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ABOUT OUR WRITER

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STORY

HEADLINE INFORMATION

• Salem, Massachusetts, 1692. Reverend Parris discovers his daughter Betty and her friends dancing in the forest; Betty faints at being discovered.

• Rumours of witchcraft begin to spread through the town and Abigail – Parris’ niece – eventually admits that the reverend’s black slave, Tituba, was trying to conjure spirits.

• Abigail is left alone with local farmer John Proctor, with whom we learn she had an affair when she worked in his household; she tells him there was no witchcraft, and that she loves him, but he insists that the relationship is over.

• Reverend Hale – a witch-hunter from a neighbouring town – arrives. Threatened with punishment, Tituba breaks down, admits to communicating with the devil and begins to name other witches in the town; a chant with which Abigail and then Betty hysterically join.

• Eight days later, Proctor and his wife Elizabeth discuss the court that has been established to charge witches.

• They learn from their servant Mary Warren – a friend of Abigail’s who is also accusing people in town – that Elizabeth herself has come under suspicion.

• Elizabeth asks Proctor to go to the court and expose Abigail as a liar, but he refuses, and she suspects he still has feelings for Abigail.

• Hale arrives to investigate Elizabeth, and soon after she – along with the wives of Giles Corey and Francis Nurse – is arrested.

• Alone with Mary, Proctor demands that she accompany him to court and reveal that the girls are lying.
• In court Mary tells Deputy Governor Danforth and Judge Hathorne that the girls have been lying.

• To prove that Abigail is a liar, Proctor admits to his affair with Abigail.

• Danforth tests the claim by calling out Elizabeth – who Proctor says has never lied in her life – from her cell and asking whether Proctor betrayed her with Abigail. She denies it in an attempt to save his honour, but in doing so condemns him as a liar.

• Abigail and the girls begin pretending that Mary is attacking them with her spirit, until the pressure is too great, and she turns on Proctor, accusing him of being a witch.

• Proctor is arrested.

• Hale, who now sees through the ludicrous nature of the proceedings, denounces the proceedings and storms out.

• Abigail steals all of Parris’ savings and runs away.

• In order to prevent more hangings, Parris and Hale try to convince those convicted of witchcraft to confess and save their lives, as Danforth refuses to stop the executions.

• Elizabeth – who is now pregnant and will therefore not be hanged – is asked to convince Proctor to confess, and he agrees.

• His refusal to incriminate other townsfolk as witches, and then to allow his signed confession to be nailed to the church door for all to see, means that Danforth won’t accept his confession.

• Proctor tears up the confession and walks out to the gallows to die after all; Parris and Hale are horrified, but Elizabeth claims that at least he has his goodness now.
CHARACTERS

As will be explored elsewhere in this Study Guide, Miller based his characters on real figures that featured in the Salem witch-trials of 1692/3. In his note on the historical accuracy of the play, Miller tells us that:

“Dramatic purposes have sometimes required many characters to be fused into one”, and that as “little is known about most of them... they may therefore be taken as creations of [his] own, drawn to the best of [his] ability in conformity with their known behaviour”.

The published text of the play, however, does include brief commentaries on some of the characters’ real-life counterparts, which may help readers, actors and directors to fully imagine the figures with which Miller populates his semi-fictionalised 17th-century Salem.
PROCTOR: How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name! (Act 4)

Proctor is a farmer in his mid 30s who might best be defined by his sense of pride and perhaps his shame.

When he first enters the Parris household in Act 1, Miller suggests that he possesses:

“a quiet confidence and an unexpressed hidden force”.

By the end of the play that force is far from unexpressed: his concern for the reputation of his name, his desire to go on living, his contempt for the
court, and his shame at having committed a deadly sin in having betrayed Elizabeth with Abigail, swirl together and make him a man less “quietly confident” than confused and furious.

This eventual explosion is seeded as early as the first act. The Proctor we know at first is quick-witted and adept at cutting through the hypocrisy which pervades the social structures of Salem, and yet quickly we learn that to some extent he is a hypocrite himself – playing the role of the upstanding virtuous farmer but secretly guilty of lechery.

He is respected and perhaps feared by Salem society – he has a particularly public dislike for Reverend Parris – but privately, his marriage has been difficult since the affair with Abigail. He feels judged by Elizabeth, telling her in Act 2 that he feels as though he:

“cannot speak but [he is] doubted, every moment judged for lies”.

On the whole, Proctor is presented to us as a man who acknowledges and battles with his own shortcomings, but our sympathy for him might be shaken when we consider the moment in Act 1 when – though he claims never to have given Abigail hope to wait for him after the end of their affair – he admits that he “may have looked up” at her window in the night, further fuelling her desire for him.

In the final moments of the play, Proctor decides that he would rather die than give a false confession that tainted his and his family’s name. Hale suggests that “it is pride, it is vanity”, but Elizabeth believes that “he have his goodness now”; there is as much disagreement among characters as among audiences as to whether his actions are selfish and proud or righteous and religious.

**QUESTIONS:**

- Can we view Proctor as a tragic hero? Is “hero” the right word?
- Think about Proctor’s relationship with Abigail. How does your opinion change of him after their conversation alone in Act 1?
• Considering the historical context of the play, how might we see Proctor as an onstage stand-in for Miller himself?
• “Any actor playing John Proctor must decide whether his deadly sin is pride, or lust.” Discuss.
• Is Proctor selfish? Make a chart of his major actions throughout the play and decide how self-motivated they are on a scale of one to ten. Is there any character development?
PROCTOR: There are them that cannot sing, and them that cannot weep – my wife cannot lie. I have paid much to learn it, sir. (Act 3)

Elizabeth is clearly a woman of good renown in Salem. When her name is first raised in court in connection with witchcraft, the accusation is not pursued, and later she is one of the wives in support of whom Giles Corey is able to gather 91 signatures. Like her husband, her problems – at least at the beginning of the play – are not public but personal.

Though she still loves her husband, her virtuosity and honesty make it difficult for her to move on from the revelation of Proctor’s affair with Abigail Williams. In the immediate aftermath, we learn she dismissed Abigail from the house and tainted her name in town, but other than this we see few signs of anger from Elizabeth.
In **Act 2** we see her – as Miller puts it – “suddenly [lose] all confidence in [Proctor]” when he accidentally let slip that he had not seen her that day in a crowd, but had spoken with her alone. One might forgive her anger at this, but her mild nature wins out and she tells her husband that she:

> “never thought [him] but a good man - only somewhat bewildered”.

The only sin we actually see her commit in the play is the lie she tells in court to protect her husband’s name when she will not admit to his affair with Abigail. The cruel irony, of course is that this lie – supposedly the only one she has told in her life and intended to preserve Proctor’s dignity – in fact condemns him.

In the **final scene of the play**, after three months of lonely contemplating, she comes to the conclusion that “it needs a cold wife to prompt lechery” and apologises to Proctor for having pushed him away from her. With this realisation she tells John that she can no longer judge him and encourages him to forgive himself and to make his own decision regarding whether or not to hang. The final line of the play goes to her when she rejects Reverend Hale’s pleas to change her husband’s mind, telling him that

> “he have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him!”

