Section 3: Comparison

IDEAS, ISSUES & THEMES

Vengeful communities

Key quotes

'We are what we always were in Salem, but now the little crazy children are jangling the keys of the kingdom, and common vengeance writes the law!' (*The Crucible*, p.72)

'In light of all they had done, and what they had not done, what they had decided not to do – they mustn't be abandoned.' (*The Dressmaker*, p.236)

On the face of it, the seventeenth-century village of Salem, Massachusetts, and the twentieth-century Australian town of Dungatar have little in common, except perhaps the fact that they are both small and rural. Yet in each case the townspeople contribute to their own destruction through a toxic combination of fear, intolerance and a desire to find scapegoats.

Widespread belief in the active malevolence of the Devil underpins the mayhem that is unleashed in Salem. Faced with a set of alarming and inexplicable circumstances, the majority are eager to attribute the girls' strange sickness to 'unnatural causes' (p.18). Accordingly, Reverend Hale – who 'has much experience in all demonic arts' (p.22) – is summoned to ascertain the presence of witchcraft in the village. Nothing is more calculated to arouse terror in this God-fearing community. The desire to lay blame is strong, and the poor and the marginalised are obvious scapegoats. Not surprisingly, Tituba is the first accused. As a black slave, she represents the 'Other' in the Salem community, and is viewed with greater suspicion and mistrust than a white servant. The assumption that she is more likely to traffic with the Devil reflects the insularity of people such as Parris and the

insight

Putnams. Therefore, her startling claim that she has seen '*white* people' (p.48) with the Devil is as incendiary as it is unexpected. Goody Good, 'that sleeps in ditches', and Goody Osburn, 'drunk and half-witted' (p.60), are initial targets because they are vulnerable and have no-one to defend their innocence.

The witch-hunt exposes the self-interest and malice that has fermented beneath the town's pious surface for a long time. Salem celebrates such Christian values as charity and love for one's neighbour but, in reality, relations in the village have often been acrimonious. Factionalism is rife, and disputes over land are common. For example, Thomas Putnam pricks up his ears at Proctor's mention of moving lumber, insisting that the forest is part of his own entitlement. Proctor's retort – 'Your grandfather had a habit of willing land that never belonged to him' (p.36) – suggests that this friction is long-standing. Hence Rebecca's apprehension at Hale's pending arrival: 'this will set us all to arguin' again in the society, and we thought to have peace this year' (p.33). Her objections reveal the undercurrent of dissension in the town and highlight the weakness that will be its undoing.

In his commentary, Miller asserts that the witch trials provided those who harboured resentments with an unprecedented opportunity to act on them under a cloak of righteousness: 'long-held hatred of neighbours could now be openly expressed, and vengeance taken, despite the Bible's charitable injunctions' (p.17). Giles Corey tells Danforth that the avaricious Putnam is exploiting the prevailing paranoia and profiting from his daughter's role in the crying-out: 'this man is killing his neighbours for their land' (p.87).

No-one takes greater advantage of this than Abigail. Driven by jealousy, she successfully manipulates the town's fear and superstition in her personal vendetta against Elizabeth. Abigail cannot accept that her relationship with Proctor is over and, with the single-minded narcissism of the young, has convinced herself of his enduring affection: 'you loved me, John Proctor, and whatever sin it is, you love me yet!' (p.30). Abigail's desire to be rid of the woman she calls 'a gossiping liar' (p.21) elevates the conjuring in the woods to a dangerous level, and the revelation that she 'drank a charm to kill John Proctor's wife' (p.26) demonstrates the full extent of her hatred. Once Elizabeth's name joins the growing list of the accused, the Proctors realise that Abigail's agenda is sinister: she hopes to take Elizabeth's place as Proctor's wife.

As panic and hysteria replace objectivity, the town starts to self-destruct. Turmoil and anarchy result. Hale paints a bleak picture when he informs Danforth of the breakdown of the town's infrastructure: 'Excellency, there are orphans wandering from house to house; abandoned cattle bellow on the highroads, the stink of rotting crops hangs everywhere' (p.114). His claim that 'no man knows when the harlot's cry will end his life' (p.114) points to the terrifyingly random nature of the accusations. Good citizens, whose only crime has been to own coveted land or provoke offence, are denounced as agents of the Devil. Proctor himself recognises the true nature of the crying-out when he tells Hale that 'vengeance is walking Salem' (p.72).

