

Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" is clearly a representation of the true meaning of tragedy. John Proctor was, in fact, the medium, the tool, of which Miller utilized to convey a universal depiction of tragedy. A broad definition of a tragic hero is a protagonist who, through faults and flaws of his own and in the society in which he exists, falters in the grand scheme of things. This mistake leads to suffering, which ultimately leads to a self-realization. Miller, himself, has said, "Tragedy, then, is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly," leading us to believe that a greater theme encompasses this downfall. Miller, as well as many other literary critics seem to convey that tragedy revolves around two universal aspects: fear and freedom. "The Crucible" is a direct parallel to the multiple ideals of tragedy and thus centers around John Proctor's fear and freedom while he exists as a tragic hero.

The first stage in the process of establishing the tragic hero for Miller was relaying the characteristics of John Proctor. It was essential that Proctor be viewed as the so called "good guy" in the plot, one who stands out or the audience can relate to. He is described as a "farmer in his middle thirties" with a "powerful body" and a "steady manner", and is already being established as the protagonist in which we sympathize with. (p.19) Miller's choice to describe him in such a fashion is very significant. By describing the tragic hero as a "strong, steady, farmer" the dramatic effect is even greater. Who else better to fall victim to his own personal freedom and the fear of others but the strong, stern character? John Proctor's description also provides another outlet to convey the dynamic nature of his character. While the physical side of Proctor deteriorated towards the conclusion of the story a contrast is created. John is said to be "...another man, bearded, filthy, his eyes misty as though webs had overgrown them, " an obvious discrepancy from his initial condition. (p.123) Thus, John's physical delineation is an apparent parallel to the changes he emotionally undergoes making him a dynamic character. Miller also establishes Proctor as the protagonist by giving him qualities the audience found favor with. John went against the normalities and conceptions of the townsfolk. An aspect we can truly justify, especially in America. Proctor's practical nature is indicated when he often does not attend Church. He does not agree with Parris' talk of hell, exclaiming "Can you speak one minute without we land in Hell again?" and thus turns away from the Church, clearly emphasizing that rebellious side. (p.28)

The second step in creating the tragic hero is emphasizing the mistake or flaw which brings upon the character's descent. It is in this stage that fear and

freedom enter

as a major part of John Proctor's actions.

"And if society alone is responsible for the cramping of our lives then the protagonist must needs be so pure and faultless as to force us to deny his validity

as a character. From neither of these views can tragedy derive, simply because

neither represents a balanced concept of life."(Miller)

It is this balance between the internal and external that opens the door for fear and

freedom to enter. Fear is society's tool. In Puritan New England paranoia was a common

aspect. The people lived in fear of the devil, a physical devil that existed and walked

among them. When word spread, speaking of witchcraft in Salem, that fear, that paranoia emerged ever so imminently and thus began the tragedy. With the people's fear

came rumors. Mrs. Putnam asked, "How high did she fly, how high?" of Betty clearly exhibiting that rumors of witchcraft were surfacing and spreading. (p.12)

Subsequently,

from such rumors came the accusations. It was the accusations that proved most costly.

People turned against each other saving themselves by accusing their neighbors.

All of

these consequences sprouted from fear in the hearts and minds of the people of Salem.

Fear, however, only contributed to this tragedy.

John Proctor's freedom within was the other half that completes the equation.

It

was this freedom that resulted in his mistakes, his flaws. Proctor chose to have relations,

outside of his marriage to Elizabeth with Abigail. In Act Two, John makes a determined

effort to please Elizabeth. He kisses her perfunctoritly; he lies in saying that her cooking

is well-seasoned (perhaps a kind of irony on the lack of spice in Elizabeth)

showing the

strain in their relationship. (Murray, 46) Like all men Proctor had his

temptations yet his

freedom allowed him to give in to them. Through his own freedom John "lusted with the

girl" and went "against the law of God and Salem" (Murray, 46) Freedom also

existed in

John's choice to not attend Church. It was this choice that also contributed to his

downfall, for it did not put him in the best standings with the townspeople. The fear in

society and the freedom of John Proctor both complement each other in that balance that

Miller spoke of. Tragedy comes from what the protagonist can, as well as cannot control. This evidence clearly holds true to Miller's definition of tragedy.

Suffering was a major step in coaxing John to his realization. He suffered mentally and emotionally because of his flaw, as the heat of the accusations intensified.

He witnessed his wife Elizabeth go through the agony of being accused as a witch. he

suffers because he too was accused of betraying God. Their true suffering becomes apparent when Proctor confesses to adultery to pardon Elizabeth. Elizabeth lies in turn to

save her husband's name. They endured this torment for each other. They endured it till their day of sentencing. This extreme anguish and emotional stress which Miller creates adds to the sense of tragedy. It is this emphatical grief which makes the conclusion of *The Crucible* so outstanding. Miller utilizes the sorrow to make Proctor's all-important realization that much more spectacular. However, in the Greek definition of tragedy this suffering would serve as pathos. Pathos is the element of sympathy in the plot to evoke pity. In the Greek tradition this was essential to the plot. However, Miller does not see his tragedy as one that should include pity for the protagonist. "The possibility of victory must be there in tragedy. Where pathos rules, where pathos is finally derived, a character has fought a battle he could not have possibly won." (Miller) This statement demonstrates the conflict in belief. Miller feels the protagonist must emerge victorious in some way where the Greek tradition relies on an emphasis of pity. In Miller's view, how can we have pity for someone who has won? This is where the conflict lies and as we see in Proctor's realization, "*The Crucible*" will hold true to Miller's definition.

Proctor learns something about himself and the world around him in his final realization before his execution. This is the concluding step in the tragic plot. "Tragedy seems to me to be an investigation of the possibilities of human freedom." (Kerr) Again, it is Proctor's freedom that makes him a tragic hero.

"I cannot mount the gibbet like a saint. It is a fraud, I am not that man. My honesty is broke, Elizabeth; I am no good man. Nothing's spoiled by giving them this lie that were not rotten long before... I want my life... I will have my life..."

Then who will judge me? God in Heaven, what is John Proctor, what is John Proctor? I think it is honest, I think so; I am no saint." (pp. 126-127) These passages indicate that Proctor has come to see the truth. He has the freedom now, to not give in to them, to let God judge him. "I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be- to secure one thing- his sense of personal dignity." (Miller) Miller's definition of tragedy is a clear cut example of Proctor's actions in "*The Crucible*." Proctor realizes that his confession to these people violated his freedom. He learned that we need to answer to God and God only for forgiveness. The confession revoked Proctor's dignity and his freedom. Miller says, "Tragedy enlightens... in that it points the heroic finger at the enemy of man's freedom." Proctor sees this and points a heroic finger at those people who tried to take his freedom.

