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# The Crucible: A Comparative Study of the Play and the Film

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# *The Crucible: A Comparative Study of the Play and the Film*

**FOULIS  
Maïa**

Sous la direction de MME. BLATTES

UFR DE LANGUES ETRANGERES  
Département Langues, Littératures et Civilisations Etrangères (LLCE)

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Mémoire de master 1 recherche - 18 crédits – Mention Langues Littératures et Civilisations

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## Introduction

*The Crucible* is one of the most famous American plays, written by one of the most famous –if not the most famous– American playwrights. In this study, we shall be comparing and contrasting the stage version of this play with one of its film adaptations. To do this we shall look at questions of historical and cultural context, structure and finally themes.

In my opinion *The Crucible* is a completely relevant play today because firstly it stands as evidence of the shameful aspects of the Cold War. Indeed, as it is not just a historical play but an allegory and a criticism of the McCarthy era it shows the modern reader and audience the persecution and discrimination that many people had to face during this dark time in American history. As such it stands as a sort of cautionary tale that is still needed so that we do not make the same mistakes (and as we do still make the same mistakes it continues to be relevant and necessary). Secondly, despite the fact that it is rooted in a particular era, it has become quite a timeless play and quite universal in its reach. It is not a relic or an outdated piece of writing; it continues to be performed worldwide which is the true sign of the success of a play. Because of this wide reach I thought that it would be interesting to study *The Crucible*. We have to wonder why it is so famous and influential. This study will set out to answer this question. Miller wanted to write a play with contemporary (to him) relevance, yet he also wanted his play to be abstract and general enough so that it would transcend historical and geographical borders. He wanted to warn people of the dangers of political and ideological tyranny and his play is in a way an ode to freedom and justice.

Furthermore, I thought that it would be interesting to compare Miller's play (written in the 1950s) with the 1990s film adaptation of *The Crucible*. I believe that this is essential for a variety of reasons: it will firstly help us question the timeless reputation of the play as the film was made over forty years after the play in a completely different era and social, political and cultural context. By comparing and contrasting these two pieces of fiction<sup>1</sup> we can study the similarities and differences (if indeed there are any) and see how the ideas expressed in the original play have evolved. We can question in what ways the passing of time has influenced *The Crucible* and also see whether a more grounded, realistic adaptation affects the universality of the play. Hopefully this study should also provide some insight into the process of film adaptation, something perhaps quite relevant as cinema today seems to be dominated by literary adaptations.

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<sup>1</sup> By this I mean two different forms of story-telling, one being theatre and the other being cinema. I shall use this term throughout the rest of this study.



As defined by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a crucible is a pot used for melting or testing metals that can withstand incredibly high temperatures. It is perhaps derived from the Latin word *crux* meaning ‘cross’ in English.<sup>2</sup> There are therefore various explanations that can be made about Miller’s choice of title: firstly it is its supposed link to the word ‘cross’ that could link it to the religious theme of the play. Secondly and perhaps more likely, the crucible is supposed to represent the main character –John Proctor- a man who can withstand the highest pressure and not crack but remain true to himself and his values. It is in any case quite an abstract and enigmatic title. Such a vague and imprecise title hints at the fact that the play is not confined to one genre or definition but is open to multiple interpretations. In this study we shall discuss the play’s supposed timelessness and universality -Miller’s choice of title certainly hints at this fact. Or perhaps it means that it is one thing masquerading as another, that its face value is just a deception to mask its real intent (that it is a play supposedly about the Salem witch trials when in reality it is a criticism of McCarthy and the Communist witch hunt). The title is our first contact with the play as a reader and a viewer and in a way it gives us certain indications as to what this play will be about. It is also interesting to note that the French title of *The Crucible* is *Les Sorcières de Salem*, a title that is certainly more straightforward and less cryptic –though perhaps it grounds the play too much in history.

Before we start to discuss the intricacies of the play and its film adaptation, I would like to give a brief summary of the plot of *The Crucible* as it will almost certainly be useful for our subsequent study of both pieces of fiction. The general plot of the film is identical to that of the play so we shall just describe the events of the play. It is a play in four acts, each act takes place at a different time and in a different location (some of which have been changed in the film). It tells a dramatised account of the real-life Salem witch trials of 1692. Miller takes some liberties with historical facts for dramatic purposes (e.g. he makes certain characters older and adds a romantic plot between two characters). In early 1692 Betty Parris, the daughter of the Reverend of Salem, becomes mysteriously afflicted with an unknown illness. It turns out that Betty and some of the other girls –notably Abigail Williams- in the village have been in the woods attempting to cast spells with Reverend Parris’ servant, Tituba. Witchcraft is quickly suspected and a local reverend, Reverend John Hale, is called to Salem. After this the girls start accusing various townspeople of witchcraft including Tituba (an easy

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<sup>2</sup> "**Crucible.**" *Encyclopaedia Britannica. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online.* Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2014. Web. 01 Jun. 2014. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/>>.

target because of her ethnicity) and other female outcasts. In the Puritan village of Salem, people start to get worried about the devil and possession and many other people are accused of witchcraft: mass hysteria ensues. A farmer, John Proctor, attempts to stay out of the hysteria; he had an affair with the young Abigail Williams and she was thrown out of their house (she was in his and his wife's care as she is an orphan) after his wife, Elizabeth "Goody" Proctor found out. Proctor and his wife have an uneasy relationship; he accuses her of being cold. Taking advantage of the hysteria and still in love with Proctor, Abigail accuses Elizabeth of witchcraft and Elizabeth is arrested.

Many more people are arrested and put on trial by what is essentially a 'kangaroo court'.<sup>3</sup> The court -led by Judges Danforth and Hathorne and assisted by Reverends Hale and Parris- does not use correct evidence and bases its judgments on what the young girls say. The young girls essentially lie and pretend that they are or were possessed and that the accused are witches. Most of the accused are thrown into jail or hanged. The court proceedings are completely unfair and Proctor attempts to stop them once his wife is accused. It turns out that she will not be hanged as she is pregnant with his child. Proctor is eventually accused of being a witch by Mary Warren and convicted after a lengthy court session. At the end of the play, Reverend Hale –who has had a change of heart about the witch trials as he sees how unfair they are- tries to persuade Proctor to confess to being a witch so that he will not be hanged. At first Proctor agrees as he wants to be free. However, after being reconciled with Elizabeth and after realising that he would have to accuse others of witchcraft (essentially condemning them to die), he decides that he would rather die a dignified death knowing that he is innocent than live a life as a guilty man –having participated in the deaths of others. The play ends with him being sent to be hanged (the film ends showing Proctor and two others being hanged). John Proctor and Abigail Williams are the central figures in the play and we shall discuss them at length in this study.

This play was published by Arthur Miller in 1953. Before we discuss this play, perhaps a few words about Miller are in order. Arthur Asher Miller was born on October 17<sup>th</sup> 1915 in Harlem, New York (United States). He grew up during the Great Depression, something which certainly influenced his work. After attending the University of Michigan he started writing plays: his first successful play was *All My Sons* in 1946, followed by *Death of a Salesman* in 1949 –for which he won a Pulitzer Prize. *The Crucible* was his next play and it

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<sup>3</sup> "A court that uses unfair methods or is not a proper court of law." *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 2014. Web. 01 Jun. 2014. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kangaroo%20court>>

was first performed in 1953. We shall discuss in depth the historical and cultural context of this play in the first part of this study. These three plays are his most well-known and celebrated plays. He continued to write plays throughout his life though they are arguably less well-known than the three previously mentioned. Miller was married three times (to Mary Slattery, Marilyn Monroe and Inge Morath) and intended getting married for a fourth time – with the painter Agnes Barley- but he died of heart failure at the age of 89 in 2005 before this could happen. He had quite an eventful personal life, the events of which probably influenced his writing (e.g. his relationship with his first wife and his subsequent relationship with Monroe certainly do mirror the relationship between the Proctors and Abigail Williams in *The Crucible*).<sup>4</sup> In his works, Miller frequently talks about families and issues surrounding familial bonds and relationships. *The Crucible* does showcase family relationships though it also links it to the community at large and issues that transcend the personal sphere. This is perhaps why it was and still is so successful internationally as his earlier works are to a certain extent rooted in the American way of life whereas *The Crucible* is more far-reaching in its scope.

*The Crucible* was first performed in 1953. It opened at the Martin Becker Theater on Broadway on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1953. Miller researched it for months beforehand as he wanted to maintain some historical accuracy. The play was directed by Jed Harris and starred, amongst others, Arthur Kennedy as John Proctor, Madeleine Sherwood as Abigail Williams, Beatrice Straight as Elizabeth Proctor and E. G. Marshall as Reverend John Hale. Though the play received mixed reviews at first it has become one of Miller's most celebrated and most performed plays and indeed perhaps one of the most famous American plays. Miller wrote the play as a veiled criticism of Senator Joseph McCarthy and of the anti-Communist 'witch hunt' of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), it was initially a very political play which perhaps influenced its reception at the time. Miller wrote the screenplay to the 1996 film adaptation of *The Crucible*. This is the film adaptation that we shall study. It was directed by Nicholas Hytner, produced by Robert A. Miller and David V. Picker, distributed by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox and starred amongst others Daniel Day-Lewis as Proctor, Winona Ryder as Abigail, Joan Allen as Elizabeth and Rob Campbell as Reverend Hale. In addition, the film was scored by George Fenton, edited by Tariq Anwar and the cinematography was by

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<sup>4</sup> 'Arthur Miller.' *Biography*, 2014. Web. 01 Jun. 2014. <<http://www.biography.com/people/arthur-miller-9408335>>

Andrew Dunn. The film was critically praised when it first came out on November 27<sup>th</sup> 1996 though it was not a commercial success despite the big-name draw.

To compare and contrast both of these pieces of fiction, this study will comprise three parts. Firstly we shall study the historical and cultural context of the play and the film to attempt to understand why they were made. To do this we shall look at the events of the 1692 Salem witch trials so as to gain a comprehensive knowledge of what transpired, which in turn will help us understand the play. We shall also look at the historical events (the political and social climate) surrounding the conception of both the play and the film to gain an insight into the reasons behind their making. We shall also look at the cultural context of the play (the 1950s and post-war American theatre) and the film (the 1990s in American cinema). All this should then help us explore our next two parts about the modalities of film adaptation and the themes discussed in *The Crucible*. In our second part we shall discuss questions of film adaptation, from a theoretical point of view and also from a practical point of view as we shall study some scenes and compare and contrast them to the source material. We shall also touch upon the staging of the first representation of *The Crucible* to further our understanding of structural differences between theatre and film. Finally in our third part we shall talk about the themes explored in the play and the film, namely the representation of women, justice and the mob versus the individual. Overall this should help us gain a comprehensive view of the similarities and differences between both pieces of fiction.

To understand both the play and the film, it is necessary to give some historical context; firstly the context of the Salem Witch Trials and secondly the context in which the play and then the film were made –which I call the cultural context. Firstly we shall discuss the notorious Salem Witch Trials. There have been very different interpretations and understandings of these trials, it is thus important that we give an accurate and correct description of what happened in Salem in 1692.

## ***I. Historical and Cultural Context***

### ***1.) The Salem Witch Trials of 1692***

#### ***i.) Understanding the Puritan Way of Life***

The first settlers arrived in Salem in 1626. Salem is located in the state of Massachusetts, Salem was named after its indigenous population of Native Americans and founded as a colony in 1620 when European pilgrims arrived and created the Plymouth Colony. Salem became a town in 1629 (previously it had been a settlement). Massachusetts had been mostly settled by Puritans and –as opposed to more religiously tolerant neighbouring states such as Rhode Island or Connecticut- rules there were harsh and strict and the settlers lacked any kind of religious tolerance (Sweet, pp.76-98). It is in this context that the Salem Witch Trials came about. These trials not only took place in Salem Town, but also in Salem Village, Ipswich and Andover (other neighbouring towns in Massachusetts); nevertheless the most notorious of these trials were the ones held in Salem Village and we shall concern ourselves with these as they are relevant to Miller’s *The Crucible*. There had been other convictions of witchcraft around New England in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, but nothing of this scale.

Religion was present in all aspects of life: government, law, school and family. In the Puritan society, everyone had to live by the same religion and the same rules, “the Puritans believed what they said, believed it passionately, and yet they not only endeavored themselves to live a ‘smooth, honest, civil life’, but tried to force everyone within their power to do likewise” (Morgan, p. 2). Indeed the Puritans thought themselves to be examples of good conduct to the world and constantly had to prove their faith, such was the Puritan ethic. For example, Puritans believed in the pursuit of knowledge and education as a means of salvation. Children were educated to read, “in order that they might gain a first-hand knowledge of the Bible” (Morgan, p. 88). In fact, laws were put into place to ensure that children should learn how to read and write.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, children were not necessarily considered as separate beings but as extensions of their parents.

Puritanism had a constrictive influence on the family. The family could not exist without the church as otherwise it would too easily succumb to outside temptations (in this

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<sup>5</sup> These laws were put into place in Massachusetts in 1642 to ensure that all Puritan children were taught to read the English language and also understand the Capital Laws (the laws of the colony based on Biblical laws). If the parents did not sufficiently educate their children, they were fined twenty shillings per neglected child. Parents were also required to teach their children the catechism at least once a week.

case the devil). The church was the link between man and God; Puritan families were not required by law to attend religious sermons, yet they were frowned upon and perhaps ostracized if they did not. Individuals who did not attend church services or did not attend regularly were suspected of convening with the devil (as we will see later on when we discuss *The Crucible*).

It is also important to consider the place of women in Puritan society as this will help in our understanding of many of the characters of the play. In accordance with many Christian beliefs women were considered as mere appendages to men, women were to help men but were not necessarily considered as separate beings (rather like children). They were considered as a sort of “necessary evil” (Morgan, p.29).<sup>6</sup> Women were considered as the weaker sex, the one that would be more prone to giving in to temptation and the devil; it is because of this mindset that most of the people who were accused of witchcraft (both in the Salem Witch Trials and in many other instances of perceived witchcraft) were women.

## ii.) The Witch Trials in Salem

Because of the omnipresence of Puritanism, witchcraft and possession (by the devil) were a widespread fear. Puritans believed in the existence of witches, ghosts, demons, et cetera. Before the Salem Witch Trials, there had been various occurrences of people (mainly women) accused of witchcraft, not only in Massachusetts but in other states too.

In 1689, Samuel Parris moved from Boston to become the new minister of Salem Village. He brought with him his daughter Betty Paris (aged 9) and his niece Abigail Williams (aged 11). Parris was Abigail’s guardian as her parents had been murdered during a raid by Native Americans thus leaving her an orphan. According to Rev. John Hale in his book *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft* (1697),<sup>7</sup> In the late winter of 1691 Elizabeth “Betty” Paris and Abigail Williams began exhibiting signs of possession (for example unexplained epileptic fits) by what their physician called the “evil hand” (Hale, p.23). This continued on into early 1692 and Samuel Parris and the other townsfolk started to fear that the girls were bewitched, especially after they accused their servant, Tituba, of

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<sup>6</sup> E. S. Morgan cites an extract from John Cotton’s *A Meet Help: Or, a Wedding Sermon, Preached at New-Castle in New England*, June 19, 1694 (Boston, 1699), p.14: “Women are Creatures without which there is no comfortable Living for man: it is true of them what is wont to be said of Governments, *that bad ones are better than none*: They are a sort of Blasphemers then who dispise [sic] and decry them, and call them a *necessary Evil*, for they are a *necessary Good*; such as it was not good that man should be without.”

<sup>7</sup> Full title of the book: *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft, and How Persons Guilty of that Crime may be Convicted: And the means used for their Discovery Discussed, both Negatively and Affirmatively, according to Scripture and Experience*, by John Hale, Pastor of the Church of Christ in Beverley (1697).

convening with the devil and being a witch. They accused her of tormenting them, and also accused two other women, Sarah “Goody” Osborne (a woman who was ill and thus hadn’t attended church service for about three years) and Sarah Good (a vagrant who was ostracized by the townsfolk) of being witches. In February 1692, two other girls also became afflicted, Ann Putnam Jr. (aged 13) and Elizabeth Hubbard (aged 17).

In March of that year, the three accused women were interrogated and Tituba confessed to being a witch and was “found to have upon her body the marks of the Devil” (Hale, p.26), and also accused Goody Osborne and Sarah Good of being witches. Furthermore, three other girls began exhibiting the same symptoms as Abigail and Betty; these girls were Mercy Lewis (aged 17), Mary Walcott (aged 17) and Mary Warren (aged 17 or 18). From the months of March to May of that year, the girls accused dozens more townspeople of being witches. Mostly women were accused but there were some men too, notably John Proctor who is the protagonist of Miller’s *The Crucible* and Dorothy Good, daughter of Sarah Good, who was only four years old. Whereas the first women accused were considered as not being proper Puritans (one of the women was homeless and a beggar, one was a black servant and the other a woman who hadn’t been to church in almost three years), the accusations that followed had nothing to do with virtue or being a practicing Puritan; indeed it is thought that the parents of the girls (such as Ann Putnam Jr. daughter of Thomas Putnam and Ann Putnam née Carr) used the witchcraft accusations for personal gain (e.g. to get more land). At the end of May, the governor of Massachusetts, William Phips created the Court of Oyer and Terminer to oversee the Salem Witch Trials. From the end of May to the end of October 1692, nineteen people were hanged, one man (Giles Corey) was pressed to death, eight more were condemned, around fifty people confessed to being witches (so as to avoid being hanged) and few hundred more were in prison or accused by various townsfolk. On the 29<sup>th</sup> October, the court was suspended as popular opinion had turned against the trials (one of the initial supporters of the trial, John Hale, ended up denouncing them). Further trials were held in early 1693 but none of the accused were hanged.

