

The deterioration of Salem's social structure precipitated the murders of many innocent people. Arthur Miller's depiction of the Salem witch trials, *The Crucible*, deals with a community that starts out looking like it is tightly knit and church loving. It turns out that once Tituba starts pointing her finger at the witches, the community starts pointing their fingers at each other. Hysteria and hidden agendas break down the social structure and then everyone must protect themselves from the people that they thought were their friends. The church, legal system and the togetherness of the community died so that children could protect their families' social status.

Being isolated from any other group of people with different beliefs created a church led Puritan society that was not able to accept a lot of change. The church was against the devil, at the same time it was against such things as dancing and other premature acts. The reputation of the family was very important to the members of the community. When the girls were caught dancing in the woods, they lied to protect not just themselves but the reputation of their families. They claimed that the devil took them over and influenced them to dance. The girls also said that they saw members of the town standing with the devil. A community living in a puritan society like Salem could easily go into a chaotic state and have a difficult time dealing with what they consider to be the largest form of evil.

Salem's hysteria made the community lose faith in the spiritual beliefs that they were trying to strictly enforce. The church lost many of its parishioners because the interest of the town was now on Abigail because people wanted to know who was going to be named next. When the church was trying to excommunicate John Proctor, there were not enough people at church to do it. The people were getting misled so far as to leave a dagger stuck in the door of their minister's house: "Tonight, when I open my door to leave my house--a dagger clattered to the ground...There is danger for me." (128) were Parris' exact words. With the conveyer of God fearing for his life there was no longer anyone but Abigail to lead the community.

The justice system is designed to protect the people that it serves but during the trials the accused witch had two choices, death or imprisonment. The punishment of death was given to all people that pleaded not guilty; the other punishment was to plead guilty and go to jail. John Proctor gave his view of the justice system when he said "I like not the smell of this 'authority' " (29). "And do you know that near to four hundred are in the jails

from Marblehead to Lynn, and upon my signature?"(85) said Danforth, describing the number of people that were in jail on charges of witchcraft. There were so many people executed that Hale commented "there are orphans wandering from house to house; abandoned cattle bellow on the highroads, the stink of rotting crops hangs everywhere..."(130) Salem was turning into a ghost town. With Abigail controlling the community, the church no longer getting the whole town to prayer, and an unjust legal system, it is natural that the people were in a state of total chaos.

The unexplained was caused by the devil, so some members of Salem used the unexplained to their advantage. Mrs. Putnam told the truth when she said, "There are wheels within wheels in this village, and fires within fires!"(26) Mrs. Putnam did her share of spreading rumors after she heard that the girls were flying, so she asked Parris "How high did she (Abigail) fly, how high?"(11). These rumors happened because people did not want any blame put on to themselves. This 'passing the buck' made people start fighting with one another such as Corey charging Putnam of having his daughter accuse a resident of witchcraft in order to get Corey's land. Abigail used her power of getting people to listen to her to her advantage when she charged Proctor's spouse with being a witch so Abigail could live with John. This again proves that Abigail had control of the town and the unexplained turned neighbor against neighbor.

The social breakdown in Salem was the major factor in the tragedy that took the lives of many innocent people. There was more than one tragedy in The Crucible. The first was the murdering of many innocent people, and the second was that a community that was once very close had been broken apart. It appeared that the people of Salem were like a family but isolation actually made them unable to adapt to a troublesome situation. If the community could have had a greater influence from another group of people then the social structure would have been able to adapt.

The Crucible by Arthur Miller

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