

The crucible essay

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The play is based on the events of 1692 in the town of Salem, where women were allegedly accused of witchcraft and relations with the devil, who allegedly sent damage to people and livestock. Women were found guilty and executed. Subsequently, of course, the church recognized such courts and executions as illegal and unjust. One of the plot lines just shows the development of the process in Salem and the tragedy of women who cannot prove their own innocence because of the absurdity of the charges against them.

Another line is the story of the trial, which was organized by Senator Joseph McCarthy against persons engaged in anti-American activities, although what exactly was understood as such was not initially stated. The process of the first half of the 50s was much like the process of the end of the XVII century: equally ridiculous accusations, equally unproven cases, equally unhappy people who do not understand what is happening and how to deal with it.

Arthur Miller participated in the trial as an accused, many details were written off “from nature”, which made the play especially convincing, and thanks to which it was immediately declared anti-American and condemned as irrelevant. Nevertheless, history has proved the opposite: it is a strong work touching the reader and viewer about stupidity and meanness, betrayal and hopelessness, when the state’s machine is launched against a person. Arthur Miller is the author of the concept of “witch hunt” as a designation of a process fabricated against a person, unproven, and therefore deadly.

Example 1: The Crucible by Arthur Miller

The novel, *The Crucible* was written in 1953 by Arthur Miller, which was based on the Salem Witch Trials existing in the late 1600s. In the play, Abigail and several other young women accuse innocent citizens of Salem for the action of witchcraft. During the trials, many individuals were unfairly persecuted; such as John Proctor. This event in history may be associated with the Red Scare, in which individuals were tried for their questionable influences of communism in the United States.

When Miller compares the character of John Proctor to himself, the reader is able to relate the similar experiences that both men faced. *The Crucible* demonstrates the struggle against corruption involving the court, which lead to the death of many innocent individuals in Salem. *The Crucible* generates an allegory for Arthur Miller's struggles with McCarthyism because of his similar experience relating to John Proctor's battle against the Salem Witch Trials, and the relation between the actions of the court in both situations.

Arthur Miller uses several writing methods in order to convey *The Crucible* as an allegory for his struggles with McCarthyism. Miller demonstrates how *The Crucible* represents an allegory for his conflict with McCarthyism by relating his experiences with the plot of the novel. Miller relates the novel to his struggles by stating, "Should the accused confess, his honesty could only be proved by naming former confederates." (*Are You Now...* 34) Miller is explaining how the court operated, in terms of coming to their conclusions. He is showing the similarity between his experience with the trials involving the Red Scare, and the trials in Salem.

The witchcraft trials were very much alike the communism suspicions in the United States, in which many individuals were falsely accused for crimes they had not committed. The court's duty was to draw names of other participants of the so-called "crimes". Miller indicates the similarity in Judge Danforth's statement to McCarthyism in the quote, "Mr. Proctor. When the devil came to you did you see Rebecca Nurse in his company?" (Crucible 129) This displays how the court believed your testimony, only if you were to mention other members.

Miller uses the technique of connecting the two experiences together by incorporating the approaches in which the court took to obtain valuable information. The court's actions demonstrate how unjust they were in coming to conclusions. Another way that Miller creates an allegory for his struggles with McCarthyism in the novel is when Hale tells Abigail, "You must have no fear to tell us who they are, do you understand? We will protect you." (Crucible 43) This technique pressures Abigail into falsely accusing others for acts they had not committed, although she is turning the blame away from herself.

Miller relates this technique to his experience with the court in which they attempted to make him feel protected, if he would reveal his knowledge. This proves that the court did whatever they could to extract information from the suspects. The novel proves to represent an allegory for Miller's struggles with the court, and the suspicion that the jury had among the suspects. He relates the Salem Witch trials to the Red Scare by stating, "In both places, to keep social unity intact, the authority of leaders had to be

hardened and words of skepticism toward them constricted” (Are You Now... 32).

Arthur Miller is clarifying the fact that as the trials continued, the more strict and severe the court became. This often caused for false accusations against innocent citizens. As the trials developed, the courts were able to establish their own conclusions stemmed from the proceedings. Miller explains how John Proctor rebelled against the court’s unjust actions of jumping to conclusions before gaining enough logical reasoning. He claims that Proctor, “ [had] become the most forthright voice against the madness around him” (Why I Wrote... 26).

