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### Crying Wolf: An Analysis of False Truths in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*

“What makes a king into a slave” is the first rhetorical statement in a speech orated by the Cowardly Lion in the movie, “the Wizard of Oz” and answered with one simple word: courage. A slave may become a king when harnessing the strength and perseverance to exude courage in an environment not conducive to success or even safety. Courage become the aftermath of dire situation, oppression, and strong motivational forces of nature and family. In Arthur Miller's play “The Crucible,” several characters demonstrate courage in various capacities. Mary Warren, Giles Corey, and John Proctor show various degrees of courage throughout the play.

In a world of mass hysteria where an accusation may become absolute truth in the eyes of a corrupt court and country, Mary Warren, the maid in the Proctor household, demonstrates courage and cowardice. After falling prey to the hysterics of Abigail and the other girls branding various townspeople with the title of “witch,” she begins to develop guilt and fear once Mrs. Proctor is taken away to be tried as a witch. Mr. Proctor, livid with the possibility of losing his wife, marches Mary to court to confess her pretenses. Mary courageously tells Danforth and the other judges that she and the other girls were pretending: “I heard the other girls screaming, and you, Your Honor, seemed to believe them, and I—It were only sport in the beginning, sir, but then the whole world

cried spirits” (Miller 1205). Putting her reputation and life on the line, Mary musters the courage to confess her sin to the court, well aware of the consequences. However, Mary later recants her statement once Abigail claims that Mary sent her spirit on her in the form of a bird. Her courage to stand up for truth is melted by the fiery accusations of Abigail, forcing her to ultimately place blame on John Proctor.

While some characters are unable to maintain courage, other characters such as Giles Corey exhibit the courage necessary to stand up to the court in the name of his neighbors and family. Corey, a wealthy landowner accuses Mr. Putnam of asking his daughter Betty to accuse George Jacobs of witchery so that he could he could buy up the land that would be forfeited for sale since Putnam is the only one in town “with coin to buy so great a piece” (1195). When the court asks him to reveal his witness, he courageously refuses to implicate another person since he already feels guilt for casting suspicion upon his wife. He later makes the ultimate sacrifice of his life to demonstrate courage, honor, and integrity when being pressed to death in order to “die Christian under law” so that “his sons [would] have his farm” (1226). For Giles Corey, courage meant sacrificing his life to support his family members’ futures.

Lastly, John Proctor exudes courage on multiple occasions. When he brings Mary Warren to court to confess the truth and lay blame on Abigail, Abigail calls “witch” on Mary. John retorts by calling Abigail a whore. After heavy thought, John shows courage by confessing his affair to the court in order to tarnish Abigail’s reputation with the court officials. Unfortunately, this isn’t enough, and John is imprisoned and accused of being a witch. At the end of the play, Elizabeth Proctor convinces John to confess to the crime of witchcraft so that his life may be spared. When Danforth requires that his confession be

posted on the outside of the church for all to see, Proctor rips it up claiming, “God sees my name; God knows how black my sins are!” (1231). Proctor decides that he would rather die an honest man with a clean name than live as a condemned and despicable human being. His courage begets goodness; he dies a martyr to show those living on how corrupt the town has become and how hubristic it is for the court and its supporters to play god with the lives of innocent people.

Characters in life as in literature, can elevate themselves from the status of slave to king of his own consciousness by showing courage. Mary Warren shows courage when confessing her sins but fails to maintain that act of valor due to her fear of Abigail’s wrath. Giles Corey exudes courage when putting his family’s well-being ahead of his own life when being pressed to death. Lastly, John Proctor exhales courage in one final breath when being hanged for a crime he didn’t commit in order to die a Christian and honest man and bring about guilt and damnation on those responsible for the death of hundreds of people—and other people-- those who stood by, let it happen, and said nothing. Whether or not the people of Salem got wrapped up in the hysteria or feared for their own lives, not objecting to injustice rears the same ugly result: the death of the innocent. The courage to stand up for what you believe in and the courage to speak up for those who cannot or will not, will forever call into question our own senses of morality and integrity.