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Introduction

Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* are two plays that have hardly anything in common, except for their popularity with critics and the public.

The Crucible makes itself the vehicle of a controversial meaning, although represented through a metaphor which the play embodies. As Miller wrote himself years after its premiere in 1953 (Miller, "Why I Wrote the Crucible"), his work, portraying the persecution of the so-called witches¹ of Salem, was a condemnation of McCarthyism, which characterized the U.S. in the early 1950s, when the play was written and first staged.

The Salem witch trials that took place in 1692 (Murray 3) were the result of mass hysteria which took over the town of Salem and turned the members of the community against one another in the hopes of defeating what were perceived as vicious forces. Retracing the events, *The Crucible* describes how a small group of girls, upon being found in the woods practicing dancing rituals, thought to be demonical practices in Puritan society, tried and succeeded to save face by accusing other members of the community of witchcraft. The craze and witch hunt that followed, the way it is represented in Miller's play, is deeply rooted in feelings of terror and paranoid fears of the unknown.

The more recent of the two plays, *Angels in America*, debuted on stage in the early 1990s, its first complete production in 1992 (Nielsen 9), and confronted the public with the controversial theme of AIDS, responding to the epidemic that swept the U.S. in the 1980s. *Angels in America* offers a depiction of the American society of the previous decade, revolving around the epidemic and its way of disrupting interpersonal relationships and fueling homophobic prejudice (Nielsen 13). The Reagan Era works as a backdrop and fertile ground for the feeling of anxiety that permeates the play and insinuates itself into the lives of the protagonists. Most characters are homosexual, several Jewish and Mormon, and throughout Kushner's work they find themselves facing disease, homophobic bias, and relationship struggles. However, real life in the play often leaves room for biblical visions and foreboding, impersonated for the most part by the Angel, one of the main character's

¹ From now on, the word *witches* will be used to define the people accused of witchcraft and persecuted in Salem as well as the witches belonging to collective imagination mentioned in certain sources.

obsession and the true protagonist of the play. The Angel alone represents at once the feelings of anxiety and paranoia that pervade Kushner's work and is its personification.

Although the plotlines and the main topics of the plays differ greatly, a brief introduction of both casts some light on a major similarity between the works: paranoid feelings and anxieties which reside at the base of the plays, although in distinct ways.

At the time of their debuts, *Angels in America* and *The Crucible* caused controversy and were received with mixed feedback by both the public and the critics of their time (Nielsen 9; Smith 75). Their critique of society is diverse and sharp, and is analyzed and studied to this day. However, one main theme that drives the two works and connects them has not so far been explored: this theme is paranoia. Paranoia is never named throughout the works, but it is persistent and palpable as the two plotlines develop. Merriam-Webster's double definition of the term provides further insights:

- 1: mental illness characterized by systematized delusions of persecution or grandeur usually without hallucinations [...]
- 2: a tendency on the part of an individual or group toward excessive or irrational suspiciousness and distrustfulness of others.

The two definitions present different types of paranoia that are present in each of the works. *Angels in America* presents grand "systematized delusions of persecution" through a series of hallucinations and visions that its main characters experience and that are central to the development of its plot, while "irrational suspiciousness and distrustfulness of others" is a fitting depiction of the mass hysteria that takes over the town of Salem in the late seventeenth century and was later represented in Miller's play. The feeling of paranoia within the theatrical pieces in question is not the first element noticeable to the reader, but its permeating the two drives their plotlines forward. Paranoia lies at the base of each work, driving the characters' actions, revealing their bare humanity, and turning the plays into two pieces that go beyond their more obvious socio-historical context.

Additionally, another connecting link between the two plays is the social-historical context itself: it is against the backdrop of the Cold War that both plotlines develop. They show Cold War America and what it meant for those who were not standing on the right side of politics, a privileged position that was fairly easy to lose at the time. On one more superficial level, *The Crucible* is primarily known as a metaphor of those years: the witch hunts function as a reflection of the communist hunts, and the unfounded accusations of witchcraft evoke

McCarthyist finger-pointing. *Angels in America* takes itself place during the late Cold War, in the 1980s. One of the protagonists, Roy Cohn, was a central character of the McCarthy era. He is a lawyer in *Angels* and in reality an assistant to McCarthy (Polster 127). In *Angels*, he is haunted by the very ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, one of the most well-known victims of McCarthyism (McNeese 68-69).

While both works deal with issues typical of their times and denounce, openly or subtly, a number of American realities, such as McCarthyism or the condition of homosexual minorities at the time of the AIDS epidemic, the characters' actions and development are thoroughly fueled by the constant presence of some form of obsession. While *Angels in America*'s protagonists' paranoid feelings about the times and their condition manifest themselves in the form of hallucinations, which dominate and drive the play, the characters in *The Crucible* embody the phenomenon of mass obsession. While most studies on Kushner's and Miller's plays focus on themes that are central to their plays, this thesis aims at digging deeper.

The main purpose of this thesis is to uncover the feelings of anxiety and paranoia deep-rooted in *Angels in America* and *The Crucible*, and, most importantly, to explore their function within the two and their connection to the political and socio-historical context of the Cold War they are presented in, as well as their position in the tapestry of 20th century narratives. While most studies about these plays concentrate on and often stop at these contexts, the focus here is exploring the major role of paranoia in setting in motion each and every important event within the plays.

Methodology

On the one hand, McCarthyism, scapegoating, and binary opposition of the individual against society have been favourite topics in studies of *The Crucible*. On the other hand, when it comes to *Angels*, much has been said and studied about biblical symbolism and queer discourse, as well as the universal themes of loss, pain, and, more obviously, politics. When it comes to the analyses so far conducted, feelings and emotions have not been left out completely for either of the plays. *Angels*' strong focus on catharsis and hallucinations, as well as its being charged with foreboding throughout as the millennium approaches, and *The Crucible*'s preponderant theme of mass hysteria within a specific community are essential

elements for any successful study of the plays. However, such themes have been mostly merely noted or enclosed within a political and socio-historical context, and never particularly explored as strong forces that drive the main events and adorn the characters' personalities in both works. This thesis' aim is to fill this gap, examining how these feelings of paranoia and obsession are not only side effects of the times under scrutiny, but are constant focus and fuel of both plays, becoming a fine yet consistent thread that ultimately connects the works and their critical readings, and providing important insights on the effects of paranoia on culture and society through time. The socio-historical and political contexts of both plays, of course, cannot be taken out of a proper text analysis. The analysis will be conducted first through the more conventional historical, political, and cultural contextualization of both works. Such contextualization is also of great importance when it comes to inspecting how feelings of paranoia affect culture itself.

The theory to be applied will be multi-faceted. Both plays offer fertile ground for the application of several concepts that are dear to literary criticism. Due to the common backdrop of the Cold War, New Historicism will be a necessary tool for a proper contextualization of both *Angels* and *The Crucible*. The theme of fear of the Other is another important element to consider throughout the analysis, as the characters of both plays belong to minorities, either created mid-play, as in the case of the ostracized witches in *The Crucible*, or by definition, as it happens for the gay community in focus within *Angels*. The theory concerning binary oppositions is also to be applied to the texts for the interpretation of biblical symbolism and character archetypes that is central to *Angels* as well as the Puritan community of Salem. These theories will be introduced and later used as key tools for a critical analysis of the plays in order to study how paranoia emerges as a link between the two, and what this means for their interpretation.

The Plays: *Angels in America* and *The Crucible*

Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* in Context

Despite its dealing with historical events which took place in the Puritan New England colony of Salem in 1692, *The Crucible* has been defined as a highly contemporary work (Smith 75). The play covers the dramatic concatenation of events that took place in the

colony as a group of young local girls was discovered practicing what, in the mentality of the place and time, was supposedly related to witchcraft. The girls' desire to keep their reputation intact caused them to blame other members of the community, giving way to an episode of mass hysteria that saw more than a hundred villagers arrested and a number of them hanged for practicing witchcraft.

To this day, such a rapid escalation is hard to explain for historians. Professor Richard Weisman successfully communicates the primary historical context of the play. The political circumstances in which Salem found itself at the time of the events might offer a clearer view of the incident. An independent colony up to 1684, Salem had been then appointed a new governor by King Charles II (Weisman 123). After his deposition, hope for renewed independence soon gave way to frustration due to the appointment of yet a new governor, Sir William Phips (Baker 110). The highly religious community of Salem found itself experiencing a sort of mass depression, and something evil was felt looming over their collective head. During these times of intense inner and outer turmoil, it was easy to find a scapegoat in what looked like an outer, unearthly threat, like the presence of witches within the community (Weisman 125-126). The spreading of the phenomenon like wildfire can be explained by looking at the way such trials were conducted and represented in the play: in order to be released, the accused was to declare himself/herself guilty and provide the names of other witches. Several people lied in order to preserve their lives, even if it meant admitting to a crime they had not committed. The further escalation of the events was facilitated by the conviction of people on the basis of "spectral evidence" only. In his work "The Salem Witch Trials: A Reference Guide", Professor David Goss defines *spectral evidence* as "evidence presented by a witness who claimed to see the spirit or a specter of an accused person committing acts of witchcraft" (21). The trials came to a halt the same year (Weisman 119) not due to a sudden disbelief in witchcraft, but rather due to spectral evidence gradually being deemed unreliable (Weisman 181-182). Among the many people suspected of witchcraft, several were arrested, about 50 confessed to the crime, and 19 of the 26 convicted were sentenced to death (Weisman 117-118).

As Miller himself states in the preamble to his play, although several names used in *The Crucible* refer to actual people present at the time of the trials and the play aims to be mostly historically accurate, some details and facts have been changed for "drama purposes" (Miller, *The Crucible* 11). However, historian Edmund Morgan states that, as "art leans on history"

(171), Miller's interpretation and reproduction of the Salem phenomenon is even more liberal than the author himself states. Miller's Puritans are depicted as the real antagonists of the play, and Puritanism as a mask worn by several characters in turn in order to conceal a deeper human weakness, fear, and paranoid feelings. In this way, Puritanism works as a barrier between the characters and the outside, threatening world, conferring them powers. There is no specific antagonist in *The Crucible*: the local Puritan hive-mind is the antagonist (Morgan 176). However, the Puritans of the time mainly saw evil within themselves before turning their eyes to the outside world. What might look as exemplary behavior today was never enough for the individual Puritan, for whom self-critique was a regular occurrence (Morgan 178). In other words, "God demanded perfection, but no one could attain it" (Morgan 179). God had to always be on a Puritan's mind, and the weight of God's judgement was ever present. The trials took place against this backdrop of intense spiritual frustration, at a time where the persecution of suspected witches was widespread in Europe as well (Morgan 181). Miller's Puritans, however, are individuals who use repression in order to protect unity. Miller's aim to portray Puritans in a certain way might as well be directly connected to his efforts to create an efficient comparison with the state of events in the U.S. at the time. If the Puritans in the play are supposed to represent the exponents of McCarthyism, it is understandable how Miller highlights common traits between the two historical contexts and projects those of one (McCarthyism) onto the other (the Salem Puritans).

The choice of subject for the play has most likely fallen on these historical events due to its belonging to common knowledge. As *The Crucible* first debuted on stage in 1953, contemporaries were quick to compare the Salem hysteria to the one raging in the U.S. at the time (Smith 75). The same disillusionment experienced by the community of Salem is a reflection of that experienced by Americans after WWII transitioned into the Cold War against a world power of similar entity such as the Soviet Union. With hegemony not belonging to the U.S. alone any longer, the nation was a rather fertile ground for anti-communist fears to spread and thrive (Polster 109; McNeese 62-63). The significant influence of Senator McCarthy on the matter reached levels comparable to the mass hysteria that swept Salem in the late seventeenth century. The McCarthy hearings, where several had to come forward and confess any past connection to the Communist Party, are comparable to the trials themselves (Aziz 169). The public testimonies and official signatures are similar to the forced confessions of the accused witches. Intolerance and national paranoia were

growing, and mistrust among citizens and even within families was an everyday ordeal (Aziz 169-170). It is against this backdrop that Miller wrote *The Crucible*, giving life to a portrait of repression that, in spite of the artistic license certainly employed, strongly conveys a feeling of struggle and paranoia as they appear in two moments of U.S. history.

Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* in Context

Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes is a play in two parts, *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*, and the work of playwright Tony Kushner. The play debuted on American and international stages in the early 1990s and won several awards, including a Pulitzer Prize in 1993 (Nielsen 9). The plot of *Angels* revolves around the lives and struggles of five main characters against the backdrop of the Reagan Era in the 1980s, when the AIDS epidemic was a major concern for specific minorities such as homosexual men and drug users. All main characters belong to minorities themselves, the four male protagonists being homosexual, whether openly or in secret up to a certain point in the play. Kushner reproduces the Reagan Era as seen through the eyes of his characters, and with real consequences on their lives. The American gay community had fought for (and had partially gained) liberation and freedom throughout the 1960s and the 1970s. With the election of Reagan in 1981 and the motto that drove his campaign as well as his approach to American politics, "Morning in America", symbolizing the intention of embracing a new sort American optimism, and with the AIDS epidemic creeping into daily life, such freedom was soon to be forgotten (Nielsen 14). The new president's agenda focused on the restoration of the nation to its former splendor. Tax-cuts, consumerism, and the promotion of religious and traditional family values produced a general wave of optimism, but little compassion was shown to minorities of various kinds. The problem of AIDS itself was generally ignored by the Reagan administration and addressed as late as 1985 when famous actor Rock Hudson publicly announced his being affected with the disease. Despite this allowing the epidemic to acquire a public face and therefore becoming real in the eyes of the population, research was still lacking funds and the affected minorities, predominantly gay men, were often seen as guilty of their own demise. As homosexuality was seen as a choice, so was falling ill with AIDS (Nielsen 10, 14).

While all main characters are somewhat confronted with the disease either directly or indirectly, it is Prior Walter to fall ill first and to become the main link between the real world and the metaphysical world that his illness propels him into. He is the one communicating with the Angel, holy messenger from above and main symbolic element of the play. In his character introduction in *Perestroika*, Kushner portrays the figure as “Four divine emanations, Flour, Phosphor, Lumen, and Candle; manifest in One: the Continental Principality of America. She has magnificent gray steel wings” (3). She² is the Angel of America, crashing through Prior’s ceiling to choose him as her prophet. It is her stated belief that God, who has abandoned heaven³ with all its angels, was turned away by the constant motion and restless progress of the world, and said progress needs therefore to be halted (Nielsen 29). This angel is inspired by Jewish and Mormon tradition, namely Angel Moroni, who allegedly appeared to Joseph Smith to lead him to found Mormonism, and Walter Benjamin’s Angelus Novus who announces “a storm [...] blowing from Paradise” (IX). Her intentions might be of a heavenly nature, but her field of action is America (Nielsen 29). Similarities among these angelical figures will be analyzed later on in greater detail.

The play’s staging includes several split scenes that also work as a connection between two worlds, between reality and the fantastical, and between dream and reality (Nielsen 16). However, the lines between the two opposites are always blurred: dreams are not stated to be dreams, and the fantastical often leaks into reality. Even without the aid of split scenes, elements of the fantastic are present throughout the scenes. An example is the first meeting of Prior and the Angel, when she crashes through the ceiling as he lies ill in bed. This encounter takes place in the very last pages of the first book of the play, *Millennium Approaches*:

A sound, like a plummeting meteor, tears down from very, very far above the earth, hurtling at an incredible velocity towards the bedroom; [...] as the room reaches darkness, we hear a terrifying CRASH as something immense strikes earth; the whole building shudders and a part of the bedroom ceiling, lots of plaster and lathe and wiring, crashes to the floor. And then in a shower of unearthly white light, spreading great opalescent grey-silver wings, the angel descends into the room and floats above the bed.

ANGEL. Greetings, Prophet;
The Great Work begins:

² Most critics use the feminine article when discussing the Angel, most likely because to play the character in productions was always intended to be a woman; this is also the reason why the same article is used in this thesis.

³ In this thesis, the words *heaven* and *earth* are intentionally not capitalized, as most sources cited do not capitalize them.

The Messenger has arrived. (90)

This meeting also separates the first book, with its political and historical context and character delineation, from the second, more allegorical book, where angels acquire a more central position, their intentions are unveiled, and other characters begin to be involved with the fantastical, like Roy Cohn's conversation with Ethel Rosenberg and Harper's intense visions, which will be explored in the analysis proper.

Theory

New Historicism

Before approaching the texts with a critical eye and moving forward with the analysis, the theories that are to be applied will be briefly introduced. The first theory that will be taken into consideration is New Historicism. The core concept of New Historicism is to read literary texts (as well as non-literary texts) as the product of the historical and political moment in time during which it was created, and connect it with the movements, both political and cultural, that were of importance at the time of writing and, in this case, of staging (Bertens 176-177). More specifically, the tracing of these connections aims at bringing to light "relations of power and processes of ideological and cultural construction" (Bertens 177). In other words, the text is strictly connected to the historical context and ideology of the time it belongs to. This critical approach therefore implies a rejection, although not total, of the individuality of the author, as the author himself/herself is also subject to the surroundings, and the products of his or her work will be inevitably, and mostly unknowingly, influenced. Just like the text, its author cannot be expected to be excluded from the historical circumstances (Bertens 176).

In another, more specific definition by John Brannigan, "[New Historicism is] a mode of critical interpretation which privileges power relations as the most important context for texts of all kinds [...] and it treats literary texts as a space where power relations are made visible" (as qtd. in Bertens 179). In Brannigan's quote, the strongest link is between the literary work and power relations. Any historical context always presents a number of political discourses and ideologies, from which the text is also inseparable, being not only its product, but also an

active part in the making of history. According to New Historicism, the text itself participates in the consolidation and construction of said discourses and ideologies (Bertens 177). The way this happens is best represented in the example that Johannes W. Bergens makes when mentioning Louis Montrose's analysis of a number of Elizabethan texts ("Shaping Fantasies:" Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture') aimed at bringing to light how the representation of Queen Elizabeth I played a major part in the creation of the myth of the "virgin queen" (Bertens 180).

