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Chapter 2

Showing It as It is Through (Postmodern) Parody: History's Spectrality and Anachronism

In this chapter I will read *The Crucible* in relation to the past as a postmodern play. This may seem strange since Miller is not known as a postmodernist author. Moreover, in the light of the previous chapter, it may even seem inconsistent, since historiography's desire for truth was a paramount target of criticism in postmodern works of art. Still, there are reasons to consider this work as a postmodern play. One concerns the specific modes in which it deals with history, another the way in which theatre intermingles with narrative. Miller himself inserted important explanatory narrative parts in the authorized edition of the play, as we have already seen, such as the following, in which he describes one of the main characters:

Mr. Hale is nearing forty, a tight skinned, eager-eyed intellectual. This is a beloved errand for him; on being called here to ascertain witchcraft he felt the pride of the specialist whose unique knowledge has at last been publicly called for. Like almost all men of learning, he spent a good deal of his time pondering the invisible world, especially since he had himself encountered a witch in his parish not long before. That woman, however, turned into a mere pest under his searching scrutiny, and the child she had allegedly been afflicting recovered her normal behavior after Hale had given her his kindness and a few days of rest in his own house. However, that experience never raised a doubt in his mind as to the reality of the underworld or the existence of the Lucifer's many-faced lieutenants.¹⁰⁰

One could read this quote as the narrative underpinning of what is supposed to be a dramatic person or character. Reverend John Hale himself is given a history, with details ('tight skinned') that can work to produce the effect of the real, as Barthes defined it.¹⁰¹ Such information comes in handy and might even be necessary for actors, directors and readers alike. In fact, more modern plays

¹⁰⁰ Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 32.

¹⁰¹ Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect', in *The Novel: An Anthropology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*, ed. by Dorothy J. Hale (Malden, MA: John Wiley, 2006), pp. 229-34.

contain such passages. Narrative, in that case, would not be substantial to the plot itself. Yet there are more narrative underpinnings, as we have seen. As I argued in chapter 1, the entire play is underpinned by a historical narrative, or, depending on the scale of focus, several ones. In the first instance there is no need to devote particular attention to this intermingling of dramatic text and narrative, apart from the fact that narratives, because of their logico-chronological orderings, are suitable vehicles for the writing of history.

However this is complicated by a passage a little further on in the text of the play. In his description of the Reverend John Hale, Miller contrasts the historical times of Salem with the hunt for Communists in the 1950s, when he states that there may be an analogy between the two:

The analogy, however seems to falter when one considers that, while there were no witches then, there are communists and capitalists now, and in each camp there is certain proof that spies of each side are at work undermining the other. But this is a snobbish objection and not at all warranted by the facts. I have no doubt that people *were* communing with, and even worshipping, the Devil in Salem, and if the whole truth could be known in this case, as it is in others, we should discover a regular and conventionalized propitiation of the dark spirit.¹⁰²

Several points require our attention here. First of all, there is Miller's conviction that 'the whole truth could be known'. At the same time he adds the revealing 'if,' which implies that not all of the historical truth can be known. As for the analogy between the Salem-period and the McCarthy-period, Miller tellingly does not suggest an uninterrupted history between the two but an analogy, which is not so much narrative in nature as *scenic*. One historical period is seen in the light of, or seen through, the other, or the two are mirroring each other whilst it remains unclear all along which is the dominant one. If we combine the two passages, narrative intermingles with scene, and historical truth with analogy. Apparently, drama and narrative – or to be more precise: historical narrative – are both relevant when studying *The Crucible* in relation to past and present, as are 'facts' or, for that matter 'the whole truth'. At the same time it seems as if the two periods concerned are pitted against each other by a

¹⁰² Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 34.

mirroring analogy that ‘seems to falter’, whereas the ‘seems’ suggests that the analogy does not falter at all.

Whether or not historical truths can be *known*, the dynamic of facts and their narrative representations and of the powers interested in them, or the way in which histories may be set in a *mise en scene* as if mirroring one another, these were all issues of the highest relevance to postmodern authors. I want to test in this chapter what a postmodern reading of *The Crucible* will bring us, or even whether the play may, in a sense, *be* a postmodern work. This is not a formal issue. It relates to the political power underlying this text and our dealing with it. Therefore, in this chapter, I want to consider the play as a fictional and dramatic play with narrative.

Linda Hutcheon defined the importance of fiction as narrative for postmodernist writing as follows:

All of these issues – subjectivity, intertextuality, reference, ideology – underlie the problematized relations between history and fiction in post-modernism. But many theorists today have pointed to narrative as the one concern that envelops all of these, for the process of narrativization has come to be seen as a central form of human comprehension, of imposition of meaning, and formal coherence on the chaos of events (H. White 1981, 795; Jameson 1981a, 13; Mink 1978, 132). Narrative is what translates knowing into telling (H. White 1980, 5), and it is precisely this translation that obsesses postmodern fiction. The conventions of narrative in both historiography and novels, then, are not constraints, but enabling conditions of possibility of sense-making (W. Martin 1986). Their disruption or challenging is bound to upset such basic structuring notions as causality and logic - as happens with Oskar’s drumming in *The Tin Drum*: narrative conventions are both installed and subverted. The refusal to integrate fragments (in novels like *The White Hotel*) is a refusal of the closure and *telos* which narrative usually demands (see Kermode 1966, 1967).¹⁰³

Hutcheon makes clear at the outset that narrative is the preferred medium for the emplotment of disparate fragments, both in fictional and historical discourse. On

¹⁰³ Linda Hutcheon, ‘Historiographic Metafiction: “The Pastime of Past Time”’, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 121.

the positive side, narrative makes cohesion possible. On the negative side, it works against truth, almost paradoxically, because it enforces cohesion and consistency on what in historical truth is a collection of fragments.

Hayden White emphasizes the point of narrative's power to bring cohesion to fragmented historical material. To him, postmodernists in architecture, the arts, literature, cinema and philosophy tend to view the past as vast, inchoate, fragmented, decontextualized, synchronic congeries of forms, media, genres, and ideas that can be treated as objects of truth.¹⁰⁴ White writes:

For the postmodernists, the past, irredeemably absent and accessible only by way of spoors, fragments and traces – is the place of memory, reverie and fantasy, and therefore of poetic inspiration, rather than a space of past human actions that can be recovered and represented more or less accurately as it really was (as it is for scientifically oriented, modern professional historians). Postmodernists are much more interested in the meanings which, by means more or less artistic can be produced by reflection on pastness than they are in truth understood as a finite set of true statements about discrete periods of history attested by a documentary record. There are few postmodernist histories because postmodernists reject what professional historians would recognize as scientific historiography.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps White is slightly too romantic, here, shifting from the scientific study of the past to the realm of 'reverie, and fantasy,' and on this last point he may even be contradicting himself. The contradiction consists in the fact that on the one hand scientific historiography needs to be rejected. But how can we distinguish or even notice reveries and fantasies if not in connection to some sort of scientific, historical accuracy? Seen from this angle, if *The Crucible* had only been that, a simple memory or reverie or fantasy, or merely a matter of 'poetic inspiration', it could not have had such a considerable political force because it could have been rejected, in the context of charged political realities, as precisely that: fantasy. There is no doubt that White's and Ankersmit's

¹⁰⁴ Hayden White, 'Postmodernism and Historiography', Special Public Opening Symposium 'After Metahistory: Lecture on Postmodernism' (unpublished lecture, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, 12 November 2009) n.p.

