

Selfishness in the crucible

Literature, American Literature



The theme of selfishness is mainly presented through the actions and speeches of characters, including Abigail, Reverend Parris and Danforth. The theme of selfishness is demonstrated through the character of Abigail. She would do absolutely anything to get John Proctor, even though he is a married man. This is demonstrated through her determination to get rid of Elizabeth Proctor. She goes as far as accusing Elizabeth of witchery, so that Elizabeth will be hanged and she can then marry John Proctor.

Her selfish desire is rightly summed up in John Proctor's comment, " She thinks to dance with me on my wife's grave." This highlights her selfishness as a ' grave-dancer' usually refers to someone who celebrates someone else's misfortunes; however, she is actually even worse than a normal grave-dancer, as she will happily send Elizabeth to her death simply because she wants her husband.

She also always put her own interests before anything else. Even though she claims to love John Proctor, she still puts herself first.

When Mary accuses Proctor of witchery in order to save herself, she says nothing to defend him. Moreover, in order to stay in power, she happily sends hundreds of people to their deaths, including Mary, who was once her close friend. By the end of the play, she steals all her uncle's money, so that she can leave Salem where she cannot survive anymore. This is a very selfish act as he has given her a home and she knows that money is his life.

The theme of selfishness is also demonstrated through the character of Reverend Parris. In the beginning of the play, Betty, Parris' daughter is ill; however, Parris seems to be more worried about the negative impacts on

him due to her illness than about her health. When he prays, he says, “ God help me!” The fact that he prays that God help him instead of his daughter shows that he cares more about himself than his own daughter.

In order to appear to be trustworthy and holy, he does not tell the court anything about the girls’ dance. Even when Hale told Danforth that, he denied the fact that he had seen the girls naked. When he had to admit that he had seen them dancing, he admitted it ‘ unwillingly’, showing his reluctance to do so. This shows how selfish he is. As a minister, he should not lie in the first place, nor should he keep any useful information from the court; the fact that he does show that he cares more about himself than God.

He has been working in Salem for quite a while, and he must know that people who are executed of witchery are really innocent, but throughout the play, he has not shown any strong emotion for their deaths; however, when he tells Danforth that there is danger for him if Proctor and Rebecca are hanged, he ‘ cries out’. The action of ‘ crying out’ expresses an intense emotion. The fact that he cares more about his own safety than innocent people’s lives demonstrate his selfishness.

The theme of selfishness is again demonstrated through the character of Danforth. When Hale and Parris beg Danforth to postpone the execution of Proctor and Rebecca, so that they have more time to persuade them to confess, Danforth refuses because he believes that ‘ postponement now speaks a floundering on his part’. ‘ Flounder’ is a verb referring to making mistakes. Essentially he is saying that he cannot postpone the execution because it will show that he is mistaken, which makes him look stupid.

The fact that he says so shows that he does not want to lose face, even if it means hanging innocent people. Moreover, he says, " I cannot withhold from them the perfection of their punishment." The use of the noun ' perfection' here shows how adamant he is, as it refers to the state of being complete and correct in every way. This is ironic as he knows the truth. This demonstrates his selfishness as he cares more about his reputation and the authority of the court than the lives of the innocent people. In conclusion, the theme of selfishness is presented thoroughly through a number of characters and their actions. The characters of Abigail, Parris and Danforth demonstrate selfishness in their own different ways.