He relates his experience with the court to the Proctor’s relation with the Witch Trials because they both had stood their ground against the authority. Miller continues on to state, “ I sensed that I had at last found something of myself in it,” (Why I Wrote... 26) Miller is able to finalize his relationship with Proctor by professing how the character in the novel was an inspirational figure. Overall, this strategy of relating himself to the character of John Proctor proved to be effective in the representation of Miller’s fight against McCarthyism.

The Crucible constructs an allegory for Arthur Miller’s struggles with McCarthyism because of his similar experience relating to John Proctor’s battle against the Salem Witch Trials, and the relation between the actions of the court in both situations. Arthur Miller is able to develop an allegory from the play to his experience with several strategies. He relates the actions of the court to the way in which the court treated him. He then uses the similarity between the role Proctor played in the play, to the role he had in

his struggles during the Red Scare. In conclusion, Miller used many effective tactics to create a compelling allegory of his struggles against McCarthyism in the novel, *The Crucible*.

Example 2: The Nature of Abigail's Villainy in *The Crucible*

A dynamic antagonist, Abigail Williams from Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is a great example of how a character can be molded by personal desires and a work's setting to become a villain. Seemingly innocent, orphaned adolescent Abigail ultimately causes hysteria in the town of Salem from her frivolity and selfishness. The reasoning and origins of Abigail's malice demonstrate the setting's influence on the inhabitants of Salem during the 1692 witch trials. Abigail is introduced as Parris' niece.

At the beginning of the play, Arthur Miller provides what might be an explanation to the start of Abigail's needy nature as she relays the story of how she became orphaned to her friends. Abigail explains that she witnessed her parents being killed by Indians when she was a child. This harsh past and lack of a good authority male figure (Parris is a character that is extremely paranoid and obsessed with his reputation; definitely not fatherly or nurturing) explains her initial attraction to John Proctor; her older, married, employer before the play begins. Abigail's affair with Proctor is the fundamental start of the witch trials.

Had she never had the affair, she'd never have fallen for Proctor, therefore she wouldn't want to kill his wife in order to have him back. The Puritan way of thinking and strict religious system in Salem paved the way for a villain to arise. Abigail's villainy is significant because it helps the reader become

familiarized with the environment of Salem Massachusetts, the Christian religion it thrived off of, and how these combined ultimately caused the witch trials. The people who practiced this intense Christianity had no spiritual method to relinquish guilt for their sins.

In turn, this led to the people of Salem having to find their own outlets for their guilt. Along with the stress of guilt, the individuals of Salem have to worry about the constant need to make themselves adequate for the community. Reputation is extremely important, and being associated with anti-christ figures and ideas is completely unacceptable. These stresses combined raise the perfect type of people for Abigail to use to aid her in her plan to rid of Elizabeth.

After practicing witch craft with her, Abigail's friends feel guilty for the sin. Abigail's failure to feel guilt or this (or any of other sin she commits throughout the play) is what attains her success in causing havoc in Salem. After being found out for their anti-Christian activities in the woods, Abigail begins accusing other random people in the community of witchcraft. The other girls follow suit, shuffling their guilt to someone else to feel self assurance. By accusing other people the girls felt they had retrieved innocence. In a sense Abigail was able to use her friends without them noticing. Through her manipulation shows malevolence. Of course, Abigail didn't mean to cause so much conflict.

She only wanted one person dead; Elizabeth. Had she not began accusing other people of witch craft to save her name, the problem wouldn't have blown up to epic proportions. This doesn't make her any less of a villain,

however. Many of the townspeople were hanged because of her selfishness. Her naivety and fervent want for Proctor blinded her from consequences. Covering up herself snowballed to her friends and then out into the community. This is particularly interesting because in any other setting the word of these girls wouldn't even be considered let alone used as solid judgement in court.

Abigail's success in causing death to innocents in the community, despite her age and insignificant role in the community, further exemplifies the atmosphere of the Puritan religion. After analyzing Abigail's character one can learn much about the behavior of other people as well. Everyone has desires that they wish to obtain. Some obstacles must be overcome in order to achieve these. Due to Abigail's villainy conceit many people suffered. Not only were lives lost, but she never found the peace she wished for with Proctor. It's important to realize that there are consequences for neglecting the well being of others for self gain.

Example 3: Informative Essay on The Crucible

The Crucible The playwright, Arthur Miller, uses the character construction in the play to position the audience to accept the dominant reading of the play, which is the concern and dangers of religious fanaticism. The play, The Crucible, is set in Salem, Massachusetts in 1692. It is based upon the actual events which led to the ' Salem witch trials', a series of hearings to determine which individuals were in fact practicing witchcraft.

