

The Crucible: Analysis

Act I Scene 1

In the written version of this play, Arthur Miller chose to add several narrative sections that were not included in the live performance. These sections give the reader a broader knowledge of characters' past actions and motivations. The opening narrative gives an introduction to Reverend Parris and his idiosyncrasies, which include a distorted view of other people's opinions of him and a driving need to be in control. These facts will go a long way toward explaining the minister's future behaviour.

We also learn something about Salem's attitude toward children. Miller tells us that Parris, "like the rest of Salem, never conceived that the children were anything but thankful for being permitted to walk straight, eyes slightly lowered, arms at the sides, and mouths shut until bidden to speak." This is important because it leads us to believe that the children would welcome a respite from such a strict life, as well as a bit of attention from the adults of the town.

The third important point in the opening narrative is the fact that the people of Salem had a "predilection for minding other people's business." They believed very strongly that their way was the only right way, and they persecuted anyone who questioned their ideas. Because of this, it was very dangerous in Salem to be caught doing anything that could be construed as contrary to accepted behaviour. The community saw, and could not explain, the sickness of the two girls, Betty and Ruth. Having a world view heavily weighted with devils and witches, it was perfectly reasonable in their minds to call anything unexplainable by earthly means the work of the devil.

The dramatic action of this opening sequence sets up many of the themes and conflicts central to the play. The defining metaphor of the play is a symbol that does not appear anywhere but in the title: *The Crucible*. A crucible is a container used to heat metal to extremely high temperatures, refining it to its barest essence and melting away any foreign substances or impurities. A crucible is also defined as a "severe test or trial, especially one that causes a lasting change or influence." The events of the previous night will eventually test the entire community's moral fibre. The court will test those accused to see if their essence is essentially good or evil. The historic episode will test the character and belief system of everyone involved.

When the girls are discovered in the woods, they know that they will be judged, and judged harshly. The details of what actually happened build slowly as new characters add to the story. We know that the girls were dancing and that Parris believes he saw at least one girl dancing naked. We know that Tituba chanted over a cauldron of some type, and we later find out that she was attempting to conjure the souls of the Putnum's dead babies. We then discover that Abigail drank the blood of a chicken in an effort to put a curse on Elizabeth Proctor, her former employer. While to us these antics may seem harmless and rather silly, they added up to serious charges in Salem. The girls certainly knew the consequences, as is clear by their comments. Why then, would they engage in such behaviour?

One theory is simple adolescent rebellion. The rules of such a strict society, with so little room for enjoyment, wore down their adolescent spirits until an outlet was sought. Tituba, with her relatively uninhibited island background, offered an opportunity for a freeing of their spirits. Another theory is

that they were actually looking for attention. In a world in which children were typically ignored, they wanted to cause a ruckus that would briefly put them in the spotlight. Whatever the reason, two of the girls were so shocked at being discovered, and at the ultimate consequence of that discovery, that they immediately feigned illness. The failure of their illness to respond to medical attention is what begins all of the rumours of witchcraft.

It is interesting to note Parris' reaction to the situation. While his daughter lies gravely ill, beyond the help of medical science, and while rumours of demonic possession circulate through the town, his thoughts are only for himself. Obviously if witchcraft is evil, witchcraft in the home of the minister—the pillar of the society and its moral leader—is doubly evil. Parris focuses all of his attention on saving his own reputation. To the citizens of Salem, a good reputation is an outward sign of rightness with God. This emphasis on a good name is a central theme of the play. The minister's first thought is to deny any element of witchcraft and hope the problem goes away. Unfortunately, Salem is a town full of people minding other people's business, and the gossip of witchcraft has already spread like wildfire. Many of the townspeople are already downstairs in the common room of Parris' house.

Parris suffers from a crucial lack of conviction. Although he is hesitant to call the events that have taken place witchcraft, he is easily convinced by the Putnams to go downstairs and denounce the evil in their midst. He is unable to tell his congregation that they are wrong about witchcraft. He prefers, instead, to do what he believes they want him to do. He goes along with the mounting hysteria and propels it forward by calling in Reverend Hale. This action paves the way for the absurdity that will follow.

The Putnams themselves set up a central conflict of the play, defining some of the suspicion, jealousy, and resentment simmering below the surface of this outwardly ordered and repressed society. When Ann Putnam admits to sending her daughter, Ruth, to conjure up the spirits of her dead babies, she reveals a strong suspicion and resentment. It occurs to her that there must be an explanation for seven of her children dying in childbirth, and she is looking for a scapegoat. She sent her daughter to get a name on which to attach blame. A narrative aside also tells us that Thomas Putnam still harbours resentment against those who voted against his brother-in-law as minister of Salem. The Putnams exemplify the feelings that must have existed throughout this society.

These feelings are echoed in the conflict between Abigail and Elizabeth Proctor, which is hinted at early in the play. When Parris questions Abigail's character, he mentions that she was dismissed as the Proctor's house servant. Rumour has obviously circulated in Salem that she was dismissed for unseemly behaviour and that Elizabeth will not come to church and sit near "something soiled." Abigail's denial holds venomous words for her former employer, whom she calls "a bitter woman, a lying, cold, snivelling woman." Elizabeth had made her life unpleasant in several ways, and Abigail's attempt to put a curse on the woman by drinking chicken blood is a vivid manifestation of her feelings.