**QUESTIONS:**

- Much of Elizabeth’s resentment of Proctor is expressed not through what she says but what she doesn’t say. Look at some of Miller’s stage directions relating to Elizabeth; how do they help us understand her?
- When Elizabeth apologises to Proctor for the “cold house [she] kept”, is she being too hard on herself?
- Was Elizabeth right to lie to Danforth about Proctor’s adultery? What does this play have to say about “white lies”?
ABIGAIL WILLIAMS

ABIGAIL: And now you bid me tear the light out of my eyes? I will not, I cannot! (Act 2)

Miller introduces Abigail as:

“a strikingly beautiful girl, an orphan, with an endless capacity for dissembling”.

She is the Reverend Parris’ niece and all we hear of her parents is that apparently Abigail:

“saw Indians smash [their] heads on the pillow next to mine”
– though whether this is true, or a tall tale being used to scare the girls into obeying her, we cannot know.

She is in love, or is at least obsessed with, **Proctor**, whom she says:

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“took [her] from [her] sleep and put knowledge in [her] heart”.
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Though on the face of it she appears to be referring to Proctor having taken her virginity, she goes on to say that she

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“never knew what pretence Salem was... never knew the lying lessons I was taught”
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– there is a sense also in which Proctor has opened her eyes to the hypocrisy and corruption that lies beneath the surface of Salem society. We might see these awakenings, both sexual and social, as governing and guiding Abigail's actions throughout the play; she is driven by her obsession with Proctor and resentment of his hasty dismissal of her and is able to manipulate those around her and whip up such mass hysteria as a result of the social frameworks Proctor has made apparent to her.

In contrast to the position of powerlessness Abigail finds herself in after her dismissal from the Proctors – dependent on her uncle to keep a roof over her head and slandered in town by **Elizabeth** – the courtroom provides a context in which Abigail is in absolute control. A mere accusation from her is enough to send innocent men and women to their deaths; her sin of adultery is nothing in comparison to the charges of witchcraft she and her friends are able to inflict on the townspeople.

By the **final act**, unseen by us, Abigail has run away from Parris' home with **Mercy Lewis**, having stolen all 31 pounds from her uncle's strongbox. He believes her to be aboard a ship, and Miller comments in his postscript to the text that the real-life Abigail was rumoured to have “turn up later as a prostitute in Boston”.
QUESTIONS:

• Is Abigail the villain of the play?
• How do Abigail’s actions conform or rebel against the patriarchal society of Salem?
• Do Proctor’s actions toward Abigail excuse her behaviour throughout the play?
• Abigail is a master manipulator. Find each of the times she claims to be being bewitched; what is her reason for doing so at each specific moment?
REVEREND JOHN HALE

HALE: I may shut my conscience to it no more - private vengeance is working through this testimony! (Act 3)

When Reverend Hale arrives at the Parris household from the neighbouring parish of Beverly, one could hardly imagine him saying the line above. At first, he is a self-assured intellectual who is proud to conduct God’s work in the hunting out of witches; having “discovered” one in Beverly he is summoned to Salem as an expert and clearly relishes his reputation. At this point in the play he is authoritative and speaks with great confidence – but he is not destined to stay that way for very long.

His transformation over the course of the play is perhaps more significant than that of any other character. In Act 2, when he visits the Proctor household and questions Proctor and Elizabeth about their Christian values, he assures them that townspeople such as Rebecca Nurse will be
safe from arrest, and even advises the Proctors how best to avoid further suspicion:

“God keep you both; let the third child be quickly baptized and go you without fail each Sunday into Sabbath prayer; and keep a solemn, quiet way among you.”

Steadily – particularly in the wake of the arrests of Elizabeth, Rebecca Nurse and Martha Corey – he begins to doubt the very proceedings that his arrival in Salem initiated. By the end of Act 3, having observed the ridiculous nature of the court – and believing Proctor and Mary Warren’s claims that the girls’ testimony has been fraudulent – he denounces the court and storms out.

Finally, in the final act, Hale is a broken man, desperately trying to convince those awaiting the gallows to confess, not because they are guilty but because he takes the blame for every townsperson who hangs; despairing he tells Danforth that “there is blood on [his] head!”

QUESTIONS:

- Hale is almost a different character in each act of the play. How does Miller capture his changing personality through the way he speaks?
- “Proctor may be the main character in The Crucible, but Hale is the most important.” Discuss.
- How does Miller use Hale’s changing view to comment on the role of religion in the play?
DANFORTH: This is the highest court of the supreme government of this province, do you know it? (Act 3)

Danforth is the most senior official in the play, the Deputy-Governor of Massachusetts; meaning he presides over witchcraft trials not only in Salem but throughout the state. His conviction in the law and unswerving belief that God will protect the innocent mean that he has no qualms in sentencing those who will not confess to witchcraft to be hanged, as his logic dictates that they must be guilty. The single-mindedness of his convictions blinds him from seeing through the mass hysteria and finger-pointing around him and allows the proceedings to continue unchallenged.

- Does Danforth’s conviction in God and the law make him a “baddie”?
HATHORNE: Excellency, will you permit me? (Act 3)

Hathorne ranks below Danforth and assists him in the court proceedings. He is quick to jump to accusations of contempt of court, and will not stand for the protestations of Proctor, Francis Nurse and Giles Corey. If anything, he is even less open to challenges than Danforth – even when Salem society is disintegrating in the final act, he refuses to recognise that the hangings may have created any bad feeling in the town.
PARRIS:  There is a faction that is sworn to drive me from my pulpit. (Act 1)

Parris is the Puritan minister of Salem. Throughout the play he is shown to be less concerned about people – even his own daughter – than he is about reputation and material wealth. He worries that rumours of witchcraft having infiltrated his house could lead to a rebellion against him. Proctor calls him out on his avaricious behaviour throughout the play; we learn that he barters over his salary, went against tradition in demanding the deeds for his house when he became reverend, and replaced the pewter candlesticks in church with gaudy golden ones.

In the last act we discover that Abigail has fled from his house with all of his money, as good as proving that she was lying all along. But Parris’ pleas that Proctor and Rebecca Nurse’s executions are postponed turn out once
more to be self-motivated: he worries that the hanging of such respected figures may prompt a violent revolt that could threaten his life.

- Is Parris’ concern for his reputation any different, better or worse than Proctor’s? How?
TITUBA:   Mister Reverend, I do believe somebody else be witchin’ these children. (Act 1)

Interestingly, though we cannot be sure, Tituba is the only character in the play who may genuinely have undertaken magical activities: possibly attempting to communicate with Ann Putnam’s dead babies and creating a charm for Abigail to kill Elizabeth. Racism seems to play a part in her fate, as her ‘Barbados songs’ are mistaken for witching incantations; indeed, when we meet Tituba again briefly in the final act of the play she explains that in her home country, the Devil is not as feared as he is in Massachusetts.

