

THE CRUCIBLE

Director's Notes by Edward R Fernandez

Let me begin by saying that I have had a love/hate relationship with *The Crucible* over the years. When I was young, I adored the play. I loved the melodrama and the scariness of it. *The Crucible* played to me like a heightened horror movie, and I enjoyed the high drama. As I got older though, I became a quasi-history buff and wanted to research certain historical events in depth. One of the events that intrigued me was the Salem Witch Trials. I have read almost everything about that period in American history. I then fell out of favor with *The Crucible* because I came to realize that a lot of it was inaccurate, and the characters were changed. John Proctor, for example, was not a farmer, he was a tavern keeper, and he was 30 years older than his wife Elizabeth. Giles Corey and he were arch enemies and not good friends. The more I read about the Salem Witch Trials, the more I realized that parts of the history were more interesting than what Miller wrote in *The Crucible*. However, once I accepted the fact that Arthur Miller's play was a dramatization based on real-life events, I came to peace with *The Crucible* and fell in love with it once again. In fact, I believe it has become my favorite Miller play.

So, why am I doing *The Crucible* at EPAC? Why am I doing this play in this stylized production? Several years ago, while I was looking over scenic designers' portfolios, I came across a few designers who had designed modern interpretations of *The Crucible* – setting the play everywhere from topical present times to the 1950s during the actual McCarthy hearings. And it struck me at the time that I would love to do a production of *The Crucible* at EPAC that was different – that I would like to set in modern times or take it out of the historical Puritan period the play is set in.

After re-reading the play several times, I realized that there is so much about *The Crucible* that can be related to the current times that we are living through in this country. Miller wrote the play in 1953 as a direct metaphor for the Communist witch hunts of the McCarthy era. As a timeless classic, it embodies, metaphorically, so much more of the 21st century. So many of the lines of the play jumped out at me and I felt as if they were talking about the present state of this country. I decided to take the play out of its Puritan context so that audiences could not sit back and say to themselves, "Oh, *The Crucible*...I have seen this a hundred times and I know what it is about." Likewise, I do not want audiences to leave feeling, "Well that took place 300 years ago, we are more advanced than that". I do not want our audiences to be comfortable. I want them to either like or dislike the production and its stylization of it. By removing the play from the context that we are used to seeing it in, the audience is forced to listen to the words of the play. It is a Brechtian device.

I do not want the audience to become emotionally involved with the characters. I want you to sit back, and actively, intellectually, participate by listening to the play and not come in with any assumptions about what the play is about or how you might have seen the play staged before.

I also want to address the language. Yes, the language in the play is stylized. Miller wrote the language as an approximation of the way that the Puritans spoke during that period. While rehearsing this play, I thought of the works by Shakespeare that I have directed in the past. Shakespeare is typically taken out of the Elizabethan period when it is performed. I figured if I, and others, could take Shakespeare out of its Elizabethan context, and that people would accept the language of Shakespeare in a modern context, that audiences would be able to accept the language of the Puritans in a modern context as well. Think of it not as naturalism, but rather, as a stylized poetry that the characters are speaking.

It was also important to me, and to the Arthur Miller estate, that I did not change any of the wonderful dialogue that Miller had written. I wanted to present the play as he wrote it. Therefore, I realize, I am asking the audience to take a leap with me at times. For example, the characters will talk about a money system that will sound weird to our modern ears. You would never pay someone six pounds for a year's work in 2022. Again, like Shakespeare there are many things that characters might say that are not topically relevant to modern times. I invite you to use your imagination. You will notice that I have made the artistic decision to present some of the characters as gender fluid. I wanted this production to be inclusive and represent the fluidity of current and future gender identities.

So, where does this production of *The Crucible* take place? Well, I would personally think it takes place in either the future or the past with a rewritten history, but I will leave that up to you, dear viewer. There is no longer any separation between church and state in this setting. The ultimate power in this society comes from a combination of government and religion. Ironically, this country was founded on freedom of religion, and yet, the separation of church and state is still one of the things that this country continues to battle about. Wherever this *Crucible* takes place, the subject matter, what the characters are going through, and the decisions they must make, are not specific to any time. They are things that we are going through now, they are thoughts that we are having now – no matter what side of the political spectrum you might stand on.

So, again, I hope you will take this leap with me. I hope you will listen to Miller's dialogue. I hope you will find this production interesting. I know that I am taking a chance. Some people might dig it. Some people might hate it. Some people might not understand what I am doing or the artistic risks I have taken. I have been an artistic director for 30 years. At 63 years old, and after doing this my entire life, if I cannot take a chance, then what is the point of the whole thing? but I have been doing this with how long I have been directing, and at my current age, if I cannot take a chance at this point, then why bother. – So, I hope you find it interesting, and I hope you enjoy this production of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*.