



# The Crucible

By Arthur Miller

# The Crucible is . . .

Puritanism

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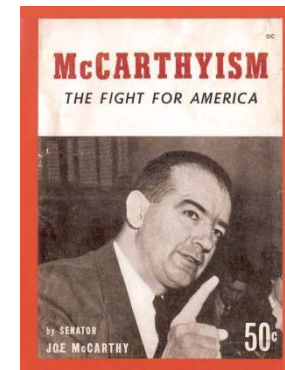
Witchcraft

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McCarthyism

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Arthur Miller



# Puritanism



- Christian faith that originated in England during the early 1600s
- Puritans believed in predestination
- They split from the Church of England in 1633
- Many emigrated to the American colonies
- Their radical beliefs flourished in the new world

# Witchcraft in Salem

- Like all Puritans, the residents of Salem Village believed in witches and in witchcraft.
- They believed that witchcraft was “entering into a compact with the devil in exchange for certain powers to do evil.”
- They considered witchcraft both a sin and a crime; it was a very serious accusation, which was carefully and thoroughly investigated.



# Witchcraft in Salem

- The witchcraft hysteria began in Salem, Massachusetts, in early 1692.
- Reverend Samuel Parris's daughter and Abigail Williams started having fits of convulsion, screaming, and hallucination.
- A doctor examined the girls and concluded that the only explanation for these bizarre behaviors was witchcraft.



# Witchcraft in Salem



- A recently published book of the time detailed the symptoms of witchcraft; the girls' fits were much like those described in the book.
- Therefore, the Puritans of Salem were quick to believe the doctor's diagnosis.



# Witchcraft in Salem

- The girls pointed fingers at Tituba (the Parris' slave), Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborn, which sparked a witch hunt.



# Witchcraft in Salem

- During the next eight months of terror, more than 150 people were imprisoned for witchcraft.
- By the time court was dismissed, 27 people had been convicted, 19 hanged, and 1 pressed to death.
- The hysteria that snowballed in Salem reveals how deep the belief in the supernatural ran in colonial America.



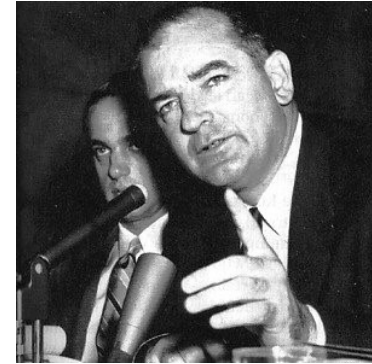


# McCarthyism



- McCarthyism is the term used to describe a period of intense suspicion in the United States during the early 1950s.
- It began when Senator Joseph McCarthy, a U.S. senator from Wisconsin, claimed that communists had infiltrated the Department of State.
- A special House Committee on Un-American Activities was formed to investigate allegations of communism.
- During this period, people from all walks of life became the subjects of aggressive “witch hunts” often based on inconclusive, questionable evidence.

# McCarthyism



- Persons accused of being communists were often denied employment in both the public and private sector.
- In the film industry alone, over 300 actors, writers, and directors were denied work in the U.S.
- American writer, Arthur Miller, was one of those alleged to have been “blacklisted.”

# McCarthyism

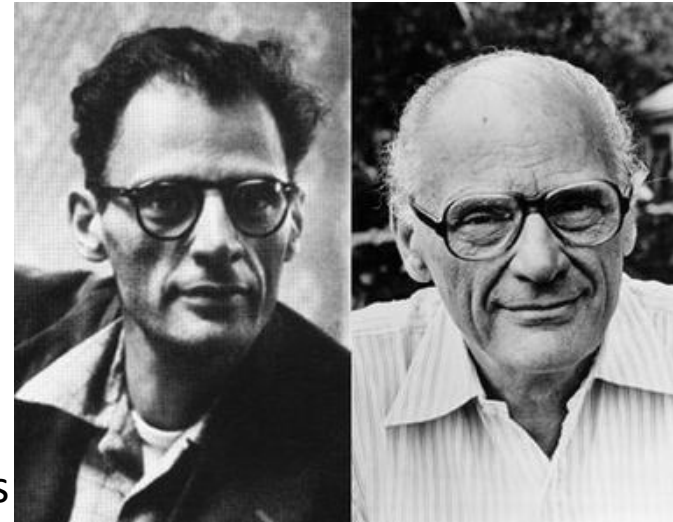
- McCarthy's influence finally faltered in 1954 when a famous CBS newsman, Edward R. Murrow, aired an investigative news report which revealed McCarthy as dishonest in his speeches and abusive in his interrogation of witnesses.
- The public was finally made aware of how McCarthy was ruining the reputations of many individuals through false accusations of communism.



