

The Crucible

by
Arthur Miller



GCSE English Language Controlled Assessment Study Guide

- crucible** → **noun** a ceramic or metal container in which metals or other substances may be melted or subjected to very high temperatures.
- a place or occasion of severe test or trial: *the crucible of combat*,
 - **ORIGIN** late Middle English: from medieval Latin *crucibulum* 'night lamp, crucible' (perhaps originally a lamp hanging in front of a crucifix), from Latin *crux*, *cruc-* 'cross'.

***The Crucible*: Narrative**

Dramatic Interpretations of Historical Events

When writers take documented historical events as the basis for dramatic narratives they use **artistic license** to create drama. Therefore, they will review the historical record and then alter the 'reality' in order to make it dramatic. This may mean they use artistic license by:

- **compressing time** – that is, when in reality a series of events may have happened over a period of months or even years, a dramatist will reduce the time frame so that the events take place during the course of the play they are writing.
- **create composite characters** – in the actual event that is being dramatised, a number of people may have been involved in different ways, but when writing their play, the dramatist chooses to condense all of the different characters into **one** fictional character. They may even change elements of real-life characters while basing the drama on them. For example, they may change their age to make the fictional events more credible.
- **conjecture events** – this means that the dramatist might add scenes to the drama that were not a part of the historical events. Usually dramatists invent scenes involving their central protagonists to develop credible characters, perhaps showing the protagonists with other characters central to the drama.

Miller uses all of these techniques in *The Crucible*.

Time Compression

The events of *The Crucible* took place in different locations over a much longer period of time than Miller suggests. One of the central reasons for this is because Miller, as a playwright, is concerned with how his text functions in performance; ultimately, he wants to ensure that the play can be performed on stage. Therefore, by limiting the number of locations, he allows theatre directors greater ease when producing the play. Therefore, he sets the action of each act in the same location.

➤ Complete the table below to show the key events in each act:

| Act I | Act II | Act III | Act IV |
|-------------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Reverend Parris's House | Proctor's House | Courtroom | Jail |
| | | | |

Composite Characters & Conjecturing of Events

According to historical sources, at the time of the Salem Witch-hunt, John Proctor was in his mid-sixties, while Abigail Williams was just eleven years old. Therefore, it is unlikely that they ever had an affair in reality. This element of *The Crucible* is fictional, it is conjecture.

- Complete the table below to show how John and Abigail's affair has an impact in each of the four acts of *The Crucible*.

| John and Abigail's Affair | | | |
|---------------------------|--------|---------|--------|
| Act I | Act II | Act III | Act IV |
| | | | |

- Write down the significance of John and Abigail's affair in relation to the rest of the narrative. What function does it serve in Miller's narrative?
- Using the table above and your response to the previous question, explain why Miller chose to alter the ages of the real 'John Proctor' and 'Abigail Williams' and to create the affair that occurs in *The Crucible*.

Another of the ways that Miller altered reality was to change John Proctor's profession. In *The Crucible*, Proctor is a farmer, whereas in reality he was an inn-keeper.

- Why do you think that Miller changed Proctor's profession?

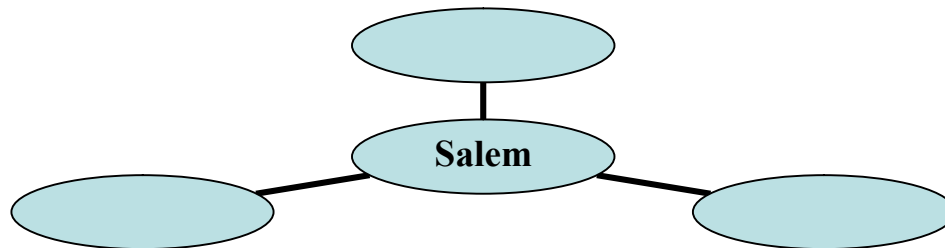
Think about:

- Puritan attitudes to alcohol
- the symbolism of farming
- Proctor's fate at the end of *The Crucible*

The Crucible: Characters

The Crucible is set in a Puritan community. In such communities, the identity and behaviour of each individual was considered to be of concern to everybody. Such communities functioned on the principle that all members of the community were working towards a common goal: the worship of God in line with the word of the Bible.

- Complete the chart below for each of the central characters in the play to show how far they fit into Salem's rigid social order. Comment on how the behaviour of each character shows how they are (or are not) committed to the principles of Salem and its Puritan beliefs.



One of the ways that Miller differentiates the characters is to group them based on their common ideas, beliefs and behaviours. The characters in the play form separate groups according to what they have in common and how they are different.

- Try to come up with a list of names for the different groups that form in *The Crucible*.
- Now complete the table below to show what the different groups are, and who belongs to each one, giving a brief description of the characteristics of each group in the space provided.

You might think about how characters are similar or different according to:

- age
- sex
- behaviour
- religious beliefs

Also, think about whether there are characters who do not fit into particular groups.

