



'Pulling Heaven Down': On 'The Crucible'

By Kristina Polidano for tpepsis

"The Crucible" is a play which was written in 1953 by Arthur Miller. Based around the Salem witch trials that occurred in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1692-93, this play was written as an allegory which criticised McCarthyism.

The supernatural and the macabre, in my eyes, are often the most difficult things to portray in theatre, especially nowadays in a world where nothing properly shocks us anymore, in a world where everyone claims that "they have seen it all" and, consequently, felt it all. With this rendition of "The Crucible," I felt like this argument was counteracted. Directed by Sean Buhagiar, this performance left a certain level of alienation and grogginess that I could not understand, leaving the theatre I felt almost drunk. Maybe this sounds crude, which it very well may be, but that's just how I felt, and maybe it was the length of the play itself that made me feel this way, but I doubt it.

I think of the performance now and I think of screaming, of the wicken chanting that echoed throughout the scenes, that was often backed by music (by Yasmin Kuymizakis) that intensified the atmosphere to a point where you almost felt like you were being like you were being dragged onto the stage just as Mary Warren (Roberta Cefai) was dragged into the court room by John Proctor (Kenneth Spiteri). This contemporary element truly brought the atmosphere to life, and aided to embellish the incredibly well composed set designed by Austin Camilleri. Regarding the stage design, I particularly appreciated the unevenness of the stage's plane. The lop-sidedness acted as a perfect parallel to the madness and corruption that took place as the plot unfolded, whilst the grey walls that surrounded the stage, seeming like the walls of a derelict stucture, acted like the perfect accessory to the suffocation and utter irrationality that was taking place upon the stage. The narrattive was further ushered into the modern world by the clothes warn by the actors. Perfectly composed, these designs by Sef Farrugia showed the personality of each character beautifully in a polished and minimalist way.

The play itself was filled with horror and sex. Sexuality could practically never be disassociated from the power and the occult throughout. Sex verged on madness, as did power, and although this was played out in a somewhat minimalist manner, the shock and horror that was intended within the script was emphasised it. Light and motion were used as the main tactic to shock until the very end when a series of puppets, corpses, washed in yellowish-red light hanged in the background as if they were burning in hell.

The acting itself throughout the performance was no less than brilliant. Kenneth Spiteri, the actor who plays the main protagonist, John Proctor, gave an outstanding performance. Every movement that he made on stage felt authentic, I feel like he truly lived and breathed the character, and that's the reason why he captivated the audience received a standing ovation as he emerged after the performance was over, he truly deserved it. In addition to his performance, Steven Oliver (Judge Danforth) portrayed the character seamlessly, adding as much intensity to his performance as needed for such a corrupt characte, Gabriela Mendez (Tituba) shifted from madness to innocence seamlessly, Edward Caruana Galizia's portrayal (Rev. John Hale) added a touch of humanity to the institution he represented excellently. The acting in its generality was quite good, although at times some of the accents that the actors used seemed to make certain words undecipherable. The only comment that I have about the acting is about Peter Galea (Judge Hathorne), who delivered his part admirably incredible intensity, but it seemed to fall short to the point where the intensity was lost and seemed bathetic. I understand that maybe his character is used to show the

irrationality of the judicial system, but that said I felt like the performance was somewhat detached from the rest.

Directing such a play can sometimes be a little bit tricky, but Sean Buhagiar truly succeeded in putting his own personal stamp on the performance and bringing it into the contemporary world. From the simultaneous movement of the girls in court that made, if I remember correctly, Abigail (Nadia Vella), into a sort of fallen angel, to the calculated movements at the beginning of the play with Betty Paris (Kyra Lautier) writhing and suddenly stiffening up on her bed.

Even though this play was rather tiring to watch in the sense that it took quite long to unfold as well as due to its subject matter, it was an experience. I can't really describe what sort of experience it was. All I can say is that it was gripping, captivating and heightened ones senses to an extreme, portraying horror, and at the end of the day, tragedy with a deeper impact than one would assume it would.

Photo by Darrin Zammit Lupi.