

Witch Hunt: The Experience of Salem, 1692, in American Literature

Caça às Bruxas: a Experiência de Salem, 1692, na Literatura Americana

Isabella Vieira de Bem

Resumo

Compreendendo a literatura como uma das formas expressivas da cultura, e esta como uma forma específica de organização de poder, o presente estudo revisa a representação do episódio histórico da caça às bruxas de Salem em 1692 em três obras: Giles Corey of Salem Farms, de Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Giles Corey, Yeoman, de Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman e The Crucible de Arthur Miller. A experiência do episódio caracteriza-se pela consciência da disjunção entre a autoridade moral do estado e sua legitimidade, uma vez que os indivíduos enfrentam a pena de morte como consequência do uso da palavra na esfera pública. O artigo é um exercício de crítica literária atenta à forma pela qual a língua revela a alteridade contingente, não totalizada e não essencializada, reconhecendo a literatura como uma interrogação e resposta à experiência concreta de vida.

Palavras-chave: Salem, experiência, representação.

Abstract

Taking the grounds that literature is one among many expressive forms of culture - and culture is one specific form of power arrangement that individuals experience in a given context - this study reviews the representation of the historical episode of the Salem Witch Hunt in 1692 in three texts: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's Giles Corey of Salem Farms, Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman's Giles Corey, Yeoman, and Arthur Miller's The Crucible. The experience of the episode is that of the disjunction between the moral authority of the state and its power, when the ruling order seems strange and illegitimate, once the individuals face the death penalty as a consequence of their public speech. The article is an instance of criticism sensitive to the way language reveals non-totalized and non-essentialized alterity, as literature constitutes a radically interrogative reflection and response to the lived experience of the world.

Key words: Salem, experience, representation

INTRODUCTION

Bearing witness to violent acts performed by the state that deploys its powerful and overshadowing legal means is ever an indelible experience to any citizen. Though we are surround-

ed by the discourse campaigning for a radical change to lead us into a more tolerant, pacific, and even ecumenical attitude in the new millennium of a world allegedly globalized, the nature of the motivations for this seems to be some steps behind. The reasons that should stir one

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to both reflect on it and help such a change to eventually take place seem to be still rooted in the old modern(ist) argument aiming at (totalized) emancipation rather than in a less programmatic concern allowing for fluidity, flexibility, and complexity to shape this “new” world.

By violent acts I mean capital punishment especially, and the historical episode of the witchcraft trials in Salem, 1692 will serve as an instance of such an indelible experience deeply etched into the American culture. Taking the grounds that literature is one among many expressive forms of culture - and culture is one specific form of power arrangement that individuals experience in a given context - I will examine the ways through which the experience of the historical episode is represented in three different texts.

This analysis should offer elements to consider whether the experience of Salem’s witchcraft trials episode in 1692 has continually resisted closure in literary representation or not. Be it in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *Giles Corey of Salem Farms*, Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman’s *Giles Corey, Yeoman*, or in Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, Salem has been textualized and problematized in various ways. Rendered in such diverse more or less overt manners, even if only through repetition, the experience of the full power of the state against its citizens is always presented anew. In each instance it is never the same and still preserves the same central issue that keeps stirring one’s most humble claims for humanness, echoed by the contemporary tolerance-raising discourse. There are surely other texts to be considered in a sequel to this study, such as Robert Coover’s *The Public Burning* and E. L. Doctorov’s *The Book of Daniel*. They are not the object of this article because they can be better explored as two examples of historiographic metafiction, though bearing reference to what is defined here as the experience of the Salem episode.

Each of the texts in this study suggest how one nation can rapidly sacrifice its rationality and self-confidence - not to mention its sense of justice - and perpetrate rituals of victimization that yield rather a sensation of disguised shame than some liberation or catharsis. Such a remorseless elaborated feeling

is expressed in the shape of the triumph over evil, most frequently an alien one. The American monomyth, whose roots can be traced back to the landing of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in New England soil, brought by the Founding Fathers, encompasses the fear of the alien intruder as a threat insurging against the quiet and peaceful Eden. The first bearers of the curse were undoubtedly the Indians (Native Americans).

The focus of the blame has ever since been systematically and continually shifted and bestowed onto other liable subjects and/or communities, as the Western Eden, The Promised Land, proved incapable of fostering the decreed immunity to the natural and economic disasters which fell upon it. Within such a cultural framework, the state’s thorough inability of dealing with otherness except through its annihilation - legal capital punishment is still in place in some states of the United States - serves as an example of the sort of victim-producing ritual which has held centrality in American culture and in many of its expressive forms.

If literature - and its derivative, literary criticism - can effectively do something to the world, I expect to contribute with an alternative motivation to the ethical concern to prevail in my academic field in this “new” world: criticism must be sensitive to the way language reveals the other, and the reader’s responsibilities must take heed of the non-totalized, non-essentialized other. It must also bring to attention the distinctiveness of the literary artifact, as long as it constitutes a radically interrogative reflection and response to the lived experience of the world, aiming to accentuate the potential intervention into the pre-defined categories of institutionalized knowledge.

The first section of this article presents a brief characterization of the historical fact known as the Salem witchcraft trials. Next, the term experience is conceptualized and a provisional definition of the experience of the episode is offered. Finally, the three texts are analyzed as to the singular textual containment of the witch hunt hysteria each one accomplishes. The readings I present here are my attempt to face the complexity of the task of criticism in an era of radical change by both at-

tending to tradition and going beyond it without falling into the dismissal of faith in rational discourse as ethical.

1. THE EPISODE

The episode of the witch trials and executions which took place in the New England colony from June to September 1692 can be read as bearing reference to one single aspect recurrently featured in American history - that of the full power of the theocratic state against its citizens. It can be briefly summarized as follows.

For more than a year, between January 1692 and May 1693, the men and women of Salem Village lived in hoisted fear of witches and their master, the devil. Hundreds were accused of practicing witchcraft. Many suspects, at least 156, languished in jail for months, helplessly losing their families, homes and possessions. Among these, 19 men and women were hanged at Gallows Hill and one was pressed to death under a pile of stones.

The witch cry had been started by a group of young girls who, after experiencing violent fits, accused their neighbors of afflicting them by witchcraft. As prayer did not prove an effective defense, the affliction soon spread and three women were cried out witches.