The exchange that takes place between the girls while the adults are gone is also telling. They argue amongst themselves between admitting the truth and denying everything. The sequence sets up the conflict between Abigail and Mary Warren, who argues for telling the truth. Mary is

seen as weak and as the one who is most likely to tell on the others. The truth is obviously something less than dabbling in witchcraft, and to admit it and take the punishment would save them from being hanged as witches. Abigail, however, asserts herself as the strongest of the girls, bullying the others into admitting nothing other than the fact that they were dancing in the woods. This much is indisputable since they were caught in the act by Parris. Her intimidation of the others and the threats she makes should they disobey her orders show her unfeeling response to their fears. Abigail will have her way, whatever it takes to get it. This bit of evil in her character will be magnified as the play unfolds.

Act I Scene 2

The exchange between Abigail and John Proctor in this section sets up what is, perhaps, the central theme of the play. The knowledge that the two have had an affair, and that Elizabeth discovered it and dismissed Abby, constitutes the conflict between Abigail and Elizabeth. John clearly feels that what he did was wrong and has tried to put the affair behind him. Abigail, however, wishes their relationship would continue. She becomes the woman scorned. Perhaps more importantly, Abby reveals the truth of the events in the woods to John. She candidly admits to him that they were merely dancing and that there was no witchcraft involved. The possession of this truth, coupled with his guilt over his crime of lechery with Abby, will later put John in the compromising position that ultimately leads to his death.

Some critics read *The Crucible* as the tragedy of John Proctor. Proctor committed a tragic error and lost his soul when he had the affair with Abby. The drama then becomes an attempt to find moral absolution, integrity, and self-respect. Other critics have argued with this interpretation on the grounds that Proctor is not a sufficient tragic hero. He can succumb to temptation as well as stand up for decency. Not a particularly good man, he is hard-headed, argumentative, and biting in his criticism. He does not attend church regularly. These characteristics, along with his thinly veiled contempt of the minister, mark him as different from the rest of the community. Proctor is a far more modern figure than any other character in the play; sceptical and ruled by common sense rather than accepted norms. Whether or not *The Crucible* is correctly viewed as the tragedy of Proctor, a central theme of the play is certainly Proctor's search for his soul.

Betty's crying out at the Lord's name is just one more shred of evidence for a community already convinced of witchcraft. Of course her outburst also immediately followed John and Abby's discussion of their infidelity. Her adverse reaction could just as easily have stemmed from this newly gained knowledge, coupled with her remembrance of Abby's attempt to put a curse on Elizabeth. Betty Parris is already suffering from fear and guilt, and her desire to go to her mother is logical. The townspeople, however, are convinced that they are facing great evil, and everything that can possibly be twisted to lend credence to their conclusion will be used. Significantly, it is Rebecca Nurse who is instantly able to calm her.

Goody Nurse serves as a symbol of goodness and reason. Her character is impeccable, and her reputation flawless. Soon after her entrance, she dismisses the behaviour of the girls as part of their "silly season" that they will soon outgrow. She sees the events of the night before as a natural outlet for adolescent emotions. Rebecca makes it quite clear that any searching for the devil in Salem based on the behaviour of the girls is, in itself, an evil. Throughout the play, she and Proctor

will represent the few consistent voices speaking reason and denouncing the proceedings as preposterous. In this scene Miller draws the conflict of Rebecca Nurse and John Proctor, two individual voices, against the voices of the rest of the society, a community caught up in the mass hysteria of the witch-hunt. Rebecca, however, is not as quick as Proctor to condemn the social order. While she agrees that there are problems with Salem's theocracy—and especially with its minister—she urges Proctor to keep peace with Parris.

Several other conflicts are set up in this scene as well. We learn that the Nurses have been involved in a land war with their neighbours, one of whom is Putnam. The Nurse family was also among those who kept Putnam's candidate for minister out of office in Salem. Further, a group of people related to, or friendly with, the Nurses had broken away from the authority of Salem and set up their own independently governed town. The split was resented by many of the older members of the Salem community. The Nurses, in short, had many silent enemies in Salem. It is important to note that prior to the witch-hunt, there was no socially sanctioned means for expressing such ill will against a neighbour. The religious code required each citizen to love his neighbour as himself. Any outward expression of hostility would have been severely frowned upon. This led to a situation in which a great deal of resentment was seething below the surface, with no outlet.

When the participants in this scene exchange angry words, it is further apparent that the cause of the tension in Salem has very little to do with witchcraft. Proctor's conflict with Parris stems from what he sees to be the minister's hypocrisy of wanting more than his due. Parris, in return, resents Proctor for arguing against his having a higher salary. Nearly everyone else in town seems caught up in the battle over land ownership, which represents status and power in the community. The witch trials will become a convenient forum in which to address these real or imagined wrongs.

Act I Scene 3

The introductory narrative section at Hale's entrance helps us understand his motivation. Hale has studied the matter of witchcraft intensively and is regarded as an expert on the spirit world. We know that Hale is proud of his position as the authority on witches and that he will zealously seek an opportunity to make use of his knowledge. Miller tells us that there was once an encounter with a suspected witch in Hale's parish; however, on closer examination, it turned out that the woman was not a witch at all. It was simply her annoying behaviour that caused a child to act "afflicted." Hale never has then encountered a substantiated case of witchcraft. Hale's previous experience, as well as his intellectual nature, should lead him first to look for a natural and logical explanation for the behaviour of the Salem girls. Instead, he begins with the supernatural, trying to fit the events he finds before him into his definition of devilry.

