

Review of *The Crucible*

Camberwell Grammar School, in association with Canterbury Girls High School, presented Arthur Miller's well known play, *The Crucible*, which opened on May 7, 2009. In general, the play was performed to a very high standard, engaging the audience and capturing the emotions and relationships within the text, surpassing the usual expectations of a standard school production.

The production on the night was near flawless, with only a small number of noticeable mistakes, such as missed lines; however, with the nerves and excitement of an opening night, such things are to be expected and excused. The experience of the actors soon became apparent and the majority of mistakes went unnoticed by the audience.

The themes of Miller's play were strongly expressed and well portrayed by the cast. There could be no mistaking the wheels of envy driving the antagonist, Abigail Williams, played by Phoebe Darlison, to manipulate the characters around her as she strove to marry John Proctor, played by Zac Puplett, by charging his wife, Elizabeth (Sarah McInnes) with witchcraft.

The themes of intolerance and obedience were explored well through Elliott Berger's depiction of the character of the Reverend Parris, as he manoeuvred himself into a position of greater power within the village. The same was evidence in Christopher Kapiniaris' depiction of the character of Deputy Governor Danforth, who captured the sense of a man driven by his own sense of righteousness and his unshakable belief in the justice of signing the death warrants of an ever increasing number of 'witches' appearing before his court.

The strength of the casting enabled the relationships between the characters to be explored to their fullest. The portrayal of the characters of Abigail Williams, John Proctor, the Reverend Hale (James McCluskey) and the Reverend Parris were largely indebted to the careful casting decisions made and their success was due largely to the experience of the actors who performed in those roles.

Arguably the most important character in *The Crucible* is John Proctor and it was disappointing to see that, at times, Zac Puplett lacked the compelling power his character should summon on stage. The concluding cry by his character at the play's conclusion, 'Leave me my name!' admirably compensated for weaker moments in his performance and did compel the audience's attention as we were left to consider the true cost of his conflict with the theocratic beliefs of Salem.

The central relationship between John Proctor and Abigail Williams was developed particularly well and the audience was left in doubt of the truth of their previous adulterous relationship and of Abigail's subsequent motivation for accusing Proctor's wife of witchcraft. This was an aspect of the production that was crucial to its success and its pleasing to note how well this part of the play was sustained by both Darlison and Puplett.

During the course of the play, McCluskey portrayed the collapse of the Reverend Hale's belief in his values with genuine intensity and the audience could readily observe Hale's collapse in tandem with the destruction of the village of Salem as it suffers under the manipulation of the girls and climaxing with the hanging of an innocent John Proctor.

It was a compelling and engaging presentation of Miller's play, which left the audience feeling satisfied and challenged by what they had seen on stage. Aspects of the stagecraft such as lighting

helped to make the malice of characters such as Abigail Williams apparent when she was on stage, with the stage often being lit with a blood red wash. While the sound may not have always been successful, the merit of the production was clear to all who saw it and congratulations must go to Ms Wood for working so hard on the production and to the entire production team who helped to realise Miller's dramatic vision.

Cameron Chidgey.