

# Feminist approach to witchcraft; case study: miller's the crucible

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Title: Re(dis)covering the Witches in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*: A Feminist Reading  
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Title Re(dis)covering the Witches in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*: A Feminist Reading [(essay date fall 1994) In the following essay, Schissel offers a feminist reading of *The Crucible*, in an effort to deconstruct " the phallogocentric sanctions implicit in Miller's account of Abigail's fate, Elizabeth's confession, and John's temptation and death. ] Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is a disturbing work, not only because of the obvious moral dilemma that is irresolutely solved by John Proctor's death, but also because of the treatment that Abigail and Elizabeth receive at Miller's hands and at the hands of critics. In forty years of criticism very little has been said about the ways in which *The Crucible* reinforces stereotypes of femme fatales and cold and unforgiving wives in order to assert apparently universal virtues. It is a morality play based upon a questionable androcentric morality.

Like Proctor, *The Crucible* "[r[roars]own" Elizabeth, making her concede a fault which is not hers but of Miller's making: " It needs a cold wife to prompt lechery,"<sup>1</sup> she admits in her final meeting with her husband. Critics have seen John as a " tragically heroic common man,"<sup>2</sup> humanly tempted, " a just man in a universe gone mad,"<sup>3</sup> but they have never given Elizabeth similar consideration, nor have they deconstructed the phallogocentric sanctions  
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implicit in Miller's account of Abigail's fate, Elizabeth's confession, and John's temptation and death.

As a feminist reader of the 1990s, I am troubled by the unrecognized fallout from the existential humanism that Miller and his critics have held dear. The *Crucible* is in need of an/Other reading, one that reveals the assumptions of the text, the author, and the reader/critic who "is part of the shared consciousness created by the [p[play]" 4 It is time to reveal the vicarious enjoyment that Miller and his critics have found in a cathartic male character who has enacted their sexual and political fantasies.

The setting of *The Crucible* is a favoured starting point in an analysis of the play. Puritan New England of 1692 may indeed have had its parallels to McCarthy's America of 1952, 5 but there is more to the paranoia than xenophobia—of Natives and Communists, respectively. Implicit in Puritan theology, in Miller's version of the Salem witch trials, and all too frequent in the society which has produced Miller's critics is gynecophobia—fear and distrust of women.

The "half dozen heavy books" (36) which the zealous Reverend Hale endows on Salem "like a bridegroom to his beloved, bearing gifts" (132) are books on witchcraft from which he has acquired an "armory of symptoms, catchwords, and diagnostic procedures" (36). A 1948 edition of the 1486 *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Hammer of Witches*), with a foreword by Montague Summers, may have prompted Miller's inclusion of seventeenth-century and Protestant elucidations upon a work originally sanctioned by the Roman Church.

Hale's books would be "highly misogynic" tomes, for like the *Malleus* they would be premised on the belief that "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust which in women is insatiable." 7 The authors of the *Malleus*, two Dominican monks, Johan Sprenger and Heinrich Kraemer, were writing yet another fear-filled version of the apocryphal bad woman: they looked to *Ecclesiasties* which declares the wickedness of a woman is all evil ... there is no anger above the anger of a woman.

It will be more agreeable to abide with a lion and a dragon, than to dwell with a wicked woman ... from the woman came the beginning of sin, and by her we all die. (25: 17, 23, 33) *The Crucible* is evidence that Miller partakes of similar fears about wicked, angry, or wise women; even if his complicity in such gynecophobia is unwitting—and that is the most generous thing we can accord him, a "misrecognition" of himself and his reputation-conscious hero John as the authors of a subjectivity<sup>8</sup> which belongs exclusively to men—the result for generations of readers has been the same.

In Salem, the majority of witches condemned to die were women.

Even so, Salem's numbers were negligible<sup>9</sup> compared with the gynocide in Europe: Andrea Dworkin quotes a moderate estimate of nine million witches executed at a ratio of women to men of as much as 100 to 1. 10 Miller assures us in one of his editorial and political (and long and didactic) comments, that despite the Puritans' belief in witchcraft, "there were no witches" (35) in Salem; his play, however, belies his claim, and so do his critics.

