

Witch Hunting and the Red Scare



T.H. Matteson: The Trial of George Jacobs (1855)

Undervisningsforløb i 3dz

Efteråret 2009

Kernestof

Shirley Jackson: "The Lottery", 1948

Fra: 50 Tekster v/ Riber Christensen, Gyldendal 1988

Arthur Miller: "The Crucible", Penguin 1953

Uddrag: Akt 1, s. 40 – 50, Akt 2, Akt 4

Arthur Miller: "Are You Now or Were You Ever", 2000

Fra: <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/miller-mccarthyism.html>

Supplerende stof

"The Crucible", 1997 (film)

Introduction to The Crucible

Fra: http://www.netcomuk.co.uk/~media/hrc_Miller.html

Grant Wood: American Gothic, 1930 (billede)

Fra: <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/6565>

Blog: McCarthyism and Witch Hunting

Til forløbet er denne blog udarbejdet: <http://crucible-miller.blogspot.com/>

Den indeholder historisk baggrundsstof, sekundære kilder til analysen af "The Crucible" samt biografisk stof om Arthur Miller.



Examination of a Witch

Source: http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/SAL_IEXA.HTM

Shirley Jackson: The Lottery

Worksheet

1. Digging into the Text

Work in pairs and discuss the questions below:

1. Read the opening paragraph of the story and comment on the atmosphere:

"The morning of June 27th was clear and sunny, with the fresh warmth of a full-summer day; the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green. The people of the village began to gather in the square, between the post office and the bank, around ten o'clock; in some towns there were so many people that the lottery took two days and had to be started on June 26th, but in this village, where there were only about three hundred people, the whole lottery took less than two hours, so it could begin at ten o'clock in the morning and still be through in time to allow the villagers to get home for noon dinner."

2. What is the procedure of the lottery and what arrangements are made before the opening of the game?
3. Usually a lottery is something good. When do you begin to suspect that no one wants to win the lottery – and when does the atmosphere change? List all the clues the text gave you.
4. In what way has the lottery changed over the years?

2. Vocabulary – Who are the villagers?

Find synonyms and antonyms for the following adjectives:

Words	Synonyms	Antonyms
Polite		
Reluctant		
Nervous		
Quiet		
Grave		
Awkward		
Gentle		
Fair		
Regretful		
Willing		
Desperate		

Now consider which of these words describe the villagers. You may also come up with adjectives of your own.

Explain why the villagers have not changed their way of life.

Discuss what reasons the villagers have for having the lottery.

Literary Analysis

1. Comment on the characters Mr. Summers, Mr. Graves, old man Warner and Tessie. What do you make of Old man Warner' saying "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon"? And what does the story imply about traditions and ceremonies?
2. Where do you think "The Lottery" takes place? What purpose do you suppose the writer has in making this setting appear so familiar and ordinary?
3. What do you think that the stones and the black box might symbolize?
4. What do you make of Old man Warner' saying "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon"? And what does the story imply about traditions and ceremonies?
5. What does the story imply about human nature?
6. What are the themes of the story? Consider each of the following interpretations:
 - a. The lottery serves to reinforce the village's hierarchical social order by instilling the villages with an unconscious fear that if they resist this order they might be selected in the next lottery.
 - b. "The Lottery" deals with an all-too-human tendency to seize upon a scapegoat.
 - c. "The Lottery" describes man's victimization by unexamined and unchanging traditions which could easily be changed if their implications were only realized.
 - d. "The Lottery" deals with the topic of mass-hysteria.
 - e. "The Lottery" is a social commentary on how society blindly follows tradition, even if the event is misunderstood or has no current relevance. It's also a comment on scapegoating, or a group using parts of it as ways to release their frustrations - in this case, by stoning.
 - f. "The Lottery" is an allegory of how society and groups tend to act everyday.
 - g. Jackson gives examples of hypocrisy, which runs rampant in today's society. Tessie is perfectly willing to stone one of her neighbors, but when she is the one who is going to be stoned, she says, "It isn't fair, it isn't right".
 - h. "The Lottery" offers at look at the selfish nature of human beings.
 - i. The story of "The Lottery" is a cry or a wake up call to everyone to step forward and stand up for what you believe in.

The Crucible, Act One, pp. 40 – 50

Worksheet I

Getting Started: The First Part of the Movie (40 min)

Communicative Exercise

Work in pairs and retell the first part of "The Crucible" based on the movie and what you have prepared for today. Make sure to include information about:

The opening scene with the gathering in the woods – The conversation between Abigail and John Proctor – The arrival of Hale – Tituba's confession – Abigail's role in the play

Please comment on these photographs, as well:



Vocabulary I

Please define these words:

charities – heathen – to cast a spell – to be afflicted – to conjure – superstition

Vocabulary II: Fill in the missing words.

Noun	Verb	Noun	Adjective
Pretence		Superstition	
	Suspect		Envious
Accusation		Charity	
	Whip		Honest
Temptation		Hysteria	
	Prove		Afflicted
Condemnation		Suspicion	
	Confess		Accused

Background Information: The Puritans

Read the following text about the Puritans and answer the questions:

Who were the Puritans?

What did they believe in?

Why did they cross the Atlantic?

What did they want?

Puritans in New England

In 1608 a group of Puritan separatists, attempting to escape religious persecution, fled England for the Netherlands. They remained there until 1620, but, fearing that they were losing their cultural identity, they decided to settle in Delaware in the New World. A mixed group of Puritan emigrants (the "Pilgrims") and adventurers from England sailed to America on the Mayflower and landed, accidentally, on Cape Cod in November 1620. Within five months half of the original 101 colonists were dead. During the course of the early seventeenth century, however, increasing numbers of immigrants, many but by no means all of them Puritans, managed to establish a group of autonomous North American colonies, including Plymouth (1620), Massachusetts (1628), New Hampshire (1629), Connecticut (1633), Maine (1635), Rhode Island (1636), and New Haven (1638). Like their counterparts in Britain they were extreme Calvinistic Protestants who viewed the Reformation as a victory of true Christianity over Roman Catholicism. They believed that the Universe was God- centered, and that man, inherently sinful and corrupt, rescued from damnation (if indeed he was) only by arbitrary divine grace, was duty-bound to do God's will, which he could understand best by studying the Bible and the universe which God had created and which he controlled.

Their isolation in the New World, their introversion, the harshness and dangers of their new existence, their sense that they were a new Chosen People of God destined to found a New Jerusalem -- a New City of God in the midst of the wilderness -- insured that American Puritanism would remain more severe (and, frequently, more intellectually subtle and rigorous) than that which they had left behind. The American Puritan tended to interpret the Bible, which had supreme literary value because it was the perfect word of God, even more literally than did his British counterparts. Though many of the original American Puritans -- many of whom were both preachers and authors -- had attended English Universities, they tended to form religious oligarchies and sought to establish a purified church -- which meant the frequently harsh imposition of religious uniformity upon an unwilling populace.

It was to escape Puritan religious persecution that Roger Williams, a minister from Salem, established his colony in Rhode Island in 1636. The overt remnants of Puritanism did not die out in New England until well into the nineteenth century, and it echoes in American society today. In coming to the New World in the first place, Puritans altered the course of history, for better or for worse. There were approximately 4,000,000 English- speaking people in the entire world in 1603: less than four centuries later there are over seventy-five times that number.

Source: http://www.curriculumunits.com/crucible/background/frames_puritan_history.htm



Quotations

Look at the following quotations and determine who the speaker is and what the quote is about:

Quote	Speaker	Contents
<p>"It's strange how I knew you, but I suppose you look as such a good soul should. We have all heard of your great charities in Beverly."</p>		
<p>"Mr Hale, I have always wanted to ask a learned man – what signifies the readin' of strange books?"</p>		
<p>"When the Devil comes to you does he ever come – with another person? Perhaps another person in the village? Someone you know?"</p>		
<p>"Let God blame me, not you, not you Rebecca! I'll not have you judging me any more! Is it a natural work to lose seven children before they live a day?"</p>		
<p>"She sends her spirit on me in church; she makes me laugh at prayer!"</p>		
<p>"You are God's instrument put in our hands to discover the Devil's agents among us. You are selected Tituba, you are chosen to help us cleanse our village."</p>		
<p>"I danced for the devil; I saw him; I wrote in his book; I go back to Jesus; I kiss his hand. I saw Sara Good with the Devil."</p>		

The Main Characters

Who are the main characters of the play and what do you know about them – and what is their attitude towards Witchcraft in Salem?

Character	Description	Attitude towards Witchcraft

Abigail and John Proctor

Comment on the relationship between Abigail and Proctor. What has happened in the past – and in what way does their relationship seem to influence the accusations of witchcraft in Salem?

Comment on the following quotation, as well:

"I look for John Proctor that took me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart! I never knew what pretence Salem was, I never knew the lying lessons I was taught by all these Christian women and their covenanted men! And now you bid me tear the light of my eyes? I will not, I cannot" You loved me, John Proctor, and whatever sin it is, you love me yet! (Page 30)

The Crucible: Act II, P. 51 – 61**Worksheet II****John and Elisabeth Proctor, p. 51 - 55**

Find examples in the text that describe their relationship and the problems they have had.

Page reference	Comments

Mary Warren, p. 55 – 61

Written exercise.

Write a brief description of the conversation between Mary and the Proctors. Who is Mary, what has happened, where has she been etc.?

The Crucible – Act II and IV

Worksheet III

The Main Characters

Discuss in pairs the following characters and the questions below. Write a brief description of each character.

