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# Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*: Background and Sources

ROBERT A. MARTIN

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WHEN *THE CRUCIBLE* opened on January 22, 1953,<sup>1</sup> the term "witch-hunt" was nearly synonymous in the public mind with the Congressional investigations then being conducted into allegedly subversive activities. Arthur Miller's plays have always been closely identified with contemporary issues, and to many observers the parallel between the witchcraft trials at Salem, Massachusetts in 1692 and the current Congressional hearings was the central issue of the play.

Miller has said that he could not have written *The Crucible* at any other time,<sup>2</sup> a statement which reflects both his reaction to the McCarthy era and the creative process by which he finds his way to the thematic center of a play. If it is true, however, that a play cannot be successful in its own time unless it speaks to its own time, it is also true that a play cannot endure unless it speaks to new audiences in new times. The latter truism may apply particularly to *The Crucible*, which is presently being approached more and more frequently as a cultural and historical study rather than as a political allegory.

Although *The Crucible* was written in response to its own time, popular interest in the Salem witchcraft trials had actually begun to surface long before the emergence of McCarthyism. There were at least two other plays based on the witchcraft trials that were produced shortly before *The Crucible* opened: *Child's Play* by Florence Stevenson was produced in November, 1952 at the Oklahoma Civic Playhouse; and *The Witchfinders* by Louis O. Coxe appeared at about the same time in a studio production at the University of Minnesota.<sup>3</sup>

Among numerous other works dealing with Salem witchcraft, a novel, *Peace, My Daughter* by Shirley Barker, had appeared as recently as 1949, and in the same year Marion L. Starkey had combined an interest in history and psychology to produce *The Devil in Massachusetts*, which was based on her extensive research of the original documents and records. Starkey's announced purpose was "to review the records in the light of the findings of modern psychology," and to supplement the work of earlier investigators by calling attention to "a number of vital primary sources of which they seem to have been ignorant."<sup>4</sup>

The events that eventually found their way into *The Crucible* are largely contained in the massive two volume record of the trials located in the Essex County Archives at Salem, Massachusetts, where Miller went to do his research. Although he has been careful to point out in a prefatory note that *The Crucible* is not history in the academic sense, a study of the play and its sources indicates that Miller did his research carefully and well. He found in the records of the trials at Salem that between June 10 and September 22, 1692, nineteen men and women and two dogs were hanged for witchcraft, and one man was pressed to death for standing mute.<sup>5</sup> Before the affair ended, fifty-five people had confessed to being witches, and another hundred and fifty were in jail awaiting trial.

Focusing primarily upon the story of John Proctor, one of the nineteen who were hanged, Miller almost literally retells the story of a panic-stricken society that held a doctrinal belief in the existence of the Devil and the reality of witchcraft. The people of Salem did not, of course, invent a belief in witchcraft; they were, however, the inheritors of a witchcraft tradition that had a long and bloody history in their native England and throughout most of Europe. To the Puritans of Massachusetts, witchcraft was as real a manifestation of the Devil's efforts to overthrow "God's kingdom" as the periodic raids of his Indian disciples against the frontier settlements.

There were, surprisingly, few executions for witchcraft in Massachusetts before 1692. According to George Lyman Kittredge in his *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, "not more than half-a-dozen executions can be shown to have occurred."<sup>6</sup> But the people of Salem village in 1692 had recent and—to them—reliable evidence that the Devil was at work in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In 1688 in Boston, four children of John Goodwin had been seriously afflicted by a "witch" named Glover, who was also an Irish washwoman. In spite of her hasty execution and the prayers of four of the most devout Boston ministers, the Goodwin children were possessed by spirits of the "invisible world" for some months afterward. One of the leading Puritan ministers of the time was Cotton Mather, who in 1689 pub-

lished his observations on the incident in "Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possession."<sup>7</sup> Although the work was intended to warn against witchcraft, Mather's account can also be read as a handbook of instructions for feigning possession by demonic spirits. Among numerous other manifestations and torments, Mather reported that the Goodwin children were most often afflicted by "fits":

Sometimes they would be Deaf, sometimes Dumb, and sometimes Blind, and often, all this at once. One while their Tongues would be drawn down their Throats; another-while they would be pull'd out upon their Chins, to a prodigious length. They would have their Mouths opened unto such a Wideness, that their Jaws went out of joint; and anon they would clap together again with a Force like that of a strong Spring Lock.<sup>8</sup>

