

## THE "WITCHCRAFT DELUSION" IN THREE AMERICAN PLAYS

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Before the eighteenth century, witchcraft had been generally considered a kind of evil practice since ancient time. Records have been found which show that Roman laws were passed to make the practice of witchcraft a crime. These laws forbade people to destroy crops, pull down crosses or religious objects, dig up corpses or make images—especially those to be used in witchcraft. The failure of crops might be charged to the curse of some human "devil." An innocent person of strange habits might be accused of witchcraft by enemies who held a grudge against him.<sup>1</sup>

### I

In early America, suspected witches were persecuted in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Virginia. The terror reached its high point in Salem, Massachusetts. Cotton Mather did much to arouse the people against the devil work of witches. In 1692, as a result of Mather's efforts, the colonists executed 20 persons as witches and sent 150 more to prison. As David

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<sup>1</sup> For the general knowledge of witchcraft, see Julio Caro Baroja, *The World of the Witches* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1964); also John Middleton (ed.), *Magic, Witchcraft and Cursing* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), and Rossell Hope Robbins. *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology* (New York: Crown, 1959).

Levin wrote in his *What Happened in Salem* (1960):

Between June 10 and September 22, 1692, nineteen Massachusetts men and women and two dogs were hanged for witchcraft, and one man was pressed to death for refusing to plead to the indictment. When the executions came to an end, fifty-five people had confessed that they were witches, and a hundred and fifty were in jail either waiting to be tried or enduring, as several convicted women did, reprieves granted them so that infants they had already conceived would not be executed with them. (Levin, xi)

These were the last persecutions for witchcraft in the Puritan New England.

Of all Puritan misconceptions, the form of superstitious Satanism was the most pernicious. Fear of the threatening world of demons—of what Cotton Mather called “the wonders of the invisible world” (Mather, 80)—led many Puritans into a misconception of nature and false evaluation of their fellow men. According to George L. Kittredge, witchcraft outbreaks in Britain generally have coincided with times of political excitement, or other anxiety. Likewise, the witchcraft delusions in early America, climaxed by the Salem trials, mark a time “when Massachusetts colony was just merging from a political and religious struggle that threatened its very existence” (Kittredge, 370). Although from the beginning New England’s Puritans had striven to maintain unity, yet public feeling, even before a fresh outbreak of angry witch-hunting and witch-prosecution, was marked by uncertainty. It is because between the end of the Quaker persecutions in 1665 and the beginning of the Salem witchcraft outbreak in 1692, the political conditions of the commonwealth had been subject to sudden, often violent, shifts, and the people of the colony were quite uncertain about their own future. The King’s decrees during the Quaker troubles had provoked only minor changes in the actual structure of the Puritan state, but they had introduced a note of apprehension and alarm which lasted for thirty years. The moment Charles II warned the Massachu-

setts authorities of his new interest in their affairs, he immediately dispatched four commissioners to the Bay to look after his remote dominions and make sure that his occasional orders were being enforced. From that moment, New England feared the worst. The sermons of the period were full of dreadful prophecies about the future of the Bay.

As New England moved through the 1670's and 1680's, political calamities grew more and more serious. In 1670, for example, a series of harsh arguments occurred between groups of magistrates and clergymen, threatening the alliance which had been the very cornerstone of the New England Way. In 1676 Charles II began to review the claims of other persons to land within the jurisdiction of Massachusetts, and it became increasingly clear that the old charter might be revoked altogether. In 1679 Charles II specifically ordered Massachusetts to permit the establishment of an Anglican church in Boston, and in 1684 the people of the Bay had become so pessimistic about the fate of the colony that several towns simply neglected to send Deputies to the General Court. The sense of impending doom reached its peak in 1686. For the moment, it looked as if the holy experiment was over: "not only had the settlers lost title to the very land they were standing on, but they ran the very risk of witnessing the final collapse of the congregational churches they had built at so great a cost" (Erikson, 138).

Throughout this period of political crisis, an even darker cloud was threatening the colony, and this had to do with the fact that a good deal of angry dissension was spreading among the saints themselves. In a colony that depended on a high degree of harmony and group feeling, the courts became a maze of land disputes and personal feuds and a complicated tangle of litigations and suits. Moreover, the earnest attempts at unanimity that had characterized the early politics of John Winthrop's era were now replaced by something like faction fighting. When John Josselyn visited Boston in 1668, for instance, he observed that the people were "savagely factious" in their relations with one another and acted more out of

jealousy and greed than any sense of religious purpose (Josselyn, 331). And the sermons of the day chose even stronger language to describe the decline in morality which seemed to darken the prospects of New England. The spirit of brotherhood which the original settlers had counted on so heavily had lately diffused into an atmosphere of commercial competition, political contention, and personal bad feeling.

Thus the political architecture which had been fashioned so carefully by the first generation and the spiritual consensus which had been defended so energetically by the second were both disappearing. At the time of the Salem witchcraft mania, most of the familiar landmarks of the New England Way had become blurred changes in the historical climate, like signposts obscured in a storm, and the people of the Bay no longer knew how to assess what the past had amounted to or what the future promised. Massachusetts had become, in Alan Heimert's words, "a society no longer able to judge itself with any certainty" (Heimert, 381).

