

Alfred Betschart

Sartre, the Film, and the United States. From Love Story to Critical Appraisal

ABSTRACT: When Sartre was a child, his relationship to the U.S. was a love story, not least mediated by love for the American movie. Sartre himself became a very dedicated writer of screenplays for some years. In the middle of the 1950s, he wrote the scenario for *Les sorcières de Salem*, based on Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. Frequently interpreted as a play on McCarthyism, it is as much a play on oppression and resistance. It shows us a society dominated by its socio-economic cleavages as well as by repression with regard to gender, religion, and race. Sartre has often been associated with blatant anti-Americanism. However, *Les sorcières de Salem* shows us his true picture of America, one that is divided between the evil America of the ruling political, religious, and economic élite with their religious bigotry and the rebellious, good America, the one of John Proctor and his friends, the part of the U.S. Sartre was always interested in.

KEYWORDS: *Les sorcières de Salem*; Film; New Social Movements; Oppression; Resistance

The American movie plays a very particular role in Sartre's life. Poulou, as the young Jean-Paul Sartre was called by his relatives, grew up in a multicultural environment. On the one side there was his German-Alsatian heritage. Most probably, Sartre was taught German at a very early age by his grandfather Charles Schweitzer and he must have spoken it quite well¹. At about the same time when he learnt German, Sartre became acquainted with the American culture by reading comics and by watching movies. Since he was seven, he went to the cinema with his mother. For

¹ When he was at the École Normale Supérieure, he read Schopenhauer, Kant, and Nietzsche as well as psychological literature and poetry in German. In 1946, Sartre's pronunciation of German on a Swiss weekly newsreel was still very close to that of a native speaker. And two years later, when he participated at a roundtable about *Les Mouches* (*The Flies*) in Berlin, Sartre did not need any translation from German to French. See A. BETSCHAT, *Sartre and the German Language* <<http://docs.sartre.ch/German.pdf>> (retrieved 14.8.2020).

the first forty years of his life, his relationship to the U.S. was a love affair. Since the publication of *La nausée* (*Nausea*) with Sophie Tucker's *Some of These Days* as its signature tune, we know about Sartre's predilection for American popular music: first it was Jazz and Blues, and after WWII it was Bebop. That his first essays of literary criticism were about William Faulkner's *Sartoris* and John Dos Passos's *1919* proves how important American literature was to him when he started his career as a writer.

Since WWII, Sartre's name has often been associated with blatant anti-Americanism². From 1950 to 1980, he was a leading intellectual opposing American politics. Obviously, a change had occurred in his attitude towards the U.S. after the end of WWII when he travelled to the country in 1945 and 1946. The low status of culture in comparison to business and the miserable treatment of African Americans and other minorities in the U.S. seem to have turned Sartre against America as much as many core elements of its politics of that time: the Cold War, the support of authoritarian regimes around the globe, and particularly McCarthyism³ in the 1950s and its involvement in the Vietnam War in the 1960s. What had begun as a love affair in his early years finally turned into a critical appraisal of American culture and politics. The target of this essay is to follow Sartre's trajectory in his relationship to the United States by focusing on the film and particularly by comparing his version of the story of the witches of Salem, one of the very important early events in U.S. history, with Arthur Miller's in *The Crucible*.

1. Sartre and the Movies

Sartre, the philosopher, author of novels and dramas, and political intellectual, is hardly known as an author of screenplays⁴, although his friendship with the film was very important in Sartre's life as Pascale Fautrier

² See A. COHEN-SOLAL, *Sartre and the United States: 'A series of Adventures in America'*, in «The Journal of Romance Studies», 6, 1-2, 2006, pp. 19-30. Here pp. 19-21.

³ McCarthyism stands for a movement in U.S. politics from the second half of the 1940s through the 1950s known for its Red Scare and the persecution of left-wing intellectuals. The name refers to Sen. Joseph McCarthy who was its leader between 1950 and 1955.

⁴ As to the various screenplays and essays about films written by Sartre see: P. FAUTRIER, *Le cinéma de Sartre*, in «Fabula LHT», 2, 2006 <<https://www.fabula.org/lht/2/fautrier.html>> (retrieved 11.5.2020); M. CONTAT, M. RYBALKA, *Les Écrits de Sartre*, Gallimard, Paris 1970; BETSCHART, *Sartres kinematographisches Schaffen* <<http://docs.sartre.ch/Sartres%20kinematographisches%20Werk.pdf>> (retrieved 11.5.2020).

showed in her very remarkable essay *Le cinéma de Sartre*⁵. His two earliest texts about the movies were a note in the *Carnet Midy*, where he analyzed the phenomenological character of film, and his *Apologie pour le cinéma*. Both texts were written in 1924 when Sartre studied at the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) and when he assiduously attended cinemas⁶. In the second text, there are many references to American films, but also Sartre's declaration of his preference of American to German movies. The subject of this text was taken up again in his speech about *L'art cinématographique* which he gave in Le Havre in 1931.