Four years later, in February, 1692, the daughter and niece of the Reverend Samuel Parris of Salem village began to have "fits" very similar to those experienced by the Goodwin children as reported and described by Mather. According to Marion Starkey, Parris had a copy of Mather's book, and, in addition, "the Parrises had probably had first-hand experience of the case, since they appear to have been living in Boston at the time. The little girls might even have been taken to see the hanging."<sup>9</sup>

In spite of an apparent abundance of historical material, the play did not become dramatically conceivable for Miller until he came upon "a single fact" concerning Abigail Williams, the niece of Reverend Parris:

It was that Abigail Williams, the prime mover of the Salem hysteria, so far as the hysterical children were concerned, had a short time earlier been the house servant of the Proctors and now was crying out Elizabeth Proctor as a witch; but more—it was clear from the record that with entirely uncharacteristic fastidiousness she was refusing to include John Proctor, Elizabeth's husband, in her accusations despite the urgings of the prosecutors. Why? I searched the records of the trials in the courthouse at Salem but in no other instance could I find such a careful avoidance of the implicating stutter, the murderous, ambivalent answer to the sharp questions of the prosecutors. Only here, in Proctor's case, was there so clear an attempt to differentiate between a wife's culpability and a husband's.<sup>10</sup>

As in history, the play begins when the Reverend Samuel Parris begins to suspect that his daughter Betty has become ill because she and his niece Abigail Williams have "trafficked with spirits in the forest." The real danger Parris fears, however, is less from diabolical spirits than from the ruin that may fall upon him when his enemies learn that his daughter is suffering from the effects of witchcraft:

PARRIS. There is a faction that is sworn to drive me from my pulpit. Do you understand that?

ABIGAIL. I think so, sir.

PARRIS. Now then, in the midst of such disruption, my own household is discovered to be the very center of some obscene practice. Abominations are done in the forest—

ABIGAIL. It were sport, uncle!<sup>11</sup>

As Miller relates at a later point in the play, Parris was a petty man who was historically in a state of continual bickering with his congregation over such matters as his salary, housing, and firewood. The irony of the above conversation in the play, however, is that while Parris is attempting to discover the “truth” to prevent it from damaging his already precarious reputation as Salem’s minister, Abigail actually is telling him the historical truth when she says “it were sport.” Whatever perverse motives may have subsequently prompted the adult citizens of Salem to cry “witch” upon their neighbors, the initiators of the Salem misfortune were young girls like Abigail Williams who began playing with spirits simply for the “sport” of it, as a release from an emotionally oppressive society. A portion of the actual trial testimony given in favor of Elizabeth Proctor (John Proctor’s wife) by one Daniel Elliott suggests that initially, at least, not everyone accepted the girls’ spectral visions without question:

the testimony of Daniel Elliott, aged 27 years or thereabouts, who testifieth and saith that I being at the house of lieutenant Ingersoll on the 28 of March, in the year 1692, there being present one of the afflicted persons which cried out and said, there’s Goody Proctor. William Raiment being there present, told the girl he believed she lied, for he saw nothing; then Goody Ingersoll told the girl she told a lie, for there was nothing; then the girl said that she did it for sport, they must have some sport.<sup>12</sup> [punctuation added]

Miller’s addition in *The Crucible* of an adulterous relationship between Abigail Williams and Proctor serves primarily as a dramatically imperative motive for Abigail’s later charges of witchcraft against Elizabeth Proctor. Although it might appear that Miller is rewriting history for his own dramatic purposes by introducing a sexual relationship between Abigail and Proctor, his invention of the affair is psychologically and historically appropriate. As he makes clear in the prefatory note preceding the play, “dramatic purposes have sometimes required many characters to be fused into one; the number of girls . . . has been reduced; Abigail’s age has been raised; . . .” Although Miller found that Abigail’s refusal to testify against Proctor was the single historical and dramatic “fact” he was looking for, there are two additional considerations that make adultery and Abigail’s altered age plausible within the historical context of the events.

