

INTRODUCTION

In 1692 nineteen men and women and two dogs were convicted and hanged for witchcraft in a small village in eastern Massachusetts. By the standards of our own time, if not of that, it was a minor event, a spasm of judicial violence that was concluded within a matter of months. The bodies were buried in shallow graves or not at all, as a further indication that the convicted had not only forfeited participation in the community of man in this life, but in the community of saints in the next. Just how shallow those graves were, however, is evident from the fact that the people buried there were not eradicated from history: their names remain with us to this day, not least because of Arthur Miller, for whom past events and present realities have always been pressed together by a moral logic. In his hands the ghosts of those who died have proved real enough even if the witches they were presumed to be were little more than fantasies conjured by a mixture of fear, ambition, frustration, jealousy, and perverted pride.

In 1957 the Massachusetts General Court passed a resolution stating that "No disgrace or cause for distress" attached itself to the descendants of those indicted, tried, and sentenced. Declaring the proceedings to be "the result of popular hysterical fear of the Devil," the resolution noted that "more civilized laws" had superseded those under which the accused had been tried. It did not, however, include by name all those who had suffered, and it was not until 1992 that the omissions were rectified in a further resolution of the court. It had taken exactly three hundred years for the state to acknowledge its responsibility for all those who died.

This was the long-delayed end of a story whose beginnings lay in the woods that surrounded the village of Salem when, in 1692, a number of young girls were discovered, with a West Indian slave called Tituba, dancing and playing at conjuring. To deflect punishment from themselves they accused others, and

those who listened, themselves insecure in their authority, acquiesced, partly because it served their interests to do so and partly because they inhabited a world in which witchcraft formed a part of their cosmology. Their universe was absolute, lacking in ambivalence. There was only one text to consult, and that text reserved only one fate for witches.

Why should it have taken so long to acknowledge error? More significantly, why offer apology at all for an event so long in the past? Perhaps because the needs of justice and the necessity for sustaining the authority of the court have not always been coincident and because there will always be those who defend the latter, believing that by doing so they sustain the possibility of the former. Perhaps because there are those who believe that authority is all of a piece and that to challenge it anywhere is to threaten it everywhere.

It was not the first such apology. In 1711 the governor of Massachusetts, acting on behalf of the general court of the province, set his hand to a reversal of attainder that offered restitution for this miscarriage of justice. In particular he granted one hundred and fifty pounds damages to John and Elizabeth Proctor. Elizabeth had survived, by virtue of the child she carried. Her husband was not so lucky; he was executed on August 19, 1692. His accusers were young girls, barely on the verge of puberty. Perversely, damages were paid not only to the victims but also to such people as William Good, who was his wife's accuser, and Abigail Hobbs, a "confessed witch" who became a hostile witness. The affair, it seemed, was to be treated as a general calamity from which all suffered and in which the state was essentially innocent. Indeed the incident was ascribed to "The Influence and Energy of the Evil Spirits so great at that time," a time that, despite the declared purpose of the document, was described as being "Infested with a horrible Witchcraft."

Arthur Miller first encountered the story of Salem and its witches while a student at the University of Michigan. It stayed in his mind, but only as one of those mysterious incidents from a past separated from us by more than time: "It never occurred to me that I would ever deal with it . . . because I had never formulated an aesthetic idea of this tragedy." Then, in 1949, he

came upon a new book about the trials, by Marion Starkey, called *The Devil in Massachusetts*.

Not the least fascinating aspect of the book lay in the fact that the author recognized the dramatic potential of the events. Claiming to have tried to "uncover the classic dramatic form of the story itself" Starkey insisted that "here is real Greek tragedy," with "a beginning, a middle and an end." Interestingly, in the notebook Arthur Miller started at this time, he noted that "It must be 'tragic'" and, when *The Crucible* opened in New York, in 1953, he remarked, "Salem is one of the few dramas in history with a beginning, a middle and an end."