An important point in time in his life and in his relationship to the film was when Sartre signed a contract as a writer of screenplays with the French film company Pathé in 1943. It was this contract – and not his success as a writer of dramas and novels – that made it possible to Sartre to take leave from teaching in 1944. Between 1943 and 1946, Sartre handed in eight screenplays. Only *Les jeux sont faits* was immediately produced as a film: directed by Jean Delannoy, it had its premiere in 1947. Two years later, the film was distributed by Lopert Films in the U.S. under the name of *The Chips are Down* without getting big attention. This contrasted with the success of the Franco-Mexican co-production *Les orgueilleux* (*The Proud and the Beautiful*) directed by Yves Allegret in 1953. This film earned a great deal of acclaim due to its use of two languages – French and Spanish – and the omnipresence of Mexican music. This film was based on Sartre's screenplay titled *Typhus*⁷. Although Sartre had his name withdrawn from the film because Jean Aurenche and Jean Clouzot had considerably changed the original scenario, Sartre was nominated for an Oscar in the category of Best Story in 1956.

Sartre's other screenplays never made it to the cinema: *Les faux nez*⁸ was transformed into a theater play which premiered in 1948; *L'engrenage* (*In the Mesh*) only appeared in print and finally became the drama *Les mains sales* (*Dirty Hands*); *Résistance* was published only posthumously in 2000⁹ and *L'apprenti-sorcier* is even completely lost. Of interest, from a point of view of Sartre's relationship to the U.S., is *Histoire de nègre* which was converted by Sartre into his play *La putain respectueuse* (*The Respectful*

⁵ FAUTRIER, *Le cinéma de Sartre*, cit. For Sartre's early works about cinema see also J.D. CONNOR, *Sartre and Cinema. The Grammar of Commitment*, in «MLN», 116, 5, 2001, pp. 1045-1068.

⁶ COHEN-SOLAL, *Sartre and the United States*, cit., p. 21.

⁷ J.-P. SARTRE, *Typhus*, Gallimard, Paris 2007.

⁸ ID., *Les faux nez*, in «La Revue du Cinéma», 6, 1947, pp. 3-27.

⁹ ID., *Résistance*, in «Les Temps modernes», 609, Gallimard, Paris 2000, pp. 1-22.

Prostitute) and dealt with the discrimination of African Americans. And the scenario *La grande peur*, which is completely lost, too, was influenced maybe by Orson Welles's radio adaptation of H.G. Wells's novel *The War of the Worlds* of 1938. Nothing documents Sartre's misfortune with the film better than Gallimard's futile attempt to publish *Typhus*, *Résistance*, *La grande peur*, and *L'apprenti-sorcier* in 1946-1947 and Pathé's final dropping of its plans to produce these screenplays in 1948.

That Sartre was very much interested in the American movie and its production is shown by his five essays about the film industry in Hollywood which he wrote during his visit as a reporter for *Combat* in the U.S. in 1945. In the same year, a critique of Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (*Quand Hollywood veut faire penser... "Citizen Kane" d'Orson Welles*) was published in *Écran français* under Sartre's name. And finally and not to be forgotten, in the very same year, Sartre founded *Les Temps Modernes* whose title refers to Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times* of 1936.

After a pause of several years, Sartre returned to film as a writer of screenplays in the middle of the 1950s. Whereas the French projects about Joseph Le Bon (1955)¹⁰ and *Germinal* (1956-1957) failed, two films with strong ties to the U.S. were produced: *Les sorcières de Salem* (*The Crucible*) and *Freud – The Secret Passion*. The latter, directed by John Huston, was released in 1962. Sartre worked on its scenario from 1958 to 1960. The film shows Freud's development from neurology via hypnosis and the theory of sexual abuse to the Oedipus complex and the theory of child sexuality. As in the case of *Les orgueilleux*, Sartre withdrew his name, because the screenplay had been cut down by Charles Kaufman and Wolfgang Reinhardt from several hours to a short 120 minutes. Nevertheless, an estimated ninety percent of the movie including all the main figures were taken from Sartre's screenplay.

The typical traits of Sartre's understanding of Freud as a person constituted by a patriarchal and antisemitic society were kept by Kaufman and Reinhardt. They just added an opening and an ending and some monologues by Freud, which did not raise the quality of the film. Kaufman and Reinhardt's nomination for an Oscar for the screenplay in 1963 should rather have gone to Sartre. Customarily, it is assumed that the reason for the break between Huston and Sartre was a quarrel about the length of the film. However, films of close to four hours were not so rare at that time (*Ben Hur*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Cleopatra*). Even John Huston hints in his

¹⁰ ID., *Fragments du scénario Joseph Le Bon*, in «Les Temps modernes», 632-633-634, Gallimard, Paris 2005, pp. 675-694.

autobiography¹¹ that the reason behind the dispute may rather be found in the content of the film, particularly in the theory of child sexuality. The differences between an American style film director who expected the writer of the screenplay to be his employee and a French writer close to the author theory of film¹² did not help to improve the relationship between Huston and Sartre either. The events around Freud most probably confirmed Sartre in his impressions he had got during his trips to the U.S. in 1945 and 1946 that business is more important than culture in America.

2. Les sorcières de Salem

The *Freud* scenario definitely has its merits as precursor to Sartre's voluminous *L'idiot de la famille* (*The Family Idiot*) about Gustave Flaubert. Of at least equal value from an artistic point of view and of particular interest with the regard to Sartre's relationship to America is his *Les sorcières de Salem*, an adaptation of one of the most important dramas written in the U.S. in the 1950s, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. By adapting a drama that reflected very much the political circumstances of the 1950s, Sartre himself took a political stand – and not only about French, but also American politics. The drama dealt with an event that became a birthmark of American politics: the conflict between individual freedom on the one hand and religious bigotry and its tendency to oppression and discrimination on the other hand. By adapting *The Crucible*, Sartre had to define his views on American society and American politics with and against one of America's most prominent liberal intellectuals at that time, Arthur Miller.