The first is that Mary Warren, in the play and in history, was simultaneously an accuser in court and a servant in Proctor's household. If an adulterous affair was probable, it would more likely have occurred between Mary Warren and Proctor than between Abigail Williams and Proctor; but it could easily have occurred. At the time, Mary Warren was a fairly mature young woman who would have had the features Miller has represented in Abigail: every emotional and sexual impulse, as well as the opportunity to be involved with Proctor. Historically, it was Mary Warren who attempted to stop the proceedings as early as April 19 by stating during her examination in court that the afflicted girls "did but dissemble": "Afterwards she started up, and said I will speak and cried out, Oh! I am sorry for it, I am sorry for it, and wringed her hands, and fell a little while into a fit again and then came to speak, but immediately her teeth were set, and then she fell into a violent fit and cried out, oh Lord help me! Oh Good Lord save me!"<sup>13</sup> As in the play, the rest of the girls prevailed by immediately falling into fits and spontaneously accusing her of witchcraft. As her testimony of April 21 and later indicates, however, she soon returned to the side of her fellow accusers. On June 30, she testified:

The deposition of Mary Warren aged 20 years here testifieth. I have seen the apparition of John Proctor senior among the witches and he hath often tortured me by pinching me and biting me and choking me, and pressing me on my Stomach till the blood came out of my mouth and also I saw him torture Mis Pope and Mercy Lewis and John Indian upon the day of his examination and he hath also tempted me to write in his book. and to eat bread which he brought to me, which I refusing to do, Jno Proctor did most grievously torture me with a variety of tortures, almost Ready to kill me.<sup>14</sup>

Miller has reduced Mary Warren's lengthy and ambiguous trial testimony to four pages in the play by focusing on her difficulty in attempting to tell the truth after the proceedings were under way. The truth that Mary has to tell—"It were only sport in the beginning, sir"—is the same that Abigail tried to tell Parris earlier; but the telling has become compounded by the courtroom presence of Proctor, Parris, Hathorne and Danforth (two of the judges), the rest of the afflicted girls, and the spectators. In a scene taken directly from the trial records, Mary confesses that she and the other girls have been only pretending and that they have deceived the court. She has never seen the spirits or apparitions of the witches:

HATHORNE. How could you think you saw them unless you saw them?

MARY WARREN. I—I cannot tell how, but I did. I—I heard the other girls screaming, and you, Your Honor, you seemed to believe

them, and I—It were only sport in the beginning, sir, but then the whole world cried spirits, spirits, and I—I promise you, Mr. Danforth, I only thought I saw them but I did not.<sup>15</sup>

The second, additional consideration is that although Miller has raised Abigail's age from her actual eleven to seventeen, and has reduced the number of girls in the play to five only, such alterations for purposes of dramatic motivation and compression do not significantly affect the psychological or historical validity of the play. As the trial records clearly establish, individual and family hostilities played a large role in much of the damaging testimony given against those accused of witchcraft. Of the ten girls who were most directly involved in crying out against the witches, only three—Betty Parris (nine years old), Abigail Williams (eleven years), and Ann Putnam (twelve years)—were below the age of sexual maturity. The rest were considerably older: Mary Walcott and Elizabeth Booth were both sixteen; Elizabeth Hubbard was seventeen; Susanna Sheldon was eighteen; Mercy Lewis was nineteen; Sarah Churchill and Mary Warren (Proctor's servant) were twenty. In a time when marriage and motherhood were not uncommon at the age of fourteen, the hypothesis of repressed sexuality emerging disguised into the emotionally charged atmosphere of witchcraft and Calvinism does not seem unlikely; it seems, on the contrary, an inevitable supposition. And it may be worth pointing out in this context that Abigail Williams was not the only one of the girls who refused to include John Proctor in her accusations against his wife, Elizabeth. In her examination of April 21, Mary Warren testified that her mistress was a witch and that "her master had told her that he had been about sometimes to make away with himself because of his wife's quarreling with him, . . ." A few lines later the entry reads: "but she would not own that she knew her master to be a witch or wizzard."<sup>16</sup>

With the exception of Abigail and Proctor's adultery, the events and characters of *The Crucible* are not so much "invented" data in a fictional sense as highly compressed representations of the underlying forces of hatred, hysteria, and fear that paralyzed Salem during the spring and summer of 1692. And even in this context Abigail Williams's characterization in the play may be more restrained in the light of the records than Miller's dramatization suggests. For example, one of the major witnesses against John Proctor was twelve year old Ann Putnam, who testified on June 30 that "on the day of his examination I saw the apparition of Jno: Proctor senior go and afflict and most grievously torture the bodies of Mistress Pope, Mary Walcott, Mercy Lewis, Abigail Williams. . . ."<sup>17</sup> In projecting several of the girls into Abigail, Miller has used the surface of the trial records to suggest that her hatred for Proctor's wife is a dramatic equivalent for the much

wider spread hatred and tension that existed within the Salem community. Abigail, although morally corrupt, ironically insists upon her “good” name, and reveals at an early point in the play that she hates Elizabeth Proctor for ruining her reputation:

PARRIS. [*to the point*] Abigail, is there any other cause than you have told me, for your being discharged from Goody Proctor’s service? I have heard it said, and I tell you as I heard it, that she comes so rarely to the church this year for she will not sit so close to something soiled. What signified that remark?