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Name of Group | | | |
| Brief Description Of Group | | | |
| Names of Characters in the Group | | | |

The central focus of *The Crucible* is the hysteria generated by the culture of accusation that develops

- Make a list of all the characters who make an accusation throughout the play. Think carefully - some are more obvious than others.
- For each character fill in the table below:

| Accusations | | | |
|-------------|------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Character | Accusation | Textual Quotation | Impact of the Accusation |
| | | | |

- Now focus on the following **major characters**:

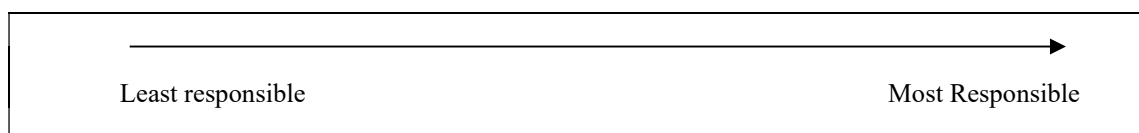
- John Proctor
- Elizabeth Proctor
- Abigail Williams
- Reverend Samuel Parris
- Reverend John Hale
- Deputy Governor Danforth
- Judge Hathorn

- For each individual complete a chart (like the one below) that shows how their character changes with regard to each of the following concepts. Give textual evidence to support your answer.

- religion
- the law
- themselves / each other

| Concept | | | |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| Act I | Act II | Act III | Act IV |
| | | | |

- The ultimate tragedy of *The Crucible* is that the mass-hysteria leads to the execution of John Proctor. On the line below, mark on each of the characters who you think bear some of the responsibility for the descent into chaos and the executions, according to their level of guilt.



- In a play about such complex ideas, it is common for the playwright to use different characters to represent specific concepts. Complete the table below to show which characters represent particular concepts:

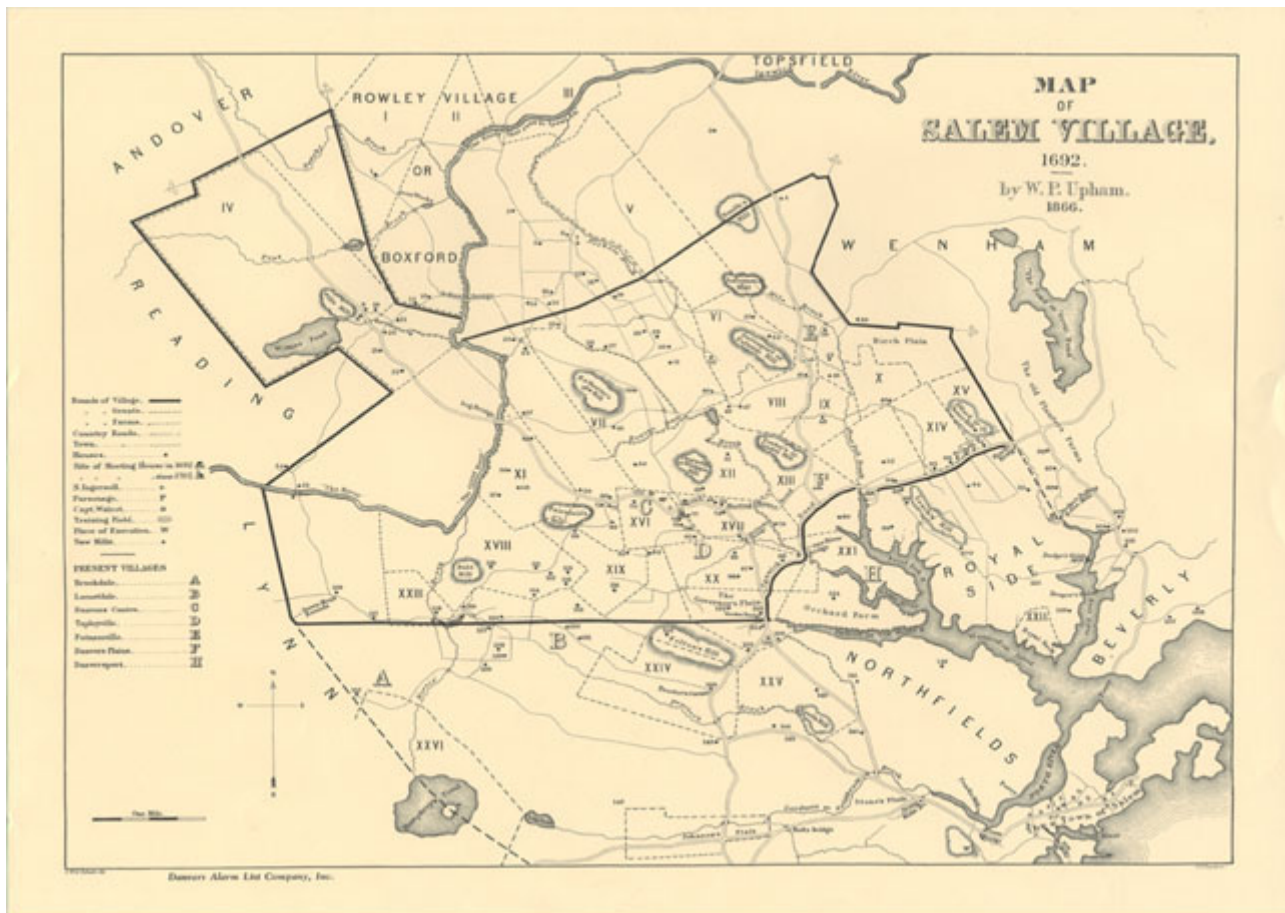
| Characters as Representations of Ideas & Concepts | | |
|---|------------------------------------|------------------|
| Character | Idea / Concept that they Represent | Textual Evidence |
| | | |

