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The Crucible

Arthur Miller

Shakespeare's Globe

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Those who run society have often mobilised scapegoats to distract dissent from themselves and increase their power. Senator Joe McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee terrified many in America in the 1950s by hunting down so-called communists. It was likened to the "witch hunts" of previous periods and prompted Arthur Miller to write about the vicious absurdity of the Salem witch-hunts of 1692 in his classic play *The Crucible*.

The director, Ola Ince, gives us a measured and faithful production in the timber-framed setting of the Globe Theatre with its open yard and bench seating. The escalating danger of a panic in the community is shown to be a product of insecurity and uncertainty rather than deliberate malice.

The Reverend Samuel Parris (Steve Furst) has caught a group of girls, including his daughter Betty and niece Abigail (Hannah Saxby), dancing in the forest. As people outside his home wait for news of what this means, Betty lies on her bed, seemingly unconscious. Abigail and Parris feel it's too risky to tell the truth, though Abi initially tries to calm things down.

Neighbours arrive, adding to a supernatural explanation. Giles (Howard Ward) mentions to the Reverend Hale (Jo Stone-Fewings) that he was bothered to find his wife reading a book. Hale may have arrived carrying ten books, which he presumably reads, but that doesn't stop him from finding it "strange" that Giles is bothered by a woman reading.

The production avoids blaming the girls for the panic. Rather, it is the Putnams chucking in notions of witchcraft to explain their children's deaths, Parris, a minister with some discontented parishioners floundering and more figures such as Hale being called in to investigate, that panics Tituba (Sarah Merrifield) the slave and the girls to suddenly confirm the story they are offered.

We are given two scenes in which the warm affection Abigail Williams and John Proctor feel for each other is still to some extent mutual and continues to be partially an engine to Abigail's cruelty in blaming Proctor's wife, Elizabeth (Phoebe Pryce), for injuries she inflicted on herself.

Two of the most powerful scenes are performed by Phoebe Pryce as Elizabeth and Gavin Drea as John Proctor. In the first, John is being urged by his wife to intervene in the horror taking place in the court. In that scene, we also see Bethany Wooding give a gentle, innocent performance as Mary Warren, one of the girls.

But surely nobody can fail to be moved by the final intense scene when Elizabeth, in effect, praises John for his decision, despite that meaning she will lose him.

This *Crucible* is always an interesting performance from a solid cast delivering a well-paced, respectful production. It takes no wild adventures into spectacle.

There will be those who yearn for the young girls to be turned into a single demonic force or those like me who would prefer more blame to be placed on the opportunist viciousness of Deputy Governor Danforth (Gareth Snook) and the property-grabbing Putnam, but most of the audience should find this show topical and watchable.

Reviewer: [Keith Mckenna](#)