ABIGAIL. She hates me uncle, she must, for I would not be her slave. It’s a bitter woman, a lying, cold, sniveling woman, and I will not work for such a woman!<sup>18</sup>

On a larger scale, Miller brings together the forces of personal and social malfunction through the arrival of the Reverend John Hale, who appears, appropriately, in the midst of a bitter quarrel among Proctor, Parris, and Thomas Putnam over deeds and land boundaries. Hale, in life as in the play, had encountered witchcraft previously and was called to Salem to determine if the Devil was in fact responsible for the illness of the afflicted children. In the play, he conceives of himself, Miller says, “much as a young doctor on his first call”:

[*He appears loaded down with half a dozen heavy books.*]

HALE. Pray you, someone take these!

PARRIS. [*delighted*] Mr. Hale! Oh! it’s good to see you again! [*Taking some books*] My, they’re heavy!

HALE. [*setting down his books*] They must be; they are weighted with authority.<sup>19</sup>

Hale’s entrance at this particular point in the play is significant in that he interrupts an argument based on private and secular interests to bring “authority” to the question of witchcraft. His confidence in himself and his subsequent examination of the girls and Tituba (Parris’s slave who inadvertently started the entire affair) represent and foreshadow the arrival of outside religious authority in the community. As an outsider who has come to weigh the evidence, Hale also helps to elevate the issue from a local to a regional level, and from an unofficial to an official theological inquiry. His heavy books of authority also symbolically anticipate the heavy authority of the judges who, as he will realize too late, are as susceptible to misinterpreting testimony based on spectral evidence as he is:

HALE. [*with a tasty love of intellectual pursuit*] Here is all the invisible world, caught, defined, and calculated. In these books the Devil stands stripped of all his brute disguises. Here are all your familiar spirits—your incubi and succubi; your witches that go by land, by air, and by sea; your wizards of the night



and of the day. Have no fear now—we shall find him out if he has come among us, and I mean to crush him utterly if he has shown his face!<sup>20</sup>

The Reverend Hale is an extremely interesting figure historically, and following the trials he set down an account of his repentance entitled “A Modest Inquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft” (Boston, 1702). Although he was at first as overly zealous in his pursuit of witches as everyone else, very much as Miller has portrayed him in *The Crucible*, Hale began to be tormented by doubts early in the proceedings. His uncertainty concerning the reliability of the witnesses and their testimony was considerably heightened when his own wife was also accused of being a witch. Hale appears to have been as tortured spiritually and as dedicated to the “middle way” in his later life as Miller has portrayed him in *The Crucible*. Five years after Salem, he wrote in his “Inquiry”:

The middle way is commonly the way of truth. And if any can shew me a better middle way than I have here laid down, I shall be ready to embrace it: But the conviction must not be by vinegar or drollery, but by strength of argument. . . . I have had a deep sence of the sad consequence of mistakes in matters Capital; and their impossibility of recovering when compleated. And what grief of heart it brings to a tender conscience, to have been unwittingly encouraging of the Sufferings of the innocent.<sup>21</sup>

Hale further commented that although he presently believed the executions to be the unfortunate result of human error, the integrity of the court officials was unquestionable: “I observed in the prosecution of these affairs, that there was in the Justices, Judges and others concerned, a conscientious endeavour to do the thing that was right. And to that end they consulted the Presidents [Precedents] of former times and precepts laid down by Learned Writers about Witchcraft.”<sup>22</sup>

In *The Crucible*, Hale’s examination of Tituba is very nearly an edited transcription of her testimony at the trial of Sarah Good, who is the first person Abigail accuses of consorting with the Devil. At the time of the trials, Sarah Good had long been an outcast member of the Salem community, “unpopular because of her slothfulness, her sullen temper, and her poverty; she had recently taken to begging, an occupation the Puritans detested.”<sup>23</sup> When she was about to be hanged, her minister, the Reverend Nicholas Noyes, made a last appeal to her for a confession and said he knew she was a witch. Her prophetic reply was probably seen later as proof of her guilt when she said to Noyes: “you are a lyer; I am no more a Witch than you are a Wizard, and if you take away my Life, God will give you Blood to drink.”<sup>24</sup> A few years after she was hanged, Reverend Noyes died as a result of a sudden and severe hemorrhage.

