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Actualising History

Responsibilities with Regard to the Future in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*

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Abstract

Whereas prior studies have focused on Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* in relation to the Puritan past of the United States of America, this article looks 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 (1692) 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 previous studies in performance research, and a possible theatrical response to them.

Keywords: alienation, distance, future, spectacle, theatre

Bertolt 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.¹ 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, *The Crucible* 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 the 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 *actualisation* of history, not in terms of the representation of a historical past, but in terms of the role of representation with regard to alternative futures. We will be taking our cue especially, in what follows, from Ernesto Laclau's approach to history in discursive terms, more specifically in terms of tropes. In the context of actualisation, 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 while, as a literary artist, he was also a 'child of his times'?

Miller as a '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 in which it was written and staged, that is, 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.² 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).³ 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 we 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 during anti-communist witch-hunts in the US during 1950s McCarthy hearings as an 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 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 our position regarding his options to intervene in society by artistic means.

Let us take the circumstances of the times seriously and use a Marxian analysis first, and then twist it. It will help us 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 our 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.⁴

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 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 a 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 actualisation 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, while, as Arendt emphasises, 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 actualisation of a future.

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 a historical drama, it is an artist's attempt to conceptualise 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'.⁵ 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 a 'vertical' view of history.⁶ 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 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.⁷

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 play's 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, to 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 recognise 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 energeise 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 Chomsky's position on the responsibility of intellectuals. Chomsky says that 'it is the responsibility of the intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies'.⁸

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.⁹ 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.

Intervention: 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.¹⁰ 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.

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 dis-

cerned right in the heart of the prosecution itself and the power of the past, that is, 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 we 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.¹¹

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 re-composition 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.¹²

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'.¹³ 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 we 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 our 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 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.¹⁴

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 the second instance, however, the hegemonic 'suture', its jointing and stitching force in the political field, has to bring into effect a re-totalisation 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 us 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 heterogeneity, for example when the Salem part is heterogeneous to the political system of the 1950s but at the same time present in it 'from the very beginning'. The metaphor relates to a re-totalising 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 a 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 us 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'.¹⁵ 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?'¹⁶ 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 generalised sense of responsibility to the national cause of security reverberate in Joseph McCarthy's use of the 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'.¹⁷ 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-totalising 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 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*.¹⁸

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 McCarthy's re-totalising 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 organised by the enemies of democracy.

The right wing, as A. Peter Foulkes describes it, benefited 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-totalising power to read all signs under one heading and one heading only.¹⁹ 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 pretended, always secretes its pearl around a grain of fact'.²⁰ 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.²¹ In terms of our 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'.²² 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 1950s, 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.²³

Once again, *The Crucible* testifies of a metaphorical re-totalisation, 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'.²⁴ Since witchcraft was an invisible crime, it served as an excellent vehicle for fitting the sign to the interpretation and, as a 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?'²⁵ Therefore he is unconcerned whether lives are wasted and people's reputations are 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.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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 government, nor an American way of Life'.²⁸ 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 organisation.

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"'.²⁹ 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-totalise 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.

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Notes

1. See Bertolt Brecht, 'Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction', in *Brecht on Theatre*, (Hill and Wang, 1964), 1.
2. 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 the Committee to his past affiliation with the Communist Party and told them the names of his associates. For full details on Elia Kazan, see Arthur Miller, *Timebends, Timebends: A Life* (London: Methuen, 1987), 333–35.
3. Erin Graff Zivin, 'Allegory and Hauntology' in *Figurative Inquisitions: Conversion, Torture and Truth in the Luso Hispanic Atlantic* (Northwestern University Press, 2014), 58; 65.
4. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 75.
5. Herbert Lindenberger, *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 131.

6. 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, no. 2 (Winter 1982), 112.
7. Arthur Miller, 'Introduction to the Collected Plays', in *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*, ed. Robert A. Martin (New York: The Viking Press, 1978), 122–123.
8. Noam Chomsky, 'The Responsibility of Intellectuals', in *The Dissenting Academy*, ed. Theodore Roszak (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), 256.
9. Donald E. Brown, 'Human Universals, Human Nature and Human Culture', *Daedalus* 133, no. 4 (Fall 2004), 48.
10. Louis Althusser, 'Contradiction and Overdetermination', in *For Marx/Louis Althusser*, trans. Ben Brewster (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), 99.
11. Ernesto Laclau, 'The Politics of Rhetoric', in *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, ed. Tom Cohn (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 237.
12. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2001), 7.
13. Laclau and Mouffe, 'Preface to the Second Edition', in *ibid.*, x. Emphasis in quote from Laclau and Mouffe in the original text.
14. Laclau, 'The Politics of Rhetoric', 230–31.
15. Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*, Methuen student editions (2010), 86.
16. *Ibid.*, 79.
17. Joseph McCarthy, 'Senator Joseph McCarthy Hunts Communists: Speech Delivered in Wheeling, West Virginia, February 9, 1950', in *Reading the American Past*, ed. Michael P. Johnson, vol. 2 (Boston, MA: Bedford Books, 2012), 221.
18. Miller, *Timebends*, 39.
19. A. Peter Foulkes, *Literature and Propaganda* (London: Methuen, 1983), 87.
20. Arthur Miller, 'Why I Wrote *The Crucible*: An Artist's Answer to Politics', *New Yorker*, 21 October 1996, 158.
21. Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 40.
22. Jonathan D. Culler. Preface, in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. xx–xxi.
23. Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 10.
24. Miller, *The Crucible*, 93.
25. *Ibid.*, 81.
26. William Inboden, 'Preface and Acknowledgments', in *Religion and American Foreign Policy: 1945–1960. The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), ix.
27. See Kevin Coe and David Domke, 'Petitioners or Prophets? Presidential Discourse, God, and the Ascendancy of Religious Conservatives', *Journal of Communication* 56, no. 2 (2006), 321 about Eisenhower as the 'national pastor' of American civil religion in the 1950s.
28. Lee Canipe, 'Under God and Anti-Communist: How the Pledge of Allegiance Got Religion in Cold War America', *Journal of Church and State* 45, no. 2 (2003), 310.
29. Miller, *The Crucible*, 30.

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