

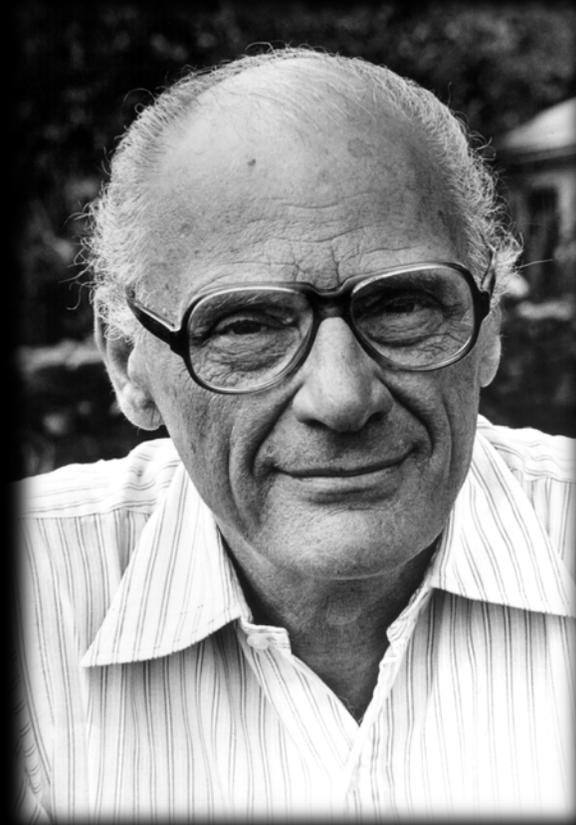
the  
CRUCIBLE

# *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller

Notes on the Author, the Historical Context, and the Drama

# The Life of the Author...

Born on October 17, 1915 and passing on February 10, 2005, Arthur Miller was one of America's most prominent playwrights. Beyond *The Crucible*, his other most famous works include *All My Sons* (1947), *Death of a Salesman* (1949), and *A View from the Bridge* (1955).



# The Life of the Author...



Miller grew up in a moderately wealthy household until the great Wall Street crash of 1929 ushered in the Great Depression and forced his father out of work. Moving then from Harlem to Brooklyn, Miller attempted to support his family by delivering bread and working other menial jobs before heading off to school.

# The Life of the Author...

Originally majoring in journalism at the University of Michigan, Miller soon changed his major after experiencing success following the publication of his first play, *No Villain*, which earned him the Avery Hopwood Award for playwrights.



# The Life of the Author...



After graduating college, Miller gained employment with the Federal Theatre Project, a New Deal agency established to provide jobs in theatre; this agency, however, was shut down in 1939 after suspected infiltration by Communist sympathizers, a great fear of the era.

# Communist Fear...

The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) reached prominence in 1952 as it investigated the actions of the film industry in Hollywood, eventually forcing many famous stars to be blacklisted or flee the United States for work. One such actor was acclaimed silent film star, Charlie Chaplin.



# Communist Fear...



Joseph McCarthy was an American politician who served as a Republican Senator from Wisconsin from 1947 until his death in 1957. Beginning in 1950, he became the public face of a period in which Cold War tensions fueled fears of widespread Communist subversion.

# Communist Fear...

He was noted for making claims that there were large numbers of Communists and Soviet spies and sympathizers inside the United States federal government and elsewhere. Ultimately, his tactics and inability to substantiate his claims led him to be censured by the United States Senate.



# Elia Kazan...

An American director and producer, Elia Kazan reached a turning point in his career when called to testify as a witness before the HUAC in 1952 at the time of Hollywood investigations, which brought him strong negative reactions from many liberal friends and colleagues. His testimony helped end the careers of former acting colleagues Morris Carnovsky and Art Smith, along with ending the work of playwright Clifford Odets.



# Elia Kazan...



Kazan later justified his act by saying he took "only the more tolerable of two alternatives that were either way painful and wrong." Nearly a half-century later, his anti-Communist testimony continued to cause controversy. When Kazan was awarded with an honorary Oscar in 1999, dozens of actors chose not to applaud and over 250 demonstrators picketed the event.



# Inspiration...

Touched by this conspiracy closely, namely through Elia Kazan, the director of the first production of *Death of a Salesman* on Broadway, Miller researched the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 and compared it to the Communist investigations of the 1950's, thus creating *The Crucible*.