Largely through the Reverend Hale, Miller reflects the change that took place in Salem from an initial belief in the justice of the court to a suspicion that testimony based on spectral evidence was insufficient for execution. This transformation begins to reveal itself in Act Two, as Hale tells Francis Nurse that the court will clear his wife of the charges against her: "Believe me, Mr. Nurse, if Rebecca Nurse be tainted, then nothing's left to stop the whole green world from burning. Let you rest upon the justice of the court; the court will send her home, I know it."<sup>25</sup> By Act Three, however, Hale's confidence in the justice of the court has been badly shaken by the arrest and conviction of people like Rebecca Nurse who were highly respected members of the church and community. Hale, like his historical model, has discovered that "the whole green world" is burning indeed, and fears that he has helped to set the fire.

Partially as a result of Hale's preliminary investigation into the reality of Salem witchcraft, the Court of Oyer and Terminer was appointed to hear testimony and conduct the examinations. The members of the court immediately encountered a serious obstacle: namely, that although the Bible does not define witchcraft, it states unequivocally that "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exodus 22:18). As Proctor attempts to save his wife from hanging, Hale attempts to save his conscience by demanding visible proof of the guilt of those who have been convicted on the basis of spectral testimony:

HALE. Excellency, I have signed seventy-two death warrants; I am a minister of the Lord, and I dare not take a life without there be a proof so immaculate no slightest qualm of conscience may doubt it.

DANFORTH. Mr. Hale, you surely do not doubt my justice.

HALE. I have this morning signed away the soul of Rebecca Nurse, Your Honor. I'll not conceal it, my hand shakes yet as with a wound!<sup>26</sup>

At first, the witches who were brought to trial and convicted were generally old and eccentric women like Sarah Good who were of questionable character long before the trials began. But people like Rebecca Nurse and John Proctor were not. As Miller has Parris say to Judge Hathorne in Act Four: "it were another sort that hanged till now. Rebecca Nurse is no Bridget that lived three year with Bishop before she married him. John Proctor is not Isaac Ward that drank his family to ruin."<sup>27</sup> In late June, Rebecca Nurse was found guilty and sentenced to hang after an earlier verdict of "not guilty" was curiously reversed. Her minister, the Reverend Nicholas Noyes again, decided along with his congregation that she should be excommunicated for the good of the church. Miller seems to have been especially moved by her character and her almost unbelievable trial and conviction, as

he indicates by his comments in the "Introduction" and his interpolated remarks in Act One. On Tuesday, July 19, 1692, she was hanged on Gallows Hill along with four others, all women. She was seventy-one years old. After the hanging, according to Starkey:

The bodies of the witches were thrust into a shallow grave in a crevice of Gallows Hill's outcropping of felsite. But the body of Rebecca did not remain there. Her children bided their time . . . and at night when the crowds and the executioners had gone home again, they gathered up the body of their mother and took it home. Just where they laid it none can know, for this was a secret thing and not even Parris, whose parsonage was not a quarter of a mile up the road past the grove where the Nurses buried their dead, must see that a new grave had been opened and prayers said. This was the hour and the power of darkness when a son could not say where he had buried his mother.<sup>28</sup>

Historically, Proctor was even more of a victim of the laws of his time than Miller details in *The Crucible*. Although the real John Proctor fought against his arrest and conviction as fervently as anyone could under the circumstances, he, like Miller's Proctor, was adamant in his refusal to confess to witchcraft because he did not believe it existed. And although fifty-two of his friends and neighbors risked their own safety to sign a petition in his behalf, nothing was done to re-examine the evidence against him. Ironically, Proctor's wife—in whose interest he had originally become involved in the affair—had become pregnant and, although sentenced, would never hang. She was eventually released after enduring her husband's public execution, the birth of her child in prison, and the seizure and loss of all her possessions.