- Think about and discuss the following idea:

‘The burden of guilt must fall not on individuals, but on societies that allow themselves to be seduced by extreme ideology into co-operating in the murder of innocents in the process of self-preservation.’

- How far do you think this statement applies to *The Crucible*?

The Crucible: Setting



Map of Salem Village in 1692

- Make a list of the four central settings in the play.
- In your copy of the text, locate Miller's descriptions for each of the settings.
- Complete the table below for each of the four settings using the examples that you have found in the text:

| Setting in <i>The Crucible</i> | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Location | Miller's Description | What is the effect of Miller's description? |
| | | |

- Using the locations listed below, complete the chart to explain its significance in the play:
 - Reverend Parris's house
 - The Courtroom
 - The Jail
 - Proctor's house

| Significance of Settings in <i>The Crucible</i> | | | | |
|---|-----|------------------------------|--|------------------|
| Location | Act | What events take place here? | What does the setting signify and symbolise? | Textual Evidence |
| | | | | |

- Although it may at first seem that Miller has only used four settings in order to help directors stage *The Crucible*, why do you think that he has chosen the four settings he has? Consider the events that take place at each one.
- What clues does Miller give in the play to the type of place that Salem, Massachusetts was at the time the play is set?
- How does Miller create the impression that Salem is a dangerous place?
- Read the statement below:

The discovery of the New World undermined its newness because it was found by men bearing the worst excesses of the Europeans they wanted to escape.
- With this statement in mind, comment on why Miller chose to take the story of a New World settlement as the backdrop for a play about oppression and brutality. Think about how the words in the statement might be relevant to *The Crucible's* events, characters and themes.

The Crucible: Themes, Symbols & Motifs

The key themes in *The Crucible* are concerned with how the characters respond to the Puritanical theocracy in Salem and the consequent mass-hysteria that is generated during the Witch-hunts. Miller's themes remain relevant beyond the world of Salem. Indeed, he intended *The Crucible* to be a commentary on reactionary and oppressive communities at any time in history - including the United States during the fear and paranoia of the McCarthy and HCUA anti-Communist hearings. Below is a list of the **central** themes of *The Crucible*. However, some more complex themes are listed towards the end for you to think about. These final themes will allow you to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the play.

The central themes of *The Crucible* are:

- Religion
- Intolerance
- Hysteria
- Rebellion

Religion

Salem, as a theocracy, is guided by the religious teachings of the Bible. Furthermore, because of the nature of Puritanism, religion is the dominant force in Salem; it pervades all aspects of the characters' lives. The characters are constantly confronted by the demands of religious conformity and the hysteria that erupts during the witch-hunts is caused by the evocation of the central antithesis to Christianity: the devil.

- Look at the headings below. These are all elements of the play that present the theme of religion:
 - Betty's illness / inertness
 - Proctor's relationship with the religious authorities of Salem
 - The trials
 - Proctor's execution
- Use the headings above and create a list of quotations that explore the theme of religion in the play.

For each sub-section, you should create a table like the one below to help structure your ideas:

| Betty's illness & theme of religion | | |
|--|-------------|---|
| Quotation | Page Number | How this quotation presents the theme of religion (refer to the language of your quotation) |
| | | |

Intolerance

Whenever any society commits itself to the absolutes of a particular ideology, the natural consequence is that it becomes intolerant of anything or anyone that deviates from the established philosophy or beliefs. *The Crucible* reflects the tendency of society to show intolerance to alternative perspectives. Indeed, one of Miller's central motivations in writing the play was to mirror the intolerance he witnessed in the United States in the 1950s to suspected Communist sympathisers.

- Look at the headings below. These are all elements of the narrative that present the theme of intolerance:
 - Parris's reaction to Betty's illness
 - The exchanges related to the affair between John and Abigail (Act I & Act II)
 - The conversation between Hale and Proctor at the end of Act I.
 - The trials
- Use the headings above and create a list of quotations that explore the theme of intolerance in the play.

