



The Crucible

By Arthur Miller

. . . When History and Literature Collide

The Crucible is . . .

Puritanism

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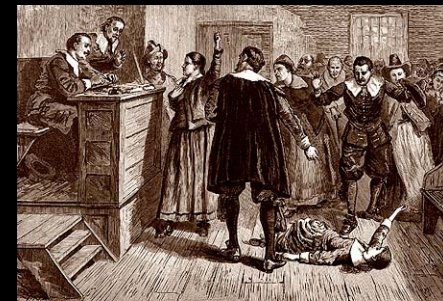
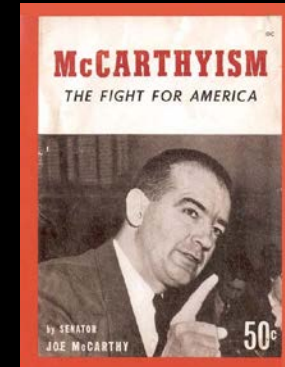
Witchcraft

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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.

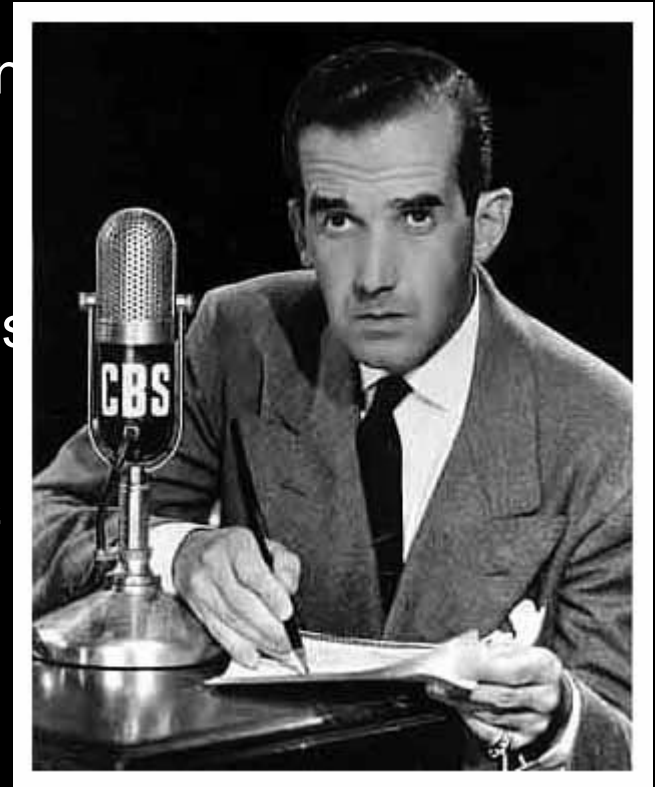
In the film industry alone, over 300 actors, writers, and directors were denied work in the U.S.

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

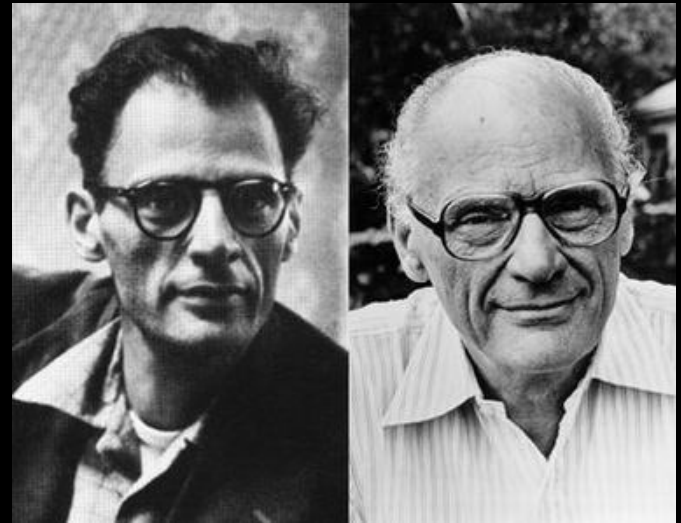
American Playwright and Writer

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 witch craft 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 effectively accuse Elizabeth. John Proctor takes Mary to the court to confess that the girls are only pretending. She is not strong enough to fight Abigail and as soon as Abigail leads the other girls against her, Mary caves and runs back to her side by accusing Proctor himself.



Drama Basics

Drama is a form of literature that is written to be performed before an audience. The two main types of drama are tragedy and comedy. A **tragedy** unveils the downfall of a main character in a serious tone; a **comedy** is light and often humorous.

Like fiction, drama includes the following elements: plot, setting, characters, and theme. The **plot** is the chain of related events that make up the story. In a drama, the plot is developed in a series of **acts** that are made up of **scenes**, with each scene establishing a different time and place, or **setting**.

The plot is brought to life through the words and actions of the **characters**, the individuals who participate in the action. The conversation between characters is called **dialogue**. The central character of a play is the **protagonist**; he or she is deeply involved in the conflict and may change because of it. A major character who opposes the protagonist is the **antagonist**. Some plays also have a **foil**, a minor character who contrasts in personality with the protagonist. The plot presents a **conflict**, or a struggle between opposing forces. Through the plot, a playwright develops a **theme**, the central message that the writer wants to share with an audience.

Drama Basics (cont'd)

When you read the script of a play, you will read the characters' dialogue. You will also encounter these elements:

- a **cast of characters**— a list of characters presented before the action starts
- **stage directions**, or the italicized instructions that identify the setting; suggest the use of props, lighting, scenery, sound effects, and costumes; describe how characters look, speak, move, and react; and provide background information

Understanding these basic dramatic conventions may help you to visualize the characters and the action in a play, creating a theater in your mind as you read.

DRAMATIC PLOT STRUCTURE

Title of Selection: The Crucible

Author: Arthur Miller

CONFLICT:

The main conflict of the play is between the Salem townspeople and the people accused of being witches.

Rising Action or Complications (actions that lead to the crisis)

The witch hunt escalates, and several women are tried for witchcraft and hung.

Falling Action (leads to resolution of the conflict)

John Proctor upholds his innocence. There are rumors of an uprising in a nearby town. Abigail flees Salem.

Exposition or Introduction (establishes conflict)

Several girls from Salem have been playing with witchcraft in the forest with the slave Tituba. They seem to be bewitched, and accuse Tituba and several others of consorting with the devil.

Climax

The Proctors are accused of witchcraft. John confesses his adultery to his wife, and she lies to the court in order to save him.

Resolution

John Proctor is hanged, along with Rebecca Nurse. Because she is pregnant, Elizabeth Proctor's life is spared.

American Drama

Drama is probably the most difficult form of writing.

A play is not finished in the same way that a poem or novel is because after it is written, it still needs to be brought to life on a stage.

A play primarily engages the enthusiasm of directors, actors, and technicians through *the story*.

The playwright makes the audience concerned for a character by focusing on a conflict that involves something important to the characters.

The protagonist of a play is the major character who usually drives the action forward.

Exposition gives the audience background information.

Most of the plays that are produced in the United States today are produced with the hope that they will make money.

American Drama (cont'd)

Playwrights must usually find an agent who submits a play to producers who are likely to consider it.

The producer

- advances money to finance a play.

- meets with agents who represent the playwrights.

- works with a playwright on changes to a play.

Theater is a collaborative medium.

A director and actors “take away” a play from its author.

Rehearsals are both pleasant and tense.

Producers seldom take risks on plays.

Thousands of plays are copyrighted each year.

The audience can contribute to a good performance.

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