

The crucible and year of wonders



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Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* and Geraldine Brooks' novel *Year of Wonders* are both works that explore the treatment of individuals under oppressive theocratic ruling. Both Miller's and Brooks' works are aligned with key themes of superstition, suspicion of witchcraft, and unknown cause of diseases which lead the communities to unravel and fraction in 1660's Salem and Eyam. Brooks' novel *Year of Wonders* exemplifies the manifestation of female power contoured against theocratic standard, creating religious boundaries, whereas Miller illustrates the ability of religion to unite or divide an isolated society against inner turmoil. In both Miller's play and Brooks' novel, suspicion of witchcraft and unknown cause of the plague sparks mass hysteria in their religious society, causing the people's faith to sway.

Miller's play and Brooks' novel both depict the lack of empowerment women face in their oppressive societies, as their actions are often dictated by their theocratic society. Through the inclusion of Tituba, Miller highlights the injustice that women face despite their continuous plea for innocence. Regarding their condemnation, Miller's stage directions suggest that superiority of women is inexistent, with Tituba "fall[ing] to her knees" begging for justice and mercy despite her innocence to the accusations of her "dancing in the forest." Through Tituba's prosecution, the audience is encouraged to notice the overshadowing injustice casted on women by their theocratic ruling. Miller exemplifies this concept through Martha Corey's character, accused by her husband, Giles Corey, she is targeted as a witch due to his suspicion of "reading strange books." In contrast, *Year of Wonders* compares the array of ways in which women strive for autonomy in their highly religious society. Brook personifies Anna as a "timid girl" whose

resilience is to rebel and completely defy social norms; when she launches onto Anteros which symbolises Eyam's women striving and overcoming the theocratic suppression, exercising that woman should be "shackle to their menfolk". These two texts highlight that the lack of empowerment women face doesn't grant them the opportunity to voice out their opinions which adds fuel towards the suspicion of witchcraft for the villagers in the communities.

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In both Miller's play and Brooks' novel, suspicion of witchcraft and unknown cause of the plague sparks mass hysteria in their religious society; leading faith to sway. Brooks' heroine, Anna Frith gradually moves from adhering to religious observance and questions her "flimsy; tattered" faith in God. As she pursues a scientific understanding of nature, she comes to reject superstition and begins to regard the plague "as a thing neither of God or the Devil, but simply a thing in nature." Brooks symbolizes that through a complex understanding, Anna becomes a more vigilant character that isn't swayed by binary thinking. In contrast, none of Miller's characters question their faith in God. Even though Proctor may well declare "God is dead," John and Elizabeth still maintain their devoted belief in Christianity. Indeed it is their trust in God's mercy and his offer of redemption that empowers John Proctor to defy Judge Danforth's court and instead places his faith in God's eternal salvation that other "judgement (that) awaits us all" to which

Rebecca Nurse refers as they are about to be hanged. Proctor's believes more in beneficent, loving and compassionate God than a vengeful punitive God. In both *The Crucible* and *Year of Wonders*, John Proctor and Anna Frith both spark innovative thinking which leads them to a division within their society.

Salem's strict religious community in *The Crucible*, superstition is rife and scientific explanations are minimal, causes the community to divide and respond to the crisis in an upheaval manner. Conversely, *Year of Wonders* illustrates the power of community during a time of crisis, where superstitions infects Eyam. Miller encapsulates John Proctor as a vessel of justice whose suffering from mental torment from his religious moral code. John Proctor struggles to "mount the gibbet like a saint" in the divided community where law is powered by superstition. However, Giles Corey "fearsome" cry for "more weight" and Rebecca Nurse's mature distinction between temporal and spiritual authorities-"let us go to God for the cause of it" serves as an inspiration to John Proctor to "show honor now, show a stony heart and sink them [the authorities] with it." Miller positions his audience to understand that his conflict protagonist inevitably clash with the men with ordained authority such as Reverend Parris and Governor Danforth; hence resulting in the division of the Salem community. Whilst mass hysteria spreads wildly through Miller and Brooks' theocratic society, Brooks presents the Mompellions as figure of strength that plays a major role in bringing the people of the village together selflessly. Brooks describes the mob's "crazed" voices that "screamed" with "frenzy" to emphasis that there is no rational evidence to justify their accusations. With the use of religious

leadership in Eyam, Mompellion condemns the hysterical actions of the drunken mob that attacks the Gowdies “ Fools! Ignorant wretches!” has pure altruistic intentions to terminate further development of the accusations of witchcraft, bring the Eyam community together. Both Miller and Brooks showcase how the effect of superstition can weaken the cohesive bond between communities.