

The individual and society (the crucible)

Literature, American Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* is a tale of hysteria and tragedy. According to Bonnet, *The Crucible* is a complex story with dual emphasis on the individual and on society. The article "Society vs. The Individual in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*" explains that constant shift between two very different ideas. The play is constantly switching between the two poles. Both society and the individual play distinct important roles in the play, but the two are also very intertwined, and to pull them apart would be to ruin the play.

Bonnet then goes on in more detail the roles of these two ideas, exploring them through the author himself, the society, setting, and language. I agree with Bonnet's analyzation of *The Crucible* because I think that there is a very complex relationship between the society and the individual in the play.

One of the first things that the author of the article points out, is that the author himself has contradictory statements on the roles of the society and the individual.

Miller says that his central impulse in writing the play was the interior psychological question of guilt. In an interview with Miller, he says that he wrote the play to emphasize the conflict between people and not the conflict within somebody (Bonnet). I agree with the author's opinion that the even Miller is ambiguous about what the focus of the play is, perhaps because he himself doesn't really know, or perhaps because he wants the reader to discover that for his or herself. Miller, in his authorial statements even lays stress on the importance of the sense of community (Bonnet), all while giving important personal characters lives.

Something else that interested me while reading the article was the way the author described the Puritan society. According to Bonnet, the unity of the community is what eventually tears it apart. I hadn't thought of the society that way before. The perfectness of the community, and the unity that that brings also leaves behind an inevitable sense of suspicion among its members. Even the set up of this society is something that Bonnet uses to exemplify her point, "The Crucible... can be seen as a magnification of petty, selfish quarrels occasioned because the individual's desires are curbed by the authoritative state."

One of Bonnet's most interesting points to me was the importance of the setting, "...the three remaining acts all take place- literally or symbolically- in court." Bonnet gives evidence from Act 2 in the Proctor house when John is being interrogated as though in court. Act 3 actually takes place in the court, and act 4 in a prison. Bonnet highlights the fourth act because it focuses more on John Proctor's personal case, but it also illustrates an important connection between the community and one's own conscience, "It illustrates how conscience...the essential being of man, is manipulated by society." Some of the others that had been accused of witchcraft gave in and falsely confessed to witchcraft, whereas others (like John and Rebecca Nurse) did not. The ones who had given in were the ones that had been manipulated by society. They knew that they had done nothing wrong, and yet society would not let them live if they did they not confess. Another thing that I found very interesting was the idea of language in the play. Bonnet describes language as the demonic force of the play.

The people are condemned with it, and those that don't die must use it falsely to live. Honesty is useless in the play. John Proctor and Rebecca Nurse are two of the most people I've ever read about, and yet their honesty is what kills them. The only time that honesty would have helped anyone is when Elizabeth is asked what happened between John and Abigail, and this is the one instance where an honest person lies. It is frustrating, but I hadn't realized the full importance and role of the language until after reading this article. I agree completely with the analysis of the play that Bonnet gives because I do think that there is a very complex relationship between the society and the individual in *The Crucible*. Through all four of these aspects, Bonnet is able to show the relationship between the two important facets of the play.