Claims of witchcraft would usually be regarded with skepticism and considered as folk superstition. However, the spread of charges next to claims of a broad conspiracy of witches met a judiciary willing to take on "spectral evidence" - only accusers being tormented could see their tormentors - as the grounds for further indictments. Among those in prison accused by the afflicted girls, none of the confessors were hanged, whereas Bridget Bishop, who would never admit to having dabbled with witchcraft, was the first to be tried, and was hanged on June 10th.

After that, "confess and avoid the gallows" would emerge as a formula, as an incitement to confession for the potentially prospective indicted. Every person confronting the legal system came to learn that safety in the public sphere, survival, required compliance with

fraud. The spread of the accusations seems to have been of necessity, mainly after confessions, which traditionally offered the strongest legally accepted evidence of witchcraft, turned into a safety maneuver.

Before August 19th no man had been hanged for witchcraft in Massachusetts. On that day, three men did hang, together with a woman: George Burroughs, John Proctor, John Willard, and Martha Carrier. George Burroughs and Martha Carrier had been dubbed by her accuser as a woman who the devil promised would be a "Queen in Hell" and George Burroughs as the "ringleader" of the coven of witches. The couple had been declared as "Future Monarchs of Hell".

George Burroughs' case turned into a model: a dissident minister in alliance with the devil - one to be justly hanged with the clergy supporting the trials. Although the head of the group was hanging, there still remained an entire demonic congregation with which to reckon. To this, the court responded with expanded executions. This time, even confessors were hanged, had the confessions grown from witchcraft or from pragmatism, had confessors honestly admitted or had they just, attending to the formula, claimed an alliance with the devil and accused someone else. From then on, there was not any incentive to confess any longer, once confessors were being tried and hanged, too.

In January 1693 a new court put an end to the episode. In November a new response to the accusations, in which the validity of accusers were systematically questioned, put aside spectral evidence as the rule on which conviction was based. The episode swiftly changed from one of active prosecution by the state to a seemingly indifferent bureaucracy processing the remaining victims.

2. THE EXPERIENCE

Clifford Geertz's sober remark that dealing with the idea of experience is at the same time fruitful and frustrating, for we are "not at the gates of paradigm-land", makes it a point



that risk can be seen as the very objective condition to knowledge. Following this point, we can envision the opportunity to regard the concept of experience as “the lived register of the contradictions between pressure and practice, limits, and freedom.” In like manner, the question of how we think the world we have inherited from past generations, of how and why we tell our stories of the past, can no longer surrender to a “false objectivism of stubborn facts.” (apud Pickering, 1997, p. 55)

In mid-century criticism experience was conceived as aesthetically transcendent, in no way dependent on cultural or historical context. The assignment of a socio-historical singularity to experience is characteristic of the cultural analyst emphasis on the ways through which experience is socially learned, shared, transmitted and constructed. Consequently, the specific and changing ways in which this experience is coded according to definite historical conditions and processes are under attention.

Experience, thus, is not something static and absolute only assimilable to the discourse of literary criticism, but rather “historically relative and culturally variable (...) only available in contextually determined language and discourse in which it is articulated, received, and in other moments made possible.” (Pickering, 1997, p.58) Experience, in these terms, is clearly construed as an anti-essentialist category.

Wilhelm Dilthey’s concept of experience presents the points to help us examine how certain texts criticize our everyday perception and make us see our surroundings and our emotions in new and critical ways.

The basis of our consciousness of self is the abiding fact that without a world we would not have such a consciousness, and without this consciousness no world would exist for us. What occurs in this contact is life, not a theoretical process; it is what we call an experience, that is, pressure and counter-pressure, expanding towards things which in turn respond, a vital power within and around us which is experienced in pleasure and pain, in fear and hope, in grief over burdens which cannot be shifted, in delight over what we receive as gifts from outside. So the I is not a spectator who sits in front of the world’s stage, but is involved in actions and counteractions in which the same actualities are

overwhelmingly experienced whether kings figure in them or fools and clowns. This is why no philosopher could ever persuade those involved that everything was appearance or show and not reality. (apud Pickering, 1997, p. 91)

There are clearly two interdependent dimensions to be considered in this formulation, the subjective involvement to be linked to a previously organized sequence of lived moments (assimilated) - experience as a process, and the cumulative body of knowledge derived from this involvement, both individually and collectively - experience as a product.

Experience as a process of participation in events and actions can only be met and scrutinized by the (cultural) analyst in mediated, synthesized forms, that is to say, as a product. These biographical and collective forms, cumulative and recursive, eventually act back and become manifest as more or less appropriate responsive behavior. Assimilated experience, then, may be used to either reproduce the legitimized conduct or to be consciously reassessed, and adapted to produce alternative forms in future participation and action.

When faced with an experience, especially one which we cannot readily fit into a previously structured frame, it is with, in, and through words mainly that such an experience will gain meaning. Language, then, not only mediates experience and constructs reality, along with other symbolic systems, but is also a social product - over time language is the only way in which the meanings attached to experience can be transmitted. It is language what makes experience social and historical rather than private, only subjective or individualistic.

However, being social, language is itself also a medium of domination and power. The accounts we produce when interpreting the experiences represented in works of art, social documentation or media texts should then be wary of our own historical forms of interpretation.

It is a point to be made, therefore, that the literary text, one kind among the many cultural texts, should be read as one form of organized production of culture. As such, it is not enough to set on to read them in the heroic quest for its encoded meaning - or meanings, as if there were a veil that once removed would



allow direct and immediate knowing of reality, of social relations or historical conditions, as if reality were ultimately there (somewhere) mirrored and at the critic's reach.

Thus, Michael Pickering's remark that

Any writing about cultural texts, processes and institutions is itself a cultural act: a product of culture which produces culture in the very act of attempting to grasp it. (...) any such act inevitably constitutes an intervention within theory, within knowledge, within culture - for it has its own stake in how knowledge is conceived, and how culture should be conceived, reproduced, or changed. (p.230)

illustrates how these texts and the agents who produce them are at the same time culturally shaped and creative. It also explains why they can be understood in terms of how particular, historically located people think, feel and act, including the way they tell the stories they tell.