Miller explains in this narrative passage the history of diabolism and the world's long history of fear and hatred of opposites. A natural outgrowth of this is aligning one's enemies with the devil. In a world in which actions and ideas are attributable either to God or to Satan, he says, the devil can be used as a weapon. This particular phrasing foreshadows the development of the witch-hunt, where many people will be accused for personal gain or satisfaction. Witchcraft is not an act that can be documented, such as stealing or murder. Its evidence is by nature circumstantial, and it therefore lends itself to such misuse.

The timing of Hale's entrance is significant. He arrives immediately after the heated discussion that revealed the many conflicts among town residents. Hale is an outsider in Salem. He knows nothing of the land wars, the behaviour of the minister, or the numerous secret animosities harboured by the townspeople. The discussion prior to his entrance would have supplied him with ample reason to suspect explanations other than witchcraft. Hale appears to be a likable man—well respected and trying his best to lend his assistance to a troubled community. Miller compares him to a doctor on his first call, armed with his knowledge and eager to use it. He attempts, however, to apply the authority of his books, along with the authority of scripture, to a situation about which he knows frightfully little. He is like a doctor who has no knowledge of the greatest and most telling symptom.

The introductions made when Hale arrives are also important. From them we learn that Rebecca Nurse's good name is known well beyond the town limits of Salem. Hale's knowledge of her good character is what will later lead him to question his involvement in the trial proceedings. As John Proctor is introduced to Hale, Giles Corey tells the visitor that he does not believe in witches. Proctor has been set up as the sceptic; the individual who refuses to be involved with what he believes to be unreasonable behaviour. Although Proctor shrugs off the remark and takes no position, the thought has been planted in Hale's mind. It will later be used against Proctor when his wife is accused.

Both Proctor and Rebecca remove themselves from the proceedings before the actual questioning begins. Both have made it clear that they believe talk of witchcraft is nonsense. Rebecca has also implied that it is the actual searching for the devil that is evil. Proctor knows from his discussion with Abigail that there was nothing supernatural occurring in the woods. Both choose to alienate themselves from the struggle that consumes the rest of Salem. This decision will later prove to be costly. Miller explores here the issue of an individual's responsibility to the community in crisis. Merely by keeping themselves removed from the hysteria, these two characters bring suspicion upon themselves. They are a threat to the unity of the community.

When Hale begins to question Betty, Abigail, and Tituba, it is clear that he knows what he is looking for. The girls do not offer information; it is suggested to them. As soon as Abby becomes uncomfortable with the questioning, she attempts to remove the blame from herself and pin it on Tituba. Suddenly she admits all of her "anti-Puritan" behaviour, but claims that it was Tituba who forced her to act. Tituba is a natural choice for a scapegoat. She is exotic in Salem, a native of Barbados where strange and incomprehensible customs are practiced. She is a far more believable "witch" than any of the others.

Tituba is understandably terrified at the accusations. While at first she denies all connection with the devil, she soon sees that her only way out is to come up with another explanation. She tells the interrogators that the devil has many witches. While Tituba has denied involvement with the devil, Hale is so sure of what he will find that he begins to question her about it anyway. Tituba can endure such bullying and confusion for only so long. The men are so kind to her when she finally says that there are women in Salem who are witches that she suddenly begins to cooperate with them, inventing conversations with the devil and indicating the name Sarah Good. Abigail sees the enthusiasm with which Tituba's accusations are received and decides to try the tactic herself. She,

too, begins to name names. Finally, Betty also rises and joins in. The three women have discovered a way out of their predicament. Far from being punished for their behaviour, they are now heroes of the community, chosen to help cleanse Salem. The naming of names is taken as an outward sign of their repentance and desire to be better Christians.

It is important to realize that while the girls are confessing to things that were not done, they are, indeed, guilty of something. While they were not performing witchcraft, they were involved with actions that were serious sins in the Puritan tradition. Dancing alone would bring serious punishment. The witch-hunt does not create guilt, it merely unleashes what is already there. The girls are attempting to hide their very real guilt by complying with the witch-hunt. The theme of guilt is strong throughout the play and will be even more important in the actions of John Proctor.

Act II Scene 1

John's simple act of re-seasoning the soup is symbolic of the nature of the relationship between John and Elizabeth. As the soup has little flavour, so does their marriage. While Elizabeth is quiet and virtuous, she has none of the individual spirit associated with her husband. She appears to be, and has been accused by Abigail of being, a cold woman. She "receives" John's kiss, rather than returning it, and she fails to enliven the house with flowers. It is not hard to imagine that John could be attracted to the daring, individualist spirit of Abigail and her raw sexuality. Elizabeth is a sharp contrast to such a girl.

The tension between John and Elizabeth is thick as they sit down to dinner. While unfailingly polite, their relationship is visibly strained. John's previous indiscretions with Abby have not yet been forgiven, despite his attempts to make amends. John has clearly tried to put the issue in his past. He has shown in Parris' house that he will no longer entertain thoughts of a relationship with Abby. Elizabeth, however, continues to interrogate and to accuse. Her judgment of her husband lacks mercy and understanding. This lack of mercy will be mirrored later in the play in the proceedings of the court.

The issue of guilt is strong in this sequence. John is clearly guilty of his infidelity. However willing he may be to repent, his position offers him no opportunity for absolution. He is not denying that he has sinned. He has clearly violated his own sense of honour by behaving as he did. John has suffered greatly for his sin, both internally and externally in Elizabeth's reaction. He has already questioned his identity in light of his actions. Elizabeth's harsh judgment of him makes his search for his soul and his "name" throughout the play all the more difficult. She stubbornly insists on the reality of his guilt. This atmosphere of guilt will later be obvious to Hale and lead to dire consequences.

