

## Crucible Essay

When looking at a situation from an outside perspective, it is often easy to be rational about what course of action is best; however, when people are faced with a situation that threatens them or invokes their own emotion, this judgment is often clouded by such factors. In Arthur Miller's The Crucible, he portrays the events surrounding and enduring the Salem witch trials of the early 17th century by expressing the relations and conflicts amongst the people of Salem, which build into hysteria and panic as the story progresses. The people of his Salem, while many believe in and use religion to justify their support of the trials and accusations of witchcraft, all seem to have some motivation outside of the pious cause of "purifying" the community. While many are motivated by greed, power, reputation, land and estate disputes, and pre-existing familial rivalries, most of their actions are sparked by the emotion invoked by these desires and conflicts, which are most often that of fear and shame. While many will choose to be proactive in trying to prevent certain events, be it for their good, or the good of the community; others will only react to situations that intimidate them, and both types of characters will be equally important in forcing the progress and escalation of the witch hunt conflict. While some characters will act proactively, such as Parris and Proctor, and others, such as the reactive Betty and Abigail will merely adjust to decisions made by the proactive; all of them, along with the rest of the informed town, will act out primarily based on the emotions of shame and fear.

In Miller's town of Salem, the entire arousal of hysteria amongst the people stems from one emotion, fear. In the social climate that exists within the town, very little loyalty is owed to other people, even family; rather, one is expected to be loyal only to god, and to not be afraid to sell out whoever they must in the name of what is righteous and pious. This meant that as the threat presented by witchcraft 'increased', panic and fear amongst some, encouraged and invoked hysterics in their more reasonable peers, and as this fear spread, the supposed severity of the situation at hand did so as well. People began to turn on friend and neighbor alike in a desperate attempt to find a viable scapegoat, often using women within the community who were considered odd, and suddenly, a new fear arose. Many began to grow more afraid, not because they were threatened by the supernatural; rather, it was because they knew that they could be falsely accused, imprisoned and even killed if they did not handle their reputation with care, and so many grew afraid of the town authority and respected figures. Though he was not an accused witch, one such character that allowed his fear to make him suspicious of his people was Reverend Parris. As the town leader, any supernatural events fell under his domain and area of expertise. This means that in times such as this, where there are rumors of witchcraft

and dark arts, involving his daughter no less, the people will turn to him for answers, which for his own sake he better make sure he provides. Mr. Parris was already a very paranoid man, as he believed that the people of Salem were indeed conspiring against him. It was his understanding that he had enemies, who he must work at all costs to make sure can't hurt his reputation or authority within the community and church. His paranoia is revealed very early on in the play, as while his daughter, Betty, lies inert on a bed, he appears more fearful for his own reputation than her safety. He shows this selfish attitude when questioning his young niece, Abigail Williams, about the events which conspired that led to his daughter's ailment, as he states "Now look your, child, your punishment will come in its time. But if you trafficked with spirits in the forest I must know it now, for surely my enemies will, and they will ruin me with it". This shows that not only is he worried that the rest of the colony has a sort of conspiracy or plot against him, but he is also very active in exacting his authority, often by doling out punishment for wrongdoers, rather than rewards for those who follow his instruction. It is his paranoia which causes his initial action of following the girls into the woods, to pursue rumors of people dealing in dark arts within the town, and preserve his reputation in bringing such activities to an end. This is the event that of course triggers the entire witch hunt, and as he grows more afraid of how the community may choose to target him, he continues to make strenuous efforts revolved around preserving his leadership position. This is why he calls upon Reverend Hale of Beverly, as he knows that while he may not have the answers that the people of Salem seek, if he is to find solutions in an outside source, he should surely be recognized for this. It is his involving of Hale that leads to a confrontation between him and the "bewitched" daughter of Parris, Betty, who resolves to quit her sleeping act and shout names of women whom she means to accuse of witchery in a last effort to save her own self from being accused. Betty is yet another character that acts out as a result of fear; however, unlike her father, she was mostly reactive, making decisions to benefit herself in response to what was going on around her. She first shows just how reactive she is when her father discovers her and multiple other girls dancing in the forest with Tituba for the sake of fun. Being discovered by her nervous and authoritative father, she becomes deathly afraid of the consequences she might face as a result of her being involved in such un-puritan activities. Her greatest effort to resolve this is to act like a victim of some sort of dark art, rather than admit to dancing and singing in the forest by will and facing the possible accusation of being a co-conspirator. She pretends to fall ill, and begins to ignore all that is around her, pretending to be asleep and bewitched, rather than face her father and answer questions which she doesn't know how to answer. The deceit is revealed when her father is out of the room and she awakens to speak to Abigail and Mary Warren, and though she