Key point

The erroneous assumption that the Devil is loose in Salem is exploited by unscrupulous individuals whose wickedness and greed are all-too-recognisably human.

In *The Dressmaker*, Dungatar's willingness to attribute blame and victimise the innocent is equally strong. When Tilly returns to the town, Molly reminds her that 'it's open slather on outcasts' (p.33). Convention and respectability form the basis of Dungatar's creed, and Molly Dunnage has committed the cardinal sin of having a child out of wedlock. In the town's eyes, this is her real crime, not her relationship with Evan Pettyman. Hypocritically, the town seems prepared to turn a blind eye to Faith O'Brien's adultery with Reginald Blood – although the chemist, Mr Almanac, concocts a painful punishment for the 'sinners' (p.23) – and Nancy Pickett's lesbian affair with Ruth Dimm. However, Molly is judged and condemned for her sexual history, and has been ostracised as 'mad' (p.232) and immoral ever since Tilly's birth.

Dungatar's judgement of Molly extends to her daughter, the evidence of her transgression. Tilly is bullied and reviled at school. The teacher, Prudence Dimm, sets the tone by victimising Tilly with blatant spite, thereby encouraging her pupils to do the same. In the playground, Tilly is called 'Dunnybum' and 'a bar-std' (p.56), and held down by the children while Stewart Pettyman charges at her like an angry bull. After his death, the town convinces itself that the little girl is responsible. Their hostility, coupled with Evan Pettyman's influence, results in Tilly being separated from her mother and sent to Melbourne.

Dungatar's refusal to forgive precipitates its destruction. Showing the same irrational bigotry as in the past, the townspeople also hold Tilly responsible for Teddy's death. Sergeant Farrat's eulogy encourages the town to reflect on its sins of spite and exclusion. Instead, the vitriol intensifies. In an echo of *The Crucible*, the Dunnage women are vilified as 'murderers' and 'witches' (p.201). Hoodlums vandalise the house, throwing rocks and rubbish. Tilly and her mother become prisoners in their home as the town's persecution makes it impossible for them to go out during daylight. Everyone in Dungatar, with the exception of Sergeant Farrat, is complicit. Even such an apparently good-natured woman as Faith O'Brien shoves Tilly on the only occasion that she ventures into town for provisions.

However, Dungatar encounters its match in Tilly. After her mother's death, her perspective shifts and, rather than accepting blame, she starts to apportion it. On her mother's behalf as much as her own, Tilly vows retribution against the town: 'Pain will no longer be our curse, Molly ... It will be our revenge and our reason' (p.236). Tilly's campaign commences with Even Pettyman. In a neat act of poetic justice, she effectively emasculates him so that Marigold is able to take her own vengeance on her lecherous husband.

Tilly's attempt to incinerate the whole town is calculated from the start. She sets the fire on a hot, windy day when the fire brigade is absent, making sure that her own house will burn quickly by stuffing it to the rafters with flammable material and dousing it with kerosene. As a final touch, she turns off the water. By the time the actors return, Dungatar is 'black and smoking' (p.294). All they can do is survey the damage while digesting the unpalatable fact that their insurance has not been paid. The battlelines are very clearly delineated in *The Dressmaker*. Tilly's reprisal is extreme, yet Ham elicits little sympathy for the citizens of Dungatar. Malice and prejudice have been their undoing and, like the people of Salem, they have brought the crisis upon themselves.

Key point

Both texts argue that the greatest threat to a community can come from within. The social compact – including respect, goodwill and shared history – is irreparably damaged when people reject rationality and become victims of their own blind prejudices.

Guilt

Key quotes

Hale: There is a prodigious fear of this court in the country –
Danforth: Then there is a prodigious guilt in the country. (*The Crucible*, p.88)

'Tilly knew she must stay in Dungatar for a kind of penance. If she went anywhere else the same thing would happen.' (*The Dressmaker*, pp.195–6)

Salem's obsession with sin and damnation provides the fertile context in which the crying-out occurs. The Puritan culture is inherently punitive, actively seeking out, and finding, wickedness in anything resembling gratuitous pleasure. For example, the reaction to the girls dancing in the woods is general condemnation. The preoccupation with sin assumes fault. When Reverend Hale counsels Proctor and his friends to 'think on your village and what may have drawn from heaven such thundering wrath upon you all' (p.73), his words suggest a collective guilt so blatant that the witch trials are the only means by which Salem can be purged.

