

## Week 1: Popular Articles

All of the articles for this week deal with evidence and evidence reliability in some way.

a) Why I Wrote “The Crucible,” Arthur Miller (*New Yorker*), October 21, 1996

Arthur Miller reminisces (in 1996) about the play “The Crucible” which he wrote in 1952.

“The Crucible” concerns the Salem Witch Trials (1692/3); it is an allegory for the House Un-American Activities Committee and the Army-McCarthy Hearings of the late 1940s/early 1950s.

Witch-hunts are analogous to hunting for and rooting out Communists in the United States.

## Definitions:

crucible: a place or occasion of severe test or trial

allegory: the representation of abstract ideas or principles by characters, figures, or events in narrative, dramatic, or pictorial form

witch-hunt: an investigation carried out ostensibly to uncover subversive activities but actually used to harass and undermine those with differing views.

naming “names” (of witches or Communists) was common to HUAC and the Salem Witch Trials

spectral evidence is a form of evidence based upon dreams and visions. Spectral evidence was testimony that the accused witch’s spirit

(i.e., spectre) appeared to the witness in a dream or vision (for example, a black cat or wolf). The dream or vision was admitted as evidence. Thus, witnesses (who were often accusers) would testify that “Goody Proctor bit, pinched, and almost choked me,” and it would be taken as evidence that the accused were responsible for the biting, pinching, and choking even though they were elsewhere at the time.

familiar spirits (or familiars or animal guides) were supernatural entities believed to assist witches and cunning folk in their practice of magic.

Signing one’s name in “the Devil’s book”

## Some Peripheral Observations:

A current version of all of this are accusations of childhood sexual abuse – “remembering trauma” and “repressed memories”

I played Giles Cory in high school; I had the line “more stone” as my chest was being crushed because I would not confess to being a witch

Arthur Miller at one time was married to Marilyn Monroe

McCarthy quote:

The State Department is infested with Communists. I have here in my hand a list of 205 – a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are

still working and shaping policy in the State Department. (1950)

Loyalty Oaths were common: for example, I have not and will not lend my aid, support, advice, counsel, or influence to the Communist Party (for Florida teachers until 1962)

In 1952 the famous director Elia Kazan (e.g., *On the Waterfront*) appeared before HUAC and named names, e.g., Clifford Odets, Lillian Hellman, among others

Quote: You don't understand. I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I coulda been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am, let's face it.

Kazan and Miller's friendship ended thereafter

Miller himself appeared before HUAC

Miller was denied a Passport after the Crucible opened

On the Crucible video with Daniel-Day Lewis and Winona Rider, the parallel commentary by Miller and the Director is *\*very\** interesting; highly recommended

Do a Google search on "Hollywood Blacklist"  
(for the Wikipedia entry)

The Trauma Trap, Frederick Crews (*New York Review of Books*), March 11, 2004

Frederick Crews is a Professor Emeritus of English at UC Berkeley (and a “public intellectual” and an avowed hater of Freud)

Again, this essay involves evidence reliability; here it is on remembering trauma, repressed and recovered memories, post-traumatic-stress-disorder

It is based off Richard McNally’s *Remembering Trauma*; I recommend this highly

Points made:

the idea of repressed memory is a lot of “crap”

the idea of multiple personality disorder is a lot of “crap”

parallel to the Crucible and the accusation of children, we now have people with recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse (a lot of “crap” ); and incidents like the McMartin preschool scandal

the ubiquity of PTSD diagnoses much beyond where it was developed as a alternative to being “shell-shocked” during War

Crews quotes:

“how much damage can be done when mistaken ideas about the mind get infused with ideological zeal”

“the PTSD diagnosis itself has proved to be a modern contagion”



Health Care: Who Knows 'Best'? Jerome Groopman (*New York Review of Books*), February 11, 2010

Jerome Groopman is a Medical Doctor at Harvard and a writer for *The New Yorker*, and another public intellectual

Here we have a discussion of evidence in the health area and what works and what doesn't; it is unclear what actually "works" or what is "best practice"

Also, behavioral economics and the "nudge idea" (as opposed to mandates) in the service of "libertarian paternalism"

Pygmalion complex: falling in love with one's own work (or as Pygmalion did with his statue); overconfidence bias

confirmation bias: one chooses “evidence” according to one’s own preconceptions

focusing illusion: basing predictions on a single change in the status quo, we mistakenly forecast dramatic effects on an overall condition (moving to California or taking estrogen will solve all of my problems)

Recent “best practice” issues: statins; blood pressure; screening

Groopman quotes:

When a medical statistician says that imposing a limit on mammography is a “no-brainer”, people may recall George Tenet’s claim that the case for invading Iraq was a “slam-dunk”

the major point of my essay was the probity [honesty] of mandates versus suggestion [nudges]