We can wonder just exactly how to convict someone of witchcraft and what kind of evidence would have been admissible by the Court of Oyer and Terminer. In his book, *Salem Witchcraft*, Charles W. Upham (1867)<sup>8</sup> lists some of the evidence that could be used to

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<sup>8</sup> Full title: *Salem Witchcraft, With an Account of Salem Village and A History of Opinions on Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects Volumes I & II*, by Charles W. Upham, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1969 (first ed. 1867).

convict a person of witchcraft, this evidence was mostly “spectral evidence” (Upham, Volume II, p.349) meaning that it was mostly based on intangible evidence that could not be verified. For example, the girls frequently said that they saw the “spectral shapes” of those they accused of witchcraft appear to them to taunt them, C. W. Upham states that:

It was believed, that, when witches found it inconvenient from any cause to execute their infernal designs upon those whom they wished to afflict by going to them in their natural human persons, they transformed themselves into the likeness of some animal,—a dog, hog, cat, rat, mouse, or toad; birds—particularly yellow birds—were often imagined to perform this service, as representing witches or the Devil (Vol. I, pp. 405-406).

If the witness (generally the accuser) saw what they described as the spectral shape of the person that was accused, then that person could be found guilty. As we can see the evidence used was highly subjective and unfair. There are many instances in which people took ordinary, mundane things to be signs of the occult. This was made worse by the mass hysteria that fuelled the trials. There are various theories as to why such an event happened, mass hysteria and the power of the mob are very important, as is the personal profit that many townspeople stood to gain from the trials; there are also various medical theories that abound that could not only explain the symptoms of the girls, but also the attitude of the townsfolk. Indeed it has been said that the water or the rye bread that the people in Salem ate contained bacteria or fungus that had similar effects to that of LSD (a psychedelic drug) which could possibly explain the attitude of the young girls; there have also been discussions about the possibility of the girls having Lyme Disease (a disease contracted through tick bites) or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), though there is not really any evidence of this pertaining to the Salem Witch Trials specifically and the explanation of hysteria seems most likely.

The topic of mass hysteria leads us to discuss the second part of our exploration of the historical context of *The Crucible*, this time focusing on the McCarthy Communist ‘witch hunt’ which happened a few hundred years later. Indeed during that era (the 1950s), there was a widespread fear of Communism in the Western world and the United States especially.

## **2.) *The McCarthy Era and the Second Red Scare (1950 – 1956)***

### **i.) Post-War America and Communism**



After the Second World War, despite the fact that they had fought side by side as allies, the Soviet Union (USSR) and the United States (USA) entered into the Cold War.<sup>9</sup> There are many reasons that could explain why exactly this happened; there is sufficient evidence to prove that the Cold War was fabricated by the Americans in order to continue the military production that supported their economy, yet there are also ideological factors to be taken into account. America and the Soviet Union had two fundamentally different ideologies, as we all know America is a Capitalist state (like much of the Western world) and the Soviet Union was Communist.

Communism however was not entirely foreign to the US; the Communist movement had been popular amongst the working class of many Western countries such as Britain, France, Australia and even the United States. The fear of Communism or 'Red Scare' truly started after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917. The idea of Communism as an alternative to Capitalism really grew during the Great Depression. Indeed in 1929, the Communist party of America only had around ten thousand members, by 1935 this had increased threefold and by 1939 it had become very popular in America for a variety of reasons.<sup>10</sup> Communism –as an ideology directly opposing Capitalism- began to scare the more conservative members of the government and in 1938 the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) was created to look into any kind of 'un-American' activities, though it focused most of its attention on the rising number of Communists in the United States (Fried, p. 12). J. Edgar Hoover and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) also began looking into what they perceived as the Communist 'threat'. Nevertheless, Communism continued its rise in popularity in the United States, especially after the Soviet Union joined the Allied side and fought with the Americans in the Second World War.

In 1945, F. D. Roosevelt died during his third term in office and was replaced by his vice-president, Harry S. Truman. Whilst Roosevelt had not been particularly fond of

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<sup>9</sup> The Cold War lasted approximately from 1947 until 1991 and was marked by much tension between the ideologically opposed USA and USSR and the 'Western' and 'Eastern' blocs. Notable events include the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The Cold War ended in 1991 after the dismantling of the Soviet Union.

<sup>10</sup> Figures taken from Albert Fried's *McCarthyism, The Great American Red Scare, A Documentary History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp.10-11. The reasons for the rise in popularity of the Communist party are tied to the response of Stalin when faced with the rise of Fascism in Europe –notably Hitler and Nazi Germany. Indeed in 1935 Stalin called for the creation of a 'popular front' to face Fascism, uniting Communists from all around the world. His response was popular as he was seen as the only person actually doing something to counter the rise of Fascism. In general, the Communist party in America was seen as the party of those in need. Thus popularity of the Communist party grew, not only amongst the poor and the workers but also black people, women and more bourgeois intellectuals.

Communists, Truman actively disliked Communism and the Soviet Union. “Popular front liberals placed Truman squarely in the conservative camp. So far as Communists were concerned –and their movement had not lost its potency- he was an enemy bent on their destruction along with the Soviet Union’s” (Fried, p. 23). It is thus in this context that anti-Communism and McCarthyism came about. Animosity between the Soviet Union and the United States escalated between 1945 and 1947 when the President made a speech that presented the Truman Doctrine<sup>11</sup> and his policy of ‘containment’, effectively a declaration of war to the Communists. From 1947 onwards we can say that there was the second ‘Red Scare’ as now the American government was openly anti-Communist and thus much propaganda circulated in the United States. Fear of Communism also rose after the Chinese Communist Revolution of 1949.<sup>12</sup> Republicans were the majority in the Congress and they took over the HUAC and brought it back into prominence. The HUAC targeted Hollywood as it was seen as a hotbed of liberals, leftists and of course Communists. Many actors, directors, screenwriters, et cetera. feared being associated with the Communist Party because if they were, then they were put on a blacklist and could not find work with any film studios (who were desperate to prove that they were not Communist sympathizers). Many people in the industry were interrogated by the HUAC, notably the ‘Hollywood Ten.’<sup>13</sup> This will be important later when we discuss Arthur Miller’s experiences with the HUAC.

Despite the fact that by 1949 the Communist Party had become increasingly unpopular, Communism was still massively feared in the United States –perhaps because the Soviets had managed to successfully explode their first atomic bomb- and many Americans were still afraid of the influence of the Soviet Union. It is thus in this climate that Senator Joe McCarthy rose to prominence.

## ii.) The Rise of McCarthy

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<sup>11</sup> The Truman Doctrine stated that the United States would provide economic and military aid to any country struggling to fight Communist uprisings, starting with Greece and Turkey.

<sup>12</sup> During World War II, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Communist Party of China (CPC) had joined forces to defeat the Japanese who had invaded Manchuria. After Japan surrendered in 1945, these two sides engaged in a war with each other and civil war broke out in China. In 1949, the CPC, led by Mao Zedong, won and established the People’s Republic of China.

<sup>13</sup> The Hollywood Ten appeared in front of the HUAC in 1947; they were a group of ten Hollywood actors, screenwriters and directors who were accused of being Communist sympathizers. They were Herbert J. Biberman, Lester Cole, Edward Dmytryk, Ring Lardner Jr., John Howard Lawson, Albert Maltz, Samuel Ornitz, Adrian Scott, Dalton Trumbo and Alvah Bessie. They had all, at one point, been members of the Communist Party. When brought in front of the HUAC, they refused to testify and pleaded the First Amendment. In 1948 they were convicted for contempt of court and were sent to jail for one year and blacklisted by Hollywood (*The Age of McCarthyism: a Brief History with Documents* by Ellen Schrecker, New York: St Martin’s Press, 1994, pp.56-57). Their experiences are detailed in John Berry’s documentary, *The Hollywood Ten*, The Criterion Collection, 1950. John Berry was also blacklisted after the release of his documentary.

Joseph McCarthy was a rather unremarkable Republican senator from Wisconsin. On February 9<sup>th</sup> 1950 at the Women's Republican Club of Wheeling (West Virginia) McCarthy announced that he had a list of all the Communist agents in the State Department. This list varied on a daily basis; on some days he said there were 57 Communists, on others 205. The names on the list changed also.

Nothing [...] could boost a politician's career as quickly as finding Communists in government [...] McCarthy had no evidence that any of the people he referred to were Communists [...] apparently, neither truth nor consistency mattered much to him [...] the blatant disregard for accuracy of his charges that distinguished him from other politicians made McCarthy notorious and frightening (Schrecker, p. 63).

McCarthy never actually had any proof of what he was saying, "McCarthy produced not a scintilla of hard evidence; only hearsay, gossip, innuendo, and downright lies from the mouths of informers" (Fried, p.73). Indeed the anti-Communist sentiment at this time was so strong that actual evidence was not necessarily required for the HUAC to convict someone, most of it was based on what (probably unreliable) witnesses had said. McCarthy never had any proof to back his accusations. One could accuse one's neighbour of being a Communist and that person could easily be convicted. This is very similar to the "spectral evidence" used by the jury to convict the witches in Salem. Around this time, the Korean War (1950-1953)<sup>14</sup> and the Julius and Ethel Rosenberg Trial (from 1951 to 1953)<sup>15</sup> did much to help exacerbate the fear of Communism and thus aided McCarthy in his anti-Communist crusade; furthermore Truman did not really do anything to stop senator McCarthy as he was helping to fuel the Red Scare.

### iii.) Arthur Miller and the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC)

As detailed in John Berry's film, *The Hollywood Ten* (The Criterion Collection, 1950), the questions asked by the HUAC were indeed traps and the trials were not fair; much of the evidence was due to witnesses and confessions made by other people interrogated by the HUAC. There was not much 'hard' evidence. We can see that this is very similar to the Salem Witch Trials in terms of mass hysteria and insufficient evidence. The search for Communists

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<sup>14</sup> The war was between South Korea (the Republic of Korea) mainly backed by the United States, and the Communist North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) backed by China and the USSR. It was essentially a proxy war between the United States and the Soviet Union; there was never a complete resolution to the war, even after the armistice in 1953 and Korea remains partitioned into two states to this day.

<sup>15</sup> Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were two Americans who were executed in 1953 after they were convicted of being Soviet spies and passing information to the USSR about the atomic bomb. Other people were tried and convicted though the Rosenbergs remain the most famous. They were the only two American citizens (non-military) to have been executed as spies during the Cold War, which adds to their notoriety.

at the time was called the ‘Communist Witch Hunt’ and further shows the parallel between the two events. We can thus see perhaps why Arthur Miller decided to set his play, *The Crucible*, during the Salem Witch Trials as a way to criticize McCarthyism and the HUAC trials.

One of Miller’s friends, Elia Kazan (an American writer, director –cinema and theatre- and actor of Greek descent who notably directed films such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* - 1951- and *East of Eden* -1955) was called to testify in front of the HUAC in 1952. Kazan, who had been a member of the Communist Party during the Great Depression, named eight other friends and former Communist Party members in order to protect his Hollywood career. After this, Miller and Kazan were no longer friends<sup>16</sup> until 1964 when they collaborated on a film. Miller became interested in the Salem Witch Trials at the time and began researching it and eventually writing *The Crucible* in 1953 as an allegory for McCarthyism; contrary to popular belief, the play was not written after he was questioned by the HUAC but before, and the play is one of the reasons why he was questioned as it was a thinly-veiled criticism of McCarthyism and that era. Miller was in fact interrogated by the HUAC in 1956.

From 1954 the HUAC had started to keep an eye on Miller, but he was only formally interrogated in 1956 when he was subpoenaed to appear before them in June of that year. At the hearing, Miller was asked to give the names of people in his entourage whom he suspected were Communist. Miller refused and in 1957 he was found guilty of contempt of Congress, was fined, blacklisted by Hollywood and had his passport confiscated (he had already been denied a passport in 1954 by the State Department when he tried to go to Belgium for a premiere of *The Crucible*).<sup>17</sup> In 1958 his conviction was overturned; in fact, by 1958 the Red Scare was over and in 1959, the HUAC was denounced by former president Truman, as was McCarthy who experienced backlash from his anti-Communist activities. Similar to what happened with the Salem Witch Trials, public opinion swiftly shifted and ended these ‘witch hunts’ (though there was still anti-Communist sentiment in America as this was the middle of the Cold War).

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<sup>16</sup> Elia Kazan remained a divisive figure in Hollywood for the rest of his career and life; he directed the film *On the Waterfront* in 1954 in an attempt to defend himself and justify his actions. The plot of the film involves a dock worker Terry Malloy, played by Marlon Brando, who testifies against a corrupt trade union boss called Johnny Friendly and finds himself unable to get any work on the docks after that. Ironically, the original screenplay of *On the Waterfront* had been entitled *The Hook* and had been written by Arthur Miller before being rewritten by Budd Schulberg.

<sup>17</sup> This timeline of events is taken from pp. viii-xxxi of the ‘Commentary’ section of the Methuen Drama edition of Miller’s *The Crucible*, edited by Susan C. W. Abbotson.

Thus we can see that *The Crucible* was a product of its time; when it comes to understanding the context of the film adaptation of *The Crucible* in 1996, it is harder to see the link between the early Clinton era (the film was made before the Monica Lewinsky scandal)<sup>18</sup> and the theme of witch hunts and mass hysteria. It is conceivable that the cultural context, more than the historical context could explain why the film was made in 1996. One historical aspect that could explain the making of the film was the end of the Cold War. 1991 marked the end of the Soviet era and the end of the Cold War; during the 1950s in Hollywood it would have been impossible to adapt *The Crucible* as a film because of Arthur Miller's reputation (as stated previously, his refusal to cooperate with the HUAC led him to be blacklisted by Hollywood). No film studio at the time would have risked being involved with Arthur Miller or *The Crucible* for fear of being associated with Communism and thus being interrogated by the HUAC. Despite easing up on certain restrictions, Hollywood film studios remained essentially anti-Communist during the rest of the Cold War era and despite Miller's high profile and restored reputation as America's greatest living playwright, *The Crucible* still had its subversive reputation.

Furthermore, certain reviews of the film when it was released give some indication as to the relevance of the film; *Rolling Stone Magazine* said "Current parallels to witch hunts include religious fundamentalism, political correctness, accusations of child abuse at day-care centers and the demonizing of race, abortion, AIDS and rock" (P. Travers, November 27<sup>th</sup> 1996); the *Los Angeles Times* said "Written with an eye on the anti-Communist witch hunting of the 1950s, *The Crucible*, as commentators take pains to remind us, continues to be of relevance in today's age of mindless homophobia and child abuse trials run amok" (K. Turan, December 13<sup>th</sup> 1996) and *Entertainment Weekly* said "Miller's play, of course, used the witch trials as a daringly transparent allegory for McCarthyism. Seeing it now, I can't claim that I was struck by any dazzling new topical parallels. Yes, events in our time have inspired elements of a witch-hunt atmosphere — accusations of child abuse in day-care centers, say, that turned out to be groundless" (O. Gleiberman, November 29<sup>th</sup> 1996).

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<sup>18</sup> Between 1995 and 1997, the former president of the United States and former White House intern Monica Lewinsky had a series of sexual encounters; these were made public in 1998 and created a scandal, firstly because the president was married –and still is- and secondly because they both initially denied the affair. Though there was a trial, Clinton was acquitted of all charges (including perjury) and remained president of the United States until the end of his second term. Miller has in fact likened the Republican attacks on Clinton during this to the attacks of the Salem magistrates and accusers during the witch trials (*The Crucible* 'commentary' p. xxx).

As we have seen, the historical context of the 1990s did perhaps have a certain influence on the making of *The Crucible*; nevertheless it is also interesting to examine the cultural context so as to determine what kind of influence it had on the making of the film. Firstly we shall focus on cinema, and the context in which the 1996 film arose, and then we shall look at American theatre in general and the 1950s in particular to understand the context in which *The Crucible* was written.

### 3.) *Cinema*

#### i.) American Cinema of the 1990s

In American cinema, the 1990s is known as the era of the rise of independent film studios. Independent film studios had always been present in the landscape of American cinema (certainly during the turbulent period of the late 1960s and early 1970s), but the 1990s saw a rise in the number of these studios.

Independent cinema “consists of low-budget projects made by (mostly) young filmmakers with a strong personal vision away from the influence and pressures of the few major conglomerates that control tightly the American film industry” (Tzioumakis, p.1). Independent cinema also tends to be considered as more artistic, experimental and perhaps taken more seriously by critics and audiences than big-budget studio films. Many independent filmmakers (though that label is debatable as some of these filmmakers have made films with non-independent film studios) such as Wes Anderson, Harmony Korine, Kevin Smith or Quentin Tarantino rose to prominence in that era, and other filmmakers such as Spike Lee or Steven Soderbergh cemented their reputations as *avant-garde* filmmakers.

