

ABIGAIL/ 1702

A TWICE-TOLD TALE

BY **ROBERTO
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ABIGAIL/1702 received its world premiere at New York Stage and Film (Johanna Pfaelzer, Artistic Director; Thomas Pearson, Executive Director), opening on June 27, 2012. It was directed by David Esbjornson; the scenic design was by Antje Ellerman; the costume design was by Katherine Roth; the lighting design was by Jeff Croiter; the sound design was by David van Tieghem; and the production stage manager was Erin Koster. The cast was as follows:

YOUNG WOMAN (ABIGAIL) Chloë Sevigny
YOUNG MAN (JOHN BROWN) Patrick Heusinger
MAN IN GREY (and others) Paxton Whitehead
ELIZABETH PROCTOR (and others) Laila Robins
THOMAS Lucas Pfeifer

CHARACTERS

One YOUNG WOMAN (late 20s) plays ABIGAIL WILLIAMS, though for most of the play she goes by the name Ruth Meadow.

One YOUNG MAN (mid-20s) plays JOHN BROWN.

One OLDER MAN (40s, 50s, or older) plays REVEREND PARRIS, JUDGE SEWALL, and the MAN IN GRAY. Also, the LION'S VOICE in the prelude.

One OLDER WOMAN (40s–50s) plays MARGARET HALE, ANN FOSTER (aka the Crone), and ELIZABETH PROCTOR.

One LITTLE BOY (10 years old) plays THOMAS.

PLACE

Massachusetts. Salem and Boston, and the road in between. Various other locations suggested as minimally as possible. (Mostly, we're in Ruth Meadow's house.)

And we've *got* to see those New England oaks...

TIME

Ten years after the witch trials—1702.

NOTES ABOUT HISTORY

Some of the characters in this play lived and breathed. Sometimes, I borrowed from their lives. Most of the time, though, I imagined what they said and did (and why).

ABIGAIL/1702

Prelude

Nighttime. Bare, winter trees. A moon. The sound of wind, the sound of wolves.

On the wind, we hear a name, echoing—"Abigail..."

The lights rise on a young woman, moving between the trees, being chased by a man, Reverend Parris, who has entered the forest. He carries a lantern.

YOUNG WOMAN. (*To us.*) I am running—*flying* through the dark woods—

PARRIS. *Abigail*—

YOUNG WOMAN. (*To us.*) I am seventeen, again—It is sixteen-ninety-and-two, again—

PARRIS. We know you are on this High Road, niece—

YOUNG WOMAN. (*To us.*) I am on the High Road to Boston—Chasing a bone-white moon I spy through trees—*being* chased by my Uncle Parris—

PARRIS. (*Looking around, using his lantern like a torch.*) We have caught your companion, Mercy Lewis, and she has confessed your fool plans—

Nothing, then a roar:

ABIGAIL!

He takes out a flask, drinks a gulp.

What will you do in Boston, girl? Or, God help you, the Barbados? Even with the thirty-one pound you stole from me?

(*To himself, in torment.*) Thirty-one pound, all my fortune...

YOUNG WOMAN. (*To us.*) If I see a torch, I shrink from it; if I hear dogs, I hold my breath—

PARRIS. (*Calling, again.*) *Get you back home to Salem, niece, and it will go softer on you!*

An owl hoots. A raven takes flight. Parris whispers to himself.

These woods...

Calling out again:

These woods are not safe at night, girl!

YOUNG WOMAN. (*To us.*) *I should have gone back, I should have—*

PARRIS. *Abigail! Repent! Repent, girl! And you shall be forgiven!*

Cursing as he goes on his way:

Damn you to hell, then!

Parris exits; the young woman steps forward as the forest recedes behind her.

YOUNG WOMAN. I ran—stole out of Salem before the first hanging. Bridget Bishop on Gallows Hill, and—and John Proctor not long after... Fled the village with my uncle's money, thirty-one pound, and—and... It were not just my uncle and I on that desolate, *hopeless* road. A lion, too, were following me—*chasing me*—its breath as icy as December wind through corn—

We hear what the young woman hears/heard. A voice echoing through trees; the sound of wind, the sound of wolves.

LION'S VOICE. Wherever you run, I will find you...

YOUNG WOMAN. And the lion's voice was the Devil's voice, it said:

LION'S VOICE. We made a pact, girl... You danced for me...

The young woman pulls an iron cross from her dress, clutches it.

YOUNG WOMAN. (*Still quiet.*) Be gone, Satan—

LION'S VOICE. You wrote your name in my book...

YOUNG WOMAN. Be gone from this High Road—

LION'S VOICE. You were baptized in my blood...

YOUNG WOMAN. *BE GONE*—The dawn is coming—*Be gone, be gone, be gone, BE GONE*—

The sound of the wolf-wind vanishes, suddenly—as if it were sucked away. The young woman, alone now, wears a modest dress and bonnet.

One

The lights change. The young woman is working her land now.

YOUNG WOMAN. (*To us.*) This is my garden. The dirt is rocky—a rocky, salty patch of earth—Cain’s garden... It is hard work, carving this land, but good work. I can grow vegetables and herbs here, so...I do. Onions, mostly.

