

- 'I say God is dead'
- 'At that time, you see, we all of us believed that god listened to such prayers'
- Compare the roles and effects of religious belief in the two communities

When crises strike and religious community, religious beliefs of all individuals are tested, and become permanently altered. Both Geraldine Brooks' *Year of Wonders* and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* explore this idea, along with the consequences that arise when religious beliefs conflict with observable evidence. Eyam, being set in the outskirts of London during The Enlightenment, exhibits a transition away from religious belief as a whole, towards science and logic. However, Salem's community, even more so isolated from the outside world, never loses religious faith, rather condemning the theocracy which teaches it. Throughout, a mixture of religious and individual leaders in both communities were required to look past the religious teachings in order to diffuse the fallout of their crises.

Both texts are set in religious 17th Century societies where their religious leaders were regarded as the voices of God, hence held ultimate power over the faithful community. However, Eyam represents the dawn of the transition away from religion, through a more relaxed and tolerant Christian teaching; compared to Salem's strict and unforgiving Puritan theocracy. Eyam's rector Michael Mompellion exhibits this relaxed teaching through his Sunday Oath Sermon, in which he describes the plague as 'a casket of gold' and a way to 'secure the valuable ore within' Eyam. This powerful optimism, combined with his assertion that 'God has singled us out' relays his ability to interpret such a deadly force as coming from God, yet retain positivity. This acts as an inversion of Salem's religious leaders, who would see anything of harm as from the Devil. Therefore, Mompellion's optimism, which stems from religious belief, is praised by Brooks as an ideal role of religion in society; as opposed to Miller's condemnation of the theocracy. Mompellion's decision to 'let none enter and none leave', quarantining Eyam and delaying the spread of the plague to the surrounding villages; displays his strength to make the painful choice to 'render' Eyam, as a selfless and worldly contribution to the wider community. This selflessness depicted through Mompellion's use of his position as rector is unlike the effects of most religious leaders in Salem, who instead of diffusing the hysteria of crisis, actually act as a source of it.

While both texts exhibits religious leaders who carry the ability to inspire their communities, Miller presents this as an impossibility, due to human's nature to preserve their status and power. In a similar societal position to rector Mompellion, Salem's Reverend Parris is characterised as overtly concerned with his 'many enemies', which he believed will 'ruin [him]'. Parris' hysterical and worried tone here emphasises that he feels personally attacked and scared for his own status, despite the supposed witchcraft being a concern for the entire community. The irony of Betty, his ten year old daughter being 'witched' beside him, yet he is only concerned with himself further reveals Parris as irresponsible and incompetent of even caring for one child, let alone leading a town. This is contrasted with Mompellion's worldly concern for the entire community, within and external to Eyam, through which Miller emphasises that religious leaders were almost useless and had no real role in diffusing the hysteria. In fact, Proctor's frustrations that 'God is dead in Salem' emphasises that religion had lost its meaning in Salem, and the way it was taught in by those like Parris actually worsened the scenario. Parris' 'preach[ing] of hellfire and damnation' acts less of a way to solve the crisis as Mompellion's decisions did, but rather was a way to scare the society to conform and blindly listen to his words for guidance, which actually catalyses the witch hunt. Since Miller uses the religious leaders of Salem to represent political leaders during the era of McCarthyism, he contends they are universally detrimental to society, regardless of setting or time. *Year of Wonders* is not such an allegory, and presents idyllic religious leaders, who inspire Eyam to take the right steps to offset the crisis.

While both Brooks and Miller depict religion as a situationally important force to hold a community together, they also contend that religious belief can be a detriment to advancement of a society. As *Year of Wonders* is set in The Enlightenment, character's advancement away from religion and towards science comes relatively seamlessly, with some entirely abandoning their faith. Anna, after losing 'all [she] had to life for' to the plague, realises that 'perhaps the Plague was neither of God nor the Devil', as the rest of Eyam would believe. Brooks depicts the transition towards understanding that 'thing[s] of nature' exist and that 'God [or] the Devil' are not dictating all events; as necessary for some crises to be overcome. Brooks juxtaposes plague remedies based on superstition and religion, such as 'a spell inscribed' with abracadabra written in a triangle and relying on 'believ[ing] that god listened to such prayers' with Anna's departure from Eyam's archaic religious beliefs to marry 'the most famous doctor in Barbary'. The disparity in logic and science between these 'plague remed[ies]' reemphasises how Anna was forced to depart Eyam and move to a non-religious country, as she no longer felt the religious beliefs in Eyam were compatible with her newfound aspirations for medicine. Therefore, Anna, despite being able to personally grow, did not have the rest of Eyam develop alongside her. However, such conflict in religious belief in Salem led to widespread, communal reforms, rather than individuals personally changing. Reverend Hale subverts his role as a religious leader, despite 'damnation [being] doubled on a minister who counsels men to lie', he pleases for John Proctor to 'confess [his] name to lies'. This comes as a result of Hale recognising that the Puritan court system is corrupt and unjust towards Proctor, and feels a need to rectify the theocracy's mistakes. Therefore, his remark that 'no man knows when a harlot's cry will end his life' is entirely in rebellion of the theocratic values he was expected to uphold; with the slanderous term 'harlot' condemning the other religious leaders for their ignorance in blindly trusting Abigail, as she was only feeding them evidence which affirmed their religious beliefs. Miller's closing remark that 'the theocracy in Salem was broken', partly as a result of Hale's protest against the theocracy's dogmatic, misguided religious faith towards what they perceived as 'voice of heaven'. So while Hale's disillusionment away from the way Puritanism is practiced is not as severe as Anna's complete abandonment of religion, the effects of his realisation that religion and court should be separated allows for widespread reform throughout Salem, while *Year of Wonders* is more of a story of personal empowerment for Anna.