It is in this context that *The Crucible* was made. Though we have talked about the rise of the independent cinema movement in the 1990s, it is important to state that *The Crucible* was not an independent film. The film was distributed by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox,<sup>19</sup> which is considered as one of the major Hollywood studios (along with production and distribution companies such as Paramount, Universal or Warner Bros). They were known –like many major film studios- for their big-budget, popular, action films. Indeed, in 1996 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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<sup>19</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox is a film production and distribution company founded in 1915 as the Fox Film Corporation by William Fox. In 1935 the Fox Film Corporation merged with 20<sup>th</sup> Century Films to create 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. It is owned by the Fox Entertainment Group, which itself is owned by 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox, created in 2013 after a split with Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation (founded in 1979). 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox is considered to be one of the major film studios in the United States, along with Disney, Universal, Columbia, Paramount and Warner Bros.

Fox released *Independence Day*, directed by Roland Emmerich, which was the highest grossing film of that year.<sup>20</sup> In 1996, major film studio Paramount released *Mission: Impossible* and *The First Wives Club*, Warner Bros released *Space Jam* and *Twister* and Universal released *The Nutty Professor*. All of these films are considered as broad action or comedy films, all were financially successful. On the contrary, independent film studio Miramax released *The English Patient* (directed by Anthony Minghella), the highest grossing independent film of that year, which was critically acclaimed and won nine Academy Awards. That is not to say that the major film studios did not release smaller-budget, critically acclaimed films that year, it is just to highlight the general difference between major film studios and independent film studios.

By 1996, Arthur Miller was considered the greatest living American playwright. Though Miller arguably didn't write any significant plays during that era –or at least as significant as his works from the 1950s and 1960s- he was still remembered as the writer of *Death of a Salesman* (1949), *All My Sons* (1947) and of course *The Crucible* (1953). His reputation meant that he had considerable influence in the theatre, but also in the cinema. Miller had already written a variety of screenplays for the cinema, notably the television film adaptation of *Death of a Salesman* (1985) and the film *The Misfits* (1961).

We can postulate that perhaps *The Crucible* was made in reaction to, or as a consequence of, the rise of independent cinema in the United States. Attaching a name like Miller's to a film would instantly give it prestige and artistic quality, while the notoriety of Miller and the titular play would make it a safe bet for a major film studio like 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox (that is that it would almost guarantee a certain amount of profit). This certainly worked, as Jeff Strickler of the *Star Tribune* said in his review of the film "because of Hollywood's obsession with special effects, 1996 has produced a marked shortage of Oscar<sup>21</sup> worthy performances. *The Crucible* goes a long way toward remedying that situation" (December 19<sup>th</sup> 1996).

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<sup>20</sup> Other notable films 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox produced and/or distributed in the 1990s include *Home Alone* (1990), *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *Point Break* (1991), *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993), *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), *Anastasia* (1997), *Alien: Resurrection* (1997), *Titanic* (1997), *Dr. Dolittle* (1998), *There's Something About Mary* (1998), *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999) and *Fight Club* (1999).

<sup>21</sup> An 'Oscar' or 'the Oscars' is a familiar way of referring to the Academy Awards; the Academy Awards are considered to be the most prestigious film awards in the United States and even the world. They were founded in 1929 and are held once a year; there are many award categories such as best film, best actress, best sound mixing, best foreign film, etc.

On one hand, we can say that perhaps 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox wanted to compete with independent film studios when it came to producing smaller-budget yet more ‘serious’ films, though on the other hand perhaps they made *The Crucible* in reaction to independent films as ‘indie’ films are generally considered to be more experimental and daring, whereas *The Crucible* is very much a ‘classic’ film, both in terms of structure and in terms of content; it also starred many famous actors of the time such as Daniel Day-Lewis and Winona Ryder, whereas independent cinema tends to rely mostly on unknown or lesser-known actors. Indeed, the film was certainly considered prestigious and ‘serious’ enough to be released in November 1996. In Hollywood many films that are considered to be awards contenders are released in the months preceding major award ceremonies such as the Academy Awards. In fact, *The Crucible* was nominated for Best Adapted Screenplay at the Academy Awards and Joan Allen (who plays Elizabeth “Goody” Procter in the film) was nominated for Best Supporting Actress.

It is also interesting to note that *The Crucible* was made as a film in 1957 entitled *Les Sorcières de Salem* and directed by French film director Raymond Rouleau, the screenplay was written by Jean-Paul Sartre. Whereas the focus of the play (and the 1996 film) was religious intolerance and sexual repression, the French adaptation of the film proposes a Marxist interpretation of the play and focuses on the class differences between the inhabitants of Salem. We can see here that European cinema in the 1950s –and French cinema in particular- was (and still is) more permissive when it came to discussing Communist themes.

## ii.) History and Film

Hollywood has always had a passion for historical films; as a medium, film is perhaps best suited for telling historical stories, be they real (generally documentaries) or fictionalized accounts of history (e.g. *Marie Antoinette* -2006-, *Spartacus*<sup>22</sup> -1960- and *Cleopatra* -1963), Biblical epics (e.g. *The Ten Commandments* -1956) or even myths and legends (e.g. *Jason and the Argonauts* -1963- and *Excalibur* -1981). There is a certain grandeur that film brings to historical dramas.

However, when talking about historical films, the notion of reality is very important. Indeed, one can wonder whether any historical film is truly realistic or if they are simply

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<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that the screenwriter of *Spartacus* is Dalton Trumbo, one of the Hollywood Ten who was blacklisted in the 1950s. The fact that he was starting to get work again in Hollywood in the 1960s is proof that McCarthyism and the Communist ‘witch hunt’ was essentially over by the late 1950s, as stated previously.



fictionalized accounts of the truth. In his book, *Cinéma et Histoire* (English: *Cinema and History*), Marc Ferro states:<sup>23</sup>

The problem is that we should ask ourselves if cinema and television are changing or not our vision of History, given that the aim of History is not only to gain knowledge of past events but also to analyse the links between past and present and to research continuities and breaks (p. 217 –my translation).

Furthermore, does film distort the truth? Does film have the duty to correctly represent History given that it is such an influential medium? One can wonder whether it is wrong for a film to present inaccuracies as facts. For example, *The Crucible* has become such an important piece of fiction about the Salem Witch Trials and its story is so well known that it's easy to forget that certain important plot points, such as the romance between John Proctor and Abigail Williams, were completely invented by Arthur Miller for dramatic purposes.

How does one judge whether a piece of fiction –in this case specifically a film- is historically accurate? One can perhaps consider whether the costumes or the speech (the accents, vocabulary) are accurate. Is a film historically accurate if it correctly shows the atmosphere of that era –without the actual plot being adapted from real events (e.g. the 1969 film *Easy Rider* which isn't based on any 'true' story but correctly represents social issues and the counter-culture in the US in the late 1960s)?

Religion and religious history (and Biblical stories) have always been a great part of American cinema. Given that religion (especially Christianity) is such an important part of many American people's lives, it is only logical that it should be the focus of many Hollywood films. The themes of good and evil are frequently explored in American cinema, both in comedies and in dramas. God and the Devil are (diversely) portrayed quite often in films such as *Little Nicky* (2000), *Bedazzled* (1967 and remade in 2000), *Bruce Almighty* (2003) -all comedies- or *Constantine* (2005), a horror-drama film. Biblical epics have always been very popular in Hollywood, films like *Samson and Delilah* (1949), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Barabbas* (1961), *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), *The Bible: in the Beginning* (1966) and *The Passion of Christ* (2004).

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<sup>23</sup> Original quotation in French : “Le problème est de se demander si le cinéma et la télévision modifient ou non notre vision de l'Histoire, étant entendu que l'objet de l'Histoire n'est pas seulement la connaissance des phénomènes passés, mais également l'analyse des liens qui unissent le passé au présent, la recherche des continuités, des ruptures.” (p. 217)

Film has been used by the Americans to glorify their own past on multiple occasions. Before the 1960s and the 1970s there were few American historical films that did not express some form of national pride or that portrayed their past in a glorious light whilst glossing over more negative elements (such as the negative treatment of the Native Americans, African Americans and other ethnic minorities). For example the 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* directed by D. W. Griffith was a dramatised version of the Civil War and the Reconstruction era, notable for its highly racist portrayal of African Americans (who were actually white actors in blackface) and its glorification of the Ku Klux Klan –the film is also a historical fiction about the founding of the Ku Klux Klan. The film posits that it was the Ku Klux Klan who helped bring peace to the Southern states after the Civil War. Thus this film –*The Birth of a Nation*- tells us more about the period in which it was made than about the period it portrays. During the Second World War, President F. D. Roosevelt commissioned Frank Capra to make war propaganda films and as we have seen during the late 1940s and 1950s, films that did not conform to a certain ideology were considered troublesome. It is only since the late 1960s and 1970s that American filmmakers have started to make historical films that examine their past in a critical light, starting with films criticizing the American involvement in Vietnam and the treatment of soldiers and war veterans (for example *Taxi Driver* -1976-, *Apocalypse Now* -1979-, *Rambo: First Blood* -1982-, or *Platoon* -1986).

Historical films have always been extremely popular, both those about American history but also those about the history of other countries. The 1990s were no exception to this and historical films enjoyed considerable success during that era, notably *Dances With Wolves* (1990), *JFK* (1991), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), *Heaven and Earth* (1993), *Schindler's List* (1993), *Braveheart* (1995), *Nixon* (1995), *Amistad* (1997), *Titanic* (1997) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). This interest in historical dramas might also explain the film adaptation of *The Crucible*.

Now that we have discussed the cultural context of the 1996 film adaptation, we shall now explore American theatre and the (cultural) context in which Miller wrote *The Crucible*. Firstly I shall give a brief explanation about American theatre and then I shall focus on Arthur Miller and the 1950s.

#### **4.) Theatre**

##### **i.) American Theatre Before the 1950s**

American theatre before the Civil War (1861-1865) was very much of the European tradition. Certainly in the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century and early 18<sup>th</sup> Century, theatre productions were sporadic as America did not yet have its own literary tradition and also because of the Puritan ethic of many colonies in New England (especially Massachusetts) where most forms of entertainment were considered frivolous. From about the mid 18<sup>th</sup> Century until around 1825, Philadelphia was considered as the centre of American theatre, as it had a “sustained record of professional theatre” (Miller and Wilmeth, p.2). It was soon after replaced by New York City which has arguably remained the centre of American theatre until this day. Nevertheless, many of the plays performed were of British import (Shakespeare’s plays were very popular). Many of the actors were also British, until around 1820 when the first “native-born stars” began to perform (Miller and Wilmeth, p. 3).

Post-Civil War, many American actors emerged onto the theatre scene in New York, notably people like Edwin Booth and Matilda Heron. Nevertheless, plays by American playwrights were still rare and many plays that were performed were either British or translated from other European languages like French. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, plays by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen and Russian playwright Anton Chekhov were also popular –perhaps due to the rise of immigrants from Eastern and Central Europe at the turn of the century. However, certain American playwrights did emerge during this era: William Dean Howells (1837-1920) and James A. Herne (1839-1901) who wrote realistic dramas, David Belasco (1853-1931) who was a Naturalist playwright and Augustin Daly (1838-1899),<sup>24</sup> Clyde Fitch (1865-1909) and Dion Boucicault (1820-1890) who all wrote melodramas and farces. Burlesque, vaudeville and operettas in the American musical theatre were also quite popular. Until the First World War, the American theatre was mostly dominated by popular, commercial theatre.

Popular American theatre (by which I mean mainly commercial plays with a broad appeal) did remain quite popular after the Second World War, notably plays by the Marx Brothers<sup>25</sup> who went on to make films in Hollywood; musical theatre was also quite popular though theatre began to be rivaled by new entertainment mediums such as radio and film.

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<sup>24</sup> Daly notably wrote *Under the Gaslight* (1867) in which a man is tied to some railroad tracks as a train is approaching; this plot device was frequently used to create suspense in many films of the silent era; thus we can see that playwrights of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century did have some influence on American culture.

<sup>25</sup> The Marx Brothers were a group of five brothers from New York City; they were the sons of Jewish European immigrants. They were nicknamed Groucho, Zeppo, Gummo, Harpo and Chico Marx and were a popular vaudeville and musical comedy act on Broadway in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, before switching to making even more popular movies in the 1920s.

African-American theatre was also starting to emerge as a consequence of the Harlem Renaissance,<sup>26</sup> notably the play *Mulatto* (1935) by Langston Hughes. The Great Depression<sup>27</sup> also greatly influenced American theatre, leading it to become more dramatic, “the Depression gripped the nation spiritually as well as economically, and set the tone for serious Drama” (Miller and Wilmeth, p. 11). During the Second World War, Broadway plays were incredibly popular amongst the American public as they were entertaining and boosted the morale of the general population.

Eugene O’Neill is considered to be the first great American playwright. He was born in 1888 in New York City and began writing plays after recovering from tuberculosis in 1913. He wrote his first plays in 1914, though his first famous play was *Beyond the Horizon* (written in 1918 and first performed in 1920) and won a Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Other famous plays of his include *The Iceman Cometh* (published in 1939, performed in 1946), *Lazarus Laughed* (published 1925, performed 1928) and his masterpiece *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (written in 1942 and performed in 1956). “The key to understanding him is that he suffered from lifelong feelings of guilt, born apparently of the fact that his mother, a shy, devout Catholic, innocently became a drug addict as a result of his birth” (Miller and Wilmeth, p. 355); indeed O’Neill was in fact a very introspective author, his father was actor James O’Neill and thus he had been in the acting milieu since his birth and understood it perfectly, which not only helped his career but also his craft. He wrote many realist plays, but also wrote comedies, expressionist works and biblical works too. He died in 1953. It is important to talk about the playwrights preceding Miller as they give us an understanding as to the trends and stylistic movements of the time, which could have influenced Miller’s writings, yet it also highlights the differences between Miller and his predecessors, and indeed his contemporaries.

## ii.) Arthur Miller and American Post-War Theatre

Thus we can see that by the Second World War, theatre was evolving and becoming much more focused on drama and more realist theatre. Certainly comedies and farces were still popular (e.g. Joseph Kesselring’s *Arsenic and Old Lace* –written in 1939 and first performed

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<sup>26</sup> Harlem is a neighbourhood in New York City and is said to be the centre of the 1920s African-American cultural Renaissance; a progressive cultural movement that emphasized racial pride and challenged racism and racist stereotypes. It influenced music, literature and art. Famous members of the movement include W. E. B. Du Bois, Claude McKay, James Weldon Johnson and Langston Hughes.

<sup>27</sup> An economic depression that originated in the US after the 1929 Wall Street Crash, and lasted until the Second World War.

in 1941), but theatre was becoming less of a popular form of entertainment (by this I mean something with a broad appeal) as popular entertainment was now provided by radio or the cinema. There was a huge difference between musical theatre (which was very popular on Broadway during the Second World War) and more dramatic plays. After the period of the war (the Americans were involved from 1941 until 1945) which was a time of very diverse plays that focused mainly on the theme of family, American theatre resumed the course it had been taking before the outbreak of the war. One of the first important post-war plays was O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (performed in 1946) which dealt with "haunting dreams, the weight of memories and past mistakes" (Villard, p. 234 –my translation).<sup>28</sup> Another important post-war play was Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) which deals with sexual desire. Arthur Miller also released his first famous play in 1947, *All My Sons*. Whereas O'Neill's and Williams' plays were both quite innovative in their subject matter, according to Léonie Villard, Miller wrote *All My Sons* in a style that was reminiscent of early 20<sup>th</sup> century plays in the same vein as Henrik Ibsen's dramas and was a very classic tragic play similar to Greek tragedies (p. 238-239).

Nevertheless Arthur Miller (1915-2005) and Tennessee Williams (1911-1983) are considered as the two most important and influential figures of American post-war theatre. Tennessee Williams was perhaps the more poetic and lyrical of the two; he wrote such plays as *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and *The Night of the Iguana* (1961). His plays were more witty and more infused with emotion and sexual desire than those of Arthur Miller (though some of Miller's plays were certainly not lacking in that department). Miller's first truly innovative play was *Death of a Salesman* (1949) for which he received a Pulitzer Prize. Innovative both in terms of structure and content, the play helped usher in a new era of American theatre, which became increasingly introspective, yet also used to question fundamental American principles (such as the 'American Dream'<sup>29</sup> in *Death of a Salesman*).