<http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/acd/gr/gsce/news/200901022_repo_0-e.htm>. [accessed 3 June 2013]

¹⁰⁵ White, 'Postmodernism and Historiography' n.p.

opponents would be those scientific historians who stick to a view of the past in terms of representing past events in ‘truth,’ which, according to White and Ankersmit, would never amount to much more than linguistically captured *narratives*. Yet *The Crucible* is a play. This provokes the question once more how this generic form relates to the problems outlined above.

Narrative’s power to provide cohesion and thereby twist the very fragmented nature of what it makes coherent, picks up on what Hutcheon ended with: narrative’s tendency towards *closure* (on which more later). Historical reality in itself is not closed as such, and cannot be closed. Both in history and fiction, moreover, narrative is the medium, which translates knowledge into telling and illustration. Narrative works epistemologically in the sense that it translates archival evidences and references into coherent pieces of writing. This has been problematized in postmodern fiction, as White rightly points out, and postmodern authors are most fascinated by the translation of ‘knowing into telling’ according to Hutcheon (who is following White’s major work, here, from 1973, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*).

Contrary to modernist assumptions regarding historical inquiry, as for example Lynn Fendler argues, postmodern historiography is based on those approaches that eschew modernist assumptions about history which include essentialism, grand narratives, notions of progress and emancipation, objectivity, truth, realism, teleology, coherence, universality, determinism, etc.¹⁰⁶ In White’s view this clearly does not mean that postmodernists are not interested in the past, history and its interpretation, or by historical truth for that matter. On the contrary, many postmodernists believe that a specifically postmodernist idea of ‘history’ provides a history to those who have been deprived of one. However, such a postmodernist form of reading history has little in common with what has been posited as the basis for modern, scientific historical research. In fact, as White maintains, it has closer ties to pre-modern conceptions of history understood as a reserve of examples to be drawn on for practical (political, pedagogical, ideological) purposes and as a discourse rather than a discipline.¹⁰⁷ This is where *The Crucible* borders on postmodern literature. It clearly uses the past as a reserve of examples and its purpose is indeed *practical*, although not *just* practical. For *The Crucible* truth does not

¹⁰⁶ Lynn Fendler, *Postmodern Historiography*. *Encyclopedia of Curriculum Studies*, ed. by Craig Kridel (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2010).

<<http://knowledge.sagepub.com/view/curriculumstudies/n358.xml>> [accessed 18 August 2014].

¹⁰⁷ White, ‘Postmodernism and Historiography’ n.p.

matter *per se*, in an essentialist or objective sense, it matters in relation to an opponent who was an expert in falsification, fabrication and fake accusations.

In relation to postmodernism's fascination with narrative, the question is how this problematic may relate to a *play* that is distinctly not 'telling' but 'showing'. However, is drama not the quintessentially suitable genre for both 'installing and subverting' narrative conventions; and can it not be characterized by its demand to be *performed* time and again and thus to 'refuse closure'? Or, to put this yet differently, is Hutcheon not talking, in a sense, about a theatricalization of history in postmodern fiction? By this I mean that postmodern authors are interested in unveiling the way in which telling may have the seemingly natural effect of showing, or that they will seek to dramatize the choices implied in telling a story in a particular way. Where and how can Miller be said to be postmodern in this complex of issues and generic possibilities?

2.1 Spectral Illusion: Doing Justice to the Facts between Telling and Showing

In the study of history, as was explained in chapter 1, the Salem trials have been recorded and narrated from various viewpoints. No single narrative can claim a monopoly on the truth and reality of the historical episode because, unavoidably, they are interpretations of the available data of evidences. As White argues, the issue of the relation between truth and reality in history is particularly evident in the difference between historiography and realist historical fiction. The writing of history deals with the representation of truth inherent in some part of reality in the past, whereas fiction has the prerogative to enter the domain of the possible without neglecting the truth while representing reality in its totality. White reflects on this relation as follows:

A simply true account of the world based on what the documentary record permits one to talk about what happened in it at particular times, and places can provide knowledge of only a very small portion of what 'reality' consists of. However, the rest of the real, after we have said what we can assert to be true about it, would not be everything and anything we could imagine about it. The real would consist of everything that can be truthfully said about its

actuality plus everything that can be truthfully said about what it could *possibly* be.¹⁰⁸

White's argument is at the same time extremely simple and complex. It is simple because any historical reality is *vast*. To describe historical reality in its entirety is simply impossible. The claim to truth can therefore only concern a small portion, a portion that the history writer will claim to be 'real'. That leaves a substantial amount of material, which is not a matter of concern in the historiographical imagination. White maintains, in this context, that disciplinary history focuses on the search for truth that belongs to the historical reality. Yet this 'real' can only be symbolized and can never be represented as a whole. This is why, according to White, the positivist trend in history to embark upon a search for the truth at the expense of anything that can be imagined about the 'real' in terms of probability, has reduced history to a lower status than modern scientific disciplines. Modern sciences aspire to grasp the 'real' while validating true hypotheses and many historians since the nineteenth century have strived to do the same. Thus disciplinary history has granted truth a benchmark value, represented by historians through their writings, which in turn are based on evidence-based proof.

However, the mere truth value is not enough to conclude that historical writing is able to *completely* represent a historical reality. That is why a realistic representation of the past, in terms of fiction, should consist of anything that can be truthfully said about it but also anything that can be faithfully imagined as a historical possibility. White refers, here, to the inclusion of artistic means in the representation of historical reality that enable any such representation to have a broad view of the possibilities in the past. He argues:

The conjuring up of the past requires art as well as information. And the reason why historical studies are in crisis today is not because a bunch of wild-eyed 'postmodernists' have captured the minds of the impressionable young; it is because historical studies have manifestly failed in their efforts to become the kind of 'science' they hoped to become in the nineteenth century. Prior to this time, history was cultivated in profitable combination with *belles-lettres*, epistolography and philosophy, as branches of

¹⁰⁸ Hayden White, 'Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality', *Rethinking History* 9.2/3 (June/September 2005), p. 147.

rhetoric, serving as the foundation of a pedagogy of virtue and as a kind of archive of experience useful for statesmen, diplomats, soldiers and other servants of the public weal. But the scientization of historical studies was thought to require their severance from any connection between, not only poetic and rhetoric but also between philosophy and imaginative literature (the novel and especially the romance).¹⁰⁹

As a philosopher of history, White upholds the distinction between information and art, as if one could exist without the other, or as if the two were really distinct. Nowadays, so his argument runs, disciplinary history is in crisis because since the nineteenth century, the historians have abandoned non-scientific disciplines like philosophy, rhetoric, literature, art, etc. in order to claim history as a science that seeks the truth and rejects anything fanciful, imaginative and bordering on probability and conjectures. However this severance from other disciplines like rhetoric, literature, law, or philosophy did not make history truly scientific. Unlike scientific facts, historical writings are debatable and are often reversed through new interpretations. Most importantly, historiography is not simply the transfer of information. Historians *tell*. They use art. They might even use dangerous arts since they ‘conjure up’.