Les sorcières de Salem was Sartre's most important screenplay. Its three main actors, Yves Montand as John Proctor, Simone Signoret as Elisabeth Proctor, and Mylène Demongeot as Abigail Williams, won a prize at the International Film Festival in Karlovy Vary (Czechoslovakia) in 1957 for best collective acting and Signoret was additionally awarded the prize for best foreign actress by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts in 1958. The film was a co-production between France and the former

¹¹ J. HUSTON, *An Open Book*, Knopf, New York 1980 (trad. C. PRÜSSMANN, ... *mehr als nur ein Leben. Die Autobiographie*, Schüren, Marburg 2007, pp. 336-348).

¹² Alexander Astruc and André Bazin, the founders of the author theory in film, published not only essays in *Les Temps Modernes*, but were also influenced by Sartre. Sartre certainly shared their conception about the importance of the author.

German Democratic Republic (GDR) with Raymond Rouleau as its director. Whereas most of the actors were French, the shooting mainly took place in Germany – in Babelsberg-Potsdam near Berlin in the DEFA studios.

The film was produced during a relatively short period of thaw. In the 1952 movie *Story of a Young Couple* (*Roman einer jungen Ehe*), directed by Kurt Maetzig, one of the most respected filmmakers in the GDR, Sartre was still the bogeyman: a young wife asks for a divorce because her husband agrees to play a role in *Les mains sales*. Shortly thereafter, Sartre had his first contact with Eastern European communists at the peace conference in Vienna in December 1952 and Stalin's death four months later opened the doors to Sartre's visit to the Soviet Union in 1954. Sartre wrote the scenario for *Les sorcières de Salem* from November 1955 to April 1956 with the film being shot in the very same year. In November 1956, not only the premiere of Sartre's play *Nekrassov* in the GDR was assisted by its president Wilhelm Pieck, but the Soviet troops also crushed the Hungarian revolution. Sartre's heavy criticism of this military intervention made him a *persona non grata* in the Eastern Bloc again.

This almost led to the film's stillbirth. Albert Wilkening, the director of DEFA, could only get approval to finish the film against heavy opposition in the ministry of culture. When Paul Wandel, the ruling party's secretary in charge of culture and education was forced to step down in October 1957, he conceded in his self-criticism to have admitted «petit-bourgeois anarchy» at DEFA¹³. The film *Les sorcières de Salem* was released first in France and then in the GDR in 1957, in Western Germany, Italy, and under the title *The Crucible* in the U.S. in the following year with many more countries following.

This difficult political history of *Les sorcières de Salem* in the former GDR found its parallel on the other side of the Atlantic. Miller's *The Crucible* cannot be understood without taking into account the political background of that time. He wrote this drama in 1952 as an allegory on McCarthyism¹⁴ after his friend Elia Kazan had named eight actors as members of the Communist Party before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the driving force in the persecution of alleged communists. For Miller, the parallels between McCarthyism and

¹³ G. HERZBERG, *Anpassung und Aufbegehren*, Christoph Links, Berlin 2006, p. 295.

¹⁴ For the historical background see A. MILLER, *The Crucible in History*, in Id., *The Collected Essays of Arthur Miller*, Bloomsbury, London 2000, pp. 468-483. This essay, written in 1999, proves how relevant this political background still was to Miller more than forty years after he had written the play.

the witch-hunt in Salem in 1692 were evident. Miller was in danger himself because he had flirted with communism in the 1930s and still had joint projects with pro-communist organizations in the second half of the 1940s¹⁵. After having written *The Crucible*, he himself became a target of the HUAC. He was denied a passport and therefore could neither travel to London in 1954 for the opening of his play nor meet Sartre in Paris at a later point in time.

Miller's experiences matched those of Sartre's friends. Nelson Algren, Beauvoir's lover, was denied a passport to travel to Paris to see her between 1953 and 1960. Fernando Gerassi, 'Pablo' of *Les Chemins de la liberté* (*The Roads to Freedom*), who had emigrated to the U.S. in 1941, was only given an American passport in 1964 after twenty years of extortion by the CIA. That Sartre wrote a film adaptation of *The Crucible* must be understood as a clear criticism of McCarthyism and politics in general in the U.S. – but also in France where the situation was not better. In 1954, the Bolshoi ballet was prohibited from performing in Paris (see Sartre's essay *Les boucs émissaires*). Already the Henri Martin affair (1950/1951) and the arrest of Jacques Duclos¹⁶, a communist vice president of the French parliament in 1952, had proven that there was a political witch-hunt going on in France, too.

To fight these tendencies in a literary manner, Sartre had started a project to write an anti-anticommunist drama already in 1954. The story would have been about a Jewish lawyer at the U.N. in New York who was threatened with exposure as a former supporter of communism. The piece, of which only a few pages were published posthumously, is known under the name *La part du feu*¹⁷. Like Willy Loman, the hero of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* of 1949, Sartre's principal figure commits suicide. Shortly thereafter, in 1955, Sartre wrote his farce *Nekrassov*, a piece exposing the French press of the 1950s hyperventilating about the Red Scare.

At the time of writing *The Crucible* and *Les sorcières de Salem* in 1952 and 1956, Sartre and Miller had a lot in common regarding their political views¹⁸. Both understood these works as political plays. In the comments

¹⁵ S.W. ABBOTSON, *Critical Companion to Arthur Miller*, Facts on File, New York 2007, pp. 379-380. For Miller's communist leanings see R. CAPSHAW, *Party Line*, <<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/party-line>> (retrieved 16.5.2020).

