College of DuPage Theater Department

Presents

The Crucible

By Arthur Miller

Directed by Daniel Millhouse

The College Theater Department sincerely thanks the library for research support, for classes studying the script and production, as well as for the cast, director, and production team working on the project.

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Play/Production Information

Brief Synopsis

Tony award winning classic *The Crucible*, delves into the Salem witch trials of 1692. Rumors have swept through a Puritan town in New England that women are practicing witchcraft. A trial progresses and the town is engulfed by fear as neighbors testify against neighbors, creating a distorted sense of justice. This gripping parable of power and its abuse explores the slippery slope of mass hysteria.

Time and Place

Act I

- **Act I Scene i** - A bedroom in Reverend Samuel Parris' house, Salem, Massachusetts, in the spring of the year 1692.
- **Act I Scene ii** - The common room of Proctor's House, eight days later.

Act II

- **Act II Scene i** - Five weeks later. A wood.
- **Act II Scene ii** - The vestry of the Salem Meeting House, two weeks later.
- **Act II Scene iii** - A cell in Salem jail, three months later.

Characters

Betty Parris
Reverend Samuel Parris
Tituba
Abigail Williams
Susanna Walcott
Mrs. Ann Putnam
Thomas Putnam
Mercy Lewis
Mary Warren
John Proctor
Rebecca Nurse
Giles Corey
Reverend John Hale
Elizabeth Proctor
Francis Nurse
Ezekiel Cheever
John Willard/Hopkins
Martha Corey
Judge Hathorne
Deputy-Governor Danforth
Sarah Good

Note: Contains adult themes and language

The Crucible Director's Note

Fall 2025

Welcome to Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* - a play that, though set in 1692 Salem, Massachusetts, feels hauntingly familiar in 2025. At its core, this story is less about witchcraft and more about us: our fears, our lies, and the desperate need to cling to control when the truth feels dangerous.

This production explores what happens when fear spreads faster than reason, when reputation outweighs humanity, and when justice becomes more performance than principle. Miller's words remind us that the most dangerous witch hunts are not about the supernatural, but about the very human desire to protect power at all costs.

We live in a time when false accusations thrive online, when division fractures communities, and when silence often feels safer than speaking the truth. And yet, Miller challenges us to imagine something different: that the strength of a society lies not in fear, but in compassion; not in control, but in community.

Our staging embraces the timelessness of this world - where past and present bleed into one another, where theatricality and simplicity meet to illuminate the raw humanity of these characters. You will see the story unfold in a heightened, communal space where each choice ripples outward, where destruction feels imminent, and where, at the end, the wind still blows, reminding us that community can be rebuilt.

Thank you for joining us in this exploration of truth, fear, and resilience. May this play not only echo the trials of Salem, but also stir reflection on the choices we face in our own fractured world. Tonight, we invite you to sit back, lean in, and experience this story as it unfolds - a world both distant and unnervingly familiar. Let the wind of Salem sweep you into its mystery, its passion, and its haunting beauty.

Publicity Photo for College of DuPage's College Theater's Fall 2025 Production of *The Crucible*
Costume Design by Kim Morris
Pictured: Abigail Williams as Abigail Williams

About the Author: Arthur Miller

Arthur Miller (1915–2005) is regarded as one of the most influential American playwrights of the twentieth century, known for his unflinching exploration of morality, justice, and the individual's struggle within society. His works often expose the fragile balance between personal integrity and social responsibility, a tension that defines many of his greatest plays.

Born in Harlem, New York, Miller grew up during the Great Depression, an experience that deeply shaped his worldview. His family's financial struggles fueled his sensitivity to themes of survival, fairness, and the pressures of the American Dream - recurring ideas in his writing. After graduating from the University of Michigan, where he studied journalism and playwriting, Miller quickly established himself as a distinctive voice in American theater.

A Playwright of Conscience

Miller's breakthrough came in 1947 with *All My Sons*, a play that examined the moral compromises made in the name of success. He followed it with one of the most iconic works in American theater, *Death of a Salesman* (1949), which won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and two Tony Awards. The story of Willy Loman, an aging salesman chasing the hollow promises of the American Dream, solidified Miller's reputation as a playwright of conscience - one willing to question the values of society itself.

In 1953, Miller wrote *The Crucible*, using the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 as an allegory for the anti-Communist hysteria of the Red Scare. At the height of McCarthyism, when accusations and fear dominated public life, Miller's play was both daring and deeply personal. He himself was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1956 and refused to name names, an act that mirrored the moral choices faced by his characters.

Other notable works include *A View from the Bridge* (1955), *After the Fall* (1964), *The Price* (1968), and *Broken Glass* (1994). Each play reflects Miller's ongoing interest in the complexities of human behavior, the weight of guilt and responsibility, and the consequences of living in a world where truth is often overshadowed by fear or ambition.

Personal Life and Legacy

Beyond the stage, Miller was often in the public eye. His marriage to Marilyn Monroe drew significant media attention, though he remained committed to exploring deeper social and moral issues in his work. Miller was also an outspoken advocate for freedom of expression and human rights, continuing to write essays and speeches long after his most famous plays premiered.

Arthur Miller received numerous awards during his career, including the Pulitzer Prize, the Kennedy Center Honors, and the Praemium Imperiale from the Japan Art Association. His works have been translated into dozens of languages and performed worldwide, continuing to resonate with audiences for their timeless exploration of truth, justice, and the human spirit.

When Miller passed away in 2005 at the age of 89, he left behind not only a body of work that continues to shape American theater, but also a legacy of artistic courage. His plays challenge us to confront uncomfortable truths, reminding us that the health of a society is measured not by its power or wealth, but by its integrity and compassion.

