceptions and lies with her history of being abused and left alone guiding her towards the path she walks.