• To what extent is racism a factor in the persecution of Tituba?
BETTY PARRIS

*Betty:* I saw George Jacobs with the Devil! I saw Goody Howe with the Devil! (Act 1)

Betty is the daughter of Reverend Parris, and in some ways the whole plot of *The Crucible* begins with her fainting after her father discovers her and the girls dancing in the woods. The fact that Abigail’s threats rouse her from her “unconscious state” shows us that her sickness is play-acting rather than any genuine illness. At the end of the first act, she joins in Abigail’s accusatory chant of the names of accused witches, setting into motion the tragic events of the play.
MARY: It were only sport in the beginning, sir, but then the whole world cried spirits, spirits, and I – I promise you, Mr Danforth, I only thought I saw them, but I did not. (Act 3)

When we first meet Mary – servant of the Proctors and friend of Abigail’s – she is intent on confessing to the girls’ activities in the forest, but Abigail and Mercy quickly intimidate her into keeping quiet. At first, she plays along as the girls become integral to Danforth’s court for the condemning of witches. In court she makes a poppet for Elizabeth, and later that night, when Elizabeth is arrested, she understands – as Proctor does – that Abigail has used the poppet as a means to frame Elizabeth for witchcraft, and reluctantly agrees to testify to the girls’ fraudulent claims in court.
Once the tables are turned on her and her former friends begin to accuse her of witchcraft, she quickly loses her nerve and falls back in with them, accusing Proctor. Mary is not as single-minded as Abigail, but is clearly susceptible to the hysteria of proceedings, and fearful enough to follow the crowd.

**QUESTIONS:**

- “The greatest sin committed in *The Crucible* is cowardice.” Discuss in relation to the character of Mary Warren.
Susanna is another of Abigail’s friends, and appears in the court scene playing along as the girls accuse Mary Warren of bewitching them and threatening to attack in the form of a bird.
Mercy is the servant of Thomas and Ann Putnam, and Abigail’s closest friend. Together they intimidate Mary Warren into keeping quiet about their activities in the forest, and at the end of the play we learn that Mercy has accompanied Abigail in her escape from Salem.
Corey is a likeable, argumentative, and slightly bumbling old man, whose gravest error is to talk publicly about how confused he is that his wife reads books; these harmless comments lead to her charge of witchcraft. He is well attuned to the social problems in Salem, and takes particular issue with Thomas Putnam, who he essentially accuses of murder in court. For his actions, and for supporting Proctor, he too is arrested and accused – but it is what he does next that makes his fate so unique and remarkable.

Corey refuses to plead either innocent or guilty to the charge of witchcraft, and as such cannot be either hanged or released. This way, he remains a Christian, but is subjected to the torture of “pressing”, whereby heavy stones are placed on his chest until he will plead one way or the other.
Instead, all he says is “more weight”, and dies under the pressure – but is able to leave his land to his sons.

**QUESTIONS:**

- To what extent does Giles Corey function as comic relief in this play?
- How does that affect our reaction to his eventual fate?
THOMAS PUTNAM

COREY: If Jacobs hangs for a witch he forfeit up his property – that’s law! And there is none but Putnam with the coin to buy so great a piece. This man is killing his neighbours for their land! (Act 3)

When Putnam enters the Parris household at the beginning of the play, it is because his daughter Ruth has also been taken strangely ill and is sleepwalking with her eyes open. He is at the forefront of the townspeople keen to explain the children’s behaviour with witchcraft and as the play progresses it becomes apparent why – he used the mechanism of accusation to further his own greedy agenda. It is a result of his dispute with Corey that the old man is sent to prison and pressed.

- How does what we learn about Putnam in Act 3 influence how an actor might choose to portray him in Act 1?
ANN:  *It is a marvel. It is surely a stroke of hell upon you. (Act 1)*

Like her husband, Ann Putnam is also keen to blame witchcraft for the strange occurrences in town and can boast a particularly tragic one of her own – she has buried seven babies who quickly died despite seeming perfectly healthy at birth. She not only believes that witchcraft is to blame but asks her daughter Ruth to enlist the help of Tituba to communicate with the spirits of her dead children. Her hysteria is as unhelpful and dangerous as anybody else’s but given her harrowing circumstances we can perhaps understand why she leapt desperately to such a far-flung conclusion.
REBECCA NURSE

REBECCA: I have eleven children, and I am twenty-six times a grandma, and I have seen them all through their silly seasons, and when it comes on them they will run the Devil bowlegged keeping up with their mischief. (Act 1)

Rebecca is an elderly woman, hugely respected in Salem and known for her devoutly religious nature; in the first act she acts as an arbiter between the arguing men, and even the hot-headed Proctor defers to her calm demeanour. Her arrest on charges of witchcraft is one of the factors in Hale’s increasing scepticism of the court, and when she is due to be hanged, Parris and other court officials worry that her death might be more than Salem could put up with. Even at this stage in the play she is a model of dignity and religious conviction, refusing to confess to witchcraft even though she knows she will be hanged.
QUESTIONS:

• “Rebecca Nurse could not have lived her life more perfectly in the eyes of God. Her crime, like those of so many of the accused in *The Crucible*, is being a woman.” Discuss.
We meet Francis when he arrives in shock at the Proctor home, to tell John that his wife Rebecca has been arrested on charges of witchcraft; he is an elderly man and loving husband who cannot understand how anyone could think his wife a witch. Together with Corey and Proctor he delivers depositions to the court in defence of their wives but comes to believe that he has betrayed his friends in the town when Danforth suggests that the 91 people who signed his deposition will be brought in for questioning.
Cheever is made the clerk of the court when Danforth begins the witch trials, and is entirely taken in by proceedings, showing no regard for the protests of those he has lived alongside his whole life.

**QUESTIONS:**

- Cheever is an ordinary man, taking orders, and not asking questions. How responsible are we as individuals to stand up to orders from our superiors if we believe they are wrong?
Herrick, like Cheever, is a man simply doing his job, though he exhibits more kindness than the clerk. In Act 4 he allows Sarah Good a swig of cider and risks the anger of the Deputy-Governor when in Act 3 he pointedly tells Danforth that he:

“know [Proctor] all [his] life. It is a good man, sir.”
Sarah Good is one of the first to be accused of witchcraft, and when we meet her in Act 4 – a mentally ill homeless woman – it becomes apparent why she was such an easy target. Unlike pillars of society such as Rebecca Nurse or John Proctor, she is in no position to defend against accusations, and will – even before the trials began, perhaps – have been a victim of persecution and social rejection before.

QUESTIONS:

- How do public scandals like the Salem witch trials affect the weakest in society?
- Can you think of any parallels with the world today?
PLOT SUMMARY

ACT 1

In the New England town of Salem, Massachusetts, the minister Reverend Parris is kneeling in prayer at the bedside of his daughter Betty, who is in a coma-like state. When the reverend’s niece Abigail Williams enters, we learn that the night before, Abigail, Betty and a group of girls had gone dancing in the forest with a black slave named Tituba, and that Betty had fainted when the reverend discovered them. With rumours of witchcraft spreading through the town, Parris has sent for Reverend Hale, an expert in the supernatural, to confirm that Betty’s illness is medical rather than magical; although Parris insists that he saw Tituba waving her arms over a fire, and a girl running naked, Abigail claims that the girls were doing nothing other than dancing.

