

# Avarice and vengeance in the crucible

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The play *The Crucible* takes place during the Salem Witch Trials of the 1800s. Yet Arthur Miller does not reveal the tragedy of the witch trials in the manner expected. Miller expresses the underlying causes of the accusations made as those stemming from personal greed and the feeling of revenge. Abigail Williams, Mr. and Mrs. Putnam, and Reverend Samuel Parris all have their own agendas as to why they “cry witch” on others in their village.

Miller outlines the history between Abigail Williams and John Proctor in Act One: Abigail was removed from the Proctor home by Elizabeth, Proctor’s wife, because of an affair happening between her and Proctor. Because of this, Abigail harbors a hate and jealousy towards Elizabeth. In Act Two, a warrant was sent for Elizabeth’s arrest: The girl, the Williams girl, Abigail Williams, sir. She sat to dinner in Reverend Parris’ house tonight, and without word nor warnin’ she falls to the floor.

Like a struck beast, [Parris] says, and screamed a scream that a bull would weep to hear. And [Parris] goes to save her, and, stuck two inches in the flesh of her belly, he draw a needle out. And demandin’ of her how she come to be so stabbed, she [...] testify it were your wife’s familiar spirit pushed it in. (Miller 79) Abigail knew that from the beginning of the witch scare that she could exact revenge on those who she felt wronged her or took something from her, which would be the case of Elizabeth.

Abigail knew Mary Warren made a doll, and was planning to give it to Elizabeth; she also saw Mary Warren stick the needle back in. Abigail took advantage of the situation to provide seemingly irrefutable evidence of witchcraft on Elizabeth’s part. Through this, Proctor sees that vengeance runs these trials, and how easily people turn on one another to get what they

want. Proctor also knows that Abigail's revenge has no limits; she has no shame, and always believes that she is right, much like the character of her uncle, Reverend Parris.

At this point, Proctor had to juggle keeping his past a secret from the public and protecting Elizabeth, as Abigail will turn on anyone who “ wrongs” her. Mr. Thomas Putnam and Mrs. Ann Putnam have a sorrowful history of losing their newborn children, while only having one that survives. Mrs. Putnam finds comfort in blaming their midwife, Sarah Osburn, for the deaths, saying, “ I begged [Thomas] not to call Osburn because I feared her. My babies always shriveled in her hands! (l. 50). Mrs. Putnam finds that crying witch on Goody Osburn would solve the “ murder” of her children, yet does not desire to take into account her own role in her pregnancy, being that Miller says she is forty-five years old (l. 13). Mrs. Putnam, in a way, wants someone to feel the pain of losing seven children, being that she is a selfish woman – putting her child in the dangers of witchcraft to find the identity of the person who “ killed” her babies.

Accusing someone of witchcraft, and potentially running their life, was the perfect way to exact her so-called “ revenge”. Although Reverend Parris never accused anyone of witchcraft, he refuses to defend Proctor of any charges brought up against him – from insulting the court to claims of witchcraft. In Act Three, Parris takes Proctor's depositions from Corey Giles and Mary Warren personally, warning Judge Danforth that “[...] since [he] come to Salem [Proctor] is blackening [his] name [...]” (110) and “[Proctor]'s come to overthrow this court, Your Honor! (97). Aside from trying to protect his reputation, Parris makes such allegations about Proctor in an attempt to

prove Proctor as an unreliable messenger. Parris wants to get vengeance for what he feels Proctor has done to him, just as Abigail wants revenge on Elizabeth. But, these alleged wrong-doings have only come from Parris's mouth; he seems to enjoy taking things personal when they come from Proctor, and the courtroom scene is the perfect place for Parris to return the hate he feels from Proctor.

The Salem Witch Trials proved to be a time of tragedy and mass hysteria as accusations ran rapidly through the small Massachusetts village. The source of the witchcraft charges came from the village people's personal greed and want of retribution, as well as many other contributing factors. Abigail, Parris, and the Putnams all used this situation to their advantage, hoping to get some personal satisfaction out of their charges, thus ruining lives of their victims: Elizabeth Proctor, John Proctor, and Sarah Osburn.