# Fact Vs. Fiction Of John Proctor

Authors who constantly write historical fiction use specific historical events in order to create the basis of their novel. In many cases, authors will purposefully alter certain events to help persuade the reader to an explicit point of view. Take for example Arthur Miller's The Crucible. Miller changes factors such as characterization of characters and even the plot altogether. As a result, Miller is able to persuade his readers to his point of view. However, Miller received immense criticism as historians viewed his novel as historically inaccurate. In The Crucible, Arthur Miller alters the characterization of John Proctor by reducing his age, presenting him as a guilty citizen of Salem, presuming the adulterous acts between Proctor and Abigail, and lastly lowering the social status of John and Elizabeth Proctor in order to emphasize his criticism of the McCarthyism era.

Miller increases Abigail's age in order to reduce the age gap between Proctor and Abigail. Historians have recognized the historical inaccuracy within the novel. The historical facts begin to contradict with each other when Miller describes Abigail as "seventeen [and]...a strikingly beautiful girl" (8). The extreme age gap between Proctor and Abigail was frowned upon in American society, therefore, Miller presented Abigail as a little older compared to the actual Salem Witch Trials. Similar to Abigail's age change, Proctor's age decreased in the novel. To emphasize the McCarthyism criticism, Miller altered that "Proctor was a farmer in his middle thirties"(19). Not only does Miller increase Abigail's age, he also reduces Proctor's age. However, according to historians, Miller's alterations to his novel are inaccurate compared to history. Historians have conducted extensive research regarding the historical accuracy of The Crucible to The Salem Witch Trials over the past few years. Some have found that "Miller maintains that the change in Abigail's age merely intensifies a possibility implicit in the circumstances"(259). Researchers believe that the sole reason that Miller changes the ages of the two characters is to make the overall plot more realistic. Not only does the alterations in age make the plot more realistic, it also makes the adulterous relationship between the two characters more believable. Historians base their research off of Miller's remark "that he has changed the age of Abigail Williams from eleven to seventeen in order to make her eligible for adultery"(540). The adulterous relationship between Abigail and Proctor played an important role in The Crucible's plot. Therefore, Miller alters the ages of both Proctor and Abigail to produce a more reasonable relationship between the two. Along with adultery, Abigail's actions and demeanor resemble a woman beyond her years. Miller fails to present " the viciousness of the children, except for Abigail"(145). The actions of Abigail represent a woman much older than her age. Therefore, Miller thought it was appropriate to alter the age gap between her and Proctor to make the plot more realistic. All four articles discuss the adulterous relationship between Abigail and Proctor and how the ages of both were changed in the writing of The Crucible to emphasize Miller's criticism of the McCarthyism era.

Along with Proctor's age, Miller displays Proctor as a culpable citizen of Salem. In The Crucible, Proctor is given certain traits by Miller that result in conflict throughout the novel. Proctor is described as " ...a sinner, a sinner not only against the moral fashion of the time…"(19). Miller describes Proctor as a sinner during Proctor's introduction in the novel. In the beginning, Miller makes it evident that Proctor was a sinful citizen of Salem. In contrast to Proctor's age, Miller believed it was appropriate to keep Proctor's guilt within the novel...

Throughout the novel, “Proctor, the fated hero, has been guilty of adultery…”(538). John Proctor carries an immense amount of guilt in Miller’s novel including adultery and lack of honesty. Although Miller might have changed the age of John Proctor, he keeps Proctor’s tragic flaws the same. To help emphasize his criticism of the 20th century McCarthyism era, “ Miller has constructed a new sort of guilt for his hero, John Proctor”(Popkin 141). In Popkin’s article, he describes how Miller accurately presents Proctor as a guilty citizen with several tragic flaws. Similarly, many historians believe that Miller precisely presents “the guilt which characterizes both Proctor and, by implication, many of the victims of McCarthyism”(Budick 3). Miller compares the guilt that Proctor carries and the guilt carried by those of the McCarthyism era. All four articles discuss how Miller’s presentation of Proctor being guilty is accurate based of off the events in the actual Salem Witch Trials.

