

## ENTERTAINMENT

## Emotions strong in Otterbein's riveting 'Crucible'

By Frank Gabrenya  
Dispatch Arts Reporter

Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* weaves a frightening story about one of the darkest chapters in mankind's endless attempt to make society march in a single line: the Salem witch trials of the late 17th century. Devils were thought to be everywhere, tempting the weak and wanton into defying Puritan law.

But Miller's intention wasn't to rake the Puritans over his artistic coals. His sights were really set on a contemporary revival of the witch hunts, the anti-Communist hearings of the early '50s, when overzealous patriotism created more victims than heroes.

The thrust of the allegory is ingenious. By expressing his growing uneasiness through an infamous chapter of

## REVIEW

Otterbein College presents *The Crucible* at 8 tonight and Saturday night and at 2 p.m. Sunday in Cowan Hall on the Otterbein campus. For tickets call 890-3023 between 1 and 4:30 p.m.

history, Miller was able to make a forceful case about society's penchant to destroy freethinkers in the name of the public good. There were no more witches in Salem, Mass., than there were Communists under every bed in 1952.

BUT, ONCE accusations started spreading, once misguided witnesses started naming names, once the accused were considered guilty until proven loyal,

the cure became more devastating than the symptoms. In 1692, the "guilty" were put to death; in 1953, they were blacklisted.

Obviously, with such grave matters on Miller's mind, *The Crucible* is a sober experience. The play is calculated to enrage the reasonable viewer and it usually succeeds. At times, its characters wade deeply into murky melodrama, with most of the principals painted in black and white. But Miller wasn't after a balanced argument; he set out to wring our emotions, and he does.

Otterbein College has mounted a handsome, riveting production of *The Crucible* with all the strongest emotions intact. Most of the 22 cast members have at least one chance to excel, and several have many more. As often happens in an

Otterbein production, the acting belies the age of the cast.

Tim Gregory as farmer John Procter and Cathy Collins as his wife, Elizabeth, form a strong center to the drama as innocents accused of dealing with the devil. John's brief dalliance with Abigail Williams has brought her cruel retribution down on them, and proving their innocence in the face of hysterical superstition gives the play its raw power.

Liana Peters is superb as Abigail, a conniving woman who learns quickly how to use the inflexible system for her own ends. Just as strong are Todd Alan Kreps as the Deputy Governor, Meg Williamson as the pitiful Mary Warren who helps Abigail spread her accusations, and Steve Geyer as the Rev. Parris

who intends to come out of these trials a wealthier landowner.

STEPHEN BUCKWALD'S direction is expansive, spreading out his company like a historical tableau, yet maintaining dramatic focus for the pivotal speeches.

At times, the relatively bare set leaves the actors little to do but pose melodramatically. Some cast members don't project enough, especially in the opening scene when a lot of groundwork is laid.

The result, though, is what Miller intended: a chilling allegory about the ever-present danger of fanaticism in a free society. If the events of the '50s that motivated Miller have faded into history, there is no guarantee they won't come back.