The experience of the Salem witch-hunt episode textualized in each of the texts under analysis in this article is one of mortal fear of the consequences of what was said by the individuals, as they are represented as the alien evil who disturbs Eden to be justly eliminated. It is the experience of the disjunction between the moral authority of the state and its power, when the ruling order is displayed as something strange and illegitimate. In each of the texts this experience is present, though made relevant in very distinctive ways, through the unique literary devices deployed by five different outstanding American writers - poet, playwrights and novelists - in the 19th and 20th century alike.

3. THE EXPERIENCE OF THE EPISODE IN THE TEXTS

3.1 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Giles Corey of the Salem Farms*.

The Salem witch hunt episode has been repeatedly pictured in American literature. The poet Henry Longfellow approaches the cultu-

ral and historical traumatic events of the colonial times concentrating on the plight one Giles Corey farmer undergoes after being accused of witchcraft by one of his hired hands. A play in five acts, *Giles Corey of the Salem Farms* presents an individual's progression into martyrdom. In times deemed by the poet as materialist and money-worshipping he features the character Giles Corey as the embodiment of the idealized high moral values and principles that should characterize and reveal the genius of America.

While still a student Longfellow delivered a speech on nationalism in literature in which he made a statement to commit himself to provide America with the native writing demanded by the nation.. His project was to derive the poetic qualities of genuinely American poetry "from the spirit (of a nation) - from its scenery and climate, its historical recollections, its government, its various institutions." (Ruland and Bradbury, 1991, p.108)

In this sense, the myth of America as Eden, as new Canaan, is continually reinforced throughout the play by means of a series of references to The Bible. In the Prologue there is the framing of a historical recollection in which Salem is cast as once a peaceful and blessed town which is eventually attacked by Evil:

Who would believe that in the quiet town
Of Salem and, amid the woods that crown
The neighboring hillsides, and the sunny farms
That fold it safe in their paternal arms,
Who would believe that in those peaceful streets,
Where the great elms shut out the summer heats,
Where quiet reigns, and breathes through brain
and breast The benediction of unbroken rest,
Who would believe such deeds could find a place
As these whose tragic history we retrace?
(Prologue)

Again in Act I, Scene II, New England is equated with Canaan by both Hathorne and Mather:

MATHER God give us wisdom
In the directing of this thorny business,
And guide us, lest New England should become
Of an unsavory and sulphurous odor(...)
That time is on the wing, and we must quicken



Our tardy pace in journeying Heavenward,
As Israel did in Journeying Canaan-ward!

HATHORNE. Then let us make all haste.
And I will show you
In what disguises and what fearful shapes
The Unclean spirits haunt this neighborhood,
And you will pardon my excess of zeal.

In the passage above the paralleling of America with the Promised Land serves to justify the excessive zeal required with which the disturbance must be countered, and given the fact that this 'thorny business' is of satanic nature, it is a matter of slaughtering the assailant as quickly as possible, lest new England plunges in doom.

On recollecting the historical episode of the Salem witch hunt, Longfellow centered the textual capture on the experience of the disjunction between the ruling order and the central character's sense of legitimacy. As it was pointed out in section 1 in this article, the historical account has it that one of the people was executed by pressure under a pile of stones. That was Giles Corey, the one victim who forced the authorities to openly exhibit the full extent of their power to the limit of the individual's resistance.

By choosing to concentrate the representation of the historical fact on this emblematic character, Longfellow managed to exhort Corey's moral stance as positive. The individual is depicted, thus, according to the Romantic decree, as the holder of his own salvation against the fierce society.

In the quotation that follows, when Giles Corey is questioned by magistrate Hathorne in trial, there is the explicit rendition of his understanding of the ruling order as illegitimate as he presents the reason and purpose for his choice to be silent:

HATHORNE What does he say? Giles Corey, go not hence. You are yourself Accused of Witchcraft and Sorcery
By many witnesses. Say, are you guilty?

COREY I know my death is foreordained by you,
Mine and my wife's.
Therefore I will not answer.

During the rest of the scene he remains silent
(Act IV, Scene I)

Later, in jail, Corey explains to his friend and visitor Richard Gardner why he would not confess:

COREY. I will not plead. If I deny, I am condemned already
In courts where ghosts appear as witnesses,
And swear men's lives away. If I confess,
Then I confess a lie, to buy a life
Which is not life, but only death in life.
I will not bear false witness against any,
Not even against myself, whom I count least.
(...)
But if a word could save me, and that word
Were not the Truth; nay, if it did but swerve
A hair's-breadth from the Truth, I would not say it!
(Act V, Scene III)

The truth is also what Gile's wife, Martha Corey, stands for. Her extensive retelling of the biblical story of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel to the Deacon who comes to her house to inquire on the accusation of witchcraft serves three purposes. It is a statement of belief and of faith:

MARTHA (rising) They do accuse me falsely. It is delusion, or it is deceit.
There is a story in the ancient Scriptures
Which I much wonder comes not to your minds.

The story is also quoted to serve as an argument for the Coreys' rightful defense, as Martha claims they are victims of a plotted scheme:

So she (Jezebel) wrote letters in King Ahab's name,
And sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters
Unto the elders that were in his city
Dwelling with Naboth, and unto the nobles;
And in the letters wrote,
Proclaim a fast;
And set this Naboth among the people,
And set two men, the sons of Belial,
Before him, to bear witness and to say,
Thou didst blaspheme against god and the King;
And carry him out and stone him, that he die!
(Act III, Scene III)



Last but not least, the story utters a warning against iniquity to the seemingly gullible authorities, once it is offered as an allegory of the “cry witch” hysteria.

And Ahab then, the King of Israel,
Said, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?
Elijah the Prophet answered, I have found thee!
So will it be with those who have stirred up
The sons of Belial here to bear false witness
And swear away the lives of innocent people;
Their enemy will find them out at last,
The Prophet's voice will thunder, I have found thee!
(Act III, Scene III)

Nevertheless, the authority and righteousness of the clergy is reassured in the end, and it is not put into question. Cotton Mather is continually presented as the sage counselor against the excessive zeal demonstrated by the magistrates and as its wary spectator. This is so in Act I:

MATHER. Be careful. Carry the knife with such
exactness,
That on one side no innocent blood be shed
By too excessive zeal, and on the other
No shelter given to any work of darkness.
(Act I, Scene II)

His advice in Act III is one that both wonders whether the punishment that has taken place is rightful, whether they have not been too zealous despite their watchfulness.