In previous paragraphs, the historical and socio-political contexts of the two main texts have been discussed. In the coming chapters, *Angels in America* and *The Crucible* will be analyzed in order to explore the way these texts are linked to said contexts, how they have been both product and maker of the times in question and, more specifically, how paranoia plays a major role in their connection with discourses, ideologies, and power relations of the time.

The Fear of the Other

The concept of Otherness⁴ can be observed in both *Angels* and *The Crucible*. In the words of Jean-François Staszak:

Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ("Us", the Self) constructs one of many dominated out-groups ("Them", Other) by stigmatizing a difference — real or imagined — presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination. [...] The creation of Otherness (also called *othering*) consists of applying a principle that allows individuals to be classified into two hierarchical groups: them and us. (2)

The binary opposition of the two hierarchical groups mentioned by Staszak is present in both plays in different forms. On the one hand, *The Crucible*'s witch hunt revolves around the separation between the community of Salem and their fear of evil reincarnated in a number of scapegoats that are part of the community. On the other hand, *Angels* deals with minorities, the Jewish and gay community hit by the AIDS epidemic of 1980s America, and at the same time with their sanctification and elevation to prophecy in some sort of overturning of roles; Prior, homosexual and ill, is the outsider and the prophet chosen by the angels in order to help them on their mission to stop the world's progress.

Another characteristic of Otherness reiterated by Staszak is the existence of the Other only in relation to the Self, and its subjectivity to it. The Others are not able to create their own

⁴ In order to avoid confusion, both *Other* and *Otherness* are capitalized throughout this thesis.

norms, because these have been already prescribed by the dominant group; hence the demise and vain attempts at redemption of the Others (2). The powerlessness of both ostracized groups (the witches as well as the homosexual community) and their struggle to regain credibility, as well as a liberation, are evident throughout both plays. The dominant groups within both *The Crucible* and *Angels* are the ones to dictate the rules of conduct, feed on fear, and control the overall plot development that inevitably tends to see the Others as the defeated party, at least to a degree.

As a matter of fact, the links that connect Otherness and the concept of paranoia are several and quite tight, as feelings of paranoia fuel those preconceptions that end up being at the very core of the fear of the Other. It is primordial paranoid fear that pushes the community of Salem to seek comfort in the active hunt, overlooking the possibility to be mistaken, denying fair trials, and creating the Others, the witches, in the collective mind as they proceed. And it is in the gay community of *Angels*, their spreading disease often overlooked by the dominant part of society, that paranoia creates visions of an impossible world.

Binary Oppositions

When looking at *Angels* and *The Crucible*, another concept that can be explored in relation to Otherness and fear of the Other is the one of binary oppositions, and specifically Jacques Derrida's approach to it. Binary oppositions are explored by Derrida through an approach that divides all things into mutually exclusive binary relationships. Contrasts such as good/evil, light/dark, male/female are examples from everyday life taken by Derrida as mutually exclusive categories that usually tend to feature a more privileged side, which is defined by the opposite it excludes (Eagleton 84, 115).

The definition of the privileged side depending on its opposite for its definition is the key that brings Derrida's binary oppositions one step closer to the fear of the Other. The two opposites are not separate, individual forces, but are in fact two antithetical sides necessary to each other for their very own existence. Literary critic Terry Eagleton gives a powerful example of the antithetical relationship between man and woman as binary opposites, defining the woman as "the 'other' of man. Non-man, defective man [...]. Woman is [...] an other intimately related to him as the image of what he is not" (115).

The same approach can be applied to the binary oppositions present in both plays. *Angels'* protagonists are themselves the Others in contrast to the society they live in. AIDS is the characteristic that defines the Other as well as its opposite, creating a division between clean and unclean, and American society of the 1980s look down upon those who have, in their opinion, dirtied themselves. In the same way, the witches of *The Crucible* are the demonized minority in contrast with the Puritan. The Self and the Other have therefore a co-dependent relationship: no category could exist without the other, nor the privileged sides, such as U.S. society in the 1980s depicted in *Angels* and Salem's inhabitants, could maintain their advantage without their relationship to their antithetic opposites.

Analysis and Theory Application

How Does Paranoia Affect Culture?

Paranoia and Identity

Before diving into the concept of paranoia's effect on culture and how this relates to the plays examined in this thesis, it is necessary to portray a clearer picture of paranoia itself. Put simply, cultural paranoia defines a type of paranoia that is strictly connected with and related to a feeling of general anxiety about themes easy to encounter in everyday society such as progress, power, identity, as well as the historical context of the individual(s) experiencing paranoid feelings (O'Donnell 10). When talking about historical context, it is clear that each historical period is lived by its contemporaries experiencing a different set of anxieties and obsessions. In a way, cultural paranoia can be said to be a defense mechanism adopted by the individual as means to defend himself/herself from the perceived threats of their current times. More specifically, paranoia is a way of making order within the chaos. "As such", writes Professor O'Donnell, "it is a means of rewriting history" (11). In other words, there is an attempt at mitigating the anxiety and uncertainty provided by chaos in order to reach relief; the history to be rewritten is the very own, personal history of the paranoid individual. When dealing with cultural paranoia, a number of symptoms can be noted. These are not meant to be part of a psychological evaluation of subjects, but rather an objective outlook at a cultural and historical phenomenon.

According to O'Donnell, the symptoms of such a phenomenon normally include a reaction originating in obsessive fears. In order to rearrange chaos into order, the individual or community affected by cultural paranoia will find solace in the projection of his/her/its internal conflicts onto a proverbial Other. The Other, once again, is not only a scapegoat. The Other is also loathed and deeply feared by the paranoid individual or community (13). The ultimate and most important factor might be the result of this process: the cultural production of paranoia is a projection enabling the creation of specific versions of identities. "In paranoia, the primary function of the enemy is to provide a definition of the real that makes paranoia necessary. We must therefore begin to suspect the paranoid structure itself as a device by which consciousness maintains the polarity of self and nonself, thus preserving the concept of identity" (Leo Bersani qtd. in O'Donnell 17). The following paragraphs will examine cultural paranoia's connection to historical contexts.

Paranoia and Fear

At its most simple state, paranoia's meaning has been in continuous evolution since it was first defined. Looking at the evolution of this term can provide interesting insights on how paranoid feelings affect us as individuals, and in function of the culture we live in, now as well as in the past.

Interestingly, the term, coined by Hippocrates, initially held a rather different meaning from the one today. The Greek words that it is made of, *para*, "beside", and *nous*, "mind", translate into "being out of one's mind", which confers indeed a certain degree of insanity to the word (Freeman 19). During his attempt at classifying diseases, including mental illnesses, the term *paranoia* was later revived by French physician François Boissier de Sauvages de Lacroix in the seventeenth century. While still classified as a mental condition, more than a century before de Lacroix' choice of classification, the first one to take a step towards a more modern definition of paranoia was scholar Robert Burton. In his work *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), he describes the feeling as some sort of fear, closer to the common conception of depression than to the one of madness (Freeman 19-22).

Of course, paranoia can indeed be a symptom or sign of a greater disorder. However, the type of paranoid feelings this thesis aims to discuss and examine are not those at a clinical level. The paranoia here explored, the same that is the driving force of the community of Salem in *The Crucible* and the one that gives way to visions in *Angels*, is "everyday", common,

widespread paranoia. It is the feeling that drives entire communities against minorities, and has done so throughout history. According to Professor of clinical psychology Daniel Freeman, a way to define paranoia in one phrase is: “Paranoia is the unrealistic belief that other people want to harm us” (23). Of course, this is a rather simplistic way to define a term that holds so many layers of depth and significance, especially when applied to literary works such as the ones this thesis is taking into consideration. Arguably, this unrealistic belief must be perceived as realistic in order to become harmful. When this kind of danger is sensed and spread throughout a community, it becomes a real threat in the eyes of the latter.

Freeman recounts an interesting finding from the late 1980s which brought to light a connection between paranoid feelings and the historical context of those who suffer from them. Upon the discovery of records of paranoid thoughts of mentally ill patients dating back to the 1930s, psychologists Jerry Mitchell and Arlyn Vierkant decided to compare them with contemporary records of the same kind. While many fears were common among patients of a certain period (in the 1980s there were the Russians, the Secret Service, and the Mafia, among others), they changed dramatically over the decades. However, the paranoid fear of external threat was always a reflection of the times in which the patients lived (24-25). In the 1980s, for example, the perceived threats were more often than not the Russians and the gay community (24-25). If every century, every roughly outlined era has its own set of paranoid thoughts, it is easier to see the common playground that characters from both *Angels* and *The Crucible* navigate, in spite of the plays taking place a few decades apart. Therefore, the fear-impregnated postwar U.S. and the menace of the Cold War act as an inescapable backdrop these plays are set against, both directly and indirectly, and one the authors of both have been, knowingly or not, indelibly marked by, as it shows in their writing and plots.

Paranoia in Postwar America

As it has been noted above, paranoia has very deep roots in human thought. Due to postwar U.S. functioning as background to both plays that are being analyzed, paranoia in this historical context needs to be attentively analyzed. Furthermore, the years following World War II saw American society becoming fertile terrain for phenomena of anxiety and mass paranoia more than ever before due to the Cold War and society's approach to it. With the economy beginning to revolve around the spreading of information rather than the distribution of goods, the focus shifted from production (of goods) to consumption (of

information) rather quickly, with confusing consequences for all individuals of society (Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy* 47). It is in postwar U.S. that conspiracy theories became widespread among several communities (Melley, *Conspiracy* 57). A new view of the world where the lingering threat of vague, secret, large organization within as well as outside the country was most likely perceived as real became common, a fear of being controlled being a central worry. A cultural phenomenon where paranoia is so central has its roots in more human fears and anxieties that were then particularly exacerbated (Melley, *Conspiracy* 58). In a time where individualism was lacking and distribution of information was more central than ever, it is easily understandable how the embracing of conspiracy theories could be an attempt at “defend[ing] the integrity of the self against the social order” (Melley, *Conspiracy* 60), and a reaction to avoid feelings of powerlessness in times of great changes (Melley, *Conspiracy* 62). Such feelings of powerlessness can be justified easily especially in a time like the Cold War, and one example of a great, scary organization to be feared was, of course, the Soviet Union.

The Red Scare was not a new fear of the American people, as it had begun to spread in the 1920s. Feelings of anxiety concerning the Soviets were a great concern among political leaders of the time, and they turned into action in 1938 with the setup of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). The HUAC’s role was to look for acts of subversions within the government (McNeese 62-63). While the state of emergency of World War II brought about a truce between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, feelings of paranoia towards the latter intensified again with the end of the war and the ensuing of the Cold War (McNeese 63). In addition to the work of the HUAC, subversives were also looked for among federal employees with the implementation of the federal employee loyalty program (1947) under president Truman. This program officially authorized the FBI to keep federal employees under scrutiny (McNeese 63). All activity that was deemed suspicious was to be brought to the attention of a Civil Service Commission Loyalty Review board, and those accused of suspicious activity were to be persecuted. While innocence until proven guilty was initially a common right for the accused, it soon disappeared and left room for a tighter grip on the suspect. Official criteria to discern subversiveness became quite arbitrary for Congress, which managed to pass laws supportive of their own strictness (McNeese 63). This background shows how paranoia during the first decade of the Cold War reached disturbing levels. The peak, however, was reached at the time of the arrival on the scene of Senator

Joseph McCarthy (McNeese 68). The senator made himself known first in 1950 when he redacted a list of alleged communists. All individuals on the list were working at the State Department, and no proof of their connection to Communism was provided (McNeese 68). This kind of unfounded accusations would characterize him and give the meaning to the word *McCarthyism*: the “opposition to elements held to be subversive and by the use of tactics involving personal attacks on individuals by means of widely publicized indiscriminate allegations especially on the basis of unsubstantiated charges” (Merriam-Webster). Although many among the political leaders initially believed him a charlatan, he quickly acquired a considerable following among the public, which contributed to the spreading of fear and prejudice against whomever he considered a potential threat. Shortly after, McCarthy’s power became even greater mainly due to a specific turn of events: the trial and consecutive execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, accused of sharing secret documents concerning the atomic bomb with the Soviet Union (McNeese 68-69). Although the trial was not a fair one according to today’s Western standards, the Rosenbergs were sentenced to the electric chair in 1951 and executed in 1953, making the “Red Menace” more threatening in the eyes of the American people and making safety measures in the U.S. against the Soviet enemy hiding in plain sight even stricter (McNeese 70-73). McCarthy found fertile ground for his policies, and he found welcoming hands within the government as well: he was made chairman of the Government Operations Committee and head of its Permanent Investigations Subcommittee (McNeese 70-73). McCarthy was to take his fear-mongering one step too far in 1954 and fall into disgrace soon afterwards (McNeese 74), but the damage had been done. The Red Scare had taken prisoners and lives, often in spite of lack of sensible proof, and a general day-to-day folly and paranoia had taken over.

Mass Hysteria, Witch Hunts, and Scapegoating in *The Crucible*

A Dual Historical Context

The Crucible represents the well-known events taking place in the town of Salem in 1692, when a craze turned the members of a whole community against one another. Several people were executed for witchcraft among many arrested and convicted (Weisman 117-118). As mentioned in the introduction to the play in context, the events covered by *The Crucible* have

mainly been read as a choice made in order to foster criticism to the McCarthyism that was widespread at the time of staging. As the relevant traits of Puritanism and scapegoating will be analyzed later on in this chapter, it is necessary to explore the dual historical background of the play through a new historicist approach.

From this perspective, Miller is tied to his work not because of his intentions behind it, but due to the inescapable relationship between author and historical context. The same can be said of the audience. It is natural that the representation on stage of the persecution of phantasmal witches which took place in Salem would be easily connected to the McCarthy hearings and the phenomenon known as Red Scare that was so actual at the time. In this case, perhaps even more than in *Angels*, Bertens' statement that portrays a literary text as always somewhat political because necessarily involved with the times (177) is quite fitting. As quoted by the same Bertens, Brannigan explains how a "literary text [is a] space where power relations are made visible" (179). In the same way, Miller's exposure of the practices common to McCarthyism (the scapegoating, the frantic search for subversives) through a series of allegories in his work brought the state of affairs to the attention of his audience, consolidating a contextual truth. Miller also allowed a new idea to take shape: the one that sees a society ridden by suspicion as a society meant to fail. The temporal gap between the audience and the historical context of Salem's trials, which took place almost 300 years before the play was staged, has also the power to cast a new light on McCarthyism in the eyes of the same audience. Just as the witch hunts seem like a barbaric and senseless ordeal, in the same way the practices of McCarthyism are put into perspective, giving a chance to the public to consider whether the McCarthy hearings were after all that different from the witch trials of 1692.

However, there is more to the new historicist perspective than the dismissal of the role of the author of *The Crucible*. In his book *Reinterpreting the Plays of Arthur Miller: An Approach Using Cultural Semiotics and New Historicism* (2010), Dr. Joshua Polster shares interesting interpretations of the play. According to him, deeper and more various meanings of the play can be explored without detaching oneself from the historical context, but at the same time without reiterating the straightforward analogy between HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee) (Collins) and the Salem witch trials.

Polster notes that, as told by the same Miller, during one performance "the audience, upon John Proctor's execution, stood up and remained silent for a couple of minutes, with heads

bowed. The Rosenbergs were at that moment being electrocuted in Sing Sing” (as qtd. in Polster 106). This particular reading is indeed related to McCarthyism, but in a way unexplored up to that moment. The incarceration and consequent execution of the Rosenbergs was a particularly significant event of those times and an extremely controversial product of the Red Scare phenomenon (Polster 106-108). After the 1949 reveal that the Soviet Union had tested the atomic bomb for the first time, therefore implying that the attempted monopoly over the “atomic secrets” had failed in the U.S. and that someone had revealed said secrets to the enemy, a spy hunt began. Through a series of interrogations and confessions during the search for Soviet spies, the name of Julius Rosenberg emerged and made him a prime suspect together with his wife, Ethel Rosenberg (Polster 121-122). Although the Rosenbergs were just two of several names made, the difference between the couple and other accused was their refusal to comply and name others or confess (Polster 122). The perceived guilt of the accused upon a lack of confession and name-naming is a central element in *The Crucible* as well. In Miller’s Salem, any accused can be ultimately released if he/she confesses and names other parties guilty of witchcraft; silence is seen as a sign of guilt. Several townspeople confess and point fingers at others in order to avoid a probable death sentence by hanging, this way reinforcing the belief that “[...] the powers of the dark are gathered in monstrous attack upon [Salem]” (Miller, *The Crucible* 62). The ease with which people could be accused in the 1950s as well as in 1692 Salem had its roots in a deep anxiety about how to identify the guilty and paranoid feelings concerning the infiltration of evil within the community, be it witches or communists. In the aftermath of the leak of atomic secrets, the invisibility of such enemies simply incentivized the fear and hysteria revolving around the risk of such infiltrations (Polster 123-125). Other parallels between the two condemned couples are evident in the way they are both implicated. Ethel Rosenberg, initially not considered a suspect, was allegedly arrested to be used as a lever in order to obtain a confession from Julius Rosenberg. In *The Crucible*, Elizabeth Proctor is arrested first due to Abigail William’s attempt at eliminating her in order to take her place at John Proctor’s side. However, when John Proctor is later arrested and the judges are trying to obtain a confession and names, Elizabeth is also used as a lever (Polster 123,133):

DANFORTH. What think you, Mr. Parris? You have closer knowledge of
[John Proctor]; might her presence soften him?
PARRIS. It is possible, sir. [...] I shall summon her.

