

WITCHCRAFT IN ARTHUR MILLERS'

THE CRUCIBLE

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ABSTRACT

Witchcraft plays an important role in Arthur Millers' *The Crucible*. A negative character in the play justifies her action with the help of it. The situation is build up on the bases of Puritans' view, evidences are collected and case is filed. Millers' use of this technique is commendable. This work will help one to UNDERSTAND the serious reality on which the drama is build.

INTRODUCTION

Arthur Miller the American playwright wrote *The Crucible* in 1953, which was initially known as "The Chronicles of Sarah Good". The play was a dramatization of the Salem witch trials that took place in the Province of Massachusetts Bay in America during 1692 and 1693. Almost 200 people were accused of practicing witchcraft, black magic or the Devil's magic and 20 out of them were hanged. Eventually the colony accepted that the trial was a mistake and they compensated the families of the convicted. Since then, the story became paranoiac and of injustice, and this imagination continues for more than 300 years. On January 22, 1953 *The Crucible* was first performed at the Martin Beck Theater on Broadway. The production won "Best Play" Tony Award in the same year.

Earlier the Salem witchcraft persecutions and the supernatural things was the part of everyday life, as there was a strong belief that Satan is present everywhere on earth. Around the fifteenth century this concept emerged in Europe and spread to Colonial America, as the Europeans' came in America. The witchcraft started with the peasants who heavily relied on good charms for farming and agriculture. This was known as the white magic which later on transformed in to dark magic and became associated with demons and evil spirits. From 1560-1670 superstitions became associated with devils and witchcraft persecution was common. In Salem everybody believed that all the misfortunes were attributed to the work of the devil; things like infant death, failure of crops, or fiction among the congregation occurred, the supernatural was blamed. The Salem witch trial was a series of hearings before the county court, they prosecuted a number of people accused of witchcraft in colonial Massachusetts. Despite being the Salem witch trials the preliminary hearings in 1692 were conducted in a variety of towns across the province: Salem Village, Ipswich, Andover and Salem Town.

Now we are going to discuss one by one the elements of witchcraft in Arthur Miller's '*The Crucible*'.

PURITAN'S VIEW ON WITCHCRAFT

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was the belief in the reality of the witchcraft which was spreading both in America and Europe. Many people were simple executed during this period and few sensible ones' questioned on the existence of the witches.

The Puritans were the first to accept the idea of witches in a society, as they accepted each word of the Bible accurate and they would never like to debate over it. The Devil was a real character for them He try to tempt the people away from the work of God and its law. The Puritans believed that the Devil was everywhere, and is the cunning and extremely powerful opponent. If he decides to destroy a soul then no one can stop him for it.

As Abigail informs Danforth:

ABIGAIL: (NOW it pours. She does not wait for his speech.) Let you
beware, Mister Danforth—think you to be so mighty that the power of
Hell may not turn your wits?!—beware of it!

(Act III, pg96)

The Puritans government was a theocratic and was fully in control of the church. The ministers of the church were the administrative members of the town. They were certainly strict about “Gods’ Law”, anything that distracts them from hard work was the part of Devils plan. Hence nothing was there for entertainment to the people; no novels, dramas, celebration, holidays etc. Children were treated as mini adults, they were not allowed to play games or with their dolls. It was then natural that the girls felt a need to dance in the woods, though it was considered as a sin. Hence they lie to cover up their crime.

Abigail lowers her crime in front of Rev. Parris

ABIGAIL: It were only sport, Uncle!

PARRIS: I saw Tituba waving her arms over the fire when I came on you;
why were she doing that? And I heard a screeching and gibberish comin’
from her mouth...

ABIGAIL: She always sings her Barbados songs and we dance.

PARRIS: I cannot blink what I saw, Abigail-for my enemies will not blink it.

And I thought I saw a....someone naked running through the trees!

ABIGAIL: No one was naked! You mistake yourself, Uncle!

(Act I, pg 19-20)

Although it was difficult for the sinners to entirely clear their sins', yet few of them possibly regain the path of righteousness. The Puritans' had to first confess their sin publically and then perform the act of penance. This open confession policy leads to an absurd length during the witch hunt. The accused of the witchcraft should either confess a lie or hanged to death, so most of them preferred confession. As the Puritans legal system use to uphold religious laws, such absurdity was possible.

The process of witch hunt uses witnesses and other hand evidence to prove whether a person is guilty or innocent. The accused is given a chance to defend oneself. However the Puritans did not rely on due process to get the truth. Because the religious crime involved the supernatural elements, they cannot trust on the evidences.

THE ELEMENTS OF WITCHCRAFT

1. LOCAL LEVEL

When a person finds that a loss, death or illness had been caused by the witchcraft, then the accuser files a complaint against the alleged witch to the local magistrates. If the magistrate finds the complaint most credible, then he may arrest the person and brings him for a public examination. The examination consists of interrogation, where the magistrate forces the accused to confess his deal. If the accused confesses his deal to the magistrate and informs him about the other accused person, then the magistrate would only prison the accused. The prisoners were handed over to be dealt with by a superior court.