Articles for your Consideration

Arthur Miller and the Red Scare

When Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible* in 1953, he was not simply interested in dramatizing the Salem Witch Trials of 1692. He was responding to the world around him, a world shaken by fear, suspicion, and political paranoia. In the early years of the Cold War, America was gripped by the Red Scare, a period when fear of Communism spread through every corner of society. Senator Joseph McCarthy's crusade to root out Communists and the investigations of the House Un-American Activities Committee created an atmosphere in which accusation was enough to ruin a career, and silence was treated as complicity. It was in this climate that Miller turned to the past, recognizing that the hysteria of Salem provided a haunting mirror for the hysteria of his own time.

The parallels between the two eras were impossible to ignore. In Salem, young girls claimed to see spirits and accused their neighbors of consorting with the Devil. In Washington, witnesses were pressured to "name names" of supposed Communist sympathizers. In both cases, the accused were trapped in a cycle of suspicion: denial was seen as proof of guilt, confession was coerced under threat, and even the innocent were forced to choose between betraying others or preserving themselves. Lives were destroyed not by evidence of wrongdoing, but by the power of fear.

Miller himself was eventually caught in the wave of accusations. In 1956, he was subpoenaed by HUAC and asked to identify others who had attended political meetings. Like his character John Proctor, Miller refused to sacrifice others in order to save himself. He was cited for contempt of Congress, though the conviction was later overturned. The experience deepened his conviction that fear and hysteria, once unleashed, could corrode justice and silence truth. Writing *The Crucible* was both a warning and an act of resistance: a way to challenge a culture that punished honesty and rewarded suspicion.

What makes *The Crucible* endure, however, is that Miller did not write it only as a story about Salem or about the 1950s. He wrote it as a story about human behavior in moments of crisis. The people of Salem are not villains or heroes in simple terms - they are neighbors, family members, and leaders caught in a web of fear and ambition. Some choose integrity at great cost, while others cling to reputation or authority, even if it means sacrificing justice. Miller understood that these choices repeat themselves across history whenever fear outweighs compassion and power outweighs truth.

The questions Miller raised in the 1950s continue to feel urgent today. What is the cost of speaking the truth in a world that punishes dissent? What responsibility do we bear for resisting hysteria, even when silence feels safer? And what happens when entire communities allow suspicion to replace trust? Although the Salem Witch Trials belong to the seventeenth century, and the Red Scare to the twentieth, the warning of *The Crucible* still resonates in the twenty-first.

Miller once reflected, "The political question is not only how to survive, but how to do so with dignity." That is the central dilemma of *The Crucible*. Whether in Salem, in McCarthy's America, or in our own divided world, the play reminds us that dignity comes not from preserving appearances, but from refusing to let fear silence the truth.

Why I wrote “The Crucible”

BY ARTHUR MILLER

Source: Miller, Arthur. “Why I Wrote ‘The Crucible,’ by Arthur Miller.” *The New Yorker*, 14 Oct. 1996, www.newyorker.com/magazine/1996/10/21/why-i-wrote-the-crucible.

As I watched “The Crucible” taking shape as a movie over much of the past year, the sheer depth of time that it represents for me kept returning to mind. As those powerful actors blossomed on the screen, and the children and the horses, the crowds and the wagons, I thought again about how I came to cook all this up nearly fifty years ago, in an America almost nobody I know seems to remember clearly. In a way, there is a biting irony in this film’s having been made by a Hollywood studio, something unimaginable in the fifties. But there they are - Daniel Day-Lewis (John Proctor) scything his sea-bordered field, Joan Allen (Elizabeth) lying pregnant in the frigid jail, Winona Ryder (Abigail) stealing her minister-uncle’s money, majestic Paul Scofield (Judge Danforth) and his righteous empathy with the Devil-possessed children, and all of them looking as inevitable as rain.

I remember those years - they formed “The Crucible” ’s skeleton - but I have lost the dead weight of the fear I had then. Fear doesn’t travel well; just as it can warp judgment, its absence can diminish memory’s truth. What terrifies one generation is likely to bring only a puzzled smile to the next. I remember how in 1964, only twenty years after the war, Harold Clurman, the director of “Incident at Vichy,” showed the cast a film of a Hitler speech, hoping to give them a sense of the Nazi period in which my play took place. They watched as Hitler, facing a vast stadium full of adoring people, went up on his toes in ecstasy, hands clasped under his chin, a sublimely self-gratified grin on his face, his body swiveling rather cutely, and they giggled at his overacting.

Likewise, films of Senator Joseph McCarthy are rather unsettling - if you remember the fear he once spread. Buzzing his truculent sidewalk brawler’s snarl through the hairs in his nose, squinting through his cat’s eyes and sneering like a villain, he comes across now as nearly comical, a self-aware performer keeping a straight face as he does his juicy threat-shtick.

Publicity Photo for College of DuPage’s College Theater’s Fall 2025 Production of *The Crucible*
Costume Design by Kim Morris
Pictured (from Left to Right): Ryan Cosillo as John Proctor, Abigail Williams as Abigail Williams, and Corinna Rodriguez as Elizabeth Proctor

McCarthy’s power to stir fears of creeping Communism was not entirely based on illusion, of course; the paranoid, real or pretended, always secretes its pearl around a grain of fact. From being our wartime ally, the Soviet Union rapidly became an expanding empire. In 1949, Mao Zedong took power in China. Western Europe also seemed ready to become Red - especially Italy, where the Communist Party was the largest outside Russia, and was growing. Capitalism, in the opinion of many, myself included, had nothing more to say, its final poisoned bloom having been Italian and German Fascism. McCarthy - brash and ill-mannered but to many authentic and true - boiled it all down to what anyone could understand: we had “lost China” and would soon lose Europe as well, because the State Department - staffed, of course, under Democratic Presidents - was full of treasonous pro-Soviet intellectuals. It was as simple as that.

