
KÖNIGS ERLÄUTERUNGEN

Band 492

Arthur Miller, **THE CRUCIBLE**

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PRÜFUNGSAUFGABEN MIT MUSTERLÖSUNGEN

In Ergänzung zu den Aufgaben im Buch (Kapitel 6) finden Sie hier zwei weitere Aufgaben mit Musterlösungen. Die Zahl der Sternchen bezeichnet das Anforderungsniveau der jeweiligen Aufgabe.

Aufgabe 5 *

In one of his long commentaries in the first act (p. 52–60), Arthur Miller alludes unmistakably to the parallels between the witch-hunt in Salem and the social situation in the USA during the so-called McCarthy Era of the 1950s. Demonstrate the parallels between both situations.

Model answer:

→ **Collective fear**

In New England, the years pre-dating 1692 were marked by locust plagues and periods of drought which brought misery to a large number of the population. The fear of further natural catastrophes was great and widespread. Many of the settlers who, due to their Puritan beliefs, lived in constant battle with the Devil and his works, associated these catastrophes with Satan. They feared that the Devil was trying to banish them from New England. In the USA of the 1950s, there was an almost hysterical fear of Communism and infiltration of Communists in the USA.

→ **Hearings conducted outside regular courts of law**

In both cases, hearings were not conducted in a normal court of law. In Salem, the first trials were held as out of court interrogations. People were arrested purely on the testimony of fellow citizens, and found guilty of the charges. Similarly, the interrogations by the House Committee on Un-American Activities were not conventional trials either. Citizens were dragged in front of the Committee following anonymous accusations. The accused were robbed of any constitutional rights such as confrontation with their accusers. The Committee, on the other hand, was empowered to employ arbitrary measures and to undertake investigations usually afforded only to the court.

→ **Dubious evidence**

Both in the 17th century as well as the 1950s, charges were based on two highly dubious kinds of 'evidence': obviously untrustworthy accusations and personal relationships. In Salem, the first accusations were made by young girls who themselves were trying to avoid punishment and charges of witchcraft. Later, accusations were often made by those who were trying to escape the gallows. The first accusations before McCarthy's Committee were made by ex-Communists who were trying to prove their loyalty. In both cases, personal alliances played an important role. In Salem, people were arrested purely on the basis of their family connections. In the 1950s, just being a friend or an acquaintance was enough to make someone become a suspect and be summoned before the Committee.

→ **Reversal of Burden of Proof**

Suspects summoned before the court in Salem or before the House Committee of Un-American Activities were had to prove their innocence. The court was not required to prove their guilt, as is the norm.

→ **Naming names**

In both cases, in Salem and before McCarthy's Committee, the accused were put under immense pressure to reveal the names of others who might also be engaging in suspicious activities. By denouncing others, people were able to redeem themselves and possibly save themselves from punishment.

→ **Exploitation for other purposes**

In Salem people were accused of witchcraft for personal reasons such as revenge or land greed. In the 1950s, right-wing racist and Republican circles used the climate of fear to push through their own interests and to prevent any form of liberalisation.

→ **No real threat**

In Salem, neither witches nor the Devil were at work. Witchcraft was nothing more than pure fiction. In the same way, the Communist threat to the USA was completely unreal. The American Communist Party was so weak that throughout the Fifties they were unable to find a candidate to run for President. For the period from 1940 to 1968, the potential number of votes they could expect to receive remained at a maximum of

0.1 percent. The fact that Communists do exist, as opposed to witches, is irrelevant in this context. It is not about who triggered the events, but about how events developed in each case.

→ **Death sentences**

In both cases, the trials ended in executions based on dubious evidence, whereby the number of those accused of and executed for witchcraft was clearly far higher than the number of those sentenced to death for communist activities or espionage. In the witch trials there was also the element of physical torture which in some cases led to the death of the accused. The trials before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) led to many of the accused losing their jobs or not being given work, to mistrust and denunciation destroying their whole social environment, and to marriages breaking down. Just how many people killed themselves because the trials left them feeling completely demoralised and robbed of any integrity will never be known.

Aufgabe 6 **

Several years have passed and Abigail is an old woman now. Write a monologue from her perspective, describing how she felt back in 1692 and how she views the events with hindsight.