JOHN PROCTOR

To what extent is this man a hero? What failings does he have? What strengths does he have? How do his strengths and weaknesses bring him into conflict with other characters (including minor characters)? Has he any eagerness to be a martyr? What forces (internal and external) compel him to become one? How else is this man 'torn internally' or suffer from internal conflicts? Do you admire him? Why?

ELIZABETH PROCTOR

Why don't we sympathise with her when we met her in Act II? How does she win our sympathy as the play develops? What does she come to realise by the end of the play?

HALE

What are your first impressions of Hale? Why do these impressions change as the play progresses? Despite all his decent instincts, why does he come off badly?

PARRIS

Who is he in conflict with in this play? What internal conflicts does he have? What are his main motivations? What does he fear about John Proctor?

ABIGAIL WILLIAMS

What does the incident involving the poppet reveal about her character? Why could she be described as a hard opportunist? Is there any softness in her?

REBECCA NURSE

In what way does she point to the criminal absurdity of the witch hunt? What do you think she symbolises?

Themes

What are the themes of *The Crucible*? Look at the following suggested themes from www.sparknotes.com and discuss their contents.

Intolerance

The Crucible is set in a theocratic society, in which the church and the state are one, and the religion is a strict, austere form of Protestantism known as Puritanism. Because of the theocratic nature of the society, moral laws and state laws are one and the same: sin and the status of an individual's soul are matters of public concern. There is no room for deviation from social norms, since any individual whose private life doesn't conform to the established moral laws represents a threat not only to the public good but also to the rule of God and true religion. In Salem, everything and everyone belongs to either God or the Devil; dissent is not merely unlawful, it is associated with satanic activity. This dichotomy functions as the underlying logic behind the witch trials. As Danforth says in Act III, "a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it." The witch trials are the ultimate expression of intolerance (and hanging witches is the ultimate means of restoring the community's purity); the trials brand all social deviants with the taint of devil-worship and thus necessitate their elimination from the community.

Hysteria

Another critical theme in *The Crucible* is the role that hysteria can play in tearing apart a community. Hysteria supplants logic and enables people to believe that their neighbors, whom they have always considered upstanding people, are committing absurd and unbelievable crimes—communing with the devil, killing babies, and so on. In *The Crucible*, the townsfolk accept and become active in the hysterical climate not only out of genuine religious piety but also because it gives them a chance to express repressed sentiments and to act on long-held grudges. The most obvious case is Abigail, who uses the situation to accuse Elizabeth Proctor of witchcraft and have her sent to jail. But others thrive on the hysteria as well: Reverend Parris strengthens his position within the village, albeit temporarily, by making scapegoats of people like Proctor who question his authority. The wealthy, ambitious Thomas Putnam gains revenge on Francis Nurse by getting Rebecca, Francis's virtuous wife, convicted of the supernatural murders of Ann Putnam's babies. In the end, hysteria can thrive only because people benefit from it. It suspends the rules of daily life and allows the acting out of every dark desire and hateful urge under the cover of righteousness.

Reputation

Reputation is tremendously important in theocratic Salem, where public and private moralities are one and the same. In an environment where reputation plays such an important role, the fear of guilt by association becomes particularly pernicious. Focused on maintaining public reputation, the townsfolk of Salem must fear that the sins of their friends and associates will taint their names. Various characters base their actions on the desire to protect their respective reputations. As the play begins, Parris fears that Abigail's increasingly questionable actions, and the hints of witchcraft surrounding his daughter's coma, will threaten his reputation and force him from the pulpit. Meanwhile, the protagonist, John Proctor, also seeks to keep his good name from being tarnished. Early in the play, he has a chance to put a stop to the girls' accusations, but his desire to preserve his reputation keeps him from testifying against Abigail. At the end of the play, however, Proctor's desire to keep his good name leads him to make the heroic choice not to make a false confession and to go to his death without signing his name to an untrue statement. "I have given you my soul; leave me my name!" he cries to Danforth in Act IV. By refusing to relinquish his name, he redeems himself for his earlier failure and dies with integrity.

Could you think of any other themes?

Compare "The Crucible" with "The Lottery".

Why is the play called *The Crucible*?

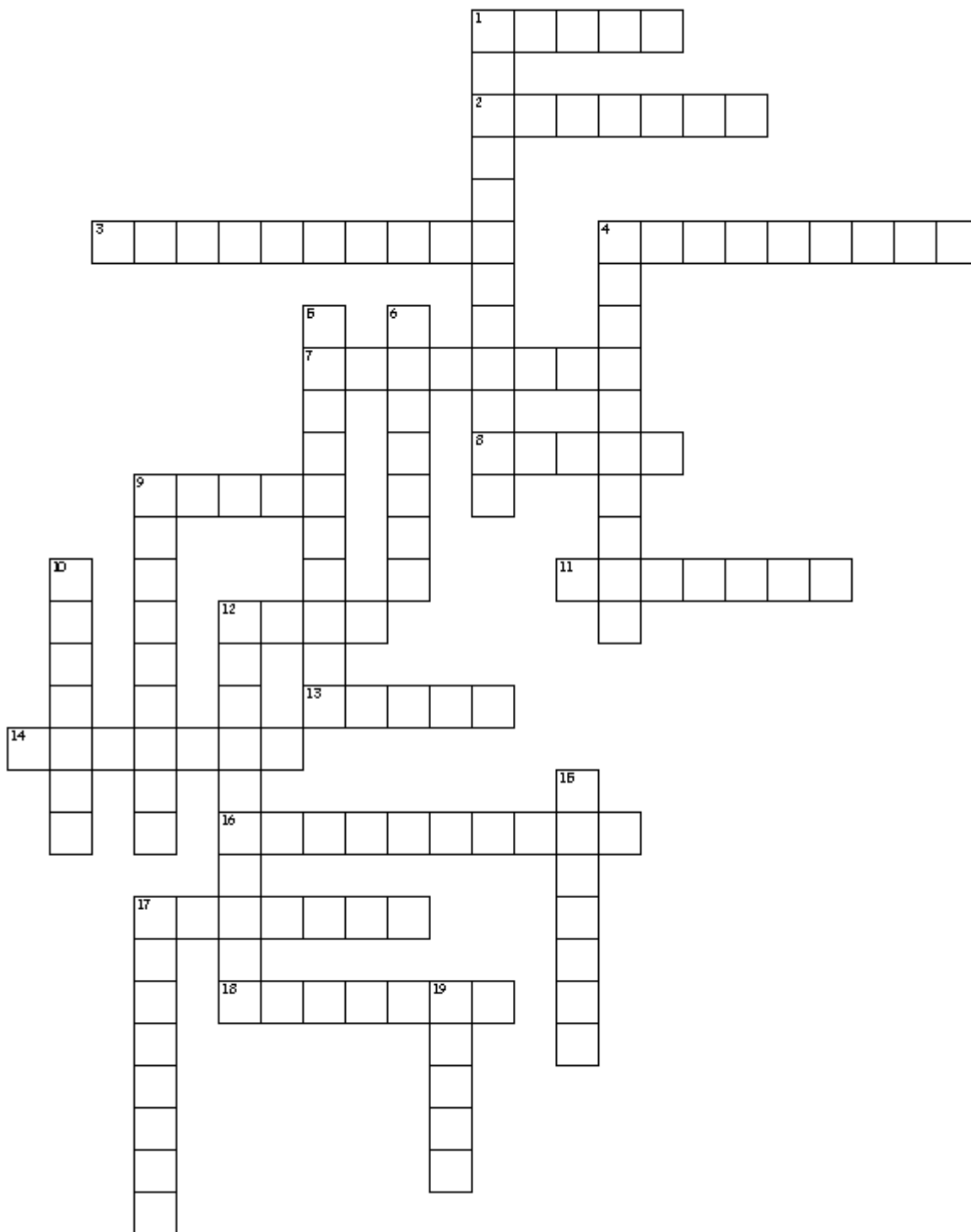
A crucible is a melting pot, a container in which you can melt metal or other substances'.

What does this have to do with the play?

Message

Write a short note (about 200 words) where you explain why Miller has written *The Crucible* – and why it should be read as an allegory.

Arthur Miller: The Crucible



Across

1. forbandelse
2. jordmoder
3. anklage
4. hjemsoegt
7. bevis
8. proces
9. helgen
11. at tilsta
12. at piske
13. lokke

14. at forhekse
16. tilstaelse
17. velgorenhed
18. at vidne

Down

1. (de 10) bud
4. pastand
5. omdomme
6. at afvise
9. mistanke

10. at fordomme
12. heksekunst
15. at hekse, trylle
17. smeltedigel
19. bedrager

An Introduction to "The Crucible"

The action of the play is based on an historical event, the Salem witchcraft trials which took place in Massachusetts in 1692. But the drama has more recent parallels with the anti-Communist witch-hunts of the 1950s carried out by the Un-American activities Commission based in Washington. In a contemporary context, one could even see parallels with the recent media witch-hunts against a number of prominent figures from the worlds of politics, business, sport and show business.

