



Bristol Old Vic

# THE CRUCIBLE

By Arthur Miller

A Bristol Old Vic Production

Directed by Tom Morris

***"The theater is so endlessly fascinating  
because it's so accidental. It's so much like life."***

Arthur Miller, *The New York Times* (9 May 1984)

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**Education Pack | Appendix**

# Appendix A

## Tom Morris full interview

### **Why have you chosen to direct *The Crucible* rather than another play by Arthur Miller?**

We're very fortunate to be able to put this play on in what is Miller's centenary year. For many people it's his most powerful play, a play that when people attend a production, whether it's well-received or not, they talk about getting completely lost in the story despite it often being quite a long play and a long evening. It's written at an incredibly high dramatic temperature. In other words from the first scene you're in crisis, people are dealing with a disaster. There's a priest who's trying to secure his job in a community that's rebelling against him, whose daughter has fallen into a coma, and people are talking about witchcraft, and he's absolutely clear in his own mind that if any rumours of witchcraft get out it will be the end of his career, and in some ways the intensity and the tension in the story never relaxes. So yes, it's very powerful. It's a play that people talk about having seen.

### **What research have you done prior to going into rehearsals?**

One book in particular is Miller's favourite source for the play, which was a book by a man called Charles W Upham written in the 1830s about the Salem Witch Trials. Reading it feels like you're reading over Miller's shoulder, which is very exciting. It's very clear from reading this book that Upham, a man otherwise forgotten, was fascinated by the resonances between this story and his age, the middle of the 19th Century, and the time of the abolition of slavery. In his book he basically says that we should be really careful when judging the society of Salem when there are issues with the politics of our own. So he was applying the story to his world, Miller was applying the story to the 1950s in America, and my experience reading the play is that you start to find little vibrations with things that are happening in our world.

We've also looked into the first staging of the play. When it was first performed, it had a pretty mixed reception in New York; it was difficult for an American audience to receive it at that point. Then quite quickly it was produced in Britain, at Bristol Old Vic. This means that a lovely added bonus to our production is that the company will be performing on the same stage as its 1954 European premiere. For people who are interested in the play, it's possible to not only see the production and to think about the play, but also to do some research into the original production and what it was like. The cast list for the original production is extraordinary. Elizabeth Proctor was played by Rosemary Harris (now recognisable as Spiderman's granny in the movies), and she recently called me about the revival. She said it's a very interesting play, as back in 1954 people didn't think it was a great play, but rather edgy and dangerous. We stage it now thinking of it as a classic, but to watch it back then must have been very exciting, to have the opportunity to understand what Miller was saying at the time, when he was still seen as a radical playwright rather than the great master of the form we now see him as.

### **This is a play first performed in England at Bristol Old Vic in 1954 and recreates events which took place in Salem in 1692. How is the play able to be relevant to these times, as well as to a contemporary audience?**

*The Crucible* is a story which, as sometimes happens with great pieces of writing for theatre, seems able to reflect whichever time, country or culture it's performed in. It was written in the 1950s when Arthur Miller was caught up in the paranoid, anti-communist investigations set up by the American Government. Lots of his friends were being interviewed, being asked to give names of other people who'd been members of the Communist party, and he very clearly wrote the play with this situation in mind.

Sometimes when people write a play that is historically specific, (another example being Fielding's *Tom Thumb* which was written about the government in the 1730s), you take away the historical context and the play no longer makes sense. However *The Crucible* is so extraordinarily structured internally, all of its conflicts so balanced, that when you take away the context, it survives. It has its own purity of structure, its own

# Appendix A

balance of conflict, and what that means is that it can then find echoes in any society that it's played in, which means that it's a great play to revive.

At the moment there's a panic about immigration. Now, the play isn't about immigration, but it is about panic. The play is so brilliantly structured to be about panic that maybe when our audiences see it they will be reminded about the intolerances and hypocrisies that characterise our society in relation to immigration. I don't need to make the production about immigration for that to happen. Also, there are all sorts of other kinds of intolerance, racial intolerance, social intolerance, which we might find the production resonates with now. It's a play in which there are children in court, it's a play in which a society doesn't know how to deal with its children, which is dangerously topical to us now. It's also a society in which religious rules are so strict that kinds of fundamentalism can apply, and that's something that we can find resonances with in our world.

