***The Crucible*** by Arthur Miller

**Plot Summary**

ACT I

The play begins with Reverend Parris praying over his daughter, Betty Parris, who lies unmoving on her bed.  Through conversations between Reverend Parris and his niece Abigail Williams, and between several girls, the audience learns that these girls, including Abigail and Betty, were engaged in occultic activities in the forest lead by Tituba, Parris’ slave from Barbados.  Parris caught them and jumped from a bush startling the girls.  Betty fainted and had not recovered.

During this session, Abigail drank chicken blood to kill Elizabeth Proctor.  She tells the girls that she will kill anyone who mutters a word about what happened.  The townspeople do not know exactly what the girls were doing but there are rumors of witchcraft.  John Proctor enters the room where Betty lies faint.  Abigail is still in there and she tries to seduce him.  Proctor is a farmer who has had an affair with Abigail a while ago, but now he wants to forget it.

  Reverend John Hale is summoned to look upon Betty and the research the incident.  He is an expert in occultic phenomena and he is eager to show his knowledge.  He questions Abigail who accuses Tituba as being a witch.  Tituba, afraid of being hanged, confesses faith in God and accuses Goody Good and Goody Osborne of witchcraft.  Abigail and Betty, who has woken up, claim to have been bewitched and confess faith in God.  They name several other people whom they claim they saw with the Devil.

ACT II

Eight days after the discussion at Parris’ house.  Between act one and act two, Deputy Governor Dansforth came to Salem to oversee the court proceedings.  Fourteen people have been arrested for witchcraft, and there is talk of hanging.  Elizabeth Proctor asks John to go to the court and testify against Abigail and the other girls.  John doesn’t want to get involved.

There is tension between Elizabeth and John since Elizabeth has not forgiven John for the affair.  Mary Warren enters.  She was in court testifying against the townspeople.  She gives Elizabeth a doll which she has made in court.  In the middle of their discussion, Hale enters to question John and Elizabeth, suspicious of witchcraft.  Later, Giles Corey and Francis Nurse enter to seek advice after both their wives had been arrested.  Next, the marshal arrives with a warrant for Elizabeth’s arrest.  Elizabeth was accused by Abigail for stabbing Abigail with a needle through a doll.  John Proctor protests but Elizabeth is taken away in chains.  Proctor demands Mary that she goes to court and testify against the girls.  He vows that he will fight the proceedings, even if it means confessing his own adultery.

ACT III

The next part takes place in court.  Francis Nurse, Giles Corey, and John Proctor present their case against the girls to Deputy Governor Dansforth and Judge Hathorne.  Proctor presents a petition signed by 91 people testifying to the good character of their wives, and Dansforth issues warrants for the questioning of all of them.  Corey charges Putnam on inciting his daughter to accuse Corey of witchcraft in order get his land.  Corey has a witness but will not name him for fear of getting the man arrested.  Corey is arrested because of contempt of the court.

Proctor presents his case and a deposition by Mary Warren saying that she never saw the devil or any spirits.  Abigail says that Mary is lying and she and the girls pretend to be bewitched by Mary. Proctor, frustrated at the gullibility of the court, grabs Abigail by the hair and exclaims to everyone that she is a whore confessing that he had an affair with Abigail.  Elizabeth is brought in to be questioned about whether this is true.  Elizabeth tells the court that John Proctor never had an affair with Abigail in order to save his name, however, this destroys Proctor’s testimony.

Mary crumbles under the peer pressure and returns to Abigail’s side, accusing Proctor of being a witch.  The girls pretend to be bewitched by Proctor.  Proctor accuses Danforth of being afraid to reveal the truth.  Dansforth tries to keep the reputation of the court rather than for justice.  Reverend Hale now sees the evil in the court and denounces the proceedings.  Proctor is arrested.

ACT IV  
  Act four begins in prison where Sarah Good and Tituba wait to be hanged.  They have gone insane and believe that Satan will take them both to Barbados.  There is rumors of an uprising in a nearby town due to similar witch trials.  The townspeople are afraid of a similar riot in Salem.

Hale and Parris are now terrified.  They go to visit the innocent people in the jail and beg them to make false confessions in order to save their lives.  Hale believes that the blood of the people who are being hanged is on his hands.  He asks Elizabeth, who is now pregnant, to tell John to confess to save his life but Elizabeth will not.  While Elizabeth is talking to John, she tells him that she has forgiven him of his affair and tells him that he can do as he will.  John Proctor confesses that he is a witch, but will not say the others are.

After a few moments, Proctor is fed up with the court, tears up his confession, and goes out to be hanged with Rebecca Nurse.  Hale pleads that Elizabeth ask Proctor to confess, but she says, “He has his goodness now.  God forbid I take it from him!”