If our losing China seemed the equivalent of a flea's losing an elephant, it was still a phrase - and a conviction - that one did not dare to question; to do so was to risk drawing suspicion on oneself. Indeed, the State Department proceeded to hound and fire the officers who knew China, its language, and its opaque culture - a move that suggested the practitioners of sympathetic magic who wring the neck of a doll in order to make a distant enemy's head drop off. There was magic all around; the politics of alien conspiracy soon dominated political discourse and bid fair to wipe out any other issue. How could one deal with such enormities in a play?

"The Crucible" was an act of desperation. Much of my desperation branched out, I suppose, from a typical Depression-era trauma - the blow struck on the mind by the rise of European Fascism and the brutal anti-Semitism it had brought to power. But by 1950, when I began to think of writing about the hunt for Reds in America, I was motivated in some great part by the paralysis that had set in among many liberals who, despite their discomfort with the inquisitors' violations of civil rights, were fearful, and with good reason, of being identified as covert Communists if they should protest too strongly.

In any play, however trivial, there has to be a still point of moral reference against which to gauge the action. In our lives, in the late nineteen-forties and early nineteen-fifties, no such point existed anymore. The left could not look straight at the Soviet Union's abrogations of human rights. The anti-Communist liberals could not acknowledge the violations of those rights by congressional committees. The far right, meanwhile, was licking up all the cream. The days of "*J'accuse*" were gone, for anyone needs to feel right to declare someone else wrong. Gradually, all the old political and moral reality had melted like a Dali watch. Nobody but a fanatic, it seemed, could really say all that he believed.

President Truman was among the first to have to deal with the dilemma, and his way of resolving it - of having to trim his sails before the howling gale on the right - turned out to be momentous. At first, he was outraged at the allegation of widespread Communist infiltration of the government and called the charge of "coddling Communists" a red herring dragged in by the Republicans to bring down the Democrats. But such was the gathering power of raw belief in the great Soviet plot that Truman soon felt it necessary to institute loyalty boards of his own.

The Red hunt, led by the House Committee on Un-American Activities and by McCarthy, was becoming the dominating fixation of the American psyche. It reached Hollywood when the studios, after first resisting, agreed to submit artists' names to the House Committee for "clearing" before employing them. This unleashed a veritable holy terror among actors, directors, and others, from Party members to those who had had the merest brush with a front organization.

The Soviet plot was the hub of a great wheel of causation; the plot justified the crushing of all nuance, all the shadings that a realistic judgment of reality requires. Even worse was the feeling that our sensitivity to this onslaught on our liberties was passing from us - indeed, from me. In "Timebends," my autobiography, I recalled the time I'd written a screenplay ("The Hook") about union corruption on the Brooklyn waterfront. Harry Cohn, the head of Columbia Pictures, did something that would once have been considered unthinkable: he showed my script to the F.B.I. Cohn then asked me to take the gangsters in my script, who were threatening and murdering their opponents, and simply change them to Communists. When I declined to commit this idiocy (Joe Ryan, the head of the longshoremen's union, was soon to go to Sing Sing for racketeering), I got a wire from Cohn saying, "The minute we try to make the script pro-American you pull out." By then - it was 1951 - I had come to accept this terribly serious insanity as routine, but there was an element of the marvelous in it which I longed to put on the stage.

In those years, our thought processes were becoming so magical, so paranoid, that to imagine writing a play about this environment was like trying to pick one's teeth with a ball of wool: I lacked the tools to illuminate miasma. Yet I kept being drawn back to it.

I had read about the witchcraft trials in college, but it was not until I read a book published in 1867 - a two-volume, thousand-page study by Charles W. Upham, who was then the mayor of Salem - that I knew I had to write about the period. Upham had not only written a broad and thorough investigation of what was even then an almost lost chapter of Salem's past but opened up to me the details of personal relationships among many participants in the tragedy.

I visited Salem for the first time on a dismal spring day in 1952; it was a sidetracked town then, with abandoned factories and vacant stores. In the gloomy courthouse there I read the transcripts of the witchcraft trials of 1692, as taken down in a primitive shorthand by ministers who were spelling each other. But there was one entry in Upham in which the thousands of pieces I had come across were jogged into place. It was from a report written by the Reverend Samuel Parris, who was one of the chief instigators of the witch-hunt. "During the examination of Elizabeth Procter, Abigail Williams and Ann Putnam" - the two were "afflicted" teen-age accusers, and Abigail was Parris's niece - "both made offer to strike at said Procter; but when Abigail's hand came near, it opened, whereas it was made up into a fist before, and came down exceeding lightly as it drew near to said Procter, and at length, with open and extended fingers, touched Procter's hood very lightly. Immediately Abigail cried out her fingers, her fingers, her fingers burned…"

In this remarkably observed gesture of a troubled young girl, I believed, a play became possible. Elizabeth Proctor had been the orphaned Abigail's mistress, and they had lived together in the same small house until Elizabeth fired the girl. By this time, I was sure, John Proctor had bedded Abigail, who had to be dismissed most likely to appease Elizabeth. There was bad blood between the two women now. That Abigail started, in effect, to condemn Elizabeth to death with her touch, then stopped her hand, then went through with it, was quite suddenly the human center of all this turmoil.

All this I understood. I had not approached the witchcraft out of nowhere, or from purely social and political considerations. My own marriage of twelve years was teetering and I knew more than I wished to know about where the blame lay. That John Proctor the sinner might overturn his paralyzing personal guilt and become the most forthright voice against the madness around him was a reassurance to me, and, I suppose, an inspiration: it demonstrated that a clear moral outcry could still spring even from an ambiguously unblemished soul. Moving crabwise across the profusion of evidence, I sensed that I had at last found something of myself in it, and a play began to accumulate around this man.