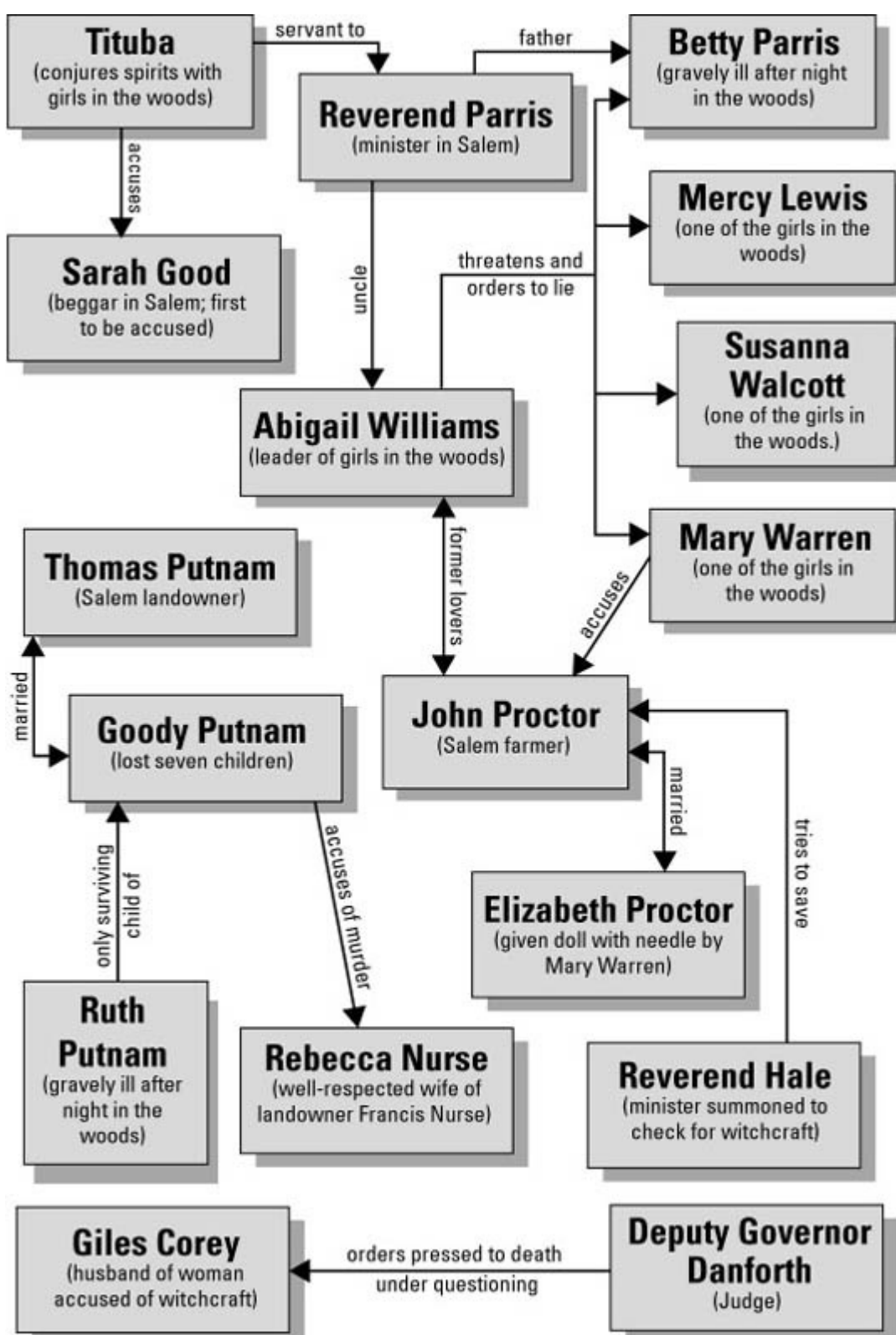
The drama centres around a husband and wife, John and Elizabeth Proctor and a young girl, Abigail, with whom John Proctor has committed adultery. In order to remove Elizabeth from the scene, thereby leaving John free to marry her, Abigail accuses John's wife of witchcraft, a crime still punishable by death in the seventeenth century. The play builds to a tense and moving climax in which both husband and wife come through a series of moral tests in order to atone for what each sees as his/her own sin against the other. Finally John Proctor, having saved his wife from death by publicly confessing to his adultery with Abigail, refuses to sign a document which could save his own life because signing it would require him to lie. He chooses death as his final act of atonement.

Set in the small, tightly knit community of Salem, the play's setting provides an appropriately claustrophobic atmosphere for the events which take place. The world of Salem is enclosed by strict moral and religious codes which inevitably encourage the growth of hypocrisy and the abuse of power. The confined setting of the play effectively reinforces the trapped emotional state of the principal characters.

The two central characters are both very strong but flawed individuals who have to come to terms with their own weaknesses. Each is put to the test as is their marriage which survives despite, or perhaps because of, what each has to suffer. The play charts the growth in self knowledge of both of these characters and explores the nature of their guilt, their pain and, above all, their moral courage, in facing up to the consequences of their actions.

Not only do these central characters exert a fascinating influence over the audience but, so also do the play's powerful themes. Betrayal, guilt, love, compassion, moral integrity, self discovery and fearless courage all feature as thematic strands running through the course of the drama. Despite the play's period setting, these themes appear timeless and universal, equally relevant today as they would have been in past centuries.

The Crucible – Character Map



Miller: "Are You Now Or Were You Ever?"

Worksheet

Why did Arthur Miller write "The Crucible"?

Please go through the following questions and you will find out why.

McCarthyism and the Communist Scare

1. How does Miller describe the period of anti-communism in the USA in the 40s and 50s in the beginning of the article?
2. Explain the following passage: "*The heart of the darkness was the belief that a massive, profoundly organised conspiracy was in place and carried forward mainly by a concealed phalanx of intellectuals, including labour activists, teachers, professionals, sworn to undermine the American government. And it was precisely the invisibility of ideas that was frightening so many people.*" (page 4)
3. Why does he call the communist scare and ideological war?
4. Give at least three examples on how McCarthyism affected people's lives:
 - People in general
 - Intellectuals and academics
 - Miller himself

Salem and the Witch Hunt Trials

1. How does Miller compare the political situation in the USA in the 50s to the Salem witch trials in 1692? (pp. 4-5 + 8)
2. What is spectral evidence? (pp. 5-6)
3. What role did Elia Kazan play in Miller's decision to write "The Crucible"?

"The Lottery" and McCarthyism

1. How did the anti-communist attitude affect the public opinion in America, according to Miller? And how can this be compared to "The Lottery"?



Senator Joseph McCarthy



Marilyn Monroe and Miller

The Crucible – A Summary of the Play

The Crucible is a play written by Arthur Miller in 1953. It is based on the events surrounding the 1692 witch trials of Salem, Massachusetts. Miller wrote about the event as an allegory for McCarthyism and the Red Scare, which occurred in the United States in the 1950s. Miller was himself questioned by the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1956.

Act One begins with the Rev. Samuel Parris praying for his daughter Betty who lies faint in her bed, suffering from a strange malady. Betty and Abigail, Parris's niece, and some of the other village girls had been surprised by Parris in the forest as they were engaged in a voodoo ritual led by Tituba, Parris's black slave. Betty fainted and still had not recovered. Ann and Thomas

Putnam, prosperous villagers, arrive and claim that the children are suffering from "the Devil's touch" at the hands of witches.

When the adults leave to pray with townspeople, who have heard rumors of witchcraft, Abigail and Mercy Lewis and Mary Warren wake Betty. Betty accuses Abigail of "drinking blood" and says that Abigail will be whipped. Abigail threatens the other girls with grievous harm if they admit too much to the elders.

At this point, John Proctor, a farmer who had an affair with Abigail, enters. Abigail tells John of her continuing love and desire, but Proctor rejects her saying nothing happened between them.

Soon the Rev. John Hale, a specialist in witch hunting arrives and examines Betty who has fainted again. He then questions Abigail and Tituba. Tituba, afraid of being hung as a witch, professes faith in God and confesses that two townswomen, Goody Good and Goody Osburn, came to her with the Devil. Abigail and then Betty claim they have been bewitched but now turn to God. The act closes as the girls ecstatically chant the names of the townspeople whom they accuse of consorting with the Devil.

Act Two opens in John Proctor's house eight days after the girls' first accusations. Deputy Governor Danforth has arrived in Salem to supervise the court proceedings against the townspeople accused as witches. Fourteen people are imprisoned, and there is talk of hanging.

John Proctor's wife Elizabeth encourages him to go into town to testify against Abby and the girls. There is tension between the Proctors because Elizabeth has not forgiven John for his affair with Abigail.

The Proctor's servant Mary Warren arrives, and although forbidden to go to town, she has been attending the trial and is "crying out" with the other girls against the accused witches. Just as John is about to whip her, she shocks the Proctors by saying that she defended Elizabeth when Abigail accused her. She gives Elizabeth a doll she has made while at the trial. As John and Elizabeth are arguing about what to do, the Reverend Hale arrives to ask questions and to test the "Christian character" of the house. He finds that John can recite all of the commandments except the one forbidding adultery.

Next, two townsmen, Giles Corey and Francis Nurse, arrive to seek John Proctor's help because their wives have just been arrested for witchcraft. As the men discuss the events, the marshal arrives with a warrant for Elizabeth's arrest. She has been accused by Abigail of sending her spirit through the doll to stab Abigail in the stomach with a needle. Over John Proctor's violent protest, Elizabeth is hauled off in chains.

After the visitors leave, an enraged John Proctor demands that Mary Warren tell the court about the girl's fraudulent behavior. As the curtain falls, Proctor is determined to fight the proceedings even revealing his own sexual misconduct.

Scene 2 - In this extra scene appearing at the rear of the reader's edition, Proctor meets Abigail in a woods to warn he will charge her with adultery if she does not recant her charge against Elizabeth. Abigail, unmoved by his pleas, appears to be deluded and says he is pretending to reject her.