(Miller, *The Crucible* 113)

What was used to implicate Ether Rosenberg (a typewriter, as proof that she had helped her husband typing notes of sensitive information to be given to the Soviets) (Polster 123) is as commonly innocent an object as the doll found in Elizabeth Proctor's house that is considered a sign of culpability at the moment of her arrest (Polster 133). The Rosenbergs were sentenced to death in the electric chair by Judge Kaufman (Polster 135). It is interesting to look at the tone of the sentence in the Trial Transcripts, as reported by Polster:

In the light of the circumstances, I feel that I must pass such sentence upon the principals in this diabolical conspiracy to destroy a God-fearing nation, which will demonstrate with finality that this nation's security must remain inviolate[.][...]No one can say that we do not live in a constant state of tension. We have evidence of your treachery all around us every day—for the civilian defense activities throughout the nation are aimed at preparing us for an atom bomb attack. (as qtd. in Polster 136)

It is inflated and apocalyptic; like the words uttered by *The Crucible's* Judge Danforth, it suggests an absolutist vision of the world and the law, where an individual is either with the court or against it:

DANFORTH: [T]here be no road between. This is a sharp time, now a precise time—we live no longer in the dusky afternoon when evil mixed itself with good and befuddled the world. Now, by God's grace, the shining sun is up, and them that fear not light will surely praise it.
(Miller, *The Crucible* 85)

Both in Salem and in the U.S., paranoid fear drives the actions of judges. The Rosenbergs were executed on June 19, 1953, in spite of further efforts to make them confess and name names. Just like the Proctors before their deaths, they did not speak (Polster 139-140).

The fate of the Rosenbergs and the Proctors have much in common. To make the paranoia even more nonsensical in *The Crucible* is the fact that “there never were any witches [in Salem] but there certainly were Communists [in 1950s U.S.]” (Miller, “Why I Wrote the *Crucible*”). Arguably, especially within a theocratic community such as Salem in the late 1690s, witchcraft was believed to be a real threat (Morgan 181). However, Polster provides another parallel between *The Crucible's* Salem and the U.S. during the Cold War concerning myths and beliefs. As mentioned, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were found guilty of sharing secrets concerning the atomic bomb with the Soviet Union (121-122). The secrecy surrounding the development of the atomic bomb in the U.S. was of extreme importance to the government at the time of the Cold War. Following the attacks on Japan in 1945, the U.S.

invested itself of the title of protector of world peace and strongest world power, with ownership and secrecy of the atomic bomb being necessary in order to keep it away from the prying eyes of the Soviet Union (Polster 109). However, monopoly over the world's most dangerous weapon was, according to many of the scientists who helped develop the bomb, impossible to achieve for longer than a few years, as the secrets of the production of a weapon which defined control over the world would be constantly sought after. Furthermore, such secrecy would have certainly embittered world relationships with countries that would be able to make their own atomic bomb later on. Nevertheless, the U.S. government decided not to give up the impossible idea of control over atomic weapons, the ultimate goal being to keep the secret from the main antagonist: the Soviet Union (Polster 111-112). In the play, Salem people's antagonist is not another town or community, but rather what surrounds their own. Encircled by the unknown territory of the New World, the townspeople "believed that the virgin forest was the Devil's last preserve, his home base and the citadel of this final stand. To the best of their knowledge the American forest was the last place on earth that was not paying homage to God" (Miller, *The Crucible* 15). Yet another idealization connects the worlds of 1950s U.S. and Salem; a fear of the unknown, of an enemy with blurred outlines, like the threat of the Soviet Union and the Devil lurking in the virgin forest.

Seemingly, both the play and the American reality of the 1950s makes evident how the power of fear is able to create the paranoid certainty of something or someone being a potential threat to a community's or an individual's integrity. Feelings of paranoia seem to stem from this primordial form of consternation. The U.S. government during the Cold War feared the leaking of atomic secrets would threaten their position in the world (Polster 109), and attempted the impossible plan to keep the atomic bomb a secret under monopoly as an act of defense. Salem people in *The Crucible* fear the obscure forces threatening and surrounding the community, and, when the slightest evidence of chaos makes itself evident, such as the girls participating in strange rites that went strongly against the religious practices of their society, they are quick to confer hellish hues to the problem and tackle it with the most efficient weapon a theocratic community might think of: religion.

If violent reactions to fear such as the spy hunts and the witch hunts are seen as defense mechanisms, it is interesting to note how far-fetched and at times delusional some of the hopes and efforts of both communities seem to be. In an attempt to protect their leading position, the U.S. government sought to cling onto a secret realistically impossible to keep,

such as the necessary information to create a weapon of mass destruction. In the play, Salem townspeople try to address the perceived threat to the integrity of the community by blaming the upheaval on the advent of evil in town. In spite of the intentions of both parties, both visions are unrealistic and unachievable; “In short, there was no atomic secret, just as there were no actual witches in Salem” (Polster 112).

Further parallels between Miller’s Salem and the U.S. during the Cold War are made through smaller yet relevant symbols found in the play, giving further layers of meaning to its reading. Polster highlights similarities that revolve around the feelings of anxiety and hysteria which allow events to spiral out of control in both Salem and Cold War U.S.. As previously mentioned, after the attacks on Japan the U.S. and the (temporary) monopoly over atomic energy, the U.S. felt invested of a new responsibility: that of protector of the world. The main threat, in their eyes, was the demonized Soviet Union (Polster 109, 114). In the same way Salem, a small community in 1692 New England, sees itself as the protector of Puritan values and fighter of evil, represented by the threat of both witches and Native Americans. Native Americans were also perceived as evil, and they also inhabited the virgin forest, just like witches were thought to do (Polster 113-114). In both cases, the U.S. government and Salem townspeople create a binary opposition by idealizing themselves and projecting fear and loathing onto the unknown, undefined enemies: the Soviet Union and the evil lurking into the wilderness of the New World, respectively. This extremization was used as means to justify the drastic actions taken by both U.S. government and Salem people to eradicate what was perceived as evil through the series of unfair trials that took place within both historical contexts. General mass hysteria was fueled by the propagation of gossip in the case of Salem, and by sensationalist media during McCarthyism (Polster 114, 116). Gossip in Salem begins to spread very early on in *The Crucible*. Soon after Betty has seemingly fallen ill, witchcraft begins to be discussed in town and related, additional rumours spread quickly:

MRS PUTNAM [*glancing at Betty*]. How high did she fly, how high?

PARRIS. No, no, she never flew —

MRS PUTNAM [*very pleased with it*]. Why, it’s sure she did. Mr. Collins saw her goin’ over Igersoll’s barn, and come down light as a bird, he says!

(Miller, *The Crucible* 21)

It has already been observed that fear of the Other implies the existence of said Other solely in relation to the dominant group, also known as the Self (Staszak 2). This way, the two

instances of polarization between two groups (the Puritan community and the witches, the U.S. government and the hidden communist spies) become necessary for the survival of the dominant groups of both contexts. Witches and communists, threats perceived respectively with exaggerated feelings of anxiety and paranoia, are the evil required for the narrative that sees both dominant groups as holy protectors of values (of world peace, of Puritan rigor) to continue to exist (Polster 118). In other words, Otherness is in both cases needed in order to confirm the identity and importance of the prevalent groups. Power also shows among further motivations fueling the actions taken against witches and spies. Several characters in the play use the opportunity to accuse neighbors who had wronged them well before the trials. Many accusations are animated by resentment and desire for revenge. Characters in *The Crucible* unearth ancient feuds about land, family businesses, and more.

The witch hunt was not, however, a mere repression. [...] Long-held hatreds of neighbours could now be openly expressed, and vengeance taken, despite the Bible's charitable injunctions. Land-lust which had been expressed before by constant bickering over boundaries and deeds, could now be elevated to the arena of morality; one could cry witch against one's neighbor and feel perfectly justified in the bargain. Old scores could be settled on a plane of heavenly combat between Lucifer and the Lord[.] (Miller, *The Crucible* 16-17)

Name and status are in the play also of paramount importance. An example can be found in the first act, where Reverend Parris is praying at his daughter's bedside, distraught. What initially seem to be simply tender fatherly feelings turn out to be also fueled by fear of losing face. Several times, as he prays for his daughter to wake as she lies inert after having being discovered dancing in the woods at night with other girls, he mentions how the witchcraft could be a threat to his position in Salem.

PARRIS. [...] I have fought here three long years to bend these stiff-necked people to me, and now, just now when some good respect is rising for me in the parish, you compromise my very character.
(Miller, *The Crucible* 20)

Status within the community is also what seems to be leading individuals such as Thomas Putnam, a rich landowner, to name names. Some of those he claims to be witches are people whose land he could benefit from buying (Polster 120). All or most of the blaming, however, happens through the children. It is the children of *The Crucible* to be afflicted by hysteria and to be considered the voice through which God speaks to the townspeople. For this reason, it is through the children's testimony that some, like Putnam, make their accusations valuable for

the court. An example of this behavior takes place during the trial when Corey tries to make the judges aware of it through a written accusation against Putnam:

DANFORTH. Mr. Putnam, I have here an accusation by Mr. [Giles] Corey against you. He states that you coldly prompted your daughter to cry witchery upon George Jacobs that is now in jail.

PUTNAM. It is a lie.

[...]

DANFORTH. What proof do you submit for your charge, sir?

GILES. My proof is there! [...] If Jacobs hangs for a witch he forfeit up his property — that's law! And there is none but Putnam with the coin to buy so great a piece. This man is killing his neighbors for their land!

(Miller, *The Crucible* 86-87)

It is interesting to note how the afflicted children seem to have been raised by the wealthier families in town. As Polster highlights, to Reverend Hale's question whether lower class families had any "afflicted children" of their own, Parris responds "no, no, these are farmers" (Miller, *The Crucible* 41), making status in the witch hunt ordeal once again relevant.

In the same way, the Republican Congress of 1950s U.S. saw a benefit in perpetuating the narrative of a spy ring sharing atomic secrets with the Soviet Union. In spite of an extremely negative portrait of the Cold War, the Red Scare allowed Republicans to stay in power through the escalation of fear, the media to earn from their excited coverage of the investigations and their general alarmist approach, the businesses benefiting from the production of weapons (Polster 120). Both Salem's people in power and 1950s U.S. government had a lot to gain from spreading fears among the masses to keep them in control and themselves in power.

Scapegoating

When discussing the treatment of the Other in *The Crucible's* Salem as well as in McCarthyist U.S., we are most certainly facing instances of scapegoating. Nowadays, the term *scapegoat* is mostly used in order to define "one that bears the blame of others", or "one that is the object of irrational hostility" (Merriam-Webster). The origins of the word, however, have their roots in religious practices.

According to Professor Richard Kearney, scapegoating owes its emergence to Judeo-Christian tradition, which in Leviticus 16 foresees an annual sacrifice to be made in order to expiate the sins of the community. More specifically, the "people of God" would

symbolically distance themselves from evil by expelling a “scapegoat” (26). A sacrificial priest would choose two goats: one to be slaughtered in a blood sacrifice and one to be symbolically released into the wild. Before the release, the latter would go through the specific rite of expiation the word *scapegoating* originates from:

Aaron will then lay both his hands on the head (of the scapegoat) and over it confess all the guilt of the Israelites, all their acts of rebellion and all their sins. Having thus laid them on the goat’s head, he will send it out into the desert . . . and the goat will bear all their guilt away into some desolate place.
(Leviticus as qtd. in Kearney 27)

A scapegoat is therefore originally an individual (initially, a proper goat) picked by the community or by its representative (a priest) as sole responsible and carrier of all sin of the members of said community. The guilt felt by the group is therefore projected onto one individual, cleansing the rest of the people of their sins (Demirkaya 124).

The choice of goats as a representation of evil is a recurrent one throughout the Bible as well as in art, especially medieval religious art, where devils are portrayed as beings with goat-like beards and horns (Kearney 28). Goats being used as surrogates for humans in order to carry out the expiation of sins is a theme that would therefore exclude actual human sacrifice while still reaping the benefits of the consequent cleansing. However, Kearney explains how the human scapegoat would sometimes be brought back throughout history. Examples are Jews, heretics, Gentiles, and, of course, witches (28). Going back to the representation of evil as goats in religious texts and art, it is interesting to note how the demons in question are often portrayed as goat-like monsters that present human features. Kearney uses medieval artistic representations as examples, where saints confront evil creatures who are “almost invariably attributed goatish characteristics (horns, thick hair, beard, snout, hooves)” (29). The fact that these characteristics persist in religious artistic representations throughout history suggests the possibility that these evil figures have either been products of collective imagination (Kearney 30), or they have become part of the collective imagination as a consequence of their representation in such fashion. In fact, one possibility does not exclude the other. It is not hard to see how such monstrous creatures emerging from the popular unconscious could be easily projected onto real-life individuals, particularly among religious communities (Kearney 31). This reading puts the witches of Salem, from the viewpoint of the Puritan folk, among the ranks of monsters and devils: possibly partially human in appearance, but not actually human. In *The Crucible*, those who are blamed of witchcraft are supposedly regular

people who have been charmed by the Devil into siding with him and against God and his creations. It is via this association that Salem's witches lose their humanity in the eyes of the accusers. Therefore, the religious community finds a scapegoat the sacrifice of whom will clean the sins of every member, keeping the community's holiness intact. Kearney also highlights how this phenomenon of demonization of an unholy Other has normally reached its peak in times of great turmoil or ecclesiastical crisis, like the outbreak of the bubonic plague in Europe, which saw several minorities being blamed and consequently scapegoated, or, more specifically, lynched (33). As noted in the introductory chapter to the historical context of *The Crucible*, the late 1600s were not times without worry for the relatively new colonies of New England. New England had seen its own relative independence being taken away through the appointment of a new governor, therefore being officially regarded more as a province of England rather than enjoying a good degree of autonomy (Daniels 5-6). An unstable political situation can be read as a possible stress element to afflict a whole community. Furthermore, the play's overture highlights the closeness of the wild, unexplored portion of the surrounding forests:

The edge of the wilderness was close by. The American continent stretched endlessly west, and it was full of mystery for them. It stood, dark and threatening, over their shoulders night and day, for out of it Indian tribes marauded from time to time, and Reverend Parris had parishioners who had lost relatives to these heathen. [...] For these reasons, among others, [Salem's townspeople] carried about an air of innate resistance, even of persecution. Their fathers had, of course, been persecuted in England. So now they and their church found it necessary to deny any other sect its freedom, lest their New Jerusalem be defiled and corrupted by wrong ways and deceitful ideas.
(Miller, *The Crucible* 14-15)

A time of political instability as well as a general fear of the surroundings of a largely unexplored land can be considered yet another example of what Kearney calls a time of crisis that generates instances of extreme scapegoating (33).

Concerning the understanding of the scapegoating narrative, Kearney mentions, among others, an anthropological reading by Lévi-Strauss. According to Lévi-Strauss, the primordial structure of sacrifice with purification as its main aim is the expression of an unconscious "savage mind". Its ultimate objective is to divide the world into binary oppositions (Kearney 34). The separation between good and evil, between the holy community and the monstrous Other to be purged is the most classical representation of binary oppositions, and it is the same polarization that takes place in Salem. However, there are more layers of binary

oppositions to be examined within *The Crucible*. It can be said that *The Crucible* is a play about the individual as well as a community and its members, and the conflict between these two opposites is rendered in a peculiar way (Bonnet 32). Individuality and unity are opposites within the play because the unity of the community is what protects its members. Paradoxically, it also imperils the individual, because any sign of nonconformism is perceived as a danger by the community itself, and as a threat to their unity (Bonnet 33). This is particularly true when looking at the hysteria surrounding the people's relationship with the court. Only the accusers, it seems, or those who support them, are given real freedom of speech during the trial. Those who come to defend their loved ones or show proof of the girls' lies are instantly perceived as a threat and hardly heard. In Judge Danforth's words, "a person is either with this court, or he must be counted against it, there be no road in-between" (Miller, *The Crucible* 85). The cohesion of the community and its unity is more important than the truth of the facts; the court, as well as the individuals of the town naming names once arrested, are motivated by hysterical fear rather than justice. As a matter of fact, those who try to "assert their individuality are strangled by the web of social constraints" (Bonnet 36). Honesty has no value in court, and this paradox is further symbolized by the fact that the accused is able to redeem himself/herself by confessing to crimes he/she did not commit. In other words, in *The Crucible*, lies are more valuable than honesty.

Although most of the events driving the play revolve around the community, the concept of individuality is not completely absent from the play. If a protagonist had to be named among all characters, that would certainly be John Proctor, together, to a degree, with his wife Elizabeth. The similarities between the Proctors and the Rosenbergs which have been previously analyzed are not the only elements to make these characters stand out. First of all, they are among the few characters to truly have a well-rounded personality (Bonnet 35). There are few exceptions, like Reverend Parris, whose striking fearfulness and only apparent interest in status make him an almost immediate antagonist. Reverend Hale, who indignantly abandons the court mid-play just to return later in order to try and save lives, also presents more dynamic traits and delivers interesting lines aimed at highlighting the conflict and the moral implications of the play's events. For example, in the final act of the play, Reverend Hale tries to convince Elizabeth to have her husband confess; he does not do so because he believes Proctor guilty nor because he is afraid of the town's reaction to his execution (like

Parris is), but because he is the only higher-status character to be able to see through the farce:

HALE. [...] I came into this village like a bridegroom to his beloved,
bearing gifts of high religion; the very crowns of holy law I brought,
and what I touched with my bright confidence, it died; and where I
turned the eye of my great faith, blood flowed up. Beware, Goody
Proctor — cleave to no faith when faith brings blood. It is mistaken
law that leads you to sacrifice. Life, woman, life is God's most precious
gift; [...] I beg you, woman, prevail upon your husband to confess. let
him give his lie.

