



## MILLER'S 'THE CRUCIBLE' OFFERS NO EASY ANSWERS

Cincinnati Post, The (OH) - Friday, October 22, 2004

**Readability:** 11-12 grade level (Lexile: 1220L)

**Author:** Stephanie Smith, Post contributor

"... For when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry, having damnation." 1 Timothy 5:11,12.

But is it really wanton feelings against God that Abigail Williams and her friends are exhibiting, or is it rebellion against the society that they are trapped in?

The events may have taken place in 1692, but the themes explored -- personal integrity, loyalty, reputation, authority -- are just as relevant now.

Thursday night's opening performance of Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" at the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park attempted to tackle these issues, but such as life is, leaves us with no definitive answers.

The play, set against the backdrop of the witch trials in Salem, Mass., was written as Miller's indictment of the social hysteria of the 1950s: paranoia about Communists, the 20th-century witch trials of Sen. Joseph McCarthy and the blacklist of leftist artists.

After half a century, the play seems heavy-handed with its point, yet there are troubling echoes relating to the events in the United States and abroad after 9/11.

The cast features Stephanie Cozart as Abigail Williams, who sets the tragedy in motion by using accusations of witchcraft to dodge blame for violating Puritan behavioral standards. (She and her friends were seen dancing in the woods; soon after, Betty Parris (Gretchen Porro) falls gravely ill.)

Like the poison fungus that likely caused the real hallucinatory illnesses in 1692 Salem, the easiness of Abigail's accusation spreads to include ever more upstanding citizens. The frenzy is fueled by Rev. John Hale, played by Tim Altmeyer, a Jerry Falwell or Jim Bakker type who is all too eager to use his "expertise" on the supernatural to get to the bottom of the mystery.

It is left to John Proctor, played by Christopher Burns, to try to stop the insanity. He, though, is hobbled by his own secret: He has had -- and broken off -- an affair with Abigail, and she uses her influence as the star witness on the town's supposed rampant witchcraft to pull a Puritan "Fatal Attraction" act by accusing Proctor's wife, Elizabeth, of being a witch as well.

Cozart shines as Abigail. One can't help but hate her the moment she starts spouting lies. Her manipulative ways come off as realistic, and highlights the village's dependence on God when faced with the unknown.

While everyone desperately searches for an explanation for the oddities, it feels out of place to rely so much on a group of teenage girls who, even back then, were only bucking against authority. It's also never fully touches upon how Abigail was able to pull the other girls into her web of deceit.

However, Burns took some getting used to. In Act I, one almost expected him to say "dude" here and there. But he blossomed in Act II; believably showing us a conflicted man who wants nothing more but to love his wife and make her happy.

Bernadette Quigley assumes the role of a stoic Puritan wife all too well. The affair with Abigail is an obvious thorn in the Proctors' relationship, but through actions done and words unsaid, there is an underlying passionate love and a strong

sense of respect between the two.

Sadly, the Proctors only realize the depths of their love when Elizabeth is arrested and hauled off in chains, and John appears before the court with hopes of exposing the deceit and rescuing his wife. However, he is forced to choose between the value of his life and the value of his name. When Elizabeth is coerced to get John to change his mind, she refuses and tells the deputy governor, that he has his goodness now. "God forbid I take it from him."

Throughout it all, one can't help but to question the validity of God. A basic Christian principle is forgiveness. If God is supposed to forgive all His children, then why the pressure to clean the village of the evil souls? If it was that easy, the play would have been over in 15 minutes. But religion is never easy once we twist it to fit our own agendas.

THE CRUCIBLE: Runs through Nov. 19. Call (513) 421-3888 or (800) 582-3208

**Memo:** Theater Review

---

***Edition:*** Final

***Section:*** Living

***Page:*** B10

***Record Number:*** 0410250058

***Copyright (c) 2004 The Cincinnati Post***