But as the dramatic form became visible, one problem remained unyielding: so many practices of the Salem trials were similar to those employed by the congressional committees that I could easily be accused of skewing history for a mere partisan purpose. Inevitably, it was no sooner known that my new play was about Salem than I had to confront the charge that such an analogy was specious - that there never were any witches but there certainly are Communists. In the seventeenth century, however, the existence of witches was never questioned by the loftiest minds in Europe and America; and even lawyers of the highest eminence, like Sir Edward Coke, a veritable hero of liberty for defending the common law against the king's arbitrary power, believed that witches had to be prosecuted mercilessly. Of course, there were no Communists in 1692, but it was literally worth your life to deny witches or their powers, given the exhortation in the Bible, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." There had to be witches in the world or the Bible lied. Indeed, the very structure of evil depended on Lucifer's plotting against God. (And the irony is that klatches of Luciferians exist all over the country today; there may even be more of them now than there are Communists.)

As with most humans, panic sleeps in one unlighted corner of my soul. When I walked at night along the empty, wet streets of Salem in the week that I spent there, I could easily work myself into imagining my terror before a gaggle of young girls flying down the road screaming that somebody's "familiar spirit" was chasing them. This anxiety-laden leap backward over nearly three centuries may have been helped along by a particular Upham footnote. At a certain point, the high court of the province made the fatal decision to admit, for the first time, the use of "spectral evidence" as proof of guilt. Spectral evidence, so aptly named, meant that if I swore that you had sent out your "familiar spirit" to choke, tickle, or poison me or my cattle, or to control my thoughts and actions, I could get you hanged unless you confessed to having had contact with the Devil. After all, only the Devil could lend such powers of invisible transport to confederates, in his everlasting plot to bring down Christianity.

Naturally, the best proof of the sincerity of your confession was your naming others whom you had seen in the Devil's company - an invitation to private vengeance, but made official by the seal of the theocratic state. It was as though the court had grown tired of thinking and had invited in the instincts: spectral evidence - that poisoned cloud of paranoid fantasy - made a kind of lunatic sense to them, as it did in plot-ridden 1952, when so often the question was not the acts of an accused but the thoughts and intentions in his alienated mind.

The breathtaking circularity of the process had a kind of poetic tightness. Not everybody was accused, after all, so there must be *some reason why you were*. By denying that there is any reason whatsoever for you to be accused, you are implying, by virtue of a surprisingly small logical leap, that mere chance picked you out, which in turn implies that the Devil might not really be at work in the village or, God forbid, even exist. Therefore, the investigation itself is either mistaken or a fraud. You would have to be a crypto-Luciferian to say that - not a great idea if you wanted to go back to your farm.

Credit: Photograph from The New York Times / Getty

The more I read into the Salem panic, the more it touched off corresponding images of common experiences in the fifties: the old friend of a blacklisted person crossing the street to avoid being seen talking to him; the overnight conversions of former leftists into born-again patriots; and so on. Apparently, certain processes are universal. When Gentiles in Hitler's Germany, for example, saw their Jewish neighbors being trucked off, or farmers in Soviet Ukraine saw the Kulaks vanishing before their eyes, the common reaction, even among those unsympathetic to Nazism or Communism, was quite naturally to turn away in fear of being identified with the condemned. As I learned from non-Jewish refugees, however, there was often a despairing pity mixed with "Well, they must have done *something*." Few of us can easily surrender our belief that society must somehow make sense. The thought that the state has lost its mind and is punishing so many innocent people is intolerable And so the evidence has to be internally denied.

I was also drawn into writing “The Crucible” by the chance it gave me to use a new language - that of seventeenth-century New England. That plain, craggy English was liberating in a strangely sensuous way, with its swings from an almost legalistic precision to a wonderful metaphoric richness. “The Lord doth terrible things amongst us, by lengthening the chain of the roaring lion in an extraordinary manner, so that the Devil is come down in great wrath,” Deodat Lawson, one of the great witch-hunting preachers, said in a sermon. Lawson rallied his congregation for what was to be nothing less than a religious war against the Evil One - “Arm, arm, arm!” - and his concealed anti-Christian accomplices.

But it was not yet my language, and among other strategies to make it mine I enlisted the help of a former University of Michigan classmate, the Greek-American scholar and poet Kimon Friar. (He later translated Kazantzakis.) The problem was not to imitate the archaic speech but to try to create a new echo of it which would flow freely off American actors’ tongues. As in the film, nearly fifty years later, the actors in the first production grabbed the language and ran with it as happily as if it were their customary speech.

“The Crucible” took me about a year to write. With its five sets and a cast of twenty-one, it never occurred to me that it would take a brave man to produce it on Broadway, especially given the prevailing climate, but Kermit Bloomgarden never faltered. Well before the play opened, a strange tension had begun to build. Only two years earlier, the “Death of a Salesman” touring company had played to a thin crowd in Peoria, Illinois, having been boycotted nearly to death by the American Legion and the Jaycees. Before that, the Catholic War Veterans had prevailed upon the Army not to allow its theatrical groups to perform, first, “All My Sons,” and then any play of mine, in occupied Europe. The Dramatists Guild refused to protest attacks on a new play by Sean O’Casey, a self-declared Communist, which forced its producer to cancel his option. I knew of two suicides by actors depressed by upcoming investigation, and every day seemed to bring news of people exiling themselves to Europe: Charlie Chaplin, the director Joseph Losey, Jules Dassin, the harmonica virtuoso Larry Adler, Donald Ogden Stewart, one of the most sought-after screenwriters in Hollywood, and Sam Wanamaker, who would lead the successful campaign to rebuild the Old Globe Theatre on the Thames.

On opening night, January 22, 1953, I knew that the atmosphere would be pretty hostile. The coldness of the crowd was not a surprise; Broadway audiences were not famous for loving history lessons, which is what they made of the play. It seems to me entirely appropriate that on the day the play opened, a newspaper headline read *“ALL THIRTEEN REDS GUILTY”* - a story about American Communists who faced prison for “conspiring to teach and advocate the duty and necessity of forcible overthrow of government.” Meanwhile, the remoteness of the production was guaranteed by the director, Jed Harris, who insisted that this was a classic requiring the actors to face front, never each other. The critics were not swept away. “Arthur Miller is a problem playwright in both senses of the word,” wrote Walter Kerr of the *Herald Tribune*, who called the play “a step backward into mechanical parable.” The *Times* was not much kinder, saying, “There is too much excitement and not enough emotion in ‘The Crucible.’ ” But the play’s future would turn out quite differently.