(Miller, *The Crucible* 115)

Nevertheless, John and Elizabeth Proctor are the only characters in the play to truly evolve as the plotline progresses (Bonnet 35). It is their conversations that lead the reader/audience not only through a good part of the play's main conflict but also through their inner struggle. A great deal of the plot revolves around John Proctor's conscience and Elizabeth Proctor's role in his approach to his own feelings (Bonnet 34). In the very first act of the play, the audience is made aware of the affair between John and Abigail, and his unwillingness to repeat his infidelity. Arguably, what motivates Abigail to keep up the pretence, ultimately bringing most of the town to court, is vengeance. Later on, John Proctor is faced with his first inner conflict: guilt, as well as anger towards Elizabeth's lack of forgiveness for his affair with Abigail. What seems to be a struggling marriage is finally fortified by the outer conflict of the play or the ongoing witch hunt which culminates in the arrest of both John and Elizabeth Proctor. The last act of the play presents a striking example of John's ultimate inner dilemma. Minutes before he is set to be executed, John Proctor cannot decide whether to confess (therefore, to lie) and live while spoiling his name or die keeping his name intact. He seeks Elizabeth's opinion, unable to choose. Ultimately, the fact that his signed confession would be shown to the whole town, therefore destroying his personal integrity, is what convinces him to die.

The binary opposition between lie and truth, with the values inverted, is evident within the events taking place in the play as well as in Proctor's character development. The inversion of values is fueled by the paranoia and mass hysteria that sweeps the town of Salem. The opposition between good and evil splits and creates a double understanding of it: what is officially good and evil, and what is humanly so. Proctor's dilemma is "inseparable from that of the community: his own personal dilemma transformed into a social crisis, is thereby

intensified to a dramatic pitch” (Bonnet 34). Nevertheless, it is the majority to acquire the role of Self and thus the predominant one in an opposition between Self (or predominant group) and Other. In the play, it is the court, representing the community, to decide what is the truth and what is a lie, and not the facts. Every action is taken in order to protect said community and its integrity; it is the sacrifice to be made in order to cleanse the people of Salem. Interestingly, Kearney mentions René Girard and his theological reading of sacrificial rites. According to Girard, most societies’ foundations lie in the expulsion and sacrifice of the “maligned Other”. Communal coexistence is tightened by a “collective projection wherein some victimized outsider becomes the alleged carrier of all the aggression, guilt and violence”; the community is hence united in the persecution of the Other (Kearney 37). The same pattern can be found in most modern societies, too (Kearney 38). After all, if communists were the witches of the McCarthy era, their questioning, incarceration, and eventual execution was a way of purging them.

Monsters

If the Other is in this sense considered a monstrous being, it is interesting to delve into the etymology of the word. The term *monster* has its roots in two Latin words: *monere*, “to warn”, and *monstrare*, “to show” (Kearney 34). Hence, a monster is an apparition, a warning. Arguably, monsters could also be a warning from the other side, the land of the dead and the unknown, concerning the real world. As previously mentioned, the most savage episodes of scapegoating took place in times of great turmoil, such as during the Black Death (Kearney 33). The disease was attributed to God’s wrath due to sin (Cantor 23), a warning from heaven. The purging of Jews, believed to be responsible for the outbreak (Levy 763), can be considered not only as an act of revenge but also as a way to restore holiness by killing the monstrous, represented by the Jews, accused of having caused the outbreak by poisoning the wells (Levy 763).

Concerning the etymological meaning *monstrare*, scholar Timothy Beal suggests that monsters are manifestations that have “something to say or show us about ourselves” (as qtd. in Kearney 34). Kearney argues that the demonization of strangers (in this sense, of the Other) can be interpreted as the expression of a fear of something that is not foreign at all: the self (75). This concept has its roots in Freudian psychoanalysis. To Freud, “[t]he *unheimlich*

[uncanny] encounter with the monstrous is a revelation not of the wholly other but of a repressed Otherness within the self. The monster, as personification of the *unheimlich* [uncanny], stands for that which has broken out of the subterranean basement or the locked closet where it has been hidden and largely forgotten” (Freud as qtd. in Kearney 35). According to Freud, the Other is not something or someone on the outside, but, on the contrary, a projection of inner turmoil that the human unconscious produces. Once again, Otherness is seen as the result of an inner conflict of the persecutor. Julia Kristeva delves further into this concept. To her, this process is unconscious and revolves around an externalization of “what is ‘strange’ within us onto an external ‘stranger’” (Kearney 73). The concept of being stranger to oneself is then negated, consequently provoking a negation of external strangers instead. The exclusion of outsiders is therefore a form of self-reassurance. “We fool ourselves into believing that we have purged that singular sense of anxiety which Freud calls the ‘uncanny’ (*das Unheimliche*)” (Kearney 73).

Salem people are victims of a paranoid state that is necessary for them to preserve their identity and their holiness. It is through the purging of those they perceive to be monsters around them that they do God’s work. Such belief makes the perpetrators blind to any other logic. When John Proctor tries to convince the judges of the innocence of the accused stating that none of them has shown signs of “dealings with the Devil” (Miller, *The Crucible* 85), Judge Danforth is quick to point out that a lack of signs of witchcraft up to that moment is due to the fact that only then, “by God’s grace, the shining sun is up” (Miller, *The Crucible* 85), meaning that the Devil’s actions are finally visible. This line of reasoning also explains the judges’ preference to believe the girls’ farce.

If Salem townspeople project their own guilt onto an othered self (Kearney 75), it is interesting to wonder where this feeling of anxiety is originating from. Arguably, it is in the Puritan mentality to experience anxiety and guilt (Demirkaya 126). The “Puritan theocracy of New England” (Carson 63) was a quite a limited environment where people lived with the assumption that they were, in the words of Professor Emily Miller Budick, “sinful and thus worthless [...] they judged themselves guilty and were willing to accept the verdict of guilty by others” (546). Following this line of reasoning, it becomes easier to understand how quick are the accused to confess as well as how easily the girls are believed when they begin to accuse other members of the community of witchcraft. If we consider the feeling of guilt as a prerogative, accusations would be easier to issue than forgiveness. The concept of guilt as a

fundamental base for the Salem townspeople will be further examined, in order to better extrapolate the reasons behind such guilt.

The Role of Guilt

In order to better understand these feelings of guilt, it is useful to go back to Kearney's explanation of the origins of scapegoating. In the portrayal of the choice of a scapegoat carrying the sins of the community, what emerges is not a particular type of sin said community needed to be cleansed of, but rather a practice through which "[t]he people of God remain holy by casting from their midst what is unholy, thus propitiating the Lord and removing all traces of evil [...]. By means of such purging they become one Holy Nation in the service of the Lord" (Kearney 27). Through the expulsion of a scapegoat, the people are working to restore their own holiness; the sin to be cleansed of being the inherent sin all humans carry: the original sin.

As a consequence of feeling "sinful and thus worthless [...]", Puritans "misread and misjudged their lives' experiences" (546). This approach to sin would explain how quickly members of the community accused of witchcraft would confess their involvement with the Devil. Of course, part of the reason was the fact that a confession was the only way to be exonerated. At the same time, however, the generally perceived weight of original sin was the catalyst needed for the scapegoating to take place. Backed by the analysis so far conducted, it is safe to assume that the children's accusations were most likely quickly believed by the townspeople not much because of the provided proof, such as spectral evidence and testimonies of the accused sending their own spirit to harm others, but rather because of the general, basic need of the people to project their own inner turmoil onto an estranged Other in order to restore the community's holiness. In a theocratic society such as 1692 Salem, the holiness factor was likely to be of paramount importance to the townspeople.

Within the play, the guilt felt by the community that needs to expel it is explicitly symbolized by the character of John Proctor. As previously discussed, Proctor's feeling of guilt is what fuels the evolution of his personality within *The Crucible*. The character of Proctor goes through a transformation that starts with him rejecting his own sins: he denies any affection to Abigail and he is aggressive towards his wife because of her lingering mistrust following his affair with the girl. Although this can be seen as a projection of his own inner crisis onto thirds, like it happens in the instances of Otherness so far explored, it does not last long. As

soon as Elizabeth is arrested, John's feelings of guilt motivate him to fight for her release. When he is also arrested and offered the chance to be freed through a confession, his choice of being executed finally allows him to be free of the weight of his previous misbehaviour. In his eyes, his willingness would clear his name once and for all:

HALE. Man, you will hang! You cannot!

PROCTOR. [*his eyes full of tears*] I can. And there's your first marvel, that I can. You have made your magic now, for now I do think I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor. Not enough to weave a banner with, but white enough to keep it from such dogs.

(Miller, *The Crucible* 125)

Before his final decision, Proctor goes through great pain as he seeks Elizabeth's counsel on the matter and, most of all, her forgiveness. As Elizabeth herself claims, however, it is not her forgiveness he should be after. The most important act of forgiveness is accomplished by John Proctor himself. "The impression of moral confusion that seems to hang over the final moments of the play arises [not from] Proctor's guilt (his guilt is taken for granted) so much as in Proctor's acceptance of that guilt" (Carson 73). Proctor accepting his misdeeds and cleaning his conscience through one final act of courageous rebellion, the acceptance of death as a protest against an unjust law, is the action that closes the circle and allows Proctor to forgive himself. Even more than forgiveness, John Proctor's actions denote, as mentioned by Carson, acceptance of his own guilt (73). He is not in denial anymore, but he takes responsibility and tackles his own remorse through the ultimate sacrifice. In a way, John Proctor makes himself the scapegoat of his own fears as he pursues his own cleansing. The standard elements of Otherness are here reversed: John Proctor does not project his sin on an external Other, but he scapegoats himself, making himself the Other. Through his allowing his own execution to take place, he takes control, becoming a sanctified Other, a martyr. With this single action, he reverses the overall Otherness in the play. The scapegoating does not leave the community holy, but the Other him/herself becomes the holy one. Of course, said holiness is not recognized by all characters. The judges are ultimately solely interested in his confession because of their fear to incur in the fury of the townspeople and treat his self-perceived heroism as a ridiculous and useless action. In this way, the play presents two instances of Otherness, one the opposite of the other, paradoxically presented. On the one hand, there is the more standard representation of Otherness through the Salem townspeople scapegoating the witches, and consequently preserving their holiness. On the other hand,

there are (some of) the scapegoats accepting their fate and therefore entering holiness themselves. This perspective offers a less seen outlook on Otherness, where the Other accepts his own role of scapegoat, at the same time elevating him/herself by this acceptance to a new, sanctified condition of Otherness.

The Myth of Witchcraft

Demirkaya argues that the creation of the witchcraft myth in Salem is the production of a discourse behind which is mostly a desire for power (127). The concept of truth is itself unreliable, if considered that the “discovery of truth is really a certain modality of the production of truth” (Foucault 238). When this reading is applied to *The Crucible*, the scapegoating that takes place in Salem is initiated by a character who will later regret his role. It is Reverend Hale to diagnose Betty as suffering from “hysteria due to witchcraft” (Demirkaya 127), consolidating the fears of Reverend Parris and supporting the gossip that has spread throughout Salem. His authority allows him to turn the rumors into confirmed reality, and the books he has brought with him back his diagnosis, functioning as tools of power. Reverend Hale is creating truth while claiming to be in the process of revealing it, as this passage where he explains the content of his books to the people around him reveals:

HALE. [*with a tasty love of intellectual pursuit*] Here is all the invisible world, caught, defined, and calculated. In these books the Devil stands stripped of all his brute disguises. Here are all your familiar spirits — your incubi and succubi; your witched that go by land, by air, and by sea; [...] Have no fear now — we shall find him out if he has come among us, and I mean to crush him utterly if he has shown his face!
(Miller, *The Crucible* 42)

With the production of truth being made by an authoritative character, the myth of witchcraft is created. In this way, the myth of witchcraft is built by power, willingly or less so, and accepted as truth widely by Salem townspeople. Reasons behind how quickly these accepted such a singular truth have been previously explored: among the mentioned causes are the belief in the existence of witches at the time (Morgan 181), the need for a scapegoat within the community as seen in the previous paragraph, and the desire for preservation of identity (O'Donnell 17). Nevertheless, the words of those in power are perceived as believable by the folk and proceed in keeping them in the same position of power.

In this way, the creation of the myth of witchcraft is nothing other than, once again, a process of scapegoating. Through the demonization of one group of individuals, the powerful in Salem remain powerful, and the damned are put to trial with little chance to redeem him/herself.

Conclusion

Much has emerged through the analysis of *The Crucible*. Several layers of meaning have managed to confer additional depth to the already profusely explored dual historical context of the play. The parallel between 1692 Salem as represented in the play and McCarthyist U.S. does not only entail the well-known comparison between the Red Scare and the witch hunts, but it also sheds light onto other connections. New readings suggest similarities between the stories of John and Elizabeth Proctor and the Rosenbergs, struggle for power in both the U.S. government and the reverends and the wealthy of Salem. However, the focus is on what is behind these episodes of mass hysteria: the feelings of fear and guilt. Fear generates monsters in Salem, and they take the shape of witches. These become the scapegoats chosen by a Puritan community looking for holiness and cleansing in a time of inner and outer crisis. The myth of witchcraft is created as fingers are pointed in the direction of friends, family, and neighbors. The feeling of guilt inherent to the Puritan community can be said to lie at the root of this phenomenon. The desire of cleansing is pursued through the application of the practices of scapegoating outlined by Kearney, where a scapegoat is singled out to function as the carrier of the sins of the whole community.

Guilt and fear are what produce instances of extreme scapegoating and drive the town of Salem beyond a point of no return. Within the mayhem, some find the much-suffered light. Those who are sentenced to death ultimately find a sort of holiness in their final martyrdom. Surprisingly, those who are considered Others or scapegoats are those to be elevated to sanctity, creating a paradox that reflexes the one taking place in court, where lies become the truth and vice versa.

Psychosis, Symbolism, and Apocalypse in *Angels in America*

Historical Context through the Eyes of the Other

The historical context represented in *Angels in America* faithfully portrays a 1980s U.S. which strives for an exacerbated optimism. As tax-cuts, promotion of traditional family values and religion, and the slogan promoting a new “Morning in America” gave way to a restoration of the country, minorities were left at the margin of contemporary society of the time (Nielsen 14). Little compassion was reserved for those individuals constituting the antonym of the restoration of a nation to what was believed to be its former splendor. The gay community, which just pre-Reagan era U.S. had seen a degree of liberation and recognition, found itself not only back along the margins of society, but also left behind at the moment of need as the AIDS epidemic spread through the homosexual population (and not only) (Nielsen 14).

Although 1980s America functions as a backdrop, it is indeed a powerful presence throughout *Angels*, with numerous political, historical, and social references being present in the lives of the characters as they are outlined. According to Bertens, certain discourses and ideologies are created and consolidated through the production of literature within the same timeframe; in this way, *Angels in America* is a reflection of the times as well as a maker of contemporary history (177). The ending of the play, which sees the characters hopeful for the construction of a better American society (“The Great Work Begins”, *Perestroika* 148), is in this way particularly significant. It is the author, Kushner, to create a prospective better future and instill the same hope in the audience and the readers of the time. Nevertheless, *Angels* sees minorities achieve relevance, being called to take control over the fate of man, and elevating themselves from the margins of society. This work does not only depict a number of specific hidden aspects of contemporary American society that prided itself with dreams of reformation (the marginalized, the disease, and general Otherness), shedding light on contemporary power relations; it also transforms the minority discourse, making the Other within the play victorious and redeemed, a deliverance that takes place also due to the hardships they have been through as Others, as it will be seen later in the analysis proper.

Most importantly, *Angels*' historical background of 1980s America is observed through the eyes of these minorities. Each of the characters presents a complex background of intertwined political, religious, and sexual preferences. While all males are homosexual, whether openly or less so, the political and religious preferences among the characters are variegated. Jewish and Mormon backgrounds intersect with ambiguous political views. Interestingly, the only openly liberal character in the play is Belize, African American former drag queen, and the "least flawed" among all protagonists in terms of human weaknesses, acting more as a wise referee for all rather than an active persona (Titi 59, 65). Significantly, Belize is also the nurse treating Roy and Prior. Notably, the character of Roy Cohn, the only main character to have existed in history and faithfully modeled on the homonymous assistant to Senator McCarthy (Polster 127), represents a flashback to Cold War extremism, incarnated. In spite of their differences, all characters are in contact, directly or less so, with AIDS. The illness, as well as homosexuality, position them in a fringe of society distinguished by Otherness. To incorporate the totality of this Otherness is Prior, whose status seems to confer him the ability to come in contact with the Angel through hallucinations or visions caused by his illness. The rest of the characters, too, offer a reading of their historical context that suggests a strive for change. Involved in their personal conflicts, each and every one of them sets in motion a series of events that build up tension within the first book of the play and find resolution in the second one. Conflict and pain are fundamental motifs of *Angels*, and the characters facing turmoil is a representation of its ultimate meaning: "progress, migration, motion is... modernity. It's *animate*, it's what living things do" (Kushner, *Perestroika* 132).

The Approach of the *Millennium*

Angels is a work of great allegories portraying not only a flawed society but also the feeling of paranoia which permeated its time. The title of the first book of *Angels*, *Millennium Approaches*, is a first allegory that contextualizes the anxiety of an era. In spite of the play being set in the 1980s, however, it is not only the year 2000 to be the millennium mentioned in the title, as Prior himself states: "Not the year two thousand, but the capital M Millennium" (Kushner, *Perestroika* 147). What, then, does this millennium stand for?

