THE CRUCIBLE – IMPORTANT QUOTES

1. *I look for John Proctor that took me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart! I never knew what pretense Salem was, I never knew the lying lessons I was taught by all these Christian women and their covenanted men! And now you bid me tear the light out of my eyes? I will not, I cannot! You loved me, John Proctor, and whatever sin it is, you love me yet!*

Abigail Williams utters these words in an Act I conversation with John Proctor, clueing the audience in to her past affair with him. For Proctor, we quickly realize, their relationship belongs to the past—while he may still be attracted to her, he is desperately trying to put the incident behind him. Abigail, on the other hand, has no such sense of closure, as this quote makes clear. As she begs him to come back to her, her anger overflows, and we see the roots of what becomes her targeted, destructive romp through Salem. First, there is her jealousy of Elizabeth Proctor and her fantasy that if she could only dispose of Elizabeth, John would be hers. But second, and perhaps more important, we see in this quotation a fierce loathing of the entire town—“I never knew what pretense Salem was, I never knew the lying lessons. . . .” Abigail hates Salem, and in the course of *The Crucible,* she makes Salem pay.

2. *I want to open myself! . . . I want the light of God, I want the sweet love of Jesus! I danced for the Devil; I saw him, I wrote in his book; I go back to Jesus; I kiss His hand. I saw Sarah Good with the Devil! I saw Goody Osburn with the Devil! I saw Bridget Bishop with the Devil!*

This outburst from Abigail comes at the end of Act I, after the slave-girl Tituba has confessed to witchcraft. Abigail spent the first act worrying desperately about the possibility of being disgraced for having cast charms with her friends in the forest. Tituba’s confession, however, offers an example of a way out, and Abigail takes it. She “confesses” to consorting with the Devil, which, according to the theology of Salem, means that she is redeemed and free from guilt. Then, as the next step in absolving herself of sin, she accuses others of being witches, thus shifting the burden of shame from her shoulders to those she names. Seeing Abigail’s success, the other girls follow suit, and with this pattern of hysterical, self-serving accusations, the witch trials get underway.

3. *You must understand, sir, that a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between. This is a sharp time, now, a precise time—we live no longer in the dusky afternoon when evil mixed itself with good and befuddled the world. Now, by God’s grace, the shining sun is up, and them that fear not light will surely praise it.*

This statement, given by Danforth in Act III, aptly sums up the attitude of the authorities toward the witch trials. In his own right, Danforth is an honorable man, but, like everyone else in Salem, he sees the world in black and white. Everything and everyone belongs to either God or the Devil. The court and government of Massachusetts, being divinely sanctioned, necessarily belong to God. Thus, anyone who opposes the court’s activities cannot be an honest opponent. In a theocracy, one cannot have honest disagreements because God is infallible. Since the court is conducting the witch trials, anyone who questions the trials, such as Proctor or Giles Corey, is the court’s enemy. From there, the logic is simple: the court does God’s work, and so an enemy of the court *must,* necessarily, be a servant of the Devil.

4. *A man may think God sleeps, but God sees everything, I know it now. I beg you, sir, I beg you—see her what she is. . . . She thinks to dance with me on my wife’s grave! And well she might, for I thought of her softly. God help me, I lusted, and there is a promise in such sweat. But it is a whore’s vengeance. . . .*

This quotation is taken from Act III, when Proctor finally breaks down and confesses his affair with Abigail, after trying, in vain, to expose her as a fraud without revealing their liaison. Proctor knows from the beginning that the witch trials constitute nothing more than a “whore’s vengeance”—Abigail’s revenge on him for ending their affair—but he shies away from making that knowledge public because it would lead to his disgrace. This scene, in the Salem courtroom, marks the climax of the play, in which Proctor’s concern for justice outstrips his concern for his reputation. This re-prioritization of values enables him to do what is necessary. But he finds, to his horror, that his actions come too late: instead of Abigail and the witch trials being exposed as a sham, Proctor is called a liar and then accused of witchcraft by the court. His attempt at honesty backfires and destroys him.

5. *Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!*

Proctor utters these lines at the end of the play, in Act IV, when he is wrestling with his conscience over whether to confess to witchcraft and thereby save himself from the gallows. The judges and Hale have almost convinced him to do so, but the last stumbling block is his signature on the confession, which he cannot bring himself to give. In part, this unwillingness reflects his desire not to dishonor his fellow prisoners: he would not be able to live with himself knowing that other innocents died while he quaked at death’s door and fled. More important, it illustrates his obsession with his good name. Reputation is tremendously important in Salem, where public and private morality are one and the same. Early in the play, Proctor’s desire to preserve his good name keeps him from testifying against Abigail. Now, however, he has come to a true understanding of what a good reputation means and what course of action it necessitates—namely, that he tell the truth, not lie to save himself. “I have given you my soul; leave me my name!” he rages; this defense of his name enables him to muster the courage to die, heroically, with his goodness intact.