General editor: Graham Handley MA Ph.D.

Brodie's Notes on Arthur Miller's

The Crucible

I. L. Baker BA

palgrave
macmillan

© The Macmillan Press Ltd 1991

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9HE.

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

First published by James Brodie Ltd
This revised edition first published 1991
by Pan Books Ltd

Published 1992 by
THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

ISBN 978-0-333-58154-4 ISBN 978-1-349-89489-5 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-89489-5

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

Contents

Preface by the general editor 5

To the student 7

The author and his work 8

***The Crucible* in its time**

McCarthyism and Arthur Miller 12

Puritanism and the Pilgrim Fathers 15

Witchcraft 20

Miller's conception of drama 22

**Act summaries, critical commentary,
textual notes and revision questions**

Act 1 26

Act 2 31

Act 3 33

Act 4 35

Arthur Miller's art in *The Crucible*

Structure 39

Style 43

The characters

The Reverend Samuel Parris 50, Abigail Williams 52,

The Reverend John Hale 54, Elizabeth Proctor 55,

Giles Corey 57, Deputy-Governor Danforth 58,

John Proctor 60

**General questions and a sample answer
in note form 65**

References in these Notes are to the Penguin edition of *The Crucible*, but as reference is made to individual acts, the Notes may be used with any edition of the play.

Preface

The intention throughout this study aid is to stimulate and guide, to encourage your involvement in the book, and to develop informed responses and a sure understanding of the main details.

Brodie's Notes provide a clear outline of the play or novel's plot, followed by act, scene, or chapter summaries and/or commentaries. These are designed to emphasize the most important literary and factual details. Poems, stories or non-fiction texts combine brief summary with critical commentary on individual aspects or common features of the genre being examined. Textual notes define what is difficult or obscure and emphasize literary qualities. Revision questions are set at appropriate points to test your ability to appreciate the prescribed book and to write accurately and relevantly about it.

In addition, each of these Notes includes a critical appreciation of the author's art. This covers such major elements as characterization, style, structure, setting and themes. Poems are examined technically – rhyme, rhythm, for instance. In fact, any important aspect of the prescribed work will be evaluated. The aim is to send you back to the text you are studying.

Each study aid concludes with a series of general questions which require a detailed knowledge of the book: some of these questions may invite comparison with other books, some will be suitable for coursework exercises, and some could be adapted to work you are doing on another book or books. Each study aid has been adapted to meet the needs of the current examination requirements. They provide a basic, individual and imaginative response to the work being studied, and it is hoped that they will stimulate you to acquire disciplined reading habits and critical fluency.

Graham Handley 1990

To the student

1 There are two readily available and convenient texts of *The Crucible* in *The Penguin Plays* (1968) and the school edition edited by E. R. Wood (Heinemann, 1967), which also has a brief introduction. In these Notes, where page references are given, the *first* is to the Penguin edition. For convenience, page references have also been inserted for the Notes, which tend to be only thinly scattered among the four Acts.

2 These Notes are not designed to replace a very close reading and re-reading of the text itself: they must be considered complementary to such careful reading and no substitute for it. The play is often performed by local repertory companies, and obviously should be seen as a live performance if at all possible.

3 There are many useful and interesting books available on Arthur Miller: in most instances, too much detail should be avoided, and the index used for particular references.

(a) Miller's own Introduction to his *Collected Plays* (Cresset, 1958) is not simple, but contains many valuable insights.

(b) *Arthur Miller: Portrait of a Playwright*, by Benjamin Nelson (Peter Owen, 1970): detailed and sympathetic, with a careful analysis of each major play.

(c) *Arthur Miller*, by Ronald Hayman (Heinemann, 1970): useful and easily read, but slight.

(d) *Arthur Miller*, by Dennis Welland (Oliver & Boyd, 1961): fairly detailed, with an excellent bibliography.

(e) *Time Bends*, by Arthur Miller (Methuen, 1987).

4 The student is not recommended to spend too much time on the topics of Puritanism and witchcraft, on both of which there is considerable literature. Any general history book will provide the religious background: the book which particularly interested Arthur Miller on witchcraft was *The Devil in Massachusetts*, by M. L. Starkey (Doubleday, New York). In the magazine *History Makers* issue No. 3, of 1969, there is a good article on the Salem Trials. Many reference libraries hold bound copies of this journal. In general, the basic material can be gleaned from any good encyclopedia.

The author and his work

Arthur Miller was born (October 17, 1915) in New York to a middle-class non-orthodox Jewish family: his mother had been a teacher, and his father was, at that time, a successful and well-to-do manufacturer of ladies' coats. The boy was fonder of and better at games than work, and did not distinguish himself at his first or subsequent schools when the family moved to Brooklyn, near Coney Island. He played games vigorously, fished and surfed, did an early-morning delivery-round (starting at 5 o'clock!) despite a knee-injury sustained at one of the games he enjoyed: but he made little headway with more formal, academic work. In 1929 a severe economic depression hit the United States: the Millers, among millions of others, lost most of their money and security; when Arthur Miller graduated from High School he had neither the financial nor the academic background necessary for entry into University. He therefore reluctantly tried his hand at a series of jobs: in the garment industry, as a truck driver, a waiter, a crooner on a local radio-station, a tanker-crewman, and as a shipping clerk at \$15 a week. In all these diverse occupations the young man noted and reflected on the enormous variety of people, the acute tensions of materialist society, and anti-semitism: these were themes later to be developed in his writing.