Although the very phrase ‘conjuring up’ would make any scientist or scholar nervous, such nervousness would very much interest postmodern authors. The Dutch philosopher of history, Frank Ankersmit, concurs with White’s thoughts when he says about his colleague historians that they:

...are painfully aware that historical debate rarely leads to conclusive results and that such regrettable things as intellectual fashions or political preference may strongly color their opinions about the past. In short, deep in their hearts historians know that, despite their emphasis on the necessity of accurate investigation of sources and on prudent and responsible interpretation, history ranks lowest in scientific status of all the disciplines taught at a university.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ White, ‘Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality’, p. 149.

¹¹⁰ F.R. Ankersmit, ‘Hayden White’s Appeal to the Historians’, *History and Theory* 37.2 (May 1998), p. 183.

Frank Ankersmit takes the view that historians mainly focus on interpretations of the available facts and evidences and that their debates are unavoidably coloured by the intellectual fashions of the times and also by the political preferences of the times. He also brings in a matter of hierarchy and academic politics when he claims that history ‘ranks lowest’ in scientific status. Not only are objectivity and truth most likely to be affected when historians represent an historical reality, they are politically in choppy waters for two reasons: their writing is always politically invested and, academically speaking, their writing is political.

Despite its positivist thrust, disciplinary history is evidently still not acknowledged as a scientific discipline. For White and Ankersmit this is no reason for despair. They emphasize how historical discourse utilizes *narrative* to emplot stories on the basis of past incidents and events, and they accept the inevitability of language as the medium to narrate. For several reasons this language contains rhetorical tropes and figures of speech in order to configure plots with a proper beginning, middle and end. Emplotment demands what White would call ‘tropological inventions’. In this respect, narrative is not a natural given in historical representations, as if narrative were a genre that enabled historians to shape stories from the past transparently. As Hans Kellner explains:

I do not believe that there are ‘stories’ out there in the archives or monuments of the past, waiting to be resurrected and told. Neither human activity nor the existing records of such activity take the form of narrative, which is the product of complex cultural forms and deep-seated linguistic conventions deriving from choices that have traditionally been called rhetorical; there is no ‘straight’ way to invent a history, regardless of the honesty and professionalism of the historian.¹¹¹

In light of my earlier discussion about *The Crucible*’s historical accuracy, Kellner would argue that narratives are not ontologically comparable to what one could ‘find’, like a letter or a stone. Narratives are a cultural form and product, depending on language conventions, which act as a medium that allows historians to translate real life events from the past into written records. These

¹¹¹ Hans Kellner, ‘Language and Historical Representation’, in *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. Keith Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 127.

past events do not repose in the archives as readymade stories which could somehow naturally be reproduced, they need to be fabricated. They cannot simply be *shown*, they need to be told.

The necessity of fabrication in the writing of history, or the impossibility of simply *showing* history, causes a distinct disciplinary unrest. Ernst van Alphen defines this unrest as a form of justified suspicion when he deals with the historians' thrust upon narrative. In clear consonance with White and Kellner, he writes:

But when considering what it is that makes the historical mode so urgent, the inevitable conclusion is that even history-writing is not good enough for the purpose. Many historians approach even the most elementary narrative plot with suspicion. They do have a point; narrative plots are always simplifications compared to the complexity of historical reality. And the coherence and unity of traditional plots produce meaning effects that may not have been present in the past. One aspect of the realist plot, for instance, is its closure: everything comes to an end, an end that somehow satisfies. And more often than not, that end is good. If the very shaping of facts into a narrative, however truthful, is inherently unable to do justice to the facts, then the only mode of representation that might satisfy, however poorly, is the archival mode: the collecting, ordering and labelling of facts, items, pieces of evidence, testimonies.¹¹²

Several elements are of relevance for my analysis of *The Crucible*. Narratives do not come into existence as true pictures of the historical events. They are rhetorical and cultural in nature and are served by linguistic tropes that elaborate upon the available facts and evidences in written and oral histories. Compared to the enormous complexity of historical facts, narrative plots are rather simplistic and artificially coherent to create meaning effects, leading for instance to happy endings (most of the times actually, as Van Alphen observes). Moreover, one defining characteristic of narratives is that they lead to forms of closure. Such closure is always artificial, which is why archival evidence may come to the rescue, as when 'items, pieces of evidence, testimonies' – as first-hand historical sources - are used to *show* how 'it' was, without such artificial closure. As Van

¹¹² Ernst van Alphen, 'Visual Archives as Preposterous History', *Art History* 30.3 (2007), p. 365.

Alphen suggests, they may somehow be a better source than narrative history to 'do justice to the facts.' I leave aside the paradoxical situation that arises as the interpretation of archives also requires narrative plots to link various dots dispersed throughout time. Yet of the essence is this 'doing justice to the facts.' Doing justice does not reside in the past. One does justice to a fact from the present and showing is of more importance here than telling.

When *The Crucible* seeks to do justice to historical facts, these facts are twofold. They are facts from the past but also from the present in which the play is written and in which it intervenes. For instance, John Proctor's statement to Danforth in Act 4 of the play bears a close resemblance to the public nature of confessions in both historical episodes: 'I have confessed myself! Is there no good penitence but it be public? God does not need my name nailed upon the church! God sees my name; God knows how black my sins are! It is enough!'¹¹³ The passage serves to connote both past and present, be it in different generic modalities. Regarding its relation to the past, this passage, and by implication the play as a whole, has first of all a narrative quality to it, in the form of the historical research underpinning it, which shaped the drama's *plot*. Secondly, in the written version of the play, narrative sections positioned and introduced the historical characters. In light of the past and the Salem trials historiography, the play is narrative in the sense that it is closed, in that it provides one of the many interpretations of the incident that have so far been presented by the historians and interpreters from other disciplines. In its relation to the present, the narrative of Miller's opponents is broken open by means of the play in a dramatic mode. Such a dramatic mode may connect to the 'archival mode' that Van Alphen talked about, as when a testimony from the past is presented that does justice to the facts and as such has an openness to it that jeopardises the narratives of closure.¹¹⁴ This is much more than what Barthes called the reality effect. Such an effect takes place, for instance, when Proctor speaks to Elizabeth in Act 2 and sketches the beauty of Massachusetts in winter: 'Lilacs have a purple smell. Lilac is the smell of nightfall, I think. Massachusetts is a beauty in the spring'.¹¹⁵ For the development of the plot lilacs are irrelevant. They simply serve to give the impression of reality. When John Proctor gives this testimony, however, this is clearly fictional but not entirely. Miller's historiographical

¹¹³ Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 129.

¹¹⁴ Stephen A. Marino, 'Poetry and Politics in *The Crucible*', in *Arthur Miller's The Crucible: Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: The Crucible*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), p. 161.

¹¹⁵ Miller, *The Crucible* p. 49.

mode of dealing with such testimony, through theatre, may also work, in part, under the heading of what Van Alphen calls an archival mode. It is then as if John Proctor is a voice from the past giving testimony in the present.