About a year later, a new production, one with younger, less accomplished actors, working in the Martinique Hotel ballroom, played with the fervor that the script and the times required, and "The Crucible" became a hit. The play stumbled into history, and today, I am told, it is one of the most heavily demanded trade-fiction paperbacks in this country; the Bantam and Penguin editions have sold more than six million copies. I don't think there has been a week in the past forty-odd years when it hasn't been on a stage somewhere in the world. Nor is the new screen version the first. Jean-Paul Sartre, in his Marxist phase, wrote a French film adaptation that blamed the tragedy on the rich landowners conspiring to persecute the poor. (In truth, most of those who were hanged in Salem were people of substance, and two or three were very large landowners.)

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that, especially in Latin America, "The Crucible" starts getting produced wherever a political coup appears imminent, or a dictatorial regime has just been overthrown. From Argentina to Chile to Greece, Czechoslovakia, China, and a dozen other places, the play seems to present the same primeval structure of human sacrifice to the furies of fanaticism and paranoia that goes on repeating itself forever as though imbedded in the brain of social man.

I am not sure what "The Crucible" is telling people now, but I know that its paranoid center is still pumping out the same darkly attractive warning that it did in the fifties. For some, the play seems to be about the dilemma of relying on the testimony of small children accusing adults of sexual abuse, something I'd not have dreamed of forty years ago. For others, it may simply be a fascination with the outbreak of paranoia that suffuses the play - the blind panic that, in our age, often seems to sit at the dim edges of consciousness. Certainly its political implications are the central issue for many people; the Salem interrogations turn out to be eerily exact models of those yet to come in Stalin's Russia, Pinochet's Chile, Mao's China, and other regimes. (Nien Cheng, the author of "Life and Death in Shanghai," has told me that she could hardly believe that a non-Chinese - someone who had not experienced the Cultural Revolution - had written the play.) But below its concerns with justice the play evokes a lethal brew of illicit sexuality, fear of the supernatural, and political manipulation, a combination not unfamiliar these days. The film, by reaching the broad American audience as no play ever can, may well unearth still other connections to those buried public terrors that Salem first announced on this continent.

One thing more - something wonderful in the old sense of that word. I recall the weeks I spent reading testimony by the tome, commentaries, broadsides, confessions, and accusations. And always the crucial damning event was the signing of one's name in "the Devil's book." This Faustian agreement to hand over one's soul to the dreaded Lord of Darkness was the ultimate insult to God. But what were these new inductees supposed to have *done* once they'd signed on? Nobody seems even to have thought to ask. But, of course, actions are as irrelevant during cultural and religious wars as they are in nightmares. The thing at issue is buried intentions - the secret allegiances of the alienated heart, always the main threat to the theocratic mind, as well as its immemorial quarry.

Fear and Hysteria in Divided Communities

At the heart of *The Crucible* lies a sobering truth: fear spreads faster than reason. Arthur Miller's dramatization of the Salem Witch Trials demonstrates how quickly a community can fracture when suspicion takes hold, and how hysteria can become more powerful than truth. Salem in 1692 was a small Puritan settlement where religious authority and civic order were deeply intertwined. Once the first accusations of witchcraft surfaced, fear raced through the town, feeding on itself until it consumed both the innocent and the guilty alike.

Hysteria does not emerge overnight; it grows slowly, fueled by anxiety, mistrust, and the desire for control. In Salem, unexplained illnesses and strict religious teachings created fertile ground for suspicion. When Abigail Williams and the other girls cried witchcraft, the community's fear gave their words extraordinary power. Rumors were treated as evidence, spectral visions became accepted as truth, and those accused were forced to confess or face execution. Each new "confession" only reinforced the belief that the Devil was at work. Fear became a kind of social currency. Accusing someone else was not just self-preservation - it was a way to gain influence, to silence rivals, and to elevate one's standing in the community. By the end of the play, reason has all but vanished, replaced by a dangerous cycle in which hysteria feeds itself.

Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible* as an allegory for his own time, but the play's exploration of fear in divided societies continues to resonate. During the Red Scare of the 1950s, accusations of Communist ties spread across America, often with little evidence. Fear silenced dissenters and gave immense power to those willing to point fingers. The cycle is not unique to Salem or the 1950s. History repeatedly shows us how societies under stress look for scapegoats. During times of war, disease, or political unrest, fear often shifts blame onto marginalized groups. In these moments, suspicion is more persuasive than logic, and hysteria becomes a weapon.

Today, we see echoes of Salem in the speed at which misinformation spreads through social media, creating panic or outrage before facts can catch up. Online accusations, viral rumors, and conspiracy theories often operate like witch trials - guilt by association, amplified by fear, and rarely corrected once the damage is done. In *The Crucible*, hysteria does not just claim the lives of the accused; it corrodes the very fabric of the community. Friends turn against friends, families fracture, and leaders abandon justice in favor of maintaining control. By the end, the Salem community is left devastated, its trust shattered.

Perhaps the most haunting lesson of the play is that hysteria thrives when people abandon compassion. Fear makes neighbors into enemies. Lies become easier to believe than uncomfortable truths. And in the desperate scramble for safety, the bonds that hold a community together are torn apart. Miller's play forces us to ask hard questions: What do we fear most? How do we respond when we feel powerless? And what happens when we allow fear, rather than empathy, to guide our choices?

The world of Salem may seem far removed from our own, but the warning of *The Crucible* remains urgent. Communities fracture not because of supernatural forces, but because of human choices - choices to spread fear, to believe lies, or to stay silent in the face of injustice. The play reminds us that hysteria is not an ancient problem; it is a human one.