In 1934, having saved as much as he could from his meagre earnings, he applied as a mature entrant into Michigan University, and was accepted. He had much to learn, and much academic background material to master; but he loved the University and its atmosphere, with its diverse population of undergraduates and staff, finding his niche eventually in the English Department under sympathetic teachers. There he won two awards in an annual competition for original playwriting, each of \$250; but when he graduated in 1938 he was unemployed. For a short spell he worked for an ill-fated Federal Theatre project, and when this collapsed he once more took up a number of manual jobs: again as truck driver and a steamfitter. In 1940 he married a college friend, Mary Slattery, and, rejected as unfit for military service because of his old

knee-injury, he divided his time between manual war-work at the shipyards and free-lance radio script-writing. His wife helped by secretarial employment. At this time Miller wrote many radio-scripts and then plays: some were patriotic as the times demanded, some were purely experimental – but he was much more interested in the live theatre, and in 1944 came his first Broadway play *The Man Who Had All the Luck*. The title was ironic: the play was a dismal failure, closing after four performances at a loss for its backers of \$55,000. It was an inauspicious start.

More successfully, he wrote a documentary narrative *Situation Normal*, based on widely and sensitively collected material he was asked to gather for a film about the American Army: reviewers commented favourably on his close and keen observation; and in 1945 he wrote *Focus*, a novel concerned with anti-semitism with the themes of personal integrity and social responsibility explored keenly and searchingly. Miller was strongly and increasingly engaged in working out the curious nature of human relationships, especially under social, economic, and religious strains in particular and delicate situations; and this, after much painstaking exploration and constant re-drafting, emerged eventually into his first positive professional dramatic success of *All My Sons* (1947), awarded the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. It ran for 328 performances and was praised for its 'dramatic sense, human sense, and moral sense': a new young playwright, a new important talent, had made a successful mark. The play ran too into foreign productions (for example in London, Paris and Stockholm), and was filmed in 1948 with Edward G. Robinson in the central role of the small factory owner who, in order to save a wartime government contract, permits the sale of damaged aeroplane engines to the Air Force with terrible consequent losses of human life: he eventually commits suicide. This success was followed by a greater, possibly the best American play of its kind ever written, *Death of a Salesman* (1949). This ran for 742 performances, was highly praised, won many further awards, and the playwright had reinforced his growing reputation by an extraordinarily complex yet realistic and powerful play, which is, as has been said, 'probably the only successful twentieth-century tragedy with an unheroic hero'. Willy Loman is the elderly exhausted travelling salesman whose life and family have become hollow,

10 The Crucible

deteriorated, falsified by the whole propaganda of sales promotion and false advertisement: most of the play is a piercing revelation of what goes on in his mind, and he, too is driven to his death. With sensitive use of flash-back techniques, of powerful evocative language in a range of rhythms, and persistent agonizing analysis of human integrity, the play remains a haunting theatrical experience.

After an unsuccessful adaptation of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, *The Crucible* followed in 1953. Its (and Miller's) relationship to what is called McCarthyism is considered in a later separate section. It ran well after considerable critical acclaim, and won several awards for distinguished drama, and was later televised, with George C. Scott as Proctor, in a remarkably fine and memorable portrayal. In 1956, amid all the turmoil of the McCarthy affair, Arthur Miller, having divorced Mary Slattery, married the most celebrated screen star of the day, Marilyn Monroe: within four years the marriage had turned sour, as most observers had prophesied. Miller had already continued his success with *A View From the Bridge* (1955): but his marriage with the vivacious, glamorous and rising star seemed to distract and disturb: unhappiness over their inability to have children, and much else, produced tensions and frictions which resulted in their eventual separation and divorce. In 1962 Marilyn Monroe died wretchedly, apparently from excess of drink and drugs: by then Arthur Miller had disentangled himself honourably from the McCarthyite 'Un-American' smear, had remarried, and had resumed playwriting (*After the Fall*, 1964; *Incident at Vichy*, 1964; *The Price*, 1968) and apart from critical introductions to his plays, had written deeply on dramatic and allied themes.

Included among his works are listed twelve articles of prose fiction, including collected short stories, and nearly forty published essays and interviews. Several early plays have been successfully filmed, such as *All My Sons* (1948), *Death of a Salesman* (1952) and *The Crucible*, under the title of *The Witches of Salem* (1957). More recently other plays, on a variety of themes, have been written and staged, such as *The American Clock* (1980), *Playing for Time* (1981), *Two Way Mirror* (1985) and *The Archbishop's Ceiling* (1989). Arthur Miller's detailed autobiography *Time Bends* appeared in 1987: a skilful, candid, meditative personal history which explores his feelings about and motives

behind his experiences and writings. His plays have been extensively translated and performed world-wide; he travels widely, frequently broadcasting on radio and television, especially on American political and cultural topics and trends. He remains a respected tradition and a considerable force in the annals of theatre.