The Crucible is filled with witches, from the wise woman/healer Rebecca Nurse to the black woman Tituba, who initiates the girls into the dancing which has always been part of the communal celebrations of women healers/witches. <sup>11</sup> But the most obvious witch in Miller's invention upon Salem history is Abigail Williams. She is the consummate seductress; the witchcraft hysteria in the play originates in her carnal lust for Proctor. Miller describes Abigail as "a strikingly beautiful girl .

.. ith an endless capacity for dissembling" (8-9). In 1953, William Hawkins called Abigail "an evil child"; <sup>12</sup> in 1967, critic Leonard Moss said she was a "malicious figure" and "unstable"; <sup>13</sup> in 1987, June Schlueter and James Flanagan proclaimed her "a whore," <sup>14</sup> echoing Proctor's "How do you call Heaven! Whore! Whore! " (109); and in 1989, Bernard Dukore suggested that "if the 'strikingly beautiful' Abigail's behaviour in the play is an indication, she may have been the one to take the initiative. <sup>15</sup> The critics forget what Abigail cannot: "John Proctor .

.. took me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart! " (24). They, like Miller, underplay so as not openly to condone the "natural" behaviour of a man tempted to adultery because of a young woman's beauty and precociousness, her proximity in a house where there is also an apparently frigid wife, and the repression of Puritan society and religion. Abigail is a delectable commodity in what Luce Irigaray has termed a "dominant scopic economy.

<sup>16</sup> We are covertly invited to equate John's admirable rebellion at the end of the play-against the unconscionable demands of implicating others in a

falsely acknowledged sin of serving that which is antithetical to community (the Puritans called that antithesis the devil)-with his more self-serving rebellion against its sexual mores. The subtle equation allows Miller not only to project fault upon Abigail, but also to make what is really a cliched act of adultery on John's part much more interesting.

Miller wants us to recognize, if not celebrate, the individual trials of his existential hero, a " spokesman for rational feeling and disinterested intelligence" in a play about " integrity and its obverse, compromise. " 17 Mary Daly might describe the scholarly support that Miller has received for his fantasy-fulfilling hero as " The second element of the Sado-Ritual [o[of the witch-craze].

. [a[an]rasure of responsibility. " 18 No critic has asked, though, how a seventeen-year-old girl, raised in the household of a Puritan minister, can have the knowledge of how to seduce a man. The only rationale offered scapegoats another woman, Tituba, complicating gynecophobia with xenophobia. ) The omission on Miller's and his critics' parts implies that Abigail's sexual knowledge must be inherent in her gender. I see the condemnation of Abigail as an all too common example of blaming the victim.

Mercy Lewis's reaction to John is another indictment of the sexual precociousness of the girls of Salem. Obviously knowledgeable of John and Abigail's affair, Mercy is both afraid of John and, Miller says, " strangely titillated" as she " sidles out" of the room (21).

Mary Warren, too, knows: " Abby'll charge lechery on you, Mr. Proctor" (80), she says when he demands she tell what she knows about the " poppet" to the court. John is aghast: " She's told you! " (80). Rather than condemning John, all these incidents are included to emphasize the " vengeance of a little girl" (79), and, I would add, to convince the reader who is supposed to sympathize with John (or to feel titillation himself) that no girl is a " good girl," free of sexual knowledge, that each is her mother Eve's daughter.

The fact is, however, that Salem's young women, who have been preached at by a fire and brimstone preacher, Mr. Parris, are ashamed of their bodies. A gynocritical reading of Mary Warren's cramps after Sarah Good mumbles her displeasure at being turned away from the Proctor's door empty-handed is explainable as a " curse" of a more periodic nature: But what does she mumble? You must remember, Goody Proctor. Last Month—a Monday, I think—she walked away, and I thought my guts would burst for two days after. Do you remember it? 58) The " girls" are the inheritors of Eve's sin, and their bodies are their reminders. Though, like all young people, they find ways to rebel—just because adolescence did not exist in Puritan society does not mean that the hormones did not flow—they are seriously repressed.

And the most insidious aspect of that repression, in a society in which girls are not considered women until they marry (as young as fourteen, or significantly, with the onset of menses), is the turning of the young women's frustrations upon members of their own gender.