Despite the popularity of radio, television and film in the 1950s, theatre remained a popular form of entertainment for the American people. Like cinema (and to a lesser extent radio and television), theatre showcased the evolving American culture and society. In terms of structure, plays became more creative and perhaps less 'classic' and more experimental;

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<sup>28</sup> Original quotation in French "Dans *The Iceman Cometh*, la hantise du rêve, le poids des souvenirs et de fautes passées opprime tous les habitués d'un bar mal fâmé." (p. 234)

<sup>29</sup> The 'American Dream' is the idea that anyone (in the United States) can become rich and successful if they work hard enough.

however in terms of content plays were not necessarily innovative and many dramas and comedies focused on the American family and the American way of life. Playwright William Inge (1913-1973) frequently wrote plays set in the American Midwest and focused on archetypal American characters.<sup>30</sup>

Aside from perhaps plays by African-American writers, American plays had never been particularly socially or politically inclined,<sup>31</sup> certainly during the 1950s many playwrights (and authors and people in the film industry) were careful not to create works that could be interpreted in a certain way and get them in trouble with the HUAC (see the previous section about the Communist ‘Witch Hunt’ in the 1950s in the United States). This is one of the reasons why Miller’s *The Crucible* stands out. Another reason is because, as opposed to cinema, there were not many historical plays being made at the time. However, courtroom dramas were actually very popular –perhaps due to the Second World War which was still fresh in everyone’s mind- something which could have influenced Miller’s decision to write the play. The theme of justice was an important one in the 1950s theatre, “the question of justice, as we have already seen, is one that, after a huge conflict and when you understand its intricacies, imposes itself on the conscience of man; American theatre is, around 1950, an eloquent expression of this same reaction” (Villard, p. 276 –my translation).<sup>32</sup> The Second World War was a source of inspiration for many playwrights and the social and political climate of the time (the Cold War and the start of the American Civil Rights Movement)<sup>33</sup> certainly influenced the creative output of many writers, filmmakers, artists, musicians, playwrights, etc. Thus legal and courtroom dramas were very popular during most of the 1950s and the success of *The Crucible* only helped fuel this trend. Other successful and acclaimed legal dramas of the 1950s include the teleplay (a play staged live on television) *Twelve Angry Men* (1954, then rewritten for the theatre and performed in 1955) by Reginald

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<sup>30</sup> He notably wrote *Come Back, Little Sheba* (1950), *Picnic* (1953), *Bus Stop* (1955) and *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* (1957).

<sup>31</sup> There were some politically committed plays in the 1930s, notably by Clifford Odets who was also questioned by the HUAC in 1952. Some of his plays include *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), *Paradise Lost* (1935), *Awake and Sing!* (1935) and *Golden Boy* (1937).

<sup>32</sup> Original quotation in French : “La question de la justice, comme on l’a déjà vu, est celle qui, après un vaste conflit et quand on en connaît mieux les procédés, s’impose à la conscience des hommes. Le théâtre américain est, vers 1950, une expression éloquente de cette même réaction.” (p. 276)

<sup>33</sup> The African-American Civil Rights Movement in America started around 1954 with the Brown vs. Board of Education judgment which ruled that segregation in schools was unconstitutional. It lasted until 1968 –the year of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. It was marked by such events as the Mississippi Bus Boycott (1955-1956), the Black Power Movement (starting in 1966) and the March on Washington in 1963, and such people as Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., the Little Rock Nine and the Black Panthers.

Rose and *Inherit the Wind* (1955) by Jerome Lawrence and Robert Edwin Lee which was also an allegory for McCarthyism.

Now that we have seen why the play and the film were made, we can study how they were made. To do this we shall look at the similarities and differences of form and discuss the modalities of film adaptation.

## **II. Questions of Form and Adaptation**

We shall now be discussing questions of structure and analysing the process of film adaptation. It is important to discuss this process as it will give us a better understanding of the differences between the film and the play and also will help make clear the intentions of the film. To do this we shall first take a look at the opening scene of the film and another involving Abigail Williams and John Proctor as they are the scenes that differ the most from the play (it is important to note that Arthur Miller wrote the screenplay for the film, thus in general most of the dialogue and action is almost exactly the same as in the play).

Before we begin however, it is interesting to note that the 1996 film adaptation of *The Crucible* is not the first adaptation of the play. Indeed, in 1957 there was a French film adaptation of the play (entitled *Les Sorcières de Salem*) directed by Raymond Rouleau with a screenplay by Jean-Paul Sartre. This adaptation developed from a Marxist reading of the play and focused on the class struggle between the inhabitants of Salem. This goes to show that *The Crucible* is a timeless play with many different interpretations, and also that film adaptation is a highly subjective matter that depends mostly on those involved in its making (screenwriters, directors, actors, producers, etc.). The film was quite a critical and commercial success, especially in Europe.

We shall now take a look at the opening scene of the film to discuss it and compare it with the opening scene of the play.

### **1.) Scene Studies**

#### **i.) Scene Study #1: The Opening Scene of *The Crucible***

Act One (subtitled ‘an overture’) of the play opens in a bedroom in Reverend Samuel Parris’ house, there is a description of the room in the stage directions, then there is a long description of Reverend Parris (throughout the play Miller frequently describes each of the main characters quite thoroughly which interrupts the events of the play), a shorter description of his slave Tituba and then various scenes of dialogue between the townsfolk (Ann Putnam, Thomas Putnam, Mary Warren, John Proctor, Abigail Williams, Mercy Lewis, Susanna Walcott, Rebecca Nurse, Giles Corey and finally John Hale) about his daughter Betty Parris who is ill and the supernatural causes of her illness.



The first act introduces most of the characters and also the premise: the supernatural possession of some of the girls in the town (for example Betty and Tituba). The rhythm of the first act is given by the dialogue which is interspersed with descriptions of the characters, this helps divide up the action as there are no clear-cut scenes indicated. The entirety of the first act takes place in Reverend Parris' house. The first scene can be seen as the discussion between Reverend Parris, Tituba, Abigail Williams, Susanna Walcott and the Putnams. The arrival of the Putnams brings about a description of Thomas Putnam and what I believe to be the next scene.

It is with this first scene that the film differs from the play. Indeed, in the film the events that transpire in Reverend Parris' home take place onscreen and the dialogue and the action are very similar; however the first five minutes of the film differ greatly from the play as they take place in the forest. The episode of the forest is discussed in the first scene of the play between Abigail and Reverend Parris yet it is never shown. It is not shown in the play for various reasons, one reason probably being that it is very hard to show a forest onstage (both in terms of space and in terms of budget), though Shakespeare did it frequently in his plays. Another reason is probably nudity, you couldn't show the same thing onstage or onscreen in the 1950s as you could in the 1990s, in the film some of the girls –notably Mercy Lewis– dance naked in the forest. In the play this is left to the spectator to imagine. In the film, Abigail wakes her cousin Betty and along with a dozen other girls (including Mercy Lewis, Joanna Preston, Ruth Putnam, Mary Warren and Hannah Brown) they go into the forest at night to meet Tituba so that they can cast love spells on various men in the village. Most of the girls start to dance, until they are caught by Reverend Parris who comes face to face with his daughter and his niece. It then cuts to the next day and the events of the film more closely follow those of the play. In the foreword to the screenplay<sup>34</sup>, director Nicolas Hytner says of this opening scene:

It was the first five minutes of the film which provided maybe the most interesting challenge. We worked from the premise that the source of the girls' destructive energy is their emergent sexuality, so the entire opening is designed to uncork the bottle of desire – to make flesh what in the play is past and done, referred to only [...] It might have been obvious to open the movie with images of Puritan gravity, and to create a context for the sensual release of the night in the forest, it seemed more dangerous to work the other way round –to taste the forbidden fruit before we enter what purports to be Eden (p. xvi – xvii).

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<sup>34</sup> In the screenplay published as *The Crucible: a Screenplay by Arthur Miller*, published by Methuen Drama Film in 1996.

Importantly, in this scene we are introduced to the girls not through the male gaze (Reverend Parris or Miller's character descriptions) but through the girls themselves. Until Reverend Parris intrudes on the scene, there are only female characters present. This also means that the girls are our entry-point to the story which gives us perhaps a more sympathetic and understanding view of them –notably Abigail. As Hytner notes, the forest is a place of release, it seems to exist outside of the bounds of society. Nevertheless these girls still have traditionally female preoccupations: their romantic and sexual interest in men. Whilst the film adaptation is certainly more progressive in this regard, it is not at all a feminist film, whilst there is a slightly more sympathetic portrayal of the girls, the protagonist and hero of the film is still John Proctor. He is the most complex character and the two main female characters (the archetypal mother/wife Goody Proctor and whore/mistress Abigail) are still presented through their marital or sexual bond to him. He will ultimately choose his good wife over his arguably evil mistress which shows that despite his dismissal of the Puritan religion, he is still a good Christian at heart. Indeed, in both the film and the play he is almost a Christ-like figure, going through temptation and ultimately redemption –two themes that are prevalent in Christian mythology. Indeed, in the commentary by Susan C. W. Abbotson in *The Crucible*,<sup>35</sup> she says of his final scene “in this trinity of death, Proctor is central, thus reinforcing his connection to a beleaguered Christ, one made earlier in the film by his crucifixion pose when he is first arrested” (p. lxi). The forest is also an interesting symbol in Christian mythology which we shall discuss later on.

This opening scene also introduces a plot point that is only made clear further on in the play, namely the ‘romance’ between Abigail Williams and John Proctor. We are also introduced to Abigail's violent, dark nature as she kills a rooster and smears its blood on her face. As mentioned before, Abigail is a more sympathetic character in the film adaptation of *The Crucible* (though of course she could also be portrayed like this in a representation of the play as it can depend on the actress that plays the role). S. C. W. Abbotson says “Miller seems to want the audience to view the coupling of Proctor and Abigail more sympathetically. Proctor is depicted as a man caught between two passions, and his dealings with Abigail have been something more than casual sex” (p. lx).

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<sup>35</sup> The Methuen Drama Student Edition (Bloomsbury) of *The Crucible* (2010).

As mentioned before, the fact that this scene takes place in the forest is important. In a chapter in *Cinéma et Histoire (History and Cinema)*<sup>36</sup>, Sandra Gorgievski writes about the film adaptation of Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1820). It was adapted by Tim Burton in 1999 (only three years after the film adaptation of *The Crucible*)<sup>37</sup>. Gorgievski analyses the film adaptation of *Sleepy Hollow* which is quite useful to us as it is quite similar to *The Crucible* in that it represents the (perceived) supernatural during early American history (the story is set in 1799).

Gorgievski writes "this period piece [*Sleepy Hollow*] goes beyond strict historical realism thanks to its use of such mythical story elements as [...] the primeval American forest" (p. 197). As in *Sleepy Hollow*, the forest in *The Crucible* is a space of transgression and transformation (such themes are essential to the Gothic genre, a genre that could be applied to certain parts of *The Crucible*). Gorgievski goes on to describe the forest as an "intermediary space" (p. 198) and a sort of shadowy world in which dark desires are realised, the woods "stage the historical contradiction between the supposed advocacy of reason and the actual denial of such rationality in History" (p. 199). Loss of reason and rationality are some of the main ideas explored in *The Crucible*, the main difference between these two films is that in *Sleepy Hollow* this loss of rationality is justified as there is an undead murderous horseman on the loose. He was created in the woods thanks to a vengeful witch. In *The Crucible*, Abigail could be perceived the vengeful witch in the woods, though she does not actually use magic for revenge, only words. For the women in these pieces of fiction, the forest is a place for the realisation of desires, "the woods clearly contain what is hidden and forbidden [...] the forest is also a sensuous place of initiation" (p. 201). The woods are a place outside of the bounds of tradition and society, thus the girls are freer there and can express themselves without the weight of Puritanism.

In the Bible, the forest and the wilderness contrast with the Garden of Eden; that the girls feel more comfortable expressing themselves in the forest could perhaps suggest the corruption of the pastoral and the idyllic which the American countryside (and the village of

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<sup>36</sup> Ed. Menegaldo, G. and Stokes, M. *Cinéma et Histoire (Cinema and History)*. Paris: Michel Houdiard Editeur, 2008, pp. 197 – 204. The chapter by S. Gorgievski is entitled *The Headless Horseman, From History to Myth*.

<sup>37</sup> In Irving's novella, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, we follow the story of Ichabod Crane, a school teacher who moves to the Dutch settlement of Tarry Town in Sleepy Hollow (New York). There he intends to marry the wealthy heiress Katrina Van Tassel for her fortune. He is frequently mocked by the other inhabitants because he is an outsider and because he is very superstitious. He hears about the legend of a headless horseman and one night he apparently has an encounter with the horseman and subsequently disappears. In the novella it is implied that this is in fact a prank by the locals. In the 1999 film adaptation directed by Tim Burton (starring Johnny Depp as Crane and Christina Ricci as Katrina) the headless horseman is in fact real and murdering townspeople.

Salem) is supposed to represent. Nature opposes the supernatural, the forest opposes the village and witchcraft opposes reason. Gorgievski writes “to stage the conflict between the rational and the irrational, the conscious and the unconscious, Burton renews the image of the archetypal medieval forest of ordeals, here transforming it into an element of the American gothic” (p. 200). Introducing the forest as an important space in the film helps introduce these contrasting themes in *The Crucible*. The woods are important in *The Crucible* yet in the play the forest scenes are never actually shown on stage. The film shows the forest scenes onscreen which shows us their importance as a symbol; they make explicit what is implicit in the play.

It is important to show the forest scene in the film. Being the first scene in the film it introduces us to various themes that will be explored throughout: the supernatural of course but also sexuality, transformation and transgression. The symbol of the forest is also reminiscent of the role of the forest in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (written in 1850 –it was also adapted as a film in 1995).<sup>38</sup> Abigail Williams is a similar figure to that of Hester Prynne, though decidedly less sympathetic and certainly less complex. Prynne’s journey is also reminiscent of Proctor’s spiritual journey and transformation (and ultimate redemption).

## ii.) Scene Study #2: Abigail and Proctor’s Last Scene

The second scene we shall be studying (to a lesser extent) is one that takes place near the end of the film. It is a scene that, like the forest scene, is not present in the play. Chronologically it is one that would be situated between Act Three and Act Four in the play. In fact, there are a series of events that happen between these two acts that only take place in the film.

At the end of Act Three, John Proctor is finally condemned for witchcraft and it seems as if the entire town believes Abigail and the court. However, at the beginning of Act Four which is set a few months later, it is implied through a discussion between Parris, Danforth and Hathorne that there is unrest in the town and that public opinion might be turning against the trials –especially as those condemned have great standing in the community (John Proctor

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<sup>38</sup> *The Scarlet Letter* is a novel about Hester Prynne, a married woman who has an affair with the town minister and gets pregnant. It is set in Boston during colonial times (it is set between 1642 and 1649). After being imprisoned and then released but made to wear a red ‘A’ (the titular scarlet letter) on her chest, Prynne spends the rest of the novel raising her daughter, Pearl, in the forest outside the town. It tells the story of her exclusion from the town and her progressive redemption and reacceptance in the Puritan community through her good deeds. There were numerous adaptations of this novel throughout the twentieth century, though the most famous is arguably the 1995 film, directed by Roland Joffé and starring Demi Moore as Prynne and Gary Oldman as Arthur Dimmesdale, the minister –the plot differs greatly from that of the novel.

and Rebecca Nurse for example). Parris also mentions that Abigail Williams and Mercy Lewis have fled the town to board a ship and have stolen all his money. Thus, the last time Proctor and Abigail see each other is at court when he is condemned.

However, this is quite different in the film. Act Three ends in a similar way, with Proctor being arrested and Reverend John Hale quitting the court. We are then shown a series of short scenes that are supposed to bridge the gap between Act Three and Act Four. First of all, we are shown the deaths of Giles Corey, Goody Osbourne, Goody Sibber and George Jacobs. The last three are hung in front of a wild, angry mob. Nevertheless, the second time the hangings are shown, the mob is less angry. There is then a scene not evoked in the play, Abigail attempts to accuse Reverend Hale's wife of witchcraft but Danforth tells her that is not possible. We then see a scene of Abigail walking through the town where she is treated like a pariah. This shows just how much Abigail's influence has waned. Afterwards we are shown a scene where Judge Sewall asks Danforth to stop the trials, though he refuses, and then a scene where Parris sees a dagger stuck into his door. This shows the growing unrest in the town. Then we finally witness the scene that is only referred to in the play. We see Mercy Lewis and Abigail escaping (which Parris reports to Danforth the next day). There is the last scene between Abigail and Proctor, in which Abigail visits his prison cell at night and asks him to leave with her:

INT. NIGHT. PROCTOR'S CELL.

PROCTOR, *chained, is alone*. ABIGAIL *moves towards him*.

ABIGAIL: They mean to take you this morning. (*No response.*) There's a ship in Boston harbour. It's bound for the Barbados. I have money for the guard. (*No response.*) I never dreamed any of this for you. (*Tears flow into her eyes.*) I wanted you, was all (*Silence.*) Listen to me, John. I have money... We could see tomorrow on the ocean. The jailer will let you go, let me call him. (*No response.*) I must board ship, John. Will you not speak?

PROCTOR: It's not on a ship we'll meet again, Abigail, but in Hell.

*She knows she has lost him* (p. 91).

We should consider why they chose to add this small bit of dialogue to the play. Indeed, it does give more information about the character of Abigail. In the play, it is implied that she leaves without saying goodbye to anyone, and at the end of the play there is a note from Miller saying that Abigail became a prostitute in Boston. The added scenes between the two Acts show us a more vulnerable side to Abigail; she appears more fragile and perhaps even regretful of her actions. In the play she never seems to regret what she has done, and we

never see her by herself as we do when she is walking around the town for example. Yet showing the hangings also reminds us of the brutality of the consequences of her actions. This added scene reminds us of the bond between Abigail and Proctor. The fact that Proctor tells her that they will meet again in Hell gives us insight into his guilty state of mind, yet they also show us that the two characters will share an eternal bond.