Through Elizabeth we learn how far the girls' "confessions" have gone. A court system has been newly established in Salem, headed by Deputy Governor Danforth. It is significant that such a court has not existed before in Salem. Up to this point, the social fabric of the community was so tightly woven that an official court was unnecessary. Anything not sanctioned by scripture was, without question, a violation of the moral code, and punishments were set and accepted. The

witch-hunt, however, goes far beyond any accusation seen in Salem up to that point. Because the evidence is circumstantial, a court must be established to weigh the evidence and attempt to make fair and honest judgments. Elizabeth knows that the foundation of the court itself is not genuine.

In trying to convince John to go to the court and convince the others that the trials are a fraud, Elizabeth is imposing a sense of duty on her husband. John has no patience for authority of any sort, and he strongly resents Elizabeth telling him what to do. He is caught in the dilemma of knowing the truth and being unwilling to tell it. Abby's confession was offered to him alone. There were no witnesses. He knows that it will be his word against Abby's. John knows what Abby is capable of, and he fears for his name. Should the knowledge of his affair with Abigail become public, his reputation in Salem will be destroyed. John is beginning to discover that he cannot escape the implications of his past actions. He struggles with these issues, as well as with his desire to remain uninvolved.

The conflict between Mary Warren and the Proctors is also established in this sequence. While the girl has not yet entered the house, Elizabeth describes how her meek and timid manner has changed. Mary's association with the court has given her power and attention she has not previously known. She has become openly defiant of her employers' orders and has neglected her duties at the house. This change in Mary, alluded to here, will be developed in the next sequence.

Act II Scene 2

The rapid escalation of hysteria in Salem is subtly revealed here in the news from Mary Warren. Where the girl reported 14 were arrested the previous day, the total now stands at 39. The mere quantity of citizens involved should surely have alerted someone to the absurdity of the charges. The evidence against the "witches" is unreasonable enough to be ridiculous. Even actions such as mumbling have been interpreted as witchcraft. At this point, however, the court has already extracted a confession from Sarah Good. Put in the untenable position of confessing to witchcraft and being warmly welcomed back into the community or not confessing and hanging for it, Goody Good chose to save her life. The effect of her confession will have broad-reaching consequences for the others. Had she not confessed, it would have been far more difficult for the court to hang anyone. Now that the court has at least one confession, the guilt of the others is far more sure in the court's eyes. With Sarah's confession, the court has reached a point of no return.

The gift of the poppet is significant. Elizabeth is perplexed by the gift, as she is a grown woman. Puritan society was not given to frivolousness. In a community where even children were expected to act like adults, such an item would not be expected to grace a woman's home. It will later be quite significant that Mary Warren brought the doll into the house. Mary's strange declaration that "We must all love each other now" as she hands the gift to Elizabeth is in strong contrast to the intensified conflict between the girl and the Proctors shortly thereafter. Not only is Mary defiant to Elizabeth, she now stands up to John as well. John's temper is apparent as he attempts to beat her for her arrogance.

As disturbing as this news of the courts is to the Proctors, the truly shocking revelation is yet to come. Mary reveals that Elizabeth herself had been named as a possible witch that day. The girl

escapes a beating by telling her employers that she put in a good word for Elizabeth, telling them that she told the court she never witnessed any witchcraft in the house. Elizabeth immediately recognizes the accusation against her as a plot by Abigail to remove her from John's side. The animosity between the two women has now become dangerous. Abigail is the chief accuser of the court and is now calling the shots. Whatever she says is being taken as gospel, however bizarre. She is in a position to take revenge on Elizabeth for dismissing her and on John for ending their affair. Elizabeth sees that Abigail is still under John's spell, and she begs her husband to break it.

Proctor was already reluctant to approach the court and reveal the fraud. Despite the danger to Elizabeth, he remains unwilling to do so. At this point John is still able to believe in the ultimate justice of the court. Sure that her innocence will be easily proven, he hesitates to take orders from his wife. While he does ultimately decide to go, it is not by his own choice, but through pressure from Elizabeth. He stubbornly maintains his individuality and refusal to be involved until he is nagged into doing otherwise. John despises the court and all it stands for, but his family has been dragged into the crisis despite all his attempts to remain aloof. His failure to respond to the crisis represents an abnegation of his personal responsibility.

Act II Scene 3

The issue of John's not attending church regularly is larger than it might seem. Not only is it expected of a good Christian, it also represents a sense of community. His failure to attend church regularly is an outward manifestation of his dangerous nonconformity that threatens the foundation of the society. John is openly hostile to Salem's obsession with sin. For that he will be punished.

The matter of not baptizing one of his sons is a far more serious offence. To the Puritans, a baby would not enter heaven if it had not been baptized and thus accepted as a child of God. Whether or not John believes this, his failure to baptize his son indicates the depth of his negative feelings toward the minister. This act in itself would surely bring the community to question his reputation. Proctor's open criticism of the materialism of the minister is a challenge to the minister's authority.

Hale's questioning of the Proctors is another example of the string of interrogations in Act Two that began with Elizabeth's interrogation of her husband. When John reveals his conflict with the minister, Hale should begin to see underlying causes for the accusations of witchcraft. Instead, he allows his ideology to hide the evidence presented to his reason. John's explanations for his failure to attend services and to baptize his son are reasonable and complete. There is no reason his faith should be tested further.