Starkey recognized, too, a truth that has always lain at the center of Miller's own approach to theater and the public world it shadows:

The human reality of what happens to millions is only for God to grasp; but what happens to individuals is another matter and within the range of mortal understanding. The Salem story has the virtue of being a highly individualized affair. Witches in the abstract were not hanged in Salem; but one by one were brought to the gallows such diverse personalities as a decent grandmother grown too hard of hearing to understand a crucial question from the jurors, a rakish, pipe-smoking female tramp, a plain farmer who thought only to save his wife from molestation, a lame old man whose toothless gums did not deny expression to a very salty vocabulary. . . . And after you have studied their lives faithfully, a remarkable thing happens; you discover that if you really know the few, you are on your way to understanding the millions. By grasping the local, the parochial even, it is possible to make a beginning at understanding the universal.

Starkey also acknowledged the wider implications of Salem, implications Miller would choose to amplify. For the witch hunt was scarcely a product only of the distant past. "It has been revived," Starkey insisted, "on a colossal scale by replacing the medieval idea of malefic witchcraft by a pseudo-scientific concept like 'race,' 'nationality' and by substituting for theological dissension a whole complex of warring ideologies. Accordingly

the story of 1692 is of far more than antiquarian interest; it is an allegory of our times."

It was as an allegory of our times that Miller seized upon it, and though it was to be the McCarthyite witch-hunts of the House Un-American Activities Committee that seemed to offer the most direct parallel, he, like Starkey, recognized other parallels, in a war then only four years behind them, for the Nazis, too, had their demons and deployed a systematic pseudo-science to identify those they regarded as tainted and impure.

But for the moment it was the domestic danger that commanded Miller's imagination. It was "the maturation of the hysteria at the time which pulled the trigger; without the latter I'd never have launched." As he remarked at the time, to his friend and colleague Elia Kazan, director of *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*, the Salem trials offered a persuasive parallel: "It's all here . . . every scene." And certainly Miller's own account suggests that what had once struck him as an impenetrable mystery had now begun to make psychological and social sense. As he has explained in his autobiography,

At first I rejected the idea of a play on the subject. . . . But gradually, over weeks, a living connection between myself and Salem, and between Salem and Washington, was made in my mind—for whatever else they might be, I saw that the hearings in Washington were profoundly and even avowedly ritualistic. . . . The main point of the 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. In other words, the same spiritual nugget lay folded within both procedures—an act of contrition done not in solemn privacy but out in the public air.

Molly Kazan objected, feeling that the parallel was a false one, since witches manifestly did not exist, but Communists did. It was an objection later echoed by others, but not one accepted by Miller. For, as he has pointed out, not only was Tituba in all probability practicing voodoo on that night in 1692, but witch-

craft was accepted as a fact by virtually every secular and religious authority. To that end he quotes the eighteenth-century British jurist Sir William Blackstone as insisting that it "is a truth to which every nation in the world hath in its turn borne testimony," and John Wesley, founder of Methodism, as stating, "The giving up of witchcraft is, in effect, giving up the Bible." Indeed, by the end of the seventeenth century an estimated two hundred thousand people worldwide had been executed as witches. The question is not the reality of witches but the power of authority to define the nature of the real, and the desire, on the part of individuals and the state, to identify those whose purging will relieve a sense of anxiety and guilt. What lay behind the procedures of both witch trial and political hearing was a familiar American need to assert a recoverable innocence even if the only guarantee of such innocence lay in the displacement of guilt onto others. To sustain the integrity of their own names, the accused were invited to offer the names of others, even though to do so would be to make them complicit in procedures they despised and hence to damage their sense of themselves. And here is the root of a theme that connects virtually all of Miller's plays: betrayal, of the self no less than of others.

Nor was the parallel a product of Miller's fanciful imagination. In 1948 Congressman George A. Dondero, in the House debate on the Mundt-Nixon bill, to "protect the United States against Un-American and subversive activities," observed that "the world is dividing into two camps, freedom versus Communism, Christian civilization versus paganism." More directly Judge Irving Kaufman, who presided over the Rosenberg espionage trial in 1951, accused those before him of "diabolical conspiracy" and "denial of God." Interestingly, on the night the Rosenbergs were executed, the cast and audience of *The Crucible* stood in silence as a gesture of respect.

