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## Theatre as Truth Practice: Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*

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## Chapter 4

### Actualizing History: Responsibilities with Regard to the Future

Whereas the previous chapters focused on the play's relation to the past, this chapter will be looking at the play's present in relation to a future. If, as is the case, the play is an intervention in its contemporary circumstances, this is obviously with the aim of moving towards a better future. The question then becomes: how does the play deal with the past in the way that the Salem trials relate, by means of a theatrical intervention, to a future? In the twentieth century the relation of theatre, and of theatricality in general, with the future was paradigmatically explored in the work of Bertolt Brecht. In his view the role of theatre was to produce a distance, not an unreflexive and emotional involvement in a plot. This distance or alienation was necessary to make people see behind the scenes of the socio-political and economic system as a result of which they would start to think and become able to act in order to change the course of history. This appears to be an essential strategy as well if we think about the powers of spectacle, as they have been dealt with in the previous chapter, and a possible theatrical response to them.<sup>260</sup>

Brecht's ideas about the powers of theatre are an aesthetic and political elaboration of Marx's views about the role of philosophy which famously was that philosophy should not reflect on the nature of reality but intervene in it. This should be done by unveiling the true reality of a mode of production that was hidden by the surface of daily social traffic. In this respect, Miller's play is Marxian in that it is not primarily aimed at reflecting reality but at intervening in it in order to change it. Yet its formal elements are not simply aimed at unveiling. The form of allegory is, in first instance, not just aimed at unveiling things, on the contrary. It is aimed at veiling things, which is understandable as we saw previously, in the context of censorship. Since the play is aimed at altering the course of history, hence leading to another future, we can ask how this relates to the allegorical form Miller chose. This implies having a closer look at the play's generic quality of being an allegory in relation to history as the *actualization* of history, not in terms of the representation of an historical past, but in terms of the role of representation with regard to alternative futures. I will be taking my cue especially, in what follows, from Ernesto Laclau's approach to history in discursive terms, more specifically in terms of tropes. In

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<sup>260</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction', *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 1.

the context of actualization it is also important, however, to ask what kind of a historical actor Miller himself was. What were his opportunities to intervene in his times whilst, as a literary artist, he also was a ‘child of his times’?

#### 4.1. Miller as ‘Child of his Times’

Although Miller does not draw any direct *political* analogy between the Salem era and the McCarthy era in his mix of dramatic themes in *The Crucible*, the play is explicitly synchronic with the age it was written and staged in, i.e. 1952 or 1953. Miller could hardly have remained indifferent to the fates of Alger Hiss, Owen Lattimore, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg and many other professionals in America, including Miller’s close associate Elia Kazan.<sup>261</sup> At the same time an almost exact or direct political analogy between witch-hunting and red-hunting was in a sense so unmediated that the allegory did not protect Miller from a bludgeoning by conservative Cold War critics who were not to be convinced by an analogous portrayal of red-hunters and witches. They evidently refused to accept the hallucinatory nature of communist threats. In this context they also rejected the author’s sympathy for the liberals’ right to a variety of freedoms. In other words, equating the persecution of ‘unreal’ witches in late seventeenth-century Salem with restrictions on real communist spies in 1950s America was a problematic political allegory to say the least, precisely because it was hardly an allegory, which may be why Graff Zivin remarks on two occasions that the Wikipedia lemma on allegory does not consider *The Crucible* as an allegory (unfortunately Graff Zivin does not mention on what date she accessed the site - the reference to *The Crucible* has now been removed, July 2014).<sup>262</sup> The issue was not only confined to the past or only to the present. The play’s intervention clearly concerned the future course of the nation.

In the context of the future to which the play opens up, the main question I would like to address first is: can Miller be called a ‘child of his times’ and, if so, how? This common phrase refers here to the play’s meaning as restricted to its own times, or what I called earlier its own ‘occasion’. Clearly Miller’s artistic sensibilities were influenced by the socio-political aura of the fifties and the concrete political circumstances of his age. Yet in response to both, he

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<sup>261</sup> Whittaker Chambers, an ex-communist, accused the State Department official Alger Hiss of passing confidential documents to his Russian counterparts. Hiss denied the charges but after two hearings he was convicted of perjury in 1950. Elia Kazan directed Miller’s plays, inter alia *Death of a Salesman* and *All my Sons*. He testified in front of Committee of his past affiliation with the Communist party and told them the names of his associates. See Miller, *Timebends*, pp. 333-35.

<sup>262</sup> Graff Zivin, p. 58, p. 65.

anchored his theatrical intervention along the witch-hunting metaphor not only in order to comment on the politics of his age in search of a truth that was submerged in an official environment of fear, but also to change circumstances. As for this conscious response, it is important to assess his status as an artist, and to clarify my position regarding his options to intervene in society by artistic means.

Let me take the circumstances of the times seriously and use a Marxian analysis first, and then twist it. It will help me to see how Miller was the *effect* of his times and circumstances, and how his writing was not. It will also help to prepare for my argument later, in dialogue with Ernesto Laclau.

In a classical Marxian analysis, Miller, as a literary artist, would have belonged to the superstructure of American society which rested upon its economic base. In an economic structure of society on which the legal and political superstructure is erected, the artist is by necessity shaped by the production relations and Miller's response would be seen in terms of predisposition. In his study on the relation between Marxism and literature, Raymond Williams repeats a much quoted passage from Karl Marx's 1859 preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. According to Williams it is relevant to define the relations between the mode of production and the socio-political and cultural superstructure as Marx defined it:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indefensible and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary their social being that determines their consciousness.<sup>263</sup>

According to the Marxist critical perspective, a literary artist's sensibilities are, firstly, shaped, triggered and stimulated by the economic circumstances and, secondly, by the entire set of social, cultural, legal and political realities and

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<sup>263</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977), p. 75.

contradictions of his age. For classical Marxists the literature of any age amounts to little more than one of the many other channels of discourse in which the energies of an historical epoch are discharged. That is to say that the same materially defined energy is dissipated by societies through their political movements, religious thought, philosophic speculations, language, moral codes and other symbolic activities, such as art and literature, through forms of cultural expression. In the Marxian view, all these expressions belong to the so-called 'superstructure' of society which is guided and driven by the economic 'base' that consists of its specific modes of production and, as a consequence, the class in which man is born, with its corresponding powers and privileges. In relation to the base, cultural expressions remain asymmetrically interrelated. There is little chance of changing the mode of production, for instance, by means of the superstructure.

Yet the paradox and historical irony, of course, is that Marx's *writings* were the driving force behind extensive material changes and substantial changes in history. In a sense, Marx's writings, or his discursive powers, turned his own material analysis on its head, and proved that discursive material can be as basic and material as the modes of production. Still, a useful aspect of the Marxian analysis remains that the literary thought of an age does not only owe its genesis to any present, discursive scenario of a society; instead, it blossoms and shoots from the preceding currents and cross-currents of thoughts that follow from a material base. Therefore, from the reader's point of view, the literature and the arts of an age *per se* must be read and received in connection with the current socio-economic dynamics of the age. At the same time, Marx's writings have taught us that writing can radically alter the actualization of history because writing is an action, in Arendt's sense of intrinsic political action.