¹⁶ Duclos's arrest was the reason why Sartre wrote *Les communistes et la paix* (*The Communists and Peace*).

¹⁷ J.-P. SARTRE, *La part du feu*, in M. CONTAT (ed.), *Jean-Paul Sartre. Théâtre complet*, Gallimard, Paris 2005, pp. 1183-1214.

¹⁸ Going beyond these political communalities, Steven R. Centola suggests that Miller's plays and Sartre's *L'être et le néant* share a nearly identical vision of the modern individual

that form an integral part of the play, Miller wrote:

At this writing, only England has held back before the temptations of contemporary diabolism. In the countries of the Communist ideology, all resistance of any import is linked to the totally malign capitalist succubi, and in America any man who is not reactionary in his views is open to the charge of alliance with the Red hell. [...] while there were no witches then, there are Communists and capitalists now, and in each camp there is certain proof that spies of each side are at work undermining the other¹⁹.

In a similar tone, Sartre had Deputy Governor Danforth saying:

DANFORTH: You know our country is in grave danger? The enemy is within, sir, in our own homes. The woe that befalls you is part of a vast conspiracy, stretching to Boston²⁰.

The immediate motivation for Sartre to write his own version of *The Crucible* was that Marcel Aymé, who had staged *The Crucible* in Paris's Sarah Bernhardt Theater in 1954, had castrated this drama by removing almost all the socioeconomic and political background of the play²¹.

This very political content, of which Sartre and the original Miller were so proud of, proved to be a stumbling block with regard to the public reception of the drama as well as the film. The 1953 Broadway production of Miller's drama was not very successful, very much for political reasons. Miller was blamed as a naïve 'liberal'. Some years later, in 1955 and then in 1958, the drama was greeted in a more positive way on the occasion of off-Broadway productions. The warming up of the political climate is also reflected in the relationship between Miller and the U.S. authorities: in 1956, Miller was subpoenaed to appear before the HUAC and, for refusing to mention any names, he was given a suspended jail sentence; this conviction was however overturned by the U.S. Court of Appeals in 1958²².

The political content of *The Crucible* was a problem for Sartre's film *Les sorcières de Salem*, too. Although the film was about a very prominent

(S.R. CENTOLA, *Confrontation with the Other: Alienation in the Works of Arthur Miller and Jean-Paul Sartre*, in «Journal of Evolutionary Psychology», 5, 1-2, 1984, pp. 1-11).

¹⁹ A. MILLER, *The Crucible*, Bloomsbury, London 2018, p. 33.

²⁰ *Les Sorcières de Salem* [DVD], Pathé 2017, min. 50.

²¹ J.-P. SARTRE, *Théâtre populaire et théâtre bourgeois*, in ID., *Un théâtre de situations*, Gallimard, Paris 1973, pp. 68-80, here pp. 78-79.

²² ABBOTSON, *Critical Companion to Arthur Miller*, cit., pp. 13-14, 109, 117.

topic in U.S. history, the success at the box office in America was lackluster. Many reasons are given: Kingsley-International Pictures, the importing agency, was a pioneer in 'art house' film distribution, but they were not very present in the mass market; the French actors Signoret and Montand and the music written by Hanns Eisler did not help its popularity; the film was in black and white (like many other art house films, even Huston's *Freud*). That it was indeed rather the political content that hampered the success of *Les sorcières de Salem* is confirmed by the focus of many criticisms²³.

In the years after the production of the film, the gap between Sartre and Miller, who politically were close to each other in the middle of the 1950s, widened. Sartre continued to clearly position himself on the left. Between 1962 and 1966, he travelled to the Soviet Union several times – with seeing his new girlfriend Lena Zonina as the most important reason. However, from 1968 onwards, after the suppression of the Prague Spring, he became a strong critic of the Soviet regime and especially its politics towards dissidents and Jews.

In contrast to Sartre's steadfast 'liberal' position, Miller, the ex-communist, was wavering at the beginning and then moved more and more to the political center. In 1957 he was still proud of the deeply political character of *The Crucible*; he even wished to have written it in a 'tougher' way²⁴. In the year in which he won the appeal against the HUAC, he regretted that the critics did not see that it was a play about individual conscience, although he was still proud of the political background of *The Crucible*²⁵. In 1966 he was elected president of the writers' association PEN-International for a period of three years, which would not have been possible without the approval of its major financier, the CIA²⁶. One year later, he visited the Soviet Union trying to include the Soviet Writers in PEN-International when Sartre already refrained from contact with them due to the affair around Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel, two early dissident writers. In the same year, as time became more rebellious, Miller emphasized the political content of *The Crucible* again²⁷. The political differences between Sartre and Miller erupted

²³ Ivi, pp. 123-124.

²⁴ A. MILLER, *Introduction to the Collected Plays*, in R.A. MARTIN, S.R. CENTOLA (eds.), *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*, Da Capo Press, New York 1996, pp. 113-170. Here pp. 153-160.

²⁵ A. MILLER, *Brewed in The Crucible*, MARTIN, CENTOLA (eds.), *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*, cit., pp. 171-174. Here pp. 173-174.

²⁶ C. BIGSBY, *Arthur Miller. 1962-2005*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 2013, pp. 79-106.

²⁷ A. MILLER, *It Could Happen Here – And Did*, in MARTIN, CENTOLA (eds.), *The Theater*

when Miller criticized *Les sorcières de Salem* in his essay *Arthur Miller on The Crucible*²⁸ as an overly Marxist screenplay in 1972.

