

Reputation on the crucible essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Crucible was written in 1952 and the situation in America was prosperous after the Second World War. But, there were problems for America and fear of the enemy, the fear of communism. The American people feared their old allies, the Russians, and feared their communist regime. The Americans were (and still are) democrats and they were devoted to their democratic government and their democratic lives so communism was a real threat to the livelihood of the American people.

In what was to become known as the “ Cold War”, two superpowers were formed. The Americans against the Soviets, west verses east. A frantic hysteria developed in the US known as the “ Red Scare” and the people began to believe that communists were in the country plotting to bring down the government. This scare was partly a product of McCarthyism, an anti-communist crusade led by Senator Joseph Raymond McCarthy, an American politician.

He allegedly possessed a list of 205 names of members of the government, servicemen and other officials who he claimed were communists. These accusations were nearly always based purely on malicious rumour or small enquiries into communist activity. People were tried and fined, some even jailed for reasons beyond their control. And then there was what you had to do after you confessed to your alleged crimes. You named and incriminated other people - guilty or not. If you did not confess you would be likely to lose your job, lose your friends and you would be publicly embarrassed.

If you confessed you were effectively destroyed. As in America in the 1950s (their assumption being that communists were out there), in The Crucible the

villagers of Salem believed that the devil was out there. The townsfolk really believed that Lucifer was roaming the streets of Salem seeking to destroy the town and seeking to destroy the institution of the church. As Reverend Parris said to the contingent surrounding the rigid body of his ill daughter Betty, "A wide opinion's running in the parish that the Devil may be among us."

"In many ways I think the assumption of devil activity seemed to be a way of finding a scapegoat for the personal problems of the community. This included the series of deaths of Mr. Putman's children and the coma in which Parris' daughter seemed to have been trapped in. Reverend John Hale of Beverly's arrival in Salem was a definite testimony to the belief of the devil and the existence of witches. He arrived at the home of Parris armed with an arsenal of books on how to hunt and recognise witches. His comment, "the devil is precise, the marks of his existence are definite as stone," proves that he believed in the presence of the devil and he knew how to recognise him.

Not only did the townsfolk of Salem believe that the devil was out there, they feared him and what he could do to them. Tituba (Parris' maid), who confessed to working for the devil towards the end of Act 1, was deeply afraid of the devil but, at the same time, she was afraid of the consequences of her actions. This shows the problems that arise when trafficking with the devil. Tituba begged to Parris, "no, no, don't hang Tituba! I tell him I don't desire to work for him, sir." This clearly indicates that she was scared of what the devil would do to her if she did not do his work. She was, however, also afraid of what the devil would do to her if she did not confess her guilt - he said that he would take her outside and hang her in the street.

The latter fear outweighed the fear of the devil resulting in Tituba confessing to her crimes and seeking forgiveness from God. Tituba was not the only one who feared the devil. Parris was also quite afraid of the devil and of what the devil could do to him. He said in fright when speaking of his daughter, " how can it be the devil? Why would he choose my house to strike? We have all manner of licentious people in this village. " He was scared of losing his apparently ill daughter and scared of the threat that the devil posed to the God as he is a clergyman.

He was worried that the presence of the devil in his house would tarnish his reputation as a respected member of the community. The fear of the devil began to split the community but it was not the only thing creating a social divide in Salem. A lot of the community distrusted one another. The relationship between John Proctor and his wife Elizabeth is a very good example of this. Their relationship was based on distrust, resentment and bitterness largely due to the affair that John had had with Abigail Williams.

The way in which they speak to each other, particularly in Act 2, shows a lot of distrust as their conversations seem to be held merely to try and break the ice. Another example of distrust, more associated with the rumours of witchcraft, was with Giles Corey and his wife Martha. When Reverend Hale arrived in town Giles took the opportunity to ask, " What signifies the readin' of strange books? " referring to mysterious books that his wife read from. He associated his recent stoppage of prayer with his wife's books indicating that he believed that she was involved in some sort of witchcraft. These types of minor hints and suspicions of the abnormal aroused much attention to the little town of Salem to the extent that an official court was set up in the town

to put on trial people suspected of being witches. It was headed up by Deputy-Governor Danforth, a very powerful judge from Boston.

Because this court was such a high profile court it was essential for it to be successful bringing to "justice" as many of the devil's worshippers as possible to prove that it was not wasting its time. Many wild and unnecessary accusations were thrown at people, to begin with at the dregs of Salem society like the housemaids and the slaves. But then the accusations advanced to a new level of society with the likes of Elizabeth Proctor being accused of being a witch and being promptly arrested by Marshall Herrick. Abigail Williams had framed her as Abigail faked being stabbed after planting a needle in the stomach of a doll (a poppet) made in court by Elizabeth's housemaid Mary Lewis.

This particular accusation is a good example of people using witchcraft as an excuse for personal problems i. e. Abigail wanted John Proctor for her own so she tried to convict his wife. The accusations were based on little evidence and when John Proctor asked demandingly, "What signifies a poppet?" to Marshall Herrick he got no real answer. In the Salem court defendants were assumed guilty until proven innocent and the sort of questions that were directed at the defendants were designed to make them sound guilty whatever answer they gave. If you confessed you would live, if you didn't then you would die - you were destroyed.

The next stage of the court was to name others quite similar to the courts in 1950s America. The people of Salem recognised that this was a way to get "off the hook", especially the girls who had been dancing in the wood. They

had reeled off a long list of names of people who they claimed they had seen with the devil. So, as the accused were expected to name others it came as a shock to Danforth when John Proctor would give no names of people he had seen (or not seen) consorting with the devil.

Proctor also refused to sign his name as one who had confessed although he accepted his confession. He firmly stated, " It is my name. I have given you my soul; leave me my name. " It is possible to draw many comparisons between the Salem Witch Trials and the McCarthy Witch Hunts in terms of the way in which the courts were operated and the social aspects of the two periods. The main factor of both periods was the assumption of an enemy believed to be out there seeking to ruin the life of the community.

We can learn a lot of lessons today from the Salem Witch Trials and from the McCarthy Witch Hunts about effects that the harsh world of rumour, deceit and wrong accusations can have on people's lives. Despite the age of *The Crucible* there are many issues included in it that are still very relevant in the modern world.