HALE: When did you compact with the Devil?

TITUBA: I don't compact with no devil!

PARRIS: You will confess yourself or I will take you out and whip you to
your death, Tituba!

PUTNAM: This woman must be hanged! She must be taken and hanged!

TITUBA: No-no, don't hang Tituba. I tell him I don't desire to work for him,
sir.

(Act I, pg. 46)

When Tituba is trapped by Abigail's confession then she accepts that devil comes to her every night with some or the other demand. Rev. Hale and other people force her to take the names of the people who are involved in a deal with the devil.

2. COURT LEVEL

The next step was to summon the witnesses before a grand jury at the superior court level. Any person could be indicted on the charge of afflicting with witchcraft, i.e. making an unlawful deal with the Devil. Once a person is indicted then he has to go under the trial, which would be on the same day or the other.

After Tituba's confession all the accused are arrested and sent to the trial, few who did not accept the blame were sent to the higher court for further decision.

3. SPECTRAL EVIDENCE

The evidence used against the accused was spectral evidence i.e. the testimony of the afflicted claiming to see the apparition, the shape of the girl who was afflicting them. Theologically there is a dispute about the use of this evidence, as they believed that unless the girl permits the Devil by a complicit to use his/her body shape the Devil cannot use the shape of the body. The opponents claimed that this theory was wrong, but the court relies on this evidence.

DANFORTH: Mary Warren!—Draw back your spirit out of them!

MARY: Mister Danforth...!

GIRLS: Mister Danforth!

DANFORTH: Have you compacted with the Devil? Have you?

MARY: Never, never!

GIRLS: Never, never!

DANFORTH: (Growing hysterical.) Why can they only repeat you?!

(Act II, pg 102)

This is a court seen where Abigail and other girls are called to speak the truth as Mary Warren has submitted a testimony saying that all of them are acting.

4. TOUCH TEST

The touch test was used in Andover during the preliminary examination. This was the most famous employment of the belief in the accusers. In this test if the accused touches the victim at the time of the fit and then the fits stopped, that meant the accused was the person who could calm the victim.

REBECCA: Pray, John...be calm. Mister Parris, I think you'd best be sent
Reverend Hale back as soon as he come. I think we ought rely on Doctor
Griggs now, and good prayer...

ANN: Rebecca, the doctor's baffled.

REBECCA: If so he is, then let us go to God for the cause of it. There is
prodigious danger in the seeking of loose spirits, I fear it, I fear it. Let us
rather blame ourselves and...

PUTNAM: How may we blame ourselves? I am one of nine sons; the
Putnam seed have peopled this province. And yet I have but one child left
of eight—and now she shrivels!

REBECCA: I cannot fathom that!

(Act I, pg 33)

Mrs. Putnam had doubted Rebecca Nurse as she was able to calm Betty. Ann had always doubted Rebecca for murdering her seven children. Now, when Betty is calmed by her touch Anns' was conformed.

Rev. John Hale explained how this supposedly worked:

“The Witch by the cast of her eye sends forth a MalefickVenome into the Bewitched to cast him into a fit, and therefore the touch of the hand doth by sympathy cause that venome to return into the Body of the Witch again.”

5. WITCH CAKE

Initially when the afflictions began, this test helped people to identify the accused. The witch cake was made using the traditional English white magic. The ingredients that were used were rye meal and the urine of the afflicted girl, and this was to give to a dog to eat. As the dog ate the cake the witch herself would be hurt, because of the invisible particles present in the girls' urine. A person's cry of pain when the dog eats the cake and this would help in identifying her as the witch. This was for the first time used by the neighbor of Rev. Parris i.e. Mary Sibly on her Indian slave John.

6. WITCH TEAT

This is another method of identification, accepted by the system of law. In this there is a search of the accused girl's body for physical signs left behind by the Devil; this was done by matrons and midwives, on the orders of the sheriff. Ironically women who knew the study of medicine and astrology to forecast illness were the victims.

7. EVIDENCES OF THE SALEM VILLAGE

Other than the above evidences there were the following which were considered;

Poppits – small dolls which were made by hand, it was considered as a voodoo doll.

CHEEVER: Mister Proctor, I have little time.... The court bid me search
your house, but I like not to search a house. So will you hand me any
poppets that your wife may keep here.

PROCTOR: Poppets?

ELIZABETH: I never kept no poppets, not since I were a girl.

CHEEVER: I spy a poppet, Goody Proctor.

(Act II, pg 69)

Mr. Cheever came with the courts business regarding an arrest of Mrs. Proctor for using a poppet against Abigail.

Books – books like palmistry, horoscopes etc. were considered as a crime.

COREY: I never said my wife were a witch, Mister Hale, I only said she were reading books!

HALE: Mister Corey, exactly what complaint were made on your wife?