MATHER May not the Devil take the outward shape
Of innocent persons? Are we not in danger,
Perhaps, of punishing some who are not guilty?
(Act III, Scene II)

Richard Gardner, who comes to visit Corey after 20 years away, finds him in jail facing death and comments aside on his bold decision:

GARDNER. (aside) Ah, what a noble character is
this!
COREY. I pray you, do not urge me to do that
You would not do yourself. I have already
The bitter taste of death upon my lips;
I feel the pressure of the heavy weight

That will crush out my life within this hour;
(...)
GARDNER. (aside) how mean I seem beside a man
like this!
(Act V, scene III)

This speech, made by the only other outsider in Salem, anticipated Mather's last words. The last scene shows Corey lying dead in a field near the graveyard. Mather's sententious speech framed within a spectator's stance closes the play:

MATHER. O sight most horrible! In a land like
this, Spangled with Churches Evangelical,
Inwrapped in our salvations, must we seek
In mouldering statute-books of ? English courts
Some old forgotten law, to do such deeds?
Those who lie buried in the Potter's Field
Will rise again, as surely as ourselves
That sleep in honored graves with epitaphs;
And this poor man, whom we have made a victim
will be counted as a martyr! (Act IV)

This portrayal of tragedy as noble adds to the healing interpretation of the cultural trauma being produced in the mid 1830s. By closing the play with the highest theological authority of the times, Cotton Mather, proclaiming Giles Corey a martyr, Longfellow reduces the political dimension of his denial to confess. Interestingly, his denial to comply with the ruling order contains the basic elements of individual liberty which would be fully articulated in Civil Disobedience. The final image of the Salem episode Longfellow's play presents to us is one that conforms the romantic idea of the individual's sovereignty, one of the basic cultural assumptions of America to this day.

3.2 Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's *Giles Corey, Yeoman*

The regional tradition in writing, which achieved universal popularity in the 1870s, both sentimentalized the American past and shed light onto ordinary aspects of the contemporary American life. The shaping of the black experience and of the experience of wo-



men, for example, started to be addressed in literary works as partaking the expressiveness of the national experience. Best known for the detailed portraits of New England life and for her engagement in the strength of establishing regional writing in America, Mary Wilkins Freeman also did not miss the Salem episode as a still timely topic.

Giles Corey, Yeoman, a play in six acts, explores the petty motivations, the often undisclosed personal rivalries and selfish plots that supported the social texture that led to the witch-hunt frenzy in colonial New England. The domestic drama of the Coreys and its tragic outcome are developed within a grim social commentary that foregrounds the gap between women's sensibility and that of men's in a world ruled by the latter, between the learned and the unlettered, between the town and the farms. The particularity of the domestic sphere should account for its potential as a documentary of the locality uniqueness on one hand, and of the diversity of aspects in American life, on the other.

The Coreys' family life is the site where contentious attitudes towards the ongoing witch hunt are displayed. These attitudes will be made evident when witchcraft is deployed as a convenient justification for the characters' ailments, very often due to petty and mundane motivations.

In so being, Act I presents Olive, Phoebe and Nancy - the Coreys' daughter, niece and servant, respectively - busy with typical house chores when Ann, the Hutchins' daughter arrives and reports she was frightened by some cold wind on her way through the wood. When Olive brings her a cape as a gift, she tosses it away and accuses Olive of performing "cursed arts". We soon learn that Ann is jealous of Olive's engagement with Paul. Giles Corey enters the room disturbed and is surprised to see Ann out of her house after nightfall when so many supernatural perils are at large:

GILES The matter is there be too many evil things abroad nowadays for a man to be out after nightfall. When things that can be hit by musket balls lay in wait, old Giles Corey is as brave as any man; but when it comes to devilish black beasts and black men that musket balls bound back from - What!

You here, Ann Hutchins? What be you out after dark for? (Act I)

When he learns that Martha is also out in the dark, he tells them that lack of fear is lack of wisdom. When Martha arrives their attitudes towards admitting the reality of witches in Salem clash,

GILES I meant not Injuns. There be worse than Injuns. There be evil things and witches.

MARTHA (laughing) Witches! Goodman, you are a worse child than Phoebe here. (Act I)

Next, Paul arrives, and Ann immediately reacts by taking leave. To this, Martha ushers to walk her home despite Ann's insistence to walk back home by herself. Paul and Olive have some time alone so that he can kiss her goodbye, as he is leaving to Boston for a week. He advises Olive to "keep away from this witchcraft folly", and reassures her he will be safe in the woods while she should be the one to be careful, "for sometimes danger sneaks the home, when we flee it abroad".

As Phoebe and Nancy are sent to bed, they engage in the witchcraft folly. Nancy tells Phoebe how to make voodoo dolls and hurt those who either neglect or contradict her wishes.

In Act II Widow Hutchins accuses Martha and Olive of practicing witchcraft to Reverend Parris and Judge Hathorne. She charges the Coreys of the affliction her daughter Ann has been suffering ever since Martha drove her home:

HUTCHINS (...) And then when Ann said she must be home, Paul rose quickly and made as though he would go with her, but goody Corey would not let him, and herself went with Ann. And she did practise her devilish arts upon my poor child all the way home, and when my poor child got on the door-stone she burst open the door, and came in as though all the witches were after her, and she has not been herself since. She ahs ever since been grievously tormented, being set upon now by Goody Corey, and now by Olive, being choked and twisted about until I thought she would die, and so I fear she will, unless they be speedily put in chains. It seemeth flesh and blood cannot endure it. (Act II)



Worried about Ann's screams and offering help, Giles Corey comes in and among other things, he comments on Martha's scornful remarks at Giles fear of witches. Her attitude thus reported is interpreted by Parris and Hathorne as proof of her alliance with the Devil. In response to Hutchin's claims and Giles complaints, the authorities take action:

HATHORNE The witch will be chained and in prison before nightfall. Come, Minister Parris, we can do no good by abiding longer here. Methinks we have sufficient testimony.