Reputation, Integrity, and the Cost of Truth

One of the central conflicts in *The Crucible* is the struggle between protecting one's reputation and preserving one's integrity. For the people of Salem, reputation was everything. In a rigid theocratic society where one's standing in the community was tied to religious purity, even the suggestion of sin could be devastating. As accusations of witchcraft spread, characters found themselves forced to choose between protecting their good names or telling the truth, a choice that often carried deadly consequences.

John Proctor embodies this dilemma most fully. At first, he hesitates to expose Abigail's lies because doing so would mean confessing to his own affair, a revelation that would destroy his reputation. His silence is not cowardice, but the hesitation of a man who understands how fragile a name can be in a world where one's entire existence is judged by public opinion. Yet as the hysteria grows and the trials spiral out of control, Proctor realizes that remaining silent enables injustice. To reveal the truth, he must sacrifice his good name. To remain silent, he must sacrifice his soul. In the end, Proctor chooses to die rather than sign a false confession, preserving his integrity even as he forfeits his life. His refusal to let his name be used to justify further lies transforms him from a flawed man into a tragic hero.

Other characters make different choices, and their decisions reveal the many ways reputation can shape human behavior. Reverend Parris, consumed by fear of losing authority, clings to reputation at the expense of justice, choosing to protect his position rather than his community. Judge Danforth insists that the court's rulings must be respected, even when evidence suggests otherwise, because to admit error would damage the credibility of the institution he represents. His devotion to the court's reputation blinds him to the suffering it inflicts. Abigail Williams, meanwhile, manipulates her reputation to gain power, wielding fear as a weapon against anyone who threatens her. She understands that in Salem, the appearance of innocence can be more powerful than the truth itself, and she uses that knowledge to devastating effect.

Arthur Miller uses these conflicts to raise enduring questions: What does it mean to live with integrity? Is a person's name more important than their survival? Can a society obsessed with appearances ever value truth? These questions resonated powerfully in Miller's own time, when the Red Scare forced individuals to choose between protecting themselves by conforming or standing against injustice at great personal risk. They remain relevant today in a world where public image is often carefully curated, and where social judgment can be swift and unforgiving. In the age of social media, a person's "name" may be nothing more than a headline, a trending hashtag, or a rumor - yet the weight it carries can shape lives as powerfully as it did in Salem.

The tragedy of *The Crucible* is not just in the lives lost but in the way a community collapses when reputation is valued above humanity. Proctor's choice to preserve his integrity by refusing a false confession offers a glimmer of redemption, reminding us that even in the darkest times, truth can endure through individual courage. Yet the play leaves us with an unsettling reminder that integrity is rarely easy, and that the cost of truth may be more than most are willing to pay. In asking us to consider what we would do in Proctor's place, Miller challenges us to reflect on our own values. Would we protect our names at any cost, or would we risk everything for the truth?

Theatricality and Timelessness in *The Crucible*

Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is rooted in a specific moment in history - the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 - yet the play is not bound to its period. From its very first productions, directors and designers have recognized that the play's themes are larger than its setting. Fear, hysteria, and the struggle for truth are not unique to Puritan New England, and Miller crafted the play with a deliberate sense of timelessness. The courtroom in Salem becomes a metaphor for any place where truth collides with power, where fear silences compassion, and where individuals must choose between conformity and integrity.

Because of this, productions of *The Crucible* often lean into theatricality rather than strict historical realism. Miller himself noted that the play should create "an atmosphere of high mystery, impending revelation," a world where the weight of accusation and the collapse of trust feel palpable to the audience. The stark simplicity of the setting, the ritualistic rhythms of the language, and the symbolic power of the trials all invite directors to shape the play less as a museum piece and more as a living allegory. A bare wooden chair can be more powerful than an elaborate set if it allows the audience to focus on the human drama unfolding before them.

In this production, the world of the play draws on both tradition and modernity, allowing past and present to bleed into one another. The time is 1692, yet it feels eerily familiar - costumes, sound, and movement are chosen not to replicate history but to heighten the story for a contemporary audience. Transitions become more than scene changes; they mark the crumbling of community, moments where fear overtakes reason and fractures what once held people together. By the final image, as the wind blows through what remains, the audience is left to consider whether community can be rebuilt after such devastation.

The theatrical choices are designed to immerse the audience not only in Salem but in the universal experience of a society under strain. The audience is invited to feel "in" the courtroom, to sense the weight of judgment and the panic of being on trial before one's peers. A soundscape that is choral, eerie, and chant-like underscores the sense that hysteria is contagious, spreading from one voice to many until it overwhelms. Even silence becomes a theatrical device, reminding us that complicity is as much a force in this play as violence or confession. Lighting, too, carries symbolic weight, drawing sharp contrasts between shadow and illumination to reflect the characters' constant struggle between lies and truth.

Ultimately, this approach emphasizes that *The Crucible* is not about witches, nor even about Salem - it is about us. By blending the traditional with the modern, the production underscores the continuity between then and now, showing how fear, lies, and vengeance remain powerful forces in divided societies. The play refuses to let the audience remain passive observers. Instead, it demands reflection: How do we, in our own time, respond to hysteria? How do we balance reputation with integrity? When do we stay silent, and when do we speak?

In choosing theatricality and timelessness, the play becomes less a story of the past and more a haunting mirror for the present. It reminds us that communities unravel not only through great acts of betrayal, but through small failures of courage, through lies told to protect appearances, and through silence that allows injustice to flourish. *The Crucible* endures because it asks us to face these uncomfortable truths, urging us to imagine how a community - our community - might resist fear and rebuild itself through compassion, integrity, and shared humanity.