Overall, my sense is that one of the reasons the play has endured so well is that it does ask questions of any context that it's put in, and that makes it very exciting to stage.

## **What do you consider to be the key themes of the play?**

All I can talk about is what's striking me at the moment, when I'm about to go into rehearsals, and these things might change while we're working on it.

Miller writes about conscience in relation to the play, and he writes about tragedy and heroism, and the things you shouldn't compromise on no matter how difficult the circumstances you're in. As the drama of the play reaches its climax, John Proctor is asked to make a confession to witchcraft, which he knows to be false, and he's offered that chance in order to save his life. He's got three children, and he clearly wants to be with his children, and Miller structures it very clearly to show that if Proctor refuses to sign that document, he won't only be making a sacrifice himself, he'll be making a sacrifice on behalf of his children who will have no father. Proctor talks about giving away his name at that point, and Miller writing about it uses the word conscience to describe what Proctor's battle is. Whether you call it your name, or your good faith, at what price do you allow yourself to support a story that you know to be false. So for Miller, conscience is a really profound theme in the play.

The other thing I've been thinking about is what the community of the play means, and here the history of the play is useful. The play is set in 1692, at a point when America isn't even a country, where many of the people who live in Salem were born in Britain. For whatever reason the people who were settling in that part of what we now call North America had abandoned lives in Britain in order to create a new life for themselves in which they had religious freedom, in which they were able to invent themselves as a kind of community on the edge of what they perceived to be a terrifying wilderness. Many people had died arriving, more than half of the first two generations, so it was a community doing something incredibly difficult, dangerous and frightening, and a community which to my mind could only survive if it was sustained by hope. The kinds of narratives that puritanism offered the religion of that community would have lived in two areas, one would have been about making the group coherent at all costs, which is one of the reasons why you can understand religious intolerance in Salem. In Salem they got rid of all the Quakers, because in this community they needed to be of one belief in order to survive. The other area is hope. Those kind of religious beliefs enable you to hope, to hope that your project is achievable on earth, and in heaven after you're dead however difficult it may have been on earth.

All this means you have a small community bound together by hope, which messes up its entire life. It's a tragedy of a community that gets it entirely wrong, and starts to tear itself apart because it misunderstands its own unity. That seems to be really powerful, and is one of the things that interests me at this point.

I think the music is going to be very important. I think that the way that the community prays and sings together will be in some way part of the production, and if the production works you will have a sense of the heroic ambition of a community to support itself, and the appalling tragedy that happens when it forgets that, and goes mad.

# Appendix A

## What can you tell us about the casting of the play?

*The Crucible* is quite hard to stage, it's got a big cast, and is very hard to double, but we've got an extraordinary cast, and I'm thrilled. We made a decision early on that we would do what's called colour-blind casting, which means we're casting across the board in terms of the actors' ability to deliver the parts. The parts are very demanding and very rich, it's very castable. It's not as if there are two central parts and then everyone else is just mucking around. If you look at the through lines of the characters, like Parris or Hale, or the sheer possibilities of Danforth, or Mary Warren who's an extraordinary character, it's very castable. We've cast based on the ability of the actors to play those roles, ignoring what they look like, what their backgrounds are. In the original text one character is black and the rest are white, but our cast isn't like that. I want the production to connect with our world, to feel as if it could be happening now, one way of doing that is to make the acting company feel like if you rounded up a group of people in a square in Bristol it might be those people. However, the text will be exactly as written, so in terms of the actors we need, we need people who can deliver this text, which is technically demanding. We need people who can carry a through-line like heightened realism, which is how it's written, but we also need an ensemble who can work together, because of those themes of what happens when a society makes a mess of its life, we need a company that can create that on stage.

## What would you like your audience to take away from the play?

I always find it hard to answer this question as I only ever want the audience to take away questions, or their own responses. If I wanted to give a message to the public I'd probably write an article in a newspaper, which would be much easier than putting on a play! Theatre is a fluid form, an exchange between the people on stage and the people in the audience. The way the play is written challenges an audience because it's very clear that what happened in Salem, and what happens in the play, is an appalling system of injustice. Miller writes about it as evil. But, he does not create characters that are easy to divide into goodies and baddies, so what he writes profoundly is flawed characters and dilemmas. It means that even Danforth, the deputy governor who's running the trial, the person most to blame for the deaths, has some amazingly brilliant arguments. So if we do the play well, the audience will think 'that kind of makes sense what he's saying there'. Hale, who starts the whole thing off, would be very easy to view as just some Puritan fool, who's getting the world profoundly wrong, and is absolutely to blame for everything that happens, but the way the writing works for his character, is much more complex than that. He's someone who's incredibly excited about the possibility of understanding the world, he's an enthusiast who wants to share with this community the wisdom of enlightenment that he finds in books about witchcraft. Now we know that's all pernicious rubbish, but he didn't, for him it's like science, so he comes in with this excitement, and then he watches it go wrong, so by the end of the play he's in despair because he can see what he's caused.