In terms of its action, any literary work also needs to be read in connection with the contemporaneous movements and cross-currents in other areas of cultural life. The findings resulting from this dual determinism of socio-economic history and cultural interdependence and agency reveal the literary artist as both the product of, and an actor in his time who, by virtue of his imagination and individuality, not only tries to rescue his creations from the dominance of a material base, or for that matter from the lethal label of journalistic historical documents, but also seeks to transform his work of art into an active force without whilst, as Arendt emphasizes, being in control of his actions, or the actions of his work. Thus, politically speaking, a literary writer

cannot *make* a literary piece work the way he or she wants, in a specific and particular way, as its action depends on its actualization of a future.

As I already discussed, before introducing the events of Salem in 1692, in the opening of the play Miller first clarifies some issues regarding historical accuracy and unambiguously dissociates the play from historiography in terms used by academic historians. But as an historical drama, it is an artist's attempt to conceptualize history in order not only to ascertain the truth of history but also to reproduce it. As Herbert Lindenberger notes: 'Historical drama, in so far as it reflects upon and interprets past events, can be considered a branch of historical thought, though one which projects hypotheses and individual theories about history more than it does fully worked out philosophies'.<sup>264</sup> Lindenberger rightly points to the particular take adopted by artists here, but in addition hints at the artist's attempt to project a philosophic insight into the customary linear view of history in order to find reversible and synchronic patterns, which Michael J. O'Neal terms as a 'vertical' view of history.<sup>265</sup> This essentially structuralist view of history and culture sees *patterns* of history: history is not considered as causal and sequential in terms of narrative ordering. Or, to put this differently, history becomes punctuated with facts and domains of historical subsets which are vertically projected as recurrent patterns on a model of linearity. In this respect, Miller dramatizes history to intervene in his contemporary times in order to reveal how an artist's imagination can transform and frame politics with a view to opening history up to new things that would not follow the familiar pattern.

Miller's views on the relation between dramatic art, with its moral purpose, and the social reality of its own times with regard to alternative futures, were reflected in his introduction to the *Collected Plays*. He writes:

These plays in one sense, are my response to what was 'in the air', and they are one man's way of saying to his fellow men, 'This is what you see every day, or think or feel; I will show you what you really know but have not had the time, or the disinterestedness, or the insight, or the information to understand consciously'. Each of these plays, in varying degrees, was begun in the belief that it was

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<sup>264</sup> Herbert Lindenberger, *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 131.

<sup>265</sup> Michael J. O'Neal, 'History, Myth, and Name Magic in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*', *Clio: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature, History, and the Philosophy of History* 12.2 (Winter 1982), p. 112.

unveiling a truth already known but unrecognized as such. My concept of the audience is of a public each member of which is carrying about with him what he thinks is an anxiety, or a hope or a preoccupation which is his alone and isolates him from mankind; and in this respect at least the function of a play is to reveal him to himself so that he may touch others by virtue of the revelation of his mutuality with them. If only for this reason I regard the theatre as a serious business, one that makes or should make man more human, which is to say less alone.<sup>266</sup>

As Miller's remarks cogently reflect, *The Crucible*, like his other social plays, is an attempt to bring on stage the political and social anomalies which people encounter in their daily lives but which they don't have the time and imagination to see, confront or correct. Moreover, in a Marxian sense, the play is aimed at unveiling the true reality of the social world and, in doing so, making collective action possible. The plays are not meant to touch the individual members of an audience aesthetically but to touch them in order to create a collective on the basis of 'mutuality,' which is to say: to make man more social.

The quote is also explicit as to the plays' function *in* history. The play is historically oriented towards the past in terms of what already 'was in the air'; towards the present in terms of unveiling the truth; and towards the future in terms of a 'revelation', or for the sake of 'making man more human'. With respect to this threefold function the play allegorically relates the Salem witch hunts to the 1950s anti-Communist frenzy. Miller's target is his audience who he believes to be a collective of individuals in which each individual member is a carrier of anxiety and internal disquiet, whom he wants to offer hope of change, change in everyone's individual capacity to become part of a collective. In reviving this hope through the revelation of truth and by offering alternative options on stage from those offered by real life, Miller attempts to lead each viewer to recognize his/her mutuality and shared responsibility in confronting political lies, and to move away from them for the greater benefit of the society. That is why for Miller theatre is a serious platform to energize a society which can easily fall apart at times of political crises, perceived or real. The important task of dramatic art advanced by Miller resonates strongly with Noam

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<sup>266</sup> Arthur Miller, 'Introduction to the Collected Plays', in *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*, ed. by Robert A. Martin (New York: The Viking Press, 1978), pp. 122-23.

Chomsky's position on the responsibility of intellectuals who says that 'it is the responsibility of the intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies'.<sup>267</sup>

The lies are exposed, here, through allegory, which brings two different historical periods together metaphorically, as two different signifiers which, through the play, relate to one signified. As for this one signified, and the desire expressed through it, one way of dealing with it was endorsed by Donald E. Brown, for whom patterns of human behaviour and human responses to social, economic and political circumstances alike stay the same.<sup>268</sup> According to Brown the most fundamental features of human nature in different historical periods remain consistent despite the paradoxical fact that human nature itself is seen as having historically developed from multiple social circumstances. Yet, as he argues, in actuality there exists a broader uniformity and similarity in human responses to historical settings in different times. This might explain why people tend to seek precedents in history in order to match them with a present crisis at any point in time, as if to reassure themselves that the present is an improvement on the past, or simply to understand the present better. However, the question remains as to how allegory relates to a future that is not predetermined but instead opened up to alternative futures.

#### **4.2 Intervention I: Allegory as a Means to Open Up an Alternative Future**

Opening up future alternatives requires, first of all, that we disregard the concepts of teleological or directional historical progression based on the premise of a purposeful and ordained order in the wake of the Enlightenment, and instead consider human agency as the bearer of choices and options, as Hannah Arendt did, within a constraining structure of circumstances defined by thinkers like Althusser in terms of discontinuities, ruptures and various time scales which lead to alternative historical outcomes, including revolutions.<sup>269</sup> These outcomes are neither entirely determined by the cause and effect principle nor are they purely accidental. Taken as a whole, history is devoid of any structured order directing it, on a fixed path and pattern, from a known past to a known future.

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<sup>267</sup> Noam Chomsky, 'The Responsibility of Intellectuals', in *The Dissenting Academy*, ed. by Theodore Roszak (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), p. 256.

<sup>268</sup> Donald E. Brown, 'Human Universals, Human Nature & Human Culture', *Daedalus* 133.4 (Fall 2004), p. 48.