Under the law, the goods and property of witches could be confiscated after their trial and conviction. In Proctor's case, however, the sheriff did not wait for the trial or the conviction. A contemporary account of the seizure indicates that neither Proctor nor his wife were ever expected to return from prison:

John Proctor and his Wife being in Prison, the Sheriff came to his House and seized all the Goods, Provisions, and Cattle that he could come at, and sold some of the Cattle at half price, and killed others, and put them up for the West-Indies; threw out the Beer out of a Barrel, and carried away the Barrel; emptied a Pot of Broath, and took away the Pot, and left nothing in the House for the support of the Children: No part of the said Goods are known to be returned.<sup>29</sup>

(The Proctors had five children, the youngest of whom were three and seven.) Along with three other men and one woman, John Proctor was hanged on August 19. On September 22, seven more witches and one wizard were hanged, and then the executions suddenly ended.

Miller has symbolized all the judges of the witchcraft trials in the figures of Danforth and Hathorne (Nathaniel Hawthorne's ancestor), and presented them as being more "official" in a legal sense than their historical models actually were. None of the judges in the trials had any legal training, and, apparently, neither had anyone else who was administering the law in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. According to Starkey, the curious nature of the trials was in part due to the Puritans' limited understanding of the law, their contempt for lawyers, and their nearly total reliance on the Bible as a guide for all matters of legal and moral authority:

The Puritans had a low opinion of lawyers and did not permit the professional practice of law in the colony. In effect the administration of the law was in the hands of laymen, most of them second-generation colonists who had an incomplete grasp of current principles of English jurisdiction. For that matter, this chosen people, this community which submitted itself to the direct rule of God, looked less to England for its precepts than to God's ancient and holy word. So far as was practicable the Puritans were living by a legal system that antedated the Magna Carta by at least two millennia, the Decalogue and the tribal laws codified in the Pentateuch.<sup>30</sup>

As historians occasionally have pointed out, the executions did not stop because the people in Massachusetts suddenly ceased to believe in either the Devil or witchcraft; they stopped, simply and ironically, because of a legal question. There never was any doubt for most people living in New England in 1692 whether or not witchcraft was real or whether witches should be executed; the question centered around the reliability of spectral evidence coming from the testimony of the afflicted. It was largely through the determinations of Increase Mather and fourteen other Boston ministers that such testimony was declared to be insufficient for conviction and therefore became inadmissible as evidence. It was better, they concluded, to allow ten witches to escape than to hang one innocent person. In late October, Governor Phips officially dismissed the Court of Oyer and Terminer, and—although the trials continued through the following April—in May, 1693 he issued a proclamation discharging all the remaining "witches" and pardoning those who had fled the colony rather than face arrest, trial, and certain conviction.

Miller has said that if he were to rewrite *The Crucible*, he would make an open thematic issue of the evil he now believes to be represented by the Salem judges. His altered viewpoint toward the play may be accounted for partially as a reconsideration of his intensive examination of the trial records which, he has said, do not "reveal any mitigation of the unrelieved, straightforward, and absolute dedication to evil displayed by the judges of these trials and the prosecutors.

After days of study it became quite incredible how perfect they were in this respect."<sup>31</sup>

Miller's subsequent view of evil, however, did not come entirely from his study of the trial records. Between writing *The Crucible* in 1952 and producing the "Introduction" to the *Collected Plays* in 1957, he underwent a personal crucible when he appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1956. Although the experience was understandably not without its effect on his later attitude toward Congressional "witchhunters," it should, nevertheless, be considered in relation to his comments on the judges and evil quoted above. A more accurate reflection of Miller's attitude while writing *The Crucible* appears perhaps most clearly in the account published in February, 1953 of his thoughts while standing on the rock at Gallows Hill:

Here hung Rebecca, John Proctor, George Jacobs—people more real to me than the living can ever be. The sense of a terrible marvel again; that people could have such a belief in themselves and in the rightness of their consciences as to give their lives rather than say what they thought was false. Or, perhaps, they only feared Hell so much? Yet, Rebecca said, and it is written in the record, "I cannot belie myself." And she knew it would kill her. . . . The rock stands forever in Salem. They knew who they were. Nineteen.<sup>32</sup>

Like the rock at Salem, *The Crucible* has endured beyond the immediate events of its own time. If it was originally seen as a political allegory, it is presently seen by contemporary audiences almost entirely as a distinguished American play by an equally distinguished American playwright. As one of the most frequently produced plays in the American theater, *The Crucible* has attained a life of its own; one that both interprets and defines the cultural and historical background of American society. Given the general lack of plays in the American theater that have seriously undertaken to explore the meaning and significance of the American past in relation to the present, *The Crucible* stands virtually alone as a dramatically coherent rendition of one of the most terrifying chapters in American history.