So, the ideal thing that an audience will take away is a hunger to talk about what they've seen, and to explore it in relation to their own lives, which is all I ever want when I create a piece of theatre.

# Appendix B

## Robert Innes Hopkins full interview

### What was your initial response when asked to design *The Crucible*?

I've seen half a dozen productions of *The Crucible*, all of which worked tremendously well, from West End to student productions. It's such a robust and rigorous piece of writing that it always delivers an impact for the audience, so it's always been a play I've wanted to work on. I've worked on a vast spectrum of productions, including opera as well as theatre, but *The Crucible* has always been on my wish-list.

### What research did you do to help you with your ideas?

Firstly, I used the script for research, and did some reading around the play. I also used reference books and the internet (google images are a designer's best friend). There's obviously no photographs from the time the play is set, but there are paintings and architectural references that I used to help inform my initial sketches. Once I had my own ideas established, I looked at the film as a comparison, but I purposely didn't do this too early in case I couldn't see beyond it.

### Can you explain the process you went through when designing the set for *The Crucible*?

Tom Morris made contact with me six months ago and asked if I was available and willing to work on *The Crucible*. I was happy to work with him again after working on *Swallows and Amazons* three years ago. So, I met with Tom and he talked about why he wanted to do *The Crucible* and his initial thoughts about how he wanted to present it.

After our first meeting, I went away and read the text. Then I read it again – there are so many notes from Arthur Miller about the scenes that it is integral to the whole production to use them as a starting point. I then did a few sketches based on what we'd discussed and I met with Tom again to talk further about his vision for the show, and we refined our ideas. The process of designing always involves refining the early ideas discussed between the director and designer, and then in later stages bringing in lighting designers, movement directors and other members of the team.

Next, I created a model box of the set, making first the white-card model, which is the first time the designs are realized in 3D and shared with the production team. At this point we have to consider production budgets and how much it will cost to build the set, so producers and technical managers are brought in who look at the viability of the design. Once this is approved by everyone, a final model is made, incorporating both artistic and technical input. This final model is then shared with all departments involved with the production, including marketing, press and box office and is the first opportunity they have to get a good idea of the artistic vision of the show.

### Can you explain your design for *The Crucible*?

As a Puritan community in Massachusetts in the 1600s, the characters in *The Crucible* would have built their own homes and would not have had many possessions. Therefore, everything on-stage is very simple, with a handmade feel that uses natural materials such as wood.

For the first half, I have the challenge of housing all the actors on-stage, even when they are not in the scene. To achieve this, I have made a playing space on a circular disc in the middle of the stage, with benches alongside where the actors will sit and enter and exit the performance space without the use of doorways – eliminating that level of naturalism. It is not designed to be a naturalistic actual space, but we represent the three main settings with unique pieces of set, for example a window or a door to demonstrate a change in environment.

The final major element of the design is on-stage seating, which was something Tom envisioned from the beginning. It is very exciting thing to pursue as a designer, because it is very much outside of the normal approach to designing a show. It also works very well for *The Crucible* because it puts the audience in the heart of the action as observers, startlingly close as the action unfolds. During some scenes they might feel a bit more like a jury than an audience as a result of the design.

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To design the on-stage seating, we looked at some of the early lecture halls and old operating theatres where they had curved rows of seats looking down on a central area. In *The Crucible*, the first scene takes place in the house of Reverend Samuel Parris and simply has a bed on stage. This set up, in some ways, suggests that we're doing a forensic examination of the play and the main characters in it which aligns with the themes of a community anatomising itself.

## **How does your design change to reflect the four scenes in *The Crucible*?**

The first scene is set in the house of Reverend Samuel Parris in the centre of the community, whose daughter, Betty, lies unconscious in a bed. To aid the transformation of the circular performance space, there is a simple but elegant window and a bed on which Betty lies.