<sup>269</sup> Louis Althusser, 'Contradiction and Overdetermination', in *For Marx/Louis Althusser*, trans. by Ben Brewster (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 99.

Again, the formal forces of allegory need to be scrutinised. Allegory may initially aim at concealing, but in the classical sense it should lead the informed to the highest meanings, or to the ultimate meaning of a seemingly universal and preordained frame from which one would have to see things. It is critical in this respect to consider allegory as a discursive form. When periods of history are singled out and studied in relation to established facts, the subsequent narration by historians and interpretation by artists through literary works, with their specific interests and deductive lenses, will eventually construct *meaning* from them. Even myths, legends and oral histories, although unconfirmed with regard to their veracity on critical epistemic weighing scales, are rushed in literary historical representations to stretch and enrich speculative interpretive plot structures. As has often been remarked, the story-telling capacity and narrative propensity of humans thus serves to construct their historical identity. They cannot alienate themselves from such narratives because they, as indicated, *give meaning* to their identity, culture and present circumstances by means of narrative. Yet from this essentially historicist perspective, any current actions of people must be seen as the outcome of their historically produced character. However, theatre and allegory are the vehicles able to dismantle this.

With regard to the future Miller uses the trial ritual allegorically, not merely to highlight the resemblances between past and present but to unveil the patterns which determine the inherent contradictions of the chronologically distinct scenes. These inherent contradictions lead to fissures in the historical continuity. Admittedly, the demons of Salem and the McCarthy era can be discerned right in the heart of the prosecution itself and the power of the past, i.e. the 1692 witch hunting, is seen to reassert itself in the present of the 1950s McCarthy hearings, as if both belonged to a category of guilt forms, historically similar in nature, and as if both were shared by the community and the individual. The point, however, is that discursively speaking allegory can never simply bring together two different historical periods under a single heading. This is where Ernesto Laclau's tropological approach of history comes in.

*The Crucible* is a political allegory which associates, both metaphorically and metonymically, the Salem episode with the 1950s anti-Communist purge in America. Metonymically, the two events are both contiguous and contingent with each other. They are contiguous through the culture they share within the same political space. They are contingent in remaining historically different and their relation in this sense is ontologically heterogeneous. There is no possibility of conflating things that *border* on one another. Metaphorically, however, as I

already indicated, they appear to be brought under one signified, or one heading. In the discursive context of metaphor and metonymy, Ernesto Laclau, in his response to the work of Paul de Man, considers the possibilities of history's make-ability in terms of a struggle about inevitable forms of hegemony. Metaphor, for Laclau, is the discursive vehicle of hegemony, bringing two different historical periods under a single dominant heading which is then accepted as the correct one, with 'true' meaning. Since any proposition is *metonymic*, it could neither be true nor false when one compares two chronologically distant paradigms of history. Yet their heterogeneity can be reduced by means of metaphorical hegemony in a strict political sense, as is the case when the Salem period is staged and read in the 1950s, for instance.<sup>270</sup>

Laclau's concept of hegemony is based, obviously, on Antonio Gramsci's work on hegemony. In an earlier work Laclau defined hegemony as follows:

'Hegemony' will allude to an absent totality, and to the diverse attempts at recomposition and rearticulation which, in overcoming this original absence, made it possible for struggles to be given a meaning and for historical forces to be endowed with full positivity.<sup>271</sup>

The absent totality Laclau refers to effectively opens up the political realm in which any power will have to establish itself *discursively*. In the second edition of *Hegemony and Socialism*, Laclau and Mouffe define hegemony along similar lines, saying that its 'very condition is that a *particular* social force assumes the representation of a *totality* that is radically incommensurable with it'.<sup>272</sup> Representation is no longer the reflection of a socio-economic basis. Instead the social element is conceived as a discursive space.

In going back to Gramsci, Laclau and Mouffe struggle with the same problem that I faced earlier: the discrepancy between the material economic forces, on the one hand, and the cultural forces, on the other, or, in the context of my study, discursive forces. For Gramsci there was no necessary coincidence between a society's mode of production and the politico-cultural system. This made it possible to explain how capitalism could manifest itself in culturally and

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<sup>270</sup> Ernesto Laclau, 'The Politics of Rhetoric', in *Material Events: Paul De Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, ed. by Tom Cohn (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 237.

<sup>271</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 2001), p. 7.

<sup>272</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, 'Preface to the second edition', p. x.

politically different societies; it also allowed for a completely different political analysis in which people were not simply the object of dominating modes of production but also able to act upon them. In other words, Gramsci was interested in opening up alternative futures. This is how Laclau looks at it:

The requirements of 'hegemony' as a central category of political analysis are essentially three. First, that something constitutively heterogeneous to the social system or structure has to be present in the latter from the very beginning, preventing it from constituting itself as a closed or representable totality. If such a closure were achievable, no hegemonic event could be possible and the political, far from being an ontological dimension of the social – an 'existential' of the social – would just be an ontic dimension of the latter. Second, however, the hegemonic suture has to produce a re-totalizing effect, without which no hegemonic articulation would be possible either. But third, this re-totalization cannot have the character of a dialectical reintegration. It has, on the contrary, to maintain alive and visible the original and constitutive heterogeneity from which the hegemonic articulation started.<sup>273</sup>

Laclau maintains that in the political arena, the 'hegemonic' prevents politics from ever becoming a closed system, which could otherwise no longer be political in essence. The reason is that any hegemonic force never completely coincides with the economic system of power. It is, in an ontological sense, different from it. Hence, from the outset, hegemony is indispensable for the political as a qualifier.

In second instance, however, the hegemonic 'suture', its jointing and stitching force in the political field, has to bring into effect a re-totalization of the scene after its intervention. Without this there would be no room for power, or further hegemonic articulation. But unlike the synthesis attained in the dialectical process to reintegrate things, hegemony also expands the innate heterogeneity in the political after its intervention and this is the beginning of the next hegemonic movement. Laclau's reading helps me to understand Miller's play politically and historically in terms of an intervention with regard to the future. It is clear that Miller associates two episodes of history metonymically and metaphorically in his play. The metonymy relates to

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<sup>273</sup> Laclau, 'The Politics of Rhetoric', pp. 230-31.

heterogeneity, for example when the Salem part is heterogeneous to the political system of the fifties but at the same time present in it 'from the very beginning'. The metaphor relates to a re-totalizing move, from both sides. For McCarthy, the idea is to see communism under the heading of evil, for Miller the idea is to see McCarthy under the heading of a deluded witch hunter. As a result, the play has the potential effect of an hegemonic move to disrupt the hegemony of McCarthy and his associates in American society to reassert both its own hegemony and an alternative future. Hence, through contingency, or heterogeneity, between two events that necessarily border on each other historically, Miller challenges politics metaphorically and allegorically.

