

CAP & DAGGER

presents

THE

CRUCIBLE



By ARTHUR MILLER

ARTHUR MILLER'S

THE CRUCIBLE

Directed by LINDA AVITABILE

Designed by HARVEY M. POWERS

Lighting Designed by REX KLEITZ

Costumes Designed by MARY KLEITZ

May 5, 6, 7, and June 4, 1960

UNIVERSITY THEATRE

THE CRUCIBLE

Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is a curious piece of theater. From one point of view it seems to be a historical play. In sprinkling his stage with the names of actual personages and with literal detail from the public and private life of Salem in the 1690's, in employing such sociological props as "poppets" and psalm-singing, Miller demonstrates to his audience that he has engaged at least in selective research. And yet, despite the "look-you-sir's" and the "mark-this-proof's," the surface realism on-stage is only partially convincing. In the same way, the play is less than completely adequate as a dramatization of a crucial and fascinating episode in American history. Miller does depict a substantial amount of the Puritan habit of mind: the significance of Danforth's acting in the name of "the government and the central church," for example, or the striking confusion of economic and religious motives, or the grotesqueness of the state of mind of a culture in which severe sexual repression prevails without the provision of any institutional machinery for relieving the private conscience—such things come across all right. But, unlike Hawthorne, who is also only half reliable as historian, Miller does not by means of his drama really mine the heart of Calvinistic Protestant New England. Nor does Miller throw light on the great tangled intellectual and cultural forces that the Salem drama was actually composed of: the struggle between orthodoxy and liberalism, for example, or between dogma and frontier empiricism. That the playwright has felt compelled to affix pages of nondramatic exposition throughout the reader's edition of his play in order to make clear certain economic motives in his characters and has found it desirable to append an epilogue that traces the historical principals after the play has ended is in itself an admission that we do not have a New England pageant and no more.

Aeschylus was not really dramatizing history, either, although the *Oresteia* undoubtedly struck some of the contemporary Greek audience as being a historical play. Aeschylus was, however, very much concerned to say something about the emergence of Athenian democracy from the old code of tribal justice. And the responsible Athenian citizen was certainly able to see the connection between the struggles within the house of Atreus and the struggles among Athenians, tyrants and democrats. In the same way, Miller is quite evidently trying to make history

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CAST

In order of appearance

<i>Betty Parris</i>	Suzanne Smith
<i>Rev. Samuel Parris</i>	Lester Greenberg
<i>Tituba</i>	Margaret Schafer
<i>Abigail Williams</i>	Margaret Beckman
<i>Susanna Wallcott</i>	Carol Connitt
<i>Mrs. Anne Putnam</i>	Carol Brozey
<i>Thomas Putnam</i>	Bruce Millon
<i>Mercy Lewis</i>	Joanne Birtley
<i>Mary Warren</i>	Ann Geluso
<i>John Proctor</i>	John Wilson
<i>Rebecca Nurse</i>	Lynda Weaver
<i>Giles Corey</i>	Joseph Lo Grippo
<i>Rev. John Hale</i>	Marvin Kahan
<i>Elizabeth Proctor</i>	Ellen Headley
<i>Francis Nurse</i>	Alan Bogar
<i>Ezekiel Cheever</i>	Sanford Schumacher
<i>John Willard</i>	Paul Simpson
<i>Judge Hathorne</i>	Thomas Waddell
<i>Deputy-Governor Danforth</i>	Julian Mueller
<i>Sarah Good</i>	Kristin Nordstrom
<i>Two Children</i>	Christopher Patten Allen Wheatcroft



SYNOPSIS of SCENES

- 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.
15 minutes intermission
- ACT II—Scene I: Five weeks later. A small 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.

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of the mid-twentieth century before the time has passed into history—"the abstract and brief chronicles of the time," says Hamlet. And surely every American who has lived through the late 1940's and the early 1950's sees forcibly played before his eyes that "precise time," as the eloquent Danforth styles it, of the twentieth, as well as of the seventeenth, century. Grippled by the ironies and galled by the injustices that were racking the American conscience ten years ago, Arthur Miller was undoubtedly responding to and answering a dark epoch when he conceived and shaped *The Crucible*. Undeniably the playwright has something of moment to say to his community. And yet, although Miller is exploiting a perhaps not altogether gratuitous parallel in American history, as Aeschylus, too, exploited the history and legend of the Hellenes, it seems to me that *The Crucible* is not essentially a parable for the mid-twentieth century, is not an allegory, or is not, as one critic has tagged it, a modern morality play.

The remarkable thing about *The Crucible* is that it works, for analysis shows that it should not. The piece itself suggests that it was composed backwards—from the outside in, rather than, as was *Death of a Salesman*, from the inside out. The very fact that the playwright works so hard, at times so obviously, to establish the parallel—"there is a softness in your record," Hale explains to Proctor—is evidence of the degree of conscious manipulation involved. And the extent to which the machinery of the play itself depends upon contrivance—the belaboring of Elizabeth's absolute verbal honesty, for example—is even more telling. Still more fundamental with regard to the dramaturgy is the uncertainty of the focus. John Proctor, of course, is the protagonist, and yet he seems to lack not so much the stature as the sensibility of the hero. Or perhaps the trouble is that Proctor's crisis has really been resolved before the play opens—he has finished his business with Abigail and the main action on-stage seems to be a kind of unhappy aftermath. In contrast to Proctor, who seems incapable of growth at the point at which we meet him, is Hale, who is transformed by his ordeal from God's specially elect vicar into a thorough skeptic—"Shall the worms declare his truth?" is his bitter eulogy over Proctor about to martyr himself. Yet quite evidently Hale does not command the center of the stage.

With regard to the antagonistic force of the drama, the focus is even more seriously blurred. Abigail surely is the chief initiator of the immediate action, yet Miller himself was so dissatisfied with the way she played her role that after the play had opened he found himself writing in the forest scene in order to clarify Abigail's motivation and her precise relationship to the Proctors. And at the really critical juncture Miller discovers that Abigail has simply evaporated from the stage, and he must hope that with so much happening to engage our attention we will forget about the little piece of baggage who caused it all. Parris, who has a personal motive, and Danforth, who represents a government which has lost touch with the community it governs, are also forces that drive Proctor to his fate. Even Elizabeth, who confesses having kept "a cold house" for her husband John, must be reckoned a part of the somewhat too broadly diffused antagonist. Or to put it another way, it is difficult to tell whether Proctor's misfortune is a private or communal matter, for there is no Aeschylean chorus to record the corresponding drama enacted in the collective sensibility of a society that in *The Crucible* never presents itself.

But the play works—in the outer theater of the community or in the inner theater of the self, the play works. To read drama for analysis is one thing: to see the drama acted out on the wooden scaffold or on the stage of the imagination is another. In *The Crucible* Miller makes us behold citizen John Proctor, who, if he cannot quite choose as can Giles Corey, to call for "more weight" to be heaped on the will that can will against itself, and thus never quite becomes a Job of the frontier—John Proctor does discover the margin of his dignity, does realize his own identity, does enable his own will. And we, bringing with us, each into his own theater, an awful conscience in the form of a parallel recognition, we become the chorus or community that, we come to discover, is caught not fortuitously in John Proctor's crisis. We, like Hale, must work out our purgation through Proctor's ordeal. To say this is merely to underscore an axiom: a play is not dramatized history, no matter how scrupulously or deftly it has been transformed, nor a tract for the times, no matter how apt, nor even a piece of literature to be taught to sophomores, no matter how critically provoking. A play is the engagement of a will caught in an instant of consequential crisis. With *The Crucible* "the play's the thing."

—J. S. W.

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