David Lewis dwells upon the fragmentary nature of such an archival mode when he states:

We depart from actuality as far as we must to reach a possible world where the counterfactual supposition comes true (and that might be quite far if the supposition is a fantastic one). But we do not make gratuitous changes. We hold fixed the features of actuality that do not have to be changed as part of the least disruptive way of making the supposition true. We can safely reason from the part of our factual background that is thus held fixed.¹¹⁶

Something is held factually fixed, despite counterfactuals. In *The Crucible*, Miller also introduces counterfactual suppositions, for instance by altering Abigail and Proctor's age, by showing the relentless wickedness of the prosecution and also by inventing a love triangle between John Proctor, Abigail and Elizabeth. But he did not alter historically proven facts, such as the roles played by each character in history. His play is not just a *play*. It is a play based on *research*.¹¹⁷ As such, the play is the opposite of historically naïve, however. It aims not to merely represent the past truthfully but to do so in order to be effective in the present. Miller alludes to this motive in his autobiography: 'I knew that to simply will a play into existence was to insure a didactic failure. By now I was far beyond the teaching impulse; I knew that my own life was speaking here in many disguises, not merely my time'.¹¹⁸ Thus, for Miller, there was clearly a personal element in this historical episode that he dramatized in his own times, which witnessed political witch-hunts of another sort. Yet this personal element was not a subjective matter. If we take Miller seriously, his own life is historically 'speaking,' as if it were an expressive subject. Likewise we could say that the historical characters in his play are historically 'speaking'. Of course, their creation is a matter of 'conjuring up' history as Sean Purdy puts

¹¹⁶ David Lewis, 'Truth in Fiction', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15.1 (1978), p. 42.

¹¹⁷ Miller, *Timebends*, p. 336.

¹¹⁸ Miller, *Timebends*, p. 338.

it.¹¹⁹ This conjuring up, however, can only get teeth if there is also an archival element to it, an element of labelling, of evidence, of testimony. Yet what is the difference then, between the reality of Miller's own life, which he made to speak through his work, and the reality of his characters?

It is relevant to emphasize, in this context, that the postmodern historiographers that I have focused on so far do not deny historical reality. On the contrary. According to Kellner, the honesty and upright professionalism of historians contributes to the writing of 'true' narratives. Such truthfulness, in turn, does not deny fiction. The rhetorical aspect of historiography is akin to literary representations, as Kellner suggests: 'If beginning and ending a historical text are artful, literary acts, then are not historical periods, or historical events themselves, equally literary creations, composed by the same conceptual process?'¹²⁰ Ankersmit elaborates on White's position on the metahistorical nature of the past in historiography, although not so much to raise this query to a level of radical dismissal of objective truth and ultimate scientific veracity in historical representation. Ankersmit writes:

Precisely by focusing on and by problematizing the historian's language, White demonstrates *not* the impossibility of getting hold of past reality, but the naiveté of the kind of positivist intuition customarily cherished in the discipline for how to achieve this goal. More specifically, what these positivist intuitions proudly represent as historical reality itself is a mere spectral illusion that is created by the historical discipline itself. Surely there is a historical reality which is, in principle, accessible to the historian. But historians have forgotten about this historical reality and mistaken the product of their tropological encoding of the past for the past itself.¹²¹

Plainly, Ankersmit accepts the objective existence of an historical past, as he does accept our ability to study it. This is something else, however, than the outcome of that study. In fact, Ankersmit hints at a metahistorical aspect of any historical writing. Such writing is not only a representation of a past reality but also and predominantly a verbal and intellectual construct that is impossible

¹¹⁹ Sean Purdy, 'Conjuring History: The Many Interpretations of the Salem Witchcraft Trials', *Rivier Academic Journal* 3.1 (Spring 2007), p. 13.

¹²⁰ Kellner, p. 129.

¹²¹ Frank Ankersmit, 'Hayden White's Appeal to the Historians', *History and Theory* 37.2 (1998), p. 187.

without the mediality of language, as a result of which it becomes a ‘spectral illusion’. In disciplinary history the *representation* of the past is presented unreflectively as a ‘show’, as an optimal and transparent picture of the historical truth. In both White and Ankersmit’s observations, this nevertheless amounts to representation, one that is illusionary or, rather, *spectral* as compared to the real past that was physically lived in by its real actors and participants.

In the context of *The Crucible*, this presents us with a doubly fictive, narrative and archival mode that relates to two different modes of *spectrality*. On the one hand the play, in its narrative mode, presents us with a spectral illusion of the past on the level of representation. On the other hand, as a drama, the play shifts to a more archival mode that depends on the fact that this play also is some sort of a testimony, in that it offers a spectral illusion of live bodies coming to us from the past through language and theatre performances (in chapter 5 we will come back to spectrality in yet another mode). The play thus works through a nuance, or perhaps it does much more than this, in the discussion about the postmodern nature of historiography. The question may not so much be whether historical representations relate epistemologically to events in the past but whether they relate ontologically to the construction of worlds in the present. This is particularly relevant in *The Crucible* because this play is re-enacting history in the context of its action in a present. In this context it does more than represent history, either in a narrative or archival mode.

2.2 Beyond Representing History?

As may have become clear, the relation of language with historical reality is not just a matter of the past, but it is not a matter of simple scientific epistemology either. Adrian Kuzminski, in his analysis of White’s notion of ‘metahistory’, correctly notes that the distinction between arguments and narratives for White is that ‘for arguments there are the modes of Formism, Organicism, Mechanism, and Contextualism; for emplotments there are the archetypes of Romance, Comedy, Tragedy and Satire; and for ideological implication there are the tactics of Anarchism, Conservatism, Radicalism and Liberalism’.¹²² Whereas the first two sets relate to argument and emplotment on the level of representation, the last set relates to an ideological position that not only concerns the present but an attitude, a position in, and a preference for a distinct world. The respective subcategories of arguments, plots and ideologies lend

¹²² Adrian Kuzminski quoting White in ‘A New Science?’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 18.1 (1976), p. 135.

historical writing more than a rhetorical tinge. They mean much more than the fact that history writing is inevitably reduced to encoded intellectual constructs in language. In fact, historiography understood in a truly postmodern sense weaves together past and present *ideologically*.

Both White and Ankersmit seem predominantly concerned with historiography in its relation to the past. They argue, for instance, that the postmodern nature of history as a discipline is evident from the relation between reality and language, which historians use to represent the past. Likewise, they observe that historical language retains an opacity that historians most often associate with the past reality itself. Although historical debates must revolve around finding a true picture of the past, this always concerns language as well as the words that mediate a past reality into its current representations. As already became clear, Ankersmit observes that, in their intellectual discussions and debates, historians frequently confuse historical language with the past reality itself. In this context Ankersmit argues that the postmodern nature of history as a discipline exposes and accounts for the neglect of the language-reality dichotomy displayed by historians when they confuse the truth-making capacity of language as a medium with the historical reality itself.¹²³

Nevertheless, his concern, and the concern of historians in general, is the past.

To be sure, Ankersmit's position cannot be reduced to the view that historiography relates only to the past. This is what John Zammito observes regarding Ankersmit's thoughts about language in historical representation:

Ankersmit claims that *sets* of statements – *texts* or 'narratios' or verbal representations – have logical or epistemological peculiarities that demand philosophical attention. For him, such sets taken as *wholes* expand ontology: they add new *things* ('narrative substances') to the world. In a word, there are some *things* that belong *both* to language and to reality, and historical representations are a primary instance. 'A historical representation is a thing that is made of language' (HR: 13) [sic.]. The point Ankersmit wants to make, without falling back into the analytic/synthetic dichotomy, is that 'language can be a truth maker no less than reality' (HR: 13). He is persuaded that as one moves from the natural sciences to the humanities, 'the indeterminacy of

¹²³ Frank Ankersmit, 'Historiography and Postmodernism', in *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. by Keith Jenkins (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 284.

truth by this compulsion of experience and truth by the compulsion of language will increase to the extent that it will be more difficult to pin down with precision which part of language corresponds to what chunk of reality' (HR: 37).¹²⁴

At first sight Zammito scrutinises Ankersmit's position on the relation between language and historical reality with reference to the sets of statements in representation. He argues that these sets of statements or verbal representations are distinctive and logical in nature with regard to knowledge about the past, and that they need to be assessed independently from a philosophic perspective. Yet they are also a source of production of new things which Ankersmit calls narrative substances. The world comprises both things that are historically real and present in the contemporary situation, not just on a linguistic level. Ankersmit anchors his argument in the proposition that language constructs truth, and that this is no less a truth-maker than reality itself.

