

The trumped-up witch hysteria in Salem, Massachusetts, deteriorated the rational, and emotional stability of its citizens. This exploited the populations weakest qualities, and insecurities. The obvious breakdown in Salem's social order led to the tragedy which saw twenty innocent people hung on the accusation of witchcraft. Arthur Miller, author of *The Crucible*, used hysteria to introduce personality flaws in vulnerable characters. A rigid social system, fear, and confusion were evident conditions that became prevalent before and during the witchtrials. These conditions only contributed to the tragedy in Salem.

The isolation of the Puritan society created a rigid social system that did not allow for any variation in lifestyle. The strict society that was employed at this time had a detrimental effect on the Proctor family. John Proctor, a hard working farmer who had a bad season the year before and struggling this year was occasionally absent at Sunday service. This was due to the fact he needed to tend to his crops. Also, Proctor did not agree with the appointment of Mr. Parris as the newest minister, and therefore did not have his last child baptized. With the latest craze of witchery and swirling accusations, John Proctor was easily indicted of being a messenger for the devil by the testimony of his disillusioned servant Mary Warren, who in the past committed perjury. The court who heard the testimony easily accepts it because she is a church going person, while John Proctor slightly deviates from the norm. This transfer of blame is also noticeable when the truth is first discovered about what the girls were doing in the woods. The girls were not blamed. The blame was put on Tituba, the "black" slave who was said to have "charmed" the girls. Abigail swears that "she [Tituba] made me do it".(pg.40) It is obvious that in the Puritan society that whatever did not conform to what the masses had decided as proper, then the deviated, but innocent, were to blame. This practice contributed to the tragedy in Salem.

The fear of what was unknown created an uneasiness within Salem's population that added to Salem's social demise. The circumstances surrounding the witchtrials gave residents something to blame the supernatural on. The condemning of Tituba was mainly due to this. When Tituba took the girls into the woods, and they performed their ceremony, something the Puritans were not accustomed to, she convicted of witchery. Along with Tituba, Martha Corey was indicted solely because she would not allow Giles to read them. Giles also stated that "I tried and tried and could not say my

prayers. And then she close her book and walks out of the house, and suddenly--mark this--I could pray again!" (pg.38) This evidence of witchery is preposterous. The only thing that is true is that Giles was not allowed to read the books, and because he did not what the books contained, he feared them. This type of reaction throughout the community to the supernatural, and what was not known indicted many people, and contributed to the tragedy in Salem.

The state of mass confusion in Salem created a society of individuals who were only concerned with what was good for them, so that they would not be the next one implicated in the witchery scandal. This situation is clearly evident after Hale becomes privy to the true story of what happened in the woods. Abigail abandons Tituba, and accuses her of "sending her spirit on me in church; she makes me laugh at prayer" (pg.41), and Abigail also says Tituba "comes to me every night to go and drink blood"[devil's blood] (pg.41). Abigail reacts like this only to save her from being suspected of witchery. At the end of Scene One, many community members are accused of consorting with the devil. These names were given by all of the girls present that took part in the ritual in the woods, in an attempt to return to the graces of God and to be declared bewitched. This was a common reaction that many had when accused of witchery. It led to confrontations which pitted neighbor versus neighbor and husband versus wife. The delirium which created this situation aided in the misfortune proceedings in Salem.

The evident destruction of Salem's social order was due to rigid stipulations on deviation, fear of the unknown, and mass confusion. These conditions left Salem susceptible to an apparent epidemic such as witchcraft. The susceptibility that Salem fell victim to, was the cause of a great tragedy which saw twenty townspeople hung at the hands of the state. The Crucible written by Arthur Miller is a story of a great catastrophe which highlights a "free man's courageous and never-ending fight against mass pressures to make him bow down in conformity" (intro.-x) and shows how hysteria can be used for evil purposes in an atmosphere where there is a belief in freedom and right of dissent.