Abigail and the other girls exploit this nexus between guilt and blame convincingly. By representing themselves as victims of malevolent forces, they shift the focus away from their own culpability and onto those supposedly acting for the Devil. The girls become the instrument through which the 'voice of Heaven' (p.81) is speaking. Danforth is so convinced of Salem's guilt that even the news of Abigail's defection fails to weaken his resolve: 'while I speak God's law, I will not crack its voice with whimpering' (p.113).

Miller is interested in the way in which good men can be persuaded to doubt themselves, and *The Crucible* shows how damaging the effects of guilt can be. Reverend Hale blames himself for his role as the 'specialist' whose investigations lend credibility to the witch-hunt, and his crisis of conscience pitches him against the very mechanism of which he was once a crucial part. Hale admits that he came into the village 'like a bridegroom to his beloved, bearing gifts of high religion' (p.115), but the subsequent hysteria has destroyed his 'bright confidence' (p.115). By the end of the play, he has denounced the court and seeks only to undo the harm he has done, telling Elizabeth that 'I would save your husband's life, for if he is taken I count

myself his murderer' (p.115). Yet Hale's dilemma is not easily resolved. However much he rationalises his behaviour, in counselling the accused to lie he sets himself an unhappy penance that compromises his Christian values. As such, he remains conflicted.

John Proctor has come to regard himself as 'a kind of fraud' (p.27) rather than the man Salem assumes him to be. He views himself as a sinner – not merely by the judgemental standards of the society in which he lives, but also according his own moral code. Proctor's guilt does not initially permit him to demonstrate principled conviction, as Rebecca Nurse or Martha Corey do. Confronted with a self-appointed moral authority, Proctor feels he has little justification for throwing away his life. In trying to convince himself, as well as his wife, that he is not the stuff of which martyrs are made, he insists that 'I cannot mount the gibbet like a saint ... I am no good man' (p.118). This sense of unworthiness tempts him to betray himself and his friends.

On the other hand, Tilly's guilt is completely unwarranted. Unlike Proctor, she has committed no crime; she has been the victim of tragic circumstances, not their agent. Tilly's guilt is compounded by the recrimination of others. Hence, like many victims of abuse, she blames herself. As a vulnerable child, she is treated shamefully by the people of Dungatar: irrationally accused of causing Stewart Pettyman's accident and cruelly punished by being separated from her mother. Sergeant Farrat is sympathetic, but he cannot prevail against the mood of the town or the determined malice of the Pettymans. Tilly is effectively abandoned, with no-one to champion her cause. When the life that she successfully establishes in Paris is destroyed with the death of her baby son, she is again blamed, this time by her grieving partner. Tilly is further punished by his desertion.

These deaths have left a permanent legacy of guilt and shame, shaping Tilly's adult sense of self. When she first returns to Dungatar, Sergeant Farrat observes perceptively that she seems 'strong, but damaged' (p.7). In Dungatar, Tilly's past remains an open wound that is impossible to cauterise; the town's resentment of her is palpable, and she is reminded of it whenever she drops her guard. As she explains to Teddy, her guilt is like 'a black thing – a weight ... it makes itself invisible then creeps back when I feel safest ...' (p.184).

Like Proctor, Tilly's guilt affects her judgement. She is reluctant to enter into a relationship with Teddy because she no longer trusts herself, fearing that she is cursed. While Teddy is the first to absolve her, ironically it is his foolhardy attempt to disprove her fears that kills him. Afterwards comes despair. Believing that she will never be free of her past, Tilly rejects the optimistic new identity she has given herself, reclaiming the name 'Myrtle' and telling Sergeant Farrat that 'everyone I've touched is hurt, or dead' (p.192). She considers herself 'bankrupted' (p.196) in every way, undeserving of forgiveness or love. All that is left for her is to stay in Dungatar and look after her infirm mother as reparation for her crimes.

Both *The Crucible* and *The Dressmaker* promote the lesson that forgiveness must come from within. The play's climax sees Proctor's self-belief reassert itself when he refuses to surrender his name. He understands that he is not defined by a single mistake and is, in fact, worthy to die with 'saints' such as Rebecca. By rejecting the court's moral integrity, Proctor reclaims his own and achieves personal redemption: 'you have made your magic now, for now I do think I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor' (p.125).