PARRIS Verily the devil hath played into our hands.
(Act II)

Act III displays Martha Corey's trial at the Meeting House. The first evidence she has to reckon with is her husband's charges of her scoffing and laughing at the afflicted girls. The second kind of evidence was Ann's narrative version of how Martha and Olive cast a spell on her, followed by the accusations by her servant Nancy and her orphan niece Phoebe.

To all these, Martha responds by reaffirming her status as a covenanted woman and by appealing to the 'domestic' nature of the whole matter:

MARTHA (with sudden fervor) I am no witch. There is no such thing as a witch. Oh, ye worshipful magistrates, ye ministers and good people of Salem Village, I pray ye hear me speak for a moment's space. Listen not to this testimony of distracted children, this raving oaf a poor lovesick, jealous maid, who should be treated so softly, but not let to do this mischief. (...) I pray you to consider that. I am no saint; I wot well that I have but poorly done the will of the Lord who made me, but I am a gospel woman, and keep to the faith according to my poor measure. Can I be a gospel woman and a witch too? I have never that I know of done aught of harm whether to man or beast. I have spared not myself nor minded mine own infirmities in tasks for them that belonged to me, nor for any neighbor that had need. I say not this to set myself up, but to prove to you that I can be no witch, and my daughter can be no witch. (...) Look at me! Can I be a witch? (Act III)

To this the afflicted girls respond with

fits and claims of spectral apparitions and pinchings by Olive Corey, who is eventually charged in the same court. Every time their deception is challenged to be cleared, they come up with one more claim, one more charge. As a result, the verdict is issued:

HATHORNE Having now received the testimony of the afflicted and the witnesses, and duly weighted the same according to our judgment, being aided to a decision, as we believe, by the divine wisdom which we have invoked, we declare the damsel Olive Corey free and quit of the charges against her. And Martha Corey, the wife of Giles Corey, of Salem Village, we commit unto the jail in Salem until - (Act III)

Giles Corey reacts violently at this and is also chained. At the realization that every one of his words have been distorted by the learned men and abused for the purpose of victimizing his family, he decides to stand mute when his trial comes.

In Act IV Paul is back from Boston and finds the Coreys' house in bad condition, once the house chores have been neglected since the week past. Olive briefly tells him what happened to her parents and Paul sets out back to Boston to get the help of "unclouded minds" and to inform the Governor, who held in his hands the only hope for her parents. Paul tells Olive about her father's refusal to plead and the reason why he has decided to stand mute at his trial:

PAUL I scarcely know why. Has he made a will, 'twill not be valid were he to plead at a criminal trial; there will be an attainder on it. They say that is one reason, and that he thinks thus to show his scorn of the whole devilish work, and of a trial that is no trial. (Act IV)

Having learned that whatever he says, in trial or outside one, is potentially a charge of dealing with witchcraft, Giles Corey manages to reverse the course of events by choosing not to say a word.

Act V takes place six weeks later on the day of Giles' trial - and execution. Martha has been hanged by then and Paul visits Giles in jail to let him know that his attempts to have



him freed with the intervention of the Governor have failed. Giles urges Paul to wed Olive so that his property is not reclaimed by the authorities as it should. To Paul's pleading with him not to choose such a dreadful death - under a pile of stones - Giles responds by restating his dignity against the madness of the court:

GILES (...) 'Tis death in any case, and what would ye have me do? Stand before their mad worships and those screeching jades, and plead as though I were before folk of sound mind and understanding? Think ye I would so humble myself for naught? (Act V)

Giles also confesses to Paul he feels guilty for what happened to Martha:

GILES I tell ye I did part on't. I was wroth with her that she made light of this witch-work over which I was so mightily wrought up, and I said words that they twisted to her undoing. Verily, words can be made to fit all fancies. 'Twere safer to be mute as I'll be this afternoon. (Act V)

Giles admission of guilt to Paul is grounded on the realization that his words have been abused by the authorities. This is the main reason he finds to counter the whole folly by choosing to remain silent. He also tells Paul that by standing mute he is both making amends to Martha and exposing the madness of the court:

GILES (...) This be verily a mightier work than ye think. It shall be not only old Giles Corey that lies pressed to death under the stones, but the backbone of this great evil in the land shall be broke the same weight. I tell ye it will be so. I have clearer understanding now, I be so near the end on't. They will dare no more after me. Today shall I stand mute at my trial, but my dumbness shall drown out the clamor of my accusers. Old Giles Corey will have the best on't. 'Tis for this and not for the goods, I will stand mute; for this and to make amends to Martha. (Act V)

In this way, Giles convinced both Paul and Olive of the righteousness of his decision to face the mockery, the false charges, and the penalty without letting out a word. Having also

succeeded in convincing Olive to marry Paul on that same day, in Act VI Giles speaks no more. We learn that he has stood his torment longer than anyone expected and ignored his chance to "speak and avert this death". As Giles had reassured Paul, his silence and his death would serve his purpose:

HATHORNE (...) Fear not, good Master Corwin, Giles Corey will not die; ere long his old tongue will wag like a millwheel.

CORWIN I doubt much, good Master Hathorne, if Giles Corey speak. And if he does not speak, and so be put to death, as is decreed, I doubt much if the temper of the people will stand more.

(...)

HATHORNE (...) He will speak. Oh, yes, fear ye not, he will speak. (Act VI)

The last lines of the play are the announcement of Giles Corey's death made by the messenger:

MESSENGER Giles Corey is dead, and he has not spoken.

In Mary Wilkins Freeman's textualization of the historical episode of the Salem witchcraft trials the experience is focused on the typical family-life sphere of New England and masterfully explored within the local colorist aesthetics to make sense of such a traumatic event in colonial America. Giles Corey learned the hard way that the power of speech lies in the import it brings to the public sphere. Though the master of his house, where his word was the law and non-controversial, it is by receding from this same power that he manages to overcome the plight his very words, once launched into the public sphere, brought upon his family. More than a martyr, Giles Corey stands as a hero, one whose choices make a difference and manages to change the course of history.

