

# Conformity, imbalance of power, and social injustice

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



A “ Great Drama” is a play in which an audience can find personal relevance. It is something which an audience can relate to. A great drama should have meaning to audiences for multiple generations. Arthur Miller’s “ The Crucible” successfully related to its audience and left us with messages that still echo today. The Crucible must be considered to be a great drama because of Miller’s skillful play writing which created a script that not only addressed the idea of conformity in American culture, but also illustrated the unreal amount of power that select individuals hold because they define the means by which we all live. These people make decisions on issues like what is considered to be right or wrong. These people have existed as long as history can acknowledge and during the period when The Crucible was first performed in America, this was a very current and delicate issue because of the actions of the House Un-American Activities Committee in Hollywood. Conformity is an idea that has plagued mankind for ages. It is a strong theme in The Crucible, and Miller’s audience can draw parallels to it in their own lives. In The Crucible, the need to conform to the church’s views and that of its minister is quite evident. The characters in the play find themselves in a very difficult situation. They must either turn their backs on what they believe in and lie by admitting to having had “ relations with the devil”, thereby conforming with the church’s wishes, or they must follow their individualistic beliefs and refuse to lie. This kind of pressure has been a theme throughout American culture forever. Miller was able to use this theme to make his audience think about where they would draw the line. People understood that these kinds of situations were around them everyday: was it more important to conform to company policy no matter

what? Or was it more important to vocalize personal views, and risk getting fired? Was a person necessarily “ bad” if they didn’t live by the rules of the Church? Or was it alright to have ones own interpretations of those rules. These are just a few of the questions that people may have been asking themselves during the fifties. The Crucible should be considered a great drama just because of it’s all encompassing theme of conformity. It is one which everyone will find personal relation to forever. The Crucible has so much more to it that it needn’t be considered great drama on the basis of a good theme alone. It also attacks the poor balance of power that we can see around us everyday. Miller shows us how much power a sole individual can have when that person defines the ideologies or beliefs by which we live. During the Salem Witch Trials religion was, much more so than now, the answer to what people didn’t understand. So as a result, ministers and priests were extremely powerful because they were the only people that were “ qualified” to interpret the rules of their religion. They were considered to be the voice of God. Back in Salem, how could anything have been more powerful than that? Nobody could question the priests because they would then be questioning God. Which of course was completely taboo. So a person in such a position of power could say nearly anything they wanted, such as deciding that “ cleansing” was needed in Salem. And, as a result, people would listen and it would be done, but not necessarily deemed to be right. In the 1950’s the idea of an imbalance of power was still an issue. After just starting to recover from the Holocaust, which was fueled by the very same need for “ cleansing” as in Salem but on a larger scale, Americans were bewildered as to how easily people could be manipulated by those in a

position of great power. Hitler had just basically accused a few million people of being witches. Americans could see how weak they were. One could not question the government, the military, or the church. To this very day, a huge amount of people are still afraid of questioning the church – look at the issue of abortion and the Catholic Church's position upon it for example. Miller portrayed the priests and judges in *The Crucible* as that certain type of people that Americans will always be up against in the struggle for power. While the Church and its' ministers isn't quite as powerful now because people can openly admit having no belief in God without fear of being hung, we now have a new group of people that decide what is true and what is not. Science is the new religion and scientists the new priests. Scientists are the only people capable of interpreting what all of the math and formulas mean. And as a result, the rest of us openly accept their conclusions to be the true. This is the same kind of reliance that people put on the church two hundred years ago. And at that time, you didn't question it. The church was always right. *The Crucible* is a great drama because it addresses the issue of conformity in American culture and questions the amount of power that we allow those to have whom are supposedly more educated than the majority of the population and are responsible for defining the ideologies and beliefs by which we live. At the time when *The Crucible* was first being performed something was taking place that was very alike the Salem Witch Trials. In Hollywood, the House Un-American Activities Committee was investigating the film industry for communist activities. Actors, writers, and directors were interrogated as to whether or not they had involved themselves in any kind of relations with the Communist Party. If people didn't readily conform to the

HUAC's line of questioning, and answer their questions regardless of whether or not they were deemed intrusive or not, it was assumed that they had been involved with the Communist Party. It was thought that the Communists were trying to gain control of the American film industry for propaganda purposes. As a result, those individuals that were thought to be in any way associated with the Communists were blacklisted in Hollywood and could no longer work there. As history has shown us, the injustices that occurred during the Salem Witch Trials continue to go on. Most obviously by the HUAC in America at the time of Miller's *The Crucible*. We see parallels between the Salem Witch Trials and other issues even today. Most recently, the military wanted to discharge any gay men in service. These kind of injustices will always exist. *The Crucible* addresses the idea of a group of select people choosing another group for a scapegoat to a supposedly determined "problem" that exists. This is yet another reason why *The Crucible* should be considered to be great drama. Arthur Miller's, *The Crucible*, addressed issues which were as important to Americans in the 1950's as they are today. The idea of conformity is one which any given individual will always face. People who define the ideologies and beliefs by which we live will also always exist. As will the accusations made by one group of select individuals towards groups of others in order to support their cause, or solve their problem. The House Un-American Activities Committee was doing exactly that in the 1950's which was why the idea of "cleansing" in *The Crucible* was so relevant to Americans. Arthur Miller's play took on very strong themes and took a stand against issues that are still pertinent to date. Great drama is something in which an audience can find relevance and

relation. Great drama is drama that will always be important. The Crucible is a play that no one will ever be able to ignore because of Miller's ability to touch issues and themes that have plagued mankind throughout history and will continue to do so in the future.