Edward R. Murrow

# Arthur Miller

- 1915-2005
- American Playwright and Writer
- In 1953 he wrote *The Crucible*, which uses the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692 to attack the anti-communist “witch hunts” of the 1950s.
- He believed the hysteria surrounding the witchcraft trials in Puritan New England paralleled the climate of McCarthyism – Senator Joseph McCarthy’s obsessive quest to uncover communist party infiltration of American institutions.
- After the publication of the *The Crucible*, Miller himself was investigated for possible associations with the communist party.
- He refused to give information regarding his colleagues and was found guilty of contempt of court. His sentence was later overturned.



# Abigail Williams

- Orphaned niece of Reverend Parris
- She was once the mistress of John Proctor but was turned out when his wife discovered the affair.
- She is extremely jealous of Elizabeth Proctor and uses her power in the town to rid herself of Elizabeth as well as any others who have insulted her in the past.
- She cannot let go of her obsession with Proctor.
- She is the leader of the girls.



# John Proctor

- Husband to Elizabeth
- He had an affair with Abigail when she was employed in his household.
- He knows that the girls are pretending but cannot tell what he knows without revealing having been alone with Abigail. When
- Abigail uses her influence to convict his wife, he tries to tell the truth and finds himself condemned.
- He refuses to admit to witchcraft or to consider Abigail as anything more than a liar.
- He is hanged.



# Elizabeth Proctor

- Wife of John Proctor
- She discovered an affair going on between her husband and Abigail Williams and turned Abigail out of her house.
- She is Abigail's main target but is saved from hanging because of her pregnancy.
- She feels responsible for driving her husband to infidelity.



# Tituba

- Servant to the Parris household
- She is a native of Barbados.
- She is enlisted by Ruth Putnam and Abigail to cast spells and create charms.
- When Abigail turns on her to save herself from punishment, Tituba confesses to all and saves herself.





# Reverend Parris

- Pastor of the church in Salem
- He is the father of Betty and the uncle of Abigail Williams.
- He believes that he is being persecuted and that the townspeople do not respect his position as a man of God.



# Deputy Governor Danforth

- He seems to feel particularly strongly that the girls are honest.
- He is sensitive to the presence of the devil and reacts explosively to whatever evidence is presented.



# The Girls

- **Betty Parris**- Daughter of the Reverend, cousin to Abigail Williams. She is a weak girl who goes along with her cousin as soon as she is threatened.
- **Susanna Walcott**-One of the girls. She is initially sent between Parris and Dr. Griggs to determine the cause of Betty's ailment. She is easily guided by Abigail.
- **Mercy Lewis**- Servant to the Putnam household. She is a merciless girl who seems to delight in the girls' activities.
- **Mary Warren**-Servant to the Proctor household. Abigail uses her to accuse Elizabeth. John Proctor takes Mary to the court to confess that the girls are pretending. She is not strong enough to fight Abigail and Mary caves and runs back to her side by accusing Proctor himself.



# Plot

- **In the town of Salem, teenage girls, led by Abigail Williams, accuse women and men of witchcraft.**
- **One man, John Proctor, had an affair with Abigail, and thinks that she is causing trouble because she is jealous of his wife.**
- **The court is swayed by the hysteria that the girls create in the court room.**
- **The judge believes the girls' stories, and many innocent townspeople are executed, including John Proctor.**

# Act 1

- Reverend Parris prays over his daughter, Betty, who lies unconscious on her bed. He questions several girls about what has happened. The girls were all involved in **activities in the forest** led by Tituba, Parris's black slave from Barbados. Parris discovered them and startled them so much that Betty collapsed.
- Rumours spread through the town and a crowd gathers in Parris's home. The Putnams are concerned for their daughter and the deaths of seven of their babies.
- The Putnams are the first to suggest that the town is **afflicted by witchcraft**. They want Parris to **root out the witches** within the community. Abigail admits to doing nothing more than dancing.

# Act 1

- While Parris tries to calm the crowd, the seventeen year old Abigail threatens the other girls that she will kill anyone who utters a word about what happened. We learn that something more **sinister** than dancing was going on in the woods and that Abigail drank **chicken blood** as part of a spell to kill Elizabeth Proctor.
- John Proctor talks to Abigail alone. While working in Proctor's home the previous year she engaged in a **secret affair** with him and was dismissed by his wife, Elizabeth. Abigail attempts to seduce Proctor, but he wants the affair to be finished and tells her to end her foolishness.
- Betty wakes up screaming. Several of the townspeople rush upstairs and, while they are gathered in her bedroom, they argue about witchcraft. In the midst of this crisis, they argue about **money and land deeds**. Salem is full of **personal grudges**.
- Reverend Hale arrives and questions Betty and Abigail. He grows suspicious about the girls' activities in the forest, especially the role of Tituba. She is summoned and Parris and Hale both interrogate her. Afraid of being hanged, Tituba accuses two townswomen of **consorting with the devil**. Suddenly, Abigail joins in, confessing to having seen the devil with other townspeople and Betty and other girls join them. The scene ends in **hysteria and uproar**.