It is not so strange as Proctor suggests for " a Christian girl to hang old women! " (58), when one such Christian girl claims her position in society

with understandable determination: " I'll not be ordered to bed no more, Mr. Proctor! I am eighteen and a woman, however single! " (60). Paradoxically, of course, the discord only serves to prove the assumptions of a parochial society about the jealousies of women, an important aspect of this play in which Miller makes each woman in John's life claim herself as his rightful spouse: Elizabeth assures him that " I will be your only wife, or no wife at all! (62); and Abigail makes her heart's desire plain with " I will make you such a wife when the world is white again! " (150). To realize her claim Abigail has sought the help of voodoo-Tituba's and the court's-to get rid of Elizabeth, but not without clear provocation on John's part.

Miller misses an opportunity to make an important comment upon the real and perceived competitions for men forced upon women in a patriarchal society by subsuming the women's concerns within what he knows his audience will recognize as more admirable communal and idealistic concerns.

The eternal triangle motif, while it serves many interests for Miller, is, ultimately, less important than the overwhelming nobility of John's Christ-like martyrdom; against that the women's complaints seem petty indeed, and an audience whose collective consciousness recognizes a dutifully repentent hero also sees the women in his life as less sympathetic. 19 For Abigail and Elizabeth also represent the extremes of female sexuality-sultriness and frigidity, respectively-which test a man's body, endanger his spirit, and threaten his " natural" dominance or needs.



In order to make Abigail's seductive capability more believable and John's culpability less pronounced, Miller has deliberately raised Abigail's age (" A Note on the Historical Accuracy of This Play") from twelve to seventeen. 20 He introduces us to John and Abigail in the first act with John's acknowledgement of her young age. Abby-the diminutive form of her name is not to be missed-is understandably annoyed: " How do you call me child! " (23).

We already know about his having " clutched" her back behind his house and " sweated like a stallion" at her every approach (22).

Despite Abigail's allegations, Miller achieves the curious effect of making her the apparent aggressor in this scene-as critical commentary proves. Miller's ploy, to blame a woman for the Fall of a good man, is a sleight of pen as old as the Old Testament. There is something too convenient in the fact that " legend has it that Abigail turned up later as a prostitute in Boston" (" Echoes Down the Corridor"). Prostitution is not only the oldest profession, but it is also the oldest evidence for the law of supply and demand. Men demand sexual services of women they in turn regard as socially deviant.

Miller's statement of Abigail's fate resounds with implicit forgiveness for the man who is unwittingly tempted by a fatal female, a conniving witch. Miller's treatment of Abigail in the second scene of Act Two, left out of the original reading version and most productions but included as an appendix in contemporary texts of the play, is also dishonest. Having promised Elizabeth as she is being taken away in chains that " I will fall like an ocean on that

court! Fear nothing" (78)-at the end of the first scene of Act Two-John returns to Abigail, alone and at night.

The scene is both anticlimactic and potentially damning of the hero. What may have begun as Miller's attempt to have the rational John reason with Abigail, even with the defense that Elizabeth has adjured him to talk to her (61)-although that is before Elizabeth is herself accused-ends in a discussion that is dangerous to John's position in the play.

Miller wants us to believe, as Proctor does " seeing her madness" when she reveals her self-inflicted injuries, that Abigail is insane: " I'm holes all over from their damned needles and pins" (149).

While Miller may have intended her madness to be a metaphor for her inherent evil-sociologists suggest that madness replaced witchcraft as a pathology to be treated not by burning or hanging but by physicians and incarceration in mental institutions<sup>21</sup>-he must have realized he ran the risk of making her more sympathetic than he intended. Miller is intent upon presenting John as a man haunted by guilt and aware of his own hypocrisy, and to make Abigail equally aware, even in a state of madness, is too risky.

Her long speech about John's " goodness" cannot be tolerated because its irony is too costly to John. Why, you taught me goodness, therefore you are good.

It were fire you walked me through, and all my ignorance was burned away.