Hale, however, persists in pressing the Proctors. When asked to repeat the commandments, John noticeably forgets adultery. This "Freudian slip" shows that John has not yet come to terms with his guilt over the affair with Abigail. John's visible discomfort is due to his overwhelming sense of his own sin. Elizabeth has created an atmosphere of guilt that could be felt by Hale. His suspicion aroused, he presses for details, knowing the commandments were a frequent sign of faith. It is often offered as a defence of character, and in Sarah Good's case, her failure to repeat them eventually led to her conviction as a witch. John's hesitation is taken as a significant sign by Hale.

Giles Corey's offhanded comment about John's belief in witches now surfaces as another accusation against him. Hale is, after all, the authority on witches. He takes them very seriously.

Elizabeth's assertion that she cannot believe if she herself is accused of being one is a significant breach of Christian behaviour. It shows an alienation from the community more typical of John than of herself.

The first realization that something is amiss in the witch-hunt proceedings comes to Hale when he learns that Rebecca Nurse has now been accused. As an outsider, he is unfamiliar with nearly everyone in Salem. Rebecca, however, has a reputation for devoutness and charity that has reached him in Boston. Surely such a woman could not be a witch! While this bit of news does shake Hale, it is not enough to convince him that the court is a fraud. As he had said earlier, the most pious members of the community are far more valuable and challenging targets for the devil. He points out that Lucifer himself was as beautiful as any other angel before he fell. Hale still has faith that the truth will win out, and Rebecca will be released if she is innocent. The incident is important, though, in that up to this point Hale has refused to admit any thought that the trials may not be just.

Act II Scene 4

The poppet represents the lengths to which Abigail is willing to go to seek vengeance. It is now clear that the doll was planted in the house by Mary Warren. Abigail has stuck her own belly with a long needle. She was simulating the voodoo practice of sewing a doll in someone's likeness, which is then used to inflict pain on that person. Abigail knows that there is no evidence of witchcraft in the Proctor household. The only way to implicate Elizabeth is to manufacture evidence. The hysteria in Salem has reached such a fevered pitch that even Mary's admission that she left the needle in the doll herself will not clear Elizabeth's name. At this point Abby is deliberately giving false evidence for her own personal gratification. She need not have legitimate proof. The court will believe only what it desires to believe. Their fanaticism has overcome their common sense and has created a new, subjective reality.

Cheever and Herrick represent the kind of blind loyalty to the social order that Proctor so despises. While they are decent men and have known the people they are arresting for years, they are bound by the law to take them unquestioningly. It is precisely this handing over of conscience to the state that Proctor strives to avoid. Cheever and Herrick have lost their sense of individual identity. They find it easier to conform than to think about their actions.

Proctor vividly shows his abhorrence of the court by tearing up the warrant for Elizabeth's arrest. He has correctly identified the cause of the hysteria as vengeance rather than justice, and he refuses to comply. Proctor believes that he is not bound to obey an unjust law. Why, he asks, has no one thought to question whether Parris or Abigail is being honest? Now, he says, "the little crazy children are jangling the keys of the kingdom, and common vengeance writes the law!" The accusers are always right, no matter how absurd the charge.

Proctor is still trying desperately to remain uninvolved in the witch-hunt procedures. When Elizabeth is taken away, however, he realizes that he can no longer remain on the sidelines. His wife's arrest has shown him the goodness of her character. He must do anything he can to clear her name. Still believing, however, that his own testimony will not convince the court, he enlists a

terrified Mary Warren to tell her story. Mary gives him the ominous warning that should he attempt to interfere, Abigail will charge him with lechery and destroy his name. Proctor is being blackmailed. Once Proctor has made up his mind to stand up for his principles, however, this will not stop him.

Act III Scene 1

The stage directions to Act Three indicate that sunlight streams into the room from two high windows in the back wall. Similarly, the lighting in Act Four will be moonlight seeping through the bars of a high window. Miller's use of lighting adds another dimension to the symbolism of the novel. In an atmosphere of darkness, ignorance, and evil, a few shafts of pure light are visible coming from above, symbolizing goodness and truth. Unfortunately, while the light burns brightly, it is not enough to overcome the overwhelming darkness of the witch-hunts.

The subjective reality created in Salem is so strong at this point that the leaders feel no need to prove themselves to the world of reason and experience. Miller states in Act One that these were a people who felt "that they held in their steady hands the candle that would light the world." The Puritans clung to principles, and they attempted to live and die by them. This system of moral absolutes and life values is not, however, corrupt in itself. Characters like Rebecca Nurse and John Proctor value both reason and religion and lead a balanced life. It is the perversion of these values that becomes dangerous and even evil; the rejection of reality in favour of a system. The false accusation of witches where no witches exist is a mockery of the spiritual values the Puritans upheld. The play's strong emphasis on truth, as seen in the characters of Rebecca and the Proctors, shows a sympathy for the Puritan beliefs, rightly and reasonably applied.

The character of Danforth embodies the wrongful application of these values. Like Hale, Danforth is an outsider in Salem. While Hale at least attempted to investigate those accused, Danforth has no interest in the defendants as people. He measures his worth by the number of people he has jailed and sentenced to death. The Salem trials will bring him recognition and further his position as a judge. These selfish motives are mixed with a strong desire to maintain the status quo. Danforth is so strongly committed to maintaining the order created by the belief system that the ends justify the means. Political authority and religious authority are one and the same in Salem, and Danforth upholds what he strongly believes is the unarguable truth.