Let me deal with this dynamic more specifically in terms of the play itself. Within the framework of the trial ritual, Miller condenses the abstract notion of authority in the personalities of Danforth and Hawthorne to dramatize some parallels with the Congressional Committee hearings and the fear mongering by McCarthy loyalists. In the play, Reverend Parris and judge Hawthorne are so worried about their position that they raise their voices when the lawfulness of the trials is queried, suspecting it as an attempt to defile the respect for a sacred court of law and its proceedings. Like the Manichean split of American society in the McCarthy era between patriots and the alleged enemy battalions of communists and liberals, the Salem court drew a straight line between friends of God and the Devil's obedient lieutenants. This is evident from Danforth's word to Francis Nurse: 'But you must understand, sir, that a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between'.<sup>274</sup> Danforth expresses more than once the arrogance of authority in Act 3: 'And do you know that near to four hundred are in the jails from Marblehead to Lynn, and upon my signature?' and he continues to boast without remorse, 'And seventy-two condemned to hang by that signature?'<sup>275</sup> His dedication to confront the so-called anomaly in front of him is unquestionable. He abides by the letter of the legal proceedings while blindly accepting the testimony of the girls, despite Hale and Proctor's insistence that the girls were dissembling.

The discursive relation between Danforth and McCarthy is distinctly metaphorical but, yet again, also metonymic. In terms of metaphor, a *similar* strike against unquestionable authority and a generalized sense of responsibility to the national cause of security reverberate in Joseph McCarthy's use of the

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<sup>274</sup> Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 86.

<sup>275</sup> Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 79.

fear-prone pool of American national socio-politics, for instance when he thrills the Republican Women's Club in Wheeling, West Virginia, in 1950 with his speech: 'I have here in my hand a list of 205...a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department'.<sup>276</sup> The metaphorical comparison with Danforth when boasting about the numbers is revealing, and is motivated *synecdochically* as if Danforth and McCarthy were both part of the same semi-jurisprudential body of texts and signatures. Metaphorically speaking, McCarthy's was a *similar* attempt to inspire awe and thrill about the seriousness of danger in America, which he, as 'patriotic' and 'knightly' figure, had vowed to affront and unravel. In the first instance, the reception of these claims prompted his political career to rise meteorically for a while, much like the success of the accusing girls in Salem. Yet, the metonymic relations between Salem and McCarthy, their bordering on one another in history and culture, also remain heterogeneous, for example when the hand of the witch hunter Danforth remains a hand that not only enforces McCarthy's agenda by means of similarity, but that could also jeopardise its power.

Miller asserts the metaphorical relation between the two episodes in terms of the second, re-totalizing suture that Laclau refers to, through his analysis of the scene in the 1950s, when he says:

It was the fact that a political objective, knowledgeable campaign from the far right was capable of creating not only a terror, but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually assuming even a holy resonance. The wonder of it all struck me that so practical and picayune a cause, carried forward by such manifestly ridiculous men, should be capable of paralyzing thought itself, and worse, causing to billow up such persuasive clouds of 'mysterious' feelings within people. It was as though the whole country had been born anew, without a memory even of certain elemental decencies which a year or two earlier no one would have imagined could be altered, let alone forgotten. Astounded, I watched men pass me by without a nod whom I had known rather

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<sup>276</sup> Joseph McCarthy, 'Senator Joseph McCarthy Hunts Communists: Speech delivered in Wheeling, West Virginia, February 9, 1950', in *Reading the American Past*, ed. by Michael P. Johnson, vol. 2 (Boston, MA: Bedford Books, 2012), p. 221.

well for years; and again, the astonishment was produced by my knowledge, which I could not give up, that the terror in these people was being knowingly planned and consciously engineered, and yet that all they knew was terror. That so interior and subjective an emotion could have been so manifestly created from without was a marvel to me. It underlies every word in *The Crucible*.<sup>277</sup>

It is worth noting the way in which Miller talks about the fabrication of fear, saying that the terror ‘was knowingly planned and consciously engineered’ and that this terror was nevertheless *real*. Miller’s explanation also defines the effect of McCarthyism as a country being ‘born anew’ because McCarthy succeeded in cutting metonymical relations with periods of one or two years earlier, by reconfiguring the other highly metonymically motivated capacity: memory. The fact that the play is an allegory is significant. It is iconic for the McCarthy’s re-totalizing strategy which the play highlights as an object of study at a time when thought was ‘paralyzed.’ In a Brechtian attempt to make people see what was actually taking place, Miller wanted to show the American public’s vulnerability to a political rhetoric of suspicion, fear and paranoia; a public that displayed an attitude of uncritical acquiescence to the ingenious narratives of a ‘Great Conspiracy’ allegedly organized by the enemies of democracy.

The right wing, as A. Peter Foulkes describes it, benefitted from a particular logic of making the sign fit the interpretation rather than the other way around, in a configuration that is metaphorical in two ways: it is similar to the Salem theocracy and fits in the re-totalizing power to read all signs under one heading and one heading only.<sup>278</sup> McCarthy ventured on a twofold path of political prominence and unfairly silencing politics of dissent in America. The manipulation of political facts by the profiteering mass spokespeople in 1950s America, influenced by a general atmosphere of paranoia against communism, served to construct conspiratorial fables of imminent threat from the enemy and his deputies and successfully brought the Americans’ deepest instinctive fears to the surface in testing times. This skilful tampering with public sensibilities and fears is a comparable phenomenon, metaphorically speaking, both of the Salem era and the McCarthy era. In response to this, Miller hints at the heterogeneity of metonymy when he says, for instance: ‘of course, the paranoid, real or

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<sup>277</sup> Miller, *Timebends*, p. 39.

<sup>278</sup> A. Peter Foulkes, *Literature and Propaganda* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 87.

pretended, always secretes its pearl around a grain of fact'.<sup>279</sup> This is why any response to manipulation must focus on this grain of fact, on the truth.

Similarly, as Richard Hofstadter remarks, the spokesperson for the paranoid style in the public realm is a double sufferer as he is afflicted by the vagaries of the real world but also by the fantasies of his own.<sup>280</sup> In terms of my argument, Miller and Hofstadter's assertions amount to what Jonathan Culler described as a metaphor's force, which is its metonymical motivation, indicated here by the 'grain of fact' and 'the real world'. This heterogeneous kernel endangers the very power of the metaphor.