It were a fire, John, we lay in fire. And from that night no woman dare call me wicked any more but I knew my answer. I used to weep for my sins when the wind lifted up my skirts; and blushed for shame because some old Rebecca

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called me loose. And then you burned my ignorance away. As bare as some December ree I saw them all-walking like saints to church, running to feed the sick, and hypocrites in their hearts! And God gave me strength to call them liars, and God made men to listen to me, and by God I will scrub the world clean for the love of Him! (150)<sup>22</sup> We must not forget, either, when we are considering critical commentary, that we are dealing with an art form which has a specular dimension.

The many Abigails of the stage have no doubt contributed to the unacknowledged view of Abigail as siren/witch that so many critics have.

In Jed Harris's original production in 1953, in Miller's own production of the same year (to which the later excised scene was first added), and in Laurence Olivier's 1965 production, Abigail was played by an actress in her twenties, not a young girl. The intent on each director's part had to have been to make Abigail's lust for John believable. Individual performers have consistently enacted the siren's role: The eyes of Madeleine Sherwood, who played Abigail in 1953, glowed with lust ...

[b[but]erhaps the most impressive Abigail has been that of Sarah Miles in 1965. A "plaguingly sexy mixture of beauty and crossness" ...

Miles "reeks with the cunning of suppressed evil and steams with the promise of suppressed passion." <sup>23</sup> Only the 1980 production of *The Crucible* by Bill Bryden employed girls who looked even younger than seventeen.

Dukore suggests that Bryden's solution to the fact that John's "seduction of a teenage girl half his age appears not to have impressed [critics] a major fault" was "ingenious yet (now that he has done it) obvious." 24 Abigail is not the only witch in Miller's play, though; Elizabeth, too, is a hag. But it is Elizabeth who is most in need of feminist reader-redemption.

If John is diminished as Christian hero by a feminist deconstruction, the diminution is necessary to a balanced reading of the play and to a revised mythopoeia of the paternalistic monotheism of the Puritans and its twentieth-century equivalent, the existential mysticism of Miller. John's sense of guilt is intended by Miller to act as salve to any emotional injuries given his wife and his own conscience. When his conscience cannot be calmed, when he quakes at doing what he knows must be done in revealing Abigail's deceit, it is upon Elizabeth that he turns his wrath: Spare me! You forget nothin' and forgive nothin'.

Learn charity, woman. I have gone tiptoe in this house all seven month since she is gone. I have not moved from there to there without I think to please you, and still an everlasting funeral marches round your heart. I cannot speak but I am doubted, every moment judged for lies, as though I come into a court when I come into this house. (54-55) What we are meant to read as understandably defensive anger—that is if we read within the patriarchal framework in which the play is written—must be re-evaluated; such a reading must be done in the light of Elizabeth's logic—paradoxically, the only "cold" thing about her.

She is right when she turns his anger back on him with “ the magistrate sits in your heart that judges you” (55). She is also right on two other counts. First, John has “ a faulty understanding of young girls. There is a promise made in any bed” (61). The uninitiated and obviously self-punishing Abigail may be excused for thinking as she does (once again in the excised scene) that he is “ singing secret hallelujahs that [h[his]ife will hang! ” (152) Second, John does retain some tender feelings for Abigail despite his indignation.

Elizabeth’s question reverberates with insight: “ if it were not Abigail that you must go to hurt, would you falter now? I think not” (54). John has already admitted to Abigail—and to us—in the first act that “ I may think of you softly from time to time” (23), and he does look at her with “ the faintest suggestion of a knowing smile on his face” (21). And John’s use of wintry images of Elizabeth and their home in Act Two—“ It’s winter in her yet” (51)—echoes the imagery used by Abigail in Act One. 25 John is to Abigail “ no wintry man,” but one whose “ heat” has drawn her to her window to see him looking up (23).

She is the one who describes Elizabeth as “ a cold, snivelling woman” (24), but it is Miller’s favoured imagery for a stereotypically frigid wife who is no less a witch (in patriarchal lore) than a hot-blooded sperm-stealer like Abigail.

Exacerbating all of this is the fact that John lies to Elizabeth about having been alone with Abigail in Parris’s house; Miller would have us believe that John lies to save Elizabeth pain, but I believe he lies out of a rationalizing

habit that he carries forward to his death. Miller may want to be kind to Elizabeth, but he cannot manage that and John's heroism, too.