The past had attractions for Miller because a rational analysis and dramatic presentation of the political realities of early-fifties America presented problems. He has said,

The reason I think that I moved in that direction was that it was simply impossible any longer to discuss what was happening to

us in contemporary terms. There had to be some distance, given the phenomena. We were all going slightly crazy trying to be honest and trying to see straight and trying to be safe. Sometimes there are conflicts in these three urges. I had known this story since my college years and I'd never understood why it was so attractive to me. Now it suddenly made sense. It seemed to me that the hysteria in Salem had a certain inner procedure or several which we were duplicating once again, and that perhaps by revealing the nature of that procedure some light could be thrown on what we were doing to ourselves. And that's how that play came to be.

The hostility of the Kazans toward the project came from Elia Kazan's decision to be a cooperative witness before the Committee and thus to identify by name those who, in his judgment, had been members of the Communist party in the 1930s. By a strange irony Miller was returning from Salem, where he had been researching the play, when he heard on his car radio news of Kazan's testimony before the Committee. Kazan had offered names: Harry Elion, John Bonn, Alice Evans, Anne Howe. He was the first of a number of Miller's colleagues and friends to capitulate to the Committee's demands and blandishments. The following month Miller's role model, the radical playwright Clifford Odets, also named names; in June of the following year, six months after *The Crucible* opened, so did Lee J. Cobb, who originated the role of Willy Loman on Broadway. They did so partly out of fear for their careers—uncooperative witnesses would almost inevitably find themselves dismissed from their jobs—and partly because they genuinely felt guilty about the naïveté of their earlier commitments. The Committee thus offered what religion offers: the opportunity for confession and the grace of redemption.

The irony lay not only in the fact that in doing so they replicated the processes of the 1692 trials, where the children cried out against Sarah Good, Bridget Bishop, George Jacobs, Martha Bellows, Alice Barrow, but that in Miller's plays there usually comes a moment when the central character cries out his own name, determined to invest it with meaning and integrity. Al-

most invariably this moment occurs when he is on the point of betraying himself and others. A climactic scene in *The Crucible* comes when John Proctor, on the point of trading his integrity for his life, finally refuses to pay the price, which is to offer the names of others to buy his life. "I like not to spoil their names. . . . I speak my own sins; I cannot judge another. I have no tongue for it." He thus recovers his own name by refusing to name others: ". . . now I do think I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor." Three years later, Miller himself was called before the Committee. His reply, when asked to betray others, was a virtual paraphrase of the one offered by Proctor. He announced, "I am trying to, and I will, protect my sense of myself. I could not use the name of another person and bring trouble on him." Asked to comment on this, thirty years later, he replied, "Well, there's only one thing to say to them. You don't have much choice."

Salem in 1692 was in turmoil. The Royal Charter had been revoked. Original land titles had been canceled and others not yet secured. Neighbor accordingly looked on neighbor with some suspicion, for fear that land might be reassigned. It was also a community riven with schisms, which centered on the person of the Reverend Parris, whose materialism and self-concern were more than many could stomach, including a landowner and innkeeper called John Proctor.

Miller observed in his notebook, "It is Shakespearean. Parties and counter-parties. There must be a counter-party. Proctor and others." John Proctor quickly emerged as the center of the story Miller wished to tell, though not of the trials, where he was one among many. But to Miller, as he wrote in the notebook, "*It has got to be basically Proctor's story.* The important thing—the process whereby a man, feeling guilt for A, sees himself as guilty of B and thus belies himself,—accommodates his credo to believe in what he knows is not true." Before this could become a tragedy for the community it had to be a tragedy for an individual: "A difficulty. This hanging must be 'tragic'—i.e. must [be] result of an opportunity not grasped when it should have been, due to 'flaw.'"

That flaw, as so often in Miller's work, was to be sexual, not least because there seemed a sexual flavor to the language of those who confessed to possession by the devil and who were accused of dancing naked in a community in which both dancing and nakedness were themselves seen as signs of corruption. But that hardly seemed possible when Abigail Williams and John Proctor, who were to become the central characters in Miller's drama, were eleven and sixty, respectively. Accordingly, at Miller's bidding she becomes seventeen and he thirty-five, and so they begin to move toward each other, the gap narrowing until a sexual flame is lit. Elizabeth Proctor, who had managed an inn, now becomes a solitary farmer's wife, cut off from communion not only with her errant husband, who has strayed from her side, but also in some degree from the society of Salem.