Thomas and Ann Putnam arrive with news that their daughter Ruth also appears to have been bewitched, and Ann admits that she had sent Ruth to Tituba to conjure the spirits of her seven dead babies in an attempt to identify their murderer. More of Betty’s friends come to see how she is. Parris leaves the bedroom to try to calm the crowd that is beginning to gather downstairs, and Betty wakes screaming that Abigail had “drank a charm to kill John Proctor’s wife”; Abigail hits her and warns the girls not to admit to anything. Proctor himself then enters and talks to Abigail alone. We learn that until seven months ago she had worked at Proctor’s home, where they had engaged in an affair which – though secret to the town – was discovered by his wife Elizabeth, leading to Abigail’s dismissal. She still desires Proctor, and admits to him that there was no witchcraft, but he tells her forcefully that their relationship is over.

Betty wakes screaming again, and the crowd below rush upstairs to her room. Their debate over whether or not her illness has been caused by witchcraft quickly devolves into an argument over various social tensions in Salem, mainly between Proctor, Parris, the elderly and quarrelsome Giles Corey, and the wealthy Thomas Putnam. Reverend Hale arrives and studies Betty, before questioning Abigail over the girls’ visit to the forest the night before. As Hale gets more and more suspicious, and his and Parris’ interrogation intensifies, Abigail eventually cries out that Tituba had called the Devil and made the girls join in. After more questioning Tituba confesses, repents, and begins to accuse other townswomen of having
conspired with the Devil; Abigail and Betty join in hysterically chanting the names of those they claim to have seen with the Devil, and the crowd becomes frenzied.

**ACT 2**

A week later, at their home, Proctor arrives home late from seeding the farm, and Elizabeth tells him that a court has been established to try witches; 14 people are already in prison awaiting trial and will be hanged if they do not confess. When Proctor refuses to reveal to the court that Abigail is a fraud, Elizabeth suspects that it is because he still has feelings for the girl, and Proctor angrily reprimands his wife for having been cold and judgmental since the revelation of his adultery. **Mary Warren** – the Proctors’ servant and a friend of Abigail’s – arrives home from the court in Salem with news that Elizabeth has been accused of witchcraft, and that the allegation was only not pursued because Mary attested to her good character.

Mary is sent to bed, and Reverend Hale arrives to question Proctor and Elizabeth on their Christian values but is interrupted by Giles Corey and **Francis Nurse** – another elderly parishioner – who have come to tell John that their wives have been arrested and are closely followed by officers of the court with a warrant to take Elizabeth. The clerk of the court, **Ezekiel Cheever**, notices a poppet with a pin in it which Mary had made for Elizabeth at court that day, but which Cheever takes as proof of witchcraft – the charge against Elizabeth is revealed to have come from Abigail, who claimed to have found a needle stabbed in her stomach. Elizabeth is taken, and Proctor informs Mary that – despite her protests – she will be accompanying him to court the following day to tell the truth about Abigail and the girls’ lies.

**ACT 3**

The next day, at court, Corey and Nurse plead with **Judge Hathorne** and **Deputy-Governor Danforth** for the innocence of their wives, claiming that they have proof that the girls are frauds. Proctor arrives with Mary and tells Danforth that she will confess that the girls are lying, but the judge suspects that Proctor’s motive may be less to free his wife than to undermine the court. Danforth attempts to stop Proctor from proceeding by telling him,
truthfully, that Elizabeth is pregnant and will not face execution, at least until the baby is born, but Proctor persists, and Mary testifies. Depositions are also contributed by Nurse – who has gathered 91 local signatures in support of his, Corey, and Proctor’s wives – and Corey, who claims that Thomas Putnam accused local landowner George Jacobs of witchcraft in order to buy up the land he would forfeit when hanged.

The girls are brought in to answer Mary’s accusations that they are lying but the feeling in court turns against her when she is unable to simulate fainting as she claims to have done in court. All of a sudden, the girls begin to claim that Mary is bewitching them, and a desperate Proctor reveals his affair with Abigail and points to her jealousy of Elizabeth as the motive for her deception. Abigail denies ever having slept with Proctor, and Danforth decides to determine the truth by summoning the unerringly honest Elizabeth and asking her if Proctor is guilty of lechery. Against her natural instinct she lies to preserve Proctor’s honour, and Danforth – despite Hale’s protests that it was an understandable deceit – condemns Proctor as a liar. Abigail and the girls again accuse Mary of bewitching them, and as their hysteria mounts, Mary herself begins to scream and accuses Proctor of being a witch. In a frenzy, Proctor furiously rails against the court, and he and Corey are arrested, as Hale denounces the proceedings and quits the court.

**ACT 4**

Months later, the day arrives when Rebecca Nurse and Proctor are to be hanged, both having resisted confessing to witchcraft. At the jail, Danforth, Hathorne, and Cheever discuss the state of chaos that Salem has fallen into: orphans and livestock roam the streets, and parishioners argue over who has a right to the land of the convicted. Parris enters and explains that Hale has returned to try to encourage Proctor and Rebecca Nurse’s confessions, to save their lives and protect the court from the anger that may follow the hanging of such respected townspeople. Parris also admits that he has been made penniless after Abigail fled Salem, having stolen all of his money.

Danforth convinces Elizabeth to persuade Proctor to confess. Proctor and Elizabeth share a moment alone and she tells him how Corey was pressed to death by stones for refusing to plead either guilty or innocent, thus enabling his sons to still inherit his property. Proctor wants to live, and
agrees to confess, but changes his mind when he learns not only that he must incriminate others, but have his confession made public – pinned to the door of the church. He tears up the confession and, despite the pleas of Hale and the court officials, follows Rebecca Nurse and others to the gallows; the curtain falls as the drumroll that precedes a hanging crashes, offstage.
THEMES

FEAR AND PERSECUTION

Many characters in the play are driven by fear:

• of each other
• of the law
• of God

The fact that Abigail and the girls are able to wake Betty Parris up in the first scene suggests that she is only faking unconsciousness. It seems fair to assume that she does this in order to escape the anger of her father, the reverend, who was angry to have discovered the girls dancing in the woods. Little does she know that her fear of being told off will set into motion a chain of events that lead to the deaths of innocent people.

Her father, the Reverend Parris, is no better. Many of his actions in the play are driven by his own fear of losing his position in Salem:

\[PARRIS:\text{Abigail, do you understand that I have many enemies?} (Act 1)\]

In this way, the theme of fear is very closely linked to that of reputation; in a society where so much importance is placed on the characters’ names being untainted, their fear of dishonour drives them to desperate and deceitful ends.

Characters such as Abigail and Danforth understand how to use fear to their own advantage. Abigail successfully threatens the girls into keeping quiet:

\[ABIGAIL:\text{I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down!} (Act 1)\]

She demonstrates her understanding of how to manipulate peoples’ fears again at the end of Act 1, when she and Betty begin to hysterically chant
the names of those they claim to have seen with the Devil. By creating a fear that witchcraft has infested Salem, she creates an environment which thrives on persecution: hostility towards a certain group of people, in this case those accused of being witches.

