

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

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

The Crucible is both an intense psychological drama and a play of epic proportions. Its cast is larger than that of almost any of Miller's plays until *The American Clock* (1980), because this is a drama about an entire community betrayed by a Dickensian surrender to the irrational; it is also, however, a play about the redemption of an individual and, through the individual, of a society. Some scenes, therefore, people the stage with characters, while others show the individual confronted by little more than his own conscience. That oscillation between the public and the private is a part of the rhythmic pattern of the play. Miller was not unaware of the danger of offering the public such a play in 1953 and thereby "writing myself into the wilderness politically but personally as well." He knew that his

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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