For each sub-section you should create a table like the one below to help structure your ideas:

| The Trials & theme of Intolerance | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|---|
| Quotation | Page Number | How this quotation presents the theme of religion (refer to the language of your quotation) |
| | | |

Hysteria

Hysteria is a state of uncontrolled, illogical and relentless panic. *The Crucible* centres on the consequences of hysteria: that is, the systematic executions of the alleged 'witches' is a consequence of the loss of reason and principle in the face of the fear generated by the supposed presence of the Devil. In communities where hysteria sets in, the consequences are profound: individuals no longer see themselves as part of society but instead become concerned with preserving themselves from the horror of the unknown. By its very nature, hysteria is a state that builds to a point of critical mass; it escalates beyond the control of all who contributed to its creation and therein lays its danger - no longer can it be contained by individuals who, instead, revert to natural instinct to survive.

- Complete the flow-chart below to show how the hysteria in Salem builds towards a point of climax. Use quotations and give references to their location in the text.



Rebellion

Rebellion is one of Miller's central themes in *The Crucible*; it serves as the catalyst for the accusations that lead to the trials and later executions of the suspected 'witches'. Rebellion is presented in numerous ways throughout the play, but there is an inevitability that the characters of the play would rebel against the puritanical rule of the theocrats. That is, in a society based around the absolutes of religious doctrine, temptation and sin are used as controlling mechanisms by the ruling theocrats to regulate the lives of their citizens. The characters in the play rebel in numerous ways, all of which play some part in the hysteria and murder that takes place in Salem.

➤ Look at the headings below:

- Adults and children
 - Temptation and desire
 - Individual free will and social conformity
 - God and Satan
- Using the headings above, find quotations from the text that explore the theme of rebellion in the play.

You should use a chart like the one below to structure your ideas:

| Adults and Children & Theme of Rebellion | | |
|--|-------------|--|
| Quotation | Page Number | How this quotation presents the theme of rebellion (refer to the language of your quotation) |
| | | |

Additional Themes

The four key themes outlined above form the central ideas that Miller presents in *The Crucible*. However, you should consider the themes listed below because they allow you to develop a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the play. For each one you should find textual quotations that trace the development of the themes throughout the play.

- Tyranny
- Bigotry
- Desire, Temptation & Sin
- Redemption & Salvation
- The burden of history

Use the headings to compile and track quotations and examples from the text where the above themes are presented.

A text's motifs are slightly different from its themes. Motifs are used by a writer in order to develop the broader themes that they are writing about.

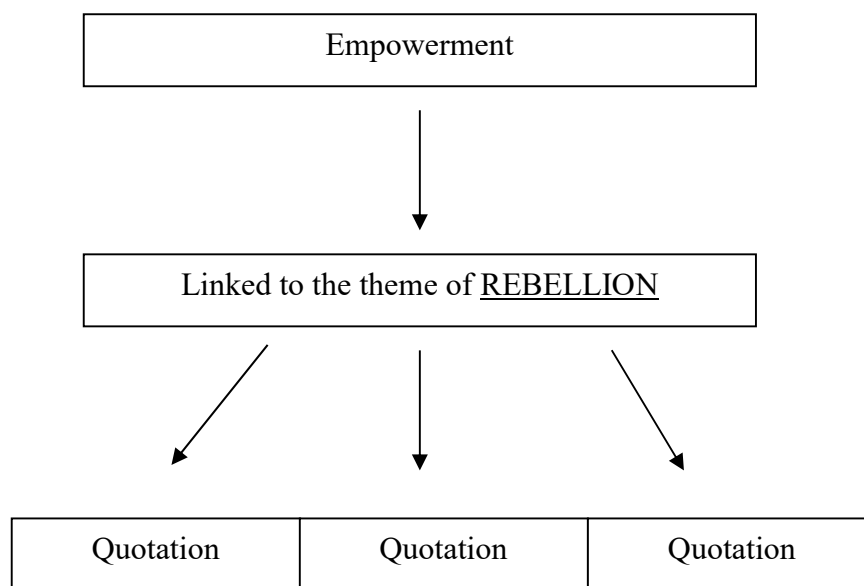
➤ Look at the list below. These are some of the central motifs that Miller has used in *The Crucible* to develop the broader themes that he is writing about.

Motifs

- Empowerment
- Accusations, Confessions & the 'due process' of Law
- Lying, deception & manipulation
- Self-isolation from Society
- Conformity
- Damnation
- Forgiveness & Re-birth

- For each motif, complete a diagram like the one below. Using each motif as a heading, show which theme it is linked to, and find a range of textual quotations that explore each one.