Other changes are made. Giles Corey, a cantankerous old man who carelessly damns his wife by commenting on her fondness for books, was killed, pressed to death by stones, on September 19, 1692, a month after Proctor's death. Miller brings that death forward so that it can prove exemplary. By the same token John Hale's growing conversion to skepticism did not come to its climax with Proctor's death, but only later, when his own wife was accused. The event is advanced in order to keep Proctor as the focus. At the same time the playwright resisted an aspect of the story that would have damaged the parallel to fifties America, though it would have struck a chord with people in many other countries who were later to seize on *The Crucible* as an account of their own situation. For the fact is that John Proctor's son was tortured. Proctor wrote in a petition, "My son William Proctor, when he was examin'd, because he would not confess that he was Guilty, when he was Innocent, they tied him Neck and Heels till the Blood gushed out of his Nose." The effect on the play of including this detail would have been to transform Proctor's motivation and diminish the significance of the sexual guilt that disables him.

Historically, John Proctor did not immediately intervene on learning of the trials and does not do so in the play. The historical account offers no explanation. In the notebooks Miller searched for one: "Proctor—guilt stays his hand (against what

action?)." The guilt derives from his adultery; the action becomes his decision to expose Abigail.

In his original plan Miller toyed with making Proctor a leader of the anti-Parris faction, who backtracks on that role and equivocates in his dealings with Hale. He toyed, too, with the notion that Proctor should half wish his wife dead. He abandoned both ideas. If Proctor emerges as a leader, it is inadvertently as he fights to defend the wife he has wronged and whose life he has placed in jeopardy because of his affair with Abigail.

What is at stake in *The Crucible* is the survival of Salem—which is to say, the survival of a sense of community. On a literal level the village ceased to operate. The trials took precedence over all other activities. They took the farmer from his field and his wife from the milk shed. In the screenplay for the film version Miller has the camera observe the depredations of the countryside: unharvested crops, untended animals, houses in disrepair. But, more fundamentally than this, Miller is concerned with the breaking of the social contract that binds a community together, as love and mutual respect bind individuals. What took him to Salem was not, finally, an obsession with McCarthyism nor even a concern with a bizarre and, at the time, obscure historical incident, but a fascination with "the most common experience of humanity, the shifts of interest that turned loving husbands and wives into stony enemies, loving parents into indifferent supervisors or even exploiters of their children . . . what they called the breaking of charity with one another." There was evidence for all of these in seventeenth-century Salem but, as Miller implies, the breaking of charity was scarcely restricted to a small New England settlement in a time distant from our own. For him the parallel between Salem in 1692 and America in 1953 was clear:

People were being torn apart, their loyalty to one another crushed and . . . common human decency was going down the drain. It's indescribable, really, because you'd get the feeling that nothing was going to be sacred anymore. The situations were so exact it was quite amazing. The ritual was the same. What they were demanding of Proctor was that he expose this conspiracy of witches

whose aim was to bring down the rule of the Church, of Christianity. If he gave them a couple of names he could go home. And if he didn't he was going to hang for it. It was quite the same excepting we weren't hanged, but the ritual was exactly the same. You told them anyone you knew had been a left-winger or a Communist and you went home. But I wasn't going to do that.

Neither was John Proctor.

One dictionary definition of a crucible is a place of extreme heat, "a severe test." John Proctor and the others summoned before the court in Salem discovered the meaning of that. Yet such tests, less formal, less judicial, less public, are the small change of daily life. Betrayal, denial, rash judgment, self-justification are remote neither in time nor place.

The Crucible, then, is not finally concerned with reanimating history or even merely with implying contemporary analogies for past crimes. It is Arthur Miller's most frequently produced play not, I think, because it addresses affairs of state nor even because it offers us the tragic sight of a man who dies to save his conception of himself and the world, but because audiences understand all too well that the breaking of charity is no less a truth of their own lives than it is an account of historical process.