The precariousness of goodness in this world is underlined by the court's actions in Act Three. When Giles Corey attempts to offer a reasonable explanation for the accusations of the girls, he is removed from the court. Clearly the proceedings are taking place in a realm far beyond reason. Corey has put his finger on the truth. Putnam has been having his daughter name names of those whose land he wishes to obtain. According to the laws of Salem, a convicted witch must forfeit his or her land. Anyone with enough capital is then given the opportunity to buy it. Corey's accusation offers a convincing, though cold-blooded, motive; a rational explanation to replace the supernatural one. The court, though, is unwilling to consider that it may be mistaken.

The second attempt to sway the judges is offered by Francis Nurse, who openly accuses Danforth of being deceived. Judge Hathorne would have both Corey and Nurse arrested for contempt of court. Any evidence that conflicts with the girls will not be heard. It becomes clear that only the girls themselves can save the victims of this madness. When Mary Warren arrives and denounces the proceedings as mere pretence, she undermines the very foundation of the court system. Rather than believe the girl, the entire group is charged with attempting to overthrow the power of the court, which is entirely based on the contention that "the voice of Heaven is speaking through the children."

The significance of Mary's arrival is not lost on Parris. His position at the center of the proceedings is in jeopardy and he is not pleased. He attempts to undermine the effect of any testimony by warning the judges that Proctor is "mischief." The trials have become a means for Parris to solidify his shaky position in Salem. Where at first he was only a commentator, in Act Three he takes on the role of accuser, making sure no possible charge is missed. While issues such as church attendance and plowing on Sunday have no bearing whatsoever on the testimony Proctor attempts to make to the court, Parris mentions them to shed doubt on Proctor's character. It is a desperate attempt to hold on to the power he has achieved through the proceedings. Parris becomes increasingly malicious and unbalanced as the act continues.

Hale, however, has begun to turn around. He is beginning to see the error of his earlier judgments and now attempts to allow the truth to be heard. As Act Three progresses, Hale will become further shaken by the injustice of the hearings until he finally denounces them. At this early point in his transformation, however, it is already clear that he has lost his influence with the court. He is all but ignored by Danforth and Hathorne. His revelation has come too late.

Act III Scene 2

Elizabeth's claim that she is pregnant brings the theme of truth to the foreground of the play. Elizabeth is one of the beacons of truth that has not been overcome by the darkness of the lying all around her. Proctor insists, "If she say she is pregnant, then she must be! That woman will never lie, Mr. Danforth." For all the coldness and disappointment of the Proctor's relationship, Elizabeth's honesty is unquestioned by her husband. Elizabeth's unfailing honesty is sharply contrasted with John's original unwillingness to let the truth be known to the court.

Elizabeth's pregnancy presents John with a decision. Danforth offers to let her live another year and have the child. The offer will save her life; however, in making the offer, Danforth is asking him to give up any further attempt to show that the proceedings are fraudulent. Proctor must again make the difficult decision to either remain uninvolved or do what he can to make the truth known. Admirably, he chooses to fight for the truth and thus recognizes his responsibility to the society of which he is a part.

Danforth states that "no uncorrupted man may fear this court." We have, however, just witnessed several uncorrupted men attempting to present evidence to the court and being charged with contempt. The ridiculousness of this behaviour is magnified when all 91 people who signed the deposition in favour of Elizabeth, Martha, and Rebecca are arrested for questioning. Their crime

was to attest to the virtue of three upstanding citizens of the community. As Danforth puts it, “a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between.” Being with the court, in this case, means closing one’s mind to the evidence of reason and submitting to the mass hysteria that has stopped all business in Salem, save for the trials. No wonder the vast majority of citizens in Salem are afraid to speak against the proceedings. The innocent do, indeed, have much to fear.

Corey’s deposition accusing Putnam of “killing his neighbours for their land,” shows just how difficult it is to prove what motivates anyone. When Putnam soundly denounces the accusation as a lie, it is his word against Corey’s. While Putnam conveniently uses the machinery of the court to further his own ends, Corey is challenging the system with thoughts they prefer not to entertain. Just as there is no definitive proof of witchcraft, there can be no definitive proof that Putnam is responsible for charging innocent people.

Hale’s assertion that Proctor should return to the court with a lawyer to present his evidence properly shows that he has growing sympathies for the charges of fraud. When he first interrogated Proctor in his home, there was no room for any evidence save the condition of Proctor’s soul. He wholeheartedly assumed that he could make a sound judgment based on his Christian character alone. Now, however, he is beginning to see that the truth of the matter is beyond the scope of such issues as knowing the catechism and plowing on Sunday. He recommends that Proctor get a lawyer to protect him from the unreasonable judgments of Danforth. Where Hale had once been suspicious of the Proctors, he is now attempting to help them. Danforth’s assertion that there is no need for lawyers shows how far from actual justice the court has strayed.

Act III Scene 3

When Abby is confronted with Mary’s confession of pretence, we see another case of one person’s word against another’s. Neither girl’s assertions can be proved definitively, one way or another. Frustrated by his failure to convince with reason alone, Proctor realizes that the only way to promote the truth is to play the judge’s own game. He therefore begins to illuminate weaknesses in Abby’s Christian character. She laughs during prayer; she dances naked in the woods. From these offences against Puritanism, Proctor hopes to show that Abby is not above lying in the courtroom, and, worse yet, scheming to murder those accused of witchcraft.