Meanwhile, as soon as Danforth establishes the court in Salem, he lets it be known that those who do not confess to witchcraft will be hanged, prompting so many to admit to being witches by the end of the play:

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**ELIZABETH:** There be many confessed... There be a hundred or more, they say. Goody Ballard is one; Isaiah Goodkind is one. There be many. (Act 4)
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In this way we see how fear spreads through Salem over the course of *The Crucible*; what begins as a few girls scared of being told off for playing in the woods ends with people sending their friends and neighbours to their deaths out of fear for their own lives.

**Thomas Putnam** is another character who sees how he might use the hysterical fear in Salem to his advantage. Knowing that all accusations of witchcraft made by the children are believed, he sees the opportunity to seize land from one of his rivals, a plan he is overheard boasting about:

---
**COREY:** The day his daughter cried out on Jacobs, he said she’d given him a fair gift of land. (Act 3)
---

Perhaps the noblest characters in the play are those who are able to overcome their fear: we respect **Giles Corey** because even when he was being tortured, he did not give in and was able to save his farm for his sons. At the very end of the play, **Proctor’s** concern for his reputation overwhelsms his fear of death and – though Hale accuses him of pride and vanity – he is able to go to the gallows and die honestly.
QUESTIONS:

• Can you think of any groups in society that are persecuted today? Might this be because of fear?
• Looking at Danforth and Abigail’s dialogue in particular, identify some of the language techniques Miller employs to make them good at using other people’s fear to their advantage.
RESPECT AND REPUTATION

PARRIS:  I have fought here three long years to bend these stiff-necked people to me, and now, just now when some good respect is rising for me in the parish, you compromise my very character. (Act 1)

By having Parris fret about what Salem thinks of him in Act 1, Miller introduces us very early to the idea that this is a town in which everybody constructs their own identity in order to appear respectable and decent to other people. It is because Abigail and the girls are so good at doing this, while concealing the fraudulent nature of their claims, that they are so readily believed:

ABIGAIL:  My name is good in the village! I will not have it said my name is soiled! (Act 1)

Just because people project an image of respectability, however, does not mean their reputation reflects their true nature: as we learn, Parris is weak willed and easily fooled, and Abigail’s lies are directly responsible for much of the chaos of the play.

The tension between public and private character, between surface respectability and inward sin, is one which is particularly important in the character of Proctor. Though he is quick to call out others on their sin and hypocrisy, he himself keeps secret the fact that he committed adultery and lechery by betraying Elizabeth with Abigail. Early in the play he could have stopped events spiralling out of control by confessing and revealing Abigail’s motive, but fear stops him from doing so:

PROCTOR: I am only wondering how I may prove what she told me, Elizabeth. If the girl’s a saint now, I think it is not easy to prove she’s a fraud, and the town gone so silly. (Act 2)
It is also interesting to consider the court officials’ fear of those with good reputations in town. They worry that while Salem may not have batted an eyelid at the hanging of individuals like Bridget Bishop – who “lived three years with Bishop before she married him” – or Isaac Ward “that drank his family to ruin”, they might have more trouble executing well-established figures such as Proctor or Rebecca Nurse:

\[\text{PARRIS} \quad \text{Let Rebecca stand upon the gibbet and send up some righteous prayer, and I fear she’ll wake a vengeance on you. (Act 4)}\]

We understand, then, that reputation is something which is to be preserved not only for the sake of one’s private morality, but because it makes one’s life more valuable in the eyes of society: as a result of having maintained a spotless reputation, Rebecca Nurse’s life is seen by Parris as being worth more than that of proven sinners such as Bridget Bishop or Isaac Ward.

At the end of the play, when Proctor first agrees to confess to witchcraft, he is resolved to tell a lie in order to save his own life. What he cannot stand, however, is the court’s necessity for that lie to be made public – for his reputation and that of his sons to be wrongly besmirched:

\[\text{PROCTOR: I have confessed myself! Is there no good penitence but it be public? God does not need my name nailed upon the church! (Act 4)}\]

As a result, then, he chooses to die with integrity rather than live in shame and disrepute.

**QUESTIONS:**

- Is it right that the lives of upstanding members of society are “worth” more than people who have sinned?
- When John chooses to die at the end of the play, do you think his actions are motivated by pride and vanity, or integrity?
• Compare Elizabeth and Proctor’s behaviours when they are alone in Act 2 and Act 4 to when they are seen in public elsewhere in the play. How does Miller write this difference?
SECRETS AND DECEIT

Throughout the play, characters are forced to lie to save themselves; that is the bizarre and paradoxical nature of Salem society, and of the witch trials as conducted by Danforth’s court. The lies and secrets which bubble under the surface of the play add to the sense of claustrophobic tension that Miller builds.

Some of the secrets and lies are exposed to us. For example, we learn that Abigail lied to Parris when she told him that the girls were only dancing in the forest, and that Proctor’s affair with Abigail has been kept a secret from most of the town. Other times, we do not know whether characters are telling the truth or not. Here, is Abigail telling the truth or spinning a tall tale to intimidate the other girls?

ABIGAIL  I saw Indians smash my dear parents’ heads on the pillow next to mine. (Act 1)

Similarly, even though we are inclined to believe Corey’s accusation that Thomas Putnam has used the witch trials as a means to gaining more land, it is impossible to know whether Putnam is lying when he denies the allegation as there is not enough proof.

Ironically, of course, in Danforth’s court the only way for those accused of witchcraft to save their lives is to confess to the crime. In doing this, the accused have to conform to what Danforth, Hathorne, and the court have decided is the truth: by confessing, the court will believe they are being honest, even though they will actually be lying. In this way, we see how the witch trials turn morality upside down, when a lie is judged as being the truth.

DANFORTH [reaches out and holds Elizabeth’s face, then]: Look at me! To your own knowledge, has John Proctor ever committed the crime of lechery? [In a crisis of indecision, she cannot speak.] Answer my question! Is your husband a lecher!
**ELIZABETH [faintly]: No, sir. (Act 3)**

Elizabeth’s lie, intended to save her husband’s reputation but instead condemning him, is perhaps one of the most tense and moving in the play. Miller’s stage directions make it clear how much it pains her to tell a lie, but she does it out of a sense of duty to her husband. Telling the truth would have actually been the best thing for her to do, just as at the end of the play the characters that are portrayed as the most heroic – Corey, Rebecca Nurse, and Proctor – are those who refuse to lie to save themselves. Perhaps, then, Miller uses this play to suggest that under no circumstances – even if told to try and save those we love – do lies lead to positive consequences?

**QUESTIONS:**

• Is there ever a good reason to lie in *The Crucible*? Is there ever a good reason to lie in life?

• Find the moments in the play where lies or secrets are exposed. How do these moments act as turning points in the dramatic action of the play?

