

Atticus finch and john proctor as men of conscience



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Both fictional characters, John Proctor from Arthur Miller's play "The Crucible" and Atticus Finch from Harper Lee's novel "To Kill a Mockingbird" are considered to be men of conscience. A man of conscience is one who is aware of his moral and ethical judgements or pronouncements and has a strong desire to prefer right over wrong. His life is ruled by his desire of seeking truth and justice in all that surrounds him and within himself. These attributes are displayed by both characters throughout their stories. In Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*; a play set in 17th century Salem a small town in Massachusetts burdened by the mad hunts for nonexistent witches, we are introduced to the character John Proctor. What differentiates John from the other inhabitants of Salem is that he refuses to hand over his good conscience, even if his life is on the line. This means that John would never accuse another as a witch to save himself.

Proctor is aware that he has sinned against the morals of the time, due to his affair with Abigail, a devious and dissembling girl of 17. "He is a sinner, a sinner not only against the moral fashion but against his own vision of decent conduct." Despite all the power and respect he appears to have in Salem, this still has an effect on his conscience which troubles him throughout the play. This effect is evident in John's relationships with people, especially with his wife Elizabeth Proctor. When Proctor tries to re-establish his relationship with Elizabeth he says "I mean to please you Elizabeth" although he becomes angered when his wife does not forgive him completely, "You forgive nothing and forget nothing" and "An everlasting funeral marches round your heart". Proctor's good conscience allows him to still care for Elizabeth; this is shown when she is accused of being a witch by

Abigail, Proctor says " I will fall like an ocean on that court". Proctor puts himself in grave danger to save his wife and others by denouncing Abigail as a whore in the open court. This shows that he is a man of principle as he is putting his own life in danger for the good of others.

In the final act John has been arrested for corrupting the soul of Mary Warren. He has the choice to lie, by admitting he is guilty and naming others that were compacted with the devil. His other option is to refuse to sign the deposition which would allow him to keep his good conscience and be hung as an innocent man rather than becoming a liar. At first Proctor decides to confess, because he has sinned in the past. However, when he is pressed to untruthfully name others who were in contact with the devil, he realises that he cannot confess. This is because naming other innocents would be handing over his conscience. When Proctor refuses to confess, Danforth asks why. Proctor cries " Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! How may I live without my name" This shows how Proctor cannot live his life with a corrupted conscience and status.

Therefore John decides to keep his conscience by hanging as a good man rather than living as a liar. Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a story set in Maycomb, Alabama; a town which is suffering from the Great Depression. It is a tale about knowledge, innocence, prejudice and courage. This novel introduces us to another man of conscience, Atticus Finch, a lawyer and caring father. He is an intelligent man, who has the ability see past the ill in anyone. Much like Proctor, his great wisdom and conscience grants him respect from everyone in the town, even though he is criticized by most of the town members for his unprejudiced attitude towards negroes. <https://assignbuster.com/atticus-finch-and-john-proctor-as-men-of-conscience/>

According to the character Mrs Maudie “ Atticus is a man who does for other people the unpleasant things that they have to do”. He is a man of justice and will fight for a cause even if he is positive that he will be beaten in the end.

He also tries his best to convey these values to his children. In the novel, Atticus accepts the responsibility to undertake the Tom Robinson case and to defend him to the best of his ability. Atticus does this as he can understand the individual worth of someone regardless of their colour; he believes that all people are equal and tries to focus on the good part of everyone. It is this attitude that allows him to tolerate Bob Ewell who means to hurt him. This point is justified in Atticus’s words “ I try my best to love everyone”. It appears that Atticus is different from Proctor who does seem to dislike some people. One of these people that Proctor despises is Reverend Parris, a paranoid and power hungry figure who Proctor generally hates throughout the play. Proctor is also a man who often resorts to violence.

This is justified by Proctor when he threatens to whip Abigail, “ Do you look for a whipping?” Whilst Atticus is a man who tends to deal with his matters by using strong words. For example, when his son Jem destroys Mrs Dubose’s camellias, instead of beating him Atticus makes Jem go and read to her as a punishment. What Jem is unaware of, is that he is helping Mrs Dubose cure her morphine addiction. When Mrs Dubose passes away she leaves a perfect camellia blossom in a box for Jem as a passing gift. Jem doesn’t understand the purpose of the gift, so Atticus explains to Jem that the camellia was a way of telling him that everything was alright. Atticus also provides a valuable lesson to Jem about what real courage is and how Mrs <https://assignbuster.com/atticus-finch-and-john-proctor-as-men-of-conscience/>

Dubose possessed this quality “ Courage is not a man with a gun in his hand. It’s knowing you’re licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do.

” This illustrates Mrs Dubose’s courage to free herself of the addiction before she died. The quote is also a reflection on Atticus’s bravery to defend an innocent negro, when he knew from the start that there is no chance of him winning the case. This shows that Atticus tries his best to convey his good conscience and values to his children. Atticus hopes that these moral and ethical lessons will eventually turn them into principled beings, who will later go on to help many others as he does. The main similarity between the two characters, is that they both put themselves in danger in the hope of ridding their communities of what is wrong. Atticus defends Tom Robinson at the risk of his and his children’s safety, to show the community that negroes are equal to Whites and have the right to enjoy social respect and justice. He does this to show that the law should be free of all prejudice, “ The one place where a man ought to get a square deal is in a