Arguably, Tilly's healing process is harder. Her ability to forgive herself has been set back by the painful circumstances of Teddy's death. She feels completely alone, having lost her sole ally and the promise of a brighter future. However, the unexpected lucidity that follows Molly's dream of her grandson leads to a cathartic moment of reconciliation and love. Tilly is able to tell her story and, in turn, hear her mother's. She realises the full extent of Molly's bereavement, and the fact that powerful forces were pitted against them both. From these shared confidences come a measure of peace and a reminder that she is not alone after all.

Key point

These texts explore the corrosive effects of guilt and the way in which it exacerbates self-doubt. John Proctor and Tilly Dunnage both judge themselves harshly, and their shared sense of unworthiness makes them complicit in the retribution demanded of them.

Abuse of power

Key quotes

'The jails are packed – our greatest judges sit in Salem now – and hangin's promised.' (Hale, *The Crucible*, p.73)

'Everyone likes to have someone to hate.' (Tilly, *The Dressmaker*, p.175)

In the seventeenth century, the concept of female empowerment is alien, yet Abigail Williams is instrumental in actually shaping the crisis that plays out in Salem. The power she exercises is malevolent and self-interested. Until the purge, young women in Puritan society were essentially invisible; Salem had never conceived that they would be 'anything but thankful for being permitted to walk straight, eyes slightly lowered ... and mouths shut until bidden to speak' (p.13). As an orphan, working as a servant and living on her uncle's charity, Abigail is more disempowered than most. However, her intimidation of the girls, especially Mary Warren, demonstrates the force of her personality and the strange hold she develops over them. Abigail secures their silence, and then their active collaboration, with threats of 'reddish work done at night' (p.27). The witch-hunt gives her status and influence; she is treated with awe by the general population, and eminent judges believe her every accusation, no matter how far-fetched. Abigail's sense of entitlement grows to such a degree that she openly threatens the Deputy-Governor: 'let *you* beware, Mr Danforth' (p.96).

Abigail's lies feed directly into the religious paranoia of the authorities. Instead of challenging her allegations, Danforth and Hathorne become willing dupes. The Deputy-Governor represents the highest power in the province, yet under his authority justice is corrupted on a grand scale. Danforth shows none of the flexibility or compassion of a true leader. Rigid in his beliefs and self-serving in his priorities, he rules by fear and embodies the face of the public terror unleashed in Salem. Danforth views every defence as 'an attack upon the court' (p.85). Accordingly, when Francis Nurse presents his well-meaning testimonial, attesting to his wife's good name, those who have signed it are also arrested. Disturbing evidence against the state's key witnesses – in particular Abigail – does nothing to change Danforth's mind. In a perverse rationalisation, he refuses to pardon the condemned prisoners

on the basis that twelve have already been hanged for the same crime. His own reputation, and that of the government he represents, is more important than the lives of the innocent people he convicts.

Women's vulnerability is evident in both *The Crucible* and *The Dressmaker*. For example, John Proctor is a good man and a fair-minded master, yet he still has a patriarchal mindset. Frustrated by a process he cannot understand, Proctor forbids his servant, Mary Warren, to go to Salem and has no hesitation threatening her with a whipping. When Mary refuses to obey him, insisting that she is 'an official of the court' (p.58), Proctor is prepared to use brute force to stop her. The girl's response – 'I'll not stand whipping any more! (p.58)' – suggests that his aggression is not out of the ordinary. This is reinforced at the end of Act Two, when Proctor again uses violence to force Mary into submission.

In many ways, Australia in the 1950s is no less patriarchal than seventeenth- century Massachusetts. As well as making the decisions and controlling the purse strings, some of the men in Dungatar abuse their wives with impunity. Mr Almanac is a sadistic, judgemental bully whose wife, Irma, 'used to have a lot of falls, which left her with a black eye or a cut lip' (p.41). Moreover, he denies her the drugs that may make her arthritic pain bearable. Though Almanac is the only chemist in town, he holds the perverse belief that sin is 'the cause of all disease' (p.40), and has no hesitation in inflicting pain on those he considers deserving of punishment. His 'remedy' for Faith O'Brien's vaginal itch is the abrasive cleaning agent White Lily.