This scene and the forest scene at the beginning of the play confirm that Abigail's actions were a consequence of the affair between her and Proctor, and her unrequited love (or lust) for Proctor. She is shown to still have feelings for him as she risks going to the prison to see him, and also refers to him with a more intimate 'John'.

Abigail is given more scenes in the film than she is in the play. On one hand, this could be used to make her character more complex, to give the audience a better understanding of her personality and her motives. On the other hand, it could be because the actress portraying Abigail is Winona Ryder and Ryder was very famous at the time, having starred in many films such as *Beetlejuice* (1988), *Heathers* (1988), *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *Dracula* (1992) and *Reality Bites* (1994). She was even nominated for an Academy Award in 1993 for her role in *The Age of Innocence* (also starring Daniel Day-Lewis). Her increased presence was perhaps a ploy to capitalise on her fame and bring in more viewers.

Author Robert Stam writes "film adaptation can also add events [...] these additions can have a number of motivations: to take advantage of a brilliant actor, to suggest contemporary relevance, or to 'correct' the novel for aesthetic reasons" (p. 72).<sup>39</sup> Adding certain scenes in *The Crucible* has added more romance to the plot, a theme that is almost universal and timeless. It also shifts the point of view of the play to include Abigail's point of view as we now have scenes where she is the central figure. Adding sex or romance to a film can also make it more appealing to contemporary audiences and more modern as well since viewers in 1996 were certainly more accepting of such things than viewers in the 1950s. It adds interest for those who do not necessarily enjoy classical texts (e.g. many modern adaptations of Shakespeare's plays contain more explicit romantic subplots or sex scenes which are sometimes only implied in the original texts).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Stam, Robert. 'Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation' (2000), a chapter in James Naremore's *Film Adaptation* (see below).

<sup>40</sup> For example, in the 2012 adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing* by Joss Whedon (starring Amy Acker, Alexis Denisof, Reed Diamond, Clark Gregg and Fran Kranz), Whedon adds a sexual relationship between the antagonist Don John (played by Sean Maher) and his follower Conrade (played by Riki Lindhome) who is a

## 2.) *General Questions about Form*

### i.) The Modalities of Film Adaptation

Close analysis of two scenes from the film allows us to consider more generally the question of film adaptation, although not in detail. We shall focus on a few elements which directly affect the adaptation of *The Crucible*. There are many things to consider when adapting a novel or a play. Firstly there are the more theoretical aspects of film adaptation, it is important to understand the concept of adaptation as it is something widely discussed amongst critics. There are various problematics to consider. In *Film Adaptation*, author James Naremore states that “a novel is a unique synthesis whose molecular equilibrium is automatically affected when you tamper with its form” (p. 19).<sup>41</sup> Naremore talks about the novel but we could say the same thing about plays, written specifically to be performed onstage by a certain cast and crew, the essence of the play changes once it is transposed onto the screen. Nevertheless, film adaptation is not a new concept, Dudley Andrew<sup>42</sup> says: “The making of a film out of an earlier text is virtually as old as the machinery of time itself” (p. 29) and “the adapter hopes to win an audience for the adaptation by the prestige of its borrowed title or subject” (p. 30). Indeed, adapting literary texts for the screen has always been popular in Hollywood (and certainly many other film industries) because it is a reliable way to make money, audiences are already familiar with the source text thus they are more easily convinced to see the film adaptation.

Film adaptations are interesting as an adaptation gives the viewer the key to understanding the original work as things are made more explicit onscreen, it also makes the work more popular as cinema is generally considered as a more popular (or more broad) form of entertainment than the novel or the theatre. Author Dudley Andrew states:

Every cinematic rendering will exist in relation to some prior whole lodged unquestioned in the personal or public system of experience [...] No filmmaker and no film [...] responds immediately to reality itself or to its own inner vision. Every representational film adapts a prior conception (p. 28–29).

Film is a very symbolic and visual medium, meaning that each image or idea expressed in the film can take on a different meaning for each viewer. Adapting a film lends the film another

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female character in the film but a male character in the play. This relationship is not at all present in the play but does help explain Conrade’s motivations in the film adaptation.

<sup>41</sup> Ed. Naremore, James. *Film Adaptation*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Andrew, Dudley. ‘Adaptation’ (from *Concepts in Film Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), chapter in Naremore’s *Film Adaptation* mentioned above.

meaning, though that can sometimes be independent of the volition of the cast and crew of the film.

This leads us to an important part of film adaptation which is fidelity to the source text. Dudley Andrew says “unquestionably the most frequent and most tiresome discussion of adaptation [...] concerns fidelity and transformation [...] more difficult is fidelity to the spirit, to the original tone, values, imagery and rhythm” (p. 31–32). Robert Stam says that this question is quite useless as “an adaptation is automatically different and original due to the change of medium” (p. 55). In this case he is discussing the novel and states that a novel is more abstract and virtual whereas a film is more realistic and representative. They are fundamentally different mediums. A film adaptation will ground a novel in reality (for example give a face to a character that one can only imagine in a novel). Thus the question of fidelity is perhaps a useless one as a film can never be entirely faithful to a play or to a novel, nor should it be as its transformation into a film would then be rather pointless.

The film also becomes a collaborative effort whereas the writing of a novel (or a play) is frequently a solo venture (though for a play there are other people involved for the performance). The play as a medium is slightly different and there are more similarities between a play and a film than between a film and a novel. Unlike a novel, a play already exists in a real space as it requires a cast and crew and a space in which to perform. There is not necessarily a right or wrong interpretation of a play as it can depend on the directing and on the acting. One can choose to focus on a variety of different meanings, thus one staging of a play can differ from another. A play exists to be interpreted in a way that the novel does not; a play can be staged many times in many different ways whereas film is quite a static medium.

Arthur Miller discussed the differences between theatre and cinema in a note preceding the screenplay of *The Crucible*:<sup>43</sup> “reading or seeing a play was something else entirely, I suppose, because plays worked away at revealing an *idea*. Movies did not have an idea, they had action” (p. v). Furthermore, he says “the stage wants to talk, loves the back and forth of revealing speech, which is exactly what the movie form seems to inherently resist. The play wants to tell, the movie wants to show” (p. vi). Miller is saying that plays rely almost exclusively on dialogue to further the plot and express the ideas of the play, whereas

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<sup>43</sup> In the screenplay published as *The Crucible: a Screenplay by Arthur Miller*, published by Methuen Drama Film in 1996



cinema prefers to show things to advance the plot –as I have said before, cinema is a very visual medium.

ii.) Adapting *The Crucible* as a film

Something we discussed whilst talking about the historical background of both pieces of fiction was its relevance to the period in which the film was made. We speculated about various events that could possibly have influenced the desire to adapt *The Crucible* as a film. Before we discuss the film adaptation of *The Crucible*, it is crucial to discuss the process of making a play so as to highlight the differences between cinema and theatre. For this we shall talk about the structure and the first theatrical representation of *The Crucible*.

*The Crucible* is a play in four acts. There are no delineated scenes, and the start of a new sequence or the end of a sequence seems to be signaled by the arrival or the departure of a character. The play is heavy with stage directions, especially in Act One as Miller writes long descriptions of most of the main characters (the description of Reverend Parris for example takes up over four pages at the start of the play). The descriptions are sometimes read out loud during performances of the play. It is set in Salem, Massachusetts. Miller also describes in detail the setting of the scenes. There are various settings throughout the play: Reverend Parris' house, John Proctor's house, the Salem meeting house (which serves as the court) and the Salem jail. Each Act takes place in one of these locations (being the theatre, they could not necessarily change the setting that easily on the stage).

The time markers are quite precise and seem to follow the real-life passing of time in the Salem witch trials. The play starts in the spring of 1692. Act Two takes place eight days later, Act Three takes place not long after and Act Four takes place three months after this. This is quite similar to real-life events, though rather shortened as the events in Salem took place from January 1692 when Betty Parris and Abigail Williams started acted strangely, until January 1693 when most of the (surviving) arrested people were released from court because of the lack of evidence.

There is an appendix that is an extra scene in Act 2 (it is called scene 2 despite the fact that there are no designated scenes in the rest of the play). It is a scene between Proctor and Abigail in which he asks her not to accuse his wife of witchcraft. The scene can be chosen to be played or not. There is a note at the beginning of the text from Miller about the historical accuracy of the play, he states that this is not a true historical play as he has taken liberties

with the characters for dramatic purposes (for example he changed the age of Abigail from eleven to seventeen so as to include the romantic plot between her and Proctor). There is also an afterword entitled 'Echoes Down the Corridor' which briefly describes the aftermath of the Salem Witch Trials.

There are twenty-one named characters in the play: the main characters are John Proctor, Elizabeth 'Goody' Proctor, Abigail Williams, Reverend Parris and Reverend John Hale. There are also characters referenced in the play but never seen on stage. The secondary characters are: Tituba, Mrs. Ann Putnam, Thomas Putnam, Mary Warren, Rebecca Nurse, Giles Corey, Judge Hathorne and Deputy Governor Danforth. Finally the minor characters are: Betty Parris, Mercy Lewis, Susanna Walcott, Francis Nurse, Ezekiel Cheever, Marshal Herrick, Sarah Good and Hopkins.

We have already discussed the historical events surrounding Miller's writing of the play and we shall now concern ourselves with its staging. The play was first staged on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1953 at the Martin Beck Theater on Broadway (in New York). Susan C. W. Abbotson describes the circumstances of its staging: because Miller no longer wanted to work with Elia Kazan due to his involvement with the HUAC, Jed Harris was chosen to produce the play even though he and Miller sharing a difficult working relationship. Abbotson says of Harris' staging of the play "his direction of the play was static; characters made speeches to the audience rather than to each other and Harris kept them frozen in tableaux while speaking their lines. This approach made critics view the play as cold and unemotional" (p. liv). At the time the play was not well received by critics. Miller re-staged the play himself and it is here that he added the scene in Act 2 between Abigail and Proctor. Since then there have been many different stagings of the play all over the world that present the play as more fluid and more emotional, and have been more well-received by critics. There was even an operatic version in 1961 by Robert Ward which won a Pulitzer Prize for music in 1962. We can also mention a 2006 staging of the play at the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford, directed by Dominic Cooke. Much as in the film, the character of Abigail was portrayed as being sympathetic, perhaps as a consequence of staging this play in a 'post-feminist' world. The set was designed by Hildegard Bechtler and according to Abbotson was "extremely austere, in order to focus attention on the actors and reflect the simplicity of the Puritan world" (p. lviii).

With this in mind, we can now discuss the film adaptation of *The Crucible* and the differences between the play and the film. One thing that is striking whilst watching the film

is the setting. In the play we have seen that there are four different sets, and all of the action takes place inside (one of the constraints of being on a stage inside a theatre). In the film, many of the scenes have been transposed outside, which opens up the story to a wider world and makes its scope seem more far-reaching. We get a real sense of what the microcosm of Salem was like.

Hytner mentions that one thing that film can do that theatre cannot is zoom in or out of scenes. He gives the example of the mob scenes which are filmed at a distance, so as to encompass the hysteria and show the viewer the mob mentality and the mass hysteria. The film, more so than the play, attempts to show the consequences of the witch-hunt on personal life and not only on the community. The camera starts out with a general view of the crowd and then it zooms onto the face of Abigail, of this he says:<sup>44</sup>

Abigail Williams alone in the crowd, the instigator of the hysteria, and now –as she struggles to come to terms with its ruinous consequences for the man she desires- one of its victims [...] where the theatre operates in permanent medium shot, a film can open wide enough to contain a whole society and move in close enough to see into a girl's heart [...] images feed one another in a spiral of cause and effect (p. ix).

The camera work helps to show that the negative effects of the witch hunt affect both the community and the personal sphere and this focus on Abigail again helps in softening her character and making her more sympathetic for the audience. Hytner also talks about the cutting and the pace of the film:

“the steadily mounting tempo of Act One of the play is translated into a constantly shifting visual perspective and increasingly rapid cutting [...] John Proctor is meanwhile in effect doing everything he can to stay out of the movie [...] his passivity is matched by the camera's: long uninterrupted takes [...] repeated cutting between the hysteria in the town and the inertia at the Proctor house ultimately brings the witch-hunt to his doorstep” (p. xiii).

Again, this emphasis shows another way in which pace and focus can be influenced by camera-work, something that is impossible to do in the theatre.

As we have said before, the setting does truly influence the story and perhaps even changes the essence of it. The representation of the film takes away the allegorical aspect of the play; it turns a political play into a historical film, perhaps to make it more relevant. By anchoring it in a historical and geographical context, the universality of the play is partly lost. Whilst the themes in the play are explored in the film, a modern audience would never

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<sup>44</sup>Methuen Drama Student Edition (Bloomsbury) of *The Crucible* (2010), edited by Susan C. W. Abbotson.

understand that the play started out as a criticism of McCarthyism or the Communist witch-hunt during the 1950s. Instead, the audience will apply the criticism to more contemporary issues such as religious fundamentalism. Religion was just an excuse to criticise the HUAC in the original play but in the film religion becomes one of the main topics of discussion. This is shown through the setting in some ways. Hytner says that he wanted the setting to be “a city on a hill<sup>45</sup> –an image of perfection” (p. xi). The film was shot on Choate Island (Massachusetts) and in the film we frequently see the sea (something absent from the play as the action takes place indoors). Water works as an interesting symbol. It can represent purification and new beginnings (such as when the first colonists arrived by the sea), it can also represent a natural threat (as opposed to the supernatural threat of witchcraft).

Hytner also mentions having to work with the geography and the weather, something obviously not applicable to theatre (unless it is outdoor theatre): “the geography of the set even dictated a shooting schedule which reflected the events we were shooting” (p. xix).

Some characters take on other characters’ lines, and some are mixed together. One character is added to the film and that is Judge Sewall played by George Gaynes. Abbotson describes this new character as the “voice of reason” (p. lx) and perhaps a character the audience can identify with. Furthermore, whereas there were seventeen characters in the play (which is already quite a lot for a play), there are forty-three listed characters in the film, and that is not counting the extras (characters without a significant or speaking role, mostly there to give the impression of a town with actual people who live in it). We are introduced to characters that are only referred to in the play, such as Martha Corey (Giles Corey’s wife who is hanged at the end of the film along with John Proctor and Rebecca Nurse). Along with the more expansive setting, adding all these new characters really gives us a sense of what Salem was like at the time. New relationships are revealed and showing family members (for example Proctor’s sons played by Michael McKinstry and Alex Kilvert) helps flesh out his character and helps us understand more about the Proctors’ family life and the devastating effect of the witch trials on many Salem families.

In the theatre, a role is made to be played by many different actors and actresses, meaning that one cannot necessarily assign a distinct face to that role. Indeed, in his

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<sup>45</sup> ‘City upon a Hill’ is a Biblical phrase (from the parable of Salt and Light in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5:14, “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.”) used by the Puritan John Winthrop in a famous sermon of 1630 to the Massachusetts Bay Colonists entitled ‘A Model of Christian Charity’. In this sermon he said that the colony had to act as an example that the world could look upon for guidance.

description of the characters Miller does not give any indication as to their appearance (except for Abigail whom he describes as a “strikingly beautiful girl” –p. 10) probably to allow for different actors to play the role without having to worry about them conforming to any particular appearance. With cinema, it is slightly different: as said before, film is very static and given its singularly permanent nature, an actor or an actress becomes the representative of that particular role. In the eyes of the viewer, that person is now forever linked to that role and will serve as its representative whenever people who have seen the film discuss the characters. The actor or actress will become the role, though they will also exist as an actor or actress outside the role given that most cinema actors or actresses tend to be more famous than their theatrical counter-parts.

In any case, the film adaptation of *The Crucible* still maintains links to the theatre, firstly because it is obviously adapted from a play and the screenplay was written by Miller himself. Secondly the director of the film, Nicholas Hytner, has a background in theatre.<sup>46</sup> Lastly, the film adaptation of *The Crucible* features many actors with a theatrical background: Daniel Day-Lewis (John Proctor) was part of the Royal Shakespeare Company,<sup>47</sup> Paul Scofield (Judge Thomas Danforth), Rob Campbell (Reverend John Hale), Jeffrey Jones (Thomas Putnam), George Gaynes (Judge Samuel Sewall) and Robert Breuler (Judge John Hathorne) all have had successful careers in the theatre. A few of the actresses also have extensive theatrical backgrounds, notably Frances Conroy (Ann Putnam) who was a friend of Miller’s and appeared in many of his productions (for example the 1994 play *Broken Glass*) and Joan Allen (Elizabeth Proctor) who won a Tony Award<sup>48</sup> for her role in the 1989 Broadway<sup>49</sup> performance of *Burn This* (by Lanford Wilson). Despite its being a film, *The Crucible* is truly anchored in theatre which gives it a very literary and ‘classical’ aspect.

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<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Hytner has worked at various places such as the Cambridge University Footlights Dramatic Club, the English National Opera (London), the Northcott Theatre (Exeter), the West Yorkshire Playhouse (Leeds), the Royal Exchange (Manchester) and has been the director of the National Theatre (London) since 2003. He has directed five films, including *The Crucible*, and most of his films are also adaptations of plays such as *The Madness of King George* in 1994 (adapted from a 1991 Alan Bennett play) and the 2006 film of *The History Boys* (adapted from a 2004 play, also by Alan Bennett).

