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A Good Man Through The Shadows of Others: John Proctor’s rise to goodliness through Reverend Parris’ fall from grace.

Evil is in the eye of the beholder. However, one man can appear to be a man of mistakes until seen next to a man who is truly a man of evil. In Arthur Miller’s 1953 play *The Crucible* he writes an allegory of McCarthyism set in the time of the Salem Witch Trials of the 1690’s. The tragic hero of the story, John Proctor, is a man with faults as he has committed adultery with Abigail Williams, the woman who use to work in his home, and is struggling to forgive himself. Abigail is the niece of the town Reverend, Parris, who appears to be more concerned with his place in society and income than with the possibility of witchcraft in his town. It is through Reverend Parris that Miller develops the character John Proctor. Arthur Miller uses Parris as a foil for John Proctor by highlighting Parris’ concern with his place in society, his greed, and his lack of remorse for his sins.

Miller’s portrayal of Reverend Parris as a man more concerned with his place in society than his family or the well-being of his congregation contrasts John Proctor’s desire to protect his family and friends at any cost. Parris, while supposed to be a man of God, is a selfish and ego-centric character who struggles to show empathy or compassion for another character. This lack of compassion extends to his feelings towards his daughter who is introduced in the play as being very ill. Parris, in an attempt to unfold the truth questions his niece, Abigail Williams claiming “I pray you feel the weight of truth upon you, for now my ministry’s at stake, my ministry and perhaps your cousin’s life” (Miller 11) This is a defining moment for Parris’ character as he, to his own niece, puts himself and his position in the church above the health and safety of his daughter. The use of the word perhaps is evidence that while it’s possible his only daughter will die, his primary focus is on his position at the ministry. Another example of Parris’ selfish nature is highlighted in the conclusion of the play where he tries to convince the court not to hang Rebecca Nurse, John Proctor, and Martha Corey. Miller suggests that Parris may have had a moment of realization as a character, but quickly reveals Parris to have possibly become more selfish when Parris admits that the plea is selfish in nature claiming “Tonight, when I open my door to leave my house – a dagger clattered to the ground. You cannot hang this sort. There is danger for me. I dare not step outside at night” (Miller 128). Parris, who is in a way responsible for the deaths of many, and the impending deaths he is referring to, is begging for their life not because it is right, but because it protects him. He argues that they cannot kill other people who may or may not be guilty because it is causing danger for him. This is the epitome of selfishness in literally putting his life above the lives of others. Parris is a man of God, yet puts his life, his financial prosperity, and position within society above all else highlighting John Proctor’s goodness as he confesses his only sin, destroying his position and name in the town in order to protect his wife and his friends who face impending death.