Act three takes place in the Salem meeting house that serves as the general court. In this act, we see the helplessness of the innocent in the face of unjust legal authority. Francis Nurse, Giles Corey, and John Proctor present their cases to Deputy Governor Danforth and Judge Hathorne. When Proctor presents a petition signed by 91 people attesting to the good character of the men's wives, Danforth issues warrants for the questioning of those who signed. Corey charges Putnam with inciting his daughter to accuse a townsman of witchcraft in order to get the townsman's land. Corey has a witness to support the charge but, fearing that the witness will be arrested, refuses to name him. Corey is, therefore, arrested for contempt of court.

Proctor presents his case and a deposition by Mary Warren that she never saw Satan or any spirits and that the other girls are lying to Danforth. However, when Abigail and the other girls are brought before the court, Abigail denies the charges against her with indignation and leads the girls in a frenzied act of being bewitched by Mary. Proctor interrupts the charade by grabbing Abigail and accusing her of being his whore. To test the truth of this charge, Danforth brings in Elizabeth and questions her about her husband's fidelity. Elizabeth lies to save her husband's reputation, but in so doing undermines the charge against Abigail. The girls renew their act of being possessed by the spirit of Mary Warren. Overcome by their hysterical display, Mary gives in and accuses Proctor of being a witch. Danforth accepts the charge, and Proctor laughs in his face, blaming Danforth and himself for being afraid to reveal the truth. Danforth acts to preserve the reputation of his court more than to seek justice. The Rev. Hale, now convinced of the evil of the court, denounces the proceedings and walks out as Danforth calls to him.

The final act opens in a Salem jail cell where Sarah Good and Tituba await hanging. They are happily deluded by the belief that they will be taken to Barbados by the devil.

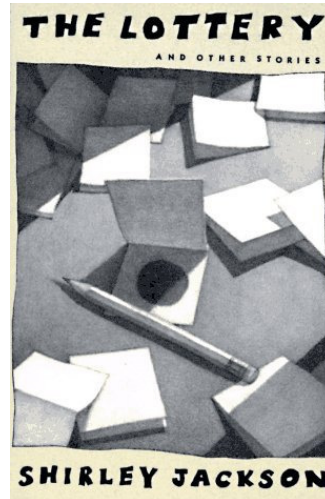
The Salem trial is ending. Rumors of a rebellion against witchcraft trials in a nearby town ignite fear that the people of Salem will riot if upstanding citizens are hung.

Hale, disillusioned and humbled, pleads with the prisoners to save their lives by making false confessions. He requests Danforth pardon the accused, but Danforth refuses saying twelve have already hung for the same crime. When Hale asks Elizabeth to counsel Proctor to lie and save himself, she balks but agrees to see him. Alone with Proctor, Elizabeth forgives him for being unfaithful and blames herself for not being able to love him enough. She cannot counsel him to lie and instead tells him to make his own decision and to be his own judge.

Proctor, refusing to be a martyr, confesses to being a witch, but stops at indicting others. When Proctor tears up his confession, Elizabeth rushes to him and they embrace. As Proctor and Rebecca Nurse are led to be hung, Hale begs Elizabeth to plead with Proctor to save himself, but Elizabeth cries, "He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him!" The curtain falls as the sunlight illuminates Elizabeth's face and the drums "rattle like bones."

The Lottery

Essay



Word Limit: 700 – 900 words

Due: October 26

Assignment

Write an analysis of the short story. Make sure to comment on:

- the setting
- the main characters and the villagers as a group
- the use of foreshadowing and symbols
- the themes
- why Shirley Jackson wrote "The Lottery" and what story implies about human nature

The Crucible

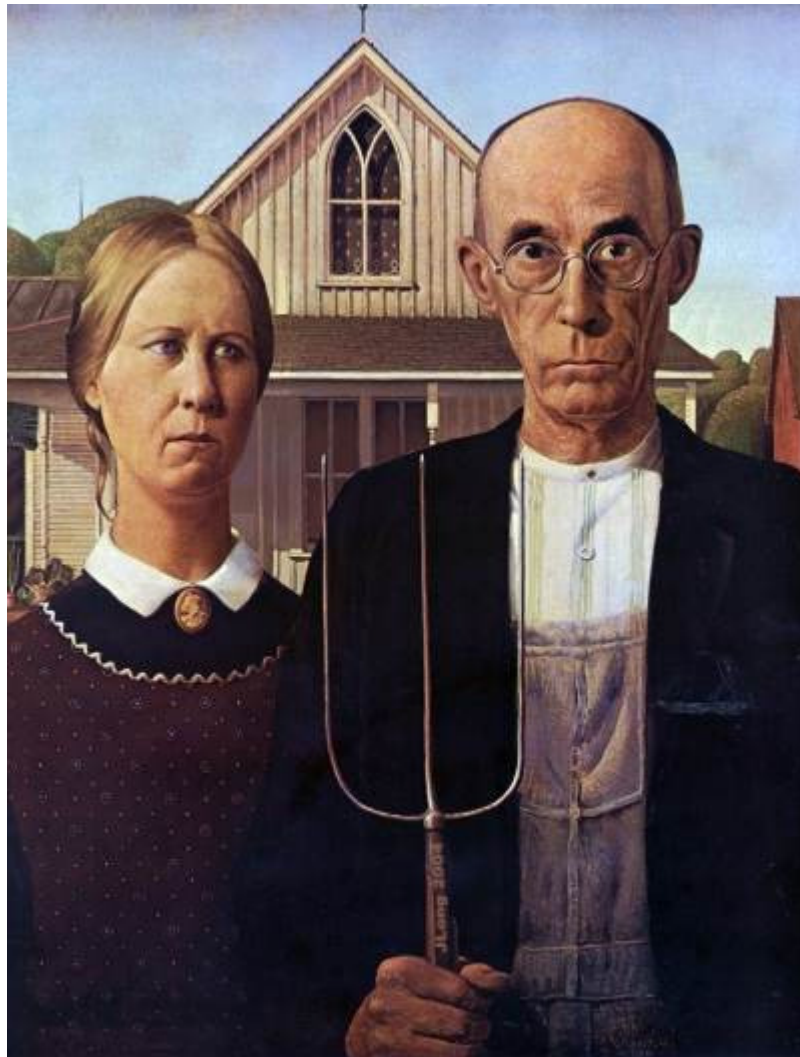
Essay

Pick **one** of the topics below and write an essay in 500 – 700 words. Your essay should contain an introduction, body and ending, and remember to include quotations to support your work.

1. Write an essay discussing the effects of the witch trials on Salem. How do the trials affect the community? Government and authority? The church? Individuals?
2. Compare the roles that Elizabeth Proctor and Abigail Williams play in *The Crucible*.
3. Discuss the role that grudge and personal rivalry play in the witch trial hysteria.
4. Analyze Reverend Hand and discuss the changes he undergoes in the course of the play.
5. In Act IV, Scene 4, Proctor agrees to falsely confess in order to avoid death. He later changes his mind. Explain why he refuses to confess. What is the "shred of goodness" he discovers?
6. A crucible is defined as a severe test. Write an essay discussing the significance of the title. What is "the crucible" within the play and how does it bring about change or reveal an individual's true character?
7. Explain why Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible*.

Due: November 12





Grant Wood: American Gothic, 1930

Shirley Jackson

The Lottery

The morning of June 27th was clear and sunny, with the fresh warmth of a full summer day; the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green. The people of the village began to gather in the square, between the post office and the bank, around ten o'clock; in some towns there were so many people that the lottery took two days and had to be started on June 26th, but in this village, where there were only about three hundred people, the whole lottery took less than two hours, so it could begin at ten o'clock in the morning and still be through in time to allow the villagers to get home for noon dinner.

The children assembled first, of course. School was recently over for the summer, and the feeling of liberty sat uneasily on most of them; they tended to gather together quietly for a while before they broke into boisterous play, and their talk was still of the classroom and the teacher, of books and reprimands. Bobby Martin had already stuffed his pockets full of stones, and the other boys soon followed his example, selecting the smoothest and roundest stones; Bobby and Harry Jones and Dickie Delacroix---the villagers pronounced this name "Dellacroy"---eventually made a great pile of stones in one corner of the square and guarded it against the raids of the other boys. The girls stood aside, talking among themselves, looking over their shoulders at the boys, and the very small children rolled in the dust or clung to the hands of their older brothers or sisters.

Soon the men began to gather, surveying their own children, speaking of planting and rain, tractors and taxes. They stood together, away from the pile of stones in the corner, and their jokes were quiet and they smiled rather than laughed. The women, wearing faded house dresses and sweaters, came shortly after their menfolk. They greeted one another and exchanged bits of gossip as they went to join their husbands. Soon the women, standing by their husbands, began to call to their children, and the children came reluctantly, having called four or five times. Bobby Martin ducked under his mother's grasping hand and ran, laughing, back to the pile of stones. His father spoke up sharply, and Bobby came quickly and took his place between his father and his oldest brother.

The lottery was conducted--as were the square dances, the teenage club, the Halloween program--by Mr. Summers, who had time and energy to devote to civic activities. He was a round-faced, jovial man and he ran the coal business, and people were sorry for him, because he had no children and his wife was a scold. When he arrived in the square, carrying the black wooden box, there was a murmur of conversation among the villagers and he waved and called, "Little late today, folks." The postmaster, Mr. Graves, followed him, carrying a three-legged stool, and the stool was put in the center of the square and Mr. Summers set the black box down on it. The villagers kept their distance, leaving a space between themselves and the stool, and when Mr. Summers said, "Some of you fellows want to give me a hand?" there was a hesitation before two men, Mr. Martin and his oldest son, Baxter, came forward to hold the box steady on the stool while Mr. Summers stirred up the papers inside it.

