

**SENSE OF JUSTICE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF *THE CRUCIBLE* BY ARTHUR MILLER**

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This paper discusses *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller, as well as examines the character of Reverend Hale and John Proctor in the play. Through the prose passages that interrupt the dialogue and action of the play, Miller establishes the particular quality of Salem society that makes it especially receptive to the repression and panic of the witch trials. The Puritan life in Salem is rigid and somber, allowing little room for persons to break from the monotony and strict work ethic that dominated the close-knit society. Furthermore, the Puritan religious ethic permeated all aspects of society, promoting safeguards against immorality at any cost to personal privacy or justice.

Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is clearly a representation of the true meaning of tragedy. John Proctor was, in fact, the medium, the tool, of which Miller utilized to convey a universal depiction of tragedy. A broad definition of a tragic hero is a protagonist who, through faults and flaws of his own and in the society in which he exists, falters in the grand scheme of things. This mistake leads to suffering, which ultimately leads to a self-realization. Miller, himself, has said, Tragedy, then, is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate him justify. Leading us to believe that a greater theme encompasses this downfall. Miller, as well as many other literary critics seem to convey that tragedy revolves around two universal aspects: fear and freedom. *The Crucible* is a direct parallel to the multiple ideals of tragedy and thus centers on John Proctor's fear and freedom while he exists as a tragic hero. The first stage in the process of establishing the

tragic hero for Miller was relaying the characteristics of John Proctor. It was essential that Proctor be viewed as the so called "good guy" in the plot, one who stands out or the audience can relate to. He is described as a "farmer in his middle thirties" with a "powerful body" and a "steady manner", and is already being established as the protagonist in which we sympathize with.(p.19) Miller's choice to describe him in such a fashion is very significant. By describing the tragic hero as a "strong, steady, farmer" the dramatic effect is even greater. Who else better to fall victim to his own personal freedom and the fear of others but the strong, stern character? John Proctor's description also provides another outlet to convey the dynamic nature of his character. While the physical side of Proctor deteriorated towards the conclusion of the story a contrast is created. John is said to be "...another man, bearded, filthy, his eyes misty as though webs had overgrown them," an obvious discrepancy from his initial condition.(p.123) Thus, John's physical delineation is an apparent parallel to the changes he emotionally undergoes making him a dynamic character. Miller also establishes Proctor as the protagonist by giving him qualities the audience found favor with. John went against the formalities and conceptions of the townsfolk. An aspect we can truly justify, especially in America. Proctor's practical nature is indicated when he often does not attend Church. He does not

agree with Parris' talk of hell, exclaiming "Can you speak one minute without we land in Hell again?" and thus turns away from the Church, clearly emphasizing that rebellious side. (p.28) The second step in creating the tragic hero is emphasizing the mistake or flaw, which brings upon the character's descent. It is in this stage that fear and freedom enter as a major part of John Proctor's actions. "And if society alone is responsible for the cramping of our lives then the protagonist must needs be so pure and faultless as to force us to deny his validity as a character. From neither of these views can tragedy derive, simply because neither represents a balanced concept of life."(Miller) It is this balance between the internal and external that opens the door for fear and freedom to enter. Fear is society's tool. In Puritan New England paranoia was a common aspect. The people lived in fear of the devil, a physical devil that existed and walked among them. When word spread, speaking of witchcraft in Salem, that fears, that paranoia emerged ever so imminently and thus began the tragedy. With the people's fear came rumors. Mrs. Putnam asked, "How high did she fly, how high?" of Betty, clearly exhibiting that rumors

of witchcraft were surfacing and spreading. (p.12) Subsequently, from such rumors came the accusations. It was the accusations that proved most costly. People turned against each other saving themselves by accusing their neighbors. All of these consequences sprouted from fear in the hearts and minds of the people of Salem. Fear, however, only contributed to this tragedy. John Proctor's freedom within was the other half that completes the equation. It was this freedom that resulted in his mistakes, his flaws. Proctor chose to have relations, outside of his marriage to Elizabeth with Abigail. In Act Two, John makes a determined effort to please Elizabeth. He kisses her perfunctorily; he lies in saying that her cooking is well seasoned (perhaps a kind of irony on the lack of spice in Elizabeth) showing the strain in their relationship. (Murray, 46) Like all men Proctor had his temptations yet his freedom allowed him to give in to them. Through his own freedom John "lusted with the girl" and went "against the law of God and Salem" (Murray, 46) Freedom also existed in John's choice to not attend Church. It was this choice that also contributed to his downfall, for it did not put him in the best standings with the townspeople. The fear in society and the freedom of John Proctor both complements each other in that balance that Miller spoke of. Tragedy comes from what the protagonist can, as well as cannot control. This evidence clearly holds true to Miller's definition of tragedy. Suffering was a major step in coaxing John to his realization. He suffered mentally and emotionally because of his flaw, as the heat of the accusations intensified. He witnessed his wife Elizabeth go through the agony of being accused as a witch. he suffers because he too was accused of betraying God. Their true suffering becomes apparent when Proctor confesses to adultery to pardon Elizabeth. Elizabeth lies in turn to save her husband's name. They endured this torment for each other. They endured it till their day of sentencing. This extreme anguish and emotional stress, which Miller creates, adds to the sense of tragedy. It is this emphatically grief, which makes the conclusion of *The Crucible* so outstanding. Miller utilizes the sorrow to make Proctor's all-important realization that much more spectacular. However, in the Greek definition of tragedy this suffering would serve as pathos. Pathos is the element of sympathy in the plot to evoke pity. In the Greek tradition this was essential to the plot. However, Miller does not see his tragedy as one that should include pity for the protagonist. "The possibility of victory must be there in tragedy. Where pathos rules, where pathos is finally derived, a character has fought a battle he could not