There is, thus, more than one mystery here. Beyond the question of witchcraft lies the more fundamental question of human nature, for which betrayal seems an ever-present possibility. *The Crucible* reminds us how fragile is our grasp on those shared values that are the foundation of any society. It is a play written not only at a time when America seemed to sanction the abandonment of the normal decencies and legalities of civilized life but in the shadow of a still greater darkness, for Miller has acknowledged that the fact of the Holocaust was in his mind, as it had been in the mind of Marion Starkey.

What replaces the sense of natural community in *The Crucible*, as perhaps in Nazi Germany and, on a different scale, 1950s America, is a sense of participating in a ritual, of conformity to a ruling orthodoxy and hence a hostility to those who threaten it. The purity of one's religious principles is confirmed

by collaborating, at least by proxy, in the punishment of those who reject them. Racial identity is reinforced by eliminating those who might "contaminate" it, as one's Americanness is underscored by identifying those who could be said to be un-American. In the film version of his play, Miller, free now to expand and deepen the social context of the drama, chose to emphasize the illusory sense of community: "The CROWD's urging rises to angry crescendo. HANGMAN pulls a crude lever and the trap drops and the two fall. THE CROWD is delirious with joyful, gratifying unity."

Alexis de Tocqueville identified the pressure toward conformity even in the early years of the Republic. It was a pressure acknowledged equally by Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson, and Thoreau. When Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* abandons his momentary rebellion to return to his conformist society, he is described as being "almost tearful with joy." Miller's alarm, then, is not his alone, nor is his sense of the potentially tyrannical power of shared myths that appear to offer absolution to those who accept them. If his faith in individual conscience as a corrective is also not unique, it is, perhaps, harder to sustain in the second half of a century that has seen collective myths exercising a coercive power, in America and Europe.

Beyond anything else *The Crucible* is a study in power and the mechanisms by which power is sustained, challenged, and lost. Perhaps that is one reason why, as Miller has noted, productions of the play seem to precede and follow revolutions and why what can be seen as a revolt of the young against the old was, on the production of *The Crucible* in Communist China, perceived as a comment on the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, in which the Young Guard humiliated, tortured, and even killed those who had previously been in authority over them: parents, teachers, members of the cultural elite. In the landscape of *The Crucible*, on the one hand stands the church, which provides the defining language within which all social, political, and moral debate is conducted. On the other stand those usually deprived of power—the black slave Tituba and the young children—who suddenly gain access to an authority as absolute as that which had previously subordinated them. Those ignored by history be-

come its motor force. Those socially marginalized move to the very center of social action. Those whose opinions and perceptions carried neither personal nor political weight suddenly acquire an authority so absolute that they come to feel they can challenge even the representatives of the state. As Miller observes, in a note to the unpublished film script, Tituba "has the feel of a power she has never known in her life." To be a young girl in Salem was to have no role but obedience, no function but unquestioning faith, no freedom except a willingness to submit to those with power over her life. Sexuality was proscribed, the imagination distrusted, emotions focused solely on the stirring of the spirit. Rebellion, when it came, was thus likely to take as its target first those with least access to power, then those for whom virtue alone was insufficient protection. Next would come those who were regarded as politically vulnerable and finally those who possessed real power. Predictably it was at this final stage that the conspiracy collapsed, just as Senator McCarthy was to thrive on those who possessed no real purchase on the political system and to lose his credibility when he chose to challenge the U.S. Army. The first three witches named were a slave, a laborer's wife who had become little more than a tramp, and a woman who had absented herself from church and reportedly lived in sin.