The Sartre-Rouveau version of *Les sorcières de Salem* disappeared sometime in the 1960s in the Orcus of oblivion. According to Mylène Demongeot, the actress who played Abigail in the film, Miller even prohibited the film from being shown²⁹. The date of when this happened is unknown and we can only guess about Miller's reason. Were these Miller's plans for his own film version of *The Crucible* of 1996 directed by Nicholas Hytner? Or did he want to punish Montand for having had an affair with his wife Marilyn Monroe during the shooting of *Let's Make Love* in 1960? The Miller-Hytner version which is bare of any political implications and Miller's statements in *Arthur Miller on The Crucible* hint at differences in the political development of Sartre and Miller. Miller most probably did not want to be remembered for the rebellious, critical views he held when was in his thirties. Pathé could finally bring a copy of the film to the market in 2017, after they had bought Miller's part of the distribution rights. Sartre's original screenplay itself remains to be published.

3. *Les sorcières de Salem. A piece about oppression and resistance*

The Crucible - Les sorcières de Salem is a political piece against McCarthyism and the persecution of dissenters. This is a topic Miller and Sartre's versions share and which ties both to the politics of the Cold War of the 1950s. In both versions, there is also a love story intertwined, the story of John and Elizabeth Proctor. In Sartre's version, this aspect is certainly more prominent. Sartre had a penchant for love stories in his screenplays, particularly unhappy ones, as in *Les jeux sont faits*, *Typhus*, *Résistance*, and *Joseph Le Bon*. In *Les sorcières de Salem*, the story of the relationship between John and Elizabeth develops from an unhappy, cold one with John looking for sexual satisfaction in a relationship with Abigail to a renewal of their mutual love ending in John's hanging.

What makes *Les sorcières de Salem* a film of timeless value is that it is a movie about oppression and resistance in more general terms. The socio-economic, religious, and gender dimensions are expressed by the conflict

Essays of Arthur Miller, cit., pp. 294-300.

²⁸ MILLER, *Arthur Miller on The Crucible*, in MARTIN, CENTOLA (eds.), *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*, cit., pp. 365-367. Here p. 366.

²⁹ *Entretien avec Mylène Demongeot*, on *Les Sorcières de Salem* [DVD], min. 0-2.

between the religious, economic, and political members of the élite and their opponents. The leaders of the élite are all male white Anglo-Saxon protestants. Its most prominent representatives are Deputy Governor Thomas Danforth, Rev. Parris, and Thomas Putnam, Sartre's typical *salaud* («I'm the richest man in Salem. God has blessed my work»³⁰). Their adversaries are the accused farmers, John Proctor, Giles Corey, and Francis Nurse. The majority of the accused, however, are women, particularly old and economically weak women like Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne. And there is a racial dimension due to Tituba, Rev. Parris's slave.

We can already find this unique blend of various kinds of oppression in Miller's drama *The Crucible*. Although Sartre increased them, it was Miller who introduced important changes in comparison to the political and socioeconomic reality of 1692. Unlike Deputy Governor Danforth in Miller's play, the one of history was not involved in the sentencing that led to the execution of twenty people. It was rather his successor, Deputy Governor Stoughton, who was the driving force. Stoughton as well as the third judge, Samuel Sewall, do not appear in *The Crucible*. Miller frankly admits historical inaccuracies in an introductory note to his play mentioning dramatic purposes as reasons³¹. Only in the film version of 1996, Miller strove for more historical accuracy – which overall did not help to make the film a real success at the box office.

Miller's drama version already included the plot of the Putnams, a family of the first generation of settlers in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, against members of the second generation such as the Nurses and the Proctors. It was a plot about land.

COMMENT BY MILLER: Land-lust which had been expressed before by constant bickering over boundaries and deeds, could now be elevated to the arena of morality.

[...]

GILES: My proof is there! (*Pointing to the paper*) 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!³².

SEWALL: And Mr. Putnam – I learn that he is in constant disputation with his neighbors over his boundaries.

[...]

DANFORTH: Mr. Putnam, we have an accusation by Mr. Corey

³⁰ *Les Sorcières de Salem*, min. 34.

³¹ MILLER, *The Crucible*, cit., p. 3.

³² Ivi, pp. 9, 87-88.

against you. He states that you prompted your daughter to cry witchery upon George Jacobs so that you might buy up his forfeited land.

PUTNAM: It is a lie.

COREY: This man is killing his neighbors for their land!³³.

Sartre, who did not study the history of the Salem witch trials, kept these changes in his scenario which made the witch trial a narrative of the rich élite against the rest of the population. Sartre has the shopkeeper from whom Elizabeth wants to buy a puppet saying, «There are no witches among the rich»³⁴.

A new element Sartre introduced was John Proctor's role as the leader of the poorer farmers with their small and medium-sized farms.

PETER COREY (to JOHN PROCTOR): John. But you are our only representative against the rich.

FRANCIS NURSE: If they hear you worked during the holy service, they will exclude you and we shall be represented no more³⁵.

Sartre portrays John Proctor as their only competent speaker against the rich. In this regard, Arthur Miller was more in line with history by depicting John Proctor as a wealthy farmer, which he really was with his 700 acres farm. The historical John and Elizabeth Procter were, like the Coreys and the Nurses, well-off members of the community with interests not only in farming, but also in trade and services. The historical Elizabeth even ran a tavern, a fact neither Miller nor Sartre mention.