Act Two opens with Elizabeth as hearth angel singing softly offstage to the children who are, significantly, never seen in the play, and bringing John his supper–stewed rabbit which, she says, “ it hurt my heart to strip” (50). But in the space of four pages Miller upbraids her six times. First, John “ is not quite pleased” (49) with the taste of Elizabeth's stew, and before she appears on stage he adds salt to it.

Second, there is a “ certain disappointment” (50) for John in the way Elizabeth receives his kiss. Third, John's request for “ Cider? made “ as gently as he can” (51) leaves Elizabeth “ reprimanding herself for having forgot” (51). Fourth, John reminds Elizabeth of the cold atmosphere in their house: “ You ought to bring flowers in the house ... It's winter in here yet” (51).

Fifth, John perceives Elizabeth's melancholy as something perennial: “ I think you're sad again” (51, emphasis added). And sixth, and in a more overtly condemning mood, John berates Elizabeth when he discovers that she has allowed Mary Warren to go to Salem to testify: “ It is a fault, it is a fault, Elizabeth–you're the mistress here” (52).

Cumulatively, these criticisms work to arouse sympathy for a man who would season his meal, his home, and his amour, a man who is meant to appeal to us because of his sensual awareness of spring's erotic promise: “ It's warm as blood beneath the clods” (50), and “ I never see such a load of flowers on the earth. ...

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Lilacs have a purple smell. Lilac is the smell of nightfall” (51). We, too, are seasoned to believe that John really does “[a[im]o please” Elizabeth, and that Elizabeth is relentless in her admonishing of John for his affair, of which she is knowledgeable.

It is for John that we are to feel sympathy when he says, “ Let you look to your own improvement before you go to judge your husband more” (54). Miller has informed us of several ways in which Elizabeth could improve herself.

Neil Carson claims that “ Miller intends the audience to view Proctor ironically” in this scene; Proctor, he says, is “ a man who is rationalising in order to avoid facing himself,” and at the beginning of Act Two “ Proctor is as guilty as any of projecting his own faults onto others. 26 While I find much in Carson’s entire chapter on *The Crucible* as sensitive a criticism of the play as any written, I am still uncomfortable about the fact that a “ tragic victory” for the protagonist<sup>27</sup> necessarily means an admission of guilt for his wife—once again, it seems to me, a victim is being blamed. No critic, not even Carson, questions Miller’s insistence that Elizabeth is at least partly to blame for John’s infidelity. Her fate is sealed in the lie she tells for love of her husband because she proves him a liar: “ as in *All My Sons*,” says critic Leonard Moss, “ a woman inadvertently betrays her husband. 28 John has told several lies throughout the play, but it is Elizabeth’s lie that the critics (and Miller) settle upon, for once again the lie fits the stereotype—woman as liar, woman as schemer, woman as witch sealing the fate of man the would-be hero. But looked at another way, Elizabeth is not a liar.

The question put to her by Judge Danforth is “ Is [p[resent tense]our husband a lecher! ” (113). Elizabeth can in good conscience respond in the negative for she knows the affair to be over. She has no desire to condemn the man who has betrayed her, for she believes John to be nothing but a “ good man ...

nly somewhat bewildered” (55). Once again, though, her comment condemns her because an audience hears (and Miller perhaps intends) condescension on her part. The patriarchal reading is invited by John’s ironic response: “ Oh, Elizabeth, your justice would freeze beer! ” (55). What seems to be happening is that Goody Proctor is turned into a goody two-shoes, a voice of morality. Why we should expect anything else of Elizabeth, raised within a Puritan society and a living example of its valued “ good woman,” escapes me.

I find it amazing that the same rules made but not obeyed by “ good” men can be used to condemn the women who do adhere to them. The other thing which Miller and the critics seem unwilling to acknowledge is the hurt that Elizabeth feels over John’s betrayal; instead, her anger, elicited not specifically about the affair but about the incident with the poppet, following hard upon the knowledge of Giles Corey’s wife having been taken, is evidence that she is no good woman. Her language condemns her: “[A[Abigail]s murder! She must be ripped out of the world! ” (76).