In 1670, the House of Deputies took note of the confusion and fear which was beginning to spread over the country and prepared a brief inventory of the troubles facing the Bay:

Declension from the primitive foundation work, innovation in doctrine and worship, opinion and practice, an invasion of the rights, liberties and privileges of churches, an usurpation of a lordly and prelatial power over God's heritage, a subversion of the gospel order, and all this with a dangerous tendency to the utter devastation of these churches, turning the pleasant gardens of Christ into a wilderness, and the inevitable and total extirpation of the principles and pillars of the congregational way; these are the leaven, the corrupting gangrene, the infecting spreading plague, the provoking image of jealousy set up before the Lord, the accursed thing which hath provoked divine wrath, and doth further threaten destruction. (Hutchinson, 232)

The tone of this resolution gives an excellent index to the mood of the time. For the next twenty years, New England turned more and more to the notion that settlers must expect

God to turn upon them in wrath because the colony had lost its original fervor and sense of mission. The motif introduced in this resolution runs like a recurrent theme through the thinking of the period: the settlers who had carved a commonwealth out of the wilderness and had planted "the pleasant gardens of Christ" (Hutchinson, 231) in its place were about to return to the wilderness. But there is an important shift of meaning here, for the wilderness they had once mastered was one of thick underbrush and wild animals, dangerous seasons and marauding Indians, while the wilderness of this particular period contained an entirely different sort of peril. "The wilderness into which we are passing to the Promised Land," Mather wrote in a volume describing the state of New England at the time of the witchcraft difficulties, "is overfilled with Fury flying serpent. . . . All our way to Heaven, lies by the Dens of Lions, and the Mounts of Leopards; there are incredible Drovers of Devils in our way" (80-81). It was while the people of the colony were preoccupied with these matters that the witches decided to strike.

No one really knows how the witchcraft hysteria began, but it originated in the home of the Reverend Samuel Parris, minister of the local church. In early 1692, several girls from the neighborhood began to spend their afternoons in the Parris's kitchen with a slave named Tituba, and it was not long before a mysterious sorority of girls, aged between nine and twenty, became regular visitors to the parsonage. It can only be speculated what was going on behind the kitchen door, but it was known to everybody that Tituba had been brought to Massachusetts from Barbados and enjoyed a reputation in the neighborhood for her skills in the magic arts. As the girls grew closer together, a remarkable change seemed to come over them, as someone later reported, that they went out into the forest to celebrate their own version of a black mass, but it is apparent that they began to live in a state of high tension and shared secrets with one another which were hardly becoming to quiet Puritan maidens.

Before the end of the winter, the two youngest girls in the

group succumbed to the shrill pitch of their amusements and began to exhibit a most unusual malady. They would scream unaccountably, fall into grotesque convulsions, and sometimes scaper along on their hands and knees making noises like the barking of a dog. No sooner had word gone around about this extraordinary affliction than it began to spread like a contagious disease. All over the community young girls were groveling on the ground in a panic of fear and excitement and while some of the less credulous townspeople were tempted to beat these young girls in the hope of bringing a little modesty into them, the rest could only stand in helpless horror as the girls suffered their torments.

One physician of the town did what he could to stop the epidemic, but he soon exhausted his meagre store of remedies and was forced to conclude that the problem lay outside the province of medicine. The Devil had come to Salem village, he announced; the girls were bewitched. At this disturbing news, ministers from many of the neighboring parishes came to consult with their colleague and offer what advice they might. Among the first to arrive was a thoughtful clergyman named Deodat Lawson, and he had been in town no more than a few hours when he happened upon a frightening exhibition of the devile's handiwork. "In the beginning of the evening," he later recounted of his first day in the Village,

I went to give Mr. Parris a visit. When I was there, his kinswoman, Abigail Williams (about 12 years of age,) had a grievous fit; she was at first hurried with violence to and fro in the room, (though Mrs. Ingersoll endeavored to hold her,) sometimes making as if she would fly, stretching up her arms as high as she could, and crying "whish, whish, whish!" several times; presently after she said there was Goodw. N[urse], and said, "Do you not see her? why there she stands!" And the said Goodw. N. offered her The Book, but she was resolved she would not take it, saying often, "I won't, I won't, I won't take it, I do not know what Book it is: I am sure it is not of God's Book, it is the Devil's Book, for aught I know." After that, she run to the fire, and began to throw fire brands about the house; and run against

the back, as if she would run up chimney, and, as they said, she had attempted to go into the fire in other fits. (Lawson, 83)

Faced by such clear-cut evidence, the ministers quickly agreed that Satan's new challenge would have to be met with vigorous action, and this meant that the afflicted girls would have to identify the witches who were harassing them.

It is hard to guess what the girls were experiencing during those early days of the commotion. They attracted attention everywhere they went and exercised a degree of power over the adult community which would have been exhilarating under the sanest of circumstances. But whatever else was going on in those young minds, the thought seems to have gradually occurred to the girls that they were indeed bewitched, and after they had been coaxed over and over again to name their torments, they finally singled out three women in the Village and accused them of witchcraft. Actually, these girls "were about to take a terrible revenge upon a society that had with the godliest of good intentions used them ill" (Starkey, 26).

Such are the historical facts and the general atmosphere dramatized in Henry W. Longfellow's *Giles Corey of the Salem Farm* (1868), Mary E. Wilkin's *Giles Corey, Yeoman* (1893), and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1955). This study will not concern itself with the dramatic techniques or theatrical performances of these three plays. Its main interest is to see how these three playwrights rely on the historical facts of the Salem Witchcraft Trials to write their plays through their own interpretations of these facts. When they recount these facts, they perceived or thought they perceived the story through their own angle of perception though they all agree that witchcraft of that Puritan society was purely a delusion and that witchcraft had actually been practiced in Massachusetts. The three playwrights also agree that New England Puritans were only men of their time. The Puritans simply intended to use the fear of witchcraft as a means of strengthening their weakened power in the community. Therefore, the three

playwrights's conclusion might be summarized as: The executions were monstrous, and attributable to some narrowness of fanaticism or repressiveness peculiar to the Puritans. By examining similarities and differences in their presentation of those historical events, we may also come to understand "the problem of how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific" (White 1987: 1).