Yet, I would argue that the shift of interest towards narratives and verbal representations after the linguistic turn and in postmodern approaches towards history has turned into an obsession. According to Samuel James, it is an obsession about: 'what humanity made of its world, and thereby displaced the question of how the world might be in itself'.¹²⁵ Here, clearly, the scope of the argument has been extended from a purely epistemological level to an ontological one. The question therefore is whether White and Ankersmit would want to follow James to the very end. As true historians, White and Ankersmit's position appears to be ambiguous. In a sense their attention remains by and large focused on the past. They assert, for example, that historians are actually at a loss when they claim to have grasped the past to the full and when they believe that their intellectual constructs explain a historical reality to the highest level. White and Ankersmit contend that, in fact, the historians' interpretations of the available facts are mostly linguistic representations, just like the representations of some past event or reality by literary artists who are better equipped to explain a *truth* through their imaginative insights about the 'probable' aspects of an historical reality that the historian might overlook. Here, however, they move towards the present, without acknowledging it. A literary work of art is not so

¹²⁴ John Zammito, 'Ankersmit and Historical Representation', *History and Theory* 44 (2005), p. 157.

¹²⁵ Samuel James, 'Louis Mink, "Postmodernism", and the Vocation of Historiography', *Modern Intellectual History* 7.1 (2010), pp. 152-53.

much judged for its scholarly adequate representation of the past but for its effective force in the present.

Ankersmit appears to be aware of this, or relates to this when he reflects on the postmodern concept of history:

To formulate this in the paradoxical manner so popular among postmodernists: the essence of the past is not, or does not lie in, the essence of the past. It is the scraps, the slips of the tongue, the *Fehlleistungen* of the past, the rare moments when the past 'let itself go,' where we discover what is really of importance for us. I suspect that at least a partial explanation can be found here for what Jorn Rusen referred to as the 'paradigm change' in present-day historiography, a paradigm change which in his opinion consists mainly of exchanging *makrohistorische Strukturen* for *mikrohistorische Situationen und Lebensverhältnisse* as the object of the historian's attention. What we are witnessing could perhaps be nothing less than the definitive farewell for the time being to all the essential aspirations which have actually dominated historiography as long as it has existed.¹²⁶

In first instance, Ankersmit maintains that recent interests have been shifted from macro-histories to micro-histories, which have in the past escaped the attention of historians as unimportant and non-significant in the context of their respective narrative plots. As John Rusen's observations suggest in this quote, the focus in postmodern historiography is on the localized narratives of the living conditions of the oppressed of history who have been denied a representation by those in power - as the latter merely had an interest in what they would want to call 'the essence and true meaning of history'. In this light, postmodernism sees history as comprising many small narratives, unlike the Enlightenment model of rationalist metanarratives. Ankersmit moreover observes that essentialism in history has been the guiding principle for historians in the West across the board. The Augustinian theological concept of history, for instance, was the precursor of its secularized version of science and positivism as the lone rescuer of humanity's progress.¹²⁷ Having said that, and despite the phrase 'what is really of importance for us,' the passage shows that

¹²⁶ Ankersmit, 'Historiography and Postmodernism', p. 289.

¹²⁷ Ankersmit, 'Historiography and Postmodernism', p. 289.

Ankersmit is an historian at heart, focusing on the past and not so much on the construction of new worlds in the present. To put this differently, his main focus remains epistemological, which is not very postmodern.

The above is of importance in relation to my postmodern reading of *The Crucible*. Does this play's power only reside in a (modernist) correct epistemologically testable narrative of past events (as I suggested in chapter 1) or does the play work performatively, by ontologically fusing two different worlds in order to produce something new? A fusion of two worlds may be found at play when John Proctor addresses Danforth in the climax of Act 4 and, in refusing to sign what he confessed, expresses how his soul has been seized from him through a false confession under duress and under pressure of the authorities:

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!¹²⁸

This is a character speaking from the past whereas equally well it could have been a contemporary of Miller who had gone through the anti-Communist prosecutions in the 1950s. In this context, the point would be that we move away from postmodernism's obsession with representation and its almost parasitic relation to modernism and modernity in terms of a critical response. This position of dependence is hinted at when White, for instance, states that: 'Postmodernism is a term which names, first a certain epochal self-consciousness, a sense shared by many artists and intellectuals of having to work and create in a situation deprived of the certainties of twentieth century modernism' (sic). This becomes even more explicit when he adds that postmodernism 'arose on the ruins of the search for certainty, objectivity, foundations and even truth itself that had underwritten the West's belief in 'progress' since the time of the enlightenment'.¹²⁹ According to White, consequently, the term postmodernism can be defined rather by what it has denied, rejected, or simply abandoned with regard to the philosophical and

¹²⁸ Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 130.

¹²⁹ White, 'Postmodernism and Historiography' n.p.

social endowment of the Enlightenment, than by any positive cognitive content or utopian aspiration of a distinctively modern kind.¹³⁰

As Brian McHale makes clear, postmodernism exists without any particular clear point of reference and it is a discursive artefact constructed by readers, writers and literary historians, as a consequence of which it can be constructed in a variety of ways.

Thus there is John Barth's postmodernism, the literature of replenishment; Charles Newman's postmodernism, the literature of an inflationary economy; Jean Francois Lyotard's postmodernism, a general condition of knowledge in the contemporary informational regime; Ihab Hasan's postmodernism, a stage on the road to the spiritual unification of humankind; and so on.¹³¹

Here we turn, by implication, from a focus on the past to a focus on the present since all the people mentioned by McHale act in the present. Literature is considered in this case not so much in terms of the adequacy of its representation, but in terms of its ability to make the world, or to make worlds, by battling one another through language. On the positive side this does not support any accusation of moral relativism. In fact, postmodernism encourages endless debate on all values. This also clearly emerges from Jane Flax's definition, from a feminist perspective, of the core issues of postmodernism:

These crucial subjects include: (1) contemporary Western culture - its nature and the best ways to understand it; (2) knowledge - what it is, who or what constructs and generates it, and its relations to power; (3) philosophy - its crisis and history, how both are to be understood, and how (if at all) it is to be practiced; (4) power - if, where, and how domination exists and is maintained and how and if it can be overcome; (5) subjectivity and the self - how our concepts and our experiences of them have come to be and what, if anything, these do or can mean; and (6) difference - how to conceptualize, preserve, or rescue it.¹³²

¹³⁰ White, 'Postmodernism and Historiography' n.p.

¹³¹ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York & London: Methuen, 1987), p. 4.

¹³² Jane Flax, 'Postmodernism: Thinking in Fragments', in *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p. 188.

