***The Crucible*** by Arthur Miller

**I/ Historical Context:** Miller & 1950s McCarthy trials in Cold War USA, Red Scare/ anti-Communism, Blacklisting.

**II/ Genre of Play**: Historical tragedy, based on real events; Allegorical: the Salem witch trials are a parallel to modern USA McCarthyism and Blacklisting; the play is a critical commentary about power abuse and absolutism, the paranoia about communism, and the power of fear within a society.

**III/ Structure**: a play of four acts and an overture

**IV/ Setting**: Salem, 1692

**V/ Play’s Title**: meaning severe test; pot for melting metals (symbolizing the testing of John’s integrity)

**VI/ Plot:** mostly Realist linear/ chronological plot development

**VII/ Themes**: **power abuse,** **absolutism**

**VIII/ Modernist Features** **: The Classical Vs The Modern Tragedy**

**Questions**

1. According to Miller, the common man can pretend to a tragic status and his story can

provide materials for tragedy provided that his story engages issues of importance, such as

the sense of personal dignity. How, do you think, does this apply to *The Crucible*?

1. Miller questions the highbred position of the classical tragic heroes. He argues that the common man can evoke tragic feelings on two conditions:

**One**: He should display an intensity of feeling and passion. This quality cannot be achieved if the protagonist’s commitment to his course is not the maximum possible. In other words, the hero should be faithfully devoted to his quest and his involvement should be strong and vigorous

**Two**: The hero should be aware of his social condition and the implication of his choice. He may lack intellectual fluency to verbalise his situation or even a complete consciousness, but he should never be unaware of the ultimate questions that he sacrifices his life for.

Clarify how Miller’s “hero” in *The Crucible*satisfies these two requirement/conditions.

1. Tragedy for Miller comes from the external forces operated on the man, his failure of confrontation towards the society he lives in. The importance of the tragic flaw is diminished in Miller’s viewpoint. Clarify how this viewpoint applies to his play.
2. Miller experiments with the device of **chorus** (*group of performers who comment with a collective voice on the action of the scene they appear in, or provide necessary insight into action*) from the classical Greek Tragedy in *The Crucible* to comment on the social background of the play and provide the audience with detailed information on the characters. Clarify how.
3. Although Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953) was written years after his *Death of a Salesman* (1949), but it reflects more Realistic than Modernist traits in comparison to *Death of a Salesman*. Give examples of Realistic traits in the play.

**Answers:**

1. The protagonist of Miller’s tragedy is John Proctor, a common man –farmer. The story of his struggle against all odds to preserve his name, his moral values, and his personal dignity, is a source of inspiration to modern man, and is worth dramatization as it proves John is so committed to his cause even at the expense of sacrificing his life.
2. John Proctor through the play proves faithfully devoted to expose Abigail’s false accusations to innocent people, including his wife and himself, he doesn’t hesitate to expose his sins publicly and tarnish his reputation. His commitment also appears in his intensely passionate asking for his wife’s forgiveness, his several attempts to persuade Abigail to confess at court and save the lives of innocent people, as well as in the most intense scene in the play when John firmly chooses to die rather than give in to the pressure of the corrupt judges and ministers. This stance definitely proves that John, the common powerless farmer, is well aware that he struggles against the power of corrupt authorities, and that his life is at stake, yet he stands firm for his moral values.
3. John’s ‘flaw’, his committing of adultery, is not the focus of the play, as is the case with classical tragedy, but rather his faithful devotion to his moral values and his sincere commitment and struggle to defend innocent people, at all price, in face of the whole community is what makes the play Modernist.
4. Miller resorts to the omniscient narrator to replace the traditional chorus in his tragedy, which functions well.
5. The omniscient narrator is a case in point. Other traits/ features of Realism are: background information, in Overture, about Salem trials, Puritan mindset, reference to McCarthyism, commenting on action, linearity of plot, and tackling of, thematically speaking, a social and political issue of the 50s USA, to say the least.