According to historians, Miller assumed the adulterous relationship between Proctor and Abigail based off of the historical events. In The Crucible, the adulterous relationship between the two play an important role in the plot. Throughout the novel, Abigail declares her love for “...Proctor and whatever sin it is(22)! In act one, Miller makes it evident that Abigail and Proctor have been in a previous relationship. He gives us background knowledge of previous events that were not specifically discussed in the novel. However, contrasting opinions have developed in regard to the historical accuracy of the adulterous relationship between the two characters. Some historians have viewed Abigail as “...a vicious wrench who...only exploits her chance to supplant Elizabeth…”(Levin 540). To some experts, the relationship between Abigail and Proctor seemed completely accurate in comparison to the historical events of the Salem Witch Trials. However, critics view the adulterous relationship within The Crucible as a stretch of the truth. Miller uses the fact that Abigail “...had been the house servant of the Proctors” to develop the adulterous relationship (259). As a result of this presumption, Miller received many negative critiques of his play. Although the assumption of adultery seems random, Miller provides reasoning for this alteration. To present Proctor as a guilty citizen, Miller uses his “...presumption of adultery…to avoid the inartistic danger”(259). The three articles contradict each other on the topic of the relationship between Abigail and Proctor. Although historians view Miller’s presentation of the two characters as accurate, other experts believe the relationship was presumed based off the historical evidence.

Lastly, Miller lowers the social status of both John and Elizabeth Proctor to enhance his criticism of the 20th century McCarthyism era. In The Crucible, the Proctor’s are presented as inferior in terms of wealth to the Putnams. Thomas Putnan, “the eldest son of the richest man in the village,” presents himself as superior to most citizens of Salem (13). Right off the back, Putnam is characterized as a fairly wealthy citizen of Salem by Miller. In contrast to Thomas Putnam, Miller presents Proctor as a farmer who conducts difficult manual labor. In addition, Putnam is accused of attempting to steal land from citizens of Salem by accusing them of witchcraft. Similarly to the other aspects of the novel, historians have critiqued Miller on the historical accuracy of his alterations of the historical events. Experts have criticized Miller on the changes he makes to John Proctor due to the inaccuracy of them all. Historians have based their argument on the inaccuracy of the novel by claiming that “Miller’s Proctor differs from the historical Proctor in...significant ways,” including the social class he belongs in (260). To enhance his criticism, “...Miller does refer to Proctor as a farmer…”(260). Researchers state that Miller changes the social status of the Proctor’s to be “...inferior to that of the Putnams”(260). However, in the actual Salem Witch Trials, the Proctor’s and Putnam's were seen as equals in regarding to their social statuses. The reason for Miller’s alteration of Proctor’s social class was to emphasize his criticism of the McCarthyism era. Miller believed that citizens of the

McCarthyism era would be able to relate to a character similar to them. Therefore, a person of the middle class, which was most common in this time period, related to John Proctor better as they shared similar social status. As a result, Miller's novel made a bigger impact on American society as he compared the witchcraft accusations of the Salem Witch Trials to the accusations of supporting the communist party in the McCarthyism era.

Many historians have analyzed and criticized the historical differences and similarities between Miller's John Proctor and the historical Proctor. To enhance his criticism of the McCarthyism era, Miller has altered certain events in the Salem Witch Trials. During the mid 1950's, Miller believed the false accusations of supporting the Communist party resembled the hysteria breakout in 17th century Salem during the Salem Witch Trials. These alterations include reducing the age of John Proctor, presenting John Proctor as a guilty citizen of Salem, presuming the adulterous acts of Proctor, and lowering the social status of Proctor. Although the alterations of the historical events by Miller improve his criticism of the McCarthyism era, historians have consistently criticized The Crucible due to its historical inaccuracy. In spite of the criticism he has received, Miller has been awarded for his great works in his novel.