In order to find the answer one needs to examine the structure of the first book, whose slow build up leads to the arrival of the Angel. While the second book, *Perestroika*, revolves

around a resolution of conflicts and a chance of redemption, the first book is where the conflicts arise in the first place and are carried along in a crescendo. The dynamics of the relationships in the play are outlined, and so are the pains and sufferings of the characters, setting events in motion. The tension is built through increasing amounts of struggle being experienced by all characters: Prior is abandoned by his lover during his battle with AIDS; Louis carries the weight of his sense of guilt; Roy finds out about his own AIDS diagnosis and is in denial; Joe gradually but steadily exits his own marriage to embrace his homosexuality, and his mother comes to New York to try and salvage the situation. Harper, Joe's wife, lives life in close contact with her own hallucinations, especially with Mr. Lies, a dream-version of a travel agent Harper has met in real life. Although Prior is the one to be chosen by the Angel as the next prophet, Harper is the character whose hallucinations often put her on the same plane of conscience as him. As a matter of fact, a clear separation between hallucinations, unearthly visions, and reality is never really made within the text. In this way, delusions induced by illness and medications become biblical visions. In one of her conversations with Mr. Lies, Harper speaks of an impending arrival of the millennium in rather apocalyptic tones:

HARPER. I'm undecided. I feel...that something's going to give. It's 1985.
Fifteen years till the third millennium. Maybe Christ will come again.
Maybe seeds will be planted, maybe there'll be harvests then, maybe
early figs to eat, maybe new life, maybe fresh blood, maybe
companionship and love and protection, safety from what's outside,
maybe the door will hold, or maybe... Maybe the troubles will come,
and the end will come, and the sky will collapse and there will be
terrible rains and showers of poison light, or maybe my life is really
fine, maybe Joe loves me and I'm only crazy thinking otherwise, or
maybe not, maybe it's even worse than I know, maybe... I want to
know, maybe I don't. The suspense, Mr. Lies, it's killing me.

MR. LIES. I suggest a vacation.

(Kushner, *Millennium Approaches* 8)

This passage represents a first glance at some of the literary conventions of apocalyptic texts spoken of by Professor Greg Carey that will later be applied to *Angels* in full. On the one hand, hopeful visions of the return of Christ, of “new life” and “love and protection” are images of ultimate redemption that are typical of the aftermath of an apocalyptic scenario (Carey 6-8). Fears of trouble to come and the collapse of the sky are, on the other hand, precise representations of apocalyptic catastrophe (Carey 6-8). For now, what should be noted are the apocalyptic hues that Harper confers to the approaching millennium. As Harper

directly refers to the year 2000, her address does not only denote her anxiety about an uncertain future, but it also turns a look at the future into a premonition. From this moment, which takes place in the first act of the first book, the events unravel and build up the tension until the arrival of the Angel. The final introduction of the Angel is the peak of the climax constituted by all the anxieties, pains, and struggles of the individual characters although, at least initially, the Angel shows herself to Prior only. As the Angel comes crashing down the ceiling at the end of the first book, she seems to incarnate a millennium herself. Symbolically, the Angel represents the connection between God and the world, the messenger. However, she comes asking Prior to be the prophet and to make known God's abandonment of heaven. What the Angel blames God's departure on is the world's progress, with its pain and destruction, and she demands that Prior help her bring stasis upon the world, as means of saving the human race and hoping for God's return to heaven. The Angel is a holy messenger, bringing apocalyptic news: the world (and the heavens) are in great danger due to human progress.

PRIOR. As the human race began to progress, travel, intermingle,
everything started to come unglued. Manifest first astronomers in
heaven.

ANGEL. Heaven is a City Much Like San Francisco.

Houses upon houses depended from Hillside,
From Crest down to Dockside,
The green Mirroring Bay:

PRIOR. And there are earthquakes there, or rather, heaven-quakes.

ANGEL. Oh Joyful in the Buckled Garden,
Undulant Landscape Over Which
The Threat of Seismic Catastrophe hangs:
More beautiful because imperiled.

POTENT: yet DORMANT: the Fault Lines of Creation!

BELIZE. So human progress...

PRIOR. Migration. Science. Forward motion.

BELIZE. ... shakes up heaven.

ANGEL. Paradise itself Shivers and Splits,
each day when You awake, as though WE are only the Dream of YOU.

PROGRESS! MOVEMENT!

Shaking *HIM*:

BELIZE. God.

ANGEL. He began to leave us!

Bored with His Angels, Bewitched by Humanity,
In Mortifying Imitation of You, his least creation,
He would sail off on Voyages, no knowing where.
Quake follows quake,

Absence follows Absence:
 Nasty Chastity and Disorganization:
 Loss of Libido, Protomatter Shortfall:
 We are his Functionaries; It is
 BEYOND US:
 Then:
 [...] Our Lover of the Million Unutterable Names,
 the Aleph Glyph from Which all Worlds Descend:
 the King of the Universe:
HE left
 [...] *YOU HAVE DRIVEN HIM AWAY! YOU MUST STOP MOVING!*
 [...] Forsake the Open Road:
 Neither Mix Nor Intermarry: Let Deep Roots Grow:
 If you do not MINGLE you will Cease to Progress:
 Seek not to Fathom the World and its Delicate Particle Logic:
 You cannot Understand, You can only Destroy,
 You do not Advance, You only Trample.
 [...] Turn back. Undo.
 Till HE returns again.
 (Kushner, *Perestroika* 50-53)

The stasis desired by the Angel is in opposition with the movement denoted by the approach of the millennium. Her message has a rather regressive stance, too. She speaks of not intermarrying in order to “let deep roots grow”; to arrest the mingling and progress in general. These principles and aversion to progress can be observed in the socio-political context of the play, too. In the early 1980s, President Reagan had the sympathies of the conservative evangelicals due to his incarnating the all-American values they were after (Dowland ch. 6); these included the very central concept of the “natural family” (meaning, with no “intermarrying”) as American staple (Buss 2), as well as millennialism (Lienesch 223). Millennialism is none other than the belief that “human history is coming to a close, that the process will take place according to a prescribed series of events, that these events will usher in a thousand year of peace called the millennium, and that at the end [...] heaven and earth will be consummated in glorious finale of Judgement Day” (Lienesch 223). International unrest due to the long-lasting Cold War was fertile ground for certain theories to gain popularity, especially with a President not denying the idea of a possible Armageddon (Lienesch 224). With this reading, the millennium approaching embodies an antithesis: it is the Angel, incarnating the beliefs of American society of the time, implicating doom for the characters; however, this apocalyptic event can also be read as being God’s abandonment of his position in heaven, and consequently, of his role in the life of man. Either way, the

apocalypse is what stands in the characters' way. According to the conventions of apocalyptic narratives, catastrophe is necessary in order to reach liberation and deliverance. In the following paragraphs, themes of the apocalyptic in *Angels* will be thoroughly analyzed in order to shed a light onto the spiritual (and non-spiritual) path of the protagonists through the catastrophe towards deliverance, and its significance within the context of paranoia.

Apocalyptic Narratives

It is not just the message carried by the Angel to confer the play its predominant apocalyptic hues. Several literary conventions of apocalyptic discourse can be found in *Angels*. According to Carey, the norm for apocalyptic texts includes several recurring scenarios. The presence of alternative worlds can be observed in the presence of heaven. The heaven that Prior sees is far from the traditional representations of the same commonly found in literature. It lacks idealization. "Everyone here wanders. Or they sit on crates, playing card games. Heaven. Holy moly" (Kushner, *Perestroika* 121). Among the literary conventions mentioned by Carey, apocalyptic revelations are always made in form of auditions, visions, trance, dreams; these manifestations have already been observed in the first reference to apocalyptic scenarios made by Harper in the previous paragraph. Prior, too, is subject to several hallucinations and dreams not only through his encounter with the Angel and official messenger from heaven, but with other figures as well, including some of his ancestors. The revelations are made by heavenly intermediaries (of course, the Angel). A catastrophe of cosmic proportions meant to take place in order for the world or the human race to obtain ultimate redemption is another convention of apocalyptic narratives (Carey 6-8). An obvious example is the Genesis flood narrative, where God is said to have brought the Earth to its original (pre-creation) state, flooding it, and saving only Noah together with his family, as well as a part of the animal population (Dundes 8). In this case, the ultimate deliverance after a catastrophic flood that engulfs the whole planet is a new beginning, new life on earth to be created by the survivors. This specific literary convention can be found in *Angels*, at least to a degree. The peculiarity in the play is that said cosmic catastrophe is not set to take place due to divine will; as a matter of fact, the Angel's request involves an arrest of human progress. As it has been discussed in the previous paragraph, there are different possible readings of the Angel's plead. To be read as the upcoming catastrophe of apocalyptic proportion could be the same American society of the 1980s and its extremely conservative values; or it could be

God's departure from heaven, projection the image of an era without God. From the Angel's perspective, there is yet one more meaning which can be attributed to this element: the progress of the world is the real calamity; a daily tragedy that the protagonists have to face before reaching the final redemption, which is hope for a better future in a bettered society. Loss, pain, disease are all part of the cosmic disaster that is as terrible as it is necessary. The characters' faith is therefore not of a religious nature; what they profess is faith in humanity.

Binary Oppositions

Carey also introduces the presence of dualism as another norm, as a provider of an "ideological lens through which apocalyptic discourse evaluates people, institutions, events, and even time" (7). The overall concept of apocalypse is itself quite dualistic, with a clear divider being set between the before and after of the cosmic catastrophe to be, and between earth and heaven. Placed in between these opposite worlds is the Angel, fulcrum and connection between several dichotomies within the play. The Angel of America, carrying influences of both Jewish and Mormon traditions, presents a series of clearly evident binaries coexisting within her character; she is "powerful/weak, heavenly/earthly [...], male/female" (Nielsen 29). Of all aforementioned binaries, the most compelling is the one addressing the dualism of power and weakness: the Angel is indeed a messenger from heaven, but coming down from a heaven where all angels are left to the only task they are allowed to perform: administration. This opposition also confers a degree of humanity to the character (heavenly/earthly). It is a humanity which reaches its peak with the character being wrong, or anyway not the ever-right figure commonly found in biblical narratives (Nielsen 29). This is represented in the play through Prior's opposition and final refusal of the role she hopes to invest him with. One significant binary opposition above all, as pointed out by David Savran, takes the analysis one step further, and portrays the events of the play as a delicate balance between utopia and dystopia. This means "that disaster is necessary in order to imagine Utopia which is why everybody, except Roy Cohn who dies, must look disaster in the eye before moving on" (Nielsen 37). If this opposition between utopia and dystopia, between the before-AIDS and after-AIDS, is considered the main dichotomy of the play, other dichotomies that constitute it are consequently visible. Nielsen goes on to describe some of them, as mentioned by Savran: pleasure/pain, homosexuality/heterosexuality,

migration/staying put, future/past, progress/stasis, life/death are all elements observed in the play as it evolves (Nielsen 37).

Another form of dualism worth mentioning is the representation of the play on stage (and within its text). Often, the action is presented in split scenes, and the characters' situations, as well as their personalities, are examined and explored as they stand on stage (or they converse in the text) in pairs. Apart from the obvious couplings, such as the initial romantic arrangements that are then set to be disrupted and shifted, other split scenes put together characters which have other (and more relevant) elements that connect them (Titi 63). Louis and Joe, new lovers, are presented together sharing a split scene with Harper, Joe's wife, and Hannah, Joe's mother. Interestingly, Harper crosses the border between the two scenes and speaks directly to Joe, as if in a dream.

[...]Split scene: Joe and Louis in bed in Alphabetland; Hannah and Harper in the Pitt apartment in Brooklyn. Hannah stands looking at Harper, who is dressed in a nightdress, picking her teeth.

[...](Joe and Louis) kiss affectionately, romantically.)

[...](Harper appears.)

HARPER. Don't worry, I'm not really here.

I have terrible powers. I see more than I want to see.

Maybe I'm a witch-

JOE. You're not.

HARPER. I could be a witch. Why not? I married a fairy.

JOE: Please, Harper, just go, I...

[...]

HARPER. [...] Why am I here? You called me.

JOE. I didn't...

HARPER. You called me. Leave me alone if you're goddamned happy.

JOE. I didn't call you.

HARPER. THEN WHY AM I HERE?

(Pause. They look at each other.)

HARPER. To see you again. Any way I can.

(Kushner, *Perestroika* 39-40)

At the same time, Prior and Harper meet in a dream:

HARPER. Are you... Who are you?

PRIOR. Who are you?

HARPER. What are you doing in my hallucination?

PRIOR. I'm not in your hallucination. You're in my dream.

[...]HARPER. There must be some mistake here. I don't recognize you.
 You're not... Are you my... some sort of imaginary friend?
 PRIOR. No. Aren't you too old to have imaginary friends?
 HARPER. I have emotional problems. I took too many pills. Why are you
 wearing make-up?
 (Kushner, *Millennium Approaches* 20)

Symbolism and Apocalyptic Visions

As symbolism is also characteristic of literary norms when it comes to apocalyptic literature (Carey 9), *Angels* as a whole presents countless allegories that audiences and readers can easily indulge and read into. Titi describes illnesses in general as a “warning sign for the organism alerting it to the fact that it is not working properly” (56). With these words in mind, AIDS, which plays a main role in *Angels*, becomes not only a curse and a disgrace for the protagonists but also a warning sign for the society they live in. Although the disease only affects a part of the population, and in the case of *Angels* we mainly see it affect a number of characters, AIDS and its relevance in the 1980s are symptoms of the dark side of the positivism that swept America during those times (Nielsen 14). Moreover, if the illness afflicting a nation or rather a minority is the catastrophe of 1980s U.S., said illness is also the way to ultimate redemption mentioned by Carey. AIDS is the tragedy the characters have to look in the eye in order to move on towards a brighter, hopeful future for society. AIDS is, in *Angels*, the cosmic catastrophe of the apocalypse.

Two characters are burdened by AIDS directly: Roy Cohn and Prior Walter. While Prior Walter is the “chosen one”, the prophet picked by the Angel in order to spread her message, Roy Cohn is in constant denial of his homosexuality. His lying about his AIDS diagnosis in spite of obvious proof provided by a medical professional is a clear example of his refusal to accept his belonging to the community he has been attacking.

HENRY. Roy Cohn, you are... You have had sex with men, many many times, Roy, and one of them, or any number of them, has made you very sick. You have AIDS.
 ROY. AIDS.
 Your problem, Henry, is that you are too hung up on words, on labels, that you believe they mean what they seem to mean.
 AIDS. Homosexual. Gay. Lesbian. You think these are names that tell you who someone sleeps with, but they don't tell you that.
 HENRY. No?
 ROY. No. Like all labels they tell you one thing and one thing only: where does an individual so identified fit in the food chain, in the pecking

order? Not ideology, or sexual taste, but something much simpler: clout. [...] Now to someone who does not understand this, homosexual is what I am because I have sex with men. But really this is wrong. Homosexuals are not men who sleep with other men. Homosexuals are men who in fifteen years of trying cannot get a pissante anti-discrimination bill through City Council. Homosexuals are men who know nobody and nobody knows. [...] And what is my diagnosis, Henry?

HENRY. You have AIDS, Roy.

ROY. No, Henry, no. AIDS is what homosexual have. I have liver cancer.

(Kushner, *Millennium Approaches* 31-32)

In this passage, what initially seems to be a heartfelt critique of labels as such turns out to be a colorful way to clear Roy's own name from all "accusations" of homosexuality. As Savran puts it (Nielsen 37), he is the only character to fall, and the one among the two ill ones to die of the disease. This fact might be related to the fact that he does not "look tragedy in the eye" like the other characters do. In other words, Roy does not go through pain and suffering because he decides not to acknowledge his condition, therefore preventing his own redemption. However, Roy Cohn is also an allegory on a whole other level. It has been previously stated that this character is the only one to actually represent a historical reference. Having been in reality assistant prosecutor in the trial against the Rosenbergs, in the play this character is haunted by the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, whose demise he admits to be responsible for:

ROY. [...] You know what my greatest accomplishment was, Joe, in my life, what I am able to look back on and be proudest of? [...]

You ever hear of Ethel Rosenberg? Huh, Joe, huh?

JOE. Well, yeah, I guess I... Yes.

ROY. Yes. Yes. You have heard of Ethel Rosenberg. Yes. [...]

If it wasn't for me, Joe, Ethel Rosenberg would be alive today, writing some personal advice column for *Ms.* magazine. She isn't. Because during the trial, Joe, I was on the phone every day, talking with the Judge...

[...] I pleaded till I wept to put her in the chair. Me. I did that. I would have fucking pulled the switch if they'd have let me.

(Kushner, *Millennium Approaches* 82-83)

Nevertheless, it is Ethel's ghost to stand at his bedside during his last moments, although not to forgive him. As she herself states, "I came to forgive you but all I can do is take pleasure in your misery" (Kushner, *Perestroika* 114). In a sort of reverse redemption, Roy's end is not projected towards the future like the other characters' are, but he does show how his character remains ultimately unchanged when he fools Ethel who takes pity on him pretending he is

hallucinating his mother. It is seemingly not by chance that a character with such past has been chosen to figure among the other protagonists of the play. Roy Cohn functions as a symbol for the parallel between 1980s U.S. and McCarthy's U.S. of thirty years before. Although the connection between these two decades is not as powerful and straightforward as the one between McCarthyist America and the contents of *The Crucible*, the reason behind this link can be found in a still-lingering 1950s mentality found in 1980s. Roy Cohn therefore seemingly acts as a link between a darker American decade, and a bridge that can be easily crossed by ghosts of the past. After the liberation and recognition found by gay communities and other minorities in the 1960s and 1970s, the 1980s idea of restoration to a lost American splendor has rather brought the treatment of homosexuals back to what it was thirty years before (Nielsen 13-14). The dismissal of the AIDS epidemic as secondary because it concerned mostly the gay community (Nielsen 10, 14) is a striking example of this mentality.