is obviously hysterical, she is also obviously awake. Once she feels that she has a safe solution out of her predicament, she eventually breaks this character and reacts to other characters feeding her ideas for what she can say in order to save herself from being under suspicion. This happens when Abigail begins to lie about seeing multiple townswomen with the devil, just after Tituba does the same exact thing in an effort to survive her accusation. Abigail begins to shout, "I want to open myself! I want the light of God, I want the sweet love of Jesus! I danced for the Devil; I saw him; I wrote in his book; I go back to Jesus; I kiss His hand. I saw Sarah Good with the Devil! I saw Goody Osburn with the Devil! I saw Bridget Bishop with the Devil!" Soon after Abby says this, Betty finally awakens in front of everyone without skipping a beat, stating, "I saw George Jacobs with the Devil! I saw Goody Howe with the Devil!" despite the fact that this is a lie. Despite her ability to stay calm and collected in her situation, Betty is actually motivated by fear to act as she does. She is terrified of her father because she knows that not only is he suspicious of everyone, but he is an extremely strict, and of the church, who is unpopular because he is so infatuated with the idea that everyone is going to hell. She knows that her activities were questionable to her community, and if she is discovered to have been fully aware of her actions, she knows that she could face persecution, so she acts accordingly based on what she believes every situation may call for.

While fear is the most common emotion which promoting the actions of many of the people of Salem, there is yet another emotion that plagues a small handful of colonists who are sincerely guilty, and that is shame. While fear can be caused by a number of ailments in life, some irrational, some rational, some caused by other people and some caused by one's own standards, shame is often felt by someone who actually has fault in whatever happened that is bothering them. She is more dangerous, because while certain fears can never harm the individual, shame means you have something which you truly need to protect and hide, and being outed for this shame he=can have ill effect on your life. One such character that is plagued by shame John Proctor, who is guilty of having had sex with an unmarried virgin, Abigail. This is not only a sin because it is adultery against his wife Elizabeth, but Abigail is ruined by the puritan standard, for she had sex outside of marriage, and if John is discovered and exposed for what he did, there is the possibility that he could be excommunicated. Despite this secret guilt, Proctor is very proactive in Salem, often acting as a voice of reason amongst the religious fanatics who search for signs of the devil as an excuse for all of their flaws. He is not as afraid of his fellow colonist as is Parris, for his fear is grounded in something logical, and real that he hides. Meanwhile, Parris is guilty of somewhat illogical suspicion, so perhaps it makes sense that he is fearful and wary of conversation with the other townsfolk about the possibility of

witchcraft. Being as Proctor; whoever, is not afraid to speak out against and question his peers, he does so on multiple occasions. He calls out Parris for mostly preaching about hell fire, blood, the devil punishment and torment, and how it motivates him and other not to go to church. He calls out Mr. Putnam for claiming land that should not belong to him, and calls out Goody Ann for being crazy to suggest witchcraft. These are some of the most highly regarded people within the community, and he finds no issue in being proactive about speaking his mind on the matter of the witch trial issue. Porter is also very proactive in protecting himself from being exposed for what he and Abigail did. When he first speaks to Abigail alone, and she makes advances on him, he refuses them and rejects her, stating that, "I have hardly stepped off my farm this seven month... 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." This shows that while Abigail seems to be throwing herself at him, and he reveals that he still feels the occasional urge to be with her again, he is being extremely active in keeping himself from her, as he knows that just as before, no good can come from interaction with her. He shows that after they were caught together, he was not even motivated to leave his farm for seven months in an effort to avoid her at all costs, and now that he finally sees her he shall make no urge to be with or speak to her again. He goes as far as to reveal that he is so ashamed that he wishes to wipe their interaction out of mind, and he suggests that she do this as well, despite the fact that he is the first and only man she has ever been with. Another character that acts out of shame rather than fear is actually Abigail herself; however, she is much more reactive than Proctor. For starters she has a short temper, and when questioned by people such as Parris or those who are suspicious of her, she tends to become outraged if they are to call her out on any of her mischief; possibly because she feels ashamed. One instance in which she reacts very violently to a situation out of shame in her actions is when Betty wakes up and cries to Abigail about their actions the night before, recalling how Abigail drank blood and cast a charm for Proctor's wife to die. Upon hearing this, Abigail angrily slaps Betty, forcing her to collapse onto the bed, and states, "Now look you. All of you. We danced. And Tituba conjured Ruth Putnam's dead sisters. And that is all. 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; I saw Indians smash my dear parents' heads on the pillow next to mine, and I have seen some reddish work done at night, and I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down!" This shows that she is somewhat afraid; however, she knows that her actions are shame fuel and question be, and doesn't want to be outed at any cost. Another instance in which she is impulsive and reactive in addressing her shame is when she is

face to face with Proctor again. She is probably ashamed in the fact that she slept with him outside of marriage, so she throws herself at him, and though she does not reveal it, she wants to be his true wife instead of Elizabeth. Her short temper is revealed again when he turns her down, as though she is angry at him because of this outcome, she is also ashamed of the predicament which she finds herself in. She is already on thin ice, is shunned by Proctor's wife who is known as a good woman, yet refuses to come to church because Abigail is there, she is 17, yet has no work or potential suitors within the town. If she is to be exposed as a non-pure girl, she is permanently ruined within the town.

To conclude, in this time where many of the people of Salem find themselves under pressure because of their reputation and external threats, both the actions of those who are reactive and proactive are taking important effect on the attitudes of those around them. Those who act out of fear are paranoid, somewhat illogical, hasty in their choices and deathly afraid of how their peers may persecute them, while those who act out of shame are strategic, manipulative and attempt to adjust their personality based on the crowd.