The Crucible is a play about the seductive nature of power and that seductiveness is perhaps not unconnected with a confused sexuality. The judges were people who chose not to inquire into their own motives. They submitted to the irrational with a kind of perverse pleasure, a pleasure not entirely drained of sexual content. They dealt, after all, with exposure, with stripping souls bare, with provoking and hearing confessions of an erotic forthrightness that no other occasion or circumstances would permit. They saw young women cry out in a kind of orgasmic ecstasy. They witnessed men and women of position, intelligence, and property rendered into their power by the confessions of those who recalled abuses and assaults, revealed to them only in a religiously and therapeutically charged atmosphere. These were the "recovered memories" of Puritan New England, and the irrational nature of the accusations, their sexual

frisson, the lack of any proof beyond "spectral evidence" (the dreams and visions of the accusers) were a part of their lubricious attraction. When Mary Warren accuses a woman, she says, "I never knew it before . . . and all at once I remembered everything she done to me!" In our own time we are not so remote from this phenomenon as to render it wholly strange. Men and women with no previous memory of assaults, which were apparently barbaric and even demonic, suddenly recall such abuse, more especially when assisted to do so by therapists, social workers, or religionists who offer themselves as experts in the spectral world of suppressed memories. Such abuse, recalled in later life, is impossible to verify, but the accusations alone have sufficed to destroy entire families. To deny reality to such abuse is itself seen as a dangerous perversion, just as to deny witchcraft was seen as diabolic in Puritan New England.

Did the young girls in Salem, then, see no witches? Were they motivated solely by self-concern or, in Abigail's case, a blend of vengeance and desire? *The Crucible* is not concerned to arbitrate. Tituba plainly does dabble in the black arts, while Mrs. Putnam is quite prepared to do so. Abigail seems a more straightforward case. Jealous of Elizabeth Proctor, she sees a way of removing her and marrying John. In Miller's screenplay, however, Abigail has a vision of Elizabeth's spirit visiting her in her bedroom:

INT NIGHT ABIGAIL BEDROOM

She is asleep in bed. She stirs, then suddenly sits up and sees, seated in a nearby chair, a WOMAN with her back to her. ABIGAIL slides out of bed and approaches the woman, comes around to see her face—it is ELIZABETH PROCTOR.

ABIGAIL: Elizabeth? I am with God! In Jesus' name begone back to Hell!

ELIZABETH'S FACE is transformed into that of a HAWK, its beak opening. ABIGAIL steps back in terror.

Whatever her motives, she plainly sees this phantom even though it is conjured not from the devil but from guilt and desire, which in Puritan New England were seen as synonymous. In the screen version Abigail is described as "Certain now that

she's mad." This takes us beyond the portrait we are offered by the play, where she is presented as more clearly calculating, but the essential point is not the nature of her motivation nor even the substantiality or otherwise of witches, but the nature of the real and the manner in which it is determined. Proctor and the others find themselves in court because they deny a reality to which others subscribe and in which, whatever their motives, they in part believe, until, slowly, skepticism begins to infect them with the virus of another reality.

It is the essence of power that it accrues to those with the ability to determine the nature of the real. They authorize the language, the grammar, the vocabulary within which others must live their lives. Miller observed in his notebook, "Very important. To say 'There be no witches' is to invite charge of trying to conceal the conspiracy and to discredit the highest authorities who alone can save the community!" Proctor and his wife try to step outside the authorized text. They will acknowledge only those things of which they have immediate knowledge. "I have wondered if there be witches in the world," observes John Proctor, incautiously, adding, "I have no knowledge of it," as his wife, too, insists: "I cannot believe it." When Proctor asserts his right to freedom of thought and speech—"I may speak my heart, I think"—he is reminded that this had been the sin of the Quakers, and Quakers of course had learned the limits of free speech and faith at the end of a hangman's noose on Boston Common.

There is a court that John and Elizabeth Proctor fear. It is one, moreover, which if it has no power to sentence them to death does nonetheless command their lives. Proctor says to his wife, "I come into a court when I come into this house!" Elizabeth, significantly, replies, "The magistrate sits in your heart that judges you." Court and magistrate are simply synonyms for guilt. The challenge for John Proctor is to transform guilt into conscience and responsibility. Guilt renders him powerless, as it had Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*; individual conscience restores personal integrity and identity, and places him at the center of social action. Miller has remarked of Proctor, "I suppose I had been searching a long time for a tragic hero, and now

I had him; the Salem story was not going to be abandoned. The longer I worked the more certain I felt that improbable as it might seem, there were moments when an individual conscience was all that could keep the world from falling apart."