By giving John the role of a leader of the poorer farmers, Sartre stressed the social dimension behind the witch trials. However, this was not his invention. Already, Miller had John Proctor saying to Thomas Putnam, «We vote by name in this society, not by acreage»³⁶. Important roles in Miller's play were given to the beggar Sarah Good and the drunkard Sarah Osborne. In this regard, Sartre again followed Miller's tracks, also in not giving a more prominent role to Judge Sewall; the historical Sewall had doubts about spectral evidence, he later excused himself for his participation and became one of the early adversaries of slavery. However, that Sartre did not follow Marxist textbooks with their dichotomy of bad capitalists vs. good workers and farmers is proven by at least two figures: James

³³ *The Crucible. A Screenplay by Arthur Miller*, Methuan Film, London 1997, pp. 51, 68.

³⁴ *Les Sorcières de Salem*, min. 57.

³⁵ *Les Sorcières de Salem*, min. 11.

³⁶ MILLER, *The Crucible*, cit., p. 28.

Putnam – he is Thomas’s brother and supports the masses led by the young Coreys – and Rev. Hale, a character antagonistic to the fanatic Rev. Parris.

Regarding religion and its relationship to sorcery and sexual repression, Miller and Sartre follow very similar lines again. Miller praises the end of theocracy and of the combination of state and religion brought to Salem by the witch trials³⁷. Sartre certainly supported this view. The same applies to Miller’s view that sex, sin, and the Devil were linked³⁸. With both Miller and Sartre, Abigail aged seventeen is older than the historical Abigail who was about twelve years of age. This allows them to write about an adulterous relationship between John Proctor and Abigail that did not exist in history. Both authors have the girls dancing in the nude – not a historical scene, but rather a scene invented by Miller. In both works Rev. Parris is a person preaching hellfire and bloody damnation and mainly interested in increasing his personal income.

The difference between Miller and Sartre in this regard is rather one of quantity than quality. Elizabeth’s religiously motivated prudery and sexual frigidity and the girls’ naked dancing are more prominent with Sartre who is also more critical of religion than Miller, particularly regarding its mercilessness and its opposition to any kind of pleasure. In Sartre’s version, children are forbidden to play with puppets on Sundays and pains are God’s punishment for our sins. Sartre has Parris saying:

PARRIS: The human beast is ferocious. Only fear can keep him down. If you fear the Almighty, whom your minister represents, if your terror of Hell overcomes your base appetites, ...

PROCTOR (*stands up and shouts*): Enough! Reverend Parris, you fail in your duties. We come here to find God, you speak only of the Devil³⁹.

A significant difference between Sartre and Miller can be seen regarding oppression by the political institutions. Miller never attacks them and shows a Governor Danforth occasionally even doubting. Sartre’s Danforth, however, is a *salaud* never showing signs of uncertainty; he thinks of himself as the instrument of God’s wrath⁴⁰. While Miller’s John Proctor hands

³⁷ Ivi, pp. 8, 137.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 34.

³⁹ *Les Sorcières de Salem*, min. 16.

⁴⁰ *Les Sorcières de Salem*, min. 96. It is noteworthy that Miller regretted this positive picture of Danforth in 1957 (MILLER, *Introduction to the Collected Plays*, cit., p. 158). In the film version of 1996, he depicted Danforth again in a positive way.

in a deposition with 91 signatures at the court, Sartre's John refuses to sign the deposition because he does not believe in the justice and fairness of the authorities⁴¹. The later political differences between Sartre and Miller can be noticed here already: on the one hand Sartre, who developed his first political philosophy, an anarchist one, in the 1970s⁴², on the other hand Miller, who made his compromises with the political institutions.

Other important differences concern oppression regarding gender and race. Obvious is the gender-related dimension of the witch trials. Fourteen of the twenty accused in the trials of 1692 were women, many of them elderly women showing independent behavior. The most important women keep their roles in Miller's as well as Sartre's version. However, Sartre describes the women with much empathy, whereas Miller's treatment is slightly sexist. Miller describes Sarah Good as a drunkard and a vagrant, whereas in history she was impoverished due to the debt of her first husband. Sarah Osborne is portrayed by Miller as drunk and half-witted; the historical person was however rather independently minded and wealthy. In Miller's play, Abigail is not just in love, but seriously insane, and there is a lot of focus on the young girls who instigated these trials, which renders their negative role very prominent⁴³.

Sartre's treatment of the women, also of the two Sarahs, is much more benevolent. Abigail is just a young woman madly in love with Proctor for which even Elizabeth forgives her at the end. Miller shows the young Proctor boys as positive examples contrasting well to the crazy girls. Sartre did not only focus less on the girls, but with Francy – the Proctors have a girl instead of boys – there is even a girl who does not participate in these persecutions. With the lesser role of the girls, the legal proceedings at the court are much shorter in Sartre's version than in Miller's.

Racial oppression, too, plays a more important role with Sartre. The major character is Tituba, Rev. Parris's slave. Miller and Sartre assume her to be of African descent, whereas the historical Tituba was most probably of indigenous origin. Both authors describe the harsh way Parris treated her. Here again, Sartre's description is by far more empathetic. Sartre describes Tituba's voodoo practices in detail, a motif that is missing with Miller. We

⁴¹ Maybe this was an early sign of Sartre's skepticism about his own signing of petitions *à gogo*.