For example:



- Using the list of symbols below complete diagrams for each one as shown below:

- The Crucible (refer to definition at front of this guide)
- The Stallion
- The Four Seasons
- Parris's golden candlesticks
- The domestic verses the pastoral
- The poppet
- The Bible & Religious teachings
- The Witch Trials
- John Proctor

The Crucible: Form - Dramatic Tragedy, Social Drama & Allegory

Tragedy

Tragedy is a genre of drama that was devised by the Greeks and has come to underpin Western culture for hundreds of years. Following the precepts of Aristotle set out in *The Poetics*, dramatic tragedy has come to be defined as a form of drama characterised by its inherent seriousness and dignity, generally having, at its centre, a flawed character in conflict with a higher power, for example, the gods, fate or society. In *The Poetics*, Aristotle defines tragedy as a drama that takes place before an audience in which the flawed character exhibits the four precepts of the tragic hero (nobleness or wisdom, hamartia, peripetia and anagnorisis), which causes the spectator to feel fear and sympathy towards the central protagonist. Furthermore, Aristotle says a dramatic tragedy should have, as its climax, a sense of the spectator being ‘cleansed’ of their fear and anxiety regarding the central protagonist (‘catharsis’).

Central to Aristotle’s definition of tragedy is the notion that there must be a ‘higher being’ at work in the form of the Gods, for example, with whom the central protagonist is in conflict. Aristotle argues that only when characters have confronted the highest forces of nature, and been defeated by their own tragic flaw, can they be considered ‘tragic heroes’. Heroism, by its very definition is concerned with the undertaking of great deeds of bravery that are beneath the grasp of others. Equally, only in taking on the greatest challenges can the protagonist be subjected to the most catastrophic defeat – and therefore evoke fear and sympathy from the spectator which, in turn, leads to the essential catharsis.

Arthur Miller, Tragedy & ‘The Common Man’

In 1949 Miller wrote a seminal essay contesting Aristotle’s definition of ‘tragedy’. Aristotle’s definition of drama, argues Miller, implies that only characters of ‘nobility’ by ‘virtue of birth’ - for example, kings or noblemen - are appropriate ‘tragic heroes’. Miller wrote his essay in response to the lack of tragedies being written in the mid-twentieth century, because, he suggested, dramatists were thinking about Aristotle’s definition too rigidly. Miller wrote:

I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as Kings were...I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing – his sense of personal dignity...the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his ‘rightful’ position in his society.

Miller went on to argue that *all* tragic heroes have a number of traits in common: they act against the established order of their societies and, in the process, they make us realise that those ideas or behaviours that we accept, are shaken to their core. Furthermore, when tragedy befalls the hero, the audience is left to contemplate their own perception of the world, which is, in a sense, the ‘catharsis’ that Aristotle describes as the necessary culmination of any tragedy.

Miller’s attempts to re-define the genre of ‘tragedy’ allowed him to become one of the most successful writers of dramatic tragedy of the 20th Century.

- Re-read the quotation taken from Miller’s essay ‘Tragedy and The Common Man’
- How does John Proctor, the tragic hero of *The Crucible*, exhibit the qualities of a ‘tragic hero’ as defined by Miller?
- How far is Proctor an ‘apt subject for tragedy’?

Social Drama

Immediately after completing *The Crucible*, Miller paid tribute to the Greeks for developing the tradition of ‘social drama’. That is a drama that contends with the conflicts facing individuals within the rules and conventions of their society. Miller pointed out that the Greek tragedies had taught the West some of the basic principles in creating and sustaining civilised society: ‘the great Greek plays taught the Western mind the law. They taught the western mind how to settle tribal conflicts without murdering each other’. Furthermore, it is clear that Miller views drama not just as an expression of artistic skill, but as an important cultural device that educates audiences about their role within society.

***The Crucible* as Social Drama**

The Crucible is evidently a social drama as well as a tragedy. Indeed, that *The Crucible* is a tragedy serves only to amplify its lessons about the individual’s role in society. Salem, as constructed by Miller, is a society crumbling, initially, at the hands of the youths who contrive to create the hysteria that leads to the witch trials; and then, as a consequence of the religious piety of its law makers and religious leaders. In the face of this cataclysmic catastrophe, Miller’s protagonist, Proctor, strives to preserve what is right and honourable about his faith, his society and the principles he holds sacred. Consequently, he is condemned to death: a man, who values truth above his life; his name above a lie and his moral virtue above the guilt of a life lived in shame. He is, by the very letter of Miller’s definition, a tragic hero who leaves us to question our own perception of the world and our place therein. Proctor’s tragedy is born out of his will to change the established order: he refuses to sign away his name to a crime that he has not committed. The injustice of Proctor’s tragedy leaves the audience to question the motivations, agendas and events that create a society in which morality is defeated by piety; in which holiness itself is defeated by those who proclaim to be its protector, and, in turn, cause the moral disintegration of not just a society, but man himself - such that, in the final analysis, man comes to be the very embodiment of that which he fears most – a mythological evil that reaches into, and changes forever, his understanding of humanity.

- If, as Miller claims, the Greeks educated the West in terms of a basic understanding of how to form civilised societies, what do you think Miller wants *The Crucible* to educate its audience about?