The play also conveys parallels to the McCarthyist era, during which the playwright was questioned as he had attended Communist meetings, and

modern day anti-terror laws, which prevent people of certain backgrounds and cultures to enter countries, as they are immediately sent to prisons, based on appearance and other individuals opinions, that are certainly not based upon facts. The audience is positioned to relate to the concepts in the play, as well as sympathising with characters. Miller does this as it is a way of getting his message to the audience.

The dominant reading of the play is religious fanaticism; this is displayed as the town of Salem is ruled by a theocracy. However, the perfect town is hardly that, filled with corruption, betrayal and a never-ending blame game, which evidently causes masses of people to be tried in court resulting in many of them being hung. This concept of doing anything to achieve what you want draws parallels to a number of occurrences. They are, the real Salem witch trials upon which the story is based upon, the McCarthyist era and the modern day anti-terror laws although not directly addressed, the likeness is overwhelming.

The anti-terror laws allow, mostly, innocent individuals to be held in prisons around the world simply because they look a certain way or are of a certain race. The comparison drawn is that one does not need evidence, merely a person's word, true or false. Miller displays certain parallels and concepts to show that religious fanaticism is not always guaranteed a peaceful society, in fact it ensues the opposite. The hero in the play is John Proctor; he is a good man who has unfortunately made one regretful decision, consorting with his previous housemaid, Abigail Williams.

Proctors' wife, Elizabeth, questions his motives and whereabouts, sometimes leaving Proctor feeling undeserving as he has told Williams to leave him alone since the event. He is the hero of the play as he, unlike many other characters, does not feel pressure to succumb to the unreasonable accusations of witchcraft. When Elizabeth Proctor, John Proctor's wife, is about to be taken away for witchcraft Proctor is portrayed as caring and selfless, as shown in this quote by John Proctor, " We are what we always were in Salem, but now the little crazy children are jangling the keys of the kingdom, and common vengeance writes the law!

This warrant's vengeance! I'll not give my wife to vengeance! " (p72).

Elizabeth replies, " I'll go John. " (p72) John responds with a quite precise answer, " You will not go! " (p72) This quote shows that Proctor, no matter what unjust decisions he has made in the past are nothing compared to the passion he feels for his wife, and that he would do anything for her.

Furthermore, it allows the audience to see that one person does know what is happening, that most citizens of Salem have succumbed to the childish antics of teenage girls.

At the end of Act IV, Proctor is asked to sign a piece of paper confessing that he had consulted with the devil, and that he was practising witchcraft, this quote displays his courage, " I have confessed myself! Is there no good penitence but it be public? God does not need my name nailed upon the church! God sees my name; God knows how black my sins are! It is enough! " (p123 - p124) This shows that Proctor is willing to save his family by

confessing his sins, furthermore he does not want his family to be shunned by Salem.

This positions the audience to sympathise with Proctor allowing the audience to like him, and view him as Miller had intended, a hero. Proctor also helps Miller to display the dangers of religious fanaticism, and what can become of a society if theology is so profusely followed; that is, a corrupt and spiteful community, where each individual has their own wellbeing, before they begin to think of any one else. Abigail Williams is a licentious individual who will stop at nothing to secure her previous paramour, John Proctor.

She believes that the previous sexual encounter between her and Proctor means he still and always will, love her. Williams is portrayed as the enemy in the play, no doubt that she is more conniving than any other character, as shown in Act I, when she threatens the other girls involved in the so called ‘witchcraft’, she states, “ And mark this. Let either of you breathe a word, or the edge of a word, about the other things, and I will come to you in the black of some terrible night and I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you.

And you know I can do it...” (p26) This quote clearly shows what Williams is capable of, and that she wants the other girls to know that she will do what is necessary for her to achieve her goal of retaining Proctor. Williams also conveys how deceptive she truly is when talking to her uncle, Parris, about why she was fired by Elizabeth Proctor, from the Proctors’ service in this quote, “ She hates me, uncle, she must, for I would not be her slave. It’s a bitter woman, a lying, cold, snivelling woman, and I will not work for such a

woman! (p20) This clearly shows that she does not care who she hurts or whose reputation she blackens, as long as her name is good it does not matter. Miller uses Williams to show that religious fanaticism does not always ensure a civilised humanity. Thomas Putnam is a greedy man who, like Williams, does what is in his power to retrieve, what he believes, is rightfully his. In this case it is supposed, by Giles Corey, that Putnam compelled his daughter, Ruth, to accuse many people in Salem, including George Jacobs, Giles Corey and Goody Osbourn.

