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"Thus Spoke Proctor": Nietzsche and the Overman in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*

Pouria Torkamaneh and Ali Ghaderi
Razi University, Islamic Republic of Iran
pouriatorkamaneh@yahoo.com, ali.ghaderi988@yahoo.com

This article analyzes Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953) through a Nietzschean critique. In fact, Miller's play presents a leading character whose individuality and interaction with his community, in terms of theology and politics, demands a re-evaluation of all values, much akin to the way Friedrich Nietzsche famously did in nineteenth-century Europe. To explore the possible connections between the two, first, Nietzsche's idea about Christianity is discussed in comparison to Proctor's treatment of religion in the play. Both Nietzsche and Miller deconstruct the self-celebrating fanaticism of their respective communities by their vitriolic attacks on individual moral standards and the introduction of an *Übermensch* ["Overman"] as a glorious model of human virtues. Therefore, second, this work will demonstrate how Nietzsche's *Übermensch* can offer a fitting paradigm to consider Proctor's rebellion against the established Church. And third, Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence is used to further illuminate Proctor's view of life.

Keywords: Arthur Miller; *The Crucible*; Friedrich Nietzsche; *Übermensch* / Overman; Christianity; eternal recurrence

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Así habló Proctor: Nietzsche y el superhombre en *The Crucible*, de Arthur Miller

Este artículo analiza *The Crucible* (1953), de Arthur Miller, a través de una perspectiva nietzscheana. De hecho, la obra de Miller presenta un personaje principal cuya individualidad e interacción con su comunidad, en términos de teología y política, exige una revalorización de todos los valores, muy similar a como lo hiciera Friedrich Nietzsche en la Europa del siglo XIX. Para explorar las posibles conexiones entre las dos, en primer lugar, se analiza la idea de Nietzsche sobre el cristianismo en comparación con el tratamiento que da Proctor a la

religión en la obra. Tanto Nietzsche como Miller coinciden al deconstruir el fanatismo autocelebrador de sus respectivas comunidades por sus virulentos ataques contra los estándares morales individuales e introducir la figura de un Übermensch ["superhombre"] como modelo glorioso de las virtudes humanas. Por consiguiente, en segundo lugar, este trabajo demostrará cómo el Übermensch de Nietzsche puede ofrecer un paradigma apropiado para considerar la rebelión de Proctor contra la Iglesia establecida. Y, en tercer lugar, el concepto de Nietzsche del eterno retorno se usa para arrojar aún más luz sobre la visión de la vida de Proctor.

Palabras clave: Arthur Miller; *The Crucible*; Friedrich Nietzsche; *Übermensch* / superhombre; Cristianismo; eterno retorno

I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none.
William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (act 1, scene 7)

1. Introduction

As numerous critics make clear, Arthur Miller (1915-2005) is a social dramatist with an imaginative energy to show the pathos of modern individuals in battle with their societies. Not only does he feel compelled to incorporate the history of his nation into his plays but he also creates characters that correspond to historical figures and events. This is probably because Miller lived through many striking historical (national) events that came to shape his works and influence his sense of morality: World War II, McCarthyism, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Watergate, the Vietnam War, 9/11, the War on Terrorism, the Iraq War and the nation-wide use of wiretapping. These major crises were significant enough to make him "criticize the powerful in business or politics or to prick the conscience of the nation" (Otten 2012, 133). In addition, such events could easily reflect the materialistic culture and politics of a nation that suffered from a type of "spiritual crisis" (134), which provoked many intellectuals, artists and philosophers in various fields to explore the country's social conditions from theological standpoints. This included Miller, who tried to address the issues of religion and spirituality in his plays alongside matters of politics and culture, albeit with a more aggrieved tone than many of his contemporaries. To be more precise, there is a strong sense in "all of Miller's dramatic worlds, that this is a Godless universe. His characters must find something sacred within themselves in order to overcome oppression" (Balakian 1997, 128). It is not a surprise, therefore, that the bulk of studies and reviews of Miller tend to emphasize the religious and social dramas of individuals in contact with their respective communities.

In the case of *The Crucible* (1953), however, it is the testimony of Elia Kazan at the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), prior to Miller's appearance before the inquiry committee accused of being a communist, that is of significance. A handful of possible events in *The Crucible* seem to be alluding to Kazan's naming names in that ritualistic HUAC hearing. "When Miller wrote *The Crucible*," writes Joshua Polster, "the American public had just gone through a significant ideological shift" (2012, 43) and this cleared the way for Miller to express his attitudes (and his sense of insecurity) about the political climate of America during the 1950s, which resembled the Salem witch trials of the 1690s. In addition, the play's debut at Martin Beck Theatre in 1953 coincided with the post-war economic boom in America that paved the way for capitalism to regain its dominance. It was during this time that marxism was deemed a threat to the values of capitalism, perhaps because it was able to attract the unprivileged and even the intelligentsia in the United States. Polster adds that Miller's play is, in fact, a didactic epic theater challenging the audience to

become critical of bourgeois ideologies in the representation, control and placement of authority (60). He asserts that "Miller, like Brecht, attempts to elevate the audience's sociopolitical consciousness not simply raise their aesthetic tastes" (59), thereby emphasizing the Marxist undertones, among other political stimuli.