• “The characters in *The Crucible* lie as much to themselves as they do to other people.” Discuss.
JUSTICE AND RELIGION

In the 17th-century time period of the play, Salem is a theocratic society, which means that the church and the state are one and the same; justice and religion are very much intertwined. This is why the status of the characters’ individual souls becomes a matter of public concern for the town and for the court, and why there is very little room for argument:

_DANFORTH_ A person is either with this court or he must be counted against it. There will be no road between. (Act 3)

The religion being practised is Puritanism, a strict form of Protestantism which governs every aspect of daily life for the characters in the play: as a matter of ritualistic habit they go to church on Sundays and do not work on the Sabbath, trust in the Gospel and regard the word of the clergy as though it were the word of God. This is why characters such as Parris, Hale, Danforth and Hathorne command so much respect; they are seen as agents of the Almighty and to be trusted. These characters, meanwhile, are led to believe that God is using the girls to identify the witches of Salem:

_DANFORTH_ The entire contention of the state in these trials is that the voice of Heaven is speaking through the children. (Act 3)

By lumping religion (which relies on faith) and the law (which relies on evidence) together, the logic by which the townspeople are charged with witchcraft does not always make sense; the court has no actual proof that the heavens are communicating through the girls other than the girls’ behaviours, which eventually transpire to be fraudulent anyway.

Characters such as Proctor – who we might say exists in a kind of moral “grey area” – do not do well in a society where those in power dictate that issues of morality are always black and white. Even the most well-intentioned lie in the play – Elizabeth’s in the interest of protecting her husband from a charge of lechery – backfires as Danforth refuses to see the world into categories other than “right” and “wrong”.

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QUESTIONS:

• Do you think we should have fixed ideas of right and wrong? Support your argument using ideas found in the play. Now, however you answered this question at first, try to argue the other point of view.
• Are there any positive portrayals of religion in the play?
• If you were directing a production of *The Crucible*, would you want the actor playing Danforth to play him as a villainous figure?
THE TITLE

There are two dictionary definitions for the word “crucible”:

- A ceramic or metal container in which metals or other substances may be melted or subjected to very high temperatures.
- A situation or severe trial, in which different elements interact, leading to the creation of something new.

Both of these meanings have relevance to the dramatic action in Miller’s play. The second definition has perhaps the most obvious links, as many characters in the play face “severe trial” – not only those being charged with witchcraft, but also characters such as Hale, who undergoes a crisis of faith as a result of the events in Salem.

It is also important, however, that we consider the first definition. Repeatedly, Miller’s characters find themselves in incredibly stressful situations that test their characters and reveal them for their true selves. Perhaps, for example, when Proctor admits to having slept with Abigail in the tense and charged environment of the court, we might read this as being akin to his character being “melted” in the “very high temperatures” of the circumstances.

If we think of the idea of “melting” as being not so much a process of purification as of destruction, then we might also think of the title as being related to the loosening grip of theocracy over the course of the play; the witch trials ultimately lead to a loss of faith in the almighty power of the court and its officials.

QUESTIONS:

- If you had to come up with another title for the play, what would it be and why?
- Consider the second definition of “crucible” which suggests that it is a severe trial that, in the end, leads “to the creation of something new”. Is anything new created by the end of Miller’s play? What?
When writing *The Crucible*, **Miller** consulted with original transcripts of the **Salem witch-trials**, and much of the language of his play tries to recreate the language of the late 17th century. Often this manifests itself in word orders that may seem strange to the modern ear:

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**ABIGAIL** Uncle, we did dance; let you tell them I confessed it. (Act 1)

**PROCTOR** Be you foolish, Mary Warren? Be you deaf? (Act 2)

**ELIZABETH** Let you go to Ezekiel Cheever. (Act 2)

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There are several reasons why Miller uses such formal, archaic language. On a practical level, it is important to remember that although *The Crucible* is set in the United States, in 1692, Salem would still be a fairly new town, having been established by English settlers only a few decades before; it is conceivable that the characters would still have spoken with English accents. Miller has also written that in the vocabulary, rhythms, and patterns of speech adopted by his characters, he was seeking to replicate the tone of the King James Bible; a decision which makes sense given the centrality of religion to the lives of these characters.

Miller’s use of language, however, establishes a dramatic tone as much as it does a historical one. The formality of the language helps create a kind of tension that would not be possible if the play were written in a more casual and relaxed modern tone; the rigorous patterns of speech used by the characters in *The Crucible* comes to reflect the rigorous forces which govern the way they live their lives.

**QUESTIONS:**

- Turn to a page in the play at random. Translate it into “modern” speech, and then read it aloud. What is the effect of abandoning Miller’s heightened, 17th-century language?
IMAGERY

The first draft of *The Crucible* was written entirely in verse – poetic language arranged with a metrical rhythm, and typically having a rhyme. Deciding that this was too artificial he redrafted it into prose, but much of the poetic language remains. Miller’s play is filled with pictures and images that recur again and again, supporting the themes of the play:

PROCTOR: Make your peace with it! Now Hell and Heaven grapple on our backs, and all our old pretense is ripped away – make your peace! Peace. It is a providence, and no great change; we are only what we always were, but naked now. Aye, naked! And the wind, God's icy wind, will blow! (Act 2)

Miller threads ideas of black and white into the language of his characters, to underline the binary way in which the court works. When Danforth says that people can only be either with the court or against it; the idea that Salem operates on these strict oppositional boundaries has already been well established:

PARRIS: Your name in the town is entirely white, is it not? (Act 1)

ABIGAIL: There be no blush about my name. (Act 1)

DANFORTH: ... Do you keep that black allegiance yet? (Act 3)

Similarly, Miller strives to constantly remind us of the role religion plays in Salem society by working imagery that relates to the Devil, and Hell, into characters’ speech. By repeating these ideas, the play does not allow its audiences and readers to forget that a fear of Hell is a motivating factor in so many of the events that take place throughout the drama:

PARRIS: There are wheels within wheels in this village, and fires within fires. (Act 1)
PROCTOR: A fire, a fire is burning! I hear the boot of Lucifer, I see his filthy face! (Act 3)

PROCTOR: You would not; if tongs of fire were singeing you, you would not! (Act 4)

In fact, fire is not the only element of nature upon which Miller repeatedly draws in *The Crucible*. By tying the dramatic action of the play to images which recall the natural world, he suggests that the issues taking place in Salem are somehow bigger than themselves; the events which take place are not just human, but elemental:

PROCTOR: I will fall like an ocean on that court! (Act 2)

PROCTOR: And the wind, God’s icy wind, will blow. (Act 2)

PROCTOR: Show honour now and show a stony heart. (Act 4)

**QUESTIONS:**

- Find each of the quotes above in your copy of the play. Why does Miller use them in the specific place he does?
- Can you think of any other images/pictures that recur throughout the play?
- Compare the way Proctor speaks in the first act to his monologues in Acts 3 and 4. Do you notice any differences?
- Why do you think this might be?
CONTEXT

When studying a play, there are three different contexts to consider:

• The context of the time when the play was written.
• The context of the time in which the play is set.
• The context in which any given production of the play takes place.

This Study Guide will discuss the first two, but it is always worth thinking about the context in which a play is performed, particularly if you are looking at specific productions or staging one yourself.