have possible won."(Miller) This statement demonstrates the conflict in belief. Miller feels the protagonist must emerge victorious in some way where the Greek tradition relies on an emphasis of pity. In Miller's view, how can we have pity for someone who has won? This is where the conflict lies and as we see in Proctor's realization, *The Crucible* will hold true to Miller's definition. Proctor learns something about himself and the world around him in his final realization before his execution. This is the concluding step in the tragic plot. "Tragedy seems to me to be an investigation of the possibilities of human freedom."(Kerr) Again, it is Proctor's freedom that makes him a tragic hero. "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... I want my life... I will have my life... Then who will judge me? God in Heaven, what is John Proctor, what is John Proctor? I think it is honest, I think so; I am no saint." (pp. 126-127) These passages indicate that Proctor has come to see the truth. He has the freedom now, to not give in to them, to let God judge him. "I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be- to secure one thing-his sense of personal dignity."(Miller) Miller's definition of tragedy is a clear-cut example of Proctor's actions in *The Crucible*. Proctor realizes that his confession to these people violated his freedom. He learned that we need to answer to God and God only for forgiveness. The confession revoked Proctor's dignity and his freedom. Miller says, "Tragedy enlightens.... in that it points the heroic finger at the enemy of man's freedom." Proctor sees this and points a heroic finger at those people who tried to take his freedom.

The Puritans of Massachusetts were a religious faction who, after years of suffering persecution themselves, developed a willful sense of community to guard against infiltration from outside sources. It is this paradox that Miller used to create a major theme of *The Crucible*. That is, in order to keep the community together, members of that community believe that they must in some sense tear it apart. Miller relates the intense paranoia over the integrity of the Puritan community. This relates strongly to the political climate of the early 1950s in which Miller wrote *The Crucible*.

In *The Crucible*, the character that sets the witchcraft trials in motion is Reverend John Hale. Indeed, Hale is perhaps the most complex character in *The Crucible*. He is a man .?' who approaches religious matters with the conviction of a scientist and a scientific, emphasizes on proper procedure? (Weales p.134). Hale holds the contradictory belief that they cannot rely on superstition to solve the girls' problems but that they may find a supernatural explanation for the events. Since he lacks the malicious motivations and obsessions that plague the other instigators of the trials, Reverend Hale has the ability to change his position, yet he finds himself caught up in the hysteria he has helped to create.

The circumstances surrounding the witch trials gave residents something to blame the supernatural on. The condemning of Tituba was mainly due to this. When Tituba took the girls into the woods, and they performed their ceremony, something the Puritans were not accustomed to, she convicted of witchery. Along with Tituba, Martha Corey was indicted solely because she would not allow Giles to read them. Giles also stated "I tried and tried and could not say my prayers. And then she close her book and walks out of the house, and suddenly--mark this--I could pray again!"(pg.38) This evidence of witchery is preposterous. The only thing that is true is that Giles was not allowed to read the books, and because he did not what the books contained, he feared them. This type of reaction throughout the community to the supernatural, and what was not known indicted many people, and contributed to the tragedy in Salem. The state of mass confusion in Salem created a society of individuals who were only concerned with what was good for them, so that they would not be the next one implicated in the witchery scandal. This situation is clearly evident after Hale becomes privy to the true story of what happened in the woods. Abigail abandons Tituba, and accuses her of "sending her spirit on me in church; she makes me laugh at prayer"(pg.41), and Abigail also says Tituba "comes to me every night to go and drink blood" [devil' s blood](pg.41). Abigail reacts like this only to save her from being suspected of witchery. At the end of Scene One, many community members are accused of consorting with the devil. These names were given by all of the girls present that took part in the

ritual in the woods, in an attempt to return to the graces of God and to be declared bewitched. This was a common reaction that many had when accused of witchery

Near the end, Miller develops the motivations of the proponents of the witchcraft trials. Reverend Parris remains motivated by suspicion and paranoia, while Thomas Putnam moves from an original motivation of grudges against others to unabashed greed. Abigail Williams, in contrast, moves from self-preservation to a more general lust for power. However, upon the arrest of Rebecca Nurse and Elizabeth Proctor, Reverend Hale eschews the supernatural explanations for more concrete, legal explanations. He redeems himself from his role as a Pontius Pilate by serving as an advocate for justice. This is significant, for it provides concrete evidence that opposition to the trials does not necessarily mean opposition to law and order.

Additionally, the theme of self-preservation recurs throughout the novel. While Hale suggests,? That God damns a liar less than a person who throws one's life away? (Weales p.123), Elizabeth suggests that this is the devil's argument. Miller seems to support Elizabeth's position, for it is by giving self-preserving lies that Tituba and Sarah Good perpetuated the witch-hunts.

In conclusion, over the course of the play, *The Crucible* utilizes Reverend Hale in a profound way. He is the scientific thinker of the two religious quarrels and the role Reverend Hale plays is one of a reoccurring sense of justice within the framework of the play. Yet, while Hale attempts to be a thinker who depends on the virtues of the Bible, he does not really have a real grasp as an enlightened thinker because, ultimately, he shifts like a politico in almost every way.

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