The Puritan belief in witchcraft as expressed in Hawthorne's tales, such as "Young Goodman Brown" and "Lady Eleanore's Mantle," has been carefully and thoroughly analyzed.<sup>2</sup> The most recent study is Thomas Pribek's "Witchcraft in 'Lady Eleanore's Mantle'" in *Studies in American Fiction* (Spring 1987) (Pribek, 95-100). However, few scholars have paid attention to the fact of witchcraft as presented in American plays, particularly the very similar two plays written by Henry W. Longfellow and Mary E. Wilkins. Perhaps it is because Longfellow is much better known as one of the nineteenth-century popular American poets while Mary E. Wilkin is almost totally unknown to the modern readers. The reason for the popularity of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is twofold: he is a dramatist of contemporary America and his presentation of witch-hunting implies the Communist-hunting American society of the nineteen fifties. Here we may see that in addition to his historical presentation of witchcraft of the Puritan age, Arthur Miller has employed witchcraft as a metaphor to depict his own contemporary society. Miller's metaphorical use of witchcraft delusion will be fully discussed

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<sup>2</sup> For the analysis of Hawthorne's use of witchcraft in his novels and tales, see the following respectively: Sheldon W. Liebman, "Ambiguity in 'Lady Eleanore's Mantle,'" *Emerson Society Quarterly* 58 (1970): 97-101; Dennis Grunes, "Allegory Versus Allegory in Hawthorne," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 32 (1976): 14-19; John E. Becker, *Hawthorne's Historical Allegory: An Examination of the American Conscience* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1971); and Michael J. Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety: Moral History in Hawthorne's Early Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984).



later in this study.

## II

In *Giles Corey of the Salem Farm*, Longfellow reveals in the prologue:

Delusion of the days that once have been,  
Witchcraft and wonders of the world unseen,  
Phantoms of air, and necromantic arts  
That crushed the weak and awed the stoutest hearts, --  
These are our theme . . . (Longfellow, 101)

In portraying elm-shaded Salem Village (amid its woods, hills, and sunny farms), Longfellow dramatizes the sudden burst of "the common madness of the time" upon a peaceful township. His version of the plight of the well-to-do old goodman, Giles Corey, and his spirited, outspoken wife Martha typifies the strong resistance of minorities to the power of the ruling theocracy and the will of the majority.

It is true that Longfellow shows a close following of history, in the temper of the times as well as in individuals: in the Indian slave Tituba, the buxom much-married goody Bishop, the Coreys, John Proctor (a central figure in *The Crucible*), the Walcotts including "afflicted" Mary, John Gloyd (Giles's hired hand and friend to Proctor), prosecutor Hathorne, Cotton Mather, and others. But through his own interpretation, Longfellow has made Martha a young wife rather than the sixty-year-old woman of reality, and he has also employed a dream in which Martha sees Giles's written testimony against herself. The other changes Longfellow has made in his play are: his giving Gloyd prominence as a vindictive informer, and his portraying a hearty sea captain and Corey's old-time friend as the symbol of man's love of freedom and as a foil to stress the true novelty of old Giles's nature.

Longfellow's portrayal of Martha Corey's stubborn, fearless self-defense reveals her as valiantly protecting her inno-

cence and begging but to be denied, the freedom to pray. But pity never was a Puritan virtue. Earnestly Martha declares: "I never had to do with any witchcraft/Since I was born. I am a gospel woman" (Longfellow, 166). In answer, Mary Walcott, her wildly emotional accuser, shrieks about Martha's power of bewitchment, points out an imagining yellow bird as Martha's familiar means, and wilfully accuses the goodwife of carrying the Devil's book. Poor Giles's blundering testimony against his own wife, together with Judge Hathorne's persistence in favoring "the poor dear girls" while condemning Martha to the gallows, turns attention toward the most significant movement in the tragedy: the eventual accusation of old Giles himself. Therefore, Martha Corey's examination and hanging prepare the way for the greater scene of her husband's trial and suffering.

The sharp contrast in Corey's nature before and after his trial condemnation is dramatically effective. An exceptionally sturdy giant of a man (about eighty), Giles in the beginning appears superstitious and at odds with the more pragmatic Martha, who disbelieves in witchcraft. Moreover, he seems confused and blundering to the point of inattentively incriminating his wife, and both stubborn and irascible in neighborly relationship with the Proctors and others. In prison, however, the old farmer actually grows in character. Contrite over his failure to save his "lass," Giles determines to win a victory for Martha and himself by complete refusal to talk (that is, confess) in the presence of the magistrates and court. His muteness (allowed under Puritan law) and courage prevail. In a desperate effort to force a confession of wizardry, Judge Hathorne mercilessly sentences the mute Corey "to be pressed by great weights until you shall be dead" (Longfellow, 182). But Giles, confounding the magistrates, dies a martyr's horrible physical death, but with soul uncrushed and triumphant. And this lone old man's spiritual victory, as a fictionalized Mather declares to Hathorne at the play's end, becomes something greater, a symbol of nonconformity to be feared. "And this poor man, whom we have made a victim,/Hereafter

will be counted a martyr" (Longfellow, 191).

Successful as Longfellow is in treating the spiritual victory of Giles Corey, he still lacks the ability to give readers glimpses of the inner life of many other characters in his play. Most of his dramatic presentation is only devoted to the Coreys and particularly the mute rebellion of Giles Corey. About the responses of the Salem community, Longfellow said nothing. It is in Mary E. Wilkins's *Giles Corey* that she reveals considerable insight into the complex nature of the Salem delusion, a community hysteria which, as Giles Corey of her play said in foolish jest, places "this whole land . . . now in bedlam, and the Governors and the magistrates swell the ravings" (Wilkins, 88). Wilkins's realistic retelling of the trouble which started in Salem Village gives evidence of her clear understanding of some familiar characteristics of the Puritan mind: its love of unity and display of power, its outbursts of enmity, its ready response to the phenomenon of superstition and fear, of trance and hypnotism, and even insanity. Humanly dramatizing the persecutions of the Coreys—a sort of prototype for Miller's modern treatment of a neighboring family, the Proctors—she traces, often in colloquial dialogue, a family's destruction as speeded by their neighbors' unnatural and "unaccountable behaviors" (Wilkins, 64).

