

The crucible

Literature



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The Crucible Arthur Miller's the Crucible is today recognized as one of the seminal American plays of the 20th century. The work explores themes of mass hysteria in an early American town where many citizens were accused of being witches. While traditional critical examination has investigated the sociological aspects of such scapegoating, the text functions on a number of other critical levels. In these regards, Miller develops complex characters that come to life on the page. Perhaps the text's most complex character is John Proctor. Throughout the play Proctor undergoes significant change. Proctor's change, his central conflict, and what Arthur Miller intends the change to communicate to the reader are important considerations throughout the text. As the play first introduces John Proctor he takes on distinct frame of being. During the early part of the play John Proctor encounters Abigail and tells her, " Abby, you'll put it out of mind. I'll not be comin' for you more. You know me better" (Miller, pg. 21). In addition to rejecting Abigail's advances, this statement indicates that Proctor is happy in his current situation. This also symbolically represents Proctor's mental state as his original characterization is presented. Another prominent aspect of Proctor's perspective is understood through his take on witchcraft and religion as he tells Parris, " I have trouble enough without I come five mile to hear him preach only hellfire and bloody damnation" (Miller, pg. 28). Here Proctor is criticizing the current church services. On a larger scale, such statements are indicative of both Proctor's tendency towards secularism, as well as a positioning of him against the communal hysteria. Ultimately, John Proctor at first constitutes a stolid individual with a distinct personality throughout the opening Act of the play. As the play advances it becomes clear that Proctor's stolid demeanor experiences a change as he faces

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growing challenges from the town. During the court proceedings Abigail comes to accuse people including Proctor's wife Elizabeth; she states, " I have seen my blood runnin' out! I have been near to murdered every day because I done my duty pointing out the Devil's people" (Miller, pg. 42). While this statement is indicative of Abigail's character, its far more revealing of Proctor's because it shows he is unwilling to tell the court about his affair with Abigail as a means of discrediting her testimony. This dichotomy between Proctor's stolid self and his internal dilemma constitute the central conflict he faces throughout the play. Later in the text Proctor changes his stance on this issue admitting, " I lusted, and there is a promise in such sweat! But it is a whore's vengeance" (Miller, pg. 49). Here Proctor has drastically shifted perspectives as he has finally admitted his affair. Miller uses this central conflict and change as a means of communicating to the reader ethical and moral questions surrounding Proctor and the narrative; it's an important change as it holds potential ramifications for the trial. Ultimately, it's clear that Proctor experiences significant change as he faces increased challenges from the town. Towards the play's conclusion Proctor experiences his most significant changes. As Proctor increasingly becomes the object of accusations he breaks down shouting, " A fire, a fire is burning! I hear the boot of Lucifer, I see his filthy face. And it is my face and yours, Danforth" (Miller, pg. 53). Here Proctor is responding to accusations from Danforth. The statement indicates that Proctor has gone from calm and objective to angry and hysterical. Proctor is placed in jail and Elizabeth visits him before he is to be hanged; he states to her, " I have given you my soul, leave me my name!" (Miller, pg. 57). While Proctor is still upset in this statement, it also demonstrates that he has achieved a level of peace with

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his upcoming death. In these regards, Proctor shifts to angry denial to death with integrity. Ultimately, Proctor's change when faced with accusations and potential death reveals his integrity and character. It's clear that John Proctor experiences significant changes throughout the Crucible. In these regards, his character shifts from stolid and unwavering to emotional and hysterical to accepting and resigned. Throughout these changes he battles with the central conflict of his affair with Abigail, as this conflict underlines his outward ethical disposition and his internal strife. Ultimately, through the challenges he faces from the community and coming to terms with his central conflict, John Proctor transforms throughout the text, before his fateful death at the hands of the congregation. Reference Miller Arthur. The Crucible. 1976. New York: Penguin.