The second act begins in the house of John Proctor which is on the edge of the community near the wilderness. Here, a different, more rustic window and a door onto the wilderness are in place, through which the different parties in this scene will enter.

The third act is situated in the Salem meeting house and this is where the on-stage audience will really feel like they are the jury, as the seating bank forms part of the architecture of the courtroom. The wilderness outside is obscured by the safety of the courthouse wall with windows, which aids the sense of state and of civic.

The final act is set in the Salem prison, the claustrophobia of which will be represented by lighting and darkness. Paradoxically, this will be the biggest, emptiest space created in the show. As John Proctor is led to the gallows at the end of the scene, the space will change. We open up the seating banks to reveal the forest, and we become aware of hanging bodies in the trees, a haunting image that embraces the openness and emptiness of the Theatre.

## **How do you work with the design areas such as lighting, sound and costume?**

I tend to work on both set and costume unless it's a very large production like opera in which case I'll only work on one, but in this instance I'm designing both the set and costumes. It's a very simple, Puritan community, with no decoration, so the clothing and architecture were simple - lots of muted, dark colours with white collars and bonnets. We don't want to be slavishly historical as we want it to still feel accessible. Currently the clothes are only sketches, but we want the clothes to add to our understanding of the characters, not distract from it.

We have a separate lighting designer, another important part of the creative team, who I haven't worked with before, so I'm excited to collaborate with them. There's a lot of crossover between the way we work, with the positioning of the lights, the colours used, and also the story you can tell through lighting. Designing lighting is more actual and less theoretical than set design, their creative process tends to start once we're actually in the theatre, but they need to produce a lighting plot before this, which involves a lot of discussion.

## **This is a play first performed in Europe at Bristol Old Vic in 1954 and recreates events which took place in Salem in 1692. How does your design reflect the three points in time, what is new about your design and how is this relevant for a contemporary audience?**

The story is now sixty years old, and has been told many, many times over - so the question is always why do it now? The easy answer is 'because it's Arthur Miller', but I think as a play it's a dissection of how society can fold on itself, and start to eat itself from the inside, which I think is as pertinent now as it was when it was written. We find it extraordinarily easy to blame other people, or the outsider in society, and to demonize people, to make people scapegoats for issues that affect all of us, which ultimately we're all responsible for. I think that's as relevant now - if not more so - as it was back then. Whenever you stage *The Crucible*, in whichever society or time, there will always be a resonance across the era its set, the time it was written, and the way those terrible human instincts are manifesting themselves across the society you're in at the moment. This is why I think theatre is important, why we all believe in it, and why it's important to keep telling each other these stories.



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Hopefully what will feel fresh and exciting about our telling of the story firstly is putting the audience on stage amongst the action. Secondly we're putting a forest upstage, which will reflect the terrifying wilderness facing this new, Puritan society that was stretching out across America. This was the start of the experimentation with witchcraft, but also the conflict between this community and the Native Americans. This wilderness is very much a character in the play, and so we're trying to put it on stage, and each of the cast has a different relationship with it, which hopefully will make the production feel visceral and exciting.

## **What are the challenges for a designer when working at Bristol Old Vic?**

It's an immense pleasure working at Bristol Old Vic. It's one of the most, if not the most, beautiful theatres in the country, with an extraordinary history and heritage. This is potentially quite daunting, but it's also a warm and generous space to work in. I think its character never disappears, so as a designer you want to work with it, to never try and take it on, because you're not going to win. Its character is very strong, with the extended forestage, the boxes on the side stage, and the beautiful green colour - that character is never going to disappear, nor should it. With the seating on stage we want it to feel both like a natural extension of the Theatre itself, but also to evoke the atmosphere, time and place of the story we're trying to tell. That's the challenge, to be sympathetic to the space, but also to be rigorous with the story you're trying to tell.

## **How closely do you work with the director and the cast?**

You stay very close to the production, it's a luxury to be in the rehearsal room as you're inevitably off doing other things, but you try and stay as close as possible as the design can ebb and flow as ideas come out of rehearsals. My closest interaction with the cast tends to be in costume fittings, especially if we're creating clothes for their character which can call for a lot of discussion. We'll also usually all meet for a production meeting once a week, and once we're into the theatre and starting technical rehearsals then we're all together all the time.