As she places the cross in a prominent place on the stage:

The legend has it that I found my way to Boston and became a harlot—or that I boarded a ship for Barbados—but that were only the legend...

Back, fully, to us:

It is 1702 now—ten years after Salem—and this is my house. It sits at a remove from the center of Boston Town, a place called Weft Hill. It is a tall hill, so if you stand—

She points it out.

on *that* stump—you can see the river, and the harbor, and the ships in the harbor. There is a well, too, behind the house. And I have a horse—old, but she’s kicking still. And a tree on the property that—“that is as ancient as the Tree of Knowledge,” Margaret Hale would say. “Do *not* eat of its fruit,” she would say, but— (*Shakes her head.*)—it bears no fruit...

A shift.

Summertime, I stand on my stump...

She does.

and I spread my arms...

She does.

and the warm breeze off the river seems to lift me... And I become

a bird, a beautiful golden bird that beats its wings towards the sun...

For a moment, she does seem like she's a bird, free, then—A young man lurches into the garden. He is handsome, in his late 20s. Scruffy, unshaven, lean. A bit unsteady.

YOUNG MAN. (*An edge of desperation in his voice.*) Good day—

YOUNG WOMAN. Good day to you.

YOUNG MAN. Is this the pest-house, then?

YOUNG WOMAN. It is.

YOUNG MAN. Are you Ruth Meadow?

RUTH. I am. What's your business here, sir?

YOUNG MAN. I am just arrived on the *Speedwell* this morning, Goody Meadow, and I—I fear I may be sick.

RUTH. Sick how?

YOUNG MAN. For four days, my head has ached. Here. And here... Like a nest of bees. And for three days, I have sweated until my clothes were sopped. And the last *two* days, I have vomited my guts over the side of the *Speedwell*.

RUTH. Sea-sickness. The storms—

YOUNG MAN. Years I have been on the sea and never once puked.

RUTH. If you thought yourself sick, why did you not stop at Castle Island?

YOUNG MAN. (*Overlapping with the previous line.*) Because I have visited that place, Goody Meadow, and seen how those sick with the pox are quarantined there. I saw one man on a bed... (*Shudders.*) Every inch of his skin were covered with blisters and pus. His body ached him awful, he said. They had not moved him, nor changed his bedding in—weeks, he said. (*He were lying in his own filth.*) When *I* moved him—

RUTH. (*Bad idea.*) *You moved him?!*

YOUNG MAN. (*Defensively.*) To ease his discomfort; I did not know!

Beat.

Half his skin came off in a bloody, ravaged mess, sticking to the sheets, the way it did.

She goes to him, feels his face.

RUTH. You *are* hot. Open your mouth. That is where the pox eruption first occurs.

He opens his mouth. She looks in it—nods. He closes his mouth. Ruth continues.

A few sores on your tongue.

YOUNG MAN. Oh, God—

He starts to panic.

I *felt* it, I *felt* it take root, in my blood—

RUTH. (*All business; don't go there.*) Where is your ship come from?

YOUNG MAN. Barbados.

RUTH. Were any else with you sick?

YOUNG MAN. They say no, but I think—three men, yes.

RUTH. There are hospitals in town—with proper surgeons. Proper beds.

YOUNG MAN. I have no money.

RUTH. Surely your captain would—

YOUNG MAN. Goody Meadow, *please*. They say, in town, that you know this monster better than any surgeon. They say you take pity on the pitiful. They say you keep your affairs private. That you are—that Ruth Meadow be a woman of God.

A beat, then.

RUTH. Get you inside—Hurry—

YOUNG MAN. Thank you. Thank you, Goody Meadow—

He starts to head for the house.

RUTH. What's your name?

YOUNG MAN. John—

Ruth reacts.

John Brown. I come from Maine.

Ruth follows John into the house. He's unsure of where he should go.

RUTH. Take off your coat and sit you there. (*The bed.*) The dis-temper lives in your blood—as you felt. To start, we must balance your humors.

ABIGAIL/1702

by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa

2M, 2W, 1 boy (doubling)

In this tale of New England witchery, it is ten years after the harrowing and tragic events of the Salem witch trials. Abigail Williams—the lead accuser who sent twenty people to their doom as a young girl—now lives under an assumed name on the outskirts of Boston, quietly striving to atone for her sins. When a handsome stranger arrives claiming to be a sailor in need, Abigail takes him in, and long-dormant passions awaken within her. Love starts to grow between the two—an unlikely flower cracking through salty earth. But their contentment is short-lived, for someone else is coming for Abigail, someone who has been looking for her since she danced in the weird woods of Salem. The Devil is demanding Abigail's soul, and a debt will be paid—but first, Abigail must make peace with the woman she most wronged...

“Aguirre-Sacasa’s skillful expression of religion and depiction of a woman’s struggle for her soul is mesmerizing.”

—**The Times Herald-Record**

“ABIGAIL/1702 is literary brain food...not so much a sequel to The Crucible, but instead a unique retelling of Faust...full of heart and conviction.”

—**The Poughkeepsie Journal**

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