One such kernel of fact or element of the real world was the existence of a strong socialist movement within American Society in earlier decades. During the fifties American democracy no longer appeared to allow any space to socialist political ideology, suspecting it to be totalitarian, unnatural and atheistic, hence as an evil rival to American constitutionalism. Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks give an account of the causes of socialism's downfall and failure in the US: the pivotal role of American political values and institutions in this respect, the splits between American trade unions and the socialist party, the unsettling force of immigration and the fragmentation of the American working class, the secretive nature of the strategic choices of the socialists, and state repression duly aided by the legal mechanism at hand. Nevertheless, the reality of a socialist alternative could not be denied, despite many attempts to vilify it.<sup>281</sup>

Once again, *The Crucible* testifies of a metaphorical re-totalization, through which signs had to fit the already established interpretation. The theocratic jargon of Puritan Salem made the entire community suffer when certain individuals transgressed its tenets, which is evident in the play when Danforth reasons with the girls upon receiving Mary Warren's deposition: 'Now, children, this is a court of law. The law based upon the Bible, and the Bible, writ by Almighty God, forbid the practice of witchcraft, and describe death as the penalty thereof. But likewise, children, the law and Bible damn all bearers of false witness'.<sup>282</sup> Since witchcraft was an invisible crime, it served as an excellent vehicle for fitting the sign to the interpretation and, as a

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<sup>279</sup> Arthur Miller, 'Why I Wrote The Crucible: An Artist's Answer to Politics', *New Yorker*, 21 October 1996, p. 158.

<sup>280</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 40.

<sup>281</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: W.W Norton, 2000), p. 10.

<sup>282</sup> Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 93.

consequence, the guilty girls instantly became bewitched victims to protect themselves from clerical wrath. The court, led by Danforth, although passionately committed to exorcise evil in the community, starts from a point of defeat by confirming witchcraft as a crime and accepting testimonies of ‘self-styled’ victims and their freakish narratives of the phantasmal wonders of the spirits, without any tangible shred of evidence or proof from the witnesses. This is illustrated by Danforth’s attitude towards the accusers’ testimony: ‘Do you know, Mr. Proctor, that the entire contention of the state in these trials is that the voice of heaven is speaking through the children?’<sup>283</sup> Therefore he is unconcerned whether lives are wasted and people’s reputation is soiled. Until the alpha and omega of the legal procedure are met, he assents to every testimony and allegation to establish guilt, even though the testimonies are based on spectral evidence. The contradiction lies in the fact that he publicly vows to entertain only factual details and literal facts during the proceedings, while he is in fact himself a hostage to a whimsical syllogism, which is to disclose the hiding places of the occult.

As William Inboden points out, the McCarthy era is characterised by an identical religious and moral absolutism that underlays the ideological framework of the decision-making apparatus, whose religious world view sufficiently influenced the cold war to take the course it did.<sup>284</sup> The core of twentieth-century American exceptionalism consisted of more than the odd remnant of old Puritan spiritual ideas about the Americans as God’s chosen people, or Woodrow Wilson’s belief in America’s manifest destiny, a concept that long predated him, and the international mission to democratise and remake the world in its own liberal image. Both Truman and Eisenhower set out to contain atheistic communist economics, politics and culture with an unambiguous reach for religious semiotics, which grew organically out of a metaphor from their American spiritual history with predominantly Protestant Christian roots. Likewise President Eisenhower associated God with the country in his public addresses.<sup>285</sup> As Lee Canipe illustrates based on the president’s public papers: ‘Recognition of the Supreme Being is the first, most basic expression of Americanism. Without God, there could be no American form of

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<sup>283</sup> Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 81.

<sup>284</sup> William Inboden, ‘Preface and Acknowledgments’ in *Religion and American Foreign Policy: 1945-1960. The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. ix.

<sup>285</sup> See Kevin Coe and David Domke, ‘Petitioners or Prophets? Presidential Discourse, God, and the Ascendancy of Religious Conservatives’, *Journal of Communication* 56.2 (2006), p. 321 about Eisenhower as the ‘national pastor’ of American civil religion in the 1950s.

government, nor an American way of Life'.<sup>286</sup> Meanwhile, as if to prove the point, in the so-called communist satellite states in Eastern Europe, religious persecutions were carried out with the excuse that the church acted as the enemy's legal organization.

In *The Crucible* as in the McCarthy trials, the trials failed to reach the professed goals of providing justice. They were ruled by a denial of personal responsibility and showed the deliberate wickedness of the legal elites, working towards a monolithic and undemocratic social order without room for plural ideas, without room for politics that is. John Proctor, in the play, tellingly summarises his disgust of church ostentation and Parris's megalomaniac obsession with his ministerial prerogatives as 'Lord's man in the Parish', in his robust disdain for the misuse of authority: 'I mean it solemnly, Rebecca; I like not the smell of this "authority"',<sup>287</sup> When personal truth clashes with the legal version of the predetermined truth of a politically motivated partisan jury, trials tend to disconnect the social and individual sense of justice, thus prompting people with a clear conscience like Proctor – and by implication the many ideologically loyal friends of international socialism in 1950s America – to internalise justice and register their dissent instead of being committed to authorities and abstract theocracy. The antagonists in the play, in the figures of Abigail, Parris and Putnam, insist on strict enforcement of the law for the safeguard of their vested interests, and in so doing disturb the community's balance by creating paranoia about the Devil and its associates, subverting the real function of the law, namely providing justice. The format of the trial, with its theatrical collection of heterogeneous voices, proves to be a disturbing element that will always threaten Laclau's secondary metaphorical, political attempt to re-totalize hegemony. In this respect, Miller's play is not merely an allegory. It introduces the heterogeneous elements of trials in two different historical periods and in both cases the trials serve to open up alternative histories.

Let me turn, finally, to this opening up of alternative histories, especially in relation to the complex issue of justice and the role of literature with regard to it. I will distinguish, in what follows, between two aspects of Miller as an artist. One fits the picture of what can be described as the more classical role of the

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<sup>286</sup> Lee Canipe, 'Under God and Anti-Communist: How the Pledge of Allegiance Got Religion in Cold War America', *Journal of Church and State* 45.2 (2003), p. 310.

<sup>287</sup> Miller, *The Crucible*, p. 30.

artist in a democracy, the other is more radical; one is defined in terms of responsibility, the other in terms of irresponsibility.

### 4.3 Intervention II: Responsibility or Literature's Classical Role in Democracy

The parallel consequences of the Congressional hearings, of loyalty oaths and individual slander in the McCarthy era, raise more general modern questions about the state and the law which, as Alzo David-West illustrates, classical Marxism views as the repressive apparatus of coercion and systemized violence.<sup>288</sup> In this context, by theatrically enacting an historically inglorious trial against the backdrop of McCarthy hearings, Miller seems to question the legitimacy of the state and its power apparatus. This brings him close to Lenin's argument in *State and Revolution* (1917), in which Lenin argues in favour of attaining an ideal of absolute democracy, promised by international Marxism as a result of the state and its institutions, including the law, withering away, in the consecutive phases of capitalism, followed by a dictatorship of the proletariat, and finally the higher stage of communism in a classless and free utopia.<sup>289</sup> Is Miller's play also hinting at such a utopian future, which in the end is necessarily totalitarian, or is it trying to open up history and, if so, how?