Despite the suspicions of his judges, though, Proctor does not offer himself as social rebel. If he seeks to overthrow the court, it is apparently for one reason only: to save his wife. But behind that there is another motive: to save not himself but his sense of himself. In common with so many other Miller protagonists, he is forced to ask the meaning of his own life. As Tom Wilkinson, who played the part of Proctor in a National Theatre production, has said, "It is rare for people to be asked the question which puts them squarely in front of themselves." But that is the question asked of John Proctor and that, incidentally, was asked of Miller in writing the play and later in appearing before HUAC.

Miller seems to have written the play in a kind of white heat. The enthusiasm and speed with which he went to Salem underline the urgency with which he regarded the project, as did his later comment, on returning from Salem, that he felt a kind of social responsibility to see it through to production. His achievement was to control and contain that anger without denying it. Linguistically he achieved that by writing the play first in verse. Dramatically he accomplished it by using the structured formality of the court hearings, albeit hearings penetrated by the partly hysterical, partly calculated interventions of the accusing girls.

Much of the achievement of *The Crucible* lies in his creation of a language that makes the seventeenth century both distant and close, which enables his characters to discover within the limiting vocabulary and grammar of faith turned dogma a means to express their own lives. For the British dramatist John Arden, who first encountered the play at a time when his own attempts at historical writing had, in his own words, proved "embarrassingly bad," it "showed me how it could be done." In particular, "It was not just the monosyllabic Anglo-Saxon strength of the words chosen so much as the rhythms that impregnated the speeches," that and "the *sounds* of the seventeenth century, not

tediously imitated, but . . . imaginatively reconstructed to shake hands with the sounds and speech patterns of the twentieth." The language of *The Crucible* is not authentic in the sense of reproducing archaisms or reconstructing a seventeenth-century lexis. It is authentic in that it makes fully believable the words of those who speak out of a different time and place but whose human dilemmas are recognizably our own.

Proctor and his judges were articulate people, even if they were fluent in different languages: he, in that of a common-sense practicality, they in that of a bureaucratic theocracy. He believed what he saw and finally accepted responsibility for his actions. They believed in a shadow world in which visions were substantial and the observable world no more than a delusion. They saw themselves as the agents of an abstract justice and hence freed of personal responsibility. These figures speak to one another across an unbridgeable divide, and that gulf is the flaw that fractures their community. But there is never any sense that those involved in this social and psychological dance of death are rhetoricians, pushing words forward in place of emotions. There may have come a time when the judges ceased defending the faith and began defending themselves, but there is a passion behind their calculation, albeit the passion of those who sacrifice humanity for what they see as an ideal. In that they hardly differ from any other zealot whose hold on the truth depends on a belief that truth must be singular.

The Crucible is both an intense psychological drama and a play of epic proportions. Its cast is larger than that of almost any of Miller's plays until *The American Clock* (1980), because this is a drama about an entire community betrayed by a Dionysian surrender to the irrational; it is also, however, a play about the redemption of an individual and, through the individual, of a society. Some scenes, therefore, people the stage with characters, while others show the individual confronted by little more than his own conscience. That oscillation between the public and the private is a part of the rhythmic pattern of the play.

Miller was not unaware of the danger of offering the public such a play in 1953 and thereby "writing myself into the wilderness politically but personally as well." He knew that his

refusal to name names in 1956 would be to invite charges of being unpatriotic. Indeed, appearing before the House Un-American Activities Committee, he was stung into insisting on his patriotism while defending his right to challenge the direction of American policy and thought: "It is not for me to make easy answers and to come forth before the American people and tell them everything is all right, when I look in their eyes and see them troubled . . . my criticism, such as it has been, is not to be confused with a hatred. I love this country, I think as much as any man, and it is because I see things that I think traduce certainly the values that have been in this country that I speak." The result was much as he had anticipated. *The Crucible* ran for only 197 performances (compared with 742 for *Death of a Salesman*) and was sustained on Broadway only by virtue of the cast's accepting a pay cut. Miller's next play, *A View from the Bridge*, ran for 149 performances, and for the following nine years no new play by Miller appeared on the American stage, though he did write the screenplay for *The Misfits*. He was, meanwhile, cited for contempt of Congress, and received a fine and prison sentence, subsequently quashed on appeal. He later explained, "I was just out of sync with the whole country . . . I simply couldn't find a way into the country anymore. . . . I had a sense that the time had gotten away from me." He found himself increasingly ostracized, but he recognized in that sense of isolation not only a fate he shared with others called before the Committee but one that the French writer Alexis de Tocqueville had identified well over a century earlier when he observed,