Like Irma, Marigold Pettyman suffers abuse and indignity at the hands of her husband. Marigold is drugged and subjected to regular marital rape. Evan Pettyman is also a womaniser with wandering hands, a 'man who touched women ... and at dances pressed his partners tightly, ramming his thigh between their legs to move them around the floor' (p.57). As shire president, Pettyman is too powerful to alienate. The local women avoid him where possible; the men tolerate his behaviour, making excuses because of his position. Pettyman's brutality towards Molly Dunnage effectively ruins her life. She is an inexperienced young woman when she is seduced by Pettyman, who pursues her ruthlessly when she tries to extricate herself from the relationship. After his son's death, he uses his influence to punish her in the cruellest way possible, by taking away her child: 'when he couldn't have his son anymore, I couldn't have you' (p.232). Nor does he divulge

Tilly's whereabouts, so that Molly lives in ignorance and loneliness until her daughter's return.

The text underscores the ugly power of the mob. In Dungatar, this power is abused decisively. While the town's hostility escalates to contemptible proportions after Teddy's accident, Tilly is targeted from the moment of her arrival in a collective campaign of harassment and covert bullying. She is snubbed, and excluded even from events where she has earned the right to be present. At the Pratt wedding reception, Tilly stands in the darkness outside the back door, waiting for an acknowledgement of her work. To the disappointment of the female guests, the name of Gertrude's dressmaker is not mentioned. Similarly, despite Tilly making the glorious gowns paraded by the women at the ball, there is no allocated place for her at the event. Her name has literally been scribbled or scrubbed out of the seating plan.

The victimisation of the adult Tilly is an extension of the treatment she received as a child, from adults as well as peers. Instead of protecting Tilly, Prudence Dimm abuses her authority by persecuting the girl. She puts her on ink-well duty day after day, hits her with a steel ruler and drags her out of the classroom by the plait (pp.55–6). This example encourages her suggestible students to behave with similar cruelty. As Molly Dunnage's daughter, Tilly has no voice and no advocate. Essentially, the town turns a blind eye to the way she is mistreated; only the outsider Edward McSwiney steps in on her behalf when tragedy strikes, telling Sergeant Farrat that 'the poor little thing ... was just trying to save herself' (p.193).

Love and forgiveness

Key quotes

'I never knew how I should say my love.' (Elizabeth, *The Crucible*, p.119)

'Sergeant Farrat said love was as strong as hate and that as much as they themselves could hate someone, they could also love an outcast.' (Farrat, *The Dressmaker*, p.197)

The Proctors love each other deeply, but Proctor's adultery has damaged their marriage. Act Two reveals just how strained relations between the couple have become: Elizabeth tells herself that she has forgiven her husband,

but still an 'everlasting funeral' (p.55) marches around her heart. Despite Abigail's dismissal and her husband's repentance, Elizabeth punishes him with a seven-month silence and emotional withdrawal. Her insecurity and natural reserve prevent her from showing warmth or true forgiveness. In turn, Proctor resents her suspicions, given that he has done his best to win back her trust: 'oh, Elizabeth, your justice would freeze beer' (p.55). Yet the threat that Abigail poses has the unintended consequence of reuniting the couple. Initially reluctant to intervene in the court's proceedings, Proctor is spurred into action by Elizabeth's arrest. The stark contrast in the language he uses to describe each woman to the court illustrates clearly where his loyalties lie: Elizabeth is his 'dear good wife', while Abigail is a 'whore' and a 'lump of vanity' (p.98).

The Crucible demonstrates how closely love is allied with forgiveness. Elizabeth's forgiveness is crucial to Proctor, but it is not until she poignantly concedes her own shortcomings that she is able to offer it sincerely: 'it were a cold house I kept' (p.119). Elizabeth knows that her husband's guilt will be compounded if he allows himself to be manipulated by the court, but she refuses to pass further judgement on him: 'whatever you will do, it is a good man does it' (p.119). This unwavering faith in Proctor's integrity helps him to make the choice he does, giving him the strength to resist the oppression of the state. The couple's passionate farewell kiss, devoid of recrimination or blame, and expressing everything that words cannot, is an affirmation of their love.

Until meeting Teddy, Tilly Dunnage receives no such absolution; her experience of love has been profoundly damaging. Abandoned by her English lover after the death of their son, she decides that the life she has built in Paris seems 'pointless and cruel' (p.232). Ormond's rejection convinces her that she has nothing to offer, and so when Teddy starts to woo her, carefully but persistently, she resists. Her feelings for him grow incrementally, despite her reluctance. Teddy's love is pure and uncomplicated. He categorically rejects Tilly's belief that she is 'cursed' (p.195) and dies attempting to prove that 'the might of his love' (p.197) will shield her from further harm.

