

Fear is something to be feared

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Fear is Something to be Feared

The word “fear” can be defined as: a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger or pain. In his play *The Crucible*, Arthur Miller addresses the fear embedded within Puritan society. According to the Public Broadcasting Service, “Puritans lived in a constant state of spiritual anxiety, searching for signs of God’s favor or anger.” This anxiety propelled the Salem Witch Trials and made them extremely difficult to stop. Therefore, Miller proves that fear had been the Puritans’ fatal flaw.

First and foremost, Tituba starts the chain of accusations due to fear. When Abigail accuses her of calling the Devil, Tituba is backed into a corner. She confesses to witchcraft after Parris threatens, “You will confess yourself or I will take you out and whip you to your death, Tituba!” (Miller 44). Then, Tituba is pressured into accusing others of witchcraft. Hale asks her, “When the Devil comes to you does he ever come– with another person?” With this question, an accusation could be avoided, but Parris interrupts with, “Who came with him?” implying that Tituba must name somebody (45).

Afterwards, Tituba is asked a series of demanding questions such as: “Did you ever see Sarah Good with him? Or Osburn?” and “Was it man or woman came with him?” until she finally cracks and begins describing who she accuses (46). Thus, Tituba is given no other choice but to choose: confess to and accuse others of witchcraft, or be killed. Consequentially, Tituba’s fear of death results in the beginning of the Salem Witch Trials, in which nineteen people were unjustly sentenced to death. The Salem Witch Trials greatly contributed to the end of Puritanism because they revealed the fear and corruption that was hidden in Puritan society.

Moreover, Mary Warren's fear of exclusion causes her to turn on Proctor. Of course, Mary fears for her life, but she feels safe when she belongs to a group. For instance, she has no problem pretending to be chilled by imaginary spirits when she is with Abby and the other girls. However, she is unable to reenact this by herself to prove to the court that the girls are only pretending to see spirits. When she is in court as Proctor's witness, she tries really hard to tell the truth. But, when Abigail and the girls pretend to see her spirit as a bird, she cannot stand to be singled out and excluded. The stage directions read: " Gradually Abigail and the girls leave off, until only Mary is left there, staring up at the " bird," screaming madly (118). The moment Mary Warren is left by herself, she turns on Proctor and accuses him of dealing with the Devil. Therefore, Mary Warren turns her back on the truth because she is afraid to be the outcast. Fear not only proves to be fatal to John Proctor, but also to Puritanism itself because it shows that the pressure to fit into Puritan society was so great that people were willing to abandon their morals to do so.

Last but not least, Danforth fails to put an end to the Witch Trials because he fears losing his peace of mind. He knows that he has convicted many people of witchcraft, and he does not know how he will live with himself if they turn out to be innocent. This leads Danforth to continue hanging people in an attempt to convince himself that he is doing the right thing. Danforth states, " Them that will not confess will hang. Twelve are already executed; the names of these seven are given out, and the village expects to see them die this morning. Postponement now speaks a floundering on my part; reprieve or pardon must cast doubt upon the guilt of them that died till now" (129).

Through this, it is clear that Danforth's fear of being wrong prompts him to lie to himself and continue the vicious cycle of convictions. The fear of being wrong was devastating to Puritan society because it directly related to corrupt leadership.

Overall, through the consequences of his characters fears, Miller is able to prove that fear is the Puritans' fatal flaw because it drove the society to a state of immorality and corruption. Each individual's fear for his/her own life cost the lives of many others. Fear has always battled with morality, and it always will.

Works Cited

Miller, Arthur. *The Crucible*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976.

"People & Ideas: The Puritans." PBS. PBS. Web. 16 Dec. 2014.