The original paraphernalia for the lottery had been lost long ago, and the black box now resting on the stool had been put into use even before Old Man Warner, the oldest man in town, was born. Mr. Summers spoke frequently to the villagers about making a new box, but no one liked to upset even as much tradition as was represented by the black box. There was a story that the present box had been made with some pieces of the box that had preceded it, the one that had been constructed when the first people settled down to make a village here. Every year, after the lottery, Mr. Summers began talking again about a new box, but every year the subject was allowed to fade off without anything's being done. The black box grew shabbier each year; by

now it was no longer completely black but splintered badly along one side to show the original wood color, and in some places faded or stained.

Mr. Martin and his oldest son, Baxter, held the black box securely on the stool until Mr. Summers had stirred the papers thoroughly with his hand. Because so much of the ritual had been forgotten or discarded, Mr. Summers had been successful in having slips of paper substituted for the chips of wood that had been used for generations. Chips of wood, Mr. Summers had argued, had been all very well when the village was tiny, but now that the population was more than three hundred and likely to keep on growing, it was necessary to use something that would fit more easily into the black box. The night before the lottery, Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves made up the slips of paper and put them in the box, and it was then taken to the safe of Mr. Summers's coal company and locked up until Mr. Summers was ready to take it to the square next morning. The rest of the year, the box was put away, sometimes one place, sometimes another; it had spent one year in Mr. Graves's barn and another year underfoot in the post office, and sometimes it was set on a shelf in the Martin grocery and left there.

There was a great deal of fussing to be done before Mr. Summers declared the lottery open. There were lists to make up--of heads of families, heads of households in each family, members of each household in each family. There was the proper swearing-in of Mr. Summers by the postmaster, as the official of the lottery; at one time, some people remembered, there had been a recital of some sort, performed by the official of the lottery, a perfunctory, tuneless chant that had been rattled off duly each year; some people believed that the official of the lottery used to stand just so when he said or sang it, others believed that he was supposed to walk among the people, but years and years ago this part of the ritual had been allowed to lapse. There had been, also, a ritual salute, which the official of the lottery had had to use in addressing each person who came up to draw from the box, but this also had changed with time, until now it was felt necessary only for the official to speak to each person approaching. Mr. Summers was very good at all this; in his clean white shirt and blue jeans, with one hand resting carelessly on the black box, he seemed very proper and important as he talked interminably to Mr. Graves and the Martins.

Just as Mr. Summers finally left off talking and turned to the assembled villagers, Mrs. Hutchinson came hurriedly along the path to the square, her sweater thrown over her shoulders, and slid into the place in the back of the crowd. "Clean forgot what day it was," she said to Mrs. Delacroix, who stood next to her, and they both laughed softly. "Thought my old man was out back stacking wood," Mrs. Hutchinson went on, "and then I looked out the window and the kids were gone, and then I remembered it was the twenty-seventh and came a-running." She dried her hands on her apron, and Mrs. Delacroix said, "You're in time, though. They're still talking away up there."

Mrs. Hutchinson craned her neck to see through the crowd and found her husband and children standing near the front. She tapped Mrs. Delacroix on the arm as a farewell and began to make her way through the crowd. The people separated good-humoredly to let her through; two or three people said, in voices just loud enough to be heard across the crowd, "Here comes your Missus, Hutchinson," and "Bill, she made it after all." Mrs. Hutchinson reached her husband, and Mr. Summers, who had been waiting, said cheerfully, "Thought we were going to have to get on without you, Tessie." Mrs. Hutchinson said, grinning, "Wouldn't have me leave m'dishes in the sink, now would you, Joe?" and soft laughter ran through the crowd as the people stirred back into position after Mrs. Hutchinson's arrival.

"Well, now," Mr. Summers said soberly, "guess we better get started, get this over with, so we can go back to work. Anybody ain't here?"

"Dunbar," several people said. "Dunbar, Dunbar."

"Mr. Summers consulted his list. "Clyde Dunbar," he said. "That's right. He's broke his leg, hasn't he? Who's drawing for him?"

"Me, I guess," a woman said, and Mr. Summers turned to look at her. "Wife draws for her husband," Mr. Summers said. "Don't you have a grown boy to do it for you, Janey?" Although Mr. Summers and everyone else in the village knew the answer perfectly well, it was the business of the official of the lottery to ask such questions formally. Mr. Summers waited with an expression of polite interest while Mrs. Dunbar answered.

"Horace's not but sixteen yet," Mrs. Dunbar said regretfully. "Guess I gotta fill in for the old man this year."

"Right," Mr. Summers said. He made a note on the list he was holding. Then he asked, "Watson boy drawing this year?"

A tall boy in the crowd raised his hand. "Here," he said. "I'm drawing for m'mother and me." He blinked his eyes nervously and ducked his head as several voices in the crowd said things like "Good fellow, Jack," and "Glad to see your mother's got a man to do it."

"Well," Mr. Summers said, "guess that's everyone. Old Man Warner make it?"

"Here," a voice said, and Mr. Summers nodded.

A sudden hush fell on the crowd as Mr. Summers cleared his throat and looked at the list. "All ready?" he called. "Now, I'll read the names--heads of families first--and the men come up and take a paper out of the box. Keep the paper folded in your hand without looking at it until everyone has had a turn. Everything clear?"

The people had done it so many times that they only half listened to the directions; most of them were quiet, wetting their lips, not looking around. Then Mr. Summers raised one hand high and said, "Adams." A man disengaged himself from the crowd and came forward. "Hi, Steve," Mr. Summers said, and Mr. Adams said, "Hi, Joe." They grinned at one another humorlessly and nervously. Then Mr. Adams reached into the black box and took out a folded paper. He held it firmly by one corner as he turned and went hastily back to his place in the crowd, where he stood a little apart from his family, not looking down at his hand.

"Allen," Mr. Summers said, "Anderson. . . .Bentham."

"Seems like there's no time at all between lotteries any more," Mrs. Delacroix said to Mrs. Graves in the back row. "Seems like we got through with the last one only last week."

"Time sure goes fast," Mrs. Graves said.

"Clark. . . . Delacroix."

"There goes my old man," Mrs. Delacroix said. She held her breath while her husband went forward.

"Dunbar," Mr. Summers said, and Mrs. Dunbar went steadily to the box while one of the women said, "Go on, Janey," and another said, "There she goes."

"We're next," Mrs. Graves said. She watched while Mr. Graves came around from the side of the box, greeted Mr. Summers gravely, and selected a slip of paper from the box. By now, all through the crowd there were men holding the small folded papers in their large hands, turning them over and over nervously. Mrs. Dunbar and her two sons stood together, Mrs. Dunbar holding the slip of paper.

"Harburt. . . . Hutchinson."

"Get up there, Bill," Mrs. Hutchinson said, and the people near her laughed.

"Jones."

"They do say," Mr. Adams said to Old Man Warner, who stood next to him, "that over in the north village they're talking of giving up the lottery."

Old Man Warner snorted, "Pack of crazy fools," he said. "Listening to the young folks, nothing's good enough for them. Next thing you know, they'll be wanting to go back to live in caves, nobody work any more, live that way for a while. Used to be a saying about 'Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon.' First thing you know, we'd all be eating stewed chickweed and acorns. There's always been a lottery," he added petulantly. "Bad enough to see young Joe Summers up there joking with everybody."

"Some places have already quit lotteries," Mrs. Adams said.

"Nothing but trouble in that," Old Man Warner said stoutly. "Pack of young fools."

"Martin." And Bobby Martin watched his father go forward. "Overdyke. . . . Percy."

"I wish they'd hurry," Mrs. Dunbar said to her older son. "I wish they'd hurry."

"They're almost through," her son said.

"You get ready to run tell Dad," Mrs. Dunbar said.

Mr. Summers called his own name and then stepped forward precisely and selected a slip from the box. Then he called, "Warner."

"Seventy-seventh year I been in the lottery," Old Man Warner said as he went through the crowd. "Seventy-seventh time."

"Watson." The tall boy came awkwardly through the crowd. Someone said, "Don't be nervous, Jack," and Mr. Summers said, "Take your time, son."

"Zanini."

After that, there was a long pause, a breathless pause, until Mr. Summers holding his slip of paper in the air, said, "All right, fellows." For a minute, no one moved, and then all the slips of paper were opened. Suddenly, all women began to speak at once, saying, "Who is it?," "Who's got it?," "Is it the Dunbars?," "Is it the Watsons?" Then the voices began to say, "It's Hutchinson. It's Bill." "Bill Hutchinson's got it."

"Go tell your father," Mrs. Dunbar said to her older son.

People began to look around to see the Hutchinsons. Bill Hutchinson was standing quiet, staring down at the paper in his hand. Suddenly, Tessie Hutchinson shouted to Mr. Summers, "You didn't give him time enough to take any paper he wanted. I saw you. It wasn't fair!"

"Be a good sport, Tessie," Mrs. Delacroix called, and Mrs. Graves said, "All of us took the same chance."

"Shut up, Tessie," Bill Hutchinson said.

"Well, everyone," Mr. Summers said, "that was done pretty fast, and now we've got to be hurrying a little more to get done in time." He consulted his next list. "Bill," he said, "you draw for the Hutchinson family. You got any other households in the Hutchinsons?"

