

Arthur Miller and *The Crucible*

concentric levels of experience: in this context, segments or “spheres” of the drama that project distinctive statements about the nature of human experience while still feeding into the transcending “message” of the drama

exposition: provides necessary background that brings the reader/viewer in touch with aspects that inform the characterization, narrative and theme of the drama

necromancy: “black magic,” the art of communicating with the Devil

coven: a group of witches who live together in a hidden conclave

denouement: the “untangling” or “wrapping up” of the conflict of a story or drama

catharsis: the Aristotelian concept that tragedy, through evoking “pity” and “fear,” “purges” emotions

Morality play: an allegorical type of play, popular in Medieval and early Renaissance time periods, which gives instruction on how to lead a virtuous life. This type of play gave a veiled presentation (one thing under the image of another) of a meaning figuratively implied but not directly stated. *Everyman*, for instance, is a Morality play.

Doctrine of Election (or Predestination): a Calvinist belief, strongly entrenched in orthodox Puritanism, that man is born “depraved” by Original Sin, but that God “elects,” predestines, some to be “saved” to join Him in Heaven. The Puritan “City on the Hill” is a “Holy Commonwealth” made up of the “Elect” and should be kept “pure,” Any sign that “evil” (the Devil) is invading the “Holy Commonwealth” must be severely dealt with.

The Great Awakening: alarmed at the “loosening” in orthodox Puritanism that was occurring, Jonathan Edwards launched the “Great Awakening” movement in an effort to reestablish the strict community control of orthodox Puritanism. *The Crucible* provides a provocative glimpse of the “threshold” events and mentality that will feed this “loosening” of orthodoxy.

Alger Hiss: Whittaker Chambers, an avowed former Communist, told the House Un-American Activities group that Hiss, a former high-ranking member of the State Department, had passed classified documents to him. After two sensational trials, Hiss was convicted of perjury, and although claiming innocence, served several years in prison.

The Rosenbergs: Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, members of the Communist Party, were accused of passing secret details to the Russians on how to manufacture the atomic bomb. The Rosenbergs were convicted, sentenced to death in the electric chair, and electrocuted in 1953.

"Southern" Puritanism: this reference is aligned with the invasion of Northern industrialism into the South after the Civil War, and the fundamentalism that prevailed in the early 20th century decades of the “New South.” Fundamentalists reacted “in horror” to the “new” morality of the South’s rapidly sprawling urban centers and fought to sustain traditional manners and codes of behavior. Their religion centered on the literal translation of the Bible; they fought strongly against the teaching of evolution, arguing that theories and teachings of the Bible should be the center of “Creation” belief. They became a strong political and social force in the South, championing such causes as prohibition, censoring the behavior of others, and gaining large control over what could be taught in schools.

"American Adam": a term used to describe Natty Bumppo, considered the first American “hero” figure in literature: innocent, virtuous, brave, escaping “civilization” by living in nature in the frontier West, courageous, highly skilled in frontier ways, idealized to be larger than life, a “Romantic” hero