Goody Osbourn was the Putnam's midwife many times, and they believe she killed their children, also George Jacob's was an innocent man accused by Ruth Putnam of sending his spirit to her at night. Giles Corey correctly identified Thomas Putnam for wrongfully accusing persons of witchcraft in order to gain their many acres surrounding his already significant property. The following quote in Act I is stated by Putnam to Parris, " When Reverend Hale comes, you will proceed to look for signs of witchcraft here. " (p23).

This quote shows that Putnam wants the witch-hunt to progress; progression of this will grant Putnam time to declare more of his rivals, in return he will receive their land. The character analysis of Putnam shows that he is also spiteful and like Williams, his own well-being and desires are all that concern him, displaying the disconcerting corruption in the ' perfect' society that is Salem. In conclusion, Arthur Miller does in fact use the character construction in the play to position the audience to accept the dominant reading of the play, which is, the dangers of religious fanaticism.

Miller does this by depicting the characters in a certain way, such as John Proctor who is portrayed as a hero for he would rather die to keep his name, than live a lie and be shunned by society. It also conveys that the dominant reading, of dangers of religious fanaticism, does not always entail a perfect life. Thus, Arthur Miller succeeded in what he set out to do which was, create a play that is not only successful but conveyed an idea of great importance, that is to display the parallels between the 1692 Salem witch trials and the McCarthyist era, and how easily it is for corruption to surface and become everyday life.

Example 4: The Crucible Play Character Analysis

Throughout The Crucible there are good characters, bad characters and the characters who do not take action when action is required. Of these characters, close to all of them embodies one of the seven deadly sins. Of each of the seven, there is always one character that is the worst sinner of that particular vice.

There are seven deadly sins but out of the seven there are two in particular that drives this play the most. In control of these sins is Abigail Williams, a young vengeful girl who used to work for the Proctor before being fired for supposedly having an affair with John Proctor. In Arthur Miller's The Crucible, Abigail demonstrates envy and wrath in order to gain power over John Proctor. Ultimately, however, her intentions result in disastrous circumstances for both her and Proctor.

In the play, Abigail is jealous of Elizabeth Proctor for having John Proctor as a husband and this is one of the main reasons she rains hell down on the city

of Salem. Abigail's envy gets the better of her, and throughout the whole play all, she wants is John by her side. Abigail goes to some extreme measure by plotting to kill Elizabeth and steal John for her own.

In the beginning of the play, the girls are in the woods dancing, and Abigail drinks a vial of blood which is part of a ritual that Tituba is in charge of. This later leads the girls to worry that they may be in some major trouble; you can tell this when Betty says, " You drank blood, Abby! You didn't tell him that! You did, you did!

You drank a charm to kill John Proctor's wife! You drank a charm to kill Goody Proctor!" (Miller 837). The reason Abigail drinks the blood is to complete the ritual to kill Elizabeth Proctor. Her plot to eliminate Elizabeth does not end there because she calls her a witch in court.

In the play Abigail's wrath is the thing that allows her to get away and out of trouble. Even though it's her envy that drives her to do the things she does it is her wrath which allows her to get what she wants. Wrath is vengeance or punishment as the consequence of anger and when Abigail gets angry or upset she starts calling people witches.

Abigail still works for her power over John by calling Elizabeth a witch to get rid of her and then have John all to herself. When Proctor asks for the transactions of the court and threatens to whip Mary, she proclaims while pointing at Elizabeth " I saved her life today!" (Miller 854) We know that it was Abigail who accused Elizabeth of being a witch because of the fact she wants John and drank a blood charm to kill her.

Close to the End of the play her intentions for both her and Proctor result in disastrous circumstances because John ends up being accused of witchcraft because of the twist of fate from Elizabeth lying about why she really fired Abigail. In the end it's John who decides his fate by not signing the confession because he wants to keep his name clean for his kids.

John also goes on to say " How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!" (Miller 886) This quote is one John's last lines in the play meaning he dies for the sole purpose of his name. Abigail goes on to run away and become a prostitute, a fitting end for a whore.

Abigail's envy and wrath for John Proctor is ultimately a disastrous circumstance for both her and Proctor. In Abigail's envy for John she ends up destroying the man she loves and raining hell on Salem. Abigail's wrath is also her passion, she loves tormenting people even the ones she loves.

In the end everything is messed up, there is no order, no listening, no control, all because of Abigail and her deadly sins.

Example 5: Avarice and Vengeance in The Crucible

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.