COREY: That bloody mongrel Walcott charge her. Y'see, he buy a pig of my wife four or five year ago, and the pig died soon after. So he come dancin' in for his money back. So my Martha she says to him, "Walcott, if you haven't the wit to feed a pig properly, you'll not live to own many," she says. Now she goes to court and claims that from that day to this he cannot keep a pig alive for more than four weeks because my Martha bewitch them with her books! (Act II, pg 68)

WITCHCRAFT IN CRUCIBLE

Arthur Millers *The Crucible* is entirely dominated with the elements witchcraft. The play is set in the Puritans' society Salem of 17th century. It starts with the circle of young girls dancing and conjuring spirits around fire in forest at mid night. After this action these girls were considered as the main evidence, so they gain importance in the society. Many arrest warrants are issued on these girls commitment. There is a big commotion in the court and then the final arrest of the main people of the society is seen.

1. GIRLS ACTION IN WOODS

The Puritans believed in hard work, there was no entertainment program. Children were considered as mini adults, they were not allowed to play or enjoy the time. In this condition few girls went to the forest at midnight, there they lit the fire and started dancing around it. Tituba the black maid bought by Rev. Parris from South Africa has some knowledge of Black Magic, so she was conjuring spirits for Ruth. Ruth is Mrs. Putnams only survived daughter out of the eight, she

wanted to know who murdered her seven siblings on the first day of their birth. Abigail the niece of Rev. Parris was using black magic against Elizabeth Proctor to gain Mr. Proctor. Betty the daughter of Rev. Parris was seen dancing around the fire, with Mercy Lewis who was naked and Mary Warren.

2. TITUBAS' CONFESSION

As Rev. Parris has seen Tituba doing something on fire he calls her for interrogation in front of Rev. Hale. While Rev. Hale was interrogating her with some doubts, Tituba and Abigail get alert. Finally Tituba confesses that she has signed a pact with the devil, and the devil has forced her to do the work of conjuring. She also adds that the devil has given her the orders to kill Rev. Parris and she had always denied it. Tituba then takes few names in order to save her and punish her enemies.

3. ARREST WARRANTS

The first warrant was sent to Sarah Good an old beggar, on Tituba's confession. Before this lady could know anything what was happening, she was hanged. Second warrant is issued against Mrs. Giles and Rebecca Nurse. Mrs. Giles is charged by Susanna Walcott, for being a witch by reading lots of witch books. Rebecca Nurse is charged by Goody Putnam for murdering her seven infants on the first day of their birth. Soon we find that the court has issued sixteen arrest warrants by Mr. Cheever. Out of the sixteen people Elizabeth Proctor was one, who was charged by Abigail for using voodoo dolls and performing witchcraft against her. Next are Martha Corey, Giles, and finally Mr. Proctor.

4. A SCENE IN THE COURT

The next day when all the victims are exposed in the court, Mr. Proctor comes with Mary Warren as a proof to save his wife and other innocents. In the court when Proctor convinces Judge Danforth about the truth, that the girls are acting. Proctor shows Danforth the commitment done by Mary Warren before she became ill. After a long interrogation of Danforth with Mary Warren he calls in for the other girls. Danforth questions Abigail and the girls for the truth, for which Abigail

assures him that she is true. Suddenly Abigail and the girls behave in a weird manner. All the girls look at the ceiling and tells' that they are getting afraid of the yellow bird which is send upon them by Mary, and they repeat Mary'sspeech exactly the way she speaks. Marry Warren get scared of Abigail's indirect warning about the bird, which Arthur Miller had stated in act one and changes her confession. She blames Mr. Proctor for forcing her to sign and confess. In this manner Mr. Proctor is considered a victim and then after an interrogation he is jailed for not confessing the crime.

5. VICTIMS CONDITION

Aurthor Miller has discussed the condition of the victims in Act 4. The first victim Sarah Good convicted by Tituba is taken by Herrick for her execution. Rebecca nurse is still in the prison waiting for the trial. Elizabeth is pregnant they cannot hang her according to the law so she is safe for the time of one year. Elizabeth informs us about the old Giles who did not speak a word and hence was punished very badly. Heavy stones were put on Giles' chest; they made it heavier and heavier until he died.

Rev. Parris and Rev. Hale request all the prisoners to confess and save their life, they ask Elizabeth to convince John Proctor. Elizabeth and Proctor were given a chance to talk with each other. John Proctor at first agree to confess, but denies the nailing of it on the church door. At last Proctor goes to the gallow for the execution.

CONCLUSION

The middle of the seventeenth century is considered purely Puritans age. The society belied the existence of the Satan or the Devil. As stated above people actually relied on these things. The Witchcraft gained importance during this time in America. According to the history of the country many innocent people were hanged for after the trial in the court.

Thus, Arthur Millers *The Crucible* contains most of the Elements of the Witchcraft: Wild act of the girls, their confessions, the trails, the arrest warrants, and the pressure created by the court.

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