In the early days of America, religion heavily influenced every aspect of life, especially literature, because America was founded upon freedom of religion; so, many different places had many different religions and beliefs. Many of these religions were based off Protestantism or Catholicism. These religions believed in the powers of not only God but also of Satan. This was especially prominent in places where the main religion was Puritanism. Because of a strong belief in the Devil's power, many people believed witches were present in their communities. This belief and fear of witchcraft affected the lives of many Americans and influenced the literature of the time period. The influence of witchcraft in society at the time was obvious. It can be seen in the infamous witch trials and the harsh punishment of those accused and in the hysteria caused by fear of this.

_The Crucible_ is one of the most well-known pieces of literature about the witch trials. It is a play written by Arthur Miller based on real events. He uses the names of real people and bases it on the Salem witch trials. In _The Crucible_, a group of young girls are discovered dancing in the forest by a reverend. One of the girls passes out and the small, Puritan town is filled with rumors of witchcraft. Confession after confession and accusation after accusation cause confusion and hysteria in the town. Those close to the accused witches try to convince them to confess falsely to save their lives, for in the witch trials, those who confessed and repented of their sins were spared and those who became hostile and denied the accusations were put to death. In the end, none of the accused confess for they do not want to accept the shame and reputation that comes with it, and they are all sent to the gallows to be executed. This play is not completely fact, but it does show what the witch trials were like and how much hysteria and unrest it caused in communities.

Abigail Williams is one of the major female characters in _The Crucible_. She is the one leading the group of girls dancing in the woods. She is one of the biggest troublemakers out of all the girls because she is not afraid to accuse even her dearest friends. This can be seen when she said, “Let either of you breathe a word, or the edge of a word, about the other things, and I will come to you in the black of some terrible night and I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you. And you know I can do it; I saw Indians smash my dear parents’ heads on the pillow next to mine and I have seen some reddish work done at night, and I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down!” (Act 1)

She fully understands the consequences of being found guilty of witchcraft and knows confessing falsely and declaring she repented and is with Jesus again will save her from execution. She also decides to accuse multiple other women when she confesses. “I want the light of God, I want the sweet love of Jesus! I danced for the Devil; I saw him, I wrote in his book; I go back to Jesus; I kiss His hand. I saw Sarah Good with the Devil! I saw Goody Osburn with the Devil! I saw Bridget Bishop with the Devil!” she proclaimed. This shows how in the witch trials, those who were deceitful and dishonest were spared and those who were innocent but did not want to accept shame or bring others into it were not.
Being accused as a witch could potentially ruin someone’s career, reputation, or life. Those who confessed and were not put to death were feared and shunned by others, for they were believed to at one time had made a pact with the Devil and no other citizens would want to associate themselves with someone who could do such evil. This can clearly be seen when John Proctor goes to confess and repent but refuses to once he is told the confession must be made public. Not only did John Proctor fear for his reputation because he was an accused witch, but also because he feared an affair he had earlier in the play would be made public as well. He declared, “Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!”

The influence of witchcraft can also be seen in the teachings and sermons of the time. Jonathan Edwards’s “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” is all about the wrath of God and the eternal fire of Hell for those who turn away from God. It is not directly about witchcraft, but the influence can still be seen through the tone and harshness of the sermon. The tone is very dark and disturbing. Edwards tells of the “great furnace of wrath” and “a wide bottomless pit full of the fire of wrath” (Edwards 98). This is very similar to the preacher, Mr. Parris, from *The Crucible*. John Proctor speaks of Mr. Parris this way: “I have trouble enough without I come five miles to hear him preach only hellfire and bloody damnation. Take it to heart Mr. Parris. There are many others who stay away from church these days because you hardly ever mention God anymore” (Miller 28-29).

Witchcraft strongly influenced American literature and still does today. For example, the Harry Potter series (though British in origin, clearly extremely popular in America) is based on witchcraft. The tone of literature of and at the time of the witch trials is very gloomy and disturbing. In some cases, like *The Crucible*, the influence is very obvious, but in some, such as Edwards's sermon, it is more indirect. Whether it is the direct plot or just sways the tone, witchcraft and the witch trials have had a heavy impact on American Literature.

BIBLIOGRAPHY