Apart from the play itself, the character of John Proctor has also attracted considerable attention on the part of scholars in the field. Dennis Welland, who is among the advocates of Proctor as a noble person, refers to "the human vulnerability of a man who is not a saint," yet should be considered a "decent man" and his death a "victory" (1985, 57), understanding him as a "shaft of light that irradiates the tragic blackness" (67) that surrounds him in Salem. On the other hand, Susan Abboston interprets "Proctor's death as beneficial to the community," and his concession that he be put on the scaffold as his "apology for his past sins" (2012, 20). No matter what the historical background reveals or what critics consider that Proctor represents, Proctor's exceptional sense of individuality and autonomy remains truly admirable. However, the nature of this individuality, in its truest essence, and the philosophy behind has somehow passed unnoticed in the mainstream scholarship on the play.

In a 1958 essay, "The Shadows of the Gods," Miller specifies the struggle between father and son as being "at the heart of all human development" ([1958] 1996, 185), for it signifies profound conflicts for power and its restoration. The son's "struggle for mastery—for the freedom of manhood," the playwright asserts, "is the struggle not only to overthrow authority but to reconstitute it anew" (193). *All My Sons* (1947) and *Death of a Salesman* (1949) both feature, on different levels, the struggle between a father and a son for the relocation of authority. In a somewhat similar fashion, *The Crucible* draws on the articulation of this opposition toward an authoritative voice or old beliefs in the absolute. Harold Bloom states, "[e]very word [in *The Crucible*] necessarily is hyperbolical, since [it] attempts to be personal tragedy as well as a social drama" (2007, 2). Of course, although *The Crucible* is resilient in its hostility toward the inquisition of McCarthyism and the dogmatism of Puritanism, its special treatment of history and moral repression requires a more in-depth analysis than the general interpretation of the play seems to offer. This is because history seems to function only as a tool by which Miller reveals the potential for absolutism inherent in every individual. Miller writes: "It was not only the rise of 'McCarthyism' that moved me, but something which seemed much more weird and mysterious. It was the fact that a political, objective, knowledgeable campaign from the far Right was capable of creating not only a terror, but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually assuming even a holy resonance" (2004, 39).

Maybe this "subjective reality" recognized by Miller is exactly what motivates Proctor to fearlessly challenge the nature of truth and Christianity in the play, which in turn makes him an exceptionally rebellious character. Inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche's view of Christianity and the concepts of the Overman (*Übermensch*) and eternal recurrence, this essay explores how the character of John Proctor shares

Nietzsche's philosophy of life. It is in his image of Christianity, his understanding of God and definition of individuality (and morality), represented in the play, and their function in their twentieth-century context, that Miller's vision corresponds with Nietzsche's worldview. A Nietzschean perspective, which objected to the materialistic interpretation of the nature of reality and definition of God in Europe back in the nineteenth century, may help to illuminate a similar condition in twentieth-century America. Perhaps in order to be able to hear the truth and identify the spirit that seems to have encouraged Proctor (or even Nietzsche), an Overman Proctor is needed to re-evaluate all modern values.

2. Proctor as a Christ(ian) Figure against Christianity

In *Human, All Too Human* (1878) and *The Antichrist* (1895), Nietzsche begins a discussion of Christianity that would later reform the conception of religion in Western civilization. In these texts he introduces his negative view of Christianity as a disaster, albeit at the same time as he admires Christ and occasionally regards him as "the noblest human being" that had ever lived ([1878] 1996, 175). In *The Antichrist*, he openly expresses his disapproval of the Christian Church: "I call Christianity the *one* great curse, the *one* great innermost depravity, the *one* great instinct for revenge for which no means is poisonous, stealthy, subterranean, *small* enough—I call it the *one* immortal blemish of mankind" ([1895] 2004, 174; emphasis in the original). He considers that the genuine form of Christianity died when Jesus was put on the cross, and what remained after his death was no more than a set of dogmatic beliefs and prejudiced generalizations that blemished Christ's true message for centuries. In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche remarks, on numerous occasions, that the living of life by Christian codes lies not in one's declaration of affiliation to certain religious rules, but rather in one's action. In fact, he states, Christ died "as he *taught*—*not* to 'save mankind,' but to show how one ought to live. It is the *practice* which he bequeathed to mankind: his behavior before the judges, before the bailiffs, before the accusers and all manner of slander and scorn—his behavior on the *Cross*" (136; emphasis in the original).