# Act 1 Questions

1. What is wrong with Betty Parris?
2. What rumor is circulating about Betty?
3. How does Abigail initially defend the girls' behavior in the woods?
4. Why is Reverend Parris so worried about his reputation?
5. What did Parris see in the woods?
6. What does Abigail claim is the reason she was discharged from the Proctor household?
7. Why did Mrs. Putnam enlist Tituba's help?
8. Why did Abigail drink blood?
9. How does Abigail threaten the other girls?
10. What happens when John and Abigail are alone?
11. What does Rebecca Nurse say about Betty and Ruth's sickness?
12. About what are Proctor and Putnam fighting?
13. Why does Tituba finally "confess"? What do you think of her actions? What do you think will happen as a result?
14. Why do you think the girls begin their accusations when they could have just let Tituba take the blame for everything?
15. What does the girls' behaviour tell you about the youth of Salem?

# Act 2

- The second act is set in John and Elizabeth Proctor's farmhouse just outside Salem. It begins with a scene between the husband and wife who are discussing the **witchcraft situation** in Salem and the increasing number of accused townspeople.
- They have a new servant girl working for them. Mary Warren is one of Abigail's circle. She arrives from the courthouse where she has been giving testimony. She gives Elizabeth a doll that she made while waiting in the court. She is tired and goes to bed, leaving the married couple to continue their argument.
- We learn more about the tension between them over the affair that John had with Abigail Williams. Elizabeth wants him to go to the court and **testify against Abigail**. If the town knows about her affair with John they will not be inclined to believe her accusations. But John refuses and there is tension between them - Elizabeth feels that he cares for Abigail and he feels his wife has not forgiven him.



# Act 2

- Reverend Hale appears to question John Proctor. He is suspicious of the Proctors because they do not attend church regularly. Giles Corey and Francis Nurse also arrive, seeking advice after both their wives are arrested. If the saintly Rebecca Nurse has been arrested on the charge of witchcraft, Elizabeth, as an irregular church goer, is in significant danger.
- Officials from Salem arrive and arrest Elizabeth Proctor. Abigail has accused her of witchcraft and attempted murder by using **black magic** and **stabbing a needle into a voodoo doll**. The officials find the doll that Mary gave Elizabeth, and in it is a needle. This is taken as evidence against Elizabeth and as she is taken away John Proctor understands that this is Abigail's **revenge**. He orders Mary Warren to go to court and testify against Abigail. He vows that he will fight the proceedings, even if it means confessing his own adultery.

# Notes

1. What is the mood at the beginning of Act Two?  
Why?
2. What are the different feelings the Proctors have towards Mary Warren?
3. What things are causing Elizabeth to be worried?
4. What do we learn about John and Elizabeth's relationship? How do they feel about each other?

# Act 2 Questions

1. What is the mood at the beginning of Act Two? Why?
2. What do we learn about John and Elizabeth's relationship?
3. What does Mary give Elizabeth?
4. What news does Mary Warren bring from court?
5. What does Elizabeth mean when she says: "Oh, the noose, the noose is up!"?
6. What does Elizabeth want John to do in town? What will everyone find out if he does this?
7. Why has Reverend Hale come to the Proctor house?
8. To what is John referring when he says: "...it tells me that a minister may pray to God without he have golden candlesticks upon the altar."?
9. What does Hale ask John to do? What happens?
10. What news do Giles Corey and Frances Nurse tell John Proctor?
11. On what basis are they accused?
12. What is the significance of the poppet? How does this serve as "proof" for Elizabeth's accusation?
13. What does John mean when he says "I'll tell you what's walking in Salem—vengeance is walking in Salem"?

# Act 3

- Act three takes place next day **in court**, with Deputy Governor Danforth and Judge Hathorne presiding.
- Francis Nurse, Giles Corey, and John Proctor all present their **case against the girls**, Proctor delivering a petition signed by ninety one people testifying to the **good character** of their wives. Corey charges Putnam with inciting his daughter to accuse Corey of witchcraft in order to get his land Corey has a witness but will not name him for fear of getting the man arrested. Danforth orders the arrest of Corey for **contempt of court**.
- Proctor has brought Mary Warren to court and he tells Judge Danforth that she will testify that the girls are lying. Danforth suspects Proctor's motives, believing that he actually wants to undermine the entire court proceedings. If all he wants to do is to free his wife then she will be spared for a time because it turns out that she is **pregnant**. Proctor is becoming committed to revealing the truth and exposing the lies that prevail in Salem. He persuades Danforth to allow Mary's testimony that she never saw the devil or any spirits. Abigail seizes control of the situation by pretending to be bewitched by Mary Warren and she spreads a hysterical sympathetic reaction through the other girls.

