Innocent People Who Were Hanged Essay, Research Paper

Trials of Her Sins

Hester Prynne, Nathanial Hawthorne’s character from his novel, The

Scarlet Letter, and Abigail Williams, from “The Crucible” by Arthur Miller,

have both committed a crime and they are both hated by their societies.

However, there are also differences between the two characters. Hester

Prynne is the more respectable Puritan woman of the two because she did

not commit as many sins as Abigail did, she was not as secretive about it,

and her actions only affected herself and her child.

Hester did sin horribly but it was not comparable to Abigail’s many

sins. The sins that Abigail were guilty of were wrath, avarice, lust, and envy,

while Hester only committed lust. Hester’s adulterous behavior was

considered one of the worst sins of the Puritan women. Although that was an

awful sin to have committed, Abigail committed a sin of the same kind and

more. Abigail and Hester both knew that what they did was wrong. Hester

took the blame and did not lie about what happened. Abigail lied and made

her friends lie just so she would not get in trouble for her sin. Abigail’s

behavior and involvement of others created a more complex reason to judge

her as less respectable of the two.

Hester was not secretive about committing her crime as Abigail was.

Abigail is even described as “an orphan with an endless capacity for

dissembling” (page 9). This proves that she tried to cover up her actions.

Hester did not try to hide the fact from the townspeople that she was

pregnant; she only tried to conceal the identity of the father of her baby.

Abigail, on the other hand, made sure that the citizens of Salem did not find

out that she and her friends had been lying when they accused many

innocent people of witchcraft. She even went as far as to threaten John

Proctor by telling him that if he told, she would have him and his wife

hanged. She also threatened her friends many times throughout the novel.

At one point, she said “Let any of you breathe 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” (page 20). If Abigail’s friends told

the truth, she would carry out her threats.

Most importantly, Hester’s actions only hurt herself, her child, and their

reputations. When Hester committed adultery, the people in town were not

affected by it, and she was the only one punished. However, Abigail’s fault

punished many people including herself, her friends, John and Elizabeth

Proctor, and the innocent people who were hanged. These townspeople

were hanged unjustly because Abigail was a lying and deceitful person.

Because Hester’s actions hurt fewer people, Abigail has less respectability.

Admittedly, both women committed crimes, Hester would be the better of the

two Puritan women.

Neither Hester Prynne nor Abigail Williams were respectable Puritan

woman because of their sins, but of the two, Hester should be considered

more honorable. If these women acted today as they did 300 years ago, they

would be judged much differently. No one would be hanged, no one would

have to suffer public humiliation, and it probably would not matter if the

whole town knew about it. Regardless of the time era, the trial of Hester’s

sins compared to Abigail’s made her more respectable.