Anger in woman, a danger of which Ecclesiastes warns, has been cause for locking her up for centuries. After Elizabeth’s incarceration, and without her persistent logic, Miller is able to focus on John and his sense of failure.



But Elizabeth's last words as she is taken from her home are about the children: " When the children wake, speak nothing of witchcraft-it will frighten them. She cannot go on. ...

Tell the children I have gone to visit someone sick" (77-78). I find it strange that John's similar concerns when he has torn up the confession-" I have three children-how may I teach them to walk like men in the world, and I sold my riends? " (143)-should be valued above Elizabeth's. Is it because the children are boys? Is it because Elizabeth is expected to react in the maternal fashion that she does, but for John to respond thus is a sign of sensitive masculinity? Is it because the communal as defined by the Word is threatened by the integrity of women? And why is maintaining a name more important than living? At least alive he might attend to his children's daily needs-after all, we are told about the sad situation of the " orphans walking from house to house" (130).<sup>9</sup> It would be foolish to argue that John does not suffer-that, after all, is the point of the play. But what of Elizabeth's suffering? She is about to lose her husband, her children are without parents, she is sure to be condemned to death as well.

Miller must, once again, diminish the threat that Elizabeth offers to John's martyrdom, for he has created a woman who does not lie, who her husband believes would not give the court the admission of guilt " if tongs of fire were singeing" her (138).

Miller's play about the life and death struggle for a man's soul, cannot be threatened by a woman's struggle. In order to control his character, Miller impregnates her. The court will not sentence an unborn child, so Elizabeth

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does not have to make a choice. Were she to choose to die without wavering in her decision, as both John and Miller think she would, she would be a threat to the outcome of the play and the sympathy which is supposed to accrue to John.

Were she to make the decision to live, for the reasons which Reverend Hale stresses, that “ Life, woman, life is God’s most precious gift; no principle, however glorious, may justify the taking of it” (132), she would undermine existential integrity with compromise.

I am not reading another version of *The Crucible*, one which Miller did not intend, but rather looking at the assumptions inherent in his intentions, assumptions that Miller seems oblivious to and which his critics to date have questioned far too little.

I, too, can read the play as a psychological and ethical contest which no one wins, and of which it can be said that both John and Elizabeth are expressions of men and women with all their failings and nobility, but I am troubled by the fact that Elizabeth is seldom granted even that much, that so much is made of Elizabeth’s complicity in John’s adultery, and that the victim of John’s “ virility,” 30 Abigail, is blamed because she is evil and/or mad. I do want to question the gender stereotypes in the play and in the criticism that has been written about it. Let me indulge finally for a moment in another kind of criticism, one that is a fiction, or more precisely, a “ crypto-friction” that defies “ stratifications of canonical thought” and transgresses generic boundaries of drama/fiction and criticism. 31 Like Virginia Woolf I would like to speculate on a play written by a fictional sister to a famous playwright. Let

us call Arthur Miller's wide-eyed younger sister, who believes she can counter a scopoc economy by stepping beyond the mirror, Alice Miller.

In Alice's play, Elizabeth and John suffer equally in a domestic problem which is exacerbated by the hysteria around them. John does not try to intimidate Elizabeth with his anger, and she is not described as cold or condescending. Abigail is a victim of an older man's lust and not inherently a "bad girl"; she is not beautiful or if she is the playwright does not make so much of it. Her calling out of witches would be explained by wiser critics as the result of her fear and her confusion, not her lust.

There is no effort made in Alice's play to create a hero at the expense of the female characters, or a heroine at the expense of a male character. John is no villain, but-as another male victim/hero character, created by a woman, describes himself-"a trite, commonplace sinner," 32 trying to right a wrong he admits-without blaming others.

Or, here is another version, written by another, more radical f(r)ictional sister, Mary Miller, a real hag. In it, all the witches celebrate the death of John Proctor.