Throughout the first act of *Giles Corey, Yeoman*, many signs suggest that the normal activities in the Corey household are not running as smoothly as usual. A vague sense of uneasiness disturbs each family member, though the routine tasks of cooking, spinning, sewing, and outdoor chores are continued. Nancy Fox, the old and petulant Negro servant, sits by the fireplace paring apples, orphaned Phoebe Morse dutifully does the dreary task of knitting stockings (something expected of even a child), and Olive (Giles and Martha's daughter) industriously works her spinning wheel. But this typical Puritan scene of hard work is broken into by Nancy's rattle-brained gossip about witchcraft and the foolish fancies of the child. Olive tries calming their fears by persuading Phoebe to join in her ringing of a spinning song, romantically beginning

"I'll tell you a story; a story of one,/'Twas of a great prince whose name was King John" (Wilkins, 62). But Nancy, like the Parris's Tituba, is not to be denied her indulgence in magic. At midnight, she lures Phoebe back into the mysteries of witchcraft by spitefully cursing Bridget Bishop (out of envy because of her silk hood) and teaching Phoebe to sue a poppet to curse her aunt, Martha, Giles, and Olive. As anticlimax, Nancy quaveringly parodies Olive's ballad: "I'll tell you a story, a story of one;/'Twas of a dark witch, and the wizard her son" (Wilkins, 64). Earlier the tender love scene between Olive and the unsuperstitious and reasonable Paul Bayly adds a lighter tone, darkened a bit by "afflicted" Ann Hutchins's envy and her malicious accusations that Olive had cast an evil spell upon her. As Paul then becomes aware, "... sometimes danger sneaks at home, when we flee it abroad" (Wilkins, 73). All in all, the later tragedy of Olive's parents appears all the more poignant in the light of what they lost: their satisfactory economic status in the township, their domestic happiness, and their lives.

Winfield S. Nevins considered the case of Giles Corey the most tragic in the history of American witchcraft (Nevins, 104). Certainly the sturdy yeoman emerging from Wilkins's six acts seems a flesh-and-blood provincial. In younger days, before his conversion, Giles's honesty may have been questionable and his contentious nature the cause of litigation with John Proctor and other neighbors. Slow-witted and superstitious, Giles, in this play as in life, became so fascinated by the witchcraft examinations from their outset that, disregarding his wife's advice, he joined the excited spectators in the village's crowded meeting-house. As landowner, Giles, proud of his physical strength, labored so diligently that frequently he created ill will among his supposedly overworked helpers. In revenge, laborer John Gloyd proved himself a loudmouthed malefactor by "crying out" against his employer. Giles, too, was quick to feel resentment, but this was not a deep part of his nature. For instance, the pique aroused in him by Martha's bossy ways was but superficial, though it was to move him to

blundering public testimony that helped sentence her to Gallows Hill. However, his love for both wife and daughter, at first undisputed, was to prove deep. And during his extreme test the tortured old fellow—scorned by Judge Hathorne to the last as “an unlettered clown, and tavern brawler”—endured with amazing courage until death. But let Giles furnish a self-portrait in the words he addressed to Master Bayley just before he was carted from the dreary Salem jail to the field where he was pressed to death:

“ . . . you see before you Giles Corey. He be verily an old man, he be over eighty years old, but there be somewhat of the first of him left. He hath never had much of the power of speech; his words have been a rude man, an unlettered man, and a sinner. He hath brawled and blasphemed with the worst of them in his day. He hath given blow for blow. . . ” (Wilkins, 95)

In the last of his confession, Giles, long since a man of the conveniences, rises to a kind of nobility. Granting his lack of nimbleness of speech or wisdom to save his life, he knows that “he hath power to die as he will, and no man hath greater” (Wilkins, 96).

The Goody Corey of Wilkins’s, realistically characterized, closely resembles Salem’s stalwart country wife victimized during the historical frenzy of 1692 as a “gospel witch.” Practical and unsuperstitious by nature, Martha caused gossip among neighbors on the farm lands by freely joking about witchcraft and reproaching the more gullible Giles for believing. In the Village, where she was known as “a stout professor of faith,” Martha’s outspoken skepticism concerning the ethics of witch-hunting was remembered during her trial, when court and spectators alike regarded her as heretic. Then, they remembered little of her thrift, practicality, and loving kindness as a good wife; rather as a community, gathered for “righteous” judgement, these gospel folk aired her dictatorial ways with Phoebe and old Nancy, her opinionated talk, and her uncanny ability to anticipate what one was about to say.

Thus, during the emotional excitement of her trial, villagers momentarily forgot her piety and neighborly help. They were swayed by the malicious spite of neurotic Widow Hutchins and the screening of the girls, who according to Giles's imprecations were nothing more than despicable "lying hussies" and "ill favored jades, puling because no man will have ye" (Wilkins, 71). Certainly these emotional weaklings and the blinded magistrates, in utter disregard of her goodness, ruined Martha beyond redemption. Ruthlessly righteous Hathorne and vacillating Jonathan Corwin were not much better than Martha's pastor, pusillanimous Samuel Parris. As for the latter, in Wilkins's portrayal, Giles's bold vilification, "Ye lying devil's tool of a parson that seasons prayer with murder," (Wilkins, 72) seems deserved.

Too late, after the jailing of Olive and her subsequent stripping and searching for witch marks, and following Mercy Lewis's hysterical crying out against Giles himself, he remorsefully tried to make atonement for his indiscreet remarks about his wife. Equally futile was Martha's long and rational speech of defense (65-68). When she had been branded as a "gospel witch" and sentenced to hang on Gallows Hill, then, again too late, Giles heatedly blurted out a frantic assurance of her decency: "Think ye Goodwife Martha Corey gallops a broomstick to the hill of a night, with her descent petticoats flapping?" (Wilkins, 71-72). But his peppery plea was to no avail and Goodman Corey came to the slow realization that had he remained silent Martha might have been saved. Accordingly, he decided, in full respect for her good name, to remain mute at his forth coming trial. His guilty complex thus led him to repay Martha and to save for her daughter Olive and the son-in-law Paul the considerable property which otherwise would have been confiscated by the authorities.