So, according to Flax, postmodernism is concerned with our *understanding* contemporary Western Culture, the nature of the production of *knowledge* in its relation with power, and the *crisis* of philosophy. All three again emphasize issues of epistemology. Yet Flax considers postmodernism critically from a feminist standpoint, with reference to its failure to bring about change in the world apart from only interpreting it. To be sure, power is a dominant motif of postmodernism and it is studied in an attempt to discern the modalities of domination and the ways to overcome it. But Flax asks how practical postmodernism can become, in this respect, and how it can do justice to the subjects that are still struggling for emancipation and self-realisation. In general, the concept of subjectivity is analyzed in postmodern studies more with reference to what the self might *mean*, than for what it might *do*. As we will see in the conclusion of this thesis, it will take Judith Butler to overcome the postmodernist tendency to *read* differentially as opposed to *acting* differentially. The latter is also what Flax is concerned with.

Flax's position is of importance in my dealing with Miller's play, for if I read it as a postmodern play, some forms or aspects of postmodernism might have reduced its powers in terms of effect. The question is: which forms or aspects *empowered* it? In my take on the matter I consider a version of postmodernism relevant which considers historiography as a battlefield for truth. So I need to return to Linda Hutcheon.

2.3 *The Crucible* as a Postmodern Parody of History: Salem as the Parody of McCarthyism

The production of the play in the early 1950s is in itself not enough to call it postmodern. Yet, its intense self-reflexivity, and its obvious intention to intervene in the playwright's present political environment compel me to read *The Crucible* as a postmodern work. Its self-reflexivity is evident from the interspersed narrative commentary in the text which reminds the reader that he/she is reading a text, language, and a drama and not viewing a world without mediation. However, the point is that the drama itself facilitates a mapping of two worlds and the question is how we can understand this mapping. The latter is evident when Miller explains the genesis of *The Crucible* in an interview with Olga Carlisle and Rose Styron. In it he says that in the 1950s, when Senator Joseph McCarthy waved the card in the air by saying 'I have in my hand the names of so-and-so', it felt eerily similar to the standard tactic of seventeenth-

century prosecutors. In Salem, they would announce: ‘we possess the names of all those people who are guilty. But the time has not come yet to release them’. This was a way of inflicting guilt upon the whole village. Many responded genuinely and many out of fear. McCarthy re-enacted this show at the national level in the 1950s by demonizing the Communists.¹³³

The mapping of two worlds is distinct from the potential of postmodern fiction to represent history in order to open it up to the present. Linda Hutcheon explains this relation of historiography to the present in postmodern fiction as follows: ‘Postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological’.¹³⁴ Hutcheon elaborates on this in her essay ‘Historiographic Metafiction’:

In the postmodern novel the conventions of both fiction and historiography are simultaneously used and abused, installed and subverted, asserted and denied. And the double (literary/historical) nature of this intertextual parody is one of the major means by which this paradoxical (and defining) nature of postmodernism is textually inscribed.¹³⁵

The difference with White and Ankersmit is crucial. It concerns not so much opposing two approaches as the simultaneous realization of possibilities. So-called postmodern metafiction is a type of fiction that self-consciously addresses the devices of fiction without, however, turning everything into mere fiction. In drawing attention to itself as a work of art, the work both emphasizes artifice and exposes the truth inhering in it. In Patricia Waugh’s view, metafiction is a fictional writing that draws attention to itself as an artefact, not to ignore but to raise questions about the relationship between reality and fiction. In self-critically assessing its methods of construction, metafictional writings examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction and explore alongside the possibility of the truth of a world outside the literary texts.¹³⁶

¹³³ Arthur Miller, ‘Arthur Miller: An Interview’, interview by Olga Carlisle and Rose Styron, in *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller*, ed. by Robert A. Martin (New York: The Viking Press, 1978), p. 290.

¹³⁴ Hutcheon, ‘Historiographic Metafiction: “The Pastime of Past Time”’, p. 110.

¹³⁵ Linda Hutcheon, ‘Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and Intertextuality of History’, in *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*, p. 5.

¹³⁶ Patricia Waugh, ‘What is Metafiction and Why are They Saying Such Awful Things About it?’, in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London / New York: Longman, 1995), p. 40.

In *The Crucible*, the dynamic at play is similar when Miller introduces John Proctor through a narrative comment on his dramatic character in relation to historical realities outside the play:

But as we shall see, the steady manner he displays does not spring from an untroubled soul. He is a sinner, a sinner not only against the moral fashion of the time, but against his own vision of decent conduct. These people had no ritual for the washing away of sins. It is another trait that we inherited from them, and it has helped to discipline us as well as to breed hypocrisy among us.¹³⁷

The passage is a good example of historiographic metafiction as John Proctor's dramatic character is narrated with reference to his socio-historical time and also with reference to the sustained cultural practices that 'we', i.e. Miller's contemporaries in the fifties, had inherited. *The Crucible* has therefore a vast postmodern potential as its subject is an historical event whereas, through dramatic performance and theatricality, Miller has established a double relationship between fact and fiction, working through both past and present to unearth new meanings for *both*. Yet what is the nature of this process of working through? For this the notion of parody in historiographic metafiction is of relevance.

When Hutcheon emphasized the importance of parody in postmodern historiography, it was certainly not a pejorative literary device meant to ridicule and imitate history. As Hutcheon explains:

What I mean by 'parody' here is *not* the ridiculing imitation of the standard theories and definitions that are rooted in eighteenth-century theories of wit. The collective weight of parodic *practice* suggests a redefinition of parody as repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity. In historiographic metafiction, in film, in painting, in music, and in architecture, this parody paradoxically enacts both change and cultural continuity.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Miller, *The Crucible* p. 21.

¹³⁸ Linda Hutcheon, 'The Politics of Postmodernism: Parody and History', *Cultural Critique* 5, Modernity and Modernism, Postmodernity and Postmodernism (Winter, 1986-87), p. 185.

So, in historiographic metafiction, the parody of history is performed through critical representation of the past with a view to finding difference and continuity in perspectives with respect to the present. Hutcheon sees in this an urge for a public discourse that articulates the ‘presentness of the past’ through a social placing of art in cultural discourse, thus linking art with what Edward Said calls the ‘world’.¹³⁹

In *The Crucible*, for instance, the ‘Black slave from Barbados,’ Tituba, can be seen as a specific example of parody of double oppression of race and gender patterns in American history. Miller introduces her character to critically revive the ghosts of race relationships from America’s past in a new space of modern American multiculturalism.¹⁴⁰ When, for example, Tituba’s speaks to Reverend Parris in Act 1 of the play, she says:

He say Mr. Parris must be kill! Mr. Parris no goodly man, Mr. Parris mean man and no gentleman, and he bid me rise out of my bed and cut your throat! (*They gasp.*) But I tell him ‘No! I don’t hate that man. I don’t want kill that man.’ But he say, ‘You work for me, Tituba, and I make you free! I give you pretty dress to wear, and put you way high up in the air, and you gone fly back to Barbados!’ And I say, ‘You lie, Devil, you lie!’ And then he come one stormy night to me, and he say, ‘Look! I have *white* people belong to me.’ And I look - and there was Goody Good.¹⁴¹

There is an obvious Caribbean tinge to Tituba’s style of speech. Marion Starkey calls it ‘slurred southern speech’.¹⁴² In the play, she is presented as a black slave woman who is an expert in traditional folk healing methods and black magic. Her identity and background have certainly played a part in her being accused in first instance of practising Voodoo. In this quote, in citing the Devil’s enticing temptations, Tituba subconsciously vents her desire for freedom and emancipation from slavery, which refers to the historic tragedy of the Africans and the Indians in the Caribbean and the Americas. There is tangible evidence that Miller introduces her character as a parody, in Hutcheon’s sense, of a past

¹³⁹ Hutcheon, ‘The Politics of Postmodernism: Parody and History’, p. 203.