The idea comes from two sources: first, a question from a female student who wanted to know if part of Elizabeth's motivation in not pressing her husband to confess is her desire to pay him back for his betrayal; and second, from a response to Jean-Paul Sartre's ending for the film *Les Sorcieres de Salem*. In his 1957 version of John Proctor's story, Sartre identifies Elizabeth "with the God of prohibiting sex and the God of judgment," but he has her save Abigail, who tries to break John out of jail

and is in danger of being hanged as a traitor too, because Elizabeth realizes “ she loved [J][ohn]” As the film ends, “ Abigail stands shocked in a new understanding. “ 33 In Mary Miller’s version Elizabeth is not identified with the male God of the Word, but with the goddesses of old forced into hiding or hanged because of a renaissance of patriarchal ideology.

Mary’s witches come together, alleged seductress and cold wife alike, not for love of a man who does not deserve either, but to celebrate life and their victory over male character, playwright, and critics, ““ men in power’ ... ho create and identify with the roles of both the victimizers and the victims,” men who Mary Miller would suggest “ vicariously enjoyed the women’s suffering. “ 34 Notes 1.

Arthur Miller, *The Crucible* (New York, 1981), 137. The play was originally published in 1953, but all further references to *The Crucible* are to the 1981 Penguin edition, and will be noted parenthetically in the text. 2. June Schlueter and James K. Flanagan, *Arthur Miller* (New York, 1987), 68.

3. Neil Carson, *Arthur Miller* (New York, 1982), 61. 4. Sandra Kemp, ““ But how describe a world seen without self? Feminism, fiction and modernism,” *Critical Quarterly* 32: 1 (1990), 99-118: 104. 5.

Miller’s interest in the Salem witchcraft trials predated his confrontation with McCarthyism (see E. Miller Budick, “ History and Other Spectres in *The Crucible*,” *Arthur Miller*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York, 1987), 127-28, but it is also clear from the Introduction to *Miller’s Collected Plays Vol 1* (New York, 1957) that he capitalized upon popular response and critical commentary

which linked the two. Miller has been, it seems, a favoured critic on the subject of Arthur Miller. 6.

In 1929 George L.

Kittredge published a work called *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (Cambridge) in which he remarked that “ the doctrines of our forefathers differed [i]n regard to witchcraft]rom the doctrines of the Roman and Anglican Church in no essential—one may safely add, in no particular” (21). In *GynEcology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston, 1978), Mary Daly says that during the European witch burnings—she does not deal with the Salem witch trials—Protestants “ vied with and even may have surpassed their catholic counterparts in their fanaticism and cruelty” (185-86). . Cited by Peter Conrad and Joseph W. Schneider, *Deviance and Medicalization: From Badness to Sickness*, expanded edition (Philadelphia, 1992), 42.

8. Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford, 1987), 30-31. 9. “[N]ineteen women and men and two dogs were hanged, one man was pressed to death for refusing to plead, and 150 were imprisoned” (see Schlueter and Flanagan, 72). 10.

“ Remembering the Witches,” *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics* (London, 1982), 16-17.

See also the 1990 National Film Board production, *The Burning Times*, directed by Donna Read, which declares the European executions for witchcraft to have been a “ women’s holocaust. ” Of the nine million people the film numbers among the burned, hanged, or otherwise disposed of, 85

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per cent, it reports, were women. 11. The Burning Times discusses at length the place of women healers in Third-World cultures. 12.

From Hawkins's review of the play in *File on Miller*, ed. Christopher Bigsby (London, 1988), 30. 3. Leonard Moss, *Arthur Miller* (New York, 1967), 60, 63. 14.

Schlueter and Flanagan, 69. 15. Bernard Dukore, "Death of a Salesman" and "The Crucible": Text and Performance (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London, 1989), 50. 16. Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Amherst, 1980), 101.

17. The only critic I have read who has made comments even remotely similar to my own regarding Abigail is Neil Carson.

In a 1982 book he remarks that "Abigail is portrayed as such an obviously bad piece of goods that it takes a clear-eyed French critic to point out that Proctor was not only twice the age of the girl he seduced, but as her employer he was breaking a double trust" (75). Despite his insight, when it comes to explaining the effect of Miller's omission of detail regarding the early stages of the affair, he does not, I think, realize its full implications.

