The Crucible- Injustice Essay, Research Paper

In The Crucible, by Arthur Miller, justice and injustice is portrayed through the characters of John Proctor, Elizabeth Proctor and Abigail Williams. It is also shown through the minor characters of Mary Warren and Mercy Lewis, followers of Abigail Williams, and through Danforth and various townspeople.

After Abigail Williams and the girls are discovered dancing in the forest by Reverend Parris, there are rumours of witchcraft among them, when Betty Parris and Ruth Putnam are found “witched”. Once the girls discover this, they become more and more frightened of being accused of witchcraft. Abigail is the first to “admit” to seeing the devil, and all the other girls join in, so the blame will not be placed on them. “I saw Sarah Good with the Devil. I saw Goody Osburn with the Devil. I saw Bridget Bishop with the Devil.”

Once the accusations began, many innocent people in the community were taken away. They were then either forced to admit that they were witches, to free themselves from a public hanging, or deny that they were witches, saving their integrity, but subjecting themselves to an unjust public hanging.

One of the first people to be charged, was Rebecca Nurse, wife of Francis Nurse, a well-respected man of the community. This disturbance caused great anxiety amongst the people in Salem, as they would have least suspected Rebecca Nurse to be one to deal with the Devil. “If Rebecca Nurse be tainted, then nothing’s left to stop the whole green world from burning.” Goody Putnam was the one to accuse her of witchcraft, for the death of her seven babies, but even with no just proof, Rebecca Nurse is hanged for “sending her spirit out on them.”

Wild accusations are flying between people in Salem. In the case of Martha Corey, Walcott accused Corey of witchcraft, to settle a score that had happened four or five years ago. Walcott claimed that after buying a pig from Corey, it died soon after that and “from that day to this he cannot keep a pig alive for more than four weeks.”

Giles Corey, Martha Corey’s husband, was later killed for a different reason. He refused to give the name of a man who heard Putnam say he was “killing his neighbours for their land.” Giles Corey died an unjust death, great stones placed on his chest, pressing him slowly to death.

Any outrageous claims were taken in by the courts, and everyone had a reason to accuse another, resulting in many innocent deaths.

The main accuser, Abigail Williams, had an ulterior motive to destroy Elizabeth Proctor. Beforehand, Abigail had an affair with Elizabeth’s husband, John Proctor, and Abigail believed if she removed Elizabeth, she would have John to herself. Most of Abigail’s allegations were based on false claims, believing the relationship between her and John Proctor to be true love.

Because of Abigail’s twisted plot of sticking a needle in herself to signify Elizabeth’s “familiar spirit” pushing it in, and Cheever finding a poppet in the Proctor’s house, Elizabeth is charged with murder. Proctor realises what Abigail is trying to do, and feels remorse, as he is partly at fault for his relationship with Abigail. “I’ll not give my wife to vengeance.”

At the trial, Proctor no longer tried to protect himself and admits to having an affair with Abigail, explains Abigail’s plan to destroy Elizabeth for revenge. Elizabeth is called in to secure these claims, but does not admit to John being an adulterer, to save his reputation and to protect him. “Elizabeth, I have confessed it.”

Mary Warren, a follower of Abigail Williams and John Proctor’s servant, wanted to confess to the court, the falseness and injustice of the whole incident, the girls’ imagination running wild, just to save themselves from being convicted of witchcraft, themselves. John Proctor learns this truth, and forces Mary to confess, to give justice to the rest of the community. The girls are given a chance to defend themselves against the claim that they were only acting. To prove their innocence, Abigail leads them to act as if Mary Warren had send her spirit in the form of a yellow bird up on the rafters. The girls’ hysterics, causes Mary Warren to break her barrier, and falls to Abigail’s pressure. Mary Warren then lets injustice prevail by accusing John Proctor to be “the Devil’s man” and her word is believed. Because of Mary’s inability to speak the truth, Proctor is taken away.

The court of Salem, was a mockery of the court system, as the court people wanted convictions that suited them.

There is a crucial flaw in the court system, when Danforth claims that “witchcraft is ipso facto, on its face and by its nature, an invisible crime….we must rely upon her victims-and they do testify..” He suggests that there is no visible evidence, so they must rely on the word of the witnesses along. But he cannot tell if he has unreliable sources or not, but prefers to believe the word of Abigail and the girls, over any other members of the community.

When Mary Warren and John Proctor challenge the court proceedings, by Mary admitting that the information that Abigail and the girls are giving are false, the court is hardly convinced. But later when Mary turns her back and accuses John of witchcraft, the court immediately takes this information aboard, and John is taken away. Also, when Elizabeth does not confess to John being an adulterer, this testimony is used to great extent, so to the court people they believe that John was undoubtedly lying. The members of the court bases its judgements on what they want to hear, resulting in many of the accused, dying in an innocent, unjust manner.

When Proctor “confesses” to dealing with witchcraft, to save his life, after being told that it would be a public notice, he rips up the confession, as he knows his reputation will be destroyed among people who had respected him. But what matters most is that Proctor would have lost his self-respect, if he had let this lie, take its course. Proctor’s name meant more than his reputation, as it was all he had left after the consequences of dealing with Abigail. “Because I lie and sign myself to lies! I have give you my soul; leave me my name!” He knew that he could not deal with being seen as a witch in the eyes of the community, and preferred to keep the honour of his name, his loyalty to himself and most of all, his personal integrity. Elizabeth Proctor realised the meaning of his name to him, realising that his name was all he had left to keep him whole. “He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him!”

The Crucible mocks the way society deals with justice. Salem is torn apart, due to the extent of Abigail’s imagination and power. It shows the bias of opinions, as it was shown in the court, and how people tend to choose outcomes that suit them. In the end, injustice thrived upon the souls of the community, leaving many innocent people dead. Justice did not prevail, as the heart behind the case, John Proctor preferred to keep his self-respect and integrity, than live a life of lies.