***The Crucible* as an Allegory**

Allegory is a common feature of a broad range of artistic disciplines from painting, sculpture to mimetic art. Mimetic art is another term used to describe drama – mimesis literally translates from the Greek as ‘the representation of nature’. Drama is considered to be a physical representation of human nature and the world which it inhabits. An ‘allegory’ is a narrative that contains a specific message which it conveys to the audience by appealing to the imagination; that is, the drama is enjoyed on two levels: a superficial level and a theoretical level. For example, when we watch drama, we see the actions of the characters performed but intellectually we infer from those actions the playwright’s broader meaning. In other words, the message or point that they are trying to convey.

- If *The Crucible* is allegorical, how effective is Miller’s drama in conveying a message or point and what do you think it is?

***The Crucible*: John Proctor as a symbol of Christ**

The Passion Narratives

The Passion is the theological term used to refer to the physical and mental suffering of Christ in the final days of his life beginning with his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane to his crucifixion at Golgotha. In each of the four canonical gospels by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are accounts of Christ's last days. They describe the key events of the final days of Christ's life during the period we now call Easter.

The agony in Gethsemane

Gethsemane is central to the Passion narratives because two of the key events in the crucifixion of Christ took place there. Firstly, Christ prayed in Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion. However, according to Luke, Christ suffered a great agony while praying. He wrote 'his sweat were as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground' (Luke, 22:43-44). In Christian theology, it has come to be believed that as Christ prayed he was suffering for the sins of man and offering himself to God as a sacrifice for the redemption of mankind. It is important also because it was the scene of his betrayal by Judas Iscariot which leads to his arrest and later crucifixion. Judas approached the Jewish authorities offering to betray Jesus and was rewarded with thirty pieces of silver for his efforts. Jesus had predicted his betrayal at what is now called 'The Last Supper' proclaiming, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.' (Matthew 26:20).

Trial at the Sanhedrin

When Christ was arrested he was taken before the Jewish Sanhedrin (High Council) where he was tried for blasphemy in front of the High Priest, Caiaphas. Caiaphas called a number of witnesses who described how Jesus had boasted of the miracles he had carried out. Tiring of the developing chaos, the High Priest said to Jesus, 'I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God', Jesus replied:

You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will
see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power
and coming on the clouds of heaven.

Caiaphas understood Jesus' words to be a confession of blasphemy. For the Jews of the time this was a highly offensive proposition because the Jews believed that they would be saved by the return of a Davidic King who would deliver them from their enemies into a period of unbroken peace. By not denying Caiaphas's accusation, Christ was claiming to be that saviour. Consequently, he was found guilty by the Sanhedrin and turned over to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

Pontius Pilate

Christ was taken before Pontius Pilate who was reluctant to order Jesus' crucifixion, desired by the Jews, because he did not understand his crime. However, stirred by the Jewish chief priests and elders, the crowd urged Pilate to order his crucifixion. Pilate's position at this point historically had been weakened by a series of revolts in the Judaea province, and detecting further unrest, Pilate announced to the crowd 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves' (Matthew 27:24), to which the crowd replied 'His blood be upon us and on our children!' (ibid). Jesus was then removed to be flogged and crucified.

The Crucifixion at Golgotha & the Curtain of the Temple

As was the custom of the day, Christ carried the beam of the cross on which he would be crucified to Golgotha - assisted by Simon of Cyrene. When he arrived at Golgotha, Christ was nailed to the cross. A sign was placed over his head which read: 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews'. The gospel of Matthew describes how from noon onwards 'a darkness came over the whole land' until three o' clock when Jesus cried out, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' ('My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?') and died. At that point, the Gospels describe how the curtain of the temple was torn in two and the 'earth shook'.

The Crucifixion & Atonement

The Crucifixion is central to the Christian faith because of the concept of Atonement (making amends for sin). Many Christians believe that the crucifixion of Christ was necessary to reunite Man with God. According to Christian theology, man – as represented by Adam – had fallen when Adam was tempted into sin by Eve in the Garden of Eden, and since that point had been distant from God. Christians argue that the sacrifice of Jesus was essential in order for Man to return to God. Therefore, Jesus' crucifixion represents the redemption (freeing from sin) of Mankind from original sin. It is believed therefore, when Christ was in agony in Gethsemane, he was offering himself as the sacrifice for mankind. Hence, Christians place such considerable emphasis on the concept of redemption, because it forms the basis of their religious beliefs.

Parallels between *The Crucible* & Christ's Passion

It has been argued by some critics that there are significant religious overtones in Proctor's death. Indeed, some even draw direct parallels between the redemption of man through Christ's crucifixion and the redemption of Salem through Proctor's death. It is possible to draw direct links between events in the Passion narratives and the tragic climactic events in *The Crucible*.