What Christ attempts to idealize is "[a] new way of living, *not* a new faith" (135; emphasis in the original). And it is precisely this point, Nietzsche emphasizes, that Christ tried most strongly to bequeath to humankind: "*Not* a believing but a doing, a *not*-doing-much above all, another kind of *being*" (139; emphasis in the original). Nietzsche accordingly distinguishes between Christian faith and Christian message, asserting that, unlike Christian faith, which tends to codify everything, Christ himself refuses to judge. As such, Nietzsche considered that "Christian faith kills the Christian message before it is allowed to spread" (Sedgwick 2009, 26) and that to live based on Christian principles is to live "in a small-minded, meaner manner" (Nietzsche [1887] 2007, 8), and thus, results in the destruction of human life in favor of priestly domination. He understands Christianity as a source of decay, for in "Christianity neither morality nor

religion makes contact with reality at any point. Nothing but imaginary *causes* ('God,' 'soul,' 'I,' 'spirit,' 'free will'—or else 'unfree will'); nothing but imaginary *effects* ('sin,' 'redemption,' 'grace,' 'punishment,' 'forgiveness of sins')" (Nietzsche [1895] 2004, 113; emphasis in the original). Indeed, his attack on Christianity in *The Antichrist* finds its true ground in relation to life itself, and what cannot respond to humanity's needs shall stand trial for its ideological basis. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), Nietzsche asserts that a "genuinely religious life requires a good conscience" ([1886] 1996, 69). Yet, this remains rather thwarted, at least, in the modern world of the nineteenth century, since its systematic view on religion, its "noisy, time-consuming industriousness [and] proud-of-itself" (69) quality, destroys a true religious lifestyle. Modern societies, he argues, that assume "an air of superior amusement" with issues of religion and express a sense of "disdain" for free spirits lose sense of the "reverential seriousness" with which religion should be approached (70). In light of this "irreverent" approach to religion, Nietzsche calls for a re-evaluation of values to save Christianity from harm, directly "wage[ing] war" against "this theological instinct" and contending that "[w]hoever has theological blood in his veins is from the start crooked and dishonorable toward all things" ([1895] 2004, 108). This, along with other factors, largely inheres in the post-Enlightenment Christian faith that "established ultimate values instead of being merely used as a means for breeding and education employed by enlightened rulers" (Young 2006, 140). Nietzsche deplores this since these ultimate values (and narratives) leave almost no space for individual speculation. This radical shift away from individuality raises another objection against Christianity; that of creating a kind of state socialism that promises uniformity and comfort for everyone. However, the fulfillment of this goal would "destroy the soil out of which the exceptional individual grows" (70). And this is what Nietzsche criticizes with respect to the social role of Christianity.

One central issue Nietzsche discusses as a reason for his view of Christianity is indeed the emergence of modernity. European modern thinking, Nietzsche declares in *The Gay Science* (1882), tends to explain life as a scientific "argument" in which, by "positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content" as "articles of faith," nobody "could endure living" ([1882] 2001, 117). Formulation of life as measured by articles of faith signifies an outlook that modern cultures embrace to the point that "knowledge wants to be more than a means" to facilitate achieving a greater end (119). It is through this process that "prejudice" finds the opportunity to haunt the human mind in theological matters. This may be a principal reason why the Madman in section 125 of *The Gay Science* thinks, "God is dead," and asks, "[w]hat then are these churches now if not the tombs and sepulchers of God?" (120). This parable, which explains much of Nietzsche's attitude toward Christianity, is important for two reasons. First is Nietzsche's storytelling whereby the declaration that God is dead is not uttered by Nietzsche himself, but, instead, is put into a madman's mouth. Second is the audience that the Madman chooses to address, which includes a group of atheists (or non-believers) in the marketplace and a theist crowd in the church. The atheists,

of course, live with the non-existence (or the death) of God every day and so do not need to be informed of it. But, why does the Madman enter a church after passing on his harrowing news about God? It is, quite possibly, because he sees the people of the church as being equally guilty as the people in the marketplace in killing the God of Christianity. And this seems to be an underlying concern that Miller, in *The Crucible*, struggles to report some decades later in modern America.

Miller's *The Crucible* presents us with a group of hysterical girls who are accused of dancing in the forest and practicing witchcraft. In order to deny these accusations, they claim they can see who has made a pact with the devil and, out of revenge, accuse others with no proof. Most of the victims are hanged in the name of Christianity despite the lack of verifiable evidence to prove their guilt. John Proctor, among others, does not confess to the charges and goes on so far as to claim the death of the Christian God. Perhaps the most important motive behind the play is to confront an authoritative world that demonizes the *other* who does not conform to whatever is mandated by pseudo-Christian figures. In the case of *The Crucible*, John Proctor appears to stand in the way of a people that Christianizes every deed through their own formulated faith. As an example, Reverend Hale is reputed to have such divine powers that he can free people from superstitions and shallow beliefs. Yet he is the one who follows superstition and assumes that he has freed both Tituba, a black slave, and the girls from the hands of the devil. This is why even his language represents "the speech of a society totally without moral referents" (Fender 1967, 88). The Church authorities desire individuals' complete obedience towards religious powers since theocracy, in their view, is a fortress of indisputable beliefs. Should any person challenge this fortress's authority, they will be subject to the retribution of the Church.