While love does not always prevail, *The Dressmaker* emphasises the idea that opening oneself to intimacy, however vulnerable or exposed one may be, remains an important and necessary part of the human condition. Though their relationship ends in tragedy, Tilly is nourished by Teddy's love. For a

short time, her fears are defused and she is invited to believe in herself again. The inherent risk of love is also evident in the Beaumont–Muncan alliance. When Mona marries Lesley, she does not get the husband she anticipates, but her ultimate acceptance allows these two lonely misfits to arrive at a compromise based on friendship.

Both of these texts deal in the polarities of love and hate, with the characters themselves reflecting this dichotomy. Sergeant Farrat speaks extensively of love and forgiveness at Teddy's funeral, trying in vain to dampen down the town's irrational hatred. He reminds the congregation that Teddy loved Tilly and intended to marry her. Moreover, he argues that the wedding would have been an inclusive, healing occasion to which all present, 'along with your secrets and mistakes and prejudices and flaws' (p.197) would have been invited. However, Dungatar gains nothing from his sermon, 'only their continuing hatred' (p.201). When the townswomen deign to re-engage Tilly's services a year after Teddy's death, she knows that their magnanimity is pragmatic rather than penitent. The townspeople have shown no remorse for their treatment of her or her mother. This lack of contrition gives the embittered Tilly permission to take revenge on Dungatar.

In *The Crucible*, the characters are similarly polarised. The merciless ethos of Danforth and Hathorne is pitted against the goodness of characters such as Proctor, Elizabeth and Rebecca, who retain their integrity despite their essential powerlessness. Proctor supporting the fragile Rebecca as they are marched to the gallows is a small but significant gesture of charity. His last words exhort Elizabeth to hold fast: 'Give them no tear! Tears pleasure them! Show honour now, show a stony heart and sink them with it!' (p.125).

The concept of forgiveness is perverted by the Salem witch-hunt. Those accused are urged to perjure themselves and confess to a crime they have not committed. If they comply, then God's – and the state's – mercy will be forthcoming. Yet when Tituba 'opens' herself to God's 'holy light' (p.47), she inadvertently plays into the hands of the spiteful Thomas Putnam, who puts words in her mouth – 'Sarah Good? Did you ever see Sarah Good with him [the Devil]? Or Osburn?' (p.47) – and gives evil the opportunity to flourish. Abigail's charade at the end of Act Three exemplifies this same unholy paradox. Knowing that Mary is telling the truth and she is the liar, Abigail nevertheless presents herself to the court as forgiving and solicitous, reaching out and drawing the distraught Mary to her. Hale comes to recognise the

fallacy on which the state's case is based, telling Danforth bitterly, 'I come to do the Devil's work. I come to counsel Christians they should belie themselves' (p.114).

Key point

In both these texts, love is presented as a powerful force for good, challenging the bigotry and hatred that threatens to overwhelm events.

Truth and deception

Key quotes

'They're all marvellous pretenders.' (Proctor, *The Crucible*, p.95)

'In this town a man can covet his neighbour's wife and not get hurt, but to speak the truth can earn a bleeding nose.' (Septimus Crescant, *The Dressmaker*, p.141)

Throughout *The Crucible* and *The Dressmaker*, there is a disconnect between what people are ready to believe – about themselves and the world around them – and what is actually true. Truth is an expendable commodity in both communities.

A number of people in Dungatar have secret lives that flout the town's accepted conventions and are at odds with their public image. Faith O'Brien is married to Hamish but having an affair with the butcher, Reginald Blood. Behind closed doors, Nancy Pickett and Ruth Dimm conduct a lesbian affair. Sergeant Farrat's conservative superiors would be appalled to know that the respected policeman wears nylon stockings and lace panties under his uniform. The way in which Evan Pettyman deceives the town and lies to his wife is less benign. He holds the respected position of shire president but is chronically unfaithful, even starting an affair with Una Pleasance when she is staying in the Pettymans' home. While he treats Marigold with deference in public, he takes gross advantage of her in private.