Other Reviews

A Steppenwolf for Young Adults *Crucible* shivers with the perils of closed minds

BY CHRIS JONES

Source: Jones, Chris. "A Steppenwolf for Young Adults 'Crucible' Shivers with the Perils of Closed Minds." *Chicago Tribune*, Chicago Tribune, 31 May 2019, www.chicagotribune.com/2017/10/09/a-steppenwolf-for-young-adults-crucible-shivers-with-the-perils-of-closed-minds/.

If there was one thing that the great American playwright Arthur Miller hated above all else, it was sanctimonious moral absolutism.

"This is a sharp time, now, a precise time," says the insufferable Danforth, the most terrifying character in "The Crucible." "We live no longer in the dusky afternoon when evil mixed itself with good and befuddled the world."

Well, it's always a sharp time, a precise time to some, is it not?

In Miller's play, which the gifted Steppenwolf director Jon Berry is staging for the Steppenwolf for Young Adults program, Danforth, played with potent and creepy alacrity by Michael Patrick Thornton, is speaking of colonial Massachusetts in the 17th century. Allegorically, Miller was speaking of the McCarthyite horrors of the early 1950s, of the naming of names. And, of course, there is plenty of dualistic thinking going on in America right now. Even as we speak.

Yet all of us are imperfect creatures. We all make serious mistakes, a point central to "The Crucible," which Berry has staged in full (two hours and 35 minutes is long these days for an education production), but with enough tension and pace that the intended young audience will not be bored.

Chilled, maybe. And I don't mean out.

More aware of human frailty, one only can hope.

Berry stages this great American play relatively simply, on a wooden platform with the cast sitting on chairs at the sides, watching what transpires. There is a lot of doubling. Some - such as casting the excellent Kristina Valada-Viars as both Betty Paris, one of the adolescent girls suspected of witchery, and Elizabeth Procter, an upstanding citizen brought to her knees by pervasive fear - add some interesting resonances. Other choices, such as having Millie Hurley play both Francis and Rebecca Nurse, work if you know the play very well, but might confuse if not. I'm sure economic practicalities were at work, but these characters can sear your soul, and it sometimes jars when it feels like they take on another identity.

Berry's production takes a while to drill down to the core; it is an initially cautious staging that seems overly hesitant when it comes to sensuality, even though one of the key themes in the play is the inability of Puritan religiosity to understand the body's interplay with the mind. Berry also creates a collection of characters who all tend to speak with a kind of defiant certitude, which works in many instances, but also doesn't fully reflect the raw fear and confusion from which so many of Miller's characters suffer, as so many of us do.

All that said, Erik Hellman really finds the full measure of his Reverend Hale, a man whose tortured soul probably does the most damage of all, since he's the last chance the honest folks have before the wall between Americans becomes impermeable, and the ideological guards make their arrests and consolidate their elitist power.

And, better yet, I'd say that Berry's third act is as good as any third act of this play I've ever seen. That's partly due to the truly stunning work by Thornton, who ignites this production as if he'd just found the electric current to make a carefully wired construct jump with the power it craved. But it's also thanks to the play's famous scene between the Proctors. That would be Elizabeth, with her moral authority, and flawed John (Travis Knight), whose original sin invited in all the pious aggressors, verbose humans with the collective ability to rip a nervous community apart.

You can see it as a giant allegory for the current moment. If you wish. But then Miller often feels that way.

In the scene between Valada-Viars and Knight, which pulses with the shadows of the past as surely as the crisis of the present, you (and, hopefully, your kids) will learn so very much about for what we need to atone, even if we serve no god.

And, of course, when we must stand and be counted, even at cost to ourselves.

Credit: Michael Brosilow

The Crucible Review: A soggy London Revival of Miller's Masterpiece

BY DAVID BENEDICT

Source: Benedict, David. "'The Crucible' Review: A Soggy London Revival of Miller's Masterpiece." *Variety*, Variety, 2 Oct. 2022, variety.com/2022/legit/reviews/the-crucible-review-national-theatre-1235388183/.

Credit: Johan Persson

There is an opera of "The Crucible." Written by Robert Ward, it won the 1962 Pulitzer Prize. But this is not the opera… or is it? Lyndsey Turner's grandiloquent National Theatre production of Arthur Miller's imperishable 1953 classic is so overloaded with singing from the opening period-style choral folk song to a final major-key angelic chorus - not to mention a permanently portentous soundscape - that you could be forgiven for mistaking it for the opera. While some 69-year-old plays need dramaturgical assistance to be successfully revived, this is not one of them.

Turner's decision to "assist" the play is also there in her equally operatic visual response. In 2016, she and designer Es Devlin transformed the naturalism of Brian Friel's masterpiece "Faith Healer" at the 250-seat Donmar Warehouse by encasing the three-sided stage with a curtain of pouring rain lit so that the water gleamed like a cage of hard, white light. It was a fitting metaphor for Friel's fictional village. Now reused for "The Crucible" in the 1,029-seat Olivier amphitheater, opening and closing the play and punctuating the scene changes, it seems less metaphorical, more an over-displayed effect.

There are also text changes, with Turner adding an expository prelude and a coda from Miller's writings about the play, in which the before and after is announced to the audience in a tone of high seriousness. The opening address is an immediate indication that the production doesn't trust the text itself to do its dramatic work.

Although this political thriller was written in response to America's mid-20th-century fever of McCarthyite witch hunts and the naming of names, there has, on either side of the Atlantic, never been a time when the play was not "relevant."

And it's to the play's immense credit that successive productions have found in it a unique response to the tenor of its time. Dominic Cooke's award-winning 2006 Royal Shakespeare Company production turned the play into a grippingly fierce distillation of the danger of fundamentalist thinking; Richard Eyre's Broadway revival with Liam Neeson and Laura Linney saw the play as a portrait of personal integrity in the face of galloping political events. Part of the trouble with this new revival is that it lacks a clear perspective because the attention-grabbing production swamps the play.