The Church, and the form of Christianity practiced therein, is not the only force John Proctor challenges. The fierce endless arguments he and Elizabeth have on the nature of truth, true Christianity and the concept of judgment highlight the issue of Christian codes in their domestic lives. Perhaps a true Christ-like figure—a Christ(ian) (in Nietzsche's terms)—might be John Proctor, who assumes the right to free himself from the weight of traditions set by the priests and follows his own sense of morality. Although he is called evil, he continues to adhere to the voice of his conscience and does not reduce it to a "mere phenomenalism of consciousness" that is, in this case, forged by the Church (Nietzsche [1895] 2004, 139). This echoes Christ's ideal of a human being, who rises against "the self-deceit of moral concepts" and tries to live "*beyond* good and evil" (118; emphasis in the original). Proctor repeatedly reminds his wife that he has already confessed his sins (of adultery) to a priest, but his wife blames him for his past and is suspicious of him for his present, which provokes John into berating her that like a "Christian, I confessed. Confessed! Some dream I had must have mistaken you for God that day. But you're not, you're not, and let you remember it! Let you look sometimes for the goodness in me, and judge me not" (Miller [1953] 1992, 45). Although confession is a part of the Church's imposition of faith, the way Proctor

is critical of his wife's blind judgment is an indirect challenge to the act of confession itself. Elizabeth's reaction, surprisingly, is even more provocative when she responds, saying "the magistrate that sits in your heart judges you. I never judge you" (45). These very internal judges, according to Nietzsche, are the ones for which a Christian must feel responsible since, otherwise, Christian faith (in its modern sense) "annihilate[s] in every single man the faith in his 'virtues'" ([1882] 2001, 117).

The religious doctrines shared by the people in Salem do not seem to be any different from those of the Church ministers. In this regard, Reverend Hale seems to advocate the principles and authority of the established Church and occupy a place that is the opposite of Proctor's stance. When Proctor reads the commandments, he fails to mention his previous adulterous acts, which for him are only minor past mistakes that do not change anything about his Christian beliefs. Reverend Hale, however, does not agree and states that "theology, sir, is a fortress; no crack in a fortress may be accounted small" (Miller [1953] 1992, 55). Hale's air of superiority expresses Nietzsche's belief that God is dead and has been replaced by pseudo-gods who have "[made] God over in [their] own image of evil and in humanizing [him, have] destroyed him" (Reno 1969, 1079). Hale, occupying as he does the place of the Christian God, imposes a brutal doom on men such as Proctor who adhere to the true essence of Christ's teachings. This is dangerous, since, on the one hand, it establishes "the belief that nothing is true and anything is permitted" (Sedgwick 2009, 35) and allows priests to send judges to amend, bend and distort the laws of God as they deem fit in order to serve their veiled power interests. On the other, though, with the declaration of the death of God there comes "the invitation to experiment, to embark upon an adventure of thought that is unbounded by the horizon of traditional morality" (35). This is what prompts Proctor to challenge the priests' claims and accusations.

The Church obstinately accuses Elizabeth of witchcraft, and Proctor's defense of her in the court is taken to be "disruptive" and a "clear attack upon the court" (Miller [1953] 1992, 75). Indeed, analyzing the dialogues exchanged by the judges reveals the relegation of Christian codes to mere tools for them to exercise their power and exclude those who do not seem to conform. Danforth, another Church minister, states, "[y]ou must understand, sir, that a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between (77). Danforth's intention to ostracize Proctor, as the *other*, demonstrates how bias allows him to defy his religious tenets in favor of his own power interests. He is, in truth, part of a jury that forms its ultimate judgment based on a set of prefabricated truths (told by the hysterical girls), and this results in tragic effects. Similar factors might have motivated Nietzsche to argue that "[a]s far as theological influence extends, *value judgment* is stood on its head, the concepts 'true' and 'false' are necessarily reversed" ([1895] 2004, 109; emphasis in the original). And much like the way the Madman (introduced by Nietzsche) was declared an antichrist—and an atheist—when he asserted the death of God, John Proctor finds himself left with no choice but to declare out of complete desperation "I say—I say—God is dead," (Miller

[1953] 1992, 95). This announcement is, indeed, not an accidental utterance or motif limited to *The Crucible* alone. It is evident, to different degrees, in most of Miller's works, quite possibly in order to explain the "tragic in our secular world where human history does not move from the Garden of Eden to the crucifix, but from Eden to the Holocaust. In fact, in Miller's vision "[God is dead and] the Holocaust, McCarthyism, and the Depression become the twentieth-century correlatives" for the fall of man and his religious faith (Balakian 1997, 120).