3.3 Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*

In mid 20th century, the Salem episode is brilliantly appropriated by Arthur Miller. *The*

Crucible was written in 1953 in an America, in the author's words "almost nobody I know seems to remember clearly". A time when Senator Joseph McCarthy, "brash and ill-mannered but to many authentic and true", stirred fears of creeping Communism "buzzing his truculent sidewalk brawler's snarl through the hairs in his nose, squinting through his cat's eyes". (Miller 1998, p.158-159)

One among the many problems Arthur Miller points out he had to face while writing the play at the same time the red-hunt was raging is especially useful to help correlate the experience of the historical fact with its representation:

...so many practices of the Salem trials were similar to those employed by the congressional committees that I could easily be accused of skewing history for a mere partisan purpose. (...) I had to confront the charge that such an analogy was specious—that there never were any witches but there certainly are Communists. (Miller, 1998, p. 162)

Though there were no Communists in 1692, there had to be witches in the world - or the Bible lied. Determined to face the challenge - and the charge - Miller was highly troubled by one similarity specially: that the spectral evidence as proof of guilt *en tour de force* turned confession into a safety maneuver. And what is more, the sincerity of a confession lay on naming others. Back in 1692 "as it did in plot-ridden 1952, when so often the question was not the acts of an accused but the thoughts and intentions in his alienated mind" (Miller, 1998, p.162). It is worth repeating here the piece of information about the nature of witchcraft as a crime in the medieval law in England: the making or seeking to make a pact with the Devil rather than the real harm caused by use of magic.

But Miller still adds that he could not help equating the two facts:

The more I read into the Salem panic, the more it touched off **corresponding ages of common experiences** in the fifties(...) (Miller, 1998, p. 162)

It is at this point, at this incidental wording marked in bold types in the quotation above, that the experience of the episode on the

witchcraft trials in Salem 1692 is defined. For the purpose of the analysis of the representation of that experience in *The Crucible*, the pattern presented by Bernard Rosenthal (1995) is instrumental. The pattern consists of four phases: the accusatory questioning of the presumed guilty accused, the testimony against her/him, the claim of spectral affliction followed by narrative depositions against the accused, and the conviction. *The Crucible*, extensively reviewed as a thematic allegory to the McCarthy red hunt, can still be treated as another allegorical dimension, the structural one. Conversely: four phases in the episodic trials, four acts in the play.

The play concentrates on John Proctor's ordeal. After his wife Elizabeth was charged with witchcraft by their ex-servant Abigail Williams, he faces the court with what he believes is hard proof of her innocence and of the lies the court had been supporting. The lies were grounded on Abigail's personal revenge after having been first bedded and later turned down by Proctor. As a result of his bold attempt to reverse the course of the inquisitions, he is accused of afflicting his servant Marry Warren and is kept in jail to be hanged, as he would not confess to witchcraft. On the day marked for his hanging he is once more exhorted to confess and have his life spared. He gives them the lie, but as he refuses to name others and to be used as an example to force others into the same lie, he is executed together with other two unconfessed convicted women.

Concerning Act I, the questioning of Abigail Williams by her uncle Samuel Parris, Reverend of Salem Town, clearly runs in the accusatory tone we have referred to above, as it is evident in the passage that follows:

PARRIS: Now, look you, child, your punishment will come in its time. But if you trafficked with spirits in the forest I must know it now, for surely my enemies will, and they will ruin me with it.

ABIGAIL: But we never conjured spirits.

PARRIS: Then Why can she not move herself since midnight? This child is desperate! *Abigail lowers her eyes.* It must come out - my enemies will bring it out. Let me know what you done there. Abigail, do you understand that I have many enemies? (Miller 1996, p.10)



Abigail is presumed guilty of Betty's ailment. During her private questioning - carried out at Parris's house - she is warned about the penalty. Though Abigail insists on the mundane and strictly familial dimension of the incident, Parris articulates the hardship to two other spheres: both the political, public aspect of the trouble he had been facing to impose his authority as a minister (in the theocracy of the time), and to the religious everlasting war between the forces of light and darkness. In each of them we watch the growing essentializing move from contingency to transcendence:

PARRIS, *with anger*: I saw it! *He moves from her. Then, resolved*: Now tell me true, Abigail. And I pray you feel the weight of truth upon you, for my ministry's at stake, my ministry and perhaps your cousin's life. Whatever abomination you have done, give me all of it now, for I dare not be taken unaware when I go before them down there.
ABIGAIL: There's nothin' more. I swear it, uncle. (p. 11)

In like manner, when Abigail was questioned by Reverend John Hale, who had been summoned from Beverly to attest whether the case was of bewitchment or not, Abigail learns how to keep out of trouble from then on - claiming spectral affliction in the form of the wonders described (prescribed?) by the expert John Hale himself.

HALE, *grasping Abigail*: Abigail, it may be your cousin is dying. Did you call the Devil last night?
ABIGAIL: I never called him! Tituba, Tituba... (...)
HALE: did you feel any strangeness when she called him? A sudden cold wind, perhaps? A trembling below the ground? (...)
Mrs. Putnam enters with Tituba, and instantly Abigail points at Tituba.
ABIGAIL: She made me do it! She made Betty do it! (...)
HALE: Woman, have you enlisted these children for the Devil?
TITUBA: No, no, sir, I don't truck with no Devil! (p.42)

From this point on Abigail, who has been attentively listening - like any proper girl of

the times - infers the safe move and sets on to accuse Tituba of causing her a series of ailments that perfectly fit the description of the wonders which could prove the bewitchment of Betty offered by Hale.