<sup>47</sup> The Royal Shakespeare Company is a prestigious theatre company founded in 1932 in Stratford-Upon-Avon in England. Many famous British actors have been a part of it.

<sup>48</sup> The Antoinette Perry Award for Excellence in Theatre (simply known as a ‘Tony Award’) is the highest honour given in American (Broadway) theatre. The awards were founded in 1947 and continue to honour those who work in theatre today. The categories include best performance by an actor/actress in a play, best musical, best original score, best revival of a play or best direction of a play.

<sup>49</sup> Broadway is an area in Manhattan, New York with many theatres (there are forty professional Broadway theatres). It is one of the most famous and prestigious theatre districts in the world.

One thing that differentiates a play and a film is the use of a musical score. Of course, music and sounds can be used in theatre but generally to a much lesser extent than with a film (unless it is a musical of course). What music does in this case is add a sense of grandeur to the film and help underscore emotional moments. Hytner says of the music: “the score composed by George Fenton<sup>50</sup> is in fact based on a fusion of different sound-worlds [...] the music, like the movie as a whole, not only speaks of the past in contemporary terms but yokes together ancient and modern to create a new world, at once strange and familiar” (p. xx).<sup>51</sup> The music grounds the film in reality and evokes both something that is supposed to be familiar to the viewer (American history, family, community) and something that unsettles them (witchcraft, mob justice, mass hysteria).

We will not mention much about costumes, except that along with the set they truly help in giving the impression of historical accuracy and ground the play in a more historical context rather than an abstract, allegorical one.

As we have seen in the scenes studied, there are some added scenes to the script, but aside from a few changes the script remains quite faithful to the play –perhaps a consequence of Arthur Miller adapting the play. There are no significant differences in plot and one gets the impression that the film is quite a faithful adaptation of the book. Hytner says “much of the screenplay reproduces dialogue from the play more or less exactly, even if the physical context is changed [...] matching the image to the word here required only minimal textual amendment” (p. xiv).

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<sup>50</sup> Fenton’s credits include: *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988), *You’ve Got Mail* (1998), *The Zero Theorem* (2013) and many others.

<sup>51</sup> *The Crucible: a Screenplay by Arthur Miller*, published by Methuen Drama Film in 1996.

### **III. Themes Explored in *The Crucible***

#### **1.) *The Treatment of Women***

We have had the chance to touch upon the subject of women in the previous parts, though mostly in relation to Abigail Williams' character. We shall now go more in depth with her character but also the other female characters in *The Crucible* and explore how they are treated in the play and the film. Miller's play was never intended to be a play about women, it was a play about John Proctor and the women only served to advance the story and give us insight into his character. However, their importance to the plot puts them in the spotlight.

Miller does not give a fair treatment to women: they are mere appendages of the men or obstacles to overcome (notably Abigail and the afflicted girls). The men, especially Proctor, are given a more nuanced portrayal (except perhaps Hathorne and Danforth). Proctor is treated like a noble character when he has in fact committed adultery. Abigail (his 'mistress') is generally portrayed as a scorned lover bent on revenge and his wife, Elizabeth, is not portrayed as particularly sympathetic even though her husband betrayed her. She is also portrayed as being cold and vindictive. The film gives a somewhat fairer portrayal of these women but as mentioned before, it is far from being a feminist film. In this part we shall discuss the women of *The Crucible*, firstly Abigail and the girls, then the wives (and Elizabeth Proctor in particular) and finally the other women in Salem.

##### **i.) Abigail and the Afflicted Girls**

The aim here is not to pardon the girls for what they have done as their actions (both in fiction and in real life) sent many innocent people to their deaths. The aim is to understand them, to understand their actions as more than foolish actions undertaken by silly, hysterical girls but young women who live in a society that oppresses them, that asks them to be passive creatures and reduces them to silence. John Proctor's ultimate mistake is that he did not understand Abigail, and he did not understand the negative consequences of his actions on a lost, young girl. He does not understand that her evils are the consequence of his. He believes that her actions are irrational but for her they are grounded and rational.

At first glance, when we look at the play we see the vindication of patriarchy; it seems to suggest that if we allow women to speak then we are inviting the devil into our community. However if we examine the play from a feminist point of view we realise that patriarchy is in fact the problem. Indeed, these girls suffer from a double disadvantage: they are young and

female. Had they been able express themselves in society like middle-aged white males then they would not have felt the need to accuse people of witch-craft to be able to speak, to be active members of the community. This is not necessarily explicit in the play, nor is it in fact Miller's intention. Miller sees Proctor as the hero of the play and it is the story of the triumph of masculine courage.

The film gives a voice to the girls (though again, I would not call it a feminist film) and gives us more insight into their motivations. *The Crucible* could potentially benefit from a feminist re-writing in the style of Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* as Abigail cuts a similar figure to that of Morgaine,<sup>52</sup> like Morgaine we could possibly re-interpret her as less of a one-dimensional evil character and more of a tragic figure.

It is not just the men that fail these girls, it is also the women. The other women show no understanding and no sympathy towards the girls, some of them even use them for their own ends (e.g. Ann Putnam). The play and the film could have potentially benefitted from a scene between Abigail and Elizabeth for example, who are depicted as rivals for the affections of Proctor. In fact, when Elizabeth finds out about Proctor and Abigail's affair, she banishes Abigail from their house –despite the fact that she was entrusted with her care as Abigail is an orphan. Elizabeth could have been a motherly figure for Abigail yet instead she is her rival.

However, the women do have reason to be fearful of the girls as mostly women are being accused of witch-craft in *The Crucible* as women were perceived as being weaker and more easily tempted by the devil, it was more believable for the girls to accuse mainly women.

The character of Abigail is generally vilified by the audience or the reader. However this applies more to American audiences as European audiences at the time were generally more sympathetic to the character of Abigail and less enthusiastic about Proctor. In an article entitled 'I Want to Be Hanged like a Witch' critic Marcel Aymé writes:<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Morgaine, also known as Morgan Le Fey, is a character from Arthurian legend. She is Arthur's half-sister (they share the same mother) and mother to his illegitimate son Mordred. She is a priestess and is frequently depicted as being the rival of Merlin. In *The Mists of Avalon*, she is the protagonist of the story and is shown as being more sympathetic and ultimately a tragic character.

<sup>53</sup> Essay first published in *Arts*, December 15-21, 1954, pp. 1-3. Article part of *Arthur Miller: The Crucible, Text and Criticism* edited by Gerard Weales. New York: The Viking Press, 1971.



The sympathy of the American spectator belongs to the seducer [...] in the presence of this eminent forefather, the girl who has given herself to him with so much passion is nothing more than a little slut come to sully the glorious dawn of the USA. Worse, she is the odious image of sin. Indeed, at no time in the play does the Puritan take account of his responsibility toward her. Pursued by remorse for having committed adultery, he shows no regrets regarding his gravest shortcoming, that of having led astray a little soul who had been entrusted to him (p. 240-241).

Indeed, Aymé writes that as Abigail represents the corruption of American ideals (through the American hero) she is immediately reviled whereas European audiences are not blinded by patriotism and thus see the situation in a different, more nuanced, light.

Now that we have sufficiently examined the character of Abigail, it will be interesting to look at the other characters. Not all the girls are named and they mostly seem to function as a group with Abigail as their ringleader. Some of the girls are singled out, especially in the film. In the play, five of the girls appear as characters: Abigail Williams, Betty Parris, Susanna Walcott, Mercy Lewis and Mary Warren. Ruth Putnam is also named though she is never seen in the play. In the film, the opening scene shows over twenty girls as being part of the group that go to the forest, not all of them are named. Abigail, Betty, Mercy and Mary are still present in the film. Susanna's role has been absorbed by Abigail (the film perhaps suggesting that these girls are interchangeable) and Ruth Putnam now appears onscreen. Furthermore, there are new named girls: Joanna Preston, Hannah Brown, Deliverance Fuller, Margaret Kenney, Debra Flint, Rachael Buxton, Lydia Sheldon, Sara Pope and Ester Wilkens. Aside from Joanna and Hannah, these were not speaking roles and mostly local girls were cast to play these bit-parts.

The three girls who get the most attention are Abigail, Betty Parris and Mary Warren. The other girls are given no significant lines or character traits that could distinguish them from each other, except for Ruth Putnam who is important because it is suggested that her parents are using her testimonials for their own personal gain. Betty Parris is in a way the catalyst of the events as it is her sickness at the beginning of the play (and the film) that brings the supposed witchcraft happening in Salem to light. However she is less of a character (she is only ten-years old in the play) and more of a plot-point. Mary Warren is slightly more of a complex character as she is present in the forest though she does not take part in the dancing and is shown to be scared of what is happening. She is initially part of the group of girls accusing the others of witchcraft but is then persuaded by Proctor to testify against them. Ultimately though she is intimidated by Abigail and her group and ends up joining them again

and accusing Proctor of witch-craft. Nevertheless she is not wholly unsympathetic, both in the play and the film, because her weakness and fears stem from something rational: the fear of the mob and the fear of being herself accused of witchcraft. Her weakness however serves to contrast with Proctor's strength as he ultimately does not testify against anyone to save himself.

## ii.) The Wives

At first seen as innocent, many of the wives in *The Crucible* are accused of witchcraft, notably Elizabeth Proctor, Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse. Given that they are respectable members of the community (unlike other women whom we shall talk about later) they are not initially accused but once the mass hysteria sets in, any person (and especially any woman) in town is suspected of being a witch.

Rebecca Nurse is accused of being a witch by the Putnams. Rebecca Nurse is described by Miller as being seventy-two years old and walking with a stick. She is married to Francis Nurse who is highly regarded in Salem. They are wealthy land-owners and have many children. Rebecca is also an exemplary Puritan and is respected by Reverend Hale. However there were tensions between the Putnams and the Nurses about land and it is Ruth Putnam who accuses Rebecca of being a witch. Ann Putnam was also jealous of Rebecca Nurse (made clearer in the film) because Rebecca has eleven children and twenty-six grand-children whereas most of Ann's children died at childbirth. It is for these reasons that Rebecca is accused.

Martha Corey is accused of being a witch because her husband, Giles Corey, accidentally mentions her curious reading habits and because someone accuses her of bewitching his pigs so that they all die (her accuser, Walcott, bought pigs from Martha Corey and they died soon after as he was not feeding them properly –this is referenced in the play by Giles and it is shown in the film). However, had her husband not first talked about her reading habits (Giles tells Reverend Hale in Act One that she reads strange books and that she hides them from him, and that when she reads them he cannot pray), she would have not been considered as suspicious and she would perhaps not have been accused of being a witch.

Elizabeth Proctor is accused of being a witch because a poppet<sup>54</sup> (also spelled poppit) is found in her house and because Abigail Williams wants her to be executed so that she can be with Proctor. She sees Elizabeth as a rival to be eliminated. Elizabeth's best quality is her honesty; John Proctor says that she never lies and that that is her best quality. Elizabeth is in a way a model wife. She is ultimately devoted to her husband and is willing to lie for him, even though this is what gets her arrested and thrown into jail.

These women are all model wives yet they somehow end up being accused of witchcraft. Elizabeth is a faithful wife to John Proctor and is punished for it (though her motherhood is something that ultimately saves her). Rebecca Nurse is essentially indicted for being a mother and Martha Corey is indicted for reading even though all Puritans were expected to be educated, even the women. Women were supposed to get married; if they did not get married then they were seen as sinful. For the Puritans, a woman's goal in life was to be a wife and a mother, yet for Elizabeth it is her marriage to John Proctor that gets her arrested as Abigail despises her connection to Proctor. However, it is her ability to have children that saves her as it is because she is pregnant that she is not executed straight away (and by the time that she gave birth to the child, the executions in Salem had stopped). It is Martha's husband, Giles, that first talks about her strange reading habits and makes her look suspicious to the townspeople. For Rebecca it is partly her motherhood that gets her arrested as Ann Putnam is jealous of her ability to have many healthy children.

Aside from Martha Corey, most of these women are arrested after accusations and testimonials from other women or girls. There was no kind of female solidarity during the Salem witch trials, nor indeed was there any during Puritan times. There seems to be a measure of respect between Martha Corey, Elizabeth Proctor and Rebecca Nurse but that is all. The women accuse each other and never defend each other. The girls accuse the women out of fear, jealousy or spite and the women do not understand or respect the girls. Whilst these three women are depicted as fundamentally good people, they still have some shortcomings. Like Proctor, they perhaps could have changed their situations had they shown more understanding towards the other women (except for Martha Corey who was indicted mainly on charges made by men): Elizabeth could have perhaps tried to understand Abigail's

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<sup>54</sup> A poppet or poppit is a sort of doll that is like a voodoo doll, meaning that you can make an effigy of a person as a doll and then use that doll to cast spells on that person. They were seen as evidence of witchcraft. The one found in the Proctor household was actually made by Abigail Williams and placed there by Mary Warren to make Elizabeth Proctor look guilty.

motivations and Rebecca could maybe have tried to understand Ann Putnam's feelings about her lost children.

There are also other wives in the play, Reverend John Hale's wife and Ann Putnam. We have already discussed Ann Putnam but we should add that she is shown to be vindictive and jealous which are two traits that seem to be quite feminine in the universe of *The Crucible*. Abigail is also vindictive and jealous. These traits are shown to be very destructive. Reverend John Hale's wife is an interesting case, she is not mentioned in the play but in the film there is a scene where Abigail attempts to accuse Hale's wife of witchcraft. This is after public opinion starts to turn on her and it is used in the film to show her waning influence on Salem. She talks about it with Judge Danforth in a scene just before she flees with Mercy Lewis (and before her last scene with Proctor). Abigail does not succeed in accusing Reverend Hale's wife (she is never named in the play or the film but in real life she was called Sarah Noyes Hale and she was actually accused though never convicted). Abigail probably thought that they would believe her as Hale had denounced the proceedings of the court, but he was still respected and his wife was the wife of a minister and probably seen as being not easily corrupted by the devil. To be a good woman, one had to be seen as being highly religious.

Female sexuality is not particularly referenced in the play, though it is made more obvious in the film. However, it is almost completely limited to the girls and Abigail especially. The wives never talk about sex or are referred to in a sexual manner. This again reinforces the fact that sex and discussions about sexuality are not respectable (except when married women had to have children of course).

The married women are commonly referred to as "Goody" (e.g. Goody Proctor, Goody Nurse, Goody Sibber, etc), an abbreviation of the form of address 'goodwife'. It's a name used for all wives and again shows that they are not treated as individuals and that their identity is almost entirely defined by their marital status (as they take their husband's last name of course). The fact that they are referred to as "Goody" demonstrates the fact that married women were almost always perceived as being good, whereas unmarried women were bad. As we have seen in relation to the girls, it almost seems as if women venturing outside of their traditional roles is a bad thing. Nevertheless, some women in *The Crucible* are shown to be honest and noble which proves that perhaps women can thrive outside of the traditional roles given to them by society. Elizabeth is obviously one of the most noble

characters is the play and when Rebecca Nurse and Martha Corey are hanged with John Proctor at the end of the film, we see them as having as much courage and dignity as the heroic Proctor.

### iii.) The Other Women

In Salem, the women who are first accused are social outcasts are those who do not conform to 'traditional' gender roles or do not live their lives like proper Puritan women. This just shows us how cruel the Puritan ethic can be on those who do not fit into traditional society and reinforces why the girls feel repressed and have to hide in the forest to express themselves. The first woman to be accused is Tituba, Reverend Parris' servant who takes care of his daughter Betty. At the end of Act One she is accused of being a witch by Abigail and, under pressure from the townsfolk (she is notably whipped), confesses to being in a compact with the devil.

Tituba's ethnicity is widely debated, she is sometimes said to be Native American, sometimes from Africa (and Nigeria in particular) and sometimes from the Caribbean. In the play, Tituba is from Barbados, which at the time was an English colony. In the film adaptation she is played by Charlayne Woodard, an African-American actress. Neither the film nor the play show her to be Native American in any case. This leads to questions about not only gender but race. In 1692, slavery was widely accepted and not questioned. It was part of the way of life. People of colour, like women, were seen as being weak and more susceptible to being in league with the devil. Even the more 'noble' characters in the play such as John Proctor and Reverend John Hale seem to have problematic (by modern standards) conceptions of gender and race. Because of her ethnic background, she is also shown as being the woman who introduces witchcraft into Salem, as is shown in the beginning of the film when she helps the girls cast love spells on the boys in Salem. However, she is also portrayed as quite moral as she refuses to help Abigail charm Proctor, a married man.

Amongst the other women to first be accused, there are Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne. These women were more susceptible to accusation because they did not live their lives according to the Puritan ethic. In the film, at Ann Putnam's suggestion, Abigail and Tituba accuse Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne of compacting with the devil. They also accuse

Bridget Bishop, “Goody” Howe and “Goody” Barrow<sup>55</sup> of compacting with the devil. Sarah Good confesses to witchcraft so as not to be hanged, Sarah Osbourne cannot recite her commandments in front of the judges and though she denies being a witch she is sent to jail and then executed. In the play, Sarah Osborne (spelled Osburn in the play) is only referenced and she does not appear as a character. Sarah Good is present in the play and we see her before her execution in Act Four.