- Re-read the section entitled 'The agony in Gethsemane' and then look again at the section of the play from page 101. How might it be possible to draw comparisons between the suffering of Jesus and John Proctor's emotions as he witnesses the events in this section?
- Re-read the section entitled 'Trial at the Sanhedrin' and then look once more at Proctor's speech that begins: 'A fire, a fire is burning'. How do you think Christ's words to Caiaphus are similar to Proctor's words to Danforth? Think in terms of how they might be offensive in each context and how they might both be considered 'blasphemous' (disrespectful of God).
- Look again at Act IV leading towards Proctor's execution. What parallels might we draw between the behaviour of the authority figures in *The Crucible* and the actions of Pilate, Caiaphus and the Jewish elders in the Passion narratives?
- Look closely at the section entitled 'The Crucifixion & Atonement'. How might Proctor's death be similar in the sense that he atones for the sins of the people of Salem? Think about what leads to Proctor's execution, but also to the idea of his unborn child and regained love for Elizabeth.
- If you think there is a sustainable parallel between the events of the Passion narratives and Proctor's death, how is Proctor's death paradoxical? Consider the nature of Salem society and its founding principles.

Arthur Miller: Life & Works

The Early Years & The Wall Street Crash of 1929

Arthur Miller was born in Harlem, New York, on October 17th 1915. Harlem was a cosmopolitan and elegant neighbourhood during this period and was home to German, Italian, Jewish and Afro-American immigrants. Miller's family was wealthy. His father, a Polish immigrant who was all but illiterate, had built a clothing business which boasted over a thousand employees. However, Miller's family were caught in the aftermath of the 1929 Wall Street Crash, which caused a global depression, leading to massive unemployment and previously unthinkable poverty across the US and many other parts of the World.

For Miller, the Depression of 1929 would become a formative event in his youth. He recalled how 'there were three suicides on the little block where we lived. They couldn't cope. The impact was incalculable.' For the young Miller, the experience of the Depression was profound: his family moved away from Harlem to Brooklyn and, with employment opportunities limited, he became a crooner and had his own radio show where he sang 'the latest hits' with a 'blind pianist' for accompaniment. The 'Crash' had left Miller needing to take a series of short-term jobs in order to pay for his university education. His family's business was destroyed, their stocks and shares lost their value and his family were, ironically, in the same poverty stricken state that Miller's father had left in Poland. However, the Depression had more than a practical impact on the Miller's life – it was also symbolic of something much greater.

Like most immigrants to the United States, Miller's Polish-Jewish father had left Europe in the pursuit of 'The American Dream'. To many people of the World, thousands of miles away in poverty stricken, undemocratic countries, America was seen as a country which afforded opportunity: that is, the chance of take control of their lives, make money, have property and become as successful as they chose to be, living in a 'free' and 'democratic' country. In other words, people saw the United States as a place where hard work and determination would lead to the material success they could not attain in their own countries. Miller himself describes the idea of the American dream and its effect on the people he lived around during the 1920s:

These people were profound believers in the American Dream. The day the money stopped their identity was gone...America is hope, even when it doesn't work... America is promises.

For the Millers, and thousands of immigrant families like them, the Wall Street Crash changed everything and it came to symbolise the destruction of the values and aspirations that they had lived by. Miller described the experience as a: 'feeling at the back of the brain that the whole thing can sink at a moment's notice... everything else is ephemeral. It's going to blow away, except what a person is.' Equally, Miller sees the Depression as an unhealed scar on the American experience: 'I don't think America ever got over the depression'. Miller's reflections are telling because they inform so many of his dramatic works and explain why so many of his plays focus on the role of the individual in times of extreme social crisis, like in *The Crucible*. Miller is constantly concerned with the battle between responsibility to the self and society in times of catastrophe, and often creates drama in which the personal conflicts of his characters are a microcosm of the wider social conflicts in the dramatic worlds he creates for them.

Miller, McCarthy & The Communist Witch-Hunts

Following the end of World War II, America became engaged in the Cold War with Russia and other Communist countries. American-Russian relations soured because the US believed that the USSR was conspiring to convert the world to Communism, an ideology at odds with America's democratic principles. In turn, this caused many Americans to both distrust and fear Communists. However, the Cold War was also fought on American soil. The fear and paranoia generated by the fear of Communists led some Americans to believe that the 'Reds' had infiltrated American society at every level.

One man in particular felt that it was his duty to pursue the Communist threat: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy. McCarthy created the blue print for a decade of persecution and paranoia that gripped the US. McCarthy was appointed to the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations from where he carried out a campaign against Americans who were considered to have made statements sympathetic to Communism, had given reason to believe they were circulating with Communists or had shown anti-American sentiments. Although McCarthy was responsible for establishing a climate of fear, he had little to do with Miller's appearance before 'HCUA' – The House Committee on Un-American Activities. McCarthy was a senator and the HCUA was comprised of members of the House of Representatives. A common mistake is to assume that McCarthy had any material connection to Miller; instead, Miller came to be a victim of the McCarthy doctrine known as *McCarthyism*.