Model answer:

Winter is coming. It is wet here and cold and you can watch the bread going mouldy. I have grown old and worn out and then there's this cough. Once or twice a week I drag myself to the market to beg and to buy a few turnips or maybe a bit of bread. 'Old witch' the snotty-nosed brats from across call after me. If they knew about Salem...I haven't thought about it for a long time, strange that I can still see it as if it happened yesterday and not in 1692. Is that where it will end?

Death of the parents

I came to Salem after my parents were murdered. I was five years old and witnessed it all. My uncle took me in, he was the reverend of Salem, one of those cheerless Puritans who is so conservative and zealous that they forget everything else over it. I shared a room with my cousin, Betty. I was given plenty to eat, I was sent to school for a couple of years, I was looked after, but without a mother, without any warmth.

Events in the forest

I came to work as a servant at the Proctors' farm at the age of 15. John Proctor, my employer, was strict but just. His wife Elizabeth was the embodiment of righteousness and as cold as a fish. I never liked her, John, on the other hand, was a handsome man who feared nothing and nobody. He was very lonely and I was very pretty back then. After I had been working for the Proctors for a year, John and I met by chance in the forest. From that moment on, he often came to my room at night, sometimes we met in the stables or in the forest. We were made for each other, he told me, and it was true, until one day his wife found out about us and chased me from the farm.

The Putnams' visit: Witchcraft!

I could not find another employment. Men courted me and I pretended to be interested but I only wanted one man. For seven months I tried in vain to arrange a meeting with him. When I could bear it no longer, I went to Tituba, the old slave woman, who knew about all sorts of magic. We went into the forest together with some other girls who also needed some magic. Tituba set up a broth on the fire and we danced, wildly and hotly, Mercy tore her clothes off her body and jumped around naked, I drank the chicken blood Tituba offered me. How unlucky that my uncle discovered us!

Elizabeth stands in the way of the future

Betty froze in shock and sort of fainted, probably from fear of punishment. We dragged her home and hoped that she would regain consciousness but she remained unconscious and people began to hear about that very quickly. When the Putnams came to visit her in her sick bed, Ann Putnam immediately started talking about her seven dead children who had died shortly after their birth. She blamed witchcraft for it and claimed that it was also the cause for Betty's illness. Of course Uncle Samuel fended off any suggestion – the Reverend's house could not possibly be associated with anything of that nature.

And then Tituba's magic seemed to work: John came to us and I could see in his eyes that he still desired me – I knew that look – but he rejected me when he spoke to me. He called me a child and said he would rather hack off his own hand than touch me again. I knew she was behind it as he would have never treated me like that. Elizabeth Proctor was the only person who stood between us. She was destroying everything and was no better than a witch. She had to be eliminated. When word of witchcraft started to make the rounds, everyone became scared of it. It was easy to plant a doll with a long needle in it in Elizabeth's house. She was accused and locked up. I did my part and she was sentenced to death. It was almost too easy to convince the judges of the spirits that I had seen. I had prepared the girls well. They were afraid of me, they did as they were told without objection. The court shuddered at my description of the yellow bird. Oh, the power that I had in my hands – what a triumph!

Elizabeth is pregnant; John is accused

Up to then, everything had gone well but then Elizabeth Proctor claimed that she was pregnant and she was believed. The death sentence was suspended. To free his wife, John told the court about us. I have

never felt so betrayed. From this moment on, I realised that I could not win him back. I don't know how it happened but now he was accused of being in league with the devil. His wife was spared for the moment due to her pregnancy and he was also put in the dungeon. I was close to despair.

The atmosphere
has changed: Abi-
gail and Mercy
flee

The general atmosphere started to change. Too many people who had been considered to be virtuous had already been sentenced and hanged, and people had started to cast doubt on the trials. Uncle Samuel began to behave more and more oddly, he began to speak strange incomprehensible stuff and walk around for hours with an empty gaze. We could not help him. But I could save myself and Mercy. With Uncle Samuel's money we took the next ship out. We got to Boston. I lost Mercy somewhere along the way. Since that time, I have never trusted any other man. I made the men pay for my services. It was a life of misery for which I have paid a high price. The fire has burnt down now and the cold is creeping into my bones.