¹⁴⁰ Jane Moss, ‘Postmodernizing the Salem Witchcraze: Maryse Condé’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*’, *Colby Quarterly* 35.1 (March 1999), pp. 5-6.

¹⁴¹ Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 45.

¹⁴² Quoted in Chadwick Hansen, ‘The Metamorphosis of Tituba, or Why American Intellectuals Can’t Tell an Indian Witch from a Negro’, *The New England Quarterly* 47.1 (1974), p. 8.

that still lurks in America's present (be it our contemporary present or the 1950s, but more so in the fifties) in the form of problematic race relations between blacks and whites.

Hutcheon defines the function of parody in her study of Robert Coover's *The Public Burning* from 1977.¹⁴³ It concerns a fictionalized account of the Rosenberg case, told from Richard Nixon's viewpoint. The novel combines metafictional techniques with a critique of American history and ideology and had a pronounced impact on Hutcheon's views on postmodernism. Hutcheon writes in this respect:

Postmodernism deliberately confuses the notion that history's problem is verification, while fiction's is veracity (Berthoff 1970, 272). Both forms of narrative are signifying systems in our culture, both are what Doctorow once called modes of 'mediating the world for the purpose of introducing meaning' (1983, 24). And it is the constructed, imposed nature of that meaning (and the seeming necessity for us to make meaning) that historiographic metafiction like Coover's *The Public Burning* reveals.¹⁴⁴

The important point here is that when both fiction and historiography are signifying systems in cultural space, and postmodern metafiction is meant to mediate the world aesthetically and politically, this is all meant not just to grasp or find meaning but to *make* meaning, as Doctorow would also suggest. The past is given meaning by verifying it through the veracity of the fictional discourse. Likewise, *The Crucible* works on the basis of this confusion of verification with veracity, i.e. historical facts in relation to the truth in their representation. Or, to put this yet differently, the veracity of the play as a truth practice calls for verification, with regard to both the past and the present, in line with Hutcheon's approach: 'It is part of the postmodern stand to confront the paradoxes of fictive/historical representation, the particular/the general, and the present/the past'.¹⁴⁵

The general picture is that postmodern historical novels, like Coover's *The Public Burning*, use metafictional techniques to juxtapose historical facts with fiction, thus not only reminding the readers of historical fiction's

¹⁴³ Robert Coover, *The Public Burning* (New York: Grove Press, 1977).

¹⁴⁴ Hutcheon, 'Historiographic Metafiction: "The Pastime of Past Time"', p. 112.

¹⁴⁵ Hutcheon, 'Historiographic Metafiction: "The Pastime of Past Time"', p. 106.

limitations as a textual version of history but also of the disturbance created by mixing historical facts through fiction.¹⁴⁶ Yet this disturbance is not just a simple matter of disturbance. In *The Crucible* the normative historical narratives of Salem and the persistent ideology of good and evil in American cultural discourse is problematized and somehow challenged through metafictional drama techniques. The truth is nowhere to be found, it has to emerge through this process. Thus the text creates room for radical political engagement in the sense formulated by French philosopher Alain Badiou: 'it is our encounter with the *emerging* truth that can ultimately force us towards an ethical confrontation or *choice*: the recognition of truth of an event 'compels us to decide a new way of being'.'¹⁴⁷

Postmodernism's revisiting of the past, in this respect, is not nostalgic; it is a critical revisiting of the past based upon a parodying dialogue of both art and society with the past. In postmodernism, this critical reflection deals with aesthetic and social formations of the past in its relation to the present. To be sure there are those who do see in postmodernism a nostalgic tendency, such as Christian Gutleben in *Nostalgic Postmodernism*.¹⁴⁸ And even in *The Crucible*, as we will see in chapter 5, there might be a perverse nostalgia in the desire to revisit the dark past with its clear-cut forces of good and evil. Such nostalgia, however, was not at issue in the fifties. At that time, *The Crucible* was able to twist the narrativization of Salem, with the aim of finding new possibilities of meaning in the present. It did work, distinctly, as a parody:

Historiographic metafiction works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction. And it is a kind of seriously ironic parody that effects both aims: the intertexts of history and fiction take on parallel (though not equal) status in the parodic reworking of the textual past of both the 'world' and literature.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Raymond A. Mazurek, 'Metafiction, the Historical Novel and Coover's *The Public Burning*', in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London / New York: Longman, 1995), p. 195.

¹⁴⁷ Badiou, quoted in Amanda Stuart Fisher, 'Developing an Ethics of Practice in Applied Theatre: Badiou and Fidelity to the Truth of the Event', *Research in Drama Education* 10.2 (2005), p. 248.

¹⁴⁸ Christian Gutleben, *Nostalgic Postmodernism. The Victorian Tradition and the Contemporary British Novel*, *Postmodern Studies* (Amsterdam / New York: Rodopi, 2001).

¹⁴⁹ Hutcheon, 'Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History', p. 4.

The key term here is ‘reworking’. The pivotal issue is that the past is not finished. In the case of *The Crucible*, there is moreover another, related, problem. Not only is the past not finished, but nor is the making of history in the present. Hutcheon explains that:

Historiography and fiction, as we saw earlier, *constitute* their objects of attention; in other words they decide which events will become facts. The postmodern problematization points to our unavoidable difficulties with the concreteness of events (in the archive, we can find only their textual traces to make into facts) and their accessibility. (Do we have a full trace or a partial one? What has been absented, discarded as non-fact material?).¹⁵⁰

The first and last sentence are of particular relevance to Miller’s play. Its main concern, again, is not to investigate the Salem case per se, but to provoke investigation into the manipulative making of events by McCarthy and his ilk, and the consciously used partiality of traces. If I read *The Crucible* as a postmodern play, it is firstly as a parody in the sense that the Salem period is used as a parody of McCarthyism. Secondly, it is also a parody of historiographical metafiction itself. It seems to focus chiefly on the past but it is actually interested in the present, in which ‘full traces and partial ones’ are used politically as a matter of public manipulation. For Hutcheon a parody of the past is used to work on historiographical sources in literary texts, whose self-reflexivity or metafictional nature reveal the possibility of alternative versions of truth that are textually inscribed in historical records. The parody works like this and yet differently in *The Crucible*. Its parody of the past is both aimed at finding different forms of truth in the past and calling for the truth in the present.

When Hutcheon shows that parody is central to postmodernism, her argument is simultaneously formal, strategic and political.¹⁵¹ Not only does she formally link parody to ironic quotation, pastiche and intertextuality, she also relates it also to appropriation, which is a matter of strategy. Such forms and strategies become political when ‘ideological consequences’ are involved. The parody of the past in postmodern works of art is not nostalgic or

¹⁵⁰ Hutcheon, ‘Historiographic Metafiction: “The Pastime of the Past Time”’, p. 122.