# Act 3

- In frustration that the court seems to believe the lies, Proctor grabs Abigail by the hair and denounces her as a **whore** and accuses her of being motivated by **jealousy**. This is a dramatic revelation and Danforth stops proceedings to investigate the claim.
- Elizabeth is brought into court and questioned. She doesn't know that Proctor has openly confessed and she is **reluctant to incriminate** her husband. Despite her natural honesty, she **lies** to protect his honour and this destroys his testimony; Danforth denounces Proctor as a liar.
- Mary Warren, in fear of being caught up in the collapse of Proctor's standing, joins in with Abigail's next move. Abigail pretends to be bewitched by Proctor, and the other girls, including Mary, join in. Proctor sees that the whole process is being corrupted by **revenge and fear**. He accuses Danforth of being afraid to reveal the truth Reverend Hale realises that the court is compromised so he denounces the proceedings and quits. Proctor is arrested.

# Act 3 Questions

1. When the act begins, who is on the stand, and of what is she accused?
2. Who bursts into court, and why?
3. What does Mary Warren tell the court?
4. What does Cheever say that Proctor did when they came to arrest Elizabeth Proctor?
5. What do we learn about Elizabeth Proctor?
6. How many people signed the deposition? Who are the people who signed, and to what are they testifying?
7. Why is Giles Corey arrested?
8. How many death warrants has Hale signed?
9. What do the men of the court want Mary Warren to do on command?
10. What does Proctor confess?
11. What do the girls pretend to see in the courtroom?
12. What does Mary claim Proctor made her do?
13. What does Hale do at the end of the act? Why?
14. In our court system today, the accused is innocent until proven guilty. In what ways does the court of Salem ignore the “innocent until proven guilty” clause?

# Act 4

- It is three months later. Deputy Governor Danforth and Judge Hathorne visit the Salem jail. Their conversations reveal a **state of chaos** in and around Salem and a dramatic **loss of confidence and principle** among the leaders.
- Parris has become **unbalanced** and frequently weeps. His wicked niece, Abigail, has discredited herself by running off with Mary Warren and taking his life savings; he is distraught.
- We hear that Hale has so little faith in the justice of the court that he prays with the accused constantly and is trying to persuade them to falsely confess to save their lives, but they refuse. Everyone lives in fear of being accused of witchcraft, there are rumours of revolt in nearby Andover. Parris proposes a **postponement of the trials** but Danforth refuses.

# Act 4

- Hale enters, **exhausted** by his efforts to help the accused. He asks Danforth for a postponement, but he is motivated by the **desire to save souls** before the hangings. Danforth wants **confessions** and wants Elizabeth Proctor to persuade her husband John to confess. If he confesses to witchcraft he will save his life, and if the other prisoners follow his example many hangings will be avoided. Elizabeth is brought from her cell and she agrees to talk to her husband.
- Proctor is left alone with his wife. Elizabeth tells of Giles Corey's principled death, refusing to compromise with the court. John wants to live and contemplates confessing but he is in **conflict with his own principles**. He thinks it dishonest to make a 'heroic' stand against them - he doesn't believe himself to be a hero or a saint.
- Hathorne re-enters and demands an answer. He is delighted to hear that Proctor will confess and he rushes off to tell all the other officials who are equally pleased. Proctor refuses to incriminate anyone else. When Danforth insists that others must be named, Proctor refuses, tears up his confession, and retracts his admission of guilt. Hale pleads with him but Proctor goes to the gallows with the others, and the witch trials reach their terrible conclusion.



# Act 4 Questions

1. What is Reverend Hale doing at the jailhouse?
2. What is happening to the farms and animals in the town of Salem? Why do you think this is happening?
3. What has happened to Abigail?
4. What happened in the town of Andover? Why is Parris afraid of this news?
5. What does Parris suggest to Danforth? Why does he make this suggestion?
6. What other indications does Hale give that the town is falling apart?
7. What does Hale mean when he says, "There is blood on my head! Can you not see the blood on my head"?
8. Why does Danforth refuse to postpone the executions?
9. What do Hale and Danforth beg Elizabeth to do? Why?
10. What does Elizabeth say happened to Giles Corey?
11. What has Proctor been contemplating doing? What is Elizabeth's response to this?
12. Why does Proctor refuse to sign the confession?
13. What does he do with the confession, and what happens to him as a result?
14. What does Elizabeth mean by: "He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him"?
15. What lessons do you think Arthur Miller wanted readers and audiences to learn from his play? What do you think are the most important themes of the play?