Sarah Good was an easy target because she and her husband were homeless and the other townspeople perceived her as rude, dirty and an outsider. Sarah Osbourne was a target because she did not attend church (and she was ill) and in the play the Putnams seem to dislike her, especially Ann Putnam as it was Sarah Osbourne who delivered three of her babies who then died (though probably of natural causes, not because Sarah Osbourne was a witch). They were accused, not only because they were women but because they were seen as violating the Puritan ethic. That they were women probably made it worse, especially for Sarah Osbourne as Ann Putnam essentially accused her to vindicate what she saw as the murder of her babies. They did not conform to the traditional image of a Puritan woman and for that they were punished by the men and women of Salem.

Overall, we can see that the film significantly expands upon the role and the treatment of women. We can perhaps see this as proof of the evolution of the play. Given that the film was made forty years later, in a post-Feminist world, it is important to note the different treatment the female characters receive. They are more nuanced and sympathetic (except for one or two characters) than in the source material.

## **2.) Questions of Justice**

In the film adaptation of *The Crucible* there is a series of scenes which expand on the time lapse between Acts Two and Three (in the play).<sup>56</sup> In these scenes we are shown just how arbitrarily people were accused of witchcraft. In one scene Goody Sibber shouts at a few goats in front of some townsfolk, in the next scene she is being arrested. In the scene after Goody Bellows and her daughter, Dorcas, turn around and look at a cart with logs in it, the logs fall as they look at it and the driver seems afraid, in the next scene they are seen on trial.

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<sup>55</sup> Bridget Bishop and Elizabeth Howe were real women accused during the Salem witch trials. They were both hanged for being witches. Elizabeth was actually from Topsfield, Massachusetts and was around fifty years old when she was accused. Bishop was from Salem Town and was also around fifty years old.

<sup>56</sup> These scenes can be found on pages 41 to 44 of the screenplay (*The Crucible: A Screenplay* by Arthur Miller, Methuen Drama, 1996).

Lastly, Putnam's servants are trying to start a fire, George Jacobs walks by and waves and at the same time the fire starts. In the next scene we see Ruth Putnam accusing George Jacobs of witchcraft. These scenes show what is implied in the play, that is that the accusations are completely random and based on nothing more than the distorted perception of townsfolk who are irrationally afraid of witchcraft. That someone can be accused of being a witch for little to no reason is quite frankly terrifying and shows just how unfair the witch trials were.

This leads us to the theme of justice. Indeed, justice is probably the most important theme in the play. It is the motivation of all the characters, be it personal justice (Abigail, the Putnams), ill-administered punitive justice (Judges Danforth and Hathorne) or social justice (the Proctors). In this part we shall discuss questions of justice pertaining not only to Salem as a whole but to certain characters and compare their different conceptions of justice. We shall also discuss the theme of injustice, represented in both the play and the film by the court and Judges Hathorne and Danforth (as well as other characters such as Abigail or the Putnams).

As we have mentioned several times before, the play was an allegory for McCarthyism and the Communist witch hunt. In this play, religious intolerance has replaced political intolerance though they are of course both as unfair and unjust as one another. The film adaptation of the play has lost any kind of political meaning and it seems to be a critique of religious intolerance, an important and relevant theme in our society. There are themes that transcend the original intentions of the play, justice is one of them. In fact, even at the time many critics understood its universality, Robert Warshow said "one of the things that has been said of *The Crucible*, Arthur Miller's new play about the Salem witchcraft trials, is that we must not be misled by its obvious contemporary relevance: it is a drama of universal significance" (p. 210).<sup>57</sup>

Miller's personal quest for justice is the very reason why this play exists. In his autobiography *Timebends*, Miller writes:<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> From the chapter entitled 'The Liberal Conscience in The Crucible' an extract from Warshow's *The Immediate Experience* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), from Arthur Miller: *The Crucible Text and Criticism* edited by Gerard Weales (New York: The Viking Press, 1971).

<sup>58</sup> Original quotation "Je faisais à l'époque des recherches pour *Les Sorcières de Salem* et ressentis devant ces œuvres une espèce de connivence intérieure avec la sorcellerie et la culture puritaine, ses illusions, ses stupidités, son côté sublime aussi. Il y avait là quelque chose de mystérieusement personnel qui allait bien au-delà d'une simple dévotion à la liberté et à la justice et qui remontait très loin dans ma vie." Extract from the French edition of Arthur Miller's autobiography entitled *Au Fil du Temps: Une Vie*. Paris: Editions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1988. Originally published as *Timebends*, New York: Grove Inc, 1987. Note : it was not possible for me to find the English version of *Timebends* thus I had to use a French copy and translate the quotations back to English.

At the time I was doing research for *The Crucible* and felt in front of these works a sort of kinship between witchcraft and Puritan culture: its illusions, its idiocies but also its sublime aspect. There was here something mysteriously personal which transcended simple devotion to freedom and justice and that went back very far in my life (p. 68, translated by me).

Miller saw a link between various forms of injustice and used this to illustrate his personal issues with McCarthy and American intolerance towards Communism in the 1950s. What is shocking to the reader or the viewer is that despite the 1950s being supposedly more advanced than the Puritan Colonial times, mass hysteria and injustice still somehow manage to exist in a so-called civilized society. Later on in the autobiography, Miller describes the contemporary significance of *The Crucible*:<sup>59</sup>

With time, *The Crucible* has become one of my most popular plays, both abroad and in the United States. Its meaning has somewhat varied depending on the place and the time. I can almost always tell what the political climate of a country is when the play is suddenly immensely successful –it means that a tyranny is arriving or that it has just finished [...] the play has become a work of art, cut from its roots it becomes a simple representation of human passion (pp. 514 – 516, translated by me).

We also have to question what personal conception of justice each character has. Each character has a different understanding of justice. For Judges Hathorne and Danforth it is abiding by the law. For Proctor it is about fairness and freedom. Proctor therefore perceives the Puritan ethic as one that is unjust as it does not allow the inhabitants of Salem to be free. The Salem witch trials embody all that is wrong about the Puritan ethic as it is the exercise of injustice and intolerance.

There are also characters within the play and the film that confuse justice and vengeance. Ann Putnam's vindictiveness seems to be more obvious in the film, whereas Abigail's vindictive nature is slightly toned down as she is given a more sympathetic portrayal. They seek to use a flawed justice system for their own personal gain, which they perceive as personal justice. However given that personal justice is self-serving in most cases (and certainly in *The Crucible*), this is no longer portrayed as a desire for justice but in fact a desire for vengeance. This also leads us to question the difference between public justice and personal justice, or justice done for personal reasons and justice done for the good of the community. Indeed, justice should not be a tool for personal interest or gain; it should benefit

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<sup>59</sup> Original quotation: "Avec le temps, *Les Sorcières de Salem* est devenue celle de mes pièces que l'on a le plus souvent jouée, tant à l'étranger qu'aux Etats-Unis. Sa signification a quelque peu varié selon les lieux et les époques. Je peux presque à coup sûr dire quelle est la situation politique d'un pays où la pièce obtient soudain un énorme succès –cela signifie soit qu'une tyrannie se prépare, soit qu'elle vient de s'achever."



the community as a whole. The witch trials were seen as benefitting the community of Salem as they were ridding the town of witches and the influence of the devil, something which in Puritan eyes is a good thing. However, from a modern point of view the motivations behind these witch trials, both in real life and in the play and film, seem almost wholly personal and it seems as though the accusers did not have the interest of the community at heart.

In the play (and in the film) it seems as if those who have an innate sense of justice are rare, and indeed not necessarily in a position to exercise that belief. John Proctor is of course the obvious example as in the end he refuses to accuse others of witchcraft to save himself. He is executed for his belief in fairness and justice. Elizabeth Proctor too seems to have an innate understanding of justice. But both of the Proctors, despite their innate sense of justice, still seem to have to learn some sort of lesson. John Proctor's character arc is about him discovering what is just and fair, and learning that he understood these concepts all along; he just never truly believed in them or practiced them. Another character who goes through this sort of process is Reverend John Hale. At first he is like Reverend Parris or the Judges and believes in the girls' claims, he is even part of the court that sentences innocents to death for witchcraft. Once he understands that the system of justice used by the court in Salem is a flawed one, he quits the court. For Miller, education and age are not necessarily signs of wisdom nor are they signs that those who are educated, old or wealthy actually understand fundamental questions of justice. It is the common man who fares the best with these kinds of questions in both the play and the film (and this is perhaps why Sartre adopted a Marxist interpretation in his 1950s film adaptation of *The Crucible*).<sup>60</sup>

Now that we have talked about justice, we should talk about injustice. Indeed this theme is set up opposite the theme of justice so that we can question them, and confront the events of the Salem witch trials with both. The expression of these themes is obvious in both the film adaptation and the play. However, I would argue that the film does a better job of showing just how many people the trials affected simply because it can afford to do so. The film, as opposed to the play which is set on a smaller more intimate scale, can show things on a much grander scale and thus take the time to show more people and more trials (as we have mentioned, the film has added extra trial scenes outside of those of Act Three in the play). On the other hand, because the film is anchored in a specific time period, the questions of justice

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<sup>60</sup> In fact Miller wrote an essay entitled 'Tragedy and the Common Man' (1949) in which he writes that tragedies should not just be written about noble characters but that in fact any man can be the hero of a tragic play if he has a tragic flaw. He says that the conception that tragedies are about rich, noble characters is archaic.

and injustice are rooted in that time. We therefore condemn what happened then without questioning whether they are themes that can be applied to contemporary settings, something that the play –because of its abstract and allegorical aspect- does very well.

If justice represents freedom, then the Salem courts are unjust because they are curbing everyone's freedom (except their own). If justice represents the law then in fact the Salem courts are still unjust as the trials are unfair. They base their judgments almost exclusively on 'spectral' evidence that is intangible and cannot be verified. These trials were brought about because of religious intolerance and fear, not because there was a desire for justice. Thus the whole proceedings are unjust, obviously so to a modern audience.

Miller shows that once the traditional structures of justice are broken, then there is no hope, as it means that even reason has been corrupted. In the *Cliff's Notes* about *The Crucible*, they write "to express it in more universal terms, the problem with which both the symbols of authority and the new individualists are concerned [...] is the traditional breakdown of order, and the consequent onslaught of chaos" (p. 32).<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the consequence of injustice is chaos. Injustice is also almost exclusively centred on the proceedings of the court and the Judges tend to judge someone's goodness on their church attendance, though not necessarily on their actions outside of church. Their actions are also unjust and unfair because they are clearly discriminatory as they consider that women –and especially women of colour- are weaker and fundamentally less moral than men. By modern standards their actions could certainly be considered as sexist and racist.

The direct consequences of these injustices are death or rejection from the community. We see this when the first people are accused and subsequently sentenced to death. Death is the most common consequence of injustice and as such this theme should not be taken lightly, it becomes synonymous with unfairness and a gross miscarriage of justice. In this context Injustice is the direct opposite of justice as an abstract concept, yet also a consequence of its practical application. That we see the victims of injustice only reinforces our rejection (as an audience, at least during the time of the play or the film) of the Puritan way of life. Proctor is both an unintentional and intentional victim of injustice. Intentional because he is an easy target as he no longer attends church and thus he almost ostracises himself from society (shown in film through his distance from the town, he lives far away and throughout most of

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<sup>61</sup> Ed. Denis M. Calandra and James L. Roberts. *Miller's The Crucible*. Lincoln, Nebraska: Cliff's Notes (1968), pp. 31 – 52.

the drama attempts to stay clear of the trials until his wife is accused). He is also an unintentional victim as his death is indirectly the fault of Abigail who did not actually want him dead as she loved him (rather, she wanted his wife dead). The witch trials take away his freedom, something which in his eyes is the ultimate injustice.

If we consider questions of justice, we should also consider questions of freedom. The fear of witchcraft is so strong that the townspeople are willing to place their (already limited) freedom into the hands of an evidently flawed system. By doing so they put each other's freedom at risk as they become a community divided by fear, greed and suspicion. This also means that they are no longer free to protest or complain. This is a dangerous and volatile situation to be in and as we have seen it does end tragically. Miller's message is that there will always be situations in the world, no matter what era, where situations are unfair and unjust. The witch trials are an obvious example of this which is why he chose them. As he said, *The Crucible* stands as a warning to people who are willing to let others be persecuted out of fear or greed. It is also a powerful message to people telling us to be wary of mass hysteria and intolerance (be it political, religious or otherwise).

Questions about justice also engender questions about responsibility and guilt. Indeed, we wonder who to blame in a situation like this. *The Crucible* tells us that everyone is to blame. Indeed, no one is safe from guilt and most of the characters experience it in some way or another. Susan C. W. Abbotson writes:<sup>62</sup>

The Greek playwrights and Henrik Ibsen were strong influences on Miller from the beginning of his career. Both wrote plays in which past mistakes inevitably impinge on the present [...] in the character of Proctor, Miller wanted to move beyond the discovery of guilt to a more circumstantial study of its effects [...] in *The Crucible* Miller explores what happens when people allow others to be the judge of their conscience. Through Proctor Miller examines the conflict between a person's deeds and that person's conception of himself (p. xxxiii – xxxiv).

Proctor is guilty of a few things, though not the things he is actually accused of. It is once he rids himself of this guilt (once he is pardoned by his wife for his adultery) that he is finally free, and instead of once again becoming a guilty man by accusing innocents of witchcraft he chooses to die a free man as he is finally at peace with himself.

The play (and the film adaptation) paints a bleak picture of freedom and justice during the Puritan era, and by linking it to McCarthyism we understand the gravity of the situation of

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<sup>62</sup> Miller, A. *The Crucible*, edited by Susan C. W. Abbotson. Methuen Drama, 2010.

the Communists in America. This elicits sympathy for those hanged as witches, for those who were persecuted for their alleged Communism and for anyone in a similar situation. The audience of the play already had many more rights than the people living in Salem at the time so they can understand and cherish the concepts of justice and freedom (especially as the play was written quite soon after the Second World War), nevertheless the McCarthy Communist witch hunt shows that the same mechanism can still be put in place and the Americans certainly did not have as much freedom during the Cold War as they should have (given the anti-Communist sentiment and general paranoia). A critic for the *New York Post* recognised this at the time in their appraisal of the stage version of *The Crucible*: “the issue of civil liberty is too serious to be confused by its defenders as well as its enemies. Freedom is under menacing fire at home as well as abroad” (p. 197).<sup>63</sup>

As a modern audience watching the play and especially the film we perhaps have an even better understanding of these concepts. As the years go by and we become more and more vigilant about freedom, fairness and justice the story of *The Crucible* should become nothing more than a far-removed cautionary tale rather than an allegory to whatever form of mass hysteria or oppression is taking place in the world.

Now if we look past the unfair reasons of why some of these people were accused of witchcraft, we can see that those who were accused were those who were outsiders, those who did not conform to societal and religious norms and therefore easy targets as they were mostly isolated from the community. This leads us to question the dynamics between the mob versus the individual.

### **3.) *The Community versus the Individual***

This is perhaps the most important aspect of both the film adaptation and the play and it certainly ties into the theme of justice which we have just discussed. It is interesting to see how an individual case can snowball. The play’s power relies in a way on the fact that there is an escalation of accusations, trials, hangings, etc. Both the ‘community’ and the ‘individual’ are quite abstract concepts in *The Crucible* as they are embodied by various people throughout the play and the film. Some people experience both sides in these pieces of fiction. Sometimes the community even acts as a mob or a pressure group.

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<sup>63</sup> ‘Witchcraft and Stagecraft’. *New York Post*, February 1<sup>st</sup> 1953. Published in Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible: Text and Criticism*, edited by Gerard Weales. New York: The Viking Press, 1971.

i.) Exploring the Various Groups in *The Crucible*

There are various mobs or groups in the film: firstly the most obvious one is the group of girls, with Abigail at their head. They stand as a front against the individuals that they are accusing of witchcraft. This is curious to the viewer or the reader because one has to wonder why the townspeople take the word of a group of young girls so seriously. They function as a sort of mob against various inhabitants of the town including Giles Corey and Martha Corey, John Proctor, Elizabeth Proctor, and others accused. We see more people being accused in the film, which shows the repetition and the accumulation of the events. It also shows just how skilled the girls become at lying (or at believing what they are accusing the Salemites of). In the play this mob is mostly referred to as ‘the girls’ which emphasizes the fact that they are a group, and that they form a bloc in front of the individuals accused.

In *The Crucible* we also see the girls turning against one of their own. Indeed, at the end of Act Three in the play (this scene is also present in the film), Mary Warren –on the urging of John Proctor- decides to tell the court that the girls are lying about the accused being witches and that it is all invented. Though she denounces the girls at first, the girls (and especially Abigail) put her under pressure (peer pressure) and make her terrified. She becomes afraid of them and does not want to be accused of being a witch so eventually she switches sides and accuses John Proctor of witchcraft. This is clearly exposing the mechanism of fear and the pressure that one experiences when placed in front of a mob or a dangerous group of people. It shows that just because a majority of people say it, it does not mean that it is the truth. Also fear is the most powerful tool when oppressing a group of people or a person as it makes them more vulnerable and thus more likely to sacrifice others to save themselves. It taps into a primordial instinct for self-preservation. Part of the power of this sequence comes from the fact that it is not clear if Mary really sees what the other girls see or if she is lying through fear. Mary Warren is also possibly a stand-in for Miller’s former friend, Elia Kazan (they even share the same amount of syllables in their name). As we discussed in previous parts, Kazan was a friend of Miller’s who ended up testifying in front of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) and betraying his friends so as to save himself. Despite her betrayal, Mary Warren’s actions are understandable as this instinct of self-preservation is one that we all share and therefore can all sympathise with.