As an artist in a democracy, Miller revives and reconstructs, through art and literature, liberal democratic values and morals in the interest of survival of its principal tenets. In doing so, he does not shrink from this duty of raising questions about civil liberties in an environment of legalized and enforced morality by a government that finds itself in a frenzy of safeguarding national security at all costs. In response to this, Miller's play is an attempt to change attitudes. It does not belong, however, to the revolutionary left-wing theatre, which flourished between 1911 and 1939 and called for a revolutionary socialist change in America.<sup>290</sup> Instead it seeks to promote democratic individual rights such as free speech, civil liberties and the independence of the courts in times of internal conflict. This call for political change had only been culturally validated

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<sup>288</sup> Alzo David-West, 'Derrida, Terrorism and Communism: A Comment on "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides"', *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 5.2 (2009), 229.

<sup>289</sup> Vladimir Lenin, 'Class Society and the State', in *The State and Revolution: The Marxist Teaching on the State and the Task of the Proletariat in the Revolution* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1976), pp. 10-12.

<sup>290</sup> Rosemarie K. Bank, review of '*Left-Wing Dramatic Theory in The American Theatre*, by Ira A. Levine, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985, pp. 183, *Theatre Research International* 14.02 (1989), p. 217.

a decade earlier in a democratic system that granted artists the freedom to express themselves without fear. Yet the times changed and the artist's role became more controversial. Miller said as much in an interview with Phillip Gelb:

The enemy is the wrong word to me, although I would concede it. The artist is the outcast; he always will be. He is an outcast in the sense that he is to one side of the stream of life and absorbs it and is, in some part of himself, reserved from its implications; that is to say, a man like Vidal says we're out to destroy every thing. I think that you can't see a thing when you are in the middle of it. To some extent, an artist has to step to one side of what is happening, divorce himself from his role as a citizen, and in that sense he becomes the enemy because he does not carry forth in himself and believe what is being believed around him. He is the enemy usually, I suppose, of the way things are, whatever way they are.<sup>291</sup>

Thus Miller implies that the artist cultivates a certain form of socio-cultural estrangement or adopts a rather antagonistic stance in all circumstances towards the doxa of society. In other words he is obliged by his vocation to affront stasis and does not accept reality as it is presented. He is encouraged by his critical genius to be either an outsider of the tradition, or a seer of the unseen, at times an inveterate optimist, and a sworn critic and anything but a eulogist of the status quo. By analogy, Miller applies a similar partial dissociation from the 1950s paranoid American citizenry and confronts it through his work of art. His literary artefact is a blunt statement against the political assassination of democratic values. This artistic crusade was the principal means to safeguard the values of liberty, democracy and truth.

Miller argues in *The Crucible* that it is a misleading to presume that a stable society can only continue to exist through the legal enforcement of morality. The objective reality that qualifies any vibrant and dynamic society is based on each individual's right to freedom, taking the universal values of good and evil as his point of departure. In this context, Miller warns against legal coercion and legal punishment as a means that is not morally justified to preserve collective morality in society. As can be seen in the case of the sublime

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<sup>291</sup> Arthur Miller and Phillip Gelb, 'Morality and Modern Drama', *Educational Theatre Journal* 10.3 (1958), p. 196.

virtue of Salem's martyrs, Miller asserts that a society's morality is best secured through individual norms and virtues that attend to the interests of social order and its vitality but also to the basic right to individual liberty. Miller's position on individual liberty mirrors John Stuart Mill's views in *On Liberty*:

Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough; there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of the society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them; to fetter the development, and, if possible prevent the formation, of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compels all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own.<sup>292</sup>

Two forces appear as a threat to the precious right to individual liberty: state repression but also repression by socio-cultural norms. These norms may lack the ability to enforce things by means of legal punishment but their power is nevertheless considerable. Miller holds the same view, as can be seen from his depiction of the voices of conscience in the Salem trials and from the example of his own testimony before HUAC.

The most revealing aspect of Miller's cautious stance on individual liberty is reflected in the famous Hart-Devlin debate on the subject of legal enforcement of morality.<sup>293</sup> In this debate, Miller took sides with Hart about refraining from legal coercion for attaining social conformity and stability because the human moral instinct and liberty instinct are entrenched side by side and society cannot attain one at the expense of the other through legal pressings. In fact, such pressings constitute moral negatives by maintaining an overt monopoly.<sup>294</sup> Basically, a democratic society has to honestly accommodate individual freedom and dissolve the seamless web that the Salem theocracy misunderstood, or was not willing to accept.<sup>295</sup> In such a theocracy, any deviation from mainstream thought and practices, no matter how well-intentioned, was likely to be seen as an attack on the fabric of society. In this respect, any individual would in all likelihood face suffering and disregard for

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<sup>292</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. by David Spitz (New York: Norton, 1975), p. 6.

<sup>293</sup> David R. Samuelson, 'Hart Devlin and Arthur Miller on the Legal Enforcement of Morality', *Denver University Law Review* 76 (1998-99), p. 189.

<sup>294</sup> Samuelson, p. 197.

<sup>295</sup> Samuelson, pp. 198-99.

his freedom, if his individualistic transgressions from the accepted norms and values were equated with treason, vice and sedition and would be retributed with the violence of law. Paradoxically, this would receive the stamp of approval from a scared public. In this perspective, Miller's stance as an artist testifies of respect for democracy and its future in more or less classical, humanist terms. In other words: in terms of responsibility.

*The Crucible*, as a dramatization of history in the context of contemporary circumstances in 1950s is, in one sense, a reflection of its age, as I already indicated. Yet, through his literary intervention, Miller radicalises this reflection into an call for change by initiating a debate in a society that approved the production of fear at recurrent historical moments without much protest. Miller engages the moral legislators of his times (in this case the American government and judiciary) in a dialogue through his literary art which contains a truth that was not always universally beautiful and digestible. His position on the effect of literature on society is not dissimilar to the stance of liberal democratic theorists such as Martha Nussbaum or Richard Rorty who postulate?, as Simon Stow observes, that reading literary writings can promote liberal democratic values and edify people by making them morally good.<sup>296</sup>

The ability of literature to arouse feelings of empathy in the reader's heart and mind makes it republican in its appeal, which to Rorty is essentially instrumental in cultivating the two democratic values of contingency and solidarity in society.<sup>297</sup> These two values induce sympathy amongst readers for the personae of the characters in the text and their real social counterparts in life. Secondly, through a tentative approach – hovering in the orbits of probability and staying remote from orthodoxy and fanaticism – the reader adopts a democratic way of assessing things, which shows him the fluid, relative and contingent nature of facts. In the same vein, Arthur Miller targets his audiences while keeping faith in literature's capacity to generate in its readers 'a rigorous scrutiny of everything they believe in and live by'.<sup>298</sup> He thus suggests that reading literature initiates a dialectical, democratic and responsible process between the text and the readers.

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<sup>296</sup> Simon Stow, 'Reading Our Way to Democracy? Literature and Public Ethics', *Philosophy and Literature* 30.2 (October 2006), p. 410.