In this tragedy, Mary Wilkins has through her perception of the historical facts delineated a narrow, primarily unlovely provincial world. Picturing largely unromantic, even grim, actualities of Salem's past, she re-creates a special crisis, which for some skeptical folk in Salem Village signified that rigid

theocratic control over the minds and destinies of men is not right. A gradually increasing dissatisfaction with the horrors of the trials led some to question cautiously, as did Giles, "Who is safe?" This sense of the new beginning of things was a bad omen for fanatical Parris, the judges whose righteousness was becoming spotted, and the jittery wenches who had had their day with their shrieks of yellow birds, black beasts, the Devil's book, wild Sabbat dancing. And Giles, though not a deep man, had more wits than the villagers dreamed of when he spoke to Paul of his own striving to understand "that which is at the root of things" (Wilkins, 93). His faith in a force beyond human ties led him into believing that "not only Giles Corey . . . lies pressed to death under stones, but the backbone of this great evil in the land shall be broken by the same weight" (Wilkins, 94). At the end of the sixth act, the marriage of Olive and Paul (at Giles's urgent request) romantically symbolizes the coming of a new year, with uncontrolled commotion ended and the plowing started again in Salem Farms.

### III

While Mary Wilkins retold the Salem witchcraft delusion with the emphasis on the theocratic control over the minds and destinies of men of that period, Arthur Miller, after more than sixty years, in *The Crucible*, picked up the witchcraft trials again to stress the plight of the individual both under the yoke of the repressive Puritanism and in connection with the injustice caused by the security trials of his own era—the late 1940's and 1950's. As John Gassner has observed, "Taking an exalted view of the theatre's responsibilities of its conscience, Miller wrote *The Crucible* in the midst of the McCarthy era. The author's motivation plainly included taking a public stand against authoritarian inquisitions and hysteria" (Gassner, 28).

Miller's *The Crucible* is obviously the ultimate treatment among these dramatic probings into superstition and injustice. Most of all, Miller, while evaluating anew the tensions of Salem Village, in this play directs our interests toward the universality

of folk delusion, injustice, and "diabolism," his term for the fear and hatred of opposites. If such fear is organized, as Miller discovered in Salem's records, the community and region at large may suffer manifold evils. As a craftsman of drama, familiar with Aristotelian principles, Miller discovered in the happenings of 1692 an organic wholeness which appealed to him. As he has said, "Salem is one of the few dramas in history with a beginning, a middle, and an end" (Griffin, 34). Their stubborn beliefs and hysteria brought months of terrors; yet the Salem folk, says Miller, saw the errors of their ways quite soon after the tragedy occurred. (Actually, there was a slow return to reason in response to a growing public protest against the trials. The realization that no one was safe was indeed a sobering thought.) Their devotion to Puritan ideology, their knowledge of why they struggle, and, when women were charged, their strength to struggle so valiantly that they did not die helplessly made these New England villagers, in Miller's opinion, fit characters for drama (Griffin, 34). As we have seen, Longfellow and Wilkins also made some creative use, that is, interpreting from their viewpoints, of this quality of Puritan nature in their scenes dramatizing the ultimate triumph of the Coreys.

Although Miller understands that the whole community of the Bay colony were affected by Salem's delusion, he cannot present all of the townspeople. In his turn, he has facilitated his ideological conception of the life implicit in Salem's records by portraying only a few chosen groups of Puritans. First, the vested interests of the Puritan theocracy and magistracy are generally represented by resentful and narrow-minded persons: the contentious Parris, whose ineffectual ministry at Salem had been marred by social frictions; the Reverend John Hale, from nearby Beverly, an intellectual interested in witchcraft, whose efforts to bring moderation "to stop the whole green world from burning" are weakened by his own vacillation—worried by problems of conscience and Puritan suppression of opposition.

Secondly, as in earlier plays, the "afflicted" girls—timid



Mary Warren, Susanna Walcott, childish Betty Parris, fat Mercy Lewis, a sly servant girl of eighteen—all show complete obedience to Abby Williams, outwardly pious as Parris's niece, but actually a liar and a whore. The next group is as historically true as the others, except for Miller's using the name of John, rather than the historical Israel, for Proctor. Here, too, are Salem's landowners, accusers (like grasping Putnam and his sarcastic wife Anne, neurotically attributing the loss of her children to Rebecca Nurse and other local "witches") as well as the accused, ranging in social status from respected farm folk—aged Francis and Rebecca Nurse, the Proctors, and Corey, stalwart at eighty-three—to disreputable old Sarah Good, Parris's slave woman, Tituba, versed in the voodooism of her native Barbadoes.

Generally, in these Puritan plays the same family and community relationships appear and reappear, somewhat in the fashion of Galsworthy's moving certain Forsytes from novel to novel in his Forsyte Saga. From different points of view we watch village folk lose their neighborly trust or forbearance and, with the outbreak of smoldering hatreds and spread of new fears, tragically victimize themselves or their neighbors. In *The Crucible*, the same atmosphere of suspicion and hysteria reappears; and the same inquisitorial tactics doom innocent Salemites to Gallows Hill. There are, however, differences. Miller's protagonist and his wife, John and Elizabeth Proctor, are made younger (in their thirties rather than middle-aged) than either their historical prototypes or their equally independent neighbors, the ill-fated Coreys, and thus have more to lose. Moreover, Miller "has made effort to create a central tragic character in John Proctor, the independent farmer who faces one decision after another and, after some understandable hesitations, makes his choice" (Gassner, 29) so as to capture the movement toward tragedy. Further, Miller's tragedy, modern in technique, belongs to the history of sociological ideas more than do its forerunners. The temptations of contemporary diabolism (of opposites); the dramatic linking of sex, sin, and the devil during the craze of 1692; the

enthrallment of the popular mind by current concepts of Satanism, all typify the more speculative and, as some reviews have indicated, controversial qualities of *The Crucible*.

