**Excerpt from Arthur Miller’s essay "Are You Now Or Were You Ever?"  
from The Guardian/The Observer - June 17, 2000**

It would probably never have occurred to me to write a play about the Salem witch trials of 1692 had  
I not seen some astonishing correspondences (similarity) with that calamity (tragedy) in the America of  
the late 40s and early 50s. My basic need was to respond to a phenomenon which, with only small  
exaggeration, one could say paralyzed a whole generation and in a short time dried up the habits of  
trust and toleration in public discourse.

I refer to the anti-communist rage that threatened to reach hysterical proportions and sometimes  
did. I can't remember anyone calling it an ideological war, but I think now that that is what it  
amounted to. I suppose we rapidly passed over anything like a discussion or debate, and into  
something quite different, a hunt not just for subversive (rebellious) people, but for ideas and even a  
suspect language. The object was to destroy the least credibility of any and all ideas associated with  
socialism and communism, whose proponents were assumed to be either knowing or unwitting  
agents of Soviet subversion.

…In both places [the U.S. in the 50s and Salem in 1692], to keep social unity intact, the authority of  
leaders had to be hardened and words of skepticism toward them constricted (limited). A new  
cautionary diction, an uncustomary prudence (carefulness) inflected (changed) our way of talking to  
one another. The word socialism was all but taboo. Words had gotten fearsome.

…The heart of the darkness was the belief that a massive, profoundly organized conspiracy was in  
place and carried forward mainly by a concealed phalanx (group) of intellectuals, including labor  
activists, teachers, professionals, sworn to undermine the American government. And it was precisely  
the invisibility of ideas that was frightening so many people. How could a play deal with this mirage  
world?

…On a lucky afternoon I happened upon The Devil in Massachusetts, by Marion Starkey, a narrative of  
the Salem witch-hunt of 1692. I knew this story from my college reading, but in this darkened  
America it turned a completely new aspect toward me: the poetry of the hunt. Poetry may seem an  
odd word for a witch-hunt but I saw there was something of the marvelous in the spectacle of a  
whole village, if not an entire province, whose imagination was captured by a vision of something  
that wasn't there.

In the stillness of the Salem courthouse, surrounded by the images of the 1950s but with my head in  
1692, what the two eras had in common gradually gained definition. Both had the menace of  
concealed plots, but most startling were the similarities in the rituals of defense, the investigative  
routines; 300 years apart, both prosecutions alleged (claimed; charged) [the accused with]  
membership of a secret, disloyal group. Should the accused confess, his honesty could only be proved  
by naming former confederates (allies; associates). The informer became the axle of the plot's  
existence and the investigation's necessity.

…I spent 10 days in Salem’s courthouse reading the crudely recorded trials of the 1692 outbreak, and  
it was striking how totally absent was any sense of irony, let alone humor. I can't recall if it was the  
provincial governor's nephew or son who, with a college friend, came from Boston to watch the  
strange proceedings. Both boys burst out laughing at some absurd testimony: they were promptly  
jailed, and faced possible hanging.

…The Crucible is my most-produced play. It seems to be one of the few surviving shards of the socalled  
McCarthy period. And it is part of the play's history that, to people in so many parts of the  
world, its story seems to be their own. I used to think, half seriously, that you could tell when a  
dictator was about to take power or had been overthrown…if The Crucible was suddenly being  
produced in that country.

…There is hardly a week that passes when I don't ask the unanswerable question: what am I now  
convinced of that will turn out to be ridiculous? And yet one can't forever stand on the shore; at  
some point, filled with indecision, skepticism, reservation and doubt, you either jump in or concede  
that life is forever elsewhere, which I dare say, was one of the major impulses behind the decision to  
attempt The Crucible.