<sup>297</sup> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>298</sup> Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 1.

Literature's function, however, is not limited to turning us all into decent, responsible citizens, certainly not when it helps us to think about alternative futures. This I will address in my conclusion. If *The Crucible* is a play waiting for the occasion, such an occasion could be slightly bigger, or much bigger, than any political situation within a region or nation state.

#### **4.4 Intervention III: Irresponsibility, or Literature as Democracy**

When Jacques Derrida reflected on the relation between literature and democracy, it almost seemed to be a direct echo of *The Crucible*:

Literature is a modern invention inscribed in conventions and institutions which, to hold on to just this trait, secure in principle its right to say everything. Literature thus ties its destiny to certain non-censure, to the space of democratic freedom (freedom of the press, freedom of speech, etc.). No democracy without literature; no literature without democracy. One can always want neither one nor the other, and there is no shortage of doing without them under all regimes; it is quite possible to consider neither of them to be unconditional goods and indispensable rights. But in no case can one dissociate one from the other. No analysis would be equal to it. And each time that a literary work is censored, democracy is in danger, as everyone agrees.<sup>299</sup>

Obviously there are many ways *in* which, and political regimes *under* which, literature can flourish. But the modern version of literature is intrinsically related to democracy. Through *The Crucible*, Miller addresses the dangers of censorship. He also shows that a paranoid democracy will destroy its very fundamentals when it is ruled by a fear of being targeted by enemies, real or imagined. This thought is akin to Derrida's idea of auto-immunity of democracies in times of risk and threat when they, in a self-contradictory process of survival, put a partial end to themselves, just like when in a biological context the human body works against a part of itself to survive.<sup>300</sup> Democracies will still appear in this context as sovereign forces, embodying a

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<sup>299</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Passions: An Oblique Offering', in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. by David Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 23.

<sup>300</sup> Samir Haddad, 'Derrida and Democracy at Risk', *Contretemps: An Online Journal of Philosophy* 4 (September 2004), pp. 29-30.

supreme power, whereas they are supposed to empower the people, individually and collectively.

As for the role of literature in this regard, Derrida's thinking about democratic responsibility is key. One form of responsibility can be defined as the basis of deconstruction, as becomes clear when he argues:

For a deconstruction [of the state] to be as effective as possible, it should not in my view, oppose the state head on and in a unilateral fashion. In many contexts, the state might be the best protection against certain forces and dangers. And it can secure the citizenship of which we have been seeking. The responsibilities to be taken with regard to the state thus differ according to the context, and there is no relativism in this. But, ultimately, these necessary transactions must not obstruct a deconstruction of the state form, which should, one day, no longer be the last word of the political. This movement of 'deconstruction' did not wait for us to begin speaking about 'deconstruction'; it has been underway for a long time, and it will continue for a long time. It will not take the form of suppression of the sovereign state at one particular moment in time but will pass through a long series of still unforeseeable convulsions and transformations, through as yet unheard-of forms of shared and limited sovereignty. [...] The deconstruction of sovereignty has thus already begun, and it will have no end, for we neither can nor should renounce purely and simply the values of autonomy and freedom, or those of power or force, which are inseparable from the very idea of law.<sup>301</sup>

What Derrida proposes here, is a slow and by implication *responsible* transformation through deconstruction, a process that would transform the current form of the representative democracy and the sovereign state into 'a new international law, a new international force'; a democracy that would function in the shape of new institutions, and that would embody a new concrete and equitable form of shared sovereignty. What Derrida envisions is a more

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<sup>301</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides - A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida', in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 131.

democratic society of the future, which he names 'democracy to come', one that will be legal in nature.<sup>302</sup>

A second form of responsibility comes into play when Derrida considers that the democracy to come will no longer be limited to isolated states or nation states. The future democracy should be considered in radically different terms than what is now commonly perceived as a global village, or an international democratic order. He explains this in an interview with Richard Beardsworth:

Second, in the determination or behavior of each citizen or singularity, there should be present, in some form or other, the call to a world of democracy to come, each singularity should determine itself with the sense of the stakes of a democracy which can no longer be contained within frontiers, which can no longer be localized, which can no longer depend on the decisions of a specific group of citizens, a nation or even of a continent. This determination means that one must both think, and think democracy, globally. This may be something completely new, something that has never been done, for we're here talking of something much more complex, much more modest and yet much more ambitious than any notion of the universal, cosmopolitan or human. I realize that there is so much rhetoric today - obvious, conventional, reassuring, determined in the sense of without risk which resembles what I'm saying. When, for example, one speaks of the United Nations, when one speaks in the name of a politics that transcends national borders, one can always do so in the name of democracy.<sup>303</sup>

Derrida proposes a delocalized and global version of democracy, one that is not confined to the national borders of certain states and groups of people. A global battle for democracy is desirable. As a 'democracy to come', it will by necessity be a broad and all-encompassing model of democracy. It is distinctly different from the conventional forms of democracy that we currently have, e.g. the United Nations. The democracy to come will not depend on national and ideological borders of different cultures or the institutions associated with them.

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<sup>302</sup> Derrida, 'Autoimmunity', p. 119.

<sup>303</sup> Jacques Derrida and Richard Beardsworth, 'Nietzsche and the Machine', interview with Jacques Derrida by Richard Beardsworth, *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 7 (Spring 1994), p. 56.

It will not be based on one particular constituency. And whilst we have to work towards it humbly, and by implication responsibly, the endeavour is not without risk. Today the rhetoric of an international order always reassuringly falls back on existing democracies. The democracy to come cannot be realized without risk, however.

Derrida further highlights the radical difference between contemporary forms of democracy and the democracy to come:

One has to make the difference clear, then, between democracy in this rhetorical sense and what I'm calling 'democracy to come.' The difference shows, for example, that all decisions made in the name of Rights of Man are at the same time alibis for the continued inequalities between singularities, and that we need to invent other concepts than state, super state, citizen, and so forth for this new international. The democracy to come obliges one to challenge instituted law in the name of an indefinitely unsatisfied justice, thereby revealing the injustice of calculating justice whether this be in the name of a particular form of democracy or of the concept of humanity. This democracy to come is marked in the movement that has always carried a present beyond itself, makes it inadequate to itself, 'out of joint' (Hamlet); as I argue in *Specters of Marx*, it obliges us to work with the spectrality in any moment of apparent presence. This spectrality is very weak; it is the weakness of the powerless, who, in being powerless, resist the greatest strength.<sup>304</sup>

The pith of Derrida's thoughts on a 'democracy to come' resides in the contrast with the concept of sovereignty, which is enshrined not only in the prevalent concept of the nation state but in law and ethics as well. This 'democracy to come' is beyond borders, universal and non-reductive, unlike the prevalent model of the nation state with its fixed boundaries and finite domain of sovereign powers, and its ultimate aim is the realisation of autonomy and true freedom of the individual. As potential, moreover, it is not entirely something of the future. It is already present, in the shape of a spectrality.