**Plot** **Development**

  In *The Crucible* all the event flow naturally from one event to the next.  Everything happens naturally from the natures of the characters.  The fact that the story isn’t contrived, and even more, the fact that it is based on a true story is interesting.  The result is so unbelievable.  The incident begins with the girls dancing in the forest and snowballs into a huge witch hunt.  The plot was exciting.  There was sufficient conflict to keep my interest aroused.  There are a lot of tension and suspense in the story.  It covers basic human instincts and qualities.  It shows the  human necessity for survival, and the lengths at which a person will go to save his life.  There is the idea of honor and truth.  Proctor tries to keep his reputation but gives it up to reveal the truth.  Through his struggle he achieves righteousness.  All these things keep the plot moving.  Proctor’s relationship with Elizabeth can be seen to grow and mature.  He continually grows more pure in Elizabeth’s sight until she is able to forgive him in act four.  Proctor’ character also improves.  He doesn’t want to get involved in the court proceedings in act two but stands up for the truth in act four.

**Style**

 Miller’s style is very simple.  He uses simple sentences and words which are easy to understand.  He brings out the evil quality of Abigail and the other girls and also the gullibility of the judges.  His style is easy to understand and should be in order to be successful as a play.  While using the simple style, Miller doesn’t take anything away from the suspense in the plot.  The dialogues of his character are like actual speech.  His words are used effectively and doesn’t include anything not necessary for making a good play.  Many clever figurative devices are used.  For example, Abigail says that John “sweated like a stallion.”  The writing is really that memorable since it was not really written as prose or poetry.  However, certain images as the one previously mentioned are hard to forget.

**Theme**   
  The theme of the story was rising over adversity, and standing for the truth even to death.  This is the theme for many stories and is always an exciting one.  John, in the beginning, wanted to keep distant from the trials.  He did not want to have a part, whether good or bad.  When Elizabeth was arrested, he was forced to become part of it.  He went to court first to set his wife free but after watching the proceedings, he saw that the evil was not only being done to his own wife but many others like his wife.  As a result, he worked even harder to free the other innocent people, getting himself arrested.  Despite this drawback, he did not give up.  He had the chance to free himself if he testified against the others but he realized that this would be wrong, and even though he wanted to free himself, he would not if it meant bringing trouble upon others.  He cleansed himself at the trial, standing for what he knew was right and died a righteous person.  Though he stayed away from church, he became more pure than the common Puritans, dying as a martyr like the original apostles.  He learned what truth meant through his suffering.   
  Through Proctor’s struggle, Miller displays the struggles within each of our own hearts.  Many times we have witnessed some wrong happening to some other person and wished not to get involved.  However, sometimes, like Proctor, there might be something that forces us in.  Would we be quit after only saving our wife like Proctor could have done, or would we go for the entire community as Proctor did?

**Conclusion**   
  The story reminds its readers of an ugly blemish on human history.  It reminds us that man is not perfect, and that we can make mistakes.  However, even with these mistakes, we can cleanse ourselves and purify ourselves by making what is wrong right.  The sufferings become to the sufferer like a crucible.

**Setting**

The play takes place in Salem, Massachusetts during the 17 century in Salem which was a Puritan village.  Since this story is based on a true story, the setting is real.  The fact that the story takes place during the 17 century is important.  The community needed to be superstitious and gullible in order for this incident to actually happen.  Also, the event needed to be in a Puritan society to have such an aversion to witches.  People in the twentieth and even the nineteenth centuries would be too skeptical about the supernatural to believe the girls.  Also, they would be likely to dismiss the act of dancing in the forest as just a little game.

**Author**

 Arthur Miller was an American playwright who was born in 1915.  He grew up in New York to a Jewish family.  He graduated from the University of Michigan in 1938 where he began to distinguish himself as a playwright.  His *Death of a Salesman* won the Pulitzer prize in 1949.  Miller wrote *The Crucible* in 1953 during the McCarthy period when Americans were accusing each other of Pro-Communist beliefs.  Many of Miller’s friends were being attacked as communists and in 1956, Miller himself was brought before the House of Un-American Activities Committee where he was found guilty of beliefs in communism (HUAC).  The verdict was reversed in 1957 in an appeals court.  Miller married Marylin Monroe in 1956 but divorced her in 1961.  *The Crucible* is set against the backdrop of the mad witch hunts of the Salem witch trials in the late 17th century.  It is about a town, after accusations from a few girls, which begins a mad hunt for witches that did not exist.  Many townspeople were hanged on charges of witchcraft.  Miller brings out the absurdity of the incident with the theme of truth and righteousness.  The theme is conveyed through the struggles of Miller’s main character, John Proctor.