Parris reacts to these charges against his niece in a curious way. Rather than defend Abigail, he immediately defends himself. “Excellency, since I come to Salem this man is blackening my name.” Parris’ involvement in the proceedings has been exclusively to protect his own reputation; his own good name. His paranoia leads him to imagine insults where none are intended. Although in Act One Parris told Abby he thought he saw one of the girls naked, here he flatly denies it. He is less interested in telling the truth than in keeping any wrongdoing of his niece’s from surfacing.

Mary Warren, the weakest of the girls and the most likely to be intimidated, finds she cannot stand up to the power of Abigail. Despite Proctor’s reassurance that no harm will come to those who tell the truth, she is deathly afraid of Abby. Having been one of the accusers of the court, Mary

witnessed many sentences of death by hanging. When Abby turns against her and accuses her of sending her spirit out, she knows what will become of her. She lacks the courage and the strength necessary to be an individual against a powerful majority.

When Proctor sees Mary falter, he uses the one weapon he still holds. He admits to his lechery and surrenders his good name. Proctor gives up his good reputation in Salem to stand up for what he believes is right. He has finally become fully committed to the truth. Elizabeth, the very model of truth, believes she can save her husband by lying. The woman who cannot lie tells a lie. She was doomed either way. To tell the truth was to ruin her husband's good name. To lie was to condemn him. In going against her own nature, her own individuality, Elizabeth begins the sequence that will lead to her husband's death.

Ironically, the one member of the community who tried so hard to remain uninvolved in the witch-hunt has become its central focus. This is a turning point in the play. Proctor, the principle enemy of the witch-hunt, has become its ultimate victim. He is dangerous to the proceedings precisely because he does not believe in them. In order for the epidemic to continue, Proctor must be removed.

The sequence is also climactic for Hale. By the end of Act Three Hale has completely denounced the hearings. Shaken by the injustice that he sees before him, he tries to right the wrong. By this point, however, he has no influence. Danforth tells him "I will have nothing from you, Mr. Hale!" Danforth, while close to perceiving the truth, has no epiphany. Faced with truths and lies, he is unable or unwilling to distinguish between them.

Act IV Scene 1

Act Four takes place in the Salem jail, dimly lit by moonlight seeping through the bars. The light of goodness is still present, though it has been greatly dimmed. No longer the bright sunlight of Act Three, we now see only the reflected light of the moon. While evil has managed to overpower good, as is vividly portrayed in the apparent madness of Tituba and Sarah Good, it cannot be obliterated.

Tituba represents a distinctly different cultural view of the devil. In her native Barbados, the devil is not seen as the embodiment of evil as he is in Puritan theology. Occult practices were, and still are, accepted in many of the islands. The contrast is between the hatred of differentness exhibited by the Puritans, and the acceptance of diversity seen in the island culture. To Tituba, the devil is not wicked. She says "Devil, him be pleasureman in Barbados, him be singin' and dancin' in Barbados." Where Tituba herself stands on the issue is unclear. The mad ravings of Tituba and Sarah Good are more a reaction against the rigid Puritanism that has condemned them than an embrace of the devil. They have been in jail for many months and are reacting to their circumstances.

Time has passed since Act Three, and it is now fall. The symbolism of the season is apparent. Fall is the time of fruition, when crops reach their fullness and are harvested. It also heralds a time of death and decay. The hysteria of the witch trials has now reached its peak and is approaching its inevitable end. For months the residents of Salem have done nothing but attend the proceedings of the court. There is a real sense that the town is tiring of the spectacle.

Tituba and Sarah Good's madness is mirrored in the madness of Reverend Parris. He has been reduced to a shadow of the man in Act One, gaunt, frightened, and prone to sudden weeping. Parris has summoned the judges back to Salem to discuss the disappearance of his niece, Abigail, and Mercy Lewis with all of his money. While nothing to this point had convinced Parris of the error of his ways, the loss of his money seems to have awakened him to the significance of the court's actions. The rumours of Andover have also begun to turn public opinion, and alliance with the witch-hunt is no longer politically advantageous for the minister. He begins to argue for postponement of the hangings in order to bring more of the condemned to confess and save their lives.

The situation in Andover is crucial. Apparently, a similar court set up there to condemn witches was thrown out by the people of the town who rebelled against its authority. Danforth attempts to silence any talk about the rebellion; however, the news has already spread through Salem. The rumour spread in this act parallels the rumours of witchcraft spread in the beginning of the play. Just as the earlier rumours quickly took hold of the town and led to the witch hysteria, so Danforth fears these new rumours will quickly undermine his authority. The disappearance of Abigail and Mercy Lewis after the Andover rebellion casts serious doubt on their testimony.

Parris fears that the hanging of two such upstanding citizens as Rebecca Nurse and John Proctor the next morning will incite a rebellion in Salem similar to the one in Andover. Still, Danforth refuses to budge. The reason he gives is that "postponement now speaks of floundering on my part." He is not so much concerned about the lives of those condemned as about his own reputation. He does not wish to appear weak, opening himself up to criticism of the entire proceeding. Once again, the ends justify the means. Miller himself has said of Danforth "there are people dedicated to evil in the world; that without their perverse example we should not know the good." While it may have been possible to excuse Danforth's earlier behaviour as a necessary result of the authority he holds, this refusal to examine his actions for fear of losing face is abominable.