Though Pettyman's behaviour is characterised by a marked lack of conscience, John Proctor's one offence causes him considerable mental anguish, as he considers himself a man of integrity. He is highly respected

in Salem as an upright man, a dutiful husband and a devoted father, but knows himself to be an adulterer who has committed the dangerous sin of lechery. Nevertheless, Abigail admires Proctor's honesty, crediting him with opening her eyes and putting knowledge in her heart. He has helped her identify the hypocrisy and self-interest that lies behind Salem's pious posturing: 'I never knew what pretence Salem was; I never knew the lying lessons I was taught by all these Christian women and their covenanted men!' (p.30).

Abigail's fundamental contempt for Salem's hypocrisy is one of the factors that enables her to rationalise her outrageous lies. In setting her terrifying fraud in motion, ignorance and the prevailing religious ethos play into her hands. Salem's citizens are predisposed to look for metaphysical, rather than rational, explanations. For example, when confronted with what he doesn't understand, a practical man such as Giles Corey still falls back on superstition: 'it [witchcraft] suggests to the mind what the trouble be among us all these years' (p.36). In the same way, Ann Putnam turns to conjuring for answers when she cannot rationalise the loss of seven babies in childbirth. Abigail manipulates this general susceptibility for her own ends, freely admitting to Proctor that the crying-out has 'naught to do with witchcraft' (p.54). However, her trustworthiness is accepted unquestioningly by Danforth and Hathorne, who, as representatives of the state, invest their 'entire contention' (p.81) in the children's testimony. The crying-out turns truth on its head. Abigail is perceived as an innocent 'child' (p.93) by the court and a 'saint' (p.53) by the cowed community. By contrast, true saints such as Rebecca Nurse are condemned as witches.

The Dressmaker explores the way in which people are willing to deceive themselves. Unexpectedly, Tilly's dressmaking abilities provide them with the means. She works a kind of alchemy on the women of Dungatar, who are 'renovated, European-touched, advanced to almost avante-garde' (p.153) by her skill and imagination. The visitor from Melbourne is confounded, wondering how 'Paris had found its way to the dilapidated confines and neglected torsos of banal housewives in a rural province' (p.165). The novel acknowledges the transformative power of fashion while at the same time underscoring its limitations. Like the work of all great couturiers, Tilly's designs offer each individual a chance to present her best self. Unfortunately, the women of Dungatar are motivated by vanity and one-upmanship. They are happy to exploit Tilly's expertise, flaunting the shallow elegance conferred

on them by her clothes, but their understanding of style is one-dimensional. Tilly's beautiful creations can only affect a superficial transformation, beneath which Dungatar remains 'a town of round shoulders and splayed gaits' (p.171).

Gertrude Pratt is a prime example. Her radiant transformation on her wedding day owes everything to Tilly's wizardry; ingenious cutting disguises the bride's lumpy thighs and square bottom, even as it showcases her slender waist. However, Gertrude becomes a victim of her own narcissism. Morphing into 'Trudy', she decides that, under her direction, her home town can do better: 'we're going to take *Doongatah* for the ride of its life' (p.136). Trudy's all-consuming self-belief is not dissimilar from Abigail's in *The Crucible*, and by sheer force of personality she carries others along with her. The idea that a successful production of *Macbeth* can be mounted with an inexperienced cast – some of whom have never heard of Shakespeare – is exposed as a pretentious delusion. In their outlandish Baroque costumes, the townspeople are revealed as vain and foolish, rather than clever or talented.

Throughout *The Dressmaker*, Ham demonstrates the townspeople's predilection to pervert the truth when it suits them. At Teddy's funeral, Sergeant Farrat points out that, like Tilly, Teddy was also an outcast, 'until he proved himself an asset' (p.197). In vain, Sergeant Farrat argues that Teddy wanted the townspeople to love Tilly and considered the way she had been treated 'unforgivable' (p.197). Dungatar remains fixed in its view that Tilly is a murderer. In Salem, Danforth and Hathorne show a comparable ability to distort the truth to justify their actions – in this case, the repressive approach taken by the state. Blinded by obsession and prejudice, they refuse to rethink their position even after Abigail's duplicity becomes clear and the integrity of the trials has been damaged. Both texts show the importance of moderate, rational voices in terms of promoting the truth, but in each case these voices are drowned out by a more powerful majority. Like Farrat, Reverend Hale's efforts to convey reason are isolated, and therefore ineffectual.