

Discuss the role of john proctor

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



Discuss the role of John Proctor in 'The Crucible'. Why does he choose to die at the end of the play? John Proctor is the protagonist of the play 'The Crucible', written by Arthur Miller. This is because Miller uses Proctor as a character to help the audience understand the characters' experience. He does this by either making sympathetic expressions or the actions that Proctor makes, whether they are violent or confusing. Miller makes us feel sympathetic for Proctor when Proctor's wife, Elizabeth gets taken away to court for being accused of doing 'the devil's work'.

Proctor knows she is innocent but nobody will believe him. In Act I, John Proctor's role is to introduce himself and show his character: 'Be you deaf? I forbid you leave the house did I not?' (Proctor, Act I) This comment suggests he likes to be powerful and in control, in this case, by being forceful. He feels 'strong about hypocrisy, but is even-tempered.

Miller tells us that 'in the presence of Proctor a fool felt his foolishness instantly'. He also tells us that Proctor 'is a sinner against his own vision of decent conduct', of which he is talking about the affair with Abigail Williams.

This is dramatic irony as, only three characters (including Proctor) are aware of this. When we first meet Proctor he is with Abigail, Mary and Mercy Lewis. Abigail's first words are: 'Gah, I'd almost forgotten how strong you are John Proctor!' (Abigail, Act I) John Proctor quickly realises what she is implying and replies: 'What's this mischief then?' (Proctor, Act I) This shows he doesn't want anything to happen between him and Abigail. 'No, no Abby. That's done with.' (Proctor, Act I) Later on he replies with this to Abigail, and

this shows he is strong-willed, recognises what is happening and the mistake.

However Abigail thinks that John is just playing around with her and speaks of how he clutched her back behind his house and sweated like a stallion. ' I may have looked up. ' (Proctor, Act I) This quotation suggests that Proctor is still interested and this brings across a message that people don't change, in this case Proctor a sinner, but then the strong, powerful part of his character comes across and he threatens to whip her, to which the stage directions say ' shaking her'. This suggests he regrets the affair and wants no more to do with Abigail.

As an affair is more likely to have happened in the 20th century, the audience sympathise with him as the play is set in the late 17th century, so Proctor is a man ahead of his time. When Proctor meets Hale, he wants him to make Salem more realistic. He shows his sensible character, but could also be seen that Proctor is trying to be ' in charge' and think he knows too much: ' He don't believe in witches. ' (Giles, Act I) ' I never speak of witches one-way or the other. Will you come Giles? ' (Proctor, Act I) ' I've heard you to be a sensible man Mr Hales.

I hope you'll leave some of it in Salem. ' (Proctor, Act I) Act II shows Proctor's house, and Proctor is tense, which brings tension upon the audience. He carries a gun, which suggests insecurity among Salem, and himself. He places it leaning on the wall, which is an accessible point, again showing insecurity. It makes the audience feel inferior. As Elizabeth walks down the stairs he goes to a basin washing his hands and face. This is symbolic as he

is trying to forget the affair, because he feels so guilty. This builds more tension: 'What keeps you so late? It's almost dark.'

'(Elizabeth, Act II) This comment of Elizabeth's shows she is anxious and suspicious of his whereabouts. He replies that he was 'planting far out the forest edge'. Then goes on to say: 'Pray now for a fair summer.' (Proctor, Act II) He is trying to please his wife, still feeling guilt. He says with a grin: 'I mean to please you, Elizabeth.' (Proctor, Act II) Elizabeth replies, although hard to say, which suggests denial or disbelief: 'I know it, John.' (Elizabeth, Act II) Proctor and Elizabeth fear each other, and this illustrates the feature of the play-fear.

Their short sentences and being silent suggests this, and also brings tension upon their marriage, and the audience. Act II is mostly to do with John Proctor, the visiting of Hale to which he is questioned about his religious efforts, his arguments with his wife, his suspicions of the witchcraft in Salem and Abigail, and the arrest of his wife. He grabs the search warrant off Cheever: 'Proctor, you dare not touch the warrant.' (Cheever, Act II) 'Ripping the warrant.' (Stage directions, Act II) This is Proctor's angry side.

He knows what Abigail is up to, yet no one will believe him. They go on what Abigail says. As he rips up the warrant, he puts a reputation to his name at the courts of the Witch trials. Act III shows Danforth, a deputy governor, talking to Proctor about witchcraft. He is questioning about the pretence that Mary Warren has confessed. He wants a second view from John Proctor: 'We burn a hot fire her; it melts down all concealment.' (Danforth, Act III) This

relates to the title of the play 'The Crucible'. It is a metaphor of a crucible, which points out the message of the play.

As a crucible is a container in which metals are heated to extract the pure elements. In the play, witches are to be purified and 'to come back to God'. When Mary is in court, Proctor is determined to get the judges to see what is really happening. He goes into the courts and confesses his sin of adultery with Abigail to try and make the judges see how much of a 'whore' she really is. He risks his well-preserved name to save his wife from being hanged. The judges have no proof: 'In her life, sir, she have never lied.' (Proctor, Act III)

Here he talks of Elizabeth, and he thinks she will tell the courts the truth of the affair, but instead she thinks the courts don't know. She worries that she is risking her husband's well-dignified name, and lies: 'Answer the question! Is your husband a lecher!' (Danforth, Act III) 'No, sir.' (Elizabeth, Act III) Proctor gets taken into jail for perverting the course of justice: 'Marshal! Take him and Corey with him to the jail!' (Danforth, Act III) Hale realises what is happening and quits the courts. Act IV is tragic, bringing the death of the 'hero' of the play.

Danforth is doing almost anything he can to get a confession from Proctor. For example he gets Elizabeth, his wife that he tries so hard to please, to go and talk to him. They understand what Proctor meant by all the lies. Abigail ran off to Barbados. When Proctor sees Elizabeth again, it creates a tragic atmosphere. To them it seems almost unreal, like they didn't think they would see each other again. The short, quick sentences that they exchange

give us a sense of tension: ' You are a – marvel, Elizabeth. ' (Proctor, Act IV) ' You – have been tortured? ' (Elizabeth, Act IV)

As she asks Proctor this it proves that she wants to forgive him, and that she wants to love him again. He decides to confess about witchery, for Elizabeth's sake. Once the confession has been written down he grabs it, saying: You have all witnessed it – it is enough. ' (Proctor, Act IV) He refuses to sign his confession. He doesn't want to blacken his name anymore: ' God knows how black my sins are! It is enough! ' (Proctor, Act IV) If he doesn't give it back, or sign the confession, he will be hanged, he will be killed. Instead he rips it like, just like he did the warrant/ He decides to die.

The atmosphere turns tragic and goes still. The audience's reaction is also tragic, but also understandable – after all, that was the role of John Proctor. He chooses to die because he would blacken his name, and his children's name – Proctor. He realises he has ruined his reputation from the affair, and that the courts in Salem were finished. He couldn't lie anymore. He chose his own death rather than betrayal of his conscience. This shows us that he too has come through the fire to be purified, just like the pure elements extracted from the metals in a crucible.