SALEM WITCH TRIALS, 1692-3

“This play is not history in the sense in which the word is used by the academic historian.”

– Arthur Miller

Although the events of The Crucible are not entirely true to life, the play is nonetheless heavily inspired by the witch trials that genuinely took place in Salem in 1692-3.

A belief and fear of the supernatural was a part of everyday life in 15th-century England that spread when the colonisation of North America began in 1607. By the end of the century, and the time in which The Crucible is set, it was still widely held that Satan walked the earth, and many believed that ghosts, demons, and, of course, witches, were very real and dangerous threats. In fact, though the Salem witch trials were particularly bloody, 12 people were executed for practising witchcraft in New England between 1647 and 1692. We can see then that although the 20 who died in Salem nearly doubled this body count in one year, the trials were part of a long-established tradition of rooting out supposed supernatural enemies.

Salem was known at the time for its argumentative population; historical records tell us that many of the village and town’s inhabitants were parties
in disputes over land, property, farming rights, and church privileges. We also know that the first three women accused of witchcraft in Miller’s play were also the first three women to be so accused in reality: the black or Indian slave Tituba, the homeless beggar Sarah Good and the remarried Sarah Osborne, who was by all accounts rarely seen at church. When Abigail Williams and Betty Parris – who in reality were 11 and nine years old, respectively – began to act strangely, the fact that Tituba, Good and Osborne were the women at whom fingers were pointed may be a coincidence. It may also be that their anti-Puritan lives grated with the many strictly religious figures in Salem, and the witch trials provided a convenient way to purge them from society – it is hard to know.

The main hearings on which Miller’s play is based took place between June and September of 1692; in this period more than 30 people were indicted, and most of them executed. It was during this period that the real-life Giles Corey did in fact refuse to plead either guilty or innocent to his charges and was pressed to death.

In 1693, a new trial was less successful, when the witch-hunt appeared to lose the support of the Governor of Massachusetts, William Phipps, who pardoned the three women found guilty of witchcraft, saving their lives. In the wake of this pardon, fewer and fewer accused witches were brought before the court, and those that were, were found not to be guilty. By the end of May 1693, the bloody episode was finally concluded.

It took almost 20 years for the town to fully accept the extent to which the justice system had so devastatingly failed so many innocent people. Calls for the judgements against the convicted to be reconsidered began in earnest in 1700, and even former accusers such as Ann Putnam publicly apologised for their actions and claimed that Satan had deluded her into accusing innocent people. In October 1711, the General Court issued a reversal of judgement for 22 of the convicted, and finally in March 1712, the excommunications of Rebecca Nurse and Giles Corey were overturned by members of the Salem church.

In his *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases* (1914), author George Lincoln Burr writes:
“More than once it has been said, too, that the Salem witchcraft was the rock on which the theocracy shattered.”

– Burr, pp. 197

Here, Burr acknowledges – as Miller later did in writing *The Crucible* – how the events hold a particularly important place in the history of the United States. From the early 18th century onwards, the Salem witch trials are regarded as having exposed the deadly danger of ignoring objective evidence in favour of conflating religion and the law.

**QUESTIONS:**

- In what ways has Miller changed or shaped the real-life narrative of the Salem witch trials? Why do you think this might be?
- Think of other plays, books, or films with historical settings. What is the impact on modern audiences/readers of setting a work of art in the past?
- “History has a way of repeating itself.” Discuss with reference to the Salem witch trials of 1692-3.
1950s MCCARTHYISM

“One of a handful of great plays that will both survive the 20th century and bear witness to it.”

– John Peter, The Sunday Times

Today, the term “McCarthyism” is used to broadly refer to the practice of making unsubstantiated claims against someone for charges of treason or subversive behaviour, but for Arthur Miller, writing *The Crucible* in the early 1950s, it would have had a very specific meaning. Republican senator Joseph McCarthy was an American politician who has gone down in history for having publicly fuelled fears of widespread Communist subversion during a period known as the Cold War.

During this time, tensions were high between the United States and the Soviet Union. The United States operated, and still does today, on the basis of an economic system called capitalism. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union – a huge state made up of multiple Eastern European republics and Russia – was governed by the Communist party. The two superpowers held radically different views about how countries should be run, and each feared the other; many were worried that nuclear war might break out between them.

After serving three reasonably unremarkable years in the Senate, McCarthy catapulted himself to international fame when he gave a speech in February 1950 in which he claimed to possess a list of names of “members of the Communist party and members of a spy ring” working in US government. It is clear now that McCarthy possessed no such list, but that didn’t stop public panic. Before long, various government institutions were being tasked with the identification of Communists with a view to removing them from positions of influence – if the link between Miller’s play and these events is not yet clear, perhaps it helps to learn that many at the time referred to this frenzy of persecution as a “Communist witch hunt”.
One of the institutions responsible for finding and questioning supposed Communists was the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Many private citizens were called to testify to this committee on the basis of their influence on public life, which meant that writers, actors, directors and other individuals working in the creative industries were under scrutiny. Miller’s friends were among those brought before the committee, and some of them named one another as members of the Communist Party; an accusation which mostly led to being blacklisted from Hollywood, fined or even imprisoned. As coincidence would have it, it was around this time that Miller read Marion Lena Starkey’s book, *The Devil in Massachusetts* (1949), which concerned itself with the 1692 witch trials in Salem and contained verbatim transcriptions of documents from the time. Slowly, Miller began to realise how powerful the connection between the events of the 17th century and his own time might be:

“Gradually, over weeks, a living connection between myself and Salem, and between Salem and Washington, was made in my mind… The main point of the [anti-Communist] hearings, precisely as in seventeenth-century Salem, was that the accused make public confession, damn his confederates as well as his Devil master, and guarantee his sterling new allegiance by breaking disgusting old vows – whereupon he was let loose to rejoin the society of extremely decent people.” – Arthur Miller

Although not before *The Crucible* was written and first performed, Miller himself was called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, in 1956, where he refused to testify, saying “*I could not use the name of another person and bring trouble to him*”. For his integrity, Miller was found guilty of contempt of Congress, sentenced either to 30 days in prison or a $500 fine, blacklisted, and had his passport confiscated.

Senator McCarthy was largely discredited by 1954, and died in 1957, but the House Committee remained active until 1975, and the Cold War – in various shapes and forms – lasted until 1991. It is easy to think of events
that occurred in the 1950s as being long gone, but the repercussions can still be felt today.

QUESTIONS:

• Although on the surface a historical play, the first audiences of *The Crucible* would have recognised that it was also Miller’s way of writing about the Communist witch-hunt. What modern events might the topic of the play resonate with today?

• “If 1690s Salem is a stand-in for 1950s Washington, then John Proctor is a stand-in for Arthur Miller.” Discuss.

• Why might Miller have chosen to deal with McCarthyism by writing about the witch trials rather than simply writing a play about McCarthyism?
Arthur Miller was born on 17 October, 1915, into an Austrian-Jewish family in Harlem, New York City. His father Isadore had moved to the United States from Poland, his mother Augusta, born in New York, was the daughter of Austrian immigrants. The family lived comfortably on the profits of a clothing store Isadore established on his arrival to the US, but when the Wall Street Crash hit in 1929 the business failed, and the Miller family moved to Brooklyn – the New York borough that would later provide the setting for Miller’s play *A View from the Bridge*.