3. Proctor as Overman

Whatever reasons might have contributed to the metaphorical death of God, they find their origin, most likely, in the appearance of a faith unable to correspond to the genuine Christian message and the creation of a modern man whose consciousness is formed by power agents and the masses. Yet, Nietzsche argues in *The Gay Science*, "[c]onsciousness gives rise to countless mistakes that lead an animal or human being to perish sooner than necessary" ([1882] 2001, 37). This is why he asks for an "*intellectual conscience*," (29; emphasis in the original) without which "humanity would have long ceased to exist" (37). Of course, the existence of individuals as functions in society who live according to their instincts, and not consciousness, is a danger to their organism. That is why "consciousness is properly tyrannized" (37) in order to prevent functions (individuals) from any possible resistance. A free spirit is the individual that Nietzsche understands to possess the qualities necessary to counter Christian morality under the grip of modernity. This spirit rebels against what Nietzsche calls "Thou Shalt"—the values that we have carried uncritically for many centuries and that have prevented us from seeking renewal. Instincts and conscience are probably the driving forces that a free spirit requires in order to call into question the mandates of bias and false religious codes that seem to cripple noble minds.

In section 108 of *Daybreak* (1881), Nietzsche introduces what he calls the *Übermensch* ["Overman"] to explain his vision of human potential. He observes that the path to happiness should come from "one's own unknown laws, and [that] prescriptions from without can only obstruct and hinder it" ([1881] 2005, 63). In a nutshell, his idea of the Overman exemplifies the "self-possession, autonomy and uniqueness of the sovereign individual in a modernity dominated by the impersonal forces of mass production and consumption" (Sedgwick 2009, 111). The crucial quality ascribed to the Overman, Nietzsche proposes, is probably his will to construct rather than destruct codes of honor and morality. Such individuals can exist in any society and are indeed the "seed-bearer of the future, the spiritual colonizers and shapers of new states and communities" ([1882] 2001, 49). Modern institutions of power, it is certain, see such individuals as agents of corruption and chaos. At the same time Nietzsche states, "corruption is just a rude word for the *autumn* of a people" (49; emphasis in the original) who, as colonizers of the future, frees man from bias and extremity.

The character of John Proctor in *The Crucible* represents, to a great degree, Nietzsche's ideal of a potential Overman. He is sent to the scaffold because what he has done is an outright confrontation with the Church, their teachings and the entire system of Christianity. He does not let Reverend Parris baptize his newborn child and this is considered valid evidence for the court to mark him as a disciple of the Antichrist. Proctor resolutely follows his voice of conscience and practice of truth-telling, which corresponds to the ideals of an Overman in the face of an established religious system, by stating "I like it not that Mr. Parris should lay his hand upon my baby. I see no light of God in that man. I'll not conceal it" (Miller [1953] 1992, 54). Proctor chooses to rely on his fearless authentic will when it comes to imposing an idea of future life upon himself. In quite the same way, an Overman welcomes this imposition since it is "not something that is to be imposed on humanity by some superior power but an idea that […] we are invited to consider imposing upon ourselves" (Sedgwick 2009, 110). And it is through this notion of the Overman that Proctor transcends his own nature to move beyond the dogma of Christianity. He justifies to himself that:

> Since we built the church there were pewter candle-sticks upon the altar; Francis Nurse made them, y'know, and a sweeter hand never touched the metal! But Parris came, and for twenty weeks he preaches nothin' but golden candlesticks until he had them. I labor the earth from dawn of day to blink of night, and I tell you true, when I look to heaven and see my money glaring at his elbows —it hurt my prayer sir, it hurt my prayer. I think, sometimes, the man dreams cathedrals, not clapboard meetin' houses. (Miller [1953] 1992, 54)

Proctor has refused to attend church sessions, which is important for two reasons. It shows not only a sense of bitterness toward Reverend Parris but also his objection to a form of injustice which finds him and his fellow-citizens working day in and day out for the benefit of the Church and its ministers. Although he is fully aware that his rejection of the Church will ultimately bring about his doom, he follows his conviction that the form of Christianity the priests (particularly Parris and Danforth) idealize does not reflect the true message of Christianity. Despite the horrifying end, Proctor is among those "who sacrifice themselves for the earth, that the earth may someday become the Overman's," as Nietzsche remarked in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* ([1883-1891] 2006, 8). Nietzsche's definition of the Overman properly applies to the character of Proctor, who never hesitates to take action against a sea of troubles and does not waver at any stage in telling the truth. An Overman is free from morality and moves beyond the shackles of any institution that tries to pass on any form of religious faith. In fact, an Overman transcends the common conceptions of good and evil since he knows that there is "Good for all, evil for all […] This is *my* way—where is yours?—That is how I answered those who asked me the way. *The* way after all—it does not exist!" (155; emphasis in the original). Proctor sees Parris as a

broken minister since he knows that the accusations the jury make against him are based on personal biases. More accurately, John Proctor "wavers between principle and compromise, and chooses, finally, principle" (Murray 2008, 13) since his act of compromise would destroy all of his personal codes of honor and morality.