HALE: You have sent your spirit out upon this child, have you not? Are you gathering souls for the Devil?
ABIGAIL: She sends her spirit on me in church; she makes me laugh at prayer! (p. 42)

Tituba's questioning then goes on to provide a most heedful Abigail with some coaching into the only way out - confession:

PUTNAM: This woman must be hanged! She must be taken and hanged!
TITUBA, *terrified, falls to her knees*: No, no, don't hang Tituba! I tell him I don't desire to work for him, sir!
(...)
HALE: You have confessed yourself to witchcraft, and that speaks a wish to come to Heaven's side. And we will bless you, Tituba. (p.44-46)

And the questioning goes on so that the process finds its necessary solution: the confirmation of a conspiracy being plotted to overthrow the Lord, the Colony, Salem Town, Reverend Parris - theocracy, in a word - and install chaos. Abigail, alert as ever, grasps the rules of the game. The next move to assure safety is implicating others, and in doing so, confirming the fiendish conspiracy, born at the house of the Devil's most desired prey:

HALE: Take courage, you must give us all their names. How can you bear to see this child suffering? Look at her Tituba. *He is indicating Betty on the bed*. Look at her God-given innocence; her soul is so tender; we must protect her, Tituba; the Devil is out and preying on her like a beast upon the flesh of the pure lamb. God will bless you for your help. Abigail rises, staring as though inspired, and cries out.
ABIGAIL: I want to open myself! *They turn to her, startled. She is enraptured, as though in a pearly light*. I want the light of God, I want the sweet love of Jesus! I danced for the Devil; I saw him; I wrote in his book; I go back to Jesus. I kiss His hand. I saw



Sarah Good with the Devil! I saw Goody Osburn with the Devil! I saw Bridget Bishop with the Devil! *As she is speaking Betty is rising from the bed, a fever in her eyes, and picks up the chant.* (p.47-48)

Act I ends with their ecstatic cries leading to the Act II and to the second phase of the pattern, the narrative testimonies against the accused. Act II takes place eight days after the first witch cry. At Proctor's farmhouse, five miles away from Salem Town, Elizabeth asks Proctor to go to Salem Town to denounce the fraud Abigail and the other girls have put up. Their servant, Mary Warren, is now an official of the General Court. When Marry arrives, she offers a report of her play in the proceedings. The passage that follows exemplifies the second phase of the pattern:

MARRY WARREN: And so I told that to Judge Hathorne, and he ask her so "Sarah Good," says he, "what curse do you mumble that this girl must fall sick after turning you away?" and then she replies - *mimicking and old crone* - "Why, your excellence, no curse at all. I only say my commandments; I hope I may say my commandments," says she!

ELIZABETH: And that's an upright answer.

MARRY WARREN: Aye, but then Judge Hathorne say "Recite for us your commandments!" - *leaning avidly toward them* - and of all tem she could not say a single one. She never knew no commandments, and they had her in a flat lie!

PROCTOR: And so condemned her?

MARRY WARREN, *now a little strained, seeing his stubborn doubt*: Why, they must when she condemned herself.

PROCTOR: But the proof, the proof!

MARRY WARREN, *with great impatience with him*: I told you the proof. It's hard proof, hard as rock, the judges said. (p.57-58)

Soon after this, Reverend Hale arrives to question the Christian character of the Proctors' house, once Elizabeth's name has been "somewhat mentioned" and Proctor fails to recite the seventh commandment. When Hale is about to leave - troubled by Proctor's fault and suspicious of the couple's heretic disbelief in the existence of witches - the marshals arrive to arrest Elizabeth. Ironically, the hard proof Proctor had been insisting upon is revealed in his

house. They find a poppet that neatly fitted Abigail's charge on Elizabeth's voodoo magic. Once again, the testimony against the accused was narrative, woven to fit the charge.

The third phase in the pattern - spectral evidence accepted as suitable grounds for judgement of the accused - is consistently presented in Act III. Four different kinds of evidence are offered in order to counter the evidence claimed by the girls while suffering fits before the jury, but none of them is deemed worthy of attention. Be it the accused denial grounded on logic, the favorable testimony of the family of the accused, a step-back move on the part of a former accuser, or the intervention of an authority other than the magistrates in defense of the accused - all these efforts to counterpoint spectral evidence were regarded and interpreted as an attack to the General Court and as proof of wrongdoing.

At the opening of Act III Martha Corey's claim of innocence during her questioning is ignored:

MARTHA COREY'S VOICE: I am innocent to a witch. I know not what a witch is.

HATHORNE'S VOICE: How do you know, then, that you are not a witch?

MARTHA COREY'S VOICE: If I were, I would know it.

HATHORNE'S VOICE: Why do you hurt these children?

MARTHA COREY'S VOICE: I do not hurt them. I scorn it! (p.83-84)

Martha's questioning is then interrupted by her husband who rushes in bringing what he believes may favor his wife's judgement. Though he demands to be heard in court, he only manages to be heard in the vestry room of the meeting house, out of the session and under the continual interruptive accusatory comments made by Reverend Parris. Despite all that, his evidence is not even submitted eventually. His desperation is considered as an assail to the proceedings. Notice the consistent patronizing attitude of the court towards Corey's demands in the following passage:

DANFORTH, *looking directly at Giles*: Who is this man?



PARRIS: Giles Corey, sir, and a more contentious -
GILES, *to Parris*: I am asked the question, and I am old enough to answer it! *To Danforth, who impresses him and to whom he smiles through his strain*: My name is Corey, sir, Giles Corey. I have six hundred acres, and a timber in addition. It is my wife you be condemning now. *He indicates the courtroom.*

DANFORTH: And how do you imagine to help her cause with so contemptuous riot? Now be gone. Your old age alone keeps you out of jail for this.

GILES, *beginning to plead*: They be tellin' lies about my wife, sir, I -

DANFORTH: Do you take it upon yourself to determine what this court shall believe and what is shall set aside?

GILES: Your Excellency, we mean no disrespect for -

DANFORTH: Disrespect indeed! It is disruption, Mister. This is the highest court of the supreme government of this province, do you know it? (p. 86)

Evidence of still a third sort is submitted to Govern Deputy Danforth and once more refused. Proctor brings his servant Marry Warren to state her part in the girls' performance of the spectral afflictions:

PROCTOR: Aye, sir. She swears now that she never saw Satan. Nor any spirit, vague or clear, that Satan may have sent to hurt her. And she declares her friends are lying now.

(...)

HATHORNE, *with a gleam of victory*: And yet, when people accused of witchery confronted you in court, you would faint, saying their spirits came out of their bodies and choked you -

MARRY WARREN: That were pretense, sir. (p. 100)

After this, Danforth turns to Abigail, who then fights Mary's accusation by falling into a fit. She is immediately joined by the other girls to accuse Mary Warren of afflicting them at that very moment, supplying Danforth with more spectral evidence.