Psychosis

When discussing themes of apocalyptic nature, it is interesting to delve into its psychological aspects. After all, when dealing with paranoia, it is in mental processes that some answers can be found. Concerning the psychology of the apocalyptic, Ulrich H. J. Körtner provides an interesting cue. "Apocalyptic is not conceptual thinking. It seeks expression in a flood of imagery. Apocalypses portray dreams and visions" (46). When writing of dreams and visions, however, Körtner mainly refers to those experienced by apocalyptists writing their texts in an act of "literary manifestation of disillusioned hope" (47). Focusing on Jewish narratives of apocalypses, he quotes W. Bousset and his research material concerning the psychology behind it: "Under the excessive pain prompted by the increasingly gloomy fate of their people, and in the paroxysm of hope that was repeatedly deceived, and then repeatedly encouraged to the straining point again, these apocalyptists experienced dreams and visions" (as qtd. in Körtner 47). Applying this reading to *Angels* would mean to include Kushner among the aforementioned hallucinating apocalyptists. In the same way, a new historicist approach seeing literary texts as inseparable from their historical context and their being inevitably involved with a discourse or ideology (Bertens 176-177) suggests that this would make of Tony Kushner an American apocalyptist of the late 20th century. Transferring such imagery and visions into *Angels*, Kushner becomes the disillusioned voice of a decade and of a minority, and his work becomes the "literary manifestation of disillusioned hope"

mentioned by Körtner (47). One of the main differences with common apocalyptic texts is certainly the lack of an all-involving religiosity. As previously seen, biblical themes and references are mostly purely symbolic and allegories of the opposite, representing a disenchanted America and a heaven abandoned by God himself, and an Angel being the Angel of America, with her dualism, her humanity, and her wings made of steel.

Such a reading makes room for yet another level of interpretation of the dreams and visions that are so essential in *Angels*. Within the psychological context, visions featuring scenarios including an imminent end of the world resemble those found in psychosis. Notions of doom are often seen as symptoms of the latter. This view can be linked to the apparitions experienced by the characters of Prior and Harper. When briefly tapping into the world of psychoanalysis, a further explanation of the phenomenon is given. “Freud explains the schizoid’s experience of the end of the world as a projection of his inner catastrophe [...]” (Körtner 47). Although a psychoanalytical interpretation can be partially pertinent to paranoid states in the way they are examined in this thesis, it is their significance that is in this case relevant. Apocalyptic visions as projections of an inner catastrophe is a concept that can be observed in *Angels* as well as in Miller’s *The Crucible*. Somewhere in-between utopia and psychosis (Körtner 49), apocalypse is always an instance of anxiety and expression of an inner turmoil. However, the turmoil is not only attached to the perceiver’s inner world.

It is also very much a crisis of the external world, or more precisely, a crisis into which the apocalypticist falls by virtue of events taking place between him and that external world. [...] The apocalyptic understanding of existence is rooted in a dead-end experience of the world, and the locus of such an experience is anxiety. (Körtner 51)

It is this crisis to be fundamental in *Angels*. As if society were one big human organism, the apocalyptic visions shown in the play are the expression of a deep-rooted unrest. Furthermore, it is projected towards the imminent apocalypse that the characters evolve through crisis, in an unarrestable movement, clashing against stasis.

Apocalyptic Otherness

Parallels between the psychology of apocalypse and paranoia as discussed so far are particularly evident, especially when considering the concept of inner crisis projected onto the real world and other individuals. As it will be seen in this paragraph, such turmoil is quick to generate monsters in the eye of the beholder through instances of Otherness. A parallel has

been previously made between the AIDS epidemic and its being an allegory of a warning sign for the organism, where the American society of the time plays the role of organism being warned (Titi 56). The illness of society, in the case of *Angels*, is Otherness; the marginalization of minorities as an act of homophobia, sexism, and racism. Instances of Otherness appear in *Angels* as a projection of the inner unrest of society, rooted in paranoid feelings. Evoking the words of O'Donnell and Bersani one more time, if the creation of discourses and versions of identities such as gender and race happens also due to the cultural production of paranoia as a projection of an inner crisis (O'Donnell 16-17), what is created in *Angels* is nothing less than a socially constructed image of patients with AIDS. It is a myth of AIDS and illness. In O'Donnell's words, the creation of this myth, or the instances of this kind of Otherness, is due to a human desire, a "mechanism that rearranges chaos into order" (11). Society tries to get rid of the issue by ostracizing it and avoiding to validate it. The play's protagonists are therefore the Others, belonging to a minority residing on the margins of society not necessarily for having contracted the diseases themselves but also for their link to homosexuality and mental illness, the latter in the case of Harper. The political situation of 1980s U.S. is illustrated in the play through the eyes of this group of people representing a real minority (Titi 55).

Change and Stasis

Apocalyptic texts have often been a way to deal with traumatic historical events within a number of religions, especially when it comes to Jewish and Mormon traditions (Omer-Sherman 14), which are also the prominent religions in the play, and all share some common traits. Scholar of apocalyptic texts Bernard McGinn defines apocalyptic narratives as follows:

Apocalypse originally signified a genre [...] containing a mediated unveiling of heavenly secrets dealing either with the description of the celestial realm or with the course of history and the imminent end of the present age. These two poles of the apocalyptic imagination—the vertical one connecting heaven and earth and the horizontal one stretching out through time into the prophetic future—have always co-existed.
(as qtd. in Omer-Sherman 14)

The arrival of the Angel includes indeed an "unveiling of heavenly secrets", and it deals with both the description of heaven and the unraveling of history and human progress.

Such apocalyptic narratives were used in order to deal with traumatic change, and we can find a great deal of painful change and evolution within *Angels*. Most of the characters' relationships involve change and transformation to some degree, as well as constant movement: Harper travels with her mind while hallucinating a friendly travel agent, Louis and Prior shift apart, Joe's mother travels from out of state to New York in order to come to her son's aid. In *Angels*, the ultimate message is that change is nothing but imperative, and life is a painful but necessary process of evolution (Omer-Sherman 15-16). Such precept is symbolized by Prior turning down the role of prophet offered to him by the Angel in exchange for his help in stopping progress on earth.

PRIOR. [...] We can't just stop. We're not rocks — progress, migration, motion is...modernity. It's *animate*, it's what living things do. We desire. Even if all we desire is stillness, it's still desire *for*. Even if we go faster than we should. We can't *wait*. And wait for what? God...
 [...] I still want...My blessing. Even sick. I want to be alive.
 (Kushner, *Perestroika* 132-134)

The division of the play in two books is itself symbolic for change. While *Millennium Approaches* is the representation of the anxiety of an era and, more specifically, of the paranoia- and pain-ridden characters overwhelmed by all sorts of conflicts, *Perestroika* is filled with acts of compassion (Omer-Sherman 24), and it is a new chapter in the lives of the protagonists. Acts of compassion take place as several antagonists show sympathy and pity for each other: Belize caring for Roy Cohn, Prior forgiving the lover who has betrayed him at the moment of need, Louis. On the other hand, the word *perestroika* itself has a very significant meaning. Technically, it is "the policy of economic and governmental reform instituted by Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union during the mid-1980s" (Merriam-Webster), and this is noteworthy even if simply because of the link between the play's setting (of course, 1980s U.S.), the relevance of the Red Scare still lingering through the character of Roy Cohn, and the ongoing Cold War. The same policy is also mentioned by Prior at the end of the book. At the same time, when looking at the literal meaning of the word, we find that *perestroika* stands for restructuration (Merriam-Webster). The second part of *Angels in America* is where reconstruction happens at least on two levels. First and foremost, the characters' conflicts are somehow resolved or tamed: Prior is healed; Hannah has accepted her son's homosexuality (Omer-Sherman 24); Harper has moved to San Francisco in order to begin a new life; the antagonist, Roy Cohn, has perished, victim of the

disease he himself condemned, conferring some sort of sense of closure to his demise. Furthermore, it is the very end of the play to entail the concept of reconstruction. The events are now set in 1990, four years after the development of the rest of the play. The final words uttered by Prior do not sound final in their meaning: “The Great Work Begins” (Kushner, *Perestroika* 148).

Interestingly, “The Great Work Begins” is, on one hand, a hint at a desire for a necessary renovation, a glimpse of hope for the future of the world; on the other hand, it is also a direct quotation from the Angel’s speeches. The Angel and Prior, however, confer to this sentence opposite meanings. The Angel has come to earth in order to free the universe from the “Virus of TIME” (Kushner, *Perestroika* 49), while Prior aims to embrace chaos and progress, albeit torturous. Humans tend to wander, migrate, change, as opposed to the stasis of heaven. For the characters, change is painful but inherent to human nature to such a degree that the wishes of the Angel cannot be satisfied.

It is not without reward that the characters go through such crisis. As a matter of fact, the redemption after the struggle is represented by a sort of catharsis the protagonists reach through change and enduring great pain (Titi 55). The etymology of the word *catharsis* per se can provide another interesting insight on the relevance of this phase of the play’s progress. According to Titi, the word *catharsis* was initially used by Aristotle to describe the effect of art on the audience, with a special focus on the effects of tragedy. In conformity with his idea, the spectator witnessing a tragedy has the chance to achieve “purification of negative emotions such as fear, pity and anger, which lead to renewal and restoration, a sort of regeneration of the spirit” (Titi 58). *Angels* is, in this way, a tragedy: the sorrows faced by the characters are several and there is no triumphant ending. This tragedy offers us, the audience, purification through the witnessing of the events of the play: in other words, we as spectators also reach catharsis in the same way the protagonists do, through their own experiences. *Catharsis* is, however, not a term related to drama only. It also has religious connotations, especially if one sees catharsis as a way to reach cleansing on a spiritual level as well (Titi 58-59). The play presents countless biblical references with high symbolic content. Apart from the obvious ones (angels, God, heaven), *Angels* in its whole is enclosed in one major allegory: the one of AIDS functioning as purgatory. Like in a similar biblical limbo, the characters face pain and misfortunes in order to be cleansed and access heaven (Titi 61). However, the heaven that Prior leaves behind is not, in this case, the religious one: it is a

human version of heaven, where men and women can thrive following their own nature envisioning change, movement, progress, and hope for a better future. Catharsis is hereby the cure for AIDS as well as for humanity.

Conclusion

This analysis of *Angels* has been conducted taking into consideration paranoia in the form of apocalyptic discourse. From the parallels between *Angels* and traditional apocalyptic narratives, themes of apocalypse permeate the play all the way from its onset and leave an open ending with the characters looking towards a brighter future to be built.

Paranoid anxiety has been abandoned in favor of a hopeful gaze at reformation. Another step has been taken within the theme of the apocalyptic. The future is no longer a scary prospect, as the final act of redemption has already taken place through the protagonists' struggles. They now reside in a limbo where Utopia is in the making, not as a promised land, but as a product of human effort.

The Role of Religion in Paranoid Visions

Religion plays a fundamental role in both plays, albeit in different ways. As the paranoia present in both works seems to have roots in religious discourses, it is important to isolate this religious element and explore it further.

Religion in *The Crucible*

In Miller's *The Crucible*, religion plays a fundamental role on several levels due to the theocracy of the town of Salem and the consequent involvement of religion with the law. A theocracy involves a sort of "government [...] by immediate divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided" (Merriam-Webster), and so is the situation in Salem. Reverend Parris is the minister, the religious guide of the town, and it is his word the townspeople await when some of the girls are struck by a strange illness and rumors of witchcraft begin to spread. In spite of his status, Reverend Parris is but a mere consultant when Reverend Hale, an outsider and an expert in witchcraft, claims that the girls are affected by the latter. The same happens when Judge Danforth (most importantly, deputy governor of Massachusetts) and Judge Hathorne arrive in Salem to preside over the trials. These four

individuals represent the law in Salem, and their law is never too far from that of God. Specifically, the members of the community are Puritan, and the precepts followed by the reverend and the judges are those of the Puritan doctrine.

Puritans

It has been previously mentioned that Puritans “assumed a priori that they were sinful and thus worthless. [...] They judged themselves guilty and were willing to accept the verdict of guilty by others” (Budick 546). In his book *Puritanism: A Very Short Introduction*, Professor Francis J. Bremer describes the everyday life of Puritans and notes that “[w]hile perfection was impossible, one was called to strive for it. Each puritan sought to make him- or herself a shining light, a small kingdom of God that would inspire others to godly living” (49). Placing these two portraits side by side, what emerges is the figure of an individual Puritan reaching for holiness while being fully aware of his/her indelible sinfulness. This image fits quite well in *The Crucible*’s Salem, where anybody could be the accuser as well as the accused. The complaints of the townspeople about other members of the community feel genuine. An example is Giles Corey who, when Reverend Hale arrives to Salem, poses him a question concerning his wife, Martha Corey.

GILES. Mr. Hale, I have always wanted to ask a learned man—what signifies the readin’ of strange books?

HALE. What books?

GILES. I cannot tell; she hides them.

HALE. Who does this?

GILES. Martha, my wife. I have waked at night many a time and found her in a corner, readin’ of a book. Now what do you make of that?

HALE. Why, that’s not necessarily—

GILES. It discomfits me! Last night—mark this—I tried and tried and could not say my prayers. And then she close her book and walks out of the house, and suddenly—mark this—I could pray again!

(Miller, *The Crucible* 43)

This question will later be used as proof in court to charge Martha Corey with witchcraft. Martha will refuse to confess and will therefore be executed. The willingness of the community to do good and fight evil is easily picked up by the authority in a frenzy. Any accusation or mention, such as the one where Giles Corey claims his wife is reading books at night, is taken as proof for the court against the newly accused. Even Rebecca Nurse, a pillar of the community, is accused of witchcraft. Rebecca Nurse is former midwife of Anne

Putnam, mother of several babies who did not survive infancy; Rebecca is also a prolific mother and grandmother. This is enough proof for Ann Putnam and the rest of the community to indict Rebecca with the accusation of having murdered the Putnam babies with sorcery.

Spectral Evidence and Theocracy

Although these mentions and accusations were used as additional proof and as means to signal a potential witch to the court, the accused was convicted on the basis of spectral evidence (Weisman 104), which would have to involve an individual claiming to have seen “the spirit or a specter of an accused person committing acts of witchcraft” (Goss 21). When, at the end of the first act, the children loudly claim to have seen several women and men of the community “with the Devil” (Miller, *The Crucible* 50), they are providing spectral evidence: they claim to have seen a specific person’s spirit conjuring with the Devil.

Spectral evidence is used throughout the play, especially by Abigail. On one occasion, Abigail tricks Mary Warren, the Proctors’ servant, into bringing home a poppet with a needle stuck in it. When Abigail “is stabbed” by a needle on the same night, the presence of the poppet in Elizabeth Proctor’s home is abundant evidence for her to be arrested for witchcraft. On another occasion, Mary Warren, forced by John Proctor, openly accuses all the girls of lying. As the conversation with the judges becomes uncomfortable and possibly harmful to girls’ position, Abigail suddenly appears transfixed and claims to see a threatening yellow bird: the spirit of Mary Warren, sending “her spirit out” (Miller, *The Crucible* 97) to attack the girls. Her friends are quick to follow.

[ABIGAIL, *with a weird, wild, chilling cry, screams up to the ceiling.*]
ABIGAIL. You will not! Begone! Begone, I say!
DANFORTH. What is it, child?
[*But ABIGAIL, pointing with fear, is now raising up her frightened eyes, her awed face, toward the ceiling — the girls are doing the same*
[...]]
ABIGAIL. Why — ? [*She gulps.*] Why do you come, yellow bird?
[...]
ABIGAIL [*to the ceiling, in a genuine conversation with the ‘bird’, as though trying to talk it out of attacking her*]. But God made my face;
you cannot want to tear my face. Envy is a deadly sin, Mary.
(Miller, *The Crucible* 101)

Spectral evidence seems to be particularly fitting in the court of theocratic Salem, and the judges are quicker to welcome accusers rather than defenders. As it is reiterated several times

throughout the play, the only way to clear one's name is to confess and name others, claiming to have seen them "with the Devil" or to have seen their spirits doing harm to someone or someone's possession, like Martha Corey being accused by Walcott to have bewitched the pigs she has sold him (Miller, *The Crucible* 68). In Puritan belief, the connection between witchcraft and the Devil is very strong. For witchcraft to make sense, a belief in Satan is necessary (Weisman 25). Witches were no other than righteous men and women seduced by the Devil, who gave them additional powers in order to accomplish his will:

Those who succumbed to the temptation were witches, to whom the devil gave the ability to harm people and their livestock. But most puritans [sic] believed that they were most likely to encounter the devil as the tempter who urged them to seek their own good rather than God's, or who injected blasphemous thoughts into their minds, sowed the seeds of despair in their souls, or led them away from the moral life. (Bremer 47)

The ordeal of the trials in Salem seems to be a religious vicious cycle which does not leave chances to escape. Whoever is accused needs to confess in order to be released, but the confession, while providing forgiveness for the accused, is inherently an admission of guilt of a crime connected to the Devil. This cycle quickly spirals out of control in Salem, pushed forward by a paranoid chain reaction of accused becoming accusers, and reaches its peak with the ultimate execution in the play: that of John Proctor.

Said execution, as previously noted, takes place amidst doubts and second thoughts on the part of the judges in the last act. Although it is clear that the judges, as well as Reverend Parris, do not feel pity for the victims, and they rather desire to avoid a potential revolt, the doubts expressed can be considered creaks in the Puritan stronghold which Salem's lawmen have so far represented.

PARRIS. [...] I fear there will be riot here.

HATHORNE. Riot! Why at every execution I have seen naught but high satisfaction in the town.

PARRIS. Judge Hathorne — it were another sort that hanged till now.

Rebecca Nurse is no Bridget that lived three year with Bishop before she married him. John Proctor is not Isaac Ward that drank his family to ruin. [...] Let Rebecca stand upon the gibbet and send up some righteous prayer, and I fear she'll wake vengeance on you.

(Miller, *The Crucible* 111-112)

Contributing factor is also, of course, Abigail's escape. As Parris tells Danforth: "Excellency, I think they be aboard a ship" (Miller, *The Crucible* 111). Interestingly, Budick advances a theory that would see the Salem witch trials ultimately destroy theocracy in Massachusetts.