As concerns the issue of opening up a new future it is, I think, of relevance to read *The Crucible* in the light of Derrida's democracy to come. The actors involved in the play or addressed by the play are no longer haunted by

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<sup>304</sup> Derrida, 'Nietzsche and the Machine', pp. 60-61.

ghosts from the past, but they may sense the play's potential for the future. In this respect, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, as a piece of literature, is a source and a medium to represent a historical experience through theatricality. The medium equips him with the means to confess everything, to say everything and reveal all secrets and truths about the disrupting forces in paranoid societies. As a piece of literature, in Derrida's definition, it stands opposed to those works which lack such candour and robust interplay of past and present, and through allegory it not only relates past with present metaphorically and metonymically but also presents us with the ghost of an alternative future. It is of importance to emphasize that this future itself has not been clearly outlined. In fact, it works the other way around. Literature always starts with the present but cannot be reduced to that very present, as Derrida states:

Experience of being, nothing less, nothing more, on the stage of metaphysics, literature perhaps stands on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself. It is the most interesting thing in the world, maybe more interesting than the world, and this is why, if it has no definition, what is heralded and refused under the name of literature cannot be identified with any other discourse. It will never be scientific, philosophical, conversational.<sup>305</sup>

So, what Derrida hints at is not just that literature is the domain that cannot be grasped, in the end, by political forces. It allows us to experience being on the edge of things, not within the domain of ideology but on its borders. This is not to romanticize literature in terms of its superior essence in comparison with other modes of discourse. Instead, as Jonathan Culler observes, 'Derrida gives great importance to literary discourse due to its experience during its engagement with all the aspects the world, on the edge of the world and the engagement that it calls forth in the readers'.<sup>306</sup> Literature, in its capacity of a historical institution, with its conventions and rules, produces the space that Derrida calls instituted *fiction* and a *fictive* institution.<sup>307</sup> It operates in a way to defy all moral or legal sanctions, institutions, rules and prohibitions, whilst subscribing to its own law. It also exceeds the actual while simultaneously

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<sup>305</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'This Strange Institution Called Literature', in *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 47.

<sup>306</sup> Jonathan Culler, 'The Most Interesting Thing in the World', *Diacritics* 38.1-2 (Spring Summer 2008), p. 10.

<sup>307</sup> Derrida, 'Nietzsche and the Machine', p. 36.

including its possibilities by giving due attention to various conditions of possibility.<sup>308</sup> This allows a literary artist to say everything, in the sense of Derrida's *tout dire*, and this is where it predominantly relates to alternative futures.

In this respect, Arthur Miller's belief in literary art and its richness and efficacy seems similar to Derrida's. Let me recall what he said about *The Crucible*, in particular its effect on the audience: 'This is what you see every day, or think or feel; I will show you what you really know but have not had the time, or the disinterestedness, or the insight, or the information to understand consciously'. Again, the aim, here, is not to redirect people to the present and the present only. Miller works on an historical event in order to make something happen historically. He attempts to change people's sensibilities in the present, by means of the 'presented', through fiction, which carries both ghosts from the past and the future. The play is written and aimed at a democratic goal in the Western legal and political sense, which is of saying everything and communicating the full truth. This is the epic feature of the democracy to come, in fact.

In light of the democracy to come, literature's role cannot be one of responsibility only. The excerpt from Derrida at the beginning of this section continues as follows:

The possibility of literature, the legitimation that a society gives it, the allaying of suspicion or terror with regard to it, all that goes together – politically - with the unlimited right to ask any question, to suspect all dogmatism, to analyze every presupposition, even those of the ethics or the politics of responsibility.<sup>309</sup>

Thus there is a direct link between the freedom to say anything via the institution of literature and the political ideal of democracy, an ideal that may be negatively influenced by the imposition of censorship by political, legal or religious elites. Not only does Derrida see democracy and literature as necessarily existing together in a free world, but literature as an institution also holds a certain sense of seditious irresponsibility within itself, in its prerogative to say everything, question any dogmatism and analyse any presupposition.

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<sup>308</sup> Culler, 'The Most Interesting Thing', p. 9.

<sup>309</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Passions: An Oblique Offering', in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. by David Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 23.

This irresponsibility, in terms of the discretionary powers the literary artist derives from his vocation, is tantamount to his refusal to be accountable and establish responsibility before socio-political or ideological bodies. Derrida would welcome this as the highest form of responsibility: ‘this duty of irresponsibility, of refusing to reply for one’s thought or writing to constituted powers, is perhaps the highest form of responsibility’.<sup>310</sup> The duty of irresponsibility is the highest responsibility function within the frame of the ideal of democracy, which is not the current democracy or an achievable democracy, but a democracy *à venir*, to come. In this context I want to read *The Crucible* and Miller’s expostulations against the practices of the United States government and the HUAC hearings of artists and academics as a distinct response in one sense. In another sense, *The Crucible*, as a messianic call for strengthening democratic ideals per se, for a democracy to come, is also a non-response. Derrida continues:

This non-response is more original and more secret than the modalities of power and duty because it is fundamentally heterogeneous to them. We find there a hyperbolic condition of democracy which seems to contradict a certain determined and historically limited concept of such a democracy, a concept which links it to the concept of a subject that is calculable, accountable, imputable and responsible, one that has-to-respond, has-to-tell [*devant-répondre, devant-dire*] the truth (‘the whole truth, nothing but the truth’) before the law, having to reveal the secret, with the exception of certain situations that are determinable and regulated by law (confession, the professional secrets of the doctor, the psychoanalyst, or the lawyer, secrets of national defence or state secrets in general, manufacturing secrets, etc.). This contradiction also indicated the task (task of thought, also theoretico-practical task) for any democracy to come.<sup>311</sup>

The argument is complex and the tropical figure governing this complexity is hyperbole. There is something in literature that will exceed any limit imposed on it, and it is precisely this aspect that makes it suspect in current democracies and that makes it the vehicle for a democracy to come. It could be argued that

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<sup>310</sup> Derrida, ‘Nietzsche and the Machine’, p. 38.

<sup>311</sup> Derrida, ‘Passions: An Oblique Offering’, p. 23.

Miller's *The Crucible* is, indeed, hyperbolic. Some saw the hyperbole in the comparison between witch-hunts and the fight against communism. In Derrida's approach, however, the element of hyperbole is more abstract. Here the argument would have to be that *The Crucible* is hyperbolic whenever an occasion gives rise to its being performed. Earlier I stated that the re-totalizing effect of metaphor demands a motivated response. In one sense Miller's play provides such a response. At the same time, given the circumstances, the play is also distinctly irresponsible. That is to say: it is not a response to McCarthyism nor to the pertaining system of democracy. It has to be, and will have to be, irresponsible for the sake of an alternative future.