He says that "Proctor's sense of guilt [s[seems] little forced and perhaps not really justified," but I think the choice was deliberately made so as to minimize John's guilt and emphasize his redemption as an existential man.

Conversely, Abigail is more easily targeted (as the critics prove) for her active role in her seduction. 18. Daly, 187. 19. Carol Billman ("Women and

the Family in American Drama," *Arizona Quarterly* 36: 1 [1980]35-48) discusses the study of "everyman" made in the family dramas of O'Neill, Williams, Albee, and Miller (although she does not mention *The Crucible*): "women necessarily occupy a central position, [but] little attention is paid to their subordination or suffering. .

.. Linda Loman [and I would add Elizabeth Proctor]◆◆

suffers at least as much as her husband" (36-7). Victoria Sullivan and James Hatch, as well, have complained about the standards of review: "' a complaining female protagonist is automatically less noble than Stanley Kowalski or Willy Loman ... [only]en suffer greatly'" (quoted in Billman, 37, emphasis added). 20.

Carson, 66.

In a play that is historically accurate in so many ways, it is significant to note that the affair between John and Abigail was invented by Miller (Dukore, 43). 21. Conrad and Schneider, 43. 22.

I think that whether or not one sees the irony as intentional on Abby's part, she becomes more sympathetic. If intentional we can agree with her realization that John's hypocrisy was least when he was seducing her; he is a commonplace lecher. If Abigail is not cognizant of the extent of the irony of what she is saying, then she truly is too young-or too emotionally disturbed-to understand the implications of what she is doing.

Carson again comes close to making a very astute judgment about Abigail's awareness of events going on around her: " It seems clear that we are to <https://assignbuster.com/feminist-approach-to-witchcraft-case-study-millers-the-crucible/>

attribute at least a little of Abby's 'wildness' and sensuality to her relationship with John, and to assume that the 'knowledge' which Proctor put in Abigail's heart is not simply carnal, but also includes some awareness of the hypocrisy of some of the Christian women and covenanted men of the community" (68). Carson's insight, however, is limited by his belief in the "'radical' side of Proctor's nature," something with which modern audiences are sure to identify.

The problem here is that the focus is once more removed from Abigail's plight to her vicarious participation in one more of John Proctor's admirable traits, for his "is not a simple personality like that of Rebecca Nurse" (68). 23. Dukore, 102. 24. Ibid.

, 95. 25. One critic, who celebrates John's "playfulness" and who does not want his description of John as a liar to be taken in a pejorative sense, suggests that John and Abigail share a kindred spirit: "The physical attractiveness of Abby for John Proctor is obvious in the play, ut, I think, so is the passionate imagination which finds its outlet in one way in her and in another in Proctor" (William T. Liston, "John Proctor's Playing in The Crucible," *Midwest Quarterly: A Journal of Contemporary Thought* 20: 4 (1979), 394-403: 403). John is a liar—that is part of his guilt—and to suggest that Abigail offers John something that Elizabeth does not condemn Elizabeth and exonerates John even more than Miller intends.

26. Carson, 69-70. 27. Ibid. , 75. 28.

Leonard Moss, *Arthur Miller, revised edition* (Boston, 1980), 40, emphasis added. 29.

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I think it significant that the orphans are but one of the wasted possessions unattended to in Salem. The next part of the same sentence mentions abandoned cattle bellowing and rotted crops stinking. Miller has described a material and contemporary world.

30. Richard Hayes, "Hysteria and Ideology in *The Crucible*," *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Crucible"*, ed. John H. Ferris (Englewood Cliffs, 1972), 34. I find it interesting and instructive that a 1953 review of the play uses the term to describe Arthur Kennedy's portrayal of John Proctor.

31. Aritha Van Herk, *In Visible Ink (crypto-frictions)* (Edmonton, 1991), 14. 2. Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (Harmondsworth, 1984), 160. 33. Eric Mottram, "Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Sorcieres de Salem*," *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Crucible"*, 93, 94.

34. Daly, 215. Source Citation Schissel, Wendy. "Re(dis)covering the Witches in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*: A Feminist Reading." *Modern Drama* 37. 3 (Fall 1994): 461-473.

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