In America the majority raises formidable barriers around the liberty of opinion; within those barriers a man may write what he pleases, but woe to him if he goes beyond them. Not that he is in danger of auto-da-fé, but he is exposed to continual obloquy and persecution. . . . Every sort of compensation, even that of celebrity, is refused to him. Before making public his opinions, he thought he had sympathizers; now it seems to him that he has none any more since he has revealed himself to everyone; then those who blame him criticize him loudly and those who think as he does keep quiet and move away without courage. He yields

at length, overcome by the daily effort which he has to make, and subsides into silence, as if he felt remorse for having spoken the truth.

It was a passage that Miller knew and later quoted in recalling the mood of this period. Yet in the end it was clear that if Miller was out of sync it was because he marched to a different drummer, and in time others came to hear the same beat. The House Un-American Activities Committee lost all credibility, the Red Scare passed, and if the accusers did not stand in a church, as Ann Putnam did in 1706, and listen as the minister read out her public apology and confession ("As I was the instrument of accusing Goodwife Nurse and her two sisters, I desire to lie in the dust and be humbled for it . . . I desire to . . . earnestly beg forgiveness of all those unto whom I have given just cause of sorrow and offence, whose relations were taken away and accused"), they quickly lost their power and influence. Nor did Arthur Miller remain silent for long.

Today, compilers of program notes feel as great a need to explain the history of Senator McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee as they do the events of seventeenth-century Salem. In fact, the play's success now owes little to the political and social context in which it was written. It stands, instead, as a study of the debilitating power of guilt, the seductions of power, the flawed nature of the individual and of the society to which the individual owes allegiance. It stands as testimony to the ease with which we betray those very values essential to our survival, but also the courage with which some men and women can challenge what seems to be a ruling orthodoxy.

In Salem, Massachusetts, there was to be a single text, a single language, a single reality. Authority invoked demons from whose grasp it offered to liberate its citizens if they would only surrender their consciences to others and acquiesce in the silencing of those who appeared to threaten order. But *The Crucible* is full of other texts. At great danger to themselves, men and women put their names to depositions, signed testimonials, wrote appeals. There was, it appeared, another language, less ab-

solute, more compassionate. There were those who proposed a reality that differed from the one offered to them by the state, nor would these signatories deny themselves by denying their fellow citizens. There have been many more such since the 1690s, many more, too, since the 1950s, who have done no less. But *The Crucible* is not to be taken as merely a celebration of the resister, of the individual who refuses incorporation, for John Proctor had denied himself and others long before Tituba and a group of young girls ventured into the forest that fringed the village of Salem.

Like so many of Miller's other plays, it is a study of a man who wishes, above all, to believe that he has invested his life with meaning, but cannot do so if he betrays himself through betraying others. It is a study of a society that believes in its unique virtues and seeks to sustain that dream of perfection by denying all possibility of its imperfection. Evil can only be external, for theirs is a city on a hill. John Proctor's flaw is his failure, until the last moment, to distinguish guilt from responsibility; America's is to believe that it is at the same time both guilty and without flaw.

In 1991, at Salem, Arthur Miller unveiled the winning design for a monument to those who had died. It was dedicated the following year by the Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel. Three hundred years had passed. The final act, it seemed, has been concluded. However, not only do accused witches still die, in more than one country in the world, but groundless accusations are still granted credence, hysteria still claims its victims, persecution still masquerades as virtue and prejudice as piety. Nor has the need to resist coercive myths or to assert moral truths passed with such a final act of absolution. The witch-finder is ever vigilant, and who would not rather direct his attention to others than stand, in the heat of the day, and challenge his authority?