Miller worked in an auto-parts warehouse to raise money to attend the University of Michigan, where he successfully applied to study only on his third attempt. He began study there in 1934, and over the next four years would work as a journalist on the student newspaper and begin to win awards for his very first plays. After graduating in 1938 he turned down the chance to work as a Hollywood screenwriter with 20th Century Fox in favour of writing plays as part of the government-funded Federal Theater Project – a decision which rebounded when the government closed the project down in 1939 fearing the risk of Communist infiltration.

In 1940, Miller married for the first time – to his college sweetheart Mary Grace Slattery. Unable to find producers for his plays, Mary supported the couple financially through her work as a waitress and editor, until in 1941 – as the US mobilised to fight in WWII – Miller returned to work in Brooklyn, this time in a shipyard. He worked in the night in order to remain focused on writing during the daytime, and around this time found some success writing radio dramas, which were produced on CBS.
After a frustrating and unfulfilling experience working as a Hollywood screenwriter in 1943, Miller eventually had his first Broadway opening a year later, with *The Man Who Had All the Luck*. Despite winning the Theater Guild National Award, the production bombed at the box office and closed after only four performances, prompting Miller to consider quitting writing altogether. That same year, Mary gave birth to the couple’s first child, a daughter named Jane.

Over the course of the next few years, any chance of Miller quitting writing was firmly forgotten. His 1947 play *All My Sons* won him his first Tony Award and established his reputation as a writer; a reputation further cemented in 1949 by the unprecedented critical success of *Death of a Salesman*, the first play to win all three major American theatre awards: the Tony Award for Best Author, New York Drama Circle Critics’ Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

*The Crucible* – now Miller’s most frequently produced work – premiered to modest success in 1953 at a time when the playwright and many of his friends were caught up in the Communist witch-hunt spearheaded by Senator Joseph McCarthy. Miller himself appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1956 as a suspected Communist and was found guilty of contempt of court for refusing to name other alleged Communists; a conviction that took two years to be overturned. During these two years, Miller wrote another of his most famous plays, *A View from the Bridge*, divorced his first wife, and promptly married actress Marilyn Monroe, catapulting him to celebrity status.

After writing a film – *The Misfits* – for Monroe in 1961, the couple divorced, and Miller married a final time, to photographer Inge Morath. Miller wrote three plays over the course of the 1960s, the last of which – *The Price* – was to be his last major Broadway success. At the same time, his experience at the hands of HUAC led to his becoming an outspoken advocate for free press, and against the censorship and oppression of writers – he became the president of international literary organisation PEN in 1965.

Over the course of the rest of his career Miller wrote many more stage works, screenplays and even short stories, though his ongoing reputation
as one of the greatest dramatists of the 20th century continues to rest on those plays written in the 1940s and 1950s. He died of heart failure, aged 89, on February 10 2005 – the 56th anniversary of the Broadway debut of *Death of a Salesman* – at his home in Connecticut.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affidavit</td>
<td>A written statement, made under oath.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anarchy</td>
<td>A state of lawlessness and disorder.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arbitrate</td>
<td>To act as an impartial judge in order to settle disputes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autocracy</td>
<td>A form of government that grants absolute power to one person; a dictatorship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bewildered</td>
<td>In the context of <em>The Crucible</em>, this word often means “bewitched” or “acting unnaturally”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calumny</td>
<td>An untrue statement made with malicious intent to damage somebody’s reputation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contemptuous</td>
<td>Full of scorn or disdain; used in <em>The Crucible</em> to describe Giles’ attempt to disrupt court.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covenant</td>
<td>A binding, religious promise to do – or indeed not do – a specified thing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Defamation</td>
<td>The damaging of another person’s reputation through false accusations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deposition</td>
<td>Witness testimony.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Excommunication</td>
<td>Exile from the church community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibbet</td>
<td>A structure from which the bodies of those already executed were re-hung for public viewing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goody</td>
<td>An archaic word used to refer to a woman, particularly an elderly woman or housewife.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harlot</td>
<td>A sexually immoral woman who exhibits promiscuous behaviours.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heathen</td>
<td>An uncivilised or irreligious person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inculcate</td>
<td>To impress upon the mind by repetition and persistence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ipso Facto</td>
<td>Latin for “by the fact itself”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Junctures</td>
<td>Points in time.</td>
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<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lechery</td>
<td>The overindulgence of sexual desires; used in <em>The Crucible</em> to refer to Proctor and Abigail’s affair.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parochial</td>
<td>Of or relating to parishes; used in <em>The Crucible</em> to refer to the narrow-mindedness of Salem.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perjury</td>
<td>The telling of a lie while under lawful oath.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pontius Pilate</td>
<td>The governor of Judea who presided over the interrogation of Jesus in the Bible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poppet</td>
<td>An archaic word used to refer to a doll.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theocracy</td>
<td>A government that claims to rule with divine authority; the conflation of church and state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trepidation</td>
<td>Anxiety; nervousness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Truck</td>
<td>In the context of <em>The Crucible</em>, meaning “to have dealings with”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Evening Standard – 04/07/2014

This revival of Arthur Miller’s great play, by South African director Yaël Farber, is astonishing.

The production has a bold simplicity yet grips like the most complex thriller.

Miller’s vision of the Salem witch trials, which convulsed colonial Massachusetts in the early 1690s, was intended to draw attention to the political repression that scarred America in the 1950s. But it could just as soon be interpreted as a picture of the way modern religious fundamentalism can strangle reason, tolerance and individuality.

Farber makes the play feel urgent and immediate — and does so by refusing to hurry. The action’s wilful slowness is often exhilarating, and the performances pulse with bruising physicality.
The current in-the-round configuration of The Old Vic brings the audience excitingly close to the action as the witch-hunters prosecute the innocent villagers. It also creates the impression that we are in a crucible in which the characters are being boiled down to their essence.

Richard Hammarton’s foreboding sound score, with its electronic growls and rumbles, ratchets up the tension like a horror movie.

There is nothing flashy about the staging, which has a stark simplicity. The director creates a feeling of night about the piece helped by Tim Lutkin’s shadowy lighting, conjuring the dread of a bad dream from which you can’t awake.

One of the strongest features of the production is the performances of the teenage girls who make the lurid allegations of witchcraft. They often speak in creepy unison, and screech and howl, shaking their long hair and writhing on the floor. There is an authentic edge of collective hysteria about them.
Yaël Farber’s revival of Miller’s witch-hunt classic feels conjured, rather than directed.

It’s as if all Farber and her powerful cast have had to do is hold a touchpaper to Miller’s ever-apposite portrayal of rampant political paranoia and let it rage like a forest fire. By the time it’s burnt to its bitter end, the audience can smell the falling ashes. Miller wrote his drama – both a warning and a lament – during the Cold War suspicions and McCarthyite purges of 1950s America, but set it in 17th-century Salem.