



FURY, LOVE, AND LONGING:

The origin of *John Proctor* is the Villain

“I usually write from a place of obsession.”

— Playwright Kimberly Belflower

In 2017, as Kimberly Belflower decompressed from grad school on her family's farm, three fixations collided. She read Stacy Schiff's *The Witches*, a historical account of the infamous Salem witchcraft trials, mere weeks before journalists broke sexual harassment and abuse allegations against movie mogul Harvey Weinstein. The reporting triggered a national reckoning with gender, power, and toxic workplace cultures. "I became obsessed with reading every single thing, like to the point where I would make myself nauseous just reading all the details," recalls Belflower. As more women publicly shared traumatic experiences – and more prominent men faced consequences for decades of malevolence – critics denounced the movement as "a witch hunt".

That invocation led Belflower to revisit Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* for the first time since high school. She was shocked at how her reading experience of the play's gender and power dynamics differed as an adult: "I was taught, and almost every single person I know is taught, that John Proctor is this beacon of goodness and the girls are hysterical. And rereading it, I found myself saying out loud, 'John Proctor is the villain.'"

Belflower's new lens on *The Crucible* and the Salem Witch Trials emphasized how the sexual power dynamics in #MeToo headlines have a centuries-long legacy — how do these values get passed from one generation to the next? She zeroed in on the rollercoaster of teenage girlhood as the flash point. "There was something about being back in a rural environment while these allegations were breaking that really connected me to my teenage self," says Belflower, who grew up in North Georgia, an area steered by Southern traditions and religious values. "I was thinking about what it is to come of age in a rural place, what it is to come of age in the church, and to be given a series of rules for your life and expectations for what things are supposed to look

like. Just thinking about the way that we're taught canonical literature as one of those systems of power—who gets to be in the canon and who doesn't."

Belflower knew that the conversation around curriculum was more than an intellectual debate; it was emblematic of greater cultural forces: Whose stories are celebrated? And at what cost? In Belflower's own oeuvre, she's always centered young women. Her multiverse of adolescent worlds includes *Gondal*, a wild Gothic collision of contemporary memes and a teenaged Emily Brontë; *Only Reason*, a collaboration with playwright Megan Tabaque celebrating online fandom; and *Lost Girl*, a Wendy-focused reimaging of *Peter Pan*. Belflower's plays delve into the intricate textures of friendships, pop culture and the internet as formative texts, and the interrogation and reframing of classic works to center female protagonists' desires. Her writing radiates with heart, intellect, and compassion, built on a bedrock of love and respect for her characters. Teenage girls are often dismissed as dramatic hormone monsters, but Belflower's work is a ferocious valentine to coming of age, where young women's emotions, obsessions, and formidable resilience are taken seriously.

John Proctor is the Villain is set in a one-stoplight Appalachian town — a place where family traditions and loyalties go back generations — during the spring of 2018 as the initial cascade of #MeToo allegations branched into a larger cultural reevaluation of systems, hierarchies, and complicity. The play captures a community and a classroom reckoning with a crumbling status quo, forcing a real-time reframing of relationships, beliefs, and familiar narratives. Fueled with righteous fury, love, and longing, can these young women transcend their shakiness and confusion to build new worlds – and burn down the old ones?

– Lauren Halvorsen

THE HUNTINGTON

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presents

JOHN PROCTOR IS THE VILLAIN

By **Kimberly Belflower**

Directed by **Margot Bordelon**

SCENIC DESIGN
Kristen Robinson

COSTUME DESIGN
Zoë Sundra

LIGHTING DESIGN
Aja M. Jackson

SOUND DESIGN
Sinan Refik Zafar

HAIR AND WIG DESIGN
Rachel Padula-Shufelt

DRAMATURG
Lauren Halvorsen

CASTING
Dale Brown, CSA

**PRODUCTION
STAGE MANAGER**
Emily F. McMullen*

STAGE MANAGER
Lucas Bryce Dixon*
Ashley Pitchford*

PRODUCING DIRECTOR
LOCAL CASTING
Lyndsay Allyn Cox

GENERAL MANAGER
Sondra R. Katz

Selections from *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller are included in the script for *John Proctor is the Villain* with express permission of The Arthur Miller 2004 Literary and Dramatic Property Trust.

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"Green Light"

Performed by Lorde

Written by Ella Marija Lani Yelich O'Connor

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