Proctor has to redeem his future, his name, the past, and this all has to be done relying on his discretion and free will alone. Therefore he sees his opposition to the Church ministers as eventually "redemptive, but in such a way that no 'afterworldly' illusions are needed in order for his redemptive potential to be communicated" (Sedgwick 2009, 112). No one except Proctor stands against the power of a contorted religion:

> Proctor: If *she* is innocent! Is the accuser always holy now? Were they born this morning as clean as God's fingers? I'll tell you what's walking Salem—vengeance is walking Salem. We are what we always were in Salem, but now the little crazy children are jangling the keys of the kingdom, and common vengeance writes the law! This warrant's vengeance! I'll not give my wife to vengeance! (Miller [1953] 1992, 63; emphasis in the original)

Although John stands alone, he opposes the voice of evil that works under the guise of theology and holiness. He never waits for a metaphysical being, a messiah, a meta-man to appear before him, nor does he relinquish his redemption to an unknown messianic principle. He redeems himself. Proctor questions the theological maxims the priests uphold and declares them as manifestations of corruption and inequality since they are designed for the diminution of individuality to the advantage of communal interests: "I will fall like an ocean on that court! Fear nothing, Elizabeth" (63). He tries to expose the role of pretense behind the testimony of the hysterical girls that jeopardize others in order to deflect punishment from themselves. Ironically, his efforts to reveal the truth make him the most un-Puritan of all the accused in Salem for he does not fear punishment or death. Proctor will go so far as to confess his past relationship with Abigail to the court just to reveal the deceitfulness of all her claims. He reassures the jury that "a man will not cast away his good name" (88) just to lie, but will do so to uncover the truth of a matter abused by others. In the end, by remaining resistant to manipulation, redemptive and critical of bias, Proctor manages to distinguish the value of his self and name that—like an Overman's creation—is worthy of praise.

4. Eternal Recurrence

If an Overman challenges the present and creates future, how does he deal with the overwhelming nihilism that comes from the death of all values and the transience of life on earth? In order to respond to this question, Nietzsche, in section 341 of *The Gay Science* (1882), asks how you would respond if a demon appeared before you in a moment of loneliness with the news that your life is to be repeated, down to the smallest of details, from the beginning. From the point of view of an Overman, it is, of course, a joyful

experience, "*to long for nothing more fervently* than for this ultimate eternal confirmation" of one's life ([1882] 2001, 195; emphasis in the original). This saying-yes-to-life is probably the fundamental axiom a free individual—an Overman—could hold, and that can, partially, rid him of all nihilistic thoughts of existence. In other words, possessing the ability to affirm the eternal recurrence of life—away from all resentments for it—reveals one's degree of health and determination in the face of a "world devoid of ultimate sense" (Sedgwick 2009, 53). What complements the concept of eternal recurrence as a creative response to the phenomenon of nihilism, Nietzsche maintains in *Twilight of the Idols* (1889), is the adoption of a Dionysian view on life that includes "celebrating its own inexhaustibility by *sacrificing* its highest types [...] beyond terror and pity, in order to *be oneself* the eternal joy of becoming" ([1889] 1997, 91; emphasis in the original). This can ingeniously justify life and its transitory quality of existence.

Nietzsche's definition of eternal recurrence and his idea of the need for freedom in and acceptance of life repeats itself in the fate of John Proctor. He is asked to write his confession on paper so that the Church authorities can "post [it] upon the church door" (Miller [1953] 1992, 111) for his name "is a weighty name" (129), but he refuses since it is "hard to give a lie to dogs" (116). He cannot bear to see his morality and his name being used as bait or an instrument of abuse in order to satisfy the interests of the authorities. He first signs, but later tears up the confession, for he deeply believes that the finitude of his life will transcend into infinity through his name:

> Danforth: Why? Do you mean to deny this confession when you are free?
> Proctor: I mean to deny nothing!
> Danforth: Then explain to me, Mr. Proctor, why you will not let—
> Proctor, *with a cry of his whole soul:* Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name! (Miller [1953] 1992, 129; emphasis in the original)

He refuses to give the paper to the ministers since he cannot live a second time, and a life (and an eternal recurrence of a life) of lies and miseries is not what an Overman seeks. He embraces his terrifying fate with open arms since he is a true Overman who sacrifices his life in order to eternalize his honor and freedom.

This brings the argument to Nietzsche's idea of *amor fati*, the love of fate to its fullest extent: "Let *looking away* be my only negation!" ([1882] 2001, 157; emphasis in the original) writes Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*. "To love fate," explains Sedgwick, "means to love what happens because this is how it must happen: one cannot avoid this necessity without denying oneself and by implication condemning existence" (2009, 3). Of course, what we understand from the "love of fate" and desire for an "eternal recurrence of life" seem to be sending the same message albeit using different words. In Miller's play, when John Proctor is in jail he has the chance to free himself from all

the impending dangers by running away with Abigail, but he embraces his fate and prefers an honorable death. Although Proctor's surrender to death may seem like an act that negates existence, one must keep in mind that "unconditional affirmation is a part of Nietzsche's strategy of spiritualizing rather than exterminating passions" (Miyasaki 2015, 208). This passion, for Nietzsche, is necessary for any singular achievement.