HCUA had been established in 1938 and was primarily concerned with all 'Un-American' activities, but by the 1950s, partially because of the paranoia created by McCarthy's pursuit of supposed Communist sympathisers, the HCUA found itself investigating Hollywood, of which Miller was a part. Writers, directors and actors were called before the committee and interrogated about their alleged links to Communists. Some were found to have been sympathisers but, for the majority, they were merely the victims of false accusations. One of the central figures in the HCUA investigations was Elia Kazan, an acclaimed theatre and film director, who had worked with Miller on his stage play *All My Sons*. Kazan made a series of allegations about numerous Hollywood figures leading to the HCUA's focus during the mid-1950s. The most horrific outcome of the 1950s Communist witch-hunts was the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg by electrocution at New York's Sing-Sing prison. The US Government had asserted that the Rosenbergs had sold secrets to the Russians. On the night of their execution, the audience at a performance of *The Crucible* stood in a moment's silence.

There are significant parallels between the experience of 1950s America and the world of *The Crucible*: both are characterised by their emphasis on allegation and the paranoia generated when society is gripped by the fear of a common enemy. In the case of 1950s America, that fear was Communism; in Salem in 1692 it was the fear of witchcraft. Miller reflected on his reasons behind writing *The Crucible* in protest at the Communist Witch-hunts: 'the message of the time was that there was no such thing as society... just people doing what they wanted [to preserve their own lives].' This sense of the fall of society is something to which Miller returns throughout his works – but it is one of the central ideas of *The Crucible*: that is, Miller is describing a world in which the values that bind communities are destroyed when the individuals within that society are faced with the loss of their own personal freedoms and liberties, indeed, even their lives.

The Witch-hunts also served as a reminder of the lessons that Miller drew from the Depression of the 1930s. Again, the values that America represented, of freedom, liberty and integrity, were abandoned in favour of a more tribalistic obsession with what was required of individuals to preserve themselves. Again, America, to Miller, had become a place of failed dreams and betrayed ideals. This is important because when we read *The Crucible* we see a common betrayal, but in the play, it is the betrayal of religious values.

Miller the Dramatist & Monroe

Miller is considered to be one of the most important dramatists of the 20th Century whose works have dissected and commented on the experience of American life beyond the Second World War. Miller's career has spanned six decades in which he has written some of the most searing examinations of American life. Miller's primary thematic concerns as a writer include the nature of society and the role of the individual within their community. A committed liberal (someone who believes in progress and change), Miller's work maintains a focus on working class people while attacking the intrusion of government into individual's lives (for example *McCarthyism* and *HCUA*).

Miller first rose to prominence in 1947 when *All My Sons* won two prestigious Tony Awards. This was followed by further acclaim for his next play, *Death of a Salesman* (1949). As the Communist hysteria rose in the 1950s, Miller wrote first, *An Enemy of the People*, an adaptation of a play by Henrik Ibsen, and then *The Crucible*. At the time *The Crucible* was considered unsuccessful and only ran for 197 performances compared with 742 for *All My Sons*. However, as audiences began to see the relevance of the play in later years, *The Crucible* became the most performed of all Miller's works.

Miller was also a noted Hollywood screenwriter, his most famous screenplay was for a film called *The Misfits*, directed by the acclaimed John Huston and starring Marilyn Monroe. Miller had married Monroe in 1956. Some members of HCUA argued that it was a cover-up to hide his Communist affiliations. However, their marriage was plagued by a number of flaws: primarily, Monroe's open infidelity with an actor called Yves Montand, her compulsive drug and substance abuse, and Monroe's multitude of mental illnesses. By the time *The Misfits* was shooting in 1960, the screenplay that had been intended as a present to his wife was, in fact, a distraction from the divorce he had filed.

Miller's marriage to Monroe has significance for several reasons, primarily because of the stature and mythology of Monroe herself. One critic has commented that Monroe was the 'most potent sexual myth of the century'. That is, the beauty, charisma and charm of Monroe's screen persona was so great that she became the subject of a mythology greater than the woman herself. Indeed, Monroe was the antithesis of the screen persona that she projected: insecure, lonely and unable to trust anyone. Monroe was iconic: she came to symbolise the beauty and grace that became the benchmark for Hollywood actresses from that point forward. She was further immortalised by her premature death in 1962 in mysterious circumstances. Some allege she was the victim of a government plot instigated by the Kennedy family; she had been involved in affairs with both John and Robert Kennedy - the President and Attorney General - at the time of her death.

Monroe is significant when we try to further understand the work of Miller because she is another myth, like the American Dream, that Miller saw destroy itself in the face of human fallibility (weakness). This perhaps explains Miller's preoccupation with how human behaviour destroys the very ideals we believe enhance our lives in times of crisis. Again, this parallel with Miller's experience of America can be drawn to *The Crucible*.

Arthur Miller died in 2005 having spent much of his later years living in the Connecticut Hills.