Within the town there are also factions of people that turn into pressure groups to condemn individuals for their own benefit. We have seen the rivalry between the Putnams and

the Nurses and how Thomas, Ann and Ruth Putnam (probably unwittingly) work together to get Rebecca Nurse condemned for witchcraft. It is not a fair fight between the two groups as the Putnams have their daughter, Ruth, in the group of girls accusing the Salemites of witchcraft which makes the Nurses vulnerable as they do not have the same kind of influence. This did happen with other families though the Putnams are used in the film and the play to illustrate this (and definitely more so in the film where the rivalry between the two factions is very clear, though Miller does provide notes on both the Putnams and the Nurses in the stage directions of the play).

The second obvious group in the film goes hand in hand with the group of girls and that is the judges versus the accused; the judges being Judge Hathorne and Judge Danforth (with the other members of the court including Reverends Parris and Hale and in the film Judge Sewall). This is made very obvious in the scenes in Act Three of the play which show Proctor on trial and Elizabeth being arrested. These scenes exist to show what we have discussed in our part about justice and that is the fairness (or in the case unfairness) of the trials. The Judges represent religious fanaticism whereas Proctor represents common sense. They embody the essential conflict of the story: fanaticism versus reason. Dennis Welland states: “to watch *The Crucible* is to be overwhelmed by the simple impotence of honest common sense against fanaticism that is getting out of control” (p. 84).<sup>64</sup> Proctor is supposed to represent all honest men (and women) and thus the audience or the reader can identify with his character. Given that we identify with him, we also feel the oppression he feels and understand just how bad religious fanaticism is and the importance of standing up for what you think is right. Stephen Fender writes:<sup>65</sup>

Salem confronts Proctor not with a monolithic ethic (however misguided) but with the total absence of any ethic. The townspeople are certain of their moral standards only on the level of abstraction; on the level of the facts of human behavior they share no criteria for judgment, and it is this lack which makes them victims –as well as protagonists- of the witch hunt (p. 273 – 274).

Indeed, Proctor is not supported by the other townspeople (save one or two –who are also condemned). As such he is thus faced by a variety of mobs: firstly the court (and to a lesser extent in this context, the girls) and then the townspeople. This leads us to discuss the

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<sup>64</sup> Welland, D. *Arthur Miller*. London: Oliver & Boyd Ltd, 1961, pp. 74 – 91.

<sup>65</sup> Fender, S. ‘Precision and Pseudo Precision in *The Crucible*’. *Journal of American Studies*, Vol I (April 1967), pp. 87 – 89. Published in *Arthur Miller’s The Crucible: Text and Criticism*, edited by Gerard Weales. New York: The Viking Press, 1971.

townspeople as a faction and a mob. There are various instances in the play and the film in which the townspeople act as a mob in front of various individuals. Proctor is in fact –as we see at the end of the play and certainly at the end of the film- one of the most respected figures in Salem and is thus less persecuted by the community than other people in the town whom we shall discuss in a moment.

First of all, at the beginning of the play (and the film) a group of townspeople act as a sort of pressure group on Tituba; as we have said before, because of her skin colour and her gender she is one of the first suspected and accused of witchcraft. She is pressured into admitting this (her being in league with the devil) at the end of Act One in the play by a group led by Reverends Parris and Hale. Whilst Tituba was in the woods with the girls, she nevertheless denies being a witch until she realises that she can save herself (for the time being) by admitting that she is, in fact, a witch. Much like Mary Warren, she is coerced into doing something by a large group of people out of fear and the instinct of self-preservation. In the context of *The Crucible*, the individuals presented are shown to generally be flawed though somewhat sympathetic characters, as individuality represents freedom in the story. However, groups or mobs are presented as wholly unsympathetic. This is why the townspeople are generally vilified as a group, because we never see each member individually. The townspeople are a necessary target for the frustration and the anger of the reader or the viewer. Ironically, they are persecuting witches whereas they themselves make us wonder if the whole community is possessed because of their behavior.

The townspeople versus the accused is something that is mostly only referenced in the play. However, in the film it is something that can be shown. Thus we experience a few more instances in which they act like a mob and oppress individuals.

Firstly, we are shown scenes in which they are cheering on the hangings. We also see scenes showing them cheering on the girls during the court scenes. They are more than happy to condemn those whom they see as being outcasts such as Sarah Good or Sarah Osborne. As the drama unfolds and more and more people are accused of witchcraft –including more well-respected Salemites- we see the townsfolk slowly becoming more subdued and by the time that Rebecca Nurse, Martha Corey and John Proctor are hanged at the end of the film they are all silent as they realise the negative consequences of their actions. They, as a group, had the power to stop these hangings instead they used their power to encourage this same behaviour.

There is also a scene that has been added to the film that shows Abigail Williams being shunned by the townsfolk. This scene was added to show her demise and perfectly illustrates her fall from grace. It also serves to show her the consequences of her actions and as we see she is very uncomfortable in this scene. This also illustrates just how fickle the townspeople are. Perhaps now that she herself has faced the mob she has a better understanding of the consequences of her actions.

This mob-like mentality also seemed to play out in real life too, in his autobiography, *Timebends*, Miller discusses how he was treated after the first representation of the play:<sup>66</sup>

What I really hadn't conceived was the hostility of the New York public when they understood the true theme of the play: an invisible layer of ice formed over their heads, thick enough to ice-skate on. And at the end, in the lobby of the theatre, people with whom I was quite close professionally passed in front of me as if I were transparent (translation by me, p. 512).

A curious case of life imitating art as just like Proctor, Miller was shunned by the New York public for standing up for what he believed in. This shows Miller being persecuted by two mobs of sorts: the HUAC and the New York public. He was oppressed both on a professional and a personal level. It also shows that despite the play being written a few hundred years after the events in Salem, we still do succumb to peer pressure and oppress those whom we perceive as outsiders.

To sum up, *The Crucible* shows us the consequences of mass hysteria and the dangers that we face when the individual conscience is threatened with widespread fanaticism that is both hypocritical and only concerned with personal interests. S. C. W. Abbotson writes “a community stays strong by allowing its individual members some measure of autonomy; when any society becomes too restrictive, trouble is bound to ensue” (p. xxxiii).<sup>67</sup> The witch trials can also be seen as the release of frustration or anger from the very authoritarian Puritan society in which they all lived. It was a chance to seize power in a society in which they thought they were powerless. In any case it was certainly a kind of temporary madness which opposed the individual and the community. This play acts a sort of warning against any kind

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<sup>66</sup>Original quotation “Ce que je n'avais pas vraiment envisagé, en fait, était l'hostilité du public New-Yorkais, lorsqu'il comprit le thème réel de la pièce : une invisible plaque de glace se forma au-dessus de sa tête, d'une épaisseur suffisante pour qu'on puisse patiner. Et à la fin, dans le hall, des gens à qui j'étais lié d'assez près, professionnellement, passèrent devant moi comme si j'étais transparent.” Miller, A. *Au Fil du Temps: Une Vie*. Paris: Editions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1988. Originally published as *Timebends*. New York: Grove Inc., 1987.

<sup>67</sup> Miller, A. *The Crucible*, edited by Susan C. W. Abbotson. Methuen Drama, 2010.



of totalitarian structure or belief system in which an individual is denied the right to think for himself or herself and to refuse conform to societal pressures.

## ii.) The Importance of One's Name

This theme ties into the themes of individuality and justice, previously discussed. Individuality is strongly represented by one's name, something we understand through Proctor's struggle with his guilt. In this play, Individuality is important as it opposes one character to the other Salemites or the mob. Puritanism was very restrictive and many people had to conform to certain norms and values, to assert one's individuality was important and even slightly subversive (though not impossible) as it separated you from the masses and in a way from the church.

One's name and reputation transcend the life of an individual, they are the things that will stay after we are dead and they become very important as symbols. Thus, Proctor feels the need to defend his name; because it is not just about himself it is about his family and his legacy as an individual. It is also about justice. Proctor deems it important not to name others as that would be unfair, it also makes him more courageous and noble as he dies for this.

At the end of the play (and the film), there is a powerful scene where John Proctor explains to his wife, Elizabeth, the importance of his name. At the end of Act Four, Proctor is in jail and Elizabeth comes to visit him. He is told that if he confesses and accuses the others of witchcraft then he gets to stay alive. There is a reconciliation between the spouses and initially Proctor decides to confess, despite a few reservations. He says "then who will judge me? [...] God in heaven, what is John Proctor, what is John Proctor?" (p. 125).<sup>68</sup> He is conscious of the significance of his name, as are the other town officials as they recognise that getting Proctor to confess to being a witch would be an important message to the townsfolk. He initially admits to it, though refuses to name the others. Finally, as he has to sign his name on a piece of paper to show the others in the town, he refuses:

“PROCTOR: I have confessed myself! Is there no good penitence but it be public? God does not need my name nailed upon the church! God sees my name; God knows how black my sins are! It is enough! [...]

PROCTOR: I have three children –how may I teach them to walk like men in the world, and I sold my friends? [...]

DANFORTH: Why? Do you mean to deny this confession when you are free?

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<sup>68</sup> Miller, A. *The Crucible*, edited by Susan C. W. Abbotson. Methuen Drama, 2010.

PROCTOR: I mean to deny nothing!

DANFORTH: Then explain to me, Mr. Proctor, why will you not let-

PROCTOR: (*with a cry of his whole soul*) because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name! I have given you my soul; leave me my name!" (p. 129 – 130).

As we can see in the dialogue, Proctor is reluctant to sign his name (or to put his guilt in writing) because he is afraid of the effect it will have on his children. He wants to set a good example and he fears by lying about his involvement and using the lives of others to obtain his own personal freedom he will be seen as undignified and dishonest. He is only willing to do so at first because he believes that his wife does not love him and looks down on him. However by the end of the play we know that this is not true and they are reconciled; one of the reasons why he decides to die is because he knows that he has been pardoned by his wife. Furthermore, he does not want to use his own name in vain as that is the only thing that he has left. Fundamentally as human beings, the only thing that we truly possess is our name. If he gives his name away then he will have nothing. Our names define us, and Proctor decides that he does not want to be defined by lies and deceit –something which his name will be inevitably tied to if he chooses to name others to save himself. Instead he chooses to die an honest and honourable man. Despite his many shortcomings and mistakes, it is this scene that makes him a hero to the reader and to the audience because it shows him to be a fair and free man.

This scene is one of the most important and powerful scenes in the play and in the film. Indeed, this scene is so important that it was used almost word for word in the film. The quotation above is presented in the film exactly as it is in the play (though the scene is no longer set in the jail but outside near the sea –perhaps to take advantage of the scenery or perhaps it is symbolic as water can represent purification). This shows us just how important this scene is in *The Crucible* and reinforces the importance of one's name and its inextricable link to justice and freedom.

## Conclusion

To summarise, we can firstly look at the historical context of both the play and the film. It is important to understand the Puritan way of life to understand the criticisms leveled at it by both the film and the play. They also help us give context to the Salem witch trials, something essential to the understanding of *The Crucible*. Interestingly, the film can be seen as a historical film rather than a political film so it is interesting for the viewer to know about the Salem witch trials so as to know what is going on in the film. When it comes to the play, historical context is very important as the play was originally written as a veiled criticism of McCarthy and the Communist witch hunt. From a cultural point of view, the play and the film are from very different eras (the 1950s and the 1990s) and thus this can partially explain why they are so different, both for questions of the ideas expressed within each piece of fiction and also from a stylistic point of view.

The differences between the play and the film can be of course brought together through studying some of the scenes and the structure of each piece. By doing this we have seen that though the script of the film is almost identical to that of the play, certain scenes have been added or amended to showcase certain characters (e.g. Abigail Williams) and make them more complex or sympathetic. The film also expands the universe of Salem through the use of extra characters, setting, music or costumes which grounds the events in historical reality rather than political allegory. Nevertheless, both the film adaptation and the play explore the same themes: the treatment of women (which is certainly expanded upon in the film), the theme of justice and the mob versus the individual. These last two themes are probably the most important ones for Miller. Despite a few minor and major differences, these similarities in theme are important and make us understand the universality of Miller's original play.

In my opinion having read the play, seen it performed (a 2011 performance by the Grenoble-based theatre group Upstage Productions) and also having seen the film I can say that the story of *The Crucible* is a powerful one. Despite its (few) flaws, it is a piece of fiction that plays on one's emotions but also on one's rationality and common sense. Personally I did quite enjoy the film and the amendments that were made such as the more sympathetic approach to the girls, and the outdoor shots (filmed on Choate Island, Massachusetts) certainly did a lot to improve the source material. Nevertheless in my honest opinion I think that the play is more powerful than the film, theatre is a very intimate medium because of the

proximity with the actors and the stage -one feels more involved. Thus as part of the audience one gets the full emotional impact of this piece of fiction because it feels more real and tangible. Furthermore the film remains fixed in its time period; a play constantly needs to be re-staged. Successful plays (like *The Crucible*) can be reinvented over the years.

In my research I did feel some limitations; not necessarily when researching the play as because it is so famous (and infamous) there was a lot of literature available and it was much easier to research the play of *The Crucible* than it was the film. Being made in the 1990s, it was firstly not easy to research online as all that I could find were old reviews of the film. Furthermore, the film was not particularly successful nor is it well-known so there hasn't been much academic writing about it (from people who do film studies for example). Aside from what the critics of the time said and the introduction from Nicolas Hytner at the beginning of the screenplay (which was extremely useful), a lot of what I have said about the film is personal analysis.

*The Crucible's* message is a universal one, and the claims of its timelessness are certainly true. Its message can easily be applied to today's society, certainly in a post September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 world; the current 'War on Terror' in the United States is slightly reminiscent of the Communist witch hunt and it seems as if we live in an age of renewed paranoia. Thus the play continues to be relevant to our modern world and will no doubt remain as popular as it has been, despite the fact that perhaps one day we will maybe forget it was an allegory for McCarthyism. The film adaptation is quite classic and of-its-time, nevertheless it was made over twenty years ago and an adaptation of the play would certainly be different today. The film remains more progressive than Miller's play, especially with regards to the women of *The Crucible*; however an adaptation of the play in this day and age would certainly be more interesting as our society is currently experiencing a renewed interest in Feminism and women's rights. No doubt a new film would focus more on the character of Abigail as a more morally complex protagonist or anti-hero rather than John Proctor.

To conclude, it is important to remember a few things. Firstly, that Miller's play is a piece of history. It is a criticism of one era (the Puritan Colonial era) that was initially a criticism of Miller's own era, the time of the Cold War and of McCarthy's Communist witch hunt. As such, it is almost evidence of the brutality of that period and it helps us remember the terrible things that happened then. But Miller's play does transcend its historical context, and the film adaptation of the play is proof that Miller's message is much more timeless and

universal than a historical criticism. Though different, the film adaptation and the play *The Crucible* fundamentally have the same message: one's individuality is a powerful thing, and human beings should always fight for what is just and fair when faced with tyrannical oppression that seeks to destroy both of these things, and attempts to force people to conform to norms and values that are not their own.

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**MOTS-CLÉS** : théâtre américain, le puritanisme, le procès des sorcières de Salem, Arthur Miller, l'adaptation cinématographique, Joseph McCarthy, la justice

## RÉSUMÉ

*Les Sorcières de Salem* d'Arthur Miller représente une des pièces de théâtre américaines parmi les plus célèbres du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle. En apparence une pièce sur le procès des sorcières de Salem, elle constitue en fait une critique à peine voilée du Maccarthysme des années 1950. Une adaptation cinématographique a été réalisée en 1996. Dans cette étude, nous allons voir, dans un premier temps, comment les changements historiques et culturels ont modifié notre perception des *Sorcières de Salem* et comment ils ont influencé l'adaptation au cinéma. Ensuite, nous allons essayer de comprendre les modalités de l'adaptation cinématographique et comment la forme de la pièce et film conditionne le développement de chaque support. En dernier, nous allons voir comment les thèmes principaux sont explorés dans chaque support et ultimement comprendre quelles sont les différences et les similarités entre le film et la pièce.

**KEYWORDS**: American theatre, Puritanism, Salem witch trials, Arthur Miller, film adaptation, Joseph McCarthy, justice

## ABSTRACT

Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is one of the most famous American plays of the 20th Century. Written about the Salem witch trials, it was actually a veiled criticism of McCarthyism and the Communist witch hunt of the 1950s. A film adaptation of the play was made in 1996. In this study we shall firstly see how historical and cultural changes have modified our perception of *The Crucible* and how they have influenced the film adaptation. We shall also try to understand the modalities of film adaptation and how the form of the play and the film influence the development of each medium. Lastly, we shall see how the main themes are explored in each piece of fiction and ultimately what the differences and similarities between the play and the film are.