## **Do you have a favourite part of the set?**

No, I love all my children equally!

## **What would you like your audience to remember from your design for *The Crucible*?**

Good design isn't necessarily noticeable in its own entity. Good design is working within a good production, and helping to tell the story, and I don't ever necessarily want people to come out having focused on the set, as this isn't the role of the designer.

I'd like the people in on-stage seating to remember a truly unique experience at the theatre, and for the people sitting in the auditorium to again remember a unique experience of a story being told in a proscenium arch, but also in the round, and being viewed on all sides, which will enable us to excavate and dissect the play in a very exciting way.

## **What made you want to be a designer? What advice would you give to aspiring designers?**

I've been designing theatre professionally for 23 years after graduating from Nottingham with a degree in Theatre Design. When I graduated, I worked as an assistant to established designers in a sort of apprenticeship, which was a great way to watch other designers at work, learn on the job, and also earn a little bit of money. I then began to work by myself, with the jobs getting bigger and bigger, and now I've probably done about 120 professional productions, mainly opera and theatre, but also some dance, and a bit of film and television.

I love the collaborative nature of designing, and how we can create something greater than the sum of its parts. When it truly works, there's something extraordinary about the alchemy that comes out of a group of people working together at that point in time. It's a very rewarding and stimulating place to be when that happens, and that's something that we pursue with every job we do.

My advice to aspiring designers would be to 'do it'. If that means producing work on a very small scale with no budget, you're still getting the chance to work on your art, to tone your muscles. Designing is a practice, don't get too stuck in theory. Whether you're producing something on a small scale, or working on a large production, it's all the same job, so just get out there and do it.

# Appendix C

## Archive material from 1954 performance



Images kindly supplied by Bristol Theatre Collection



Tuesday, November 9th, 1954

For THREE Weeks

## THE CRUCIBLE

By ARTHUR MILLER

The cast in the order of their appearance:

BETTY PARRIS ..... ANNETTE CROSBIE  
 REVEREND SAMUEL PARRIS ..... JOHN CAIRNEY  
 TITUBA ..... BARBARA ASSOON  
 ABIGAIL WILLIAMS ..... PAT SANDYS  
 SUSANNA WALLCOT ..... PATRICIA HEALEY  
 MRS. ANN PUTNAM ..... PHYLLIDA LAW  
 THOMAS PUTNAM ..... RONALD HINES  
 MERCY LEWIS ..... GILLIAN LEWIS

JOHN WILLARD ..... EDWARD HARDWICKE  
 JUDGE HATHORNE ..... PETER WYLDE  
 DEPUTY-GOVERNOR DANFORTH ..... JOHN KIDD  
 SARAH GOOD ..... PHYLLIDA LAW

Produced by WARREN JENKINS

Settings designed by PATRICK ROBERTSON

ACT I. Scene 1.—A bedroom in Reverend Samuel Parris' house, Salem, Massachusetts, in the Spring of the year 1692.  
 ACT I. Scene 2.—The Common room of Proctor's house, eight days later.

INTERVAL OF FIFTEEN MINUTES

ACT II. Scene 1.—Five weeks later. A wood.

the Salem Meeting House, later.  
 in jail, three months later.

costumes made in the Bristol of Alvary Williams. Men's and Morris Angel & Son Ltd. rig.  
 Tripp, 36, Whiteladies Road.

JOHN MOODY  
 CHARLES LANDSTONE  
 T. C. P. HICKSON  
 NAT BRENNER  
 BRIAN JOHNSTONE

THIS PRODUCTION . . .

### THE CRUCIBLE

"In Salem also is his Tabernacle.  
 Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."

When (following in the wake of the earlier Cabots and the '18 men of Bristol') the Puritans of Salem, Massachusetts, gave thanks to God for deliverance with the building of their first church in 1629, three years after landing in New England, they were already beset with terrors new and old: Papist Spain was killing their fellow-religionists to the south, as was Catholic France to the north; the Indians were massacring to the west, while a jealous England soon cast envious eyes on their increasing wealth and power.

Later, when the Puritans felt their existence further threatened from within by men of more liberal thought or incompatible religious groups, they in their turn, reacted with savage persecution, purging the colony with torture, imprisonment and death or by forcing any recalcitrants to leave the colony.

