

"the crucible" by arthur miller essay sample



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In *The Crucible*, John Proctor initially portrayed a sinful man whom had an affair, struggling to prove to his wife that he should be trusted again. The dishonesty of the betrayal of Elizabeth and his marriage to her changed, though, by the end of the play. This transition in Proctor's character showed he transformed from a deceitful man and husband, to one whom was true to himself as well as his beliefs. This paper will discuss Proctor's change in character and his struggle with getting to the point in his life where he was finally at peace with himself. In Act I, John Proctor displayed his guilt about having an affair with Abigail Williams, a young girl of seventeen ' with an endless capacity for dissembling.' Proctor convinced himself he was a sinful man that had done wrong, and to have respect for himself once again, he must break off all ties with Abigail. When Abigail mentioned to Proctor the relationship she and he once had, he said to her, ' No, no, Abby. That's done with,' and, ' Abby, you'll put it out of mind. I'll not be comin' for you more.' Even when Abigail tried to persuade Proctor to admit his love for her, he still denied it and claimed he had no love for her any longer.

She said to him, ' I know how you clutched my back behind your house and sweated like a stallion whenever I came near! Or did I dream that? It's she put me out, you cannot pretend it were you. I saw your face when she put me out, and you loved me then, and you do now.' In all of Abigail's persuasion to try to get him to admit his love for her, Proctor replied, ' Abby, I may think of you softly from time to time. But I will cut off my hand before I'll ever reach for you again. Wipe it out of mind. We never touched, Abby.' Proctor saying to Abigail that they never touched was his way of trying to get

through to her that the relationship between the both of them had to end here. In Proctor's mind, saying that to Abigail was a finalization of their affair and gave him the closure that he needed to truly forget what he and Abigail had. The affair between Proctor and Abigail also had made his love for Elizabeth grow stronger.

The guilt of the affair made him realize how Elizabeth was a good woman and deserved more than a cheating husband, and he refused to allow Abigail to speak maliciously about her. Abigail said bitterly to Proctor, ' Oh, I marvel how such a strong man may let such a sickly wife be -,' in which he interrupted angrily with, ' You'll speak nothin' of Elizabeth!' Abigail, realizing the respect he now had for Elizabeth as to not let her speak of Elizabeth in such a manner, then tried to convince Proctor otherwise, saying, ' She is blackening my name in the village! She is telling lies about me! She is a cold, sniveling woman...' The anger he felt at this time was not only toward Abigail, but also toward himself. He felt he had sinned greatly and did not provide Elizabeth, a good wife and mother of their three children, with the respect and loyalty that one would expect out of a husband. Act II brought across Proctor's need for true forgiveness from Elizabeth to officially put Abigail out of mind. He at first tried to assure Elizabeth of his love for her, despite the affair and their ' separation'. Trying to assure Elizabeth of his love for her was also a way for him to assure himself of his love for her. He said to her, ' I mean to please you, Elizabeth,' in which she replied with hesitation, ' I know it, John.' Proctor noticed this hesitation, and later came to realize that something was bothering her.

He also sensed their separation when he said with a good feeling, '...On Sunday let you come with me, and we'll walk the farm together; I never see such a load of flowers on the earth Lilacs have a purple smell. Lilac is the smell of nightfall, I think. Massachusetts is a beauty in the spring!' and she merely replied with, 'Aye, it is.' It is her suspicion of Proctor and Abigail that had Elizabeth troubled. When Proctor mentioned speaking to Abigail alone, Elizabeth questioned him about it, and in reply to his excuse for being alone with her, she said, 'Do as you wish, then,' losing all faith in him. He felt hurt by Elizabeth's suspicion and felt she judges him and that he does not have her forgiveness. Getting angry with her, he said, 'No more! I should have roared you down when first you told me your suspicion. But I witted, and like a Christian, I confessed. Confessed! Some dream I must have mistaken you for God that day. But you're not, and let you remember it! Let you look sometimes for the goodness in me and judge me not!'

