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Political practices inherently seek to assert the moral superiority of their own ideologies in order to maintain power over society and protect existing regimes. Such exercise of power represses individual perspectives, but also causes power to be abused by those in positions of legitimate authority. Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* (1953) and Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004) affirm this political perspective by critiquing political practices that subsume individuals beneath the suffocating forces of conformist ideologies. Miller's account of the Salem Witch Trials, an allegory to McCarthyism in 1950s America, exposes the limitations and tragic repercussions of political ideologies grounded in absolutism. Likewise, Spiegelman examines the highly demoralising nature of the Bush Administration's response driven by unthinking patriotism and conformity following the September 11 terrorist attacks. In response, both texts also champion acts of individualism that seek to expose these manipulative acts of power.

The dangers of absolutist political systems are inherently destructive toward collective society and the individual. In the *Crucible*, Miller initially employs authorial commentary to expose the ideologies of Salem, a society bounded by the binary tenets of a theocentric authority and "still gripped between two diametrically opposed absolutes". Such references to acts of exclusivity allude to unremitting authoritative forces during The Red Scare, where the pervasive fear of communism prompted individuals to succumb to the manipulation of their government. Miller articulates a tragic political regime that causes powerless individuals to inevitably succumb to a society where "there be no road in between", a metaphor emphasising the binary attitudes of Salem. Voiceless individuals are forced to exploit illegitimate power in order to achieve their own ends, albeit at the expense of moral integrity. Abigail's engagement with the rising hysteria in Act One exemplified through false confessions and exclamation "I will not black my face for any of them!", demonstrates her attempt to wield physical power and retain autonomy in a theocracy that seeks to silence her. The detriments of political expressions of power also extends to those bearing legitimate power. Danforth's desire to attain ideological purity is exemplified through the symbolism of the crucible in his remark "we burn a hot fire here; it melts down all concealment", and the bestial connotations in Hale's suggestion to "rip and tear" Betty from the Devil highlight how individual expression and protection is sacrificed for the protection of the collective. Thus, Miller exposes how the costs of political ideologies rooted in absolutism are further exacerbated when these individuals become complicit in proceedings of Salem.

Spiegelman's graphic novel *In The Shadow of No Towers* communicates the limitations of manipulative political systems that seek to elevate their own public image, and like Miller, exposes how the dogmatic assertion of political agendas impact upon the voiceless individual. Spiegelman's grotesque subversion of the conventional linear comic format and use of garish coloured vignettes plastered across the oversized pages heighten the unsettledness and confusion that plagued the individual following the Bush Administration's declaration of "War on Terror" in response to the September 11 attacks. An illustration of Spiegelman burying his head beneath the emblematic image of the American flag coupled with the caption "I should feel safe under here" exemplifies his desire to seek protection from his government following the mass atrocity. Yet, his inability to find solace in patriotic imagery demonstrated by the diabolical remark "inner demons...taken over our shared reality" highlights the demoralising impact of the Bush Administration's desire to pursue

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military retaliation in Iraq, thereby enforcing the government's disregard for the people in order to assert the strength of their political ideology. While Miller exposes the fallibility of a system that elevates political interest above human life, Spiegelman illustrates the impact upon the individual by conveying them as "a bunch of stunned pigeons", when political power is used to assert ideologies perceived to be beneficial to the public, but in fact seek to elevate their own political image. Both composers thereby critique this act of political safeguarding which is more dangerous to the existing society than the enemies it seeks to vanquish.

Context

In response to the abuse of political power, the need for individuals to discharge their political responsibilities by resisting subjugating authoritative forces and accepting their own complicity in their political landscape is paramount in order to restore truth and the protection of the individual. In *The Crucible*, Hale's transition from an idealistic faith in the theocracy, established through the visual symbolism of books "weighted with authority", to denouncement of the court when he declares "cleave to no faith when faith brings blood" represents an individual's ability to accept complicity in falsehood. Further, the characterisation of Proctor as the moral force of the plot through his continued resistance against a theocracy "grounded on the idea of exclusion" represents an individual who actively galvanises change in his political landscape through personal sacrifice. His early interjection "this society will not be a bag to swing around your head" represents an overt challenge to those who wield legitimate power, and the compulsion to protect his own right to "speak (my) heart". However, it is Proctor's admission of his own complicity in the political subterfuge of Salem that Miller champions as an act of moral acknowledgement, that is beyond any other character. Diabolical imagery in Proctor's reference to "Lucifer" and how his "filthy face" is both Danforth's and his own in the dramatic denouement of Act III highlights his recognition of his own moral failings. It is through the characterisation of individuals who question the exclusive, legitimate power of the court and admit to their acts of complicity that Miller is able to heighten the need for individuals to discharge their political responsibilities and thereby ensure "the power of theocracy...was broken".

Similarly, Spiegelman endorses an individual's resistance against unjust political ideals, albeit through his own critique of the Bush Administration's attempt to homogenise America's response to 9/11. The use of alliteration and bestial imagery in his representation of the government as "rampaging Republican elephants" desperately seeking an appropriate response to 9/11, and his facetious proposition for citizens to create an "Ostrich Party" satirises his fellow citizens' blind following of government responses, and thereby elevates his own act of resistance against political ideals breeding terror. However unlike Proctor whose act of political resistance is encapsulated in forthright interjections, Spiegelman's disapproval of his government's desire to "reduce 9/11 all to a war recruitment poster" is realised through subtler expressions of dissent in an inflammatory cartoon. Anthropomorphic imagery depicts himself as a mouse cowering beneath bin-Laden and Bush, both holding weaponry. By coupling this with the caption "equally terrorized by al-Qaeda and by his own government", Spiegelman's inflammatory cartoon enables him to strongly condemn the Bush Administration by equating US military retaliation to the extremism of al-Qaeda and demonstrating how it incites individual vulnerability and powerlessness to object. Further, the bald eagle tied around his neck, which previously

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symbolized American liberty now literally depicts the strangulation of dissenting voices in US discourse post 9/11. Thus he also critiques to the suppression of freedom of speech and thereby the government's desire to mask societal objection to their political decisions.