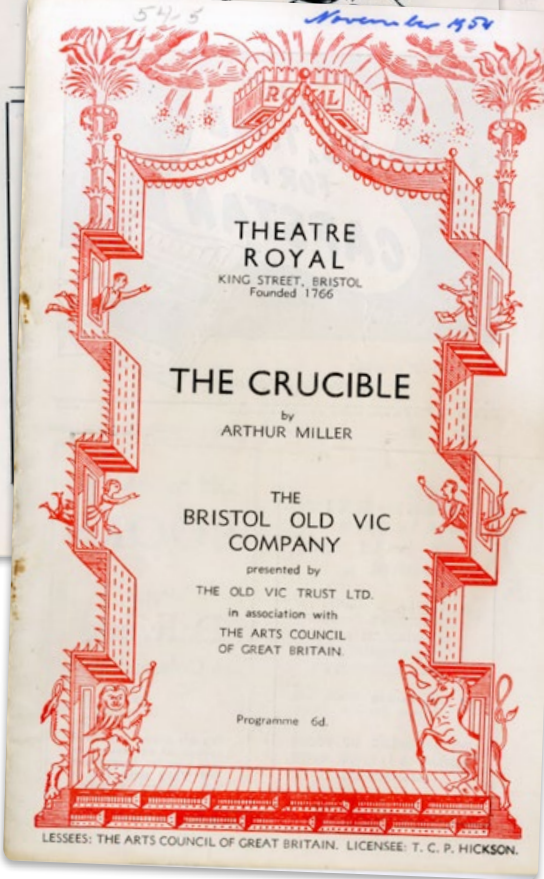
At the time of the opening of this play, 1692, the Salem Puritans were feeling the effects of rising forces, within and without, threatening their faith, and being unable by their very history and nature to believe that opposing ideas can sometimes 'co-exist peacefully,' they had retreated deeper into their convictions, feeling that only a fiercely held rigid unity together with a forceful attack on any challenging ideas could guarantee their survival as the elect of this world. Thus when, in their very midst, the Devil, as real to them as God, revealed himself in the shape of a 'witch,' they could not suffer 'it' to live.

Arthur Miller's play which dramatizes the Salem witch hunt and witch trials of 1692 is a play of our time.

THE BRISTOL OLD VIC SCHOOL (Principal: Duncan Ross) is run in conjunction with the Company. Full details of the School can be obtained from the Principal at the Theatre.

THE BRISTOL OLD VIC THEATRE CLUB exists to promote interest in dramatic art and to further the policy of the Company by assisting to build up a permanent and regular audience. Chairman, Mrs. Veronica Lyne, Theatre Royal, Bristol.

The next meeting of the Club will be held in the Theatre on Sunday, November 21st at 7.0 p.m. Mr. Peter Ustinov will speak on "The Theatre Abroad."



# Appendix D

## Cast headshots



**Jude Akuwudike**  
Reverend Parris



**Dominic Allen**  
Ezekiel Cheever



**Zoe Castle**  
Betty Parris



**Olivia Edwards**  
Susannah Walcott



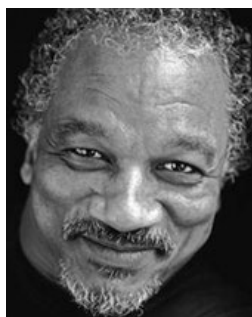
**Peter Edwards**  
Marshal Herrick



**Annes Elwy**  
Mary Warren



**David Hargreaves**  
Giles Corey



**Jeffery Kissoon**  
Deputy Gov. Danforth



**Dean Lennox Kelly**  
John Proctor



**Mark Letheren**  
Thomas Putnam



**Kika Markham**  
Rebecca Nurse



**Neve McIntosh**  
Elizabeth Proctor



**Rona Morison**  
Abigail Williams



**Emma Naomi**  
Mercy Lewis



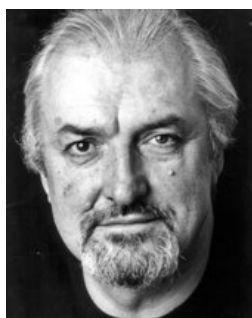
**Saskia Portway**  
Ann Putnam / Sarah Good



**Sara Powell**  
Tituba



**Grace Reynolds Buckton**  
Betty Parris



**John Stahl**  
Judge Hathorne



**Ewart James Walters**  
Francis Nurse



**Daniel Weyman**  
Reverend Hale