Proctor felt that since he chose to confess to her rather than lie and deny her accusations, she should give him more credit than she had been giving him. He thought that she should think him a good man because he was only obligated to confess his sin to God, but he confessed it to her. Elizabeth then tried to support her suspicion and said, 'John, have you ever showed her somewhat of contempt? She cannot pass you in the church but you will blush,' and then said, '...go and tell her she's a whore. Whatever promise she may sense - break it, John, break it.' Proctor refuses to 'break it' and said, '...it speaks deceit, and I am honest! But I'll plead no more! I see now your spirit twist around the single error of my life and I will never tear it free.' This quote fully explains why Proctor was angry. He was an honest man until his

affair with Abigail, and even though he admitted it were a mistake, Elizabeth still can not forgive him for what he had done. Elizabeth, also very angry, expressed her feelings clearly when she said, ' You'll tear it free - when you come to know that I will be your only wife, or no wife at all. She has an arrow in you, John Proctor, and you know it well!'

Elizabeth was angry at the fact that Proctor was not understanding why she was upset with him and how the affair had extremely affected her. He only thought of himself and how he needed her forgiveness, not thinking about Elizabeth's needs in this time of turmoil. In Act III, Proctor shows a change in character that was unexpected. He lost all faith in the outcome of the trial and he was at his breaking point. Proctor saw the trial to seek the truth in all that had happened, but at the end of it realized that there was no hope anymore. Proctor wildly bursted out, ' I say - I say - God is dead!' He then said laughing insanely, ' 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! For them that quail to bring men out of ignorance, as I have quailed, and as you quail now when you know in all your black hearts that this be fraud - God damns out kind especially, and we will burn together!' Finishing it off, he proclaimed, ' You are pulling Heaven down and raising up a whore!'

This outburst showed that Proctor felt that there was no longer hope for the truth, and the court was not believing the reputable women, but rather the one that was known to have ' an endless capacity for dissembling.' He felt that the honest women of Salem were being persecuted for the lies of Abigail, the whore. Act IV is when Proctor showed his change in character as he made his final decision of whether to confess to witchcraft or stay true to

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his belief. By his final choice of getting hung, Proctor showed that he had reached the title of an 'honest man' and was also honest to God. In this act, Hale returns to convince Elizabeth to plead with Proctor to sign a confession, even though it was a lie. Proctor had already considered the idea, but was unsure, and said to Elizabeth, 'I have been thinking I would confess to them, Elizabeth. What say you? I give then that?' He then said, 'I cannot mount the gibbet like a saint. It is a fraud. I am not that man. My honesty is broke, Elizabeth; I am no good man. Nothing's spoiled by giving them this lie that were not rotten long before.'

Proctor felt that it would not be much of a sin to save his life by confessing a lie. He felt that he was not an honest man to begin with, so giving in to a lie would not change him from good to bad. Elizabeth said to Proctor, 'Do what you will. But let none be your judge. There be no higher judge under Heaven that Proctor is! Forgive me, forgive me, John - I never knew such goodness in the world!' Elizabeth showed that she cared about Proctor greatly but wanted him to realize that it was his own decision to make whether to stay true to himself or not. She told him that he was the only one who could judge himself and decide whether he could live with himself after this lie. Proctor proclaimed, 'I want my life... I will have my life.' Proctor then admitted to Parris and Danforth that he had seen the Devil and he had bound himself to his service. Rebecca Nurse then entered the room, and Proctor could not face her.

He was ashamed that he could not be true to his faith as she was. Proctor signed the confession, but when he heard that it was to be posted on the church door and he was asked why he would not allow it, Proctor cried out, '

Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!' Proctor felt that since he had given his soul to the courts by signing a lie, he could not give him the name because it felt as if they had taken everything else away from him. By saying, '... I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang!' Proctor showed that he truly did not believe in signing the confession, and the fact that he did made him a deceitful person that was not true to oneself. He then tore up the confession and boldly said, ' I can. And there's your first marvel, that I can. You have made you magic now, for now I do think I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor.

Not enough to wave a banner with, but enough to keep it from such dogs.' From this statement, it is shown the Proctor is finally at peace with himself. Though he felt that choosing to get hung and be true to God and himself does not make him a saint, it is enough to show that the truth and goodness lies in him. He no longer was himself as a dishonest man that had cheated on his wife and had considered turning his back on himself for life, he was a good man that knew the truth and was going to stand by it. The transition in Proctor's character was a great one, from a cheating man to a man that was true to himself and gained a newfound faith. At the end of the play, John Proctor learned to have more respect for himself and learned the truth about himself; that he had always held the honesty that he desired.