The life of John Proctor and the theological and social dramas he goes through are—in striking ways—evocative of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, who descends the mountain to inform humans of the death of God and the need for man to take on his will to power. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1891) is, indeed, memorialized as a prose piece with a narrative voice that makes it a non-dramatic creation on the surface. Yet, it was initially devised to be a dramatic work in four acts, which embodied some of the essential characteristics of a play as is particularly clear in the tale of the tightrope walker. In that part of the book, Zarathustra bursts into the scene, trying to inform the crowd—like Greek choruses—adopting dramatic language in accord with the theatricality of the occasion. His main asset for conveying his message effectively is, indeed, the appropriate use of his verbal skill and speech as a means of inciting the assembled crowd. And the feature that most likens him to Greek heroes is probably his soliloquies, due partly to his disappointment at not convincing the people to accept his beliefs on the life of man. Martin Puchner appropriately bolsters this understanding of Nietzsche's work and writes, "Nietzsche created a mixture of narrative and drama, a mix of styles and modes, including sermons and Romanic poetry, but also Aristotle, Seneca, Emerson, and Goethe, all supercharged with an elevated rhetoric stemming from biblical prophecy" (2010, 143). This, indeed, lays claim to Zarathustra's resemblance to the Greek tragic heroes that always fascinated Nietzsche.

Similar to Zarathustra, who is Nietzsche's enlightening tragic figure, Proctor struggles, using all means available, to impress the audience. In the tale of the tightrope walker, Zarathustra's long speech soon becomes mixed with another theatrical art that affects the audience: dancing. This might remind us of how in tragedy Nietzsche favors music and dance as a form of artistic creation with intellectual and artistic weight. In Miller, however, dance and music do not fulfill these Nietzschean roles. Dance in *The Crucible* is represented as a challenge to Christian theocracy since it is considered to be a satanic ritual. Puchner observes: "Nietzsche's chief figure for philosophy becomes the act of dancing. He describes speaking as a kind of tomfoolery, with which humans dance above and across everything" (2010, 144). Despite their differences with respect to the role of a dancer's virtue, both Nietzsche and Miller favor performative arts as pillars upon which an intellectual and philosophical stance against dogmatism could be built. Miller's Proctor is, indeed, a hero of speech and interaction that says what could not be said directly by Miller himself; talking against the absolutism and dogmatism of McCarthyism. Likewise, Nietzsche's Zarathustra is able to "speak philosophy," to "become a particular kind of speaker," and to "say what needs to be said but cannot be said simply by Nietzsche himself" (Puchner 2010, 145).

Both Zarathustra and John Proctor stand courageously when it comes to the matter of truth and honesty. In this vein, we should remember the two significant doctrines that Nietzsche enthusiastically tried to advertize through the character of "Zarathustra as the prophet of [his] philosophical doctrines, the will to power and the eternal return" (Puchner 2010, 146). The two tragic heroes exemplify these two features as they endeavor to place on a pedestal the figure of an Overman who overcomes all limitations to achieve truth and eternal honor. What they never embrace is the acceptance of misery and pretense that for them can only end in pity and terror. They are not afraid to proclaim the figurative death of God—like choruses in crowds—for they know that doing otherwise means the murder of God and of all human values and codes of honor.

Surprisingly, despite all these shared affinities, Miller does not appear to affirm explicitly his philosophical indebtedness to Nietzsche's worldview. However, we might associate Miller's rapport with Nietzsche to the groundbreaking patterns of thought produced by continental philosophers that most likely contributed to Miller's exposition of the status of man in modern times. In order to outline the general principles of continental philosophy, Simon Critchley refers to the "radical *finitude* of the human subject, i.e., that there is no God-like standpoint or point of reference outside of human experience from which the latter might be characterized and judged" (1999, 10; emphasis in the original). Later in his "Introduction," Critchley talks about how Nietzsche made a dramatic impact on twentieth-century thinkers because of his declaration of how, in the modern era, "the subject's freedom goes hand in hand with the collapse of moral certainty in the world" (11). And quite specifically, concepts like truth, freedom, God, individuality, certainty and morality—that likewise engaged philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth century—are a range of narratives that Miller explores and aims to deconstruct in the face of dogmatic social and political challenges. In fact, through *The Crucible* in particular, Miller (re)discovers history and examines the politics of encounter between conscience and community. And there is no doubt that these specters did haunt Nietzsche's mind a few decades before Miller.

