

The crucible: troubles in the proctor household

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Emotions Run High in Proctor Household In the beginning of Act II of Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible*, the story presents an interaction between John Proctor and his wife, Elizabeth. The interaction between the couple emphasizes that their relationship is anything but normal than that of a married couple. The main cause of their awkward relationship stems from John's wandering lust. John Proctor has conflicting emotions towards Elizabeth because both of them are trying to avoid the huge fact that he committed adultery.

The conflicting emotions are present when John Proctor tries to avoid confrontations with his wife, the small talk between them where John constantly tries to please Elizabeth, and the lack of mutual agreement between them. Throughout the scene, John Proctor tried very hard in order to avoid altercations with his wife. In a patriarchal society of the 1600's, it would be very common for a woman to be subservient towards her husband.

In the Proctor household, it is no different since Elizabeth quietly questions her husband's authority because she "fear(s) to anger him" although she has all the leverage she needs in an argument by simply stating the fact that he cheated on her (Miller 53). However, John displays the complete opposite behavior of what is expected of a male in a patriarchal society. Firstly, when John comes home and tastes the soup his wife prepared, he is "not quite pleased" with it for it was not seasoned well (Miller 49).

After adding more salt himself, John notices that Elizabeth is intently watching him taste the soup. Instead of being a typical husband back in the 1600s by criticizing such a small mistake about how his food is seasoned, he compliments on how good-tasting the soup is while knowing that it was the

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product of his handy-work. By holding his tongue, he avoids a confrontation between him and his wife over a very small issue of not putting enough salt in the soup.

Additionally, John seems not to be the typical male in his society when he, “as gently as he can” asks for some cider (Miller 51). It is clear that this is not what his normal behavior would be because, as Elizabeth is fetching him his cider, she feels “a sense of reprimand...for having forgot” (Miller 51). Because Elizabeth felt as if she did something to wrong her husband, she expects that John will make a huge fuss over the issue. However, John casually brushes off her mistake by just changing the subject to him tending to the fields.

His careful behavior towards Elizabeth makes him adopt the tone of a husband that has done something to immensely displease his wife and is trying not to anger her. Clearly, it shows that John has conflicting emotions towards his wife because he wants to act as a typical husband back in the 1600s, but he remembers the heinous crime he committed and tries to avoid confrontation and the possibility of the two of them talking about his mistake. John Proctor’s entire conversation with Elizabeth is mostly saying things to please her in an attempt to make-up for his affair.

For example, while eating his meal he makes constant remarks about their farm being extremely big and the reason for coming home so late was because he was busy “planting far out to the forestedge” (Miller 49). In this obvious attempt to please Elizabeth, John hints at the fact that he has worked very hard on their farm. By hinting at this, he hopes to show

Elizabeth that he is working for the greater good of the family and that he is not spending time with Abigail.

Furthermore, John wants to make sure that Elizabeth sees all his hard work when he suggests that on " Sunday... (they'll) walk the farm together" (Miller 51). The above passage clearly shows how much John is trying to please Elizabeth because he openly said that they would go explore the farm on Sunday which is supposed to be dedicated to a day of prayer where no one is supposed to do any work and if an individual skips church service, they would get in trouble.

Secondly, John tries to please Elizabeth with material wealth when he breaks the awkward silence between them by explicitly saying that " if the crop is good I'll buy George Jacob's heifer. How would that please you? " (Miller 50). By asking Elizabeth her opinion on what she thinks about his decision to buy a heifer shows an atypical relationship between a husband and wife back in the 1600s since the male usually does not ask for their wife's opinion on their decisions and that John is also trying hard to please his wife.

The typical male attitude toward women voicing their opinions on things is also present in John's demeanor when he explodes at the slight thought that Elizabeth " has lost all faith in him" due to the fact that he " faltered slightly" at the thought of hurting Abigail's reputation (Miller 54). The constant battle in John's demeanor to act as the man of the house as well as the caring husband act he is struggling to put up in order to make up for his mistake is an example of the conflicting emotions he is experiencing while dealing with his wife.