

# THE NEW YORKER

LIFE AND LETTERS

## WHY I WROTE "THE CRUCIBLE"

by Arthur Miller

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**ABSTRACT:** LIFE AND LETTERS about the inspiration for and influence of Miller's play, "The Crucible," a reflection of the Communist witchhunts of its time. Miller recalled the source of his creation while watching the filming of the new movie of "The Crucible." When he wrote it, Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Committee on Un-American Activities were prosecuting alleged Communists from the State Department to Hollywood; the Red hunt was becoming the dominant fixation of the American psyche. Miller did not know how to deal with the enormities of the situation in a play. "The Crucible" was an act of desperation; Miller was fearful of being identified as a covert Communist if he should protest too strongly. He could not find a point of moral reference in contemporary society. Miller found his subject while reading Charles W. Upham's 1867 two-volume study of the 1692 Salem witch trials, which shed light on the personal relationships behind the trials. Miller went to Salem in 1952 and read transcripts. He began to reconstruct the relationship between John and Elizabeth Proctor and Abigail Williams, who would become the central characters in "The Crucible." He related to John Proctor, who, in spite of an imperfect character, was able to fight the madness around him. The Salem court had moved to admit "spectral evidence" as proof of guilt; as in 1952, the question was not the acts of an accused but his thoughts and intentions. Miller understood the universal experience of being unable to believe that the state has lost its mind.







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