Miller's stress on marital conflicts, caused by mutual distrust and infidelity, is a facet barely touched upon in the Longfellow and Wilkins characterizations of the Coreys. Conflicts within conflicts disturb John, Elizabeth, and Abby, as each struggles against the others, with self, and against society. The unhappiness of the Proctors—their sense of a growing separation—stems largely from John's lusting for Abby and his impatience with Elizabeth's illness, her reticence and coldness, her suspicious manner, and her determination to keep John for herself alone. Accordingly, their unhappiness early turns John toward their mature maidservant. Elizabeth, understanding psychological problems better than John, intuitively knows that Abby yearns to be his new wife, for there is "monstrous profit." In turn, Abby, decisively branding Elizabeth, in John's presence, as a "cold, sniveling woman," imagines the fulfillment of her desires through Goody Proctor's death. (Here, the hatred—the diabolism—of opposites!) Ironically, Elizabeth herself hastens the finale of their tragedy by urging John to break his promises to Abby. His contrition does move him to renounce Abby. Fearlessly but tactlessly he accuses Abby of possessing a whore's "lump of vanity" and threatens to tell the court of their love affairs. Abby, angered at being cast off, achieves vengeance in the easiest way: by "crying out" against Elizabeth. There is grim irony in her eventual loss of John.

Their domestic entanglement links the Proctors with the madness catching the town. Though but a farmer, John (like Corey) acts with a dangerous self-reliance and a shocking non-conformity. His heated swearing that "my wife will never die for me!" (Miller 1954: 77) clearly demonstrates his struggle against the theocracy's repressive, irrational, and destructive use of authority. His denunciation of the rigid Puritan view of God is shown in his reluctance of going to church on the Sabbath. At first his excuse is that he needs the extra work-

day on his farm to produce to full capacity. We learn next that the real reason is his resentment of the Reverend Mr. Parris's grasping materialism, hypocritically concealed behind a mask of piety, and also his preoccupation with his congregation's possible future in hell instead of its actual spiritual needs in the present. Although John has never "desired the destruction of religion" (Miller 1954: 64), he can "see no light of God" (63) in Parris and is "sick of Hell" (27). His denunciation is not complete, however, until he is arrested for witchcraft. At that point, he is convinced that "God is dead" (Miller 1954: 115). By daring to speak his own mind, John subjects himself to imprisonment and the death penalty, but maintains his own identity. In short his bitter mental struggle to reassert the prime importance of the individual, in the face of theocratic control, brings the comforting realization, as Emerson was to say later, the self-reliant man "must take himself for better or for worse as his portion" (Emerson, 157). Resisting ministerial pleas to confess to participation in witchcraft, John refuses to lie or compromise. At the stage he chooses death but maintains his goodness and integrity. Thus without hindrance from Elizabeth (saved from the gallows because of pregnancy), John Proctor triumphed in his severe test, his crucible.

To the finale, Miller stimulates thought about a cosmology "gripped between two diametrically opposed absolutes," good and evil (Miller 1954: 30). Miller's record of Salem closes with the re-affirmation that the town's delusion, like all human dilemmas, had run its natural course. As the final drumroll crashes for her husband, Elizabeth, by her prison window, feels "the new sun . . . pouring in upon her face, and the drums rattle like bones in the morning air" (Miller 1954: 139). By the time the play ends, "it is no longer the hit-or-miss chronicle of mass hysteria it tended to become earlier; it is a tragedy and its point is that men, no matter how erring, are capable of enduring everything for their sense of decency" (Gassner, 30).

In *The Crucible*, Miller dramatizes one of the "crimes" of the Proctors, their supposed consorting with the devil, as guilt

by association, interpreted by some critics as a link with the "security trials" of contemporary America. In a reference to such a parallel, Joseph W. Krutch says that "its validity depends upon the validity of the parallel and those who find it invalid point out that, whereas witchcraft was pure delusion, subversion is a reality, no matter how unwisely or intemperately it may be combatted" (Krutch, 325). To many in the audience at the Martin Beck Theater, *The Crucible* seemed to draw a parallel between the Salem witch trials of 1692 and government investigations of alleged Communist subversion in the United States in the late 1940's and early 1950's. Given the national temper at the time, this is hardly surprising. Henry Popkin reminds us that for several years before *The Crucible* was produced "public investigations had been examining and interrogating radicals, former radicals, and possible former radicals, requiring witnesses to tell about others and not only about themselves. The House Committee to investigate Un-American Activities evolved a memorable and much-quoted sentence: 'Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist party?' Borrowing a phrase from a popular radio program, its interrogators called it 'the \$64 question'" (Popkin, 139).

Far from denying the parallel, Miller has emphasized it repeatedly in the interpolated commentary on *The Crucible*, and in the introduction to the *Collected Plays*, he has made it very clear that he was concerned not only with the parallel between the redhunts and witch-hunts, but also with what lay behind these historical phenomena. Here I quote him at length:

It was not only the rise of "McCarthyism" that moved me, but something which seemed much more weird and mysterious. It was the fact that a political, objective, knowledgeable campaign from the far Right was capable of creating not only a terror, but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually assuming even a holy resonance. The wonder of it all struck me that so practical and picayune a cause, carried forward by such manifestly ridiculous men, should be capable of paralyzing

thought itself, and worse, causing to billow up such persuasive clouds of "mysterious" feelings within people. It was as though the whole country had been born anew, without a memory even of certain elemental decencies which a year or two earlier no one would have imagined could be altered, let alone forgotten. Astounded, I watched men pass me by without a nod whom I had known rather well for years; and again, the astonishment was produced by my knowledge, which I could not give up, that the terror in these people was being knowingly planned and consciously engineered, and yet that all they knew was terror. That so interior and subjective an emotion could have been so manifestly created from without was a marvel to me. It underlies every word in *The Crucible*. (Miller 1957: 39-40)

About the play's contemporary parallel, Miller further wrote in his introduction:

I had known of the Salem witch hunt for many years before "McCarthyism" had arrived, and it had always remained an inexplicable darkness to me. When I looked into it now, however, it was with the contemporary situation at my back, particularly the mystery of the handing over of conscience which seemed to me the central and informing fact of the time. One finds, I suppose, what one seeks. (Miller 1957: 41)

The above quotations are significant in several respects. First of all, speaking of the play's contemporary parallel, Miller affirms that both Salem witch-hunt and Senator Joseph McCarthy's investigations of Communist subversion in the United States of the early 1950's have created a "subjective reality" that gradually assumes the same kind of "holy resonance." Due to the "holy resonance," there was both in the Puritan community and the American society of the early 1950's "A new religiosity in the air, not merely the kind expressed by the spurt in church construction and church attendance, but an official piety" of State administration (Miller 1957: 40). And what has horrified Miller the most is that both the Salem witch-hunt and McCarthyism can be "paralyzing thought itself" and "causing to billow up such per-

suasive clouds of 'mysterious' feelings within people." Therefore, the whole situation is that "the terror in these people was being knowingly planned and consciously engineered, and yet all they knew was terror." Miller's conclusion in both cases clearly refers to a situation: "the necessity of the Devil may become evident as a weapon, a weapon designed and used time and time again in every age to whip men into a surrender to a particular church of church state. . . . A political policy is equated with moral right, and opposition to it with diabolical malevolence" (Moss 38).

#### IV

In one sense, all these three plays may well be called "social plays," since they all tend to analyze a public historical phenomenon. They all, too, focus on the "subjective reality" of that phenomenon. Since witchcraft itself is a delusion, all three playwrights condemn it with one accord but interpret it freely. Thus they cannot be judged merely on literary accuracy. For Longfellow, Martha Corey is a much younger wife than the sixty-year-old woman of reality. Then her death has much more to lose. On the other hand, Giles Corey is the only character in his whole play to be fully portrayed and carefully examined. His moral stature grows as the play proceeds from one act to another. Before his trial, Giles seems superstitious and often at odds with Martha and even blunders to incriminate his own wife. But after he is put in prison, his character grows. He regrets Martha's death and determines not to answer any questions in the court. By so doing, he has won a victory both for Martha and himself. Longfellow has purposely demonstrated Giles Corey's courage in his play.

While Longfellow's emphasis is on the spiritual victory of Corey himself, Wilkins's interest is in revealing an insight into the complex nature of the community hysteria at Salem. In her *Giles Corey*, Wilkins tries to show how the Salem community has become hypnotized and insane during the period of witch hunting. As has been analyzed in the preceding sec-

tions, Wilkins traces the family destruction of the Coreys and the Salem community loss of their domestic happiness. Of course, lost, too, are their lives and social stability. In this play, Giles Corey is at first very much interested in the witchcraft examinations. His love for his wife Martha at first appears also superficial. He can easily get angry with Martha's bossy way. But his undisplayed love for both his wife and daughter later proves very deep. The old man can endure all his torture with amazing courage until his death. In portraying Giles Corey, Wilkins has followed the historical record and Longfellow closely.

In *The Crucible*, as has been discussed earlier, Miller has paid equal attention to the individuals and their community. However, in presenting the individual characters, Miller has obviously divided them into three groups. John and Elizabeth Proctor are of the group of moral growth. Abby, Hathorne, and Danforth belong to the group of rigidity. Tituba, Parris, and the girls are the ones being constantly unstable. As Leonard Moss has pointed out, "The moral growth of . . . the Proctors contrasts on the one hand with the rigidity of Abigail, Hathorne, and Danforth, and on the other with the instability of Tituba, Parris, and the girls" (Moss 42). At the outset, Elizabeth holds a firm sense of duty and moral rectitude. Her manner is often cold and unforgiving. She condemns her husband's single adulterous act and cannot forgive him. Proctor complains, "You forget nothin' and forgive nothin', learn charity, woman" (Miller 1954: 65). But during her trial and imprisonment, Elizabeth gradually learns to tolerate human fallibility and appreciate human goodness. Before the play ends, she regrets that how cold and suspicious she was toward John in the past, so she says, "John, I counted myself so plain, so poorly made, no honest love could come to me! Suspicion kissed you when I did; I never knew how I should say my love. It were a cold house I kept!" (Miller 1954: 106).

John Proctor does not advance, like Elizabeth, from narrow-mindedness to generous understanding and sympathy. He progresses in a different direction—"from shame to renewed

assurance" (Moss 42). At first, he is a man of independent spirit in his thirties. Normally he would prefer to stay out of public matters. And he is even suspicious of those who crave power or succumb to mob hysteria. But after that single adulterous act, he becomes humiliated and believes that he is imperfect. Later he even makes himself more humiliated by confessing to witchcraft, for he thinks that he cannot sacrifice his life for a principle and agrees to confess. He is thus tempted to save his life. But when Deputy Governor Danforth insists that John must name others he has seen in the devil's company, Proctor becomes indignant and insists that he can only speak for himself. Proctor thus speaks, "I have confessed myself! Is there no good penitence but it be public? God does not need my name nailed upon the church! God knows how black my sins are! It is enough!" (Miller 1954: 108). Danforth only reluctantly agrees to a confession that mentions no one else, and asks John to sign the confession. John tries to avoid this commitment, then signs it but insists on keeping the paper. Danforth demands that the confession be made public. Finally John realizes that he is buying his life with public dishonor and disgrace for his family. As Miller narrates, "Proctor, with a cry of his whole soul: '... How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!' ... His breast heaving, his eyes staring, Proctor tears the paper and crumples it, and he is weeping in fury, but erect" (Miller 1954: 112). Miller himself explains in an interview with Henry Hewes that what Proctor has rediscovered is a "sense of personal inviolability. . . . That's what Proctor means near the end of the play when he talks of his 'name.' He is really speaking about his identity, which he cannot surrender" (Hewes, 25).