¹⁵¹ Linda Hutcheon, ‘The Politics of Parody’, in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 93.

commemorative, nor is it based on lamentation of the past; rather it is always critical and seeks new meanings from the past whilst having its feet entrenched in history and fiction at the same time, which in terms of parody boils down to ‘installing and ironizing’ simultaneously. Miller’s *The Crucible* proves the point. The play both claims to install an historical reality whilst ironizing it. Miller’s main goal is not to just represent the Salem events correctly but to present them in such a way that they appear as a parody of themselves and of McCarthyism. In strategic terms, he appropriates the Salem events to criticize the contemporary McCarthy events, which are parodied in? the play. There is thus a double parody in play. Considered in this way, *The Crucible* is a theatrical piece that confronts the established narrative of the 1950s US political environment by dramatizing an historical episode, or by *redoing* this episode in the context of the play’s contemporaneous present. As a result, its theatricality has the effect of transversing time scales (about which more later).

In this context, Walter Benjamin’s reading of Brecht’s epic theatre is relevant, in particular when Benjamin mentions that the use of gesture and citability distinguish epic theatre from classical drama. Regarding this gesture and citability, Samuel Weber explains:

Epic theater, it could be said, turns the traditional claims of drama *inside out*. This is why gesture *as such* is only the ‘raw material’ of theater, and why Benjamin citing Brecht, singles out the citability of gesture as the defining principle and resource of his theater. For ‘gesture’ does not merely interrupt some thing external to it: the expressive intentionality of an action, the teleology of a narrative, or the causal necessity or probability of a sequence of events. It does all of this, but it also does something more: insofar as it is citable, it interrupts *itself*, and indeed, only ‘is’ in its possibility of becoming other, of being transported elsewhere.¹⁵²

The gesture in epic theatre possesses a dialectical dimension in that it interrupts a specific movement towards meaning, comprehension and closure and brings out effects to render these apparent. The point in relation to this quote is, again, that *The Crucible* does not intend to be a classic dramatic piece that tells a closed, yet gripping story that may fascinate us. The relation between Salem and

¹⁵² Samuel Weber, ‘Citability - of Gesture’, in *Benjamin’s -abilities* (Cambridge, MA / London: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 103.

McCarthyism is, indeed, one of citability. In this case, it is not so much the actors working by means of gesturing, but the play itself, as a whole, that functions as gesture. The play itself is ‘the raw material’ of theatre that interrupts the gripping and dramatic events of the present in which it is brought. As such it is citable as well, as we will see in chapter 5 and in the conclusion.

Sarah Bryant-Bertail states that ‘epic theatre rejects the old dichotomy between, on one side, human consciousness as the *interior time of the spirit of history*; and, on the other side, the world, including the human body, as the *exterior space and matter of nature*’.¹⁵³ Miller’s *The Crucible* uses theatrical gesture much like Brecht’s epic theatre because it refuses such a dichotomy, for it would restrict literature and art to the position of *reflecting* on history’s internal sense and meaning. Instead *The Crucible* is very much concerned with the world of acting bodies, both political bodies and individual ones. The piece retains this strength to confront the grand narrative of its age by interrupting it and intervening critically. As Sarah Bryant-Bertail says: ‘theater can still be used as a forum to stage and critique the crises of our own era, to help us see the images we have constructed of our own historical existence, constructions that have real-life consequences’.¹⁵⁴ The argument in this section is that this does not hold for theatre per se, but for specific forms of theatre, of which *The Crucible* is one example.

In relation to history, the play does not only work by means of parodic gesture and citability, however. Its parodic potential is even more complicated, or doubly doubled, as when Salem becomes the parody of McCarthyism.

2.4 *The Crucible* in the Present: the Preposterousness of McCarthyism Parodying Salem

The Crucible deals with an historical episode and it is because of it being written in the 1950s, i.e. Miller’s present, that an anachronistic effect is unavoidably generated. It may be a form of anachronism, however, that doubles the parody of which I spoke in the previous section. When cultural analyst Mieke Bal developed her idea of preposterous history, she meant that the time scales may be reversed by means of works of art. Especially in *Quoting Caravaggio*, in which she examines the way in which postmodern artists reworked the baroque, she explores how works of art can foster a way of

¹⁵³ Sarah Bryant-Bertail, *Space and Time in Epic Theater: The Brechtian Legacy* (New York: Comden House, 2000), p. 214.

¹⁵⁴ Bryant-Bertail, p. 211.

looking at the past in which the present precedes the past on the chronological scale.¹⁵⁵ Korsten, working on theatre plays from the baroque himself, summarizes Bal's position as follows:

History seems to be defined chronologically by a *pre* and a *post*. Yet this seemingly natural order of things is not that solid. The point was put forward convincingly by Mieke Bal, who coined the term *preposterous history* in order to indicate how past and present are caught in an embrace that confuses chronological order. In the case of Bal, in her *Quoting Caravaggio*, she considered the way in which many postmodernist artists reworked material of the baroque. On average, this would be seen as a matter of influence, or of chronologically hierarchized intertextuality. Bal's point was that it works the other way as well. We now read baroque works of art also through the pre-position of postmodernist art. In the case of literature I would say that, for instance, we now read *Iliad* as much through Derek Walcott's *Omeros* as that we read *Omeros* through *Iliad*. But as the term preposterous suggests there is more to it than simple reversal. Taking her cue from anthropologist Johannes Fabian, Bal is talking about 'shared time,' of a coevalness between scholar and historical subject.¹⁵⁶

Almost naturally the chronological order of things seems based on the notion that the past precedes the present which leads to the future. However, as Bal argues in her notion of preposterous history, past and present are caught in a mutual embrace in postmodern works of art, and not just in postmodern works. For instance, the reworking of the historical subjects in the postmodern works of art, as in the case of baroque paintings, has enabled the readers to view the past through these present representations. Hence from this logic, the present preposterously precedes the past in the postmodern works of art to disrupt an apparently solid hierarchy of chronologically ordered things in which the past always leads to the present. Yet there is more to it. This logic also allows for the possibility of a 'shared time,' which is located here in the interstice between the

¹⁵⁵ Mieke Bal, Introduction, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 7.

¹⁵⁶ Korsten, p. 42.

pieces of art and the studying scholar, but which can be extended to any audience dealing with such works of art.

In postmodernist writings, the present reworking of historical subjects enables the reader to view the past through them. But this is more than a matter of 'viewing'. According to Van Alphen, 'The complex ways in which art acts upon the past - or more specifically its predecessors - and conventional motifs and modes of representation, suggests that it is the past, not the present, that is conditioned by a perpetual flux'.¹⁵⁷ So, it is not only the artists' complex reworking of historical subjects that obliterates the natural order of things from the past to the present. In the postmodernist logic, this constant reworking of history makes the past, through its interpretations and re-workings, conditioned by a continuous process of flux and change. That being said, the opposition suggested by Van Alphen may be more complex in the case of *The Crucible*. A preposterous order of history, in which the present leads to the past's mouldability, is crucial in assessing *The Crucible*'s political power as a parody.

At first it may seem that the play uses Salem as a parody of McCarthyism. If, however, we take the logic of preposterousness seriously, it reverses that order: McCarthyism becomes the parody of Salem. The play's critical intervention is even more devastating, since McCarthyism itself, in its pompous pretence to make history, becomes the object of history now. McCarthyism becomes the parody of a past event and, as a consequence, it loses its totalitarian grip in and on the present.

It is time now to have a closer look at the intervention of the play in its contemporaneous present.

¹⁵⁷ Van Alphen, pp. 365-66.