

Discuss the importance of the Courtroom scene in Act Three of Arthur Miller's 'The Crucible'.

- Arthur Miller.
 - Important American playwright.
 - 'The Crucible'
 - Full of dramatic tension mirroring real-life events.
 - Courtroom scene is important; the crucial/climactic scene for the whole play – much depends on its outcome.
 - Dramatically a spectacular scene for an audience to view; characters true personalities exposed starkly.
-
- The central issue: Mary Warren's brave disclosure that her friends are in fact lying; the accusations of witchcraft made by the young girls are all unfounded/made up.
 - Much depends on Mary's charge:
 - Abigail and the other girls will be punished.
 - The accused will be free; no threat of hanging, or excommunication from church.
 - Life will return to some sort of normality.
 - Important question: whether or not Mary Warren is a strong enough character to turn on her friends, especially the bullying ringleader (antagonist) Abigail Williams.
-
- Mary Warren: frail state of mind/extremely nervous, adds tension to her agreement; will she follow it through? Turn on her friends? Is she a strong enough character to do this? Hard to say...
 - Mary knows what is happening is wrong/sinful and that innocents are accused, BUT she faces isolation and bullying from her friends...
 - Proctor has to guide her through her court appearance; talk for her on many occasions...
 - Weakest character has most power – good contrast; interesting to see whether she will rise to the occasion...

- Thought Proctor's wife has been announced safe from hanging thanks to her newly announced pregnancy, he insists on proceeding with his charge that Abigail and the girls are liars – shows the strength of his character...
- In the courtroom he is clearly agitated and frustrated at:
 - Mary's nervous inability to help him (faint)
 - Abigail's continued lies (and the other girls)
 - Judge Danforth and Hawthorne's continued insistence in believing the girls' lies instead of seeing reason.
 - His wife's false imprisonment; her good name is important to him (just as his own).
- Mary's failure to faint at Hawthorne's request raises Proctor's tension to a dramatic climax; he cannot see any alternative but to sacrifice the last thing he wishes to keep: his good name...
- Finally, is forced to reveal Abigail as a 'harlot'/'whore' and therefore himself as a 'lecher'/'adulterer' – one of the ten commandments broken. Reputation ruined.
- Shows how important it is to him that this business is exposed as rubbish.
- Dramatically tragic moment as a good man (with a mistake made through a very human weakness) is forced to reveal his personal business to save others...
- Abigail's base (rubbish) character traits are apparent in the way she acts/reacts to other in the court:
 - Mary, (her friend?!?), willing to consign her to hanging by turning on her...
 - Her behaviour in the face of the man she supposedly loves...
 - Attitude towards the most powerful man in the court/whole province of Massachusetts...
- Classic example of a character whose arrogance/hubris and belief in themselves is causing them to over-reach...go too far. Surely she must reach a downfall/ find fit retribution for her deeds...
- Shows us she is cowardly, selfish, immature, self-centred, impetuous, etcetcetc...

- She is getting away with her stunts; this brings with it a mix of sadness/annoyance – she needs to be brought to justice but is avoiding it, frustrating that others are suffering thanks to her (e.g. Mary Warren, Proctor’s name/wife...).
- Proctor’s admission of adultery/loss of his good name STILL isn’t enough to bring Abigail down..
- Danforth requires concrete proof – ironic as he doesn’t ask for this in order to pass judgement on supposed witches..
- This sets us up for the crucial, climactic scene of the play...
- Elizabeth Proctor is a character who has suffered much in this play:
 - Discovery of husband and Abigail...
 - Pain of empty marriage...
 - Accusation of witchcraft...
- Now, must publicly tell all whether her husband has turned from her...
- Big question for an audience is: will she made this admission? To do so is:
 - Shameful for her (she has not been able to satisfy her husband...)
 - To ruin John’s good name publicly...(though he has already done this...)
- Will she behave as everyone expects and tell the truth, or will she show love for her husband (who has hurt her) and protect his good name by lying about his adultery?
- She lies and ruins everything...
- Terrible, tragic irony that an honest woman’s truth would have saved the day, but she thought to lie in order to do so and ended up causing disaster...
- One small lie has major consequences for play, ironic when set against major lies of most others surrounding her...
- Evokes real sympathy/pathos in audience who have been able to observe the dramatic irony (audience knows what the character doesn’t) of the situation...

- That such a good woman has felt that she should lie (something she never does) to protect a man she obviously loves (though he has hurt her), only for it to backfire and cause more pain/suffering...
 - Abigail needs to be brought to justice! Too many are suffering thanks to her cowardly greed!
-
- Judge Danforth & Hawthorne both represent (metaphors) ugly side of law, reason gone wrong; common sense has flown out of the window!!
 - Shows how dangerous law and power can be – it(they) shows little emotion/humanity in carrying out their business.
 - Affects the lives of ordinary, but rarely affected by the ordinary themselves...
 - Both show predatory (attacking) instincts (esp. Hawthorne in asking Mary Warren to faint)...
 - Show tendencies to be swayed by persuasion (Abigail's arguments), instead of reason (Proctor's arguments)...
 - Biggest exposure as inconsistent (and therefore hypocritical) comes when Danforth dismisses Abigail's final accusation of witchcraft against a person of standing...
 - The law should be blind and impartial (not biased). These characters aren't; another reason for an audience to sympathise with Proctor who tries to fight the law unsuccessfully.
-
- Mary Warren's final capitulation to Abigail and the girls means all hope has been lost for Proctor. His only evidence of their lies has turned against him.
 - Now isolated.
 - By being a weak character, easy to feel sympathy more than anger towards her...
 - Was under huge pressure from Abigail and the other cowards, so no huge surprise, just disappointment.
 - Shows audience just how hard it is to stand against the beliefs of others in your peer/social group...

- Proctor's complete isolation, with his only support now coming from an ineffectual Hale who is no longer listened to, dooms him to the fate of the other accused in Salem...
- The only real comfort an audience can take from such a miserable resolution to the courtroom scene is that it doesn't appear that Abigail will get what she is after: John Proctor.
- Abigail's actions have come back to haunt her...taken away the loved one that caused her to start this whole stupidly sad affair...
- Good riddance to bad rubbish!!!