#### NOTES

1. *The Crucible* opened at the Martin Beck Theater in New York City. Directed by Jed Harris, the cast included Arthur Kennedy as John Proctor, E. G. Marshall as the Reverend John Hale, and Beatrice Straight as Elizabeth Proctor. After 197 performances, the play closed on July 11, 1953.

2. John and Alice Griffin, "Arthur Miller Discusses *The Crucible*," *Theatre Arts* 37 (October, 1953), 33.

3. Dennis Welland, *Arthur Miller* (New York, 1961), p. 74.

4. Marion L. Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts* (New York, 1949), p. 12; hereafter cited as *The Devil*.
5. For this and other information of an historical and factual nature, I am indebted to *What Happened in Salem?*, ed. David Levin (New York, 1960), hereafter cited as *Salem*; *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases, 1648-1706*, ed. George Lincoln Burr (New York, 1914), hereafter cited as *Narratives*; and *Salem Witchcraft* by Charles W. Upham (Boston, 1867). I have also drawn upon material located in the Essex County Archives, particularly the Works Progress Administration transcript of *Salem Witchcraft, 1692* on file in the Essex County Court House at Salem. For a perspective of the events as social history, see Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1974).
6. George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1929), p. 367. Frederick C. Drake, however, in "Witchcraft in the American Colonies, 1647-62," documents by names, dates, and places twenty executions for witchcraft between 1647-62, the majority of which took place in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Only two executions, Drake says, took place in the colonies between 1662 and 1691, one of which was the result of the Goodwin case in Boston in 1688 (*American Quarterly* 20 [1968], 694-725).
7. Cotton Mather, "Memorable Providences . . .," (Boston, 1689); rpt. in Burr, *Narratives*, pp. 93-143.
8. Burr, *Narratives*, p. 101.
9. Starkey, *The Devil*, p. 24.
10. Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (New York, 1957), p. 41; hereinafter cited as *C.P.* Present-day Salem is not where the witchcraft began in 1692. The town of Danvers, originally called "Salem Village," is the location of Miller's play and the historical site in Essex County where the tragedy began. Danvers, or Salem Village, is a few miles northwest of present-day Salem, which was then called "Salem Town."
11. *C.P.*, p. 231.
12. Levin, *Salem*, p. 64.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
15. *C.P.*, pp. 302-303.
16. Levin, *Salem*, p. 56.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.
18. *C.P.*, p. 232.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 253. *Incubi, succubi*: in the mythology of witchcraft, incubi are evil spirits capable of assuming the human male form to have sexual intercourse with women at night, while succubi assume the female form to have sexual intercourse with men in their sleep.
21. Burr, *Narratives*, pp. 404-405. Hale's account was written in 1697; published in 1702 after his death.
22. Burr, *Narratives*, p. 415.
23. Levin, *Salem*, p. xviii.

24. Burr, *Narratives*, p. 358.

25. *C.P.*, p. 277.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 297.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 316.

28. Starkey, *The Devil*, p. 177.

29. Burr, *Narratives*, p. 361.

30. Starkey, *The Devil*, p. 36. In addition to Starkey's conclusion, George Lincoln Burr has noted that "in these trials of 1692 the jurors were chosen from among church-members only, not, as later, from all who had the property to make them voters under the new charter." *Narratives*, p. 362, n. 2.

31. *C.P.*, pp. 42-43.

32. Arthur Miller, "Journey to 'The Crucible,'" *New York Times*, February 8, 1953, Sec. 2, p. 3. Miller's admiration for the "Salem Nineteen" is presumably also extended to the twentieth person who died there—the eighty year old Giles Corey, who was pressed to death on September 19 for standing mute before the judges and the court. "Pressing" involved placing rocks on the accused's chest until he died or consented to enter a plea and stand trial. Tradition has it that Corey's last words were "more weight," just before he died, but a less heroic end was recorded by a contemporary who probably witnessed the gruesome procedure: "In pressing [.] his Tongue being prest out of his Mouth, the Sheriff with his Cane forced it in again, when he was dying. He was the first in New-England, that was ever prest to Death." Burr, *Narratives*, p. 367.