Hale has now come full circle in his development. While he appeared in Salem bearing the weighty authority of his books on the devil and witchcraft, he is now there to attempt to reverse the consequences of that early behaviour. Far from examining the souls of these men and women and judging their content, he is now encouraging them to lie and save their lives. Hale is finally acting as an individual, and he attempts to persuade others to do the same. The trials had been a farce, and Hale saw no sin in telling a lie to an unjust authority to save one's life. As Hale was fanatical in his zeal to find witches, he is now fanatical in his zeal to save lives. His argument that the victims should all be pardoned is greatly weakened by the fact that at least one of those condemned has already confessed. Danforth will no longer take him seriously. His efforts are too late.

Act IV Scene 2

By this point, Hale's attempts to rectify the wrongs done to those condemned has reached near hysteria. He has again let his emotion overpower his principle, this time in the very opposite extreme. He is attempting to convince the prisoners that two wrongs will make a right. As he himself says, "I come to do the Devil's work. I come to counsel Christians they should belie themselves." His assertion that "there is blood on my head! Can you not see the blood on my head!" mimics Lady Macbeth as she attempts to wash her bloodstained hands in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Hale tells Elizabeth "I would save your husband's life, for if he is taken I count myself his murderer." The extent of the guilt that he feels is enormous.

The short scene between Elizabeth and John Proctor in the jail is pivotal to the play. Hale counsels Elizabeth to convince her husband to lie. Elizabeth, however, has seen the results of her own lie, which led to John's sentence to death. Her calmness in the face of tragedy astounds Danforth. The emotion between husband and wife at first laying eyes on each other is powerful. Each had sacrificed to save the other: John by offering up his reputation; Elizabeth by lying. Both attempts were a dismal failure. John's death is just hours away.

John Proctor's choice does not come as easily as Rebecca Nurse's. His good name—his identity—is crucial to him. If he joins the mistaken majority and admits witchcraft, he will lose his identity. This is a much deeper concept of a good name than mere reputation. The confession of his relationship with Abigail was about his standing in the eyes of others. This confession will be about his own personal integrity. Proctor's name is threatened only by his fear of death and the knowledge of his own adultery. What the community thinks of him is not his concern. His concern is to be true to himself. To confess is to be a fraud.

Of course, to confess is also to save his life. Is it true, as Hale insists, that "life is God's most precious gift" and that "no principle, however glorious, may justify the taking of it"? Elizabeth would say it is not. To her the goal should not be life at any price, but a life of moral integrity. To confess is too great a concession. Curiously, Proctor struggles not with the telling of the lie that will save his life, but with the image he will present if he chooses to die. He knows that Rebecca Nurse will be seen, deservedly, as a martyr. He feels that he has not earned such a death; he is unworthy of that appellation. Proctor has not lived up to his own moral standards. The calm demeanour of his wife only serves to emphasize his unworthiness. He is tempted to agree with Hale and avoid a meaningless death.

Proctor has decided to sign a confession; however, he is not secure in his decision, and he seeks the approval of his wife. He admits that he has only waited this long because "it is hard to give a lie to dogs." Elizabeth withholds her advice. She thinks this decision must be made by John deeply searching his own conscience. Elizabeth has changed. She has seen her coldness and the reasons for John's adultery. She has realized that neither she nor any other person on earth can be his judge. Her statement that "whatever you will do, it is a good man does it" is a long way from comments in Act Two. Elizabeth has not attempted to sway him, and John delivers his decision: he will have his life.

Act IV Scene 3

The theme of the good name is critically important in this last scene of the play. While Proctor verbally confesses to witchcraft, he refuses to name others who are involved. He is refusing to spoil anyone's good name or reputation in the community. Proctor realizes that one's name is everything. His refusal is taken as a sign that he is not truly repentant. Of course he is not repentant. He has done nothing wrong; however, slandering the names of others is perversely seen as a sign of rightness with God.

Proctor, after much protest, proceeds to sign a written confession. He refuses, however, to surrender it to the judge. The written evidence of his dishonesty is more than he can bear. Proctor also knows that his signature will be posted publicly on the church doors and used to force others to confess, thereby losing their own identities. He refuses to incriminate others or to serve as an example of submission. It is enough that he has offered the lie. God knows his soul and should be its only judge. The reason that he gives to Danforth in the climax of the play comes back to the idea of a good name: "Because it is my name! . . . How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!"

Proctor finally asserts his individuality and claims his name by denouncing his confession as a lie. In a vivid gesture, he tears and crumples the paper before the judges. Proctor is honest, above all, with himself. To confess is to align himself with what he believes to be evil. The prosecution is the real example of the devil. All who consort with them, then, become true witches. For Proctor, to confess is to admit the truth of the court's charge against him. In the end he refuses to surrender his unique beliefs. He makes the choice that costs him his life but restores his soul. Proctor surprises himself with this new strength. "You have made your magic now," he says, "for now I do think I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor." Proctor has earned his death in his final act. His achievement is heralded by his wife, who says to Hale: "He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him!"

Miller has stated that he was drawn to this subject by the "moral size" of the people involved. "They knew who they were." Each of the 20 who died in Salem believed so strongly in themselves and in the rightness of their consciences as to die rather than belie themselves. In a situation where "men were handing their conscience to other men and thanking them for the opportunity to do so," they refused to give in. While the parallel to the McCarthy era is striking, the lessons of the play are applicable to any situation that allows the accuser to be always right. It is similarly applicable to any conflict between the individual and authority. The final authority must always rest not with the majority, but with the individual conscience.