“The seeds of this destruction were [...] within the rigours of the Puritan definition of sainthood which identified moral goodness with outward manifestations of salvation, a belief which [...] characterized ‘witches’ and judges alike” (539). According to Budick, the Salem witch trials managed to break the theocratic system of Salem because once the trials reached their peak, saints and devils were no longer discernible. This is true especially in the eyes of the reader/audience when the great paradox of *The Crucible* is made evident. It is necessary to mention once again the binary opposition between lies and truth, where lying in court (confessing) corresponds to embracing the truth of God, and telling the truth (about not being a witch) means being guilty of witchcraft. In the same way, sanctity and wickedness are binary opposites at the peak of the witch trials, as the judges as well as the reverends, technically acting as the hands of God, begin to lack conviction (Reverend Hale actually having detached from the court well before that point), and the wicked play the role of saints. The speeches of John Proctor and Rebecca Nurse being represented like martyrs of the trials are in this sense very suggestive.

DANFORTH [*Pointing at the confession in Proctor’s hand*]. Is that document a lie? If it is a lie I will not accept it! What say you? I will not deal in lies, Mister! [PROCTOR *is motionless*.] You will give me your honest confession in my hand, or I cannot keep you from the rope. [PROCTOR *does not reply*.] Which way do you go, Mister? [*His breast heaving, his eyes staring, PROCTOR tears the paper and crumples it, and he is weeping in fury, but erect.*]

DANFORTH. Marshal!

PARRIS [*hysterically, as though the tearing paper were his life*]. Proctor, Proctor!

HALE. Man, you will hang! You cannot!

PROCTOR [*His eyes full of tears*]. I can. And there’s your first marvel, that I can. You have made your magic now, for now I do think I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor. Not enough to weave a banner with, but white enough to keep it from such dogs. [*Elizabeth, in a burst of terror, rushes to him and weeps against his hand*] Give them no tear! Tears please them! Show honor now, show a stony heart and sink them with it! [*He has lifted her, and kisses her now with great passion.*]

REBECCA. Let you fear nothing! Another judgment waits us all!
(Miller, *The Crucible* 124-125)

Signs of this opposition are visible throughout the play as well. During the third act, for example, some Salem citizens approach the judges and the reverends in court in order to discuss the acquittal of some of the accused. They bring with them statements signed by

several other members of the community, and asking whether “it not strike upon you that so many of these women have lived so long with such upright reputation” (Miller, *The Crucible* 83). In his answer, Reverend Parris evokes the Gospel, which recounts that “Cain were an upright man, and yet he did kill Abel” (Miller, *The Crucible* 83). The spotless reputation of some of the accused, such as Rebecca Nurse, is of no use to the court, as anyone is likely to fall prey to the Devil’s charms. Spectral evidence alone is enough to mud one’s reputation. Although this line of thinking is initially favorable to the court, it is also an early sign of the upcoming paradox that will catapult the persecuted into sainthood. In a way, the strict Puritan morals that cause so many witches to be condemned are also those that push the opposites of sanctity and wickedness to the point where they are inverted.

From another point of view, yet a new paradox can be found in the last act of the play. When John Proctor fights with his sense of guilt to decide whether to confess or to be executed, his final choice of the latter looks like a rebellion. Proctor finally embraces his execution in a saint-like fashion; the final motivation for John is the chance to save his reputation and to defy an unjust theocracy. However, Budick argues that this martyrdom actually follows the same precepts of the Puritan church that the Proctors aim at defying (541). Their approach to guilt is in this sense particularly significant. John Proctor is, as it has been seen, ridden by indecision and guilt towards his wife Elizabeth, as well as his neighbors for wanting to confess and be freed once and for all, and he does not fail to voice his concerns to his wife. Elizabeth’s answer follows sternly: “Do what you will. But let none be your judge. There be no higher judge under heaven than Proctor is!” (Miller, *The Crucible* 119). While this comment seems to put Proctor above all laws and in real control of his life, this can also be read as yet another sign that, even at the most dramatic hour of their lives, John and Elizabeth cannot escape the strict Puritan morals which entail carrying the burden of constant guilt and knowledge of sinfulness (Budick 541, 546). John claims to embrace death because of his desire of keeping his name clean, and such desire comes from a place of profound guilt and shame of himself. His final sacrifice is an act of redemption because of his inability to free himself from an inherent burden. If he wants to regard himself as a man, he does not really have a choice different from taking the place of a heretic on the scaffold. At the same time, Elizabeth is also burdened by what she perceives as her wrongdoings as a wife, which have distanced John, because “It needs a cold wife to prompt lechery” (Miller, *The Crucible* 119). In a way, John and Elizabeth Proctor fail to let go of the anxiety that is inherent to the Puritan

tenacity during the witch trials. They show an “inability to relent in their own moral verdicts, both of themselves and of each other, and to forgive themselves for being human” (Budick 541). In other words, according to this reading, there is no true forgiveness or redemption within *The Crucible*; the prevailing theme of the play is a violent and all-covering religious paranoia that does not let go of the characters even in the face of capital punishment.

Signs

Religious paranoia can be spotted throughout the play taking notice of several indicators. Interestingly often, when witchcraft is discussed, the word *sign* is mentioned. “She cannot bear to hear the Lord’s name, Mr. Hale; that’s a sure sign of witchcraft afloat,” says Putnam of Betty (Miller, *The Crucible* 41). “I never see no sign you ever sent your spirit out to hurt no one, and seeing I do live so closely with you, they dismissed it”, says Mary Warren to Elizabeth (55). The people of Salem seem to be perpetually looking for a hint at witchcraft, their spirituality obviously stronger than their rational side. In the play, the word *sign* is also used profusely to indicate its other meaning, which is “to sign”. The whole first act revolves around John Proctor’s indecision between two undesirable alternatives: signing the paper to regain his freedom, or not signing it and being hanged. The act of signing is, in this case, the final division between good and evil, although Proctor is not initially sure where lies what, consumed as he is with guilt and indecision. Signing also means for him to give away his name, make his confession to save his life public, hence mudding his own family’s reputation. It is the significance of his signature and the weight it carries, the handing of his dignity to an unjust authority, to finally convince Proctor to choose execution. A lot of signing is done also while literally making deals with the Devil, as the witches-to-be falling prey to Satan are often told to be signing “his book”:

MARY WARREN. [*hysterically, indicating PROCTOR*] He come at me by night and every day to sign, to sign, to—

DANFORTH. Sign what?

PARRIS. The Devil’s book? He come with a book?

MARY WARREN. [*hysterically, pointing at PROCTOR, fearful of him*]

My name, he want my name. [...] He wake me every night, his eyes were like coals and his fingers claw my neck, and I sign, I sign...

(Miller, *The Crucible* 104)

Through this reading, in this already highly symbolical work where biblical imagery is mentioned often, signatures work as symbol for spiritual commitment. Signing the Devil’s

book makes a witch, and signing a forced confession, paradoxically, frees the witch's spirit from evil once and for all. The prolific use of signatures is also an example of how easily names are named in Salem during the trials. In the final act, Judge Danforth, Judge Hathorne, and Reverend Parris, although stating otherwise, do not seem interested in a confession from Proctor because they believe in the honesty of his admission, but rather because they fear the angry mob. They prompt him to sign before the sun rises in a hurry, without special care for the nature of his eventual confession:

HALE. [*quickly to DANFORTH*] Excellency, it is enough he confess himself. Let him sign it, let him sign it.

PARRIS. [*Feverishly.*] It is a great service, sir. It is a weighty name; it will strike the village that Proctor confess. I beg you, let him sign it. The sun is up, Excellency!

DANFORTH. [*Considers; then with dissatisfaction*] Come, then, sign your testimony. [*To Cheever*] Give it to him. [*CHEEVER goes to Proctor, the confession and a pen in hand. Proctor does not look at it.*] Come, man, sign it.

(Miller, *The Crucible* 123)

The townspeople also sign papers to testify about the innocence of the incarcerated members of the community, and the same names are used to bring new people to court. Names are written down easily and fingers are pointed quickly. In *The Crucible*, finding a scapegoat is seemingly more urgent than singling out with care the actual wrongdoings of the accused.

As it has been seen throughout this chapter, the representation of paranoid religious practices found in *The Crucible* goes hand in hand with the mass hysteria which characterizes feelings of paranoia and anxiety in this play. Puritanism is made protagonist but also antagonist: the theocracy of the town of Salem becomes an excuse for the darkest thoughts and fears of an entire community to prevail over better judgement. The witch trials and the consequent hangings are finally symbols of a deep-rooted inner unrest of the members of the community. Whether the play is read as a metaphor of the Red Scare or as an insight into human feelings and fear, the result always sees an entire population governed by fear and paranoia, more keen on finding justification for said fear rather than rational solutions.

Religion in *Angels in America*

As it has been observed so far in this chapter, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* presents religious beliefs that are the cause behind the creation of monsters (the witches) in the first place. The centrality of religion within the theocracy of Salem, the fervor of the pious members of the

community, and the Puritan beliefs of the time concerning the manifestation of the Devil through people are factors that contribute to the creation of paranoid visions that make the witches the protagonists of the play. Religion becomes the vessel and the symbol of human fears and anxieties at their most primordial state.

Religion is also a preponderant theme in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*. Once again, it is presented symbolically, and several motifs of Judaism, Mormonism, and biblical imagery are repurposed throughout the development of the play. However, it is not the protagonists' beliefs to be particularly relevant. Manifestations are central in the play, where a messenger angel from heaven descends on earth with the aim to make one of the characters (Prior, affected by AIDS) her prophet. The presence of angels, visions, and hallucinations make the role of faith in *Angels* highly symbolical in a stricter sense than in *The Crucible*. The practice of faith is only partially relevant. Several characters belong to a church, but they do not act on (and they are not required to do so by the circumstances) their beliefs in a way that influences the development of the plotline. The reason behind this might as well lie in the two most prominent themes found in the play, the AIDS epidemic and the apocalyptic scenario that sees the intervention of heavenly messengers and more than a glimpse into heaven. As the AIDS epidemic and the people affected by it on earth represent a marginal side of contemporary society, angels come down from the highest ranks of heaven to reach and interact with this specific group of people. One of the most striking aspects of *Angels* lies in the way these two opposite worlds run side by side and end up touching, each an allegory of the other. Prior, abandoned to his illness by a world in perpetual movement, is offered the role of chosen prophet. To offer him this role is an angel coming down from a heaven troubled by the same progress that Prior is suffering through.

The Angel

Religion is mainly expressed through the biblical imagery and allegories permeating the play throughout. The Angel of America is, of course, the main symbol and possibly the real protagonist of the play. She represents both its traditional meaning as messenger of God, as well as a more humanized version of an angelical figure. She is, after all, the Angel of America, with her "gray steel wings" (Kushner, *Perestroika* 3). Representing the link between the earthly and the spiritual world, she belongs to both. She comes to earth because the angels are thoroughly upset by God taking his leave, a rather human emotional reaction

taking place in the holy home of God. She does not appear in front of Prior, but she breaks through the ceiling with “a terrifying CRASH” (Kushner, *Millennium Approaches* 90). In spite of its originality, this figure does seem to have roots, as briefly observed previously, in specific traditional imagery. Nielsen claims that “she is not the angel Moroni who appeared to Joseph Smith and showed him the Golden Tablets on which Mormonism is founded, and she is not Walter Benjamin’s male angel either” (29), but she does indeed have elements in common with both. First of all, the angels mentioned by Nielsen have their origin in Mormonism and Judaism respectively, which are the two faiths to be practiced by the believers in the play, although, as stated, with little fervor. Angel Moroni is the messenger sent from God to earth in order to make of Joseph Smith a prophet. According to Mormon beliefs, Moroni appeared several times to Smith, the founder of Mormonism and at the time a farm boy, in order to guide him through the finding and consequent translation of gold plates (Hermans 1-2), the contents of which presented “the fullness of the everlasting Gospel” (Hill as qtd. in Hermans 1). The resulting work would be later called the *Book of Mormon*, fundamental book for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Hermans 2). In a comedic twist, just like Angel Moroni led Smith to unearth the plates, the Angel leads Prior to the kitchen to his Book, located in suitcase beneath the floor tiles. Instead of the seer stones that Smith is said to have found with the golden plates and used to read and translate them, Prior finds glasses with rock-like lenses. However, most similarities between the Angel of America and angel Moroni lie in the role as messenger of the heavenly being, and their search of a prophet in the name of God.

A closer resemblance can be found between Kushner’s Angel of America and Walter Benjamin’s Angel of History. A Jewish German philosopher, Benjamin did not write about a meeting with a holy messenger but used the figure of the angel as a metaphor for his theory on history.

There is a painting by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees on single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile

of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is this
Storm. (Benjamin IX)

Both Benjamin's and Kushner's angels bear a specific message: progress is chaos. The Angel of America has descended on earth in order to convince Prior to convey the same message to humanity. The Angel wants Prior to stop the progress of the world, which is said to be the cause of God's taking his leave from heaven, and to convince humanity to adopt stasis instead. Benjamin's Angel of History seems to fear progress just the same, as, "where a chain of events appears before us, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage". The angel's desire to stay, "awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" is also a wish for stasis that cannot be granted, due to the storm that is progress, blowing directly from Paradise. Walter Benjamin thus represents history, with the metaphor of an angel looking at modernity in horror, unable to bring any significant change. The unattainability of stasis is repurposed in *Angels*, too, with the refusal of Prior to take part to the Angel's plans and become his prophet. However, Prior's refusal is not the refusal of the Angel's vision of the world. As a matter of fact, Prior does not deny the destruction and the wreckage brought about by the constant progress and evolution of the world; nevertheless, he believes these are elements inherent to the nature of the world itself and necessary.

PRIOR. [...] This disease will be the end of many of us, but not nearly all,
and the dead will be commemorated and will struggle on with the
living, and we are not going away. We won't die secret deaths
anymore. The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time
has come.

(Kushner, *Perestroika* 148)

The reception of the Angel of America on earth lacks the solemnity expected in the greeting of a heavenly figure coming down from the sky; "God almighty...very Steven Spielberg" says Prior (Kushner, *Millennium* 90). Nevertheless, what the play's Angel, Moroni, and Benjamin's Angel of History seem to have in common is their roles as messengers. Whether physical carriers of news from heaven or in the form of mere allegories (as it is the case for Benjamin's Angel of History, taken himself from Klee's *Angelus Novus*), these creatures are all symbols and projections of a human turmoil or need. Angel Moroni's alleged arrival in Joseph Smith's life happened in a time during which the adolescent boy felt "[t]roubled over his own deeply aroused yearnings an uncertain where to turn for sustenance" (Owens II), and made him the founder of a new faith. Walter Benjamin's creature seems to act as a metaphor

of a troubled time in history (this and other essays on history were, after all, written in 1940). In the same way, the Angel of America can be seen as a projection of the struggle of the minorities of the America portrayed by Kushner, and she appears to Prior in a moment of utmost weakness, while sick in the hospital after being abandoned by his partner. This Angel asks for stasis in a time where the progress of the world crushes the outsider as if portraying a desperate need. However, it is an outsider, Prior, to refuse the comfort of stasis in order to embrace the evolution of man as a necessary step for humanity and the world.

Judaism

Judaism is a predominant theme within the play, not much for its religious implications as for its symbols and cultural elements. Omer-Sherman focuses on the adoption of the Judaic theme of prophecy in contemporary key. “[T]he politics of *Angels* cannot be isolated from its relation to Judaism’s understanding of the sacred. By considering Judaism’s intrinsic relation to ‘prophecy’ as a rigorous mission for social progress, the coherence of Kushner’s vision of men and angels emerges with greater clarity” (9). Much has been written and analyzed so far concerning the importance of the Angel as a biblical symbol and link between both earthly world and heaven within the play, but the figure of Prior as a prophet can be said to be on the same plane of importance when it comes to symbolism. Prior is the portrait of a prophet not unlike those of ancient Judaism: he has visions of God’s messengers, and he is chosen among others to convey a fundamental message to the world. The prophets of ancient Judaism were often outsiders standing at the margins of society (Omer-Sherman 9). Ill and a homosexual, Prior is the ultimate outsider. Nevertheless, it will be his illness to allow him to evolve and elevate himself. “Prior moves ahead, not in spite of AIDS but rather *because* of AIDS. The ‘virus of time’ has jolted him out of torpor and self-pity and eventually transforms him into the play’s strongest character” (Frantzen as qtd. in Omer-Sherman 9). The “virus of TIME” (Kushner, *Perestroika* 49), what the Angel despises because the reason behind God’s abandonment, is again a fearsome fuel to propel the characters into the future, a driving force. In a way, Prior’s evolution is like his personal apocalypse, where the doom of AIDS is overcome in order to gain a state of holiness after the catastrophe.