Much of that stems from a lack of pacing. Miller's handling of the manipulative lies of angry, spurned adolescent Abigail Williams (a suitably staunch and febrile Erin Doherty) - who stokes terror, harnesses resentments and ushers in the hanging of innocent townsfolk - is masterly. His tale features what should be engrossing and unceasing turns of the screw. But outside the obvious plot climaxes of the girls' hysteria or the entrapment of individuals in the trial scenes, the production turns stealthy, enthralling writing into unvarying scenes that feel shouty, wordy and long.

Much of that is the result of the perma-doom soundtrack: constant, insistent underscoring and humming from the actors. By telling the audience what to think - "listen up: something terrible is about to happen" - the music relegates the dialogue to further accompaniment and flattens the drama.

It's also down to Turner's direction of the actors, too many of whom have been encouraged to overstate themselves from their first entrance. But by fatally playing the end of their dramatic trajectory at the very beginning, their character and motives are too immediately obvious. This leaves audiences with almost nothing to discern and disengages them from the moment-by-moment drama. That distancing is further extended by disconnected performances, including from the highly experienced Matthew Marsh, who relies upon a carefully over-precise delivery as Judge Danforth, channeling Kelsey Grammar's Frasier Crane and thus merely coming across as a one-note version of self-deluded.

There are exceptions. As Mary Warren, who almost succeeds in escaping Abigail's power and tries to tell the truth, Rachelle Diedericks puffs herself up nicely with power and, unlike a bewilderingly high percentage of the cast, her accent work is consistent.

Tim Lutkin's fierce side lighting scalds the actors and allows them to be beautifully etched against enveloping darkness. His work has an arresting precision and depth that is woefully absent elsewhere. Even the central relationship between John and Elizabeth Proctor lacks traction because although Eileen Walsh is nicely pinched and tired as Elizabeth, Brendan Cowell's John is too physically and vocally shambling. It's a characterful performance but too generalized to allow crucial moments to land, not least his climactic, play-defining cry: "How may I live without my name?"

Karl Johnson is winning as the argumentative, honorable, elderly Giles Corey, who goes to his death for refusing to bow to the court's double-think. He dies by being pressed with stones, his only words being "more weight." Ironically, this entirely self-conscious production's attempt to add more weight is what stifles the play.

Analysis Tools

Things to Think About Prior to Performance

- What does a community need in order to feel safe? What threatens that safety most - outside forces, or the actions of its own members?
- How do fear and suspicion spread more quickly than trust or compassion? Can you think of examples from history or from today?
- What matters more to you personally: your reputation in the eyes of others, or your own sense of integrity?
- When someone is accused of wrongdoing, do we tend to believe the evidence, or the people who speak the loudest?
- What happens to a society when its systems of justice become a performance rather than a search for truth?
- Are people more likely to believe something that is comforting or something that is true? Why do we sometimes cling to lies?
- How does silence play a role in times of fear? Is staying silent a way of staying safe, or is it a way of becoming complicit?
- What sacrifices are worth making for the truth? When does survival matter more than principle, and when does principle matter more than survival?
- Who holds the most power in divided societies - the leaders, the accusers, or the people who remain silent?
- In moments of crisis, what role does forgiveness play? Can a fractured community ever rebuild?

Things to Watch For in Performance

- Notice how fear spreads from one character to another. How do accusations change the balance of power in the room?
- Pay attention to the moments of silence. What do they reveal about complicity, hesitation, or resistance?
- Watch how the community shifts over the course of the play. What is lost when trust begins to crumble?
- Consider the ways characters protect their reputations. Who sacrifices truth to preserve appearances, and who risks everything to remain honest?
- Observe how authority figures use language. How does the courtroom feel like a stage, and how do words become weapons?
- Look for the tension between the private and the public. What do characters reveal in private moments that they would never admit in front of others?
- Notice how the staging, sound, and transitions reflect the collapse of community. How does the theatrical world mirror the emotional world of the characters?
- Watch for acts of forgiveness, both given and withheld. How does forgiveness - or the refusal of it - shape the ending of the play?
- Pay attention to Proctor's final decision. What does it mean for him, and what does it mean for the community he leaves behind?
- Throughout the play, ask yourself: Who is telling the truth? Who is lying? And why are those lies so easily believed?

Things to Think About After the Performance

- How did the events of the play change your perspective on the Salem Witch Trials? Did you see them as history, or as a reflection of today?
- Which character's choices felt most understandable to you? Which choices were the hardest to accept?
- What role did fear play in shaping the actions of individuals and the direction of the community?
- Do you think John Proctor made the right choice at the end of the play? Why or why not?
- How do you interpret the role of Abigail Williams? Is she simply a villain, or is she also a victim of the world around her?
- How did the theatrical choices - design, sound, staging, movement - shape your experience of the story?
- Did you notice moments of compassion or forgiveness within the chaos? How did those moments affect the overall impact of the play?
- In what ways did the play make you reflect on our current society? Where do you see parallels between Salem and the world we live in today?
- What might it take for a fractured community to rebuild after fear and suspicion tear it apart?
- What do you think Arthur Miller wanted audiences to carry with them after seeing *The Crucible*? What will you carry with you?

Other Analysis Tools

- What happens in the very last moments of the play? What is said, and how does that wrap up the characters' arcs and thematic elements?
- Consider the title, *The Crucible*. How does it encapsulate the essence of the characters, the setting, and the theme of the play? Why do you think Miller chose this title to reflect the world of the play?

Additional Information

The running time for this production is approximately two hours and twenty minutes, which includes one, fifteen minute intermission.

Please join us for a pre-show discussion Thursday, October 9 at 5:45pm in MAC 117, known as the lounge or "fishbowl", preceding the preview performance. Note that the pre-show discussions will include the director and designers and will be a discussion on the approach to this production.

There will also be a post-show discussion following the Friday, October 17 performance. The post-show will be with the director, cast, and crew, and we will be fielding questions from the audience.

Please join us!