The last kind of evidence offered to debase the status of spectral evidence is Reverend Hale's continual remarks to Danforth about the appropriateness of entertaining testimony which favored the accused not as an attack to the court but as sound legal measure. This time the evidence is refused as an attempt to foster rebellion within the Church itself.

HALE: We cannot blink it more. There is a prodigious fear of this court in the country -

(...)

DANFORTH, angered now: Reproach me not with the fear in the country. There is fear in the country because there is a moving plot to topple Christ in the country!

HALE: But it does not follow that everyone accused is part of it.

(...)

DANFORTH: Mr. Hale, believe me; for a man of such terrible learning you are most bewildered (...)

To Proctor and the others: And I bid you all do likewise.

In an ordinary crime, how does one defend the accused? One calls up witnesses to prove his innocence. But witchcraft is *ipso facto*, on its face and by its nature, an invisible crime, is it not? Therefore, who may possibly be witness to it? The witch and the victim. None other. Now we cannot hope the witch will accuse herself; granted? Therefore, we must rely upon her victims - and they do testify, the children do testify. As for witches, none will deny that we are most eager for all their confessions. Therefore, what is left for a lawyer to bring out? I think I have made my point. Have I not? (p.98-100)

As the corresponding fourth phase in the dynamics of the episode, the conviction to be hanged, Act IV opens in a cell in Salem jail where two confessed witches, Tituba and Sarah Good, await their lord, the Devil, to rescue them - once they will not hang. Other prisoners who remain unconfessed are marked to be hanged on that day. In the time that still precedes daylight Reverend Hale summons Elizabeth, who should not be hanged before her baby is due, to try to draw her husband to confess. As he considers himself a fraud among many of those who died claiming innocence and Christians, he chooses to have his life spared. He confesses to Danforth and Hathorne having seen the Devil, having bound himself to the Devil's service, but denies having seen anybody else with the Devil.

He signs the document before the judges, the reverends and his wife, but after doing that he tears it, preventing the authorities from nailing it at the sight of the community. His confession has surely acted to cleanse his private calamity, but Proctor does not give in to make this one more shame any more public:



PROCTOR: I'd have you see some honesty in it. Let them that never lied die now to keep their souls. It is pretense for me, a vanity that will not blind God nor keep my children out of the wind.
Pause. What say you (p. 136)

Proctor has lived up to perform his "duty", he has confessed his private soul to God and the magistrates - consistent with his realization and public speech: "I say- I say- God is dead!" However, he will resist and face death, to surrendering his name, his public existence to be appropriated and abused by the authorities, to contributing to their horrible efficiency in extracting confessions.

DANFORTH: Then explain to me, Mr. Proctor, why you will not let-

PROCTOR, *with a cry of his whole soul*: Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my sou; Leave me my name! (p.142-143)

In so doing, Proctor faces the weight, the burden of countering the theocratic state which reduces his uniqueness to an instance of the all-embracing transcendent essence of the unified and totalized subject. In other words, he embodies the essentialized theocracy's Other, to be justly and legally crushed. The textual capture of the experience of the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692 presented in *The Crucible* in allegorical mode in the 50s America is such an eloquent one that whenever their civil liberties are openly challenged, it is Proctor's ordeal what comes to mind and is invoked as a sober warning.

CONCLUSION

When choosing the Salem episode as a topic for their works, the three writers conferred a variety of different meanings to that cultural experience. They not only re-signified this

national landmark but also added to its stirring potential as an unhealed wound in some of the most cherished national features of America - the light-house to the world, the land of freedom and opportunity.

The avowedly national virtue of free-speech and thought is approached in each of the three works as bearing the impending danger of its misappropriation to justify the suppression of the individual liberties. This contradiction is developed to the extent of a matter of life and death, regarding the theocratic character of the foundational narratives of America as a free nation.

Longfellow portrayed Giles Corey as a martyr and a model to shape the American spirit when recalling the traumatic colonial episode. He chooses to problematize the individual's struggle to make sense of the tragic situation in which he finds himself caught up. Corey is a Christian who performs his duties as a landowner and farmer. His dignity, courage and self-sacrifice stand as an example of self-determination. It also invites a counterpoint to the rule still in place in England, the Old World where the Old Order reigns and the spirit of the times that will forge the American Nation, the New World, the New Order. His martyrdom reinforces the religious character of the young nation, but also entertains the liberal ideas to be incorporated and consolidated in American soil. Civil Disobedience finds in Giles Corey a prototype of the American learned revolutionary.

Mary W. Freeman's choice was to don the same historical character with the richness of his laic dimension, which implicates matters other than the national character or religious zeal. The repetition of Giles martyrdom still brings something new to the legend of the brave farmer who prefers being tormented to death to complying with the frantic authorities. Giles' concern is not only with his soul, with the afterlife, but rather with the future of the society his daughter and son-in-law will have to reckon with.

In her play, Freeman points out the political aspect of family-life demonstrating how the apparently domestic issues *par excellence* constitute the social texture that supports the trials. In this way, the disguised jealousy and



resentment in the Coreys' house between servant and master, orphan niece and foster parents, and between the Coreys' and their neighbors turn out to motivate the successive indictments and cry-witches. When Corey finds out that whatever he says fuels the trial frenzy and turns out to implicate his family members one after the other, he contrives both his way out of it and his victory over the whole process of witch-hunt. What the magistrates called justice he exposed as pure murder. In this way, more than a martyr he becomes a hero.

Arthur Miller elected Proctor to embody the crucible of bearing the taints and blessings of a theocratic state in which public and private must reconcile - or else. Proctor's refusal to give in his name publicly as a confessed witchcraft dabbler and to name others serves still now as a reminder that one's name should not be taken in vain, be it a man's, a saint's or The Lord's.

This is an unavoidable token to the HUAC hearing sessions and name extraction procedures Arthur Miller himself has outlived - one among the many victim producing rituals still in place in 21st century America. What makes one wonder if the evil to be triumphed over in the New-Canaan was not, after all, the theocratic state.

The three instances of representation of the experience of the episode of the Salem witch trials examined above stand as a mirror, an interrogation, and a response to the lived experience of the shape of the theocratic state in America not only in colonial times. Witch-hunts are still with us, totalized and essenti-

alized otherness is still today an outrageous heresy to be countered with capital punishment in some states of America.

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