⁴² A. BETSCHART, *Sartre's anarchist political philosophy – a draft for a diverse society?* <<http://docs.sartre.ch/Sartre-anarchy-NASS-16.pdf>> (retrieved 14.8.2020).

⁴³ As to Miller's presentation of women in his play *The Crucible* see Wendy Schissel's criticism in W. SCHISSEL, *Re(dis)covering the Witches in Arthur Miller's The Crucible: A Feminist*, in «Modern Drama», 37, 3, 1994, pp. 461-473.

know that Sartre was very much interested in voodoo practices when he was in Brazil in 1960 and in Haiti in 1949 where he learnt about Baron Samedi, the Loa of the dead described in the scenario. To underline the settlers' status as colonialists, Sartre additionally adds a Native American as Governor Danforth's butler. And differently from Miller's theater and film version, Sartre did not mention the Indians who smashed Abigail's parents' heads.

Another major difference between Miller and Sartre refers to the kind and amount of resistance against oppression. In both of Miller's versions, the solution to oppression seems to lie in having more people of the kind of Rev. Hale and Judge Sewall: more critical members of the *élite*. Hale even stands out as a prototype of the critical intellectual. The masses who welcome the first hangings play a rather negative role in Miller's film. Sartre's story differs here in important details, especially when it comes to the role of John Proctor and the masses.

Sartre's John is much more rebellious than Miller's figure in the play. He stands up in church and speaks out against Rev. Parris's sermon. John also defends his wife with his rifle in his hand. There is even a brawl between John and the Coreys, and those who detain Elizabeth – an element later adopted by Miller in his film. With Miller, John refuses to sign the confession in jail because he does not want to damage his name in the community. Sartre's John refuses to sign the confession because of Elizabeth and particularly his friends waiting with weapons at the gallows outside the prison – a remarkable difference. Sartre's John hopes that his death will not be useless, that there will be a riot that will sweep away the current authority in Salem so that his children can finally live in freedom⁴⁴. Whereas Miller has John, Martha Corey, and Rebecca Nurse saying the Lord's Prayer under the gallows, they refuse to kiss the cross in Sartre's version. And last, but not least, in Sartre's final scene we are given the impression that the people try to storm the prison into which Danforth retreats.

When Miller described Sartre's screenplay as 'overly Marxist', he most probably had this scene in mind: the masses turn against their rulers. However, Miller must have forgotten that it was he who included Rev. Parris speaking about a rebellion in Andover:

PARRIS: I tell you what is said here, sir. Andover have thrown out the court, they say, and will have no part of witchcraft. There be

⁴⁴ *Les Sorcières de Salem*, min. 129.

a faction here, feeding on that news, and I tell you true, sir, I fear there will be riot here⁴⁵.

Sartre just integrated this remark into his scenario. It is significant that this remark is missing in Miller's screenplay of 1996. Miller seemed to have forgotten what he had written in 1957:

There is and will always be in my mind the spectacle of the great minister, and ideological authority behind the persecution, Cotton Mather, galloping up to the scaffold to beat back a crowd of villagers so moved by the towering dignity of the victims as to want to free them⁴⁶.

Miller wished in 1957 that he had written *The Crucible* in a tougher way⁴⁷. This is what Sartre did.

4. Sartre and his post-1945 relationship to the U.S.

Sartre's *Les sorcières de Salem* is not just a criticism of a political tendency to oppress dissenters in the U.S. and in France, but it is a critical appraisal of the American society. It was a society divided between the ruling élite, represented by the Putnams, Danforth, and Parris, involved in religious bigotry, oppression, and discrimination, and freedom loving individuals, the Salem of the Proctors, Abigail, Tituba, the Coreys and the Nurses. The accusation of anti-Americanism, often raised against Sartre, is not true. John and his friends are Americans, too. In 1968 Sartre gave an interview to the German journal *konkret* with the title *Ich bin nicht gegen die Amerikaner, ich bin für Vietnam* (*I am not against the Americans, I am for Vietnam*)⁴⁸. Even if the bitter discussion with David I. Grossvogel⁴⁹ – Sartre had canceled his stay at the Cornell University, planned for 1965, because of the Vietnam War – seems to prove the opposite, the volume of notes Sartre had written down for his lectures at Cornell⁵⁰ proves that Sartre had high hopes in the American students.

⁴⁵ MILLER, *The Crucible*, cit., p. 115.

⁴⁶ MILLER, *Introduction to the Collected Plays*, cit., p. 157.

⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 158.

⁴⁸ J.-P. SARTRE, *Ich bin nicht gegen die Amerikaner, ich bin für Vietnam*, in «Konkret», 1968, pp. 31-38.

⁴⁹ See ID., *Situations VIII. Autour de* 68, Gallimard, Paris 1972, pp. 9-26.

⁵⁰ ID., *Morale et Histoire*, in «Les Temps Modernes», 632-633-634, 2005, pp. 268-414.

Until the very end of his life, he maintained a good relationship with progressive Americans and followed the cultural and academic scene in the U.S. In the 1950s, it was particularly American sociology that influenced him⁵¹. He read *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) by David Riesman, *The Organization Man* (1956) by William H. Whyte, *The Exurbanites* (1955) by Auguste Comte Spector, and all the books by C. Wright Mills, who became a good friend of Sartre's in the year before Mills died in 1962⁵². All four of them published contributions in *Les Temps modernes* (*TM*).