In his seminal essay "Tragedy and the Common Man" (1949), Miller describes his formulations of how a dramatic tragedy in the twentieth century might differ from those produced by the ancient Greek dramatists in terms of characterization and the themes explored. Interestingly, much of what he illustrates runs in line with what Nietzsche seems to embrace as an ideal tragic drama or a noble individual. In his essay Miller explains how he advocates the idea of tragedy for the sake of tragic pleasure; that it should impart "more optimism [...] than does comedy" ([1949] 2016, 63), since it should effect a genuine catharsis of fear and pity. A "Dionysian perspective," as proposed by Nietzsche in *Twilight of Idols*, complements such a view and he refers to it as the "bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet, the key to the concept of *tragic* feeling" ([1889] 1997, 91; emphasis in the original) that ought to generate a sense of tragic joy in the end.

Miller goes on to say that the function of a tragedy remains chiefly its "thrust for freedom" and that it "enlightens—and […] must […] point the heroic finger at the enemy of man's freedom" ([1949] 2016, 63). Similarly, no one among the continental philosophers cares more than Nietzsche about emphasizing the individual sovereignty of man in the face of conventional constraints of morality. His is a free man who rejoices in the sense of responsibility and power he has over "himself and his destiny" (Nietzsche [1887] 2007, 37), which reminds us of the heroic characters that Miller features in a number of his plays. Ultimately, what seems to have engaged both writers to a considerable extent is the mighty task of questioning unjust authorities. "No tragedy can therefore come about when its author fears to question absolutely everything," maintains Miller, "when he regards any institution, habit or custom as being either everlasting, immutable or inevitable" ([1949] 2016, 63). This assertion regarding the function of tragedy and art, in general, sums up, one might say, almost the entire philosophy or worldview of Friedrich Nietzsche. The way his nonconformist attitudes changed Western civilization continues to influence philosophers and artists alike. And what makes him a truly unique philosopher is his questioning of all institutions of power and master narratives—reason, truth, morality, certainty, Christianity, etc.—that since modernity have decided the fate of human kind and shaped our innermost thoughts and convictions.

5. Conclusion

With an admirable sense of individuality and determined will, the Christ-like Proctor attempts to prove the hollowness of the trials and authorities that put so many people on the scaffold. He seals his fate in eternity, however, through his endeavors to remain a true Christ(ian) figure and become an Overman. Taking this perilous path, he does not wait or hope for an after-worldly figure to redeem him from the trials conducted by religious fanatics. Instead, he becomes his own savior and, to his very death, remains a redemptive believer for himself and others alike. In this regard, we should read Arthur Miller as a philosopher-playwright who, according to Julian Young, "addresses nearly all of the central questions that have concerned philosophers of tragedy," and should be "temporarily promoted to the position of honorary philosopher" (2013, 247). Nietzsche sees the Enlightenment as a force that—for the first time in human civilization—casts divinity to the periphery so strenuously that it does not seem that it will be able to restore its central role anytime soon. The aftermath of this is the replacement of Christianity, as a divine religion, with a form of faith that Nietzsche could not bear to leave uncontested. His observation of human life and values goes on to have an undeniable influence on the next generations of philosophers. What Arthur Miller sees in his own era is probably the same ethos of modern man still under the influence of another form of bias. It was, in Terry Eagleton's words, "[i]dealism [that] had a hand in producing one of the

most successful of all modern surrogates for religious faith: nationalism" (2014, 84), a force that comes to represent so strong a supreme being that authentic theological tendencies in life remain undesired.

This rejection of theological desires is the idea that Nietzsche curiously explores in his *The Gay Science*. In fact, in book five, aphorism 372, Nietzsche initially expresses his most scathing objection to Platonism and the idealism it favored over the worldly desires and the dismissal of the body. He explains how earlier Greek philosophers "saw the senses as trying to lure them away from *their* world" ([1882] 2001, 237; emphasis in the original), a type of illness whose only antidote was an idealistic intellectualism within a culture focused almost entirely on the body. Nietzsche, however, concludes this section with an unexpected question: "Maybe we moderns are not healthy enough *to need* Plato's idealism?" (274; emphasis in the original). One first encounters a Nietzsche who seems adamantly anti-Platonist, who then surprisingly finds Plato to be a philosopher of the future. Indeed, the point that ties these two bipolar ideas together is how Nietzsche seems to have cunningly envisioned a future when we exercise this materialism and embrace our senses to such an extent that we find ourselves so *(un)healthy*—in this day and age—and in dire need of an antidote that Plato's idealist philosophy seems like the only remedy.

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Pouria Torkamaneh is a PhD student in English literature at Razi University. His main areas of research include comparative literature, literature and philosophy, and contemporary British and American literature. He obtained an MA in English literature at Razi (2015), writing on American postmodern literature.

Address: Taghe Bostan, Baghe Abrisham, Daneshgah Boulevard. 67155, Kermanshah, Iran. Tel.: +9883342839 12.

Ali Ghaderi is a doctoral candidate in English literature at Razi University. His research interests include continental and analytical philosophy and contemporary American and English literature and culture. His MA was mainly concerned with contemporary continental philosophy and English high epic fantasy.

Address: Taghe Bostan, Baghe Abrisham, Daneshgah Boulevard, 67155, Kermanshah, Iran. Tel.: +9883342839 12.