What further emerges from this overview is that *Angels* arguably creates a rarely-seen parallel between homosexuality and Judaism. The parallel might seem even straightforward: in a play filled with biblical imagery and symbolism, the projection of the struggle of Jews onto the

more current struggle of the gay community is evident. In *Angels*, homosexuals, especially homosexuals plagued by AIDS, assume the role of the Other while showing religious and cultural elements that traditionally characterizes the practices of Judaism, like prophecy and the motif of movement and migratory transitions (Omer-Sherman 16) covered in the analysis of the play. According to Professor Jonathan Freedman, “[a]lthough Kushner emphasizes the contiguity between the Jew and the queer, he does not insist in positing their common alterity. Instead, he uses each as a metonym for the other, creating an interplay of similarity and difference that conspicuously resists the reduction to identity” (92). This interplay is subtle but persistent throughout *Angels*, where stereotypes are played with and recurrent motifs are interchangeable. Freedman continues with the most striking example of the play’s union of Judaism and homosexuality: Roy Cohn (93). Apart from representing a piece of American history, Cohn is also the meeting point of Jewish stereotypization and Otherness in homosexuality (93-94). Freedman highlights the moment when Roy Cohn is portrayed for the first time in the play, surrounded by a horde of ringing phones, answering all and speaking into each receiver resembling an octopus (94), and even wishing to be one, with “[e]ight loving arms and all those suckers” (Kushner, *Millennium Approaches* 2). The figure of the octopus does not seem to be there by chance among the various metaphors in the play. Portraying himself as a creature with (or with the desire to have) several tentacles, both in his own imagination and in real life, as he has several conversations at the same time on the phone, Roy Cohn also portrays one of the most stereotypical and anti-Semitic representations of Jews around the 19th and 20th century. At this time, in one of the most widespread anti-Semitic images, the anthropomorphism of the Jew is extremized, to the point of “the transformation of the hand-the emblem of warmth, love, and pleasure-into bat wings, vampire talons, spider legs, or octopus tentacles” (Freedman 94). Ironically, Roy Cohn, while containing within himself these two dimensions of Otherness, is also the one protagonist of the play to act as a persecutor towards the other members of the same minorities. He is a non-practicing Jew; it is interesting here to observe a simple exchange, quoted also by Freedman, between Roy and Joe:

ROY. CHRIST!

JOE. Roy.

ROY (*Into receiver*). Hold. (*Hold button; to Joe*) What?

JOE. Could you please not take the Lord's name in
vain?

(*Pause.*)

I'm sorry. But please. At least while I'm. ..
ROY (*Laughs, then*). Right. Sorry. Fuck.
(Kushner, *Millennium Approaches* 5)

He is also a (partially) closeted homosexual in denial, as it is revealed in the passage seen in the analysis, where he refuses his AIDS diagnosis with particular vehemence. The fundamental union of two instances of Otherness seemingly promotes a sort of sanctification of the Other, where a contemporary minority is united with one of the past; this process would be further reinforced through the materialization in the play of the aforementioned several biblical motifs and symbols, from the Angel to the prophecy.

A word needs to be spent on Prior's role as prophet. So far, Prior's prophecy has been treated as if it had gone unfulfilled. Of course, this is due to the character's refusal of complying with the Angel and his embracing the opposite approach to the world: picking painful progress over stasis. However, in his embrace of life as a painful yet necessary evolutionary process, Prior refuses to be heaven's prophet, becoming somehow the prophet of the earthly world. He is the one to have survived his condition and to have taken his illness as a chance to grow. Towards the end of the play, as the characters sit on the Bethesda Fountain, Prior shares prophetic words of wisdom with his companions:

PRIOR. [...] Bye now.
You are fabulous creatures, each and every one.
And I bless you: *More Life*.
The Great Work Begins.
(Kushner, *Perestroika* 148)

Visions and hallucinations throughout the development of the play is a physical manifestation of an impending apocalyptic doom which dominates the times in which the play takes place and which is the religious representation of the most human degree of paranoia. Themes of Judaism are repurposed through the experiences of the protagonists, producing a sort of double Otherness and conferring the minorities of the play the ability to access sanctification through their struggle.

Discussion

When looking for indicators of paranoid feelings and anxiety throughout *Angels in America* and *The Crucible*, what is clear from the beginning is how these plays treat the same motif in different ways. Throughout the analysis so far conducted, two main themes emerge: the

theme of scapegoating and the one of apocalypse. Each of these can be defined as a driving theme for each play respectively, and the instance around which analysis of the underlying theme of paranoia revolves. In this chapter, these two main themes will be thoroughly analyzed and compared in order to understand the differences and similarities of instances of paranoia within the plays, and how (and if) they relate to each other.

Looking for Holiness

Scapegoating is a phenomenon present in both plays, being only one manifestation (and maybe the most evident one) of Otherness. However, *The Crucible* is without a doubt the play where this theme thrives and plays a fundamental role. Instances of scapegoating are the nucleus of the play, where the witches become the sacrificial goat in the moment when they are accused of witchcraft. The strict connection between the religiosity of the town of Salem and the religious origins of the practice of scapegoating creates an obvious link. To be fundamental in the play are not the Puritan practices per se, but rather the extent to which the members of the community will go in order to retain their own holiness in the eyes of God. As thoroughly explored so far, scapegoating is a purge of all sins, a holy custom meant to cleanse the devout (Demirkaya 124) as a community. The town of Salem's approach to scapegoating is rather literal as everybody in town is involved into an episode of mass hysteria where the truth and its opposite exchange places in a paradox, where lying in the face of the court (which, in a theocracy, represents God) means salvation.

The protagonists of *Angels* all belong to the homosexual minority; some are afflicted by the plague of AIDS. Scapegoating is an intrinsic element in the play. However, these minorities' condition is just partially explored throughout the development of the plotline. Prior is preoccupied with his visions of the Angel, dreams, trances, manifestations that, in Carey's definition, are all elements of apocalyptic narratives (7). The apocalyptic theme is central in the play and continuously repurposed through a number of allegories explored in the analysis. The Angel stands in-between the earth and the heavenly realms, carrying a message of doom and judgement. As quoted previously, Omer-Sherman reports two poles of the apocalyptic narrative in *Angels*: "the vertical one connecting heaven and earth and the horizontal one stretching out through time into the prophetic future" (14). The horizontal pole mentioned here refers to the preoccupation of the Angel with a desired stasis, in opposition to the

progress that humanity relentlessly pursues. The prophetic future mentioned by Omer-Sherman is undoubtedly not a propitious one for humanity in *Angels*. Any apocalyptic narrative entails not only the elements so far stated, like the visions, the intermediaries between heaven and earth, and the high symbolism of the content. Another inherent component is the upcoming doom to which the world is destined. The Merriam-Webster defines apocalypse briefly as “the expectation of an imminent cosmic cataclysm in which God destroys the ruling powers of evil and raises the righteous to life in a messianic kingdom”; as Carey puts it, apocalyptic narratives always entail a “cosmic catastrophe” preceding “ultimate deliverance. [...] They almost always imply suffering for the faithful, though they often affect all people” (8). The expectation of a cosmic judgement after the tribulations of the apocalypse, and the ultimate salvation for the deserving ones (Carey 9) represent the ultimate reprimand towards those who seek said deliverance in the afterlife. The cosmic catastrophe is a purge of greater (possibly, the greatest) dimensions; it is the sacrifice of someone, or something, in order to save the future of the world. Just like the practice of scapegoating, the apocalypse cleans the cosmos of what is unholy, in order to achieve a holy greatness.

Putting the practice of scapegoating taking place in Salem next to the apocalyptic narrative of *Angels*, it becomes clear that what is generally sought after is holiness. In the case of Salem, it is the entire community to purge its aliens, or rather, to create them through a chain of blame, and then eliminate them in order to retain their status of people of God. In *Angels*, the protagonists go against the wishes of the Angel and embrace progress. They commit to life “as a violent progress and as painful but necessary transformation” (Omer-Sherman 15). AIDS deeply affects Prior, kills Roy, and pain and loss are central as Louis leaves Prior at the time of need and contributes to the breaking of Joe’s marriage. What they reach at the end after the struggle is a state of catharsis (Titi 55): a spiritual cleansing that opens the doors to a new era. Like a deliverance after catastrophe, the characters reach a state of renewed holiness. Dr. Claudia Barnett’s reading of the play suggests that the character’s struggle, and specifically Prior’s illness, is to be considered a purgatory of sorts. AIDS becomes the vehicle that lets the affected characters get in contact with the spiritual and the supernatural; Prior communicates with the Angel, with his ancestors, and even with Harper during her hallucinations; Roy Cohn is haunted by Ethel Rosenberg on his deathbed. “[B]oth Prior and Roy are, in fact, sanctified by their proximity to death, and the liminal ‘space’ of AIDS

functions as a metaphor for Purgatory throughout the play” (Barnett 472). A purgatory that in the end will, in the case of Prior, give way to an all-human heaven on earth, with the final redemption. Roy, who does not accept the struggle by refusing to acknowledge his own homosexuality and fallibility, will be the one to succumb to the same struggle. In *Angels*, life and death go hand in hand, and, at the same time, represent a binary opposition, with AIDS in the middle. AIDS is not just obliteration but also “a precondition for life, as Prior learns on his prophetic journey. He sees because he has AIDS; he survives because he sees; and, in the end, he shares his vision with humanity” (Barnett 472).

In a way, *Angels* takes further the concept of scapegoating primarily and more fundamentally explored in *The Crucible*. Not only it is the scapegoat to rise to heavenly ranks, in the case of Prior, or to be at least in contact with the afterlife, such as Roy when he sees and speaks to Ethel Rosenberg; the scapegoat also survives the purging, and it is the one to ultimately reach salvation. Prior is the one to eventually lead his companions and turn towards a better future. The last sentence of *Perestroika*, “The Great Work Begins” (148), is a symbol of the desire of creating a better tomorrow. The traditional roles found in apocalyptic narrative reverse as deliverance is found by the othered minorities of the play, and not by the faithful, the devout, or in any case not by those belonging to the powerful majority, in this case represented by 1980s America’s dominant socially and politically conservative class. Its flawed contemporary society loses in the moment the protagonists of the play decide to embrace life, with its struggles and loss and pain, and to fix their surroundings; in other words, when the “great work begins”.

The overturning of roles from scapegoat to saint that takes place in *Angels*, although even more subtle, is similar to the one occurring in *The Crucible*. As seen in the analysis, the witches who finally refuse to confess and are sent to the gutter embody in that moment the role of martyrs and saints. John Proctor’s last inner fight, deciding whether to confess or to face death, is terminated by a sudden desire to overcome all guilt with his own final sacrifice. The same happens to Rebecca Nurse as she accepts the same fate, and to Elizabeth Proctor supporting her husband’s decision in spite of the pleas of the reverends. They, like Prior and all characters of *Angels*, are Others, scapegoats and monsters transformed into saints by the same purge that is supposed to eliminate them and what they stand for.

Both plays present several instances of binary oppositions: good/evil, heaven/hell, lie/truth, and of course Self/Other. Some critics of *Angels* have suggested that these opposition work

“also as an *oxymoron*, a figure of undecidability whose contradictory being becomes an incitement to think the impossible: revolution” (Savran as qtd. in Barnett 480). As Barnett discusses, in each of these oppositions there is never a side to finally prevail on the other. Consequently, these binary oppositions are not, paradoxically, “contradictions but states of coexistence” imitating life itself (480). The same reading can be applied to the paradoxes found in *The Crucible*, where lies often ultimately equal truth and those said to be conjuring with the Devil turning into saints. In *Angels*, life and death are tied together by the purgatory of AIDS, and the ill who accepts this transition becomes the redeemed.

Sacrifice, used in the practice of scapegoating in order to cleanse a community of its sins, and in apocalyptic narratives in order to re-create a new, better world and future, becomes in these two plays an act of both revolution and redemption. Paranoid feelings have pushed the minorities in *The Crucible* and in *Angels* to their limits; mass hysteria has driven the Others of Salem to the gutter, and the psychosis which has projected Prior and the whole universe of 1980s America into an apocalyptic scenario are the elements to ultimately free the characters from their status of scapegoats. Immolation becomes its opposite: atonement.

Conclusion

Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* and Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* are two plays that make themselves memorable in and since the 20th century. The span of approximately forty years which divides their debuts defines the difference in topics covered, themes, motifs and contemporary controversies that are approached on stage. When *The Crucible* debuted in 1953 narrating the events of 1692 Salem, several in the audience believed to see a critique of the Red Scare that took over the country in a moment of great social paranoia. The witch trials looked like the McCarthy hearings to most, and they do today, too (Aziz 169). When *Angels* appeared on stage in 1992 (Nielsen 9), it brought with it a triumph of allegories and biblical imagery. Although the plot taps into events of 1980s America such as the AIDS epidemic, there is little realism in the event that unfolds in the two books of *Angels*, where visions and hallucinations intertwine with visits on earth on the part of Angels and heavenly intermediaries announcing imminent doom. The message seems to be of a similar nature to the one of Miller’s work: a critique of society, a controversial scream in the dark. In themes

and motifs, these two plays could hardly be less similar. At the same time, at their very core lies an over-encompassing strength that all encircles but also all drives: paranoia.

When looking at the plays closely, paranoid feelings are seen ruling over the characters' actions in both works. Be it in 1692 New England or in 1980s New York as they are portrayed in the plays, the feelings of anxiety fuel Salem people's hatred of the unknown, as well as the psychotic dreams of an AIDS patient. It is paranoia to create monsters out of the dark in Salem in *The Crucible*, and it is again paranoia to make way for an Angel to descend from heaven and elevate a man from the fringes of society to the role of prophet in *Angels*. The conception of this thesis was driven by the desire to shed light upon the way this deeply human feeling connects these two plays in ways that exceed the overly-explored interpretation of social commentary so far applied to *The Crucible* and *Angels*. With my work, I wanted to prove that anxiety and obsession have the power to set in motion each and every major action that takes place in both plays, and are therefore inherent to their development.

With the help of the analytical tools provided by fundamental theories such as New Historicism, the study of relationships of Otherness, and the concept of binary oppositions and symbolism, this study has delved into the historical background of the plays, a context which is crucial for a correct analysis, but also to the roots of paranoia as a cultural and psychological phenomenon. It is, after all, the understanding of how these feelings affect people on a deep level to offer interesting means of interpretation for *The Crucible* and *Angels*. Such analysis of paranoia within our culture reveals a deep connection between feelings of anxiety and the desire of preservation of identity (Bersani qtd. in O'Donnell 17). Every action dictated by paranoid feelings seems to be a consequence of an attempt at alienating what is unknown and frightening within ourselves (Kearney 75). Like the sleep of reason, it can easily generate monsters. Salem's witches are monsters, part of the collective imaginary, but they are also projections coming from within the community, swept by a fear so deep to generate Otherness within itself. Alienation manifests itself in a flood of symbols and images, blurring the border between fantasy and reality in New York. Moreover, it happens outside of the literary world, too, a great example being the historical event that has seemingly influenced both plays: paranoia in postwar America, or the Red Scare.

The work conducted in this thesis has unveiled the multifaceted nature of the plays and all the ways paranoid feelings shine through both plotlines. More often than not, religion is a major

theme and carrier of obsessive imagery and driving force behind instances of scapegoating, both in Salem, with an extreme mass hysteria leaning onto a Puritan theocracy, and in *Angels*, with minorities being elevated to heavenly grandeur. Both works seem to be condemning unjust societies and their scapegoating of minorities, but what they also let through is how deeply paranoia is engrained in the same culture that then produces apocalyptic visions and fears to be found in its texts.

Nevertheless, the scapegoats, products of the same paranoid feelings and victims of unjust societies, are not themselves only victimized in the plays. As a matter of fact, the same religion that fuels instances of Otherness also finally elevates the scapegoats of both plays to a quasi-sanctified redemption; the witches, sentenced to death in Salem, face the gutter with the spirit and decisiveness of martyrs; *Angels'* Prior is chosen as prophet by the Angel descending on earth, and overcomes illness because touched by a greater truth. One way or another, the Other is finally sanctified in both plays, therefore reversing the very same notion of Otherness behind the paranoia that permeates *The Crucible* and *Angels*. The most important finding of this thesis is not only the preponderant presence of paranoia in *The Crucible* and *Angels in America*, but its function, too. These feelings of anxiety and these obsessions do permeate the plays and drive the main actions that unravel throughout their development; however, paranoia is also an instrument of deliverance; it ultimately acts as a vehicle for all scapegoats involved, handing them what by definition they could not be handed: holiness and redemption.

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Appendix

Abstract in English

Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* are two plays which both resonated with their audience and caused controversies at the time of their debuts because of their strong social critique. Depicting struggle at different times in American society, these two plays do not seem to have more in common than the representation of minorities in times of great distress. At a closer look, however, it becomes evident that both plotlines are intertwined with the powerful feeling of paranoia. This thesis aims at unearthing these paranoid feelings within *The Crucible* and *Angel in America*, and explore to which degree they influence the action in the plays as well as their messages. This thesis includes an exploration of both works with the help of the analytical tools provided by New Historicism, the study of Otherness, symbolism, and binary oppositions. The analysis later delves into the depths of the themes of the apocalyptic as well as the theme of scapegoating. These readings shed a light on how feelings of paranoia permeate the plays throughout and lie at their roots. The findings additionally illustrate the role of religion in the creation of paranoid visions as well as in the solidification of paranoia within *The Crucible* and *Angels in America*.

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Arthur Millers *The Crucible* und Tony Kushners *Angels in America* sind zwei Theaterstücke, die beide großen Anklang fanden und zur Zeit Ihres Debuts durch die enthaltene implizite und doch nachdrückliche Gesellschaftskritik kontroverse Debatten auslösten. Obwohl beide existenzielle Konflikte in verschiedenen Phasen der US-amerikanischen Gesellschaft reflektieren, scheinen sie nicht mehr gemein zu haben als die Repräsentation von Minderheiten in Zeiten immenser Not. Genauer betrachtet ist jedoch evident, dass beide Plots durch das intensive Gefühl der Paranoia verwoben sind. Diese Arbeit zielt darauf ab, jene Paranoia in *The Crucible* und *Angels in America* zu offenbaren - und zu eruieren, wie stark sie die Handlungen und Botschaften dieser Stücke beeinflusst. Diese Arbeit beinhaltet eine Untersuchung beider Stücke mittels der analytischen Werkzeuge des Neuen Historizismus, der Untersuchung der Andersheit und der binären Oppositionen. Im weiteren Verlauf erkundet sie apokalyptische und schuldzuweisende Motive im Detail. Diese Interpretationen beleuchten, wie Gefühle der Paranoia die untersuchten Theaterstücke durchdringen und fundamental für diese sind. Die gewonnenen Erkenntnisse veranschaulichen die Rolle der Religion in sowohl der Genese paranoider Visionen als auch der Verfestigung der Paranoia in *The Crucible* und *Angels in America*.