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English 9

April 23, 2013

Values Versus Life

During the seventeenth century, people in the New World and Europe were accused by the thousands of participating in the illegal act of witchcraft. Specifically in Salem, Massachusetts, the hysteria took over the mindset of the predominantly Puritan population, and accusations arose of people working with the Devil. Some confessed to this accusation in order to save their life, but others took a stand to defend themselves. However, when reading *The Crucible*, by Arthur Miller, a quite peculiar pattern arose. We can infer from *The Crucible* that staying true to one's personal values may not always be the route prospering in vitality, and instead conforming to one's society will in the end save one's life; supporting stories are the ones of Tituba, Rebecca Nurse, and John Proctor.

During this time, it was highly common for slaves to be owned by well to do, white individuals. Then, as the reverend of Salem at the time, it was no shock that the Parris owned a slave, Tituba; He brought her back "with him from Barbados" (Miller 7). Since Tituba obviously did not grow up in a Puritan community, we can infer that she converted to this life style from a different religion or set of morals. This alone could raise suspicion of her working for the Devil, but what finally ignited her accusation was due to one strange evening in the woods with a group of adolescent girls. Abigail, the reverend's devious niece, originally claims that as Tituba was singing songs from

Barbados as she and a few others simply danced. However, as the debate became heated and others began accusing Abigail of questionable acts, Abigail blames an awful denunciation upon Tituba and Hale accuses her of selling herself to the Devil: “She comes to me every night to go and drink blood!” Of course, Tituba first denies this charge, but soon reveals, “You beg me to conjure! She beg me to make charm-” (41). This plea goes against her original stance, and her true memory of this event. The fearful, but innocent, woman soon falls to her knees and begs the reverend for redemption from this sin; nevertheless, Hale begins to question Tituba in a persuasive manner until she claims she is, “a good Christian woman,” and states, “I love God with all my bein” (42). When expressing those words, she appears to be sincere, and soon follows through with what her peers desire: more names of those involved with the Devil. Tituba effortlessly titles Goody Good and Goody Osburn as witches, and Abigail and Betty take over from there and accuse many more people in Salem: Bridget Bishop, George Jacobs, Goody Howe, Martha Bellows, Goody Siber, Alice Barrow, Goody Hawkins, Goody Bibber, and Goody Boothe (44-46). So in the act of saving her own life, Tituba spoke a flame that soon spread into a wildfire, all the while going against her original values. This is the path many accused persons chose when facing their own life or death decision, but a few stood their ground and in result came very unfortunate events.

Perhaps one of the most well known stories amongst historians is the one of a kind elderly woman, Rebecca Nurse. In the eyes of many, Goody Nurse was a proper, Christian woman who served God as her number one priority. Nonetheless, some saw her good-natured heart as a cover up to her secret life as a witch. As Betty was asleep on the table, Goody Nurse came to her and stood over her body in a grandmotherly fashion, but

Goody Putnam was suspicious of her and soon accused Goody Nurse because, “Rebecca’s spirit of ‘tempting her to iniquity’” (Miller 25). Oddly enough the sisters of Goody Proctor were accused as well during this madness even after knowing Rebecca’s “reputation was virtually unblemished” (Linder). She also was particularly open with her love and trust for God, “. . .then let us go to God for the cause of it. . . (Miller 26), so there was should have been no falter at the purity of Goody Nurse’s name. Nevertheless, this accusation bestowed upon her did not taint Rebecca’s saintly nature. She stayed true to her values and did not give in and confess to a crime she did not commit. Furthermore, Goody Nurse almost escaped her fate and was extremely close to being announced as not-guilty, but she ruined her own chances by one small statement about another woman who she believed to be only accused and not a confessed witch: "What do you bring her? She is one of us" (Linder). Nonetheless, the court took this harmless comment to great concern and thought it be enough evidence to come to a verdict. Rebecca Nurse, a well-known Christian woman who stood her ground, was guilty of being a witch and soon after had a noose around her neck. Perchance Goody Nurse would have confessed to the crime she may have lived a bit longer, but instead she did what was the ‘right thing to do’ and was sentenced to death for it.

John Proctor is similar to Rebecca Nurse in the aspect that he stands his ground and does not sway from what he believes in to please society. After admitting to the act of adultery and criticizing Abigail for her behavior publically, Mary Warren, along with the persuasion of her fellow dancing and trouble making adolescent acquaintances, accuses him of working with the Devil. Later it is evident that Abigail would make sure Proctor was accused of the heinous act of witchcraft if he mentioned a word about their

affair and her involvement with any other men. John came to Abigail the night before Elizabeth Proctor, the pregnant wife of John, had her trial; at this point in time, Goody Proctor had been in jail for more than a month. The next morning, despite Abigail's warning, John confesses to having an affair with the threatening girl in his own attempt to expose Abigail's unacceptable conduct: "I will prove the fraud you are!" (Miller 3068). Proctor also makes the point that Abigail is a "whore," but soon Goody Proctor rejects that idea in order to save John's life; she lies about the affair when asked by the court (101). Minutes later, Mary Warren points at Proctor and cries, "You're the Devil's man!" (109). This accusation puts John Proctor in jail, but even after suffering in his cell he will stay true to his value of truth. Weeks later during one of his last few moments with Elizabeth, Proctor continuously questions her as to if he should confess and live, or stay strong to the truth. His loving wife knows him too well to make a decision for him and is aware that he will be unable to live with himself unless he makes the decision. In addition, this idea is supported when John makes his final decision. When Danforth begins the process of asking Proctor whether or not he works with the Devil, he reluctantly confesses. However, as the interrogations resume and Parris and Danforth press him to accuse others, Proctor reaches his breaking point. He echoes his earlier confession verbally, but refuses to sign his name on a paper saying he has confessed: "Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them who hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!" (132). This outburst and rebellious action cost Proctor his life but saved his him in a personal way. It

would have been completely out of character for John to confess willingly, but by staying true to the truth he lost his life.

From the novel *The Crucible*, we can come to the conclusion that staying true to one's personal values may not always be the route prospering in vitality, and instead conforming to one's society will in the end save one's life. Tituba was able to escape this fate by confessing to the accusation of witchcraft and placing the blame onto others; however, Rebecca Nurse and John Proctor were not as willing to go down without a fair fight. Staying true to the morals of one's self seem to be an acceptable theme in most cases, but in others perhaps conforming to society rules will literally save lives.

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