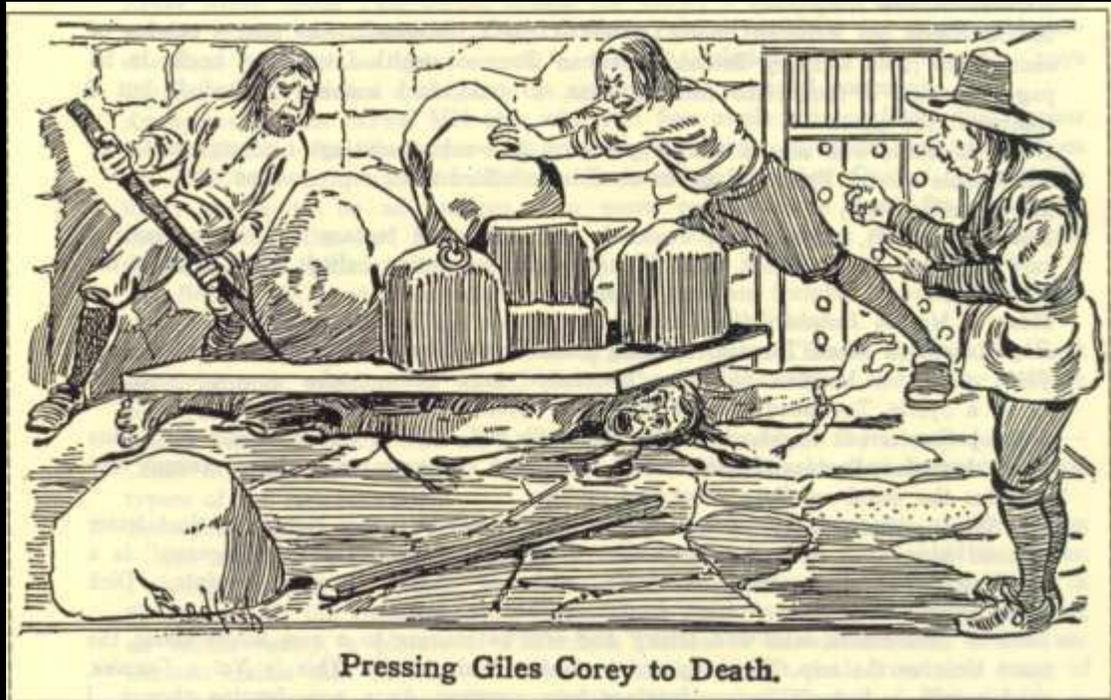


# *The Crucible...*

Written as a warning against actions similar to McCarthyism and HUAC, Miller presents the horrific occurrences of February 1692 to May 1693 in the Province of Massachusetts Bay. Over 150 people were arrested and imprisoned. Fourteen women and five men were convicted and then executed by hanging due to accusations of being a witch.



# *The Crucible...*



One man, Giles Corey, who refused to enter a plea, was crushed to death by heavy stones, a process wherein the convicted is “pressed” for the truth.

# Salem Witch Trials...

The infamous Salem witch trials began during the spring of 1692, after a group of young girls in Salem Village, Massachusetts, claimed to be possessed by the devil and accused several local women of witchcraft. As a wave of hysteria spread throughout colonial Massachusetts, a special court was convened in Salem to hear the cases; the first convicted witch, Bridget Bishop, was hanged that June.



# Salem Witch Trials...

Eighteen others followed Bishop to Salem's Gallows Hill, while some 150 more men, women, children, and even two dogs were accused over the next several months. By September 1692, the hysteria had begun to abate and public opinion turned against the trials. Though the Massachusetts General Court later annulled guilty verdicts against accused witches and granted indemnities to their families, bitterness lingered in the community, and the painful legacy of the Salem witch trials would endure for centuries.



# A Crucible?

By definition, a “crucible” is a severe test or a situation that requires an individual to make a difficult decision.

Imagine for a moment being accused of committing a crime by a person of great authority, and you have no way of defending yourself or proving your innocence.



# Themes...

- The search for truth amongst lies and deceit
- The price of one's reputation
- Compassion and forgiveness from sin
- Good vs. evil or God vs. Satan
- The search for justice in an unjust world