Whereas the U.S. and American culture were a marginal theme in the *TM* in the 1950s, they gained much prominence in the 1960s. Intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky, Paul A. Baran, and Paul Sweezy contributed essays. Not only was the war in Vietnam a topic in the *TM* several times, but also the new social movements, particularly black power (with contributions by Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver)⁵³ and feminism (with essays by Betty Friedan and later Susan Sontag). *TM* no. 223, issued in December '64, was devoted to the Beatniks, the most important literary influence on the youth and hippie movement of the 1960s. Allen Ginsberg had dedicated *Howl*, the beatnik poem *par excellence*, to Carl Solomon, «a Bronx-born Jewish intellectual, a bisexual, part-time Communist, Dadaist, and existentialist» as Jonah Raskin described him⁵⁴. Carl Solomon heard Sartre when he was in Paris in 1947 and he introduced Ginsberg to Sartre's existentialism and Jean Genet⁵⁵. Jack Kerouac, too, knew Sartre⁵⁶. When Sartre gave up the Marxist model of class society in 1972-73⁵⁷ in favor of an 'antihierarchical-libertarian' model based on the

⁵¹ ID., *Critique de la raison dialectique Tome I. Théorie des ensembles pratiques, précédé de Questions de méthode*, Gallimard, Paris (1960) 1985, p. 35. Later again in ID., *Sartre par Sartre (Itinerary of a Thought)*, in «New Left Review», 58, 1969, pp. 43-66). In ID., *Situations IX. Mélanges*, Gallimard, Paris 1972, pp. 99-134. Here p. 113.

⁵² ID., 'Wir müssen unsere eigenen Werte schaffen'. Ein Playboy-Interview über philosophische und literarische Fragen, in ID., *Sartre über Sartre*. Rowohlt, Reinbek 1980, pp. 129-143. Here p. 142.

⁵³ Another important member of the Black movement was Stokely Carmichael with whom Sartre worked together at the Russell Tribunal.

⁵⁴ J. RASKIN, *American Scream. Allen Ginsberg's Howl and the Making of the Beat Generation*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2004, p. 97.

⁵⁵ As to Sartre's and Ginsberg's influence on the sexual revolution see A. BETSCHART, *Von Freud zu Sartre. Die Vordenker der sexuellen Revolution*, in J. BONNEMANN, P. HELFRITZSCH, T. ZINGELMANN (eds.), 1968. *Soziale Bewegungen, geistige WegbereiterInnen*, Zu Klampen, Springe 2019, pp. 149-165.

⁵⁶ Cfr. V. LANE, *The French Genealogy of the Beat Generation*, Bloomsbury, New York 2017, particularly pp. 71-74.

⁵⁷ See SARTRE, *On a raison de se révolter* or *Sartre parle des maos* and *Entretien avec Sartre* <<http://docs.sartre.ch/Sartre%20parle%20des%20maos.pdf>> (retrieved 14.8.2020)..

new social movements⁵⁸, he was influenced by André Gorz and Philippe Gavi, two close observers of the American New Left, and also by the many articles *TM* had published about the social movements in the U.S. since the early 1960s.

For Sartre, not only the ‘evil’ U.S. of Danforth, Putnam, and Parris existed, but also the ‘good’, rebellious America, the America of John Proctor, the Coreys and the Nurses, and the two Sarahs. This was the U.S. of the progressive intellectuals and particularly the youth of the 1960s and 1970s symbolized not least by John Gerassi, Sartre’s interlocutor for several years. Radical students such as Jerry Rubin, Tom Hayden, and Angela Davis were influenced by Sartre, whose book *Sartre on Cuba* was frequently present on bookstalls of the Left protesting against U.S. politics on Cuba⁵⁹. Although Sartre did not visit the U.S. after 1946, they were very present with him. The position as #1 point of reference, held by Germany in the time before WWII, was passed on to America (closely followed by Italy) – of course, not the official U.S. of Deputy Governor Danforth, but John Proctor’s America.

ABSTRACT: Quando Sartre era un bambino, la sua relazione con gli Stati Uniti fu una sorta di storia d’amore, mediata soprattutto dal suo amore per i film americani. Sartre stesso divenne uno scrittore di sceneggiature per alcuni anni. A metà degli anni Cinquanta, scrisse il canovaccio de *Les sorcières de Salem*, basato su *The Crucible* di Arthur Miller. Interpretata spesso come un’opera sul maccartismo, è altrettanto un’opera sull’oppressione e sulla resistenza. Ci mostra una società dominata dalle sue fratture socioeconomiche e dalla repressione relativa al genere sessuale, alla religione e alla razza. Sartre è stato spesso associato a uno sfacciato anti-americanismo. Tuttavia *Les sorcières de Salem* ci mostra il suo vero ritratto dell’America, che è diviso tra l’America malvagia delle élite politiche, religiose ed economiche dominanti con il loro bigottismo religioso e l’America buona e ribelle, quella di John Proctor e dei suoi amici, quella parte di America da cui Sartre è stato sempre interessato.

⁵⁸ ‘Libertarian’ stands for the French *libertaire*, which is a codeword for anarchist since the 1880s. Together with Alain Touraine, Sartre was one of the first in France to support this new sociological model of society based on new social movements. Pierre Bourdieu, today the more prominent French sociologist of that time, maintained the old Marxist model of a class society up until the 1990s.

⁵⁹ See R. ARONSON, *Sartre and the American New Left*, in A. BETSCHART, J. WERNER (eds.), *Sartre and the International Impact of Existentialism*, Palgrave, Cham 2020, pp. 45-60. Here p. 52.