By thus interpreting the historical record of Salem witchcraft from his own angle of vision, each of the three playwrights seems to have created another "subjective reality" out of the "subjective reality" of Salem witchcraft. However, what should not be misunderstood is that the two versions of reality in each play is not created by each playwright's mere fancy. Before presenting his version of the Salem witchcraft



delusion, each playwright has dug down to the essential historical issues of the period as the historians themselves have defined them—"issues such as spectral evidence, innate depravity, and its paradoxical corollary, visible sanctity" (Budick, 129). Like so many other historical novels and plays, these three witchcraft plays, since they are all based on the very same kind of historical record, force a revolution in our perception of historical plays and definition of reality. According to Hayden White, even historical narratives contain "an irreducible and inexpungeable element of interpretation." White further observes:

The historian has to interpret his materials in order to construct the moving pattern of images in which the form of the historical process is to be mirrored. And this because the historical record is both too full and too sparse. On the one hand, there are always more facts in the record than the historian can possibly include in his narrative representation of a given segment of the historical process. And so the historian must "interpret" his data by excluding certain facts from his account as irrelevant to his narrative purpose. On the other hand, in his efforts to reconstruct "what happened" in any given period of history, the historian inevitably must include in his narrative an account of some event or complex of events for which the facts that would permit a plausible explanation of its occurrence are lacking. And this means that the historian must "interpret" his materials by filling in the gaps in his information on inferential or speculative grounds. A historical narrative is thus necessarily a mixture of adequately and inadequately explained events, a congeries of established and inferred facts, at once a representation that is an interpretation and an interpretation that passes for an explanation of the whole process mirrored in the narrative. (White 1978: 51)

As a theorist of historiography, White has made it very clear that "all histories are in some sense interpretations" (White 1978: 51). Thus, it becomes quite apparent that these three playwrights' presentations of the Salem witch-hunt are their interpretations of the same historical record. As readers of

these three plays, we are attracted not only by the historical facts about the Salem witchcraft but also by the playwrights' interpretations.

As a social play, what makes *The Crucible* different from the Giles Corey plays is that *The Crucible* explores two contrary processes in the context of a given social order—the generation of mass hysteria and the achievement of the individual's moral honesty. Witchcraft in this play is the central psycho-social issue which links both the private and public issues. And witchcraft itself arises from the private issue of the triangular relationships among Abby Williams, John and Elizabeth Proctor. It is Abby's passion for John Proctor that moves her to attack Elizabeth through the witch-hunt. Rumors quickly spread through the village that witchcraft is abroad and immediately ascends toward insanity. If Abby's desire to supplant Elizabeth is the prime cause for the generation of mass hysteria, Proctor's desire to preserve his "name" is then the prime reason for stopping the spread of the witch fire. Here, Leonard Moss's observation is quite to the point, "When the protagonist realizes he cannot betray himself and his friends with a false confession, he at once completes his progression toward integrity and diverts Salem from its movement toward chaos" (Moss, 43).

The contemporary appeal of *The Crucible* can hardly be attributed to any analogy it draws between the Salem witch-hunts of 1692 and Joe McCarthy's communist hunts, however, since the majority of those who see or read the play today are too young to remember the Wisconsin senator. Foreign audiences, like us Chinese, must be even less conscious of the analogy. Why then has *The Crucible* held up so well? What makes it still worth reading and performing? One can perhaps begin to answer these questions by quoting something that Miller said in an interview about his later play, *After the Fall*: "I am trying to define what a human being should be, how he can survive in today's society without having to appear to be a different person from what he basically is" (Miller 1957: 11).

To put it simply, Miller believes that a man must be true to himself and to his fellows, even though being untrue may be the only way to stay alive. Out of the ordeals of their personal crucibles, both John Proctor, as presented by Miller, and Giles Corey, as presented by Longfellow and Wilkins, come to know the truth about themselves. In order to confront his essential self, to discover that self in the void between being and seeming, a man must strip away the disguises society requires him to wear. John Proctor, refusing at the moment of truth to sell his friends, tears up his confession and faces his death bravely. Giles Corey, refusing to make any statement, is crushed dead by the great stones piled on his chest. In so doing, he can save his property for his children. Thus, once the self has been revealed by this process, a man must be true to it. Much more than the Puritan age or the Cold War period, ours is a time when traditional values are eroding. The individual feels compelled to look inward for new ones. A man must either stand or fall alone once the fog of old standards has been cleared away in the crucible of crisis. Stand or fall, though, he can achieve wholeness of being or "a sense of personal inviolability," in Miller's words, that justifies his new faith. Perhaps, it is in this sense that these three witchcraft plays still have their values and are worth our reading or performing long after their publications.

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## 美國三劇本中所表現的「巫術謬見」

田 維 新

### 摘 要

本論文所研究的美國三劇本是：朗費羅的賽倫農莊的吉爾斯·柯雷，維爾肯絲的吉爾斯·柯雷農夫；和米勒的坩堝。

在一六九二年間，美國新格蘭地區的清教徒城市賽倫，原本生活平靜，但突然間地方教會及政府官員認為該市巫術猖獗，逮捕衆多無辜居民，審判定罪，處以死刑。本論文首先說明引起巫術的可能原因。

三劇作家都對歷史記錄做了個人的詮釋，改寫為劇本。朗氏的劇本在表現柯雷農夫在巫術審判前後人格之變化。維女士則在強調柯雷夫婦的變化及賽倫市因巫術指控，在市民間引起的恐慌及歇斯底里的反應。米勒的劇作是以普洛克特爾夫婦為主要人物，故事由家庭及社會兩層面發展；巫術指控並影射美國當時所引起的紅色指控。

本文研究重點有二：一是分析各劇作家如何根據同一歷史紀錄，做自己的詮釋，表現不同的重點。本文作者認為詮釋歷史是不可避免的。另一重點是說明為何這三個劇本仍值得我們研究和演出。除了歷史文化價值之外，個人自我肯定及犧牲小我的精神也值得我們認識與了解。