"There's Don and Eva," Mrs. Hutchinson yelled. "Make them take their chance!"

"Daughters draw with their husbands' families, Tessie," Mr. Summers said gently. "You know that as well as anyone else."

"It wasn't fair," Tessie said.

"I guess not, Joe," Bill Hutchinson said regretfully. "My daughter draws with her husband's family, that's only fair. And I've got no other family except the kids."

"Then, as far as drawing for families is concerned, it's you," Mr. Summers said in explanation, "and as far as drawing for households is concerned, that's you, too. Right?"

"Right," Bill Hutchinson said.

"How many kids, Bill?" Mr. Summers asked formally.

"Three," Bill Hutchinson said. "There's Bill, Jr., and Nancy, and little Dave. And Tessie and me."

"All right, then," Mr. Summers said. "Harry, you got their tickets back?"

Mr. Graves nodded and held up the slips of paper. "Put them in the box, then," Mr. Summers directed. "Take Bill's and put it in."

"I think we ought to start over," Mrs. Hutchinson said, as quietly as she could. "I tell you it wasn't fair. You didn't give him time enough to choose. Everybody saw that."

Mr. Graves had selected the five slips and put them in the box, and he dropped all the papers but those onto the ground, where the breeze caught them and lifted them off.

"Listen, everybody," Mrs. Hutchinson was saying to the people around her.

"Ready, Bill?" Mr. Summers asked, and Bill Hutchinson, with one quick glance around at his wife and children, nodded.

"Remember," Mr. Summers said, "take the slips and keep them folded until each person has taken one. Harry, you help little Dave." Mr. Graves took the hand of the little boy, who came willingly with him up to the box. "Take a paper out of the box, Davy," Mr. Summers said. Davy put his hand into the box and laughed. "Take just one paper," Mr. Summers said. "Harry, you hold it for him." Mr. Graves took the child's hand and removed the folded paper from the tight fist and held it while little Dave stood next to him and looked up at him wonderingly.

"Nancy next," Mr. Summers said. Nancy was twelve, and her school friends breathed heavily as she went forward, switching her skirt, and took a slip daintily from the box. "Bill, Jr." Mr. Summers said, and Billy, his face red and his feet over-large, nearly knocked the box over as he got a paper out. "Tessie," Mr. Summers said. She hesitated for a minute, looking around defiantly, and then set her lips and went up to the box. She snatched a paper out and held it behind her.

"Bill," Mr. Summers said, and Bill Hutchinson reached into the box and felt around, bringing his hand out at last with the slip of paper in it.

The crowd was quiet. A girl whispered, "I hope it's not Nancy," and the sound of the whisper reached the edges of the crowd.

"It's not the way it used to be," Old Man Warner said clearly. "People ain't the way they used to be."

"All right," Mr. Summers said, "Open the papers. Harry, you open little Dave's."

Mr. Graves opened the slip of paper and there was a general sigh through the crowd as he held it up and everyone could see that it was blank. Nancy and Bill, Jr., opened theirs at the same time, and both beamed and laughed, turning around to the crowd and holding their slips of paper above their heads.

"Tessie," Mr. Summers said. There was a pause, and then Mr. Summers looked at Bill Hutchinson, and Bill unfolded his paper and showed it. It was blank.

"It's Tessie," Mr. Summers said, and his voice was hushed. "Show us her paper, Bill."

Bill Hutchinson went over to his wife and forced the slip of paper out of her hand. It had a black spot on it, the black spot Mr. Summers had made the night before with the heavy pencil in the coal-company office. Bill Hutchinson held it up, and there was a stir in the crowd.

"All right, folks," Mr. Summers said, "let's finish quickly."

Although the villagers had forgotten the ritual and lost the original black box, they still remembered to use stones. The pile of stones the boys had made earlier was ready; there were stones on the ground with the blowing scraps of paper that had come out of the box. Mrs. Delacroix selected a stone so large she had to pick it up with both hands and turned to Mrs. Dunbar. "Come on," she said. "Hurry up."

Mrs. Dunbar had small stones in both hands, and she said, gasping for breath, "I can't run at all. You'll have to go ahead and I'll catch up with you."

The children had stones already, and someone gave little Davy Hutchinson a few pebbles.

Tessie Hutchinson was in the center of a cleared space by now, and she held her hands out desperately as the villagers moved in on her. "It isn't fair," she said. A stone hit her on the side of the head.

Old Man Warner was saying, "Come on, come on, everyone." Steve Adams was in the front of the crowd of villagers, with Mrs. Graves beside him.

"It isn't fair, it isn't right," Mrs. Hutchinson screamed, and then they were upon her.

(1948)

Arthur Miller, "Are You Now Or Were You Ever?"

from *The Guardian/The Observer* (on line), Saturday, June 17, 2000

Are you now or were you ever...? The McCarthy era's anti-communist trials destroyed lives and friendships. Arthur Miller describes the paranoia that swept America - and the moment his then wife Marilyn Monroe became a bargaining chip in his own prosecution

Saturday June 17, 2000

It would probably never have occurred to me to write a play about the Salem witch trials of 1692 had I not seen some astonishing correspondences with that calamity in the America of the late 40s and early 50s. My basic need was to respond to a phenomenon which, with only small exaggeration, one could say paralysed a whole generation and in a short time dried up the habits of trust and toleration in public discourse.

I refer to the anti-communist rage that threatened to reach hysterical proportions and sometimes did. I can't remember anyone calling it an ideological war, but I think now that that is what it amounted to. I suppose we rapidly passed over anything like a discussion or debate, and into something quite different, a hunt not just for subversive people, but for ideas and even a suspect language. The object was to destroy the least credibility of any and all ideas associated with socialism and communism, whose proponents were assumed to be either knowing or unwitting agents of Soviet subversion.

An ideological war is like guerrilla war, since the enemy is an idea whose proponents are not in uniform but are disguised as ordinary citizens, a situation that can scare a lot of people to death. To call the atmosphere paranoid is not to say that there was nothing real in the American-Soviet stand-off. But if there was one element that lent the conflict a tone of the inauthentic and the invented, it was the swiftness with which all values were forced in months to reverse themselves.

Death of a Salesman opened in February 1949 and was hailed by nearly every newspaper and magazine. Several movie studios wanted it and finally Columbia Pictures bought it, and engaged a great actor, Frederick March, to play Willy [the central character].

In two years or less, with the picture finished, I was asked by a terrified Columbia to sign an anti-communist declaration to ward off picket lines which the rightwing American Legion was threatening to throw across the entrances of theatres showing the film. In the phone calls that followed, the air of panic was heavy. It was the first intimation of what would soon follow. I declined to make any such statement, which I found demeaning; what right had any organisation to demand anyone's pledge of loyalty? I was sure the whole thing would soon go away; it was just too outrageous.

But instead of the problem disappearing, the studio actually made another film, a short to be shown with *Salesman*. This was called *The Life of a Salesman* and consisted of several lectures by City College School of Business professors - which boiled down to selling was a joy, one of the most gratifying and useful professions, and that Willy was simply a nut. Never in show-business history has a studio spent so much good money to prove that its feature film was pointless. In less than two years *Death of a Salesman* had gone from being a masterpiece to being a heresy, and a fraudulent one at that.

In 1948-51, I had the sensation of being trapped inside a perverse work of art, one of those Escher constructs in which it is impossible to make out whether a stairway is going up or down. Practically everyone I knew stood within the conventions of the political left of centre; one or two were Communist party members, some were fellow-travellers, and most had had a brush with Marxist ideas or organisations. I have never been able to believe in the reality of these people

being actual or putative traitors any more than I could be, yet others like them were being fired from teaching or jobs in government or large corporations. The surreality of it all never left me. We were living in an art form, a metaphor that had suddenly, incredibly, gripped the country.

In today's terms, the country had been delivered into the hands of the radical right, a ministry of free-floating apprehension toward anything that never happens in the middle of Missouri. It is always with us, this anxiety, sometimes directed towards foreigners, Jews, Catholics, fluoridated water, aliens in space, masturbation, homosexuality, or the Internal Revenue Department. But in the 50s any of these could be validated as real threats by rolling out a map of China. And if this seems crazy now, it seemed just as crazy then, but openly doubting it could cost you.

So in one sense *The Crucible* was an attempt to make life real again, palpable and structured. One hoped that a work of art might illuminate the tragic absurdities of an anterior work of art that was called reality, but was not. It was the very swiftness of the change that lent it this surreality. Only three or four years earlier an American movie audience, on seeing a newsreel of Stalin saluting the Red Army, would have applauded, for that army had taken the brunt of the Nazi onslaught, as most people were aware. Now they would look on with fear or at least bewilderment, for the Russians had become the enemy of mankind, a menace to all that was good. It was the Germans who, with amazing rapidity, were turning good. Could this be real?

In the unions, communists and their allies, known as intrepid organisers, were to be shorn of membership and turned out as seditious. Harry Bridges, the idol of west coast longshoremen, whom he had all but single-handedly organised, was subjected to trial after trial to drive him back to his native Australia as an unadmitted communist. Academics, some prominent in their fields, were especially targeted, many forced to retire or fired for disloyalty. Some were communists, some were fellow travellers and, inevitably, a certain number were unaffiliated liberals refusing to sign one of the dozens of humiliating anti-communist pledges being required by terrified college administrations.

But it is impossible to convey properly the fears that marked that period. Nobody was shot, to be sure, although some were going to jail, where at least one, William Remington, was murdered by an inmate hoping to shorten his sentence by having killed a communist. Rather than physical fear, it was the sense of impotence, which seemed to deepen with each week, of being unable to speak accurately of the very recent past when being leftwing in America, and for that matter in Europe, was to be alive to the dilemmas of the day.

As for the idea of willingly subjecting my work not only to some party's discipline but to anyone's control, my repugnance was such that, as a young and indigent writer, I had turned down lucrative offers to work for Hollywood studios because of a revulsion at the thought of someone owning the paper I was typing on. It was not long, perhaps four or five years, before the fraudulence of Soviet cultural claims was as clear to me as it should have been earlier. But I would never have found it believable, in the 50s or later, that with its thuggish self-righteousness and callous contempt for artists' freedoms, that the Soviet way of controlling culture could be successfully exported to America.

Some greatly talented people were driven out of the US to work in England: screenwriters like Carl Foreman and Donald Ogden Stewart, actors like Charlie Chaplin and Sam Wanamaker. I no longer recall the number of our political exiles, but it was more than too many and disgraceful for a nation prideful of its democracy.

Writing now, almost half a century later, with the Soviet Union in ruins, China rhetorically fending off capitalism even as in reality it adopts a market economy, Cuba wallowing helplessly in the Caribbean, it is not easy to convey the American fear of a masterful communism. The quickness with which Soviet-style regimes had taken over eastern Europe and China was breathtaking, and I believe it stirred up a fear in Americans of our own ineptitudes, our mystifying inability, despite our military victories, to control the world whose liberties we had so recently won back from the Axis powers.

In 1956, the House Un-American Activities Committee (Huac) subpoenaed me - I was cited for contempt of Congress for refusing to identify writers I had met at one of the two communist writers' meetings I had attended many years before. By then, the tide was going out for Huac and it was finding it more difficult to make front pages. However, the news of my forthcoming marriage to Marilyn Monroe was too tempting to be passed. That our marriage had some connection with my being subpoenaed was confirmed when Chairman Walters of the Huac sent word to Joseph Rauh, my lawyer, that he would be inclined to cancel my hearing if Miss Monroe would consent to have a picture taken with him.

The offer having been declined, the good chairman, as my hearing came to an end, entreated me to write less tragically about our country. This lecture cost me \$40,000 in lawyer's fees, a year's suspended sentence for contempt of Congress, and a \$500 fine. Not to mention about a year of inanition in my creative life.

My fictional view of the period, my sense of its unreality had been, like any impotence, a psychologically painful experience. A similar paralysis descended on Salem. In both places, to keep social unity intact, the authority of leaders had to be hardened and words of scepticism toward them constricted. A new cautionary diction, an uncustomary prudence inflected our way of talking to one another. The word socialism was all but taboo. Words had gotten fearsome. As I learned directly in Ann Arbor on a 1953 visit, university students were avoiding renting rooms in houses run by the housing cooperative for fear of being labelled communist, so darkly suggestive was the word cooperative. The head of orientation at the university told me, in a rather cool, uninvolved manner, that the FBI was enlisting professors to report on students voicing leftwing opinions, and - more comedy - that they had also engaged students to report on professors with the same views.

In the early 50s, along with Elia Kazan, who had directed *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*, I submitted a script to Harry Cohn, head of Columbia Pictures. It described the murderous corruption in the gangster-ridden Brooklyn longshoremen's union. Cohn read the script and called us to Hollywood, where he casually informed us that he had had the script vetted by the FBI, and that they had seen nothing subversive in it. But the head of the AFL motion picture unions in Hollywood, Roy Brewer, had condemned it as untrue communist propaganda, since there were no gangsters on the Brooklyn waterfront. Cohn, no stranger to gangsterism, having survived an upbringing in the tough Five Points area of Manhattan, opined that Brewer was only trying to protect Joe Ryan, head of the Brooklyn longshoremen (who, incidentally, would go to Sing Sing prison for gangsterism).

Brewer threatened to call a strike of projectionists in any theatre daring to show the film. Cohn offered his solution to the problem: he would produce the film if I would make one change - the gangsters in the union were to be changed to communists. This would not be easy; I knew all the communists on the waterfront - there were two of them (both of whom in the following decade became millionaire businessmen). So I had to withdraw the script, which prompted an indignant telegram from Cohn: "As soon as we try to make the script pro-American you pull out." One understood not only the threat but also the cynicism: he knew the mafia controlled waterfront labour. Had I been a movie writer, my career would have ended. But the theatre had no such complications, no blacklist - not yet - and I longed to respond to this climate of fear, if only to protect my sanity. But where to find a transcendent concept?

The heart of the darkness was the belief that a massive, profoundly organised conspiracy was in place and carried forward mainly by a concealed phalanx of intellectuals, including labour activists, teachers, professionals, sworn to undermine the American government. And it was precisely the invisibility of ideas that was frightening so many people. How could a play deal with this mirage world?

Paranoia breeds paranoia, but below paranoia there lies a bristling, unwelcome truth, so repugnant as to produce fantasies of persecution to conceal its existence. The unwelcome truth denied by the right was that the Hollywood writers accused of subversion were not a menace to the country, or even bearers of meaningful change. They wrote not propaganda but

entertainment, some of it of a mildly liberal cast, but most of it mindless, or when it was political, as with Preston Sturges or Frank Capra, entirely and exuberantly un-Marxist.

As for the left, its unacknowledged truth was more important for me. If nobody was being shot in our ideological war but merely vivisected by a headline, it struck me as odd, if understandable, that the accused were unable to cry out passionately their faith in the ideals of socialism. There were attacks on the Huac's right to demand that a citizen reveal his political beliefs; but on the idealistic canon of their own convictions, the defendants were mute. The rare exception, like Paul Robeson's declaration of faith in socialism as a cure for racism, was a rocket that lit up the sky.

On a lucky afternoon I happened upon *The Devil in Massachusetts*, by Marion Starkey, a narrative of the Salem witch-hunt of 1692. I knew this story from my college reading, but in this darkened America it turned a completely new aspect toward me: the poetry of the hunt. Poetry may seem an odd word for a witch-hunt but I saw there was something of the marvellous in the spectacle of a whole village, if not an entire province, whose imagination was captured by a vision of something that wasn't there.

In time to come, the notion of equating the red-hunt with the witch-hunt would be condemned as a deception. There were communists and there never were witches. The deeper I moved into the 1950s, the further away drifted the America of the 1690s, and, rather than the appeal of analogy, I found something different to draw my curiosity and excitement.

Anyone standing up in the Salem of 1692 and denying that witches existed would have faced immediate arrest, the hardest interrogation and possibly the rope. Every authority not only confirmed the existence of witches but never questioned the necessity of executing them. It became obvious that to dismiss witchcraft was to forgo any understanding of how it came to pass that tens of thousands had been murdered as witches in Europe. To dismiss any relation between that episode and the hunt for subversives was to shut down an insight into not only the similar emotions but also the identical practices of both officials and victims.

There were witches, if not to most of us then certainly to everyone in Salem; and there were communists, but what was the content of their menace? That to me became the issue. Having been deeply influenced as a student by a Marxist approach to society, and having known Marxists and sympathisers, I could simply not accept that these people were spies or even prepared to do the will of the Soviets in some future crisis. That such people had thought to find hope of a higher ethic in the Soviet was not simply an American, but a worldwide, irony of catastrophic moral proportions, for their like could be found all over the world.

But as the 1950s dawned, they were stuck with the past. Part of the surreality of the anti-left sweep was that it picked up people for disgrace who had already turned away from a pro-Soviet past but had no stomach for naming others who had merely shared their illusions. But the hunt had captured some significant part of the American imagination and its power demanded respect.

Turning to Salem was like looking into a petri dish, an embalmed stasis with its principal moving forces caught in stillness. One had to wonder what the human imagination fed on that could inspire neighbours and old friends to emerge overnight as furies secretly bent on the torture and destruction of Christians. More than a political metaphor, more than a moral tale, *The Crucible*, as it developed over more than a year, became the awesome evidence of the power of human imagination inflamed, the poetry of suggestion, and the tragedy of heroic resistance to a society possessed to the point of ruin.

In the stillness of the Salem courthouse, surrounded by the images of the 1950s but with my head in 1692, what the two eras had in common gradually gained definition. Both had the menace of concealed plots, but most startling were the similarities in the rituals of defence, the investigative routines; 300 years apart, both prosecutions alleged membership of a secret, disloyal group. Should the accused confess, his honesty could only be proved by naming former confederates. The informer became the axle of the plot's existence and the investigation's necessity.

The witch-hunt in 1692 had a not dissimilar problem, but a far more poetic solution. Most suspected people named by others as members of the Devil's conspiracy had not been shown to have done anything, neither poisoning wells, setting barns on fire, sickening cattle, aborting babies, nor undermining the virtue of wives (the Devil having two phenomenally active penises, one above the other).

To the rescue came a piece of poetry, smacking of both legalistic and religious validity, called Spectral Evidence. All the prosecution need do was produce a witness who claimed to have seen, not an accused person, but his familiar spirit - his living ghost - in the act of throwing a burning brand into a barn full of hay. You could be at home asleep in your bed, but your spirit could be crawling through your neighbour's window to feel up his wife. The owner of the wandering spirit was obliged to account to the court for his crime. With Spectral Evidence, the air filled with the malign spirits of those identified by good Christians as confederates of the Beast, and the Devil himself danced happily into Salem village and took the place apart.

I spent 10 days in Salem courthouse reading the crudely recorded trials of the 1692 outbreak, and it was striking how totally absent was any sense of irony, let alone humour. I can't recall if it was the provincial governor's nephew or son who, with a college friend, came from Boston to watch the strange proceedings. Both boys burst out laughing at some absurd testimony: they were promptly jailed, and faced possible hanging.

Irony and humour were not conspicuous in the 1950s either. I was in my lawyer's office to sign some contract and a lawyer in the next office was asked to come in and notarise my signature. While he was stamping pages, I continued a discussion with my lawyer about the Broadway theatre, which I said was corrupt; the art of theatre had been totally displaced by the bottom line, all that mattered any more. Looking up at me, the notarising lawyer said, "That's a communist position, you know." I started to laugh until I saw the constraint in my lawyer's face, and I quickly sobered up.

I am glad that I managed to write *The Crucible*, but looking back I have often wished I'd had the temperament to do an absurd comedy, which is what the situation deserved. Now, after more than three-quarters of a century of fascination with the great snake of political and social developments, I can see more than a few occasions when we were confronted by the same sensation of having stepped into another age.

A young film producer asked me to write a script about what was then called juvenile delinquency. A mystifying, unprecedented outbreak of gang violence had exploded all over New York. The city, in return for a good percentage of profits, had contracted with this producer to open police stations and schools to his camera. I spent the summer of 1955 in Brooklyn streets with two gangs and wrote an outline. I was ready to proceed with the script when an attack on me as a disloyal lefty opened in the *New York World Telegram*. The cry went up that the city must cancel its contract with the producer so long as I was the screenwriter. A hearing was arranged, attended by 22 city commissioners, including the police, fire, welfare and sanitation departments, as well as two judges.

At the conference table there also sat a lady who produced a thick folder of petitions and statements I had signed, going back to my college years, provided to her by the Huac. I defended myself; I thought I was making sense when the lady began screaming that I was killing the boys in Korea [this was during the Korean war]. She meant me personally, as I could tell from the froth at the corners of her mouth, the fury in her eyes, and her finger pointing straight into my face.

The vote was taken and came up one short of continuing the city's collaboration, and the film was killed that afternoon. I always wondered whether the crucial vote against me came from the sanitation department. But it was not a total loss; the suffocating sensation of helplessness before the spectacle of the impossible coming to pass would soon help in writing *The Crucible*.

That impossible coming to pass was not an observation made at a comfortable distance but a blade cutting directly into my life. This was especially the case with Elia Kazan's decision to cooperate with the Huac. The surrounding fears felt even by those with the most fleeting of contacts with any communist-supported organisation were enough to break through long associations and friendships.

Kazan had been a member of the Communist party only a matter of months, and even that link had ended years before. And the party had never been illegal, nor was membership in it. Yet this great director, left undefended by 20th Century Fox executives, his longtime employers, was told that if he refused to name people whom he had known in the party - actors, directors and writers - he would never be allowed to direct another picture in Hollywood, meaning the end of his career.

These names were already known to the committee through other testifiers and FBI informants, but exactly as in Salem - or Russia under the Czar and the Chairman, and Inquisition Spain, Revolutionary France or any other place of revolution or counter-revolution - conspiracy was the name for all opposition. And the reformation of the accused could only be believed when he gave up the names of his co-conspirators. Only this ritual of humiliation, the breaking of pride and independence, could win the accused readmission into the community. The process inevitably did produce in the accused a new set of political, social and even moral convictions more acceptable to the state whose fist had been shoved into his face, with his utter ruin promised should he resist.

I had stopped by Kazan's house in the country in 1952 after he had called me to come and talk, an unusual invitation - he had never been inclined to indulge in talk unless it concerned work. I had suspected from his dark tone that it must have to do with the Huac, which was rampaging through the Hollywood ranks .

Since I was on my way up to Salem for research on a play that I was still unsure I would write, I called at his house, which was on my route. As he laid out his dilemma and his decision to comply with the Huac (which he had already done) it was impossible not to feel his anguish, old friends that we were. But the crunch came when I felt fear, that great teacher, that cruel revealer. For it swept over me that, had I been one of his comrades, he would have spent my name as part of the guarantee of his reform. Even so, oddly enough, I was not filling up with hatred or contempt for him; his suffering was too palpable. The whole hateful procedure had brought him to this, and I believe made the writing of *The Crucible* all but inevitable. Even if one could grant Kazan sincerity in his new-found anti-communism, the concept of an America where such self-discoveries were pressed out of people was outrageous, and a contradiction of any concept of personal liberty.

Is all this of some objective importance in our history, this destruction of bonds between people? I think it may be, however personal it may appear. Kazan's testimony created a far greater shock than anyone else's. Lee J Cobb's similar testimony and Jerome Robbins's cooperation seemed hardly to matter. It may be that Kazan had been loved more than any other, that he had attracted far greater affection from writers and actors with whom he had worked, and so what was overtly a political act was sensed as a betrayal of love.

It is very significant that in the uproar set off by last year's award to Kazan of an Oscar for life achievement, one heard no mention of the name of any member of the Huac. One doubted whether the thought occurred to many people that the studio heads had ignominiously collapsed before the Huac's insistence that they institute a blacklist of artists, something they had once insisted was dishonourable and a violation of democratic norms. Half a century had passed since his testimony, but Kazan bore very nearly the whole onus of the era, as though he had manufactured its horrors - when he was

surely its victim. The trial record in Salem courthouse had been written by ministers in a primitive shorthand. This condensation gave emphasis to a gnarled, densely packed language which suggested the country accents of a hard people. To lose oneself day after day in that

record of human delusion was to know a fear, not for one's safety, but of the spectacle of intelligent people giving themselves over to a rapture of murderous credulity. It was as though the absence of real evidence was itself a release from the burdens of this world; in love with the invisible, they moved behind their priests, closer to that mystical communion which is anarchy and is called God.

Evidence, in contrast, is effort; leaping to conclusions is a wonderful pleasure, and for a while there was a highly charged joy in Salem, for now that they could see through everything to the frightful plot that was daily being laid bare in court sessions, their days, formerly so eventless and long, were swallowed up in hourly revelations, news, surprises. The *Crucible* is less a polemic than it might have been had it not been filled with wonder at the protean imagination of man.

The *Crucible* straddles two different worlds to make them one, but it is not history in the usual sense of the word, but a moral, political and psychological construct that floats on the fluid emotions of both eras. As a commercial entertainment the play failed [it opened in 1953]. To start with there was the title: nobody knew what a crucible was. Most of the critics, as sometimes does happen, never caught on to the play's ironical substructure, and the ones who did were nervous about validating a work that was so unkind to the same sanctified procedural principles as underlay the hunt for reds. Some old acquaintances gave me distant nods in the theatre lobby on opening night, and even without air-conditioning the house was cool. There was also a problem with the temperature of the production.

The director, Jed Harris, a great name in the theatre of the 20s, 30s and 40s, had decided that the play, which he believed a classic, should be staged like a Dutch painting. In Dutch paintings of groups, everyone is always looking front. Unfortunately, on a stage such rigidity can only lead an audience to the exits. Several years after, a gang of young actors, setting up chairs in the ballroom of the McAlpin Hotel, fired up the audience, convinced the critics, and the play at last took off and soon found its place. There were cheering reviews but by then Senator McCarthy was dead. The public fever on whose heatwaves he had spread his wings had subsided.

The *Crucible* is my most-produced play. It seems to be one of the few surviving shards of the so-called McCarthy period. And it is part of the play's history that, to people in so many parts of the world, its story seems to be their own. I used to think, half seriously, that you could tell when a dictator was about to take power, or had been overthrown, in a Latin American country, if The *Crucible* was suddenly being produced in that country.

The result of it all is that I have come, rather reluctantly, to respect delusion, not least of all my own. There are no passions quite as hot and pleasurable as those of the deluded. Compared to the bliss of delusion, its vivid colours, blazing lights, explosions, whistles and liberating joys, the search for evidence is a deadly bore. My heart was with the left. If only because the right hated me enough to want to kill me, as the Germans amply proved. And now, the most blatant and most foul anti-semitism is in Russia, leaving people like me filled not so much with surprise as a kind of wonder at the incredible amount of hope there once was, and how it disappeared and whether in time it will ever come again, attached, no doubt, to some new illusion.

There is hardly a week that passes when I don't ask the unanswerable question: what am I now convinced of that will turn out to be ridiculous? And yet one can't forever stand on the shore; at some point, filled with indecision, scepticism, reservation and doubt, you either jump in or concede that life is forever elsewhere. Which, I dare say, was one of the major impulses behind the decision to attempt The *Crucible*.

Salem village, that pious, devout settlement at the edge of white civilisation, had displayed - three centuries before the Russo-American rivalry and the issues it raised - what can only be called a built-in pestilence in the human mind; a fatality forever awaiting the right conditions for its always unique, forever unprecedented outbreak of distrust, alarm, suspicion and murder. And for people wherever the play is performed on any of the five continents, there is always a certain amazement that the same terror that is happening to them or that is threatening them, has

happened before to others. It is all very strange. But then, the Devil is known to lure people into forgetting what it is vital for them to remember - how else could his endless reappearances always come as such a marvellous surprise?

© 2000 Arthur Miller

The crucible in history and Other Essays by Arthur Miller is published by Methuen on 13 July 2000

[SEARCH](#) | [50s HOME](#) | [READING LIST](#) | [NEWS](#) | [FILREIS HOME](#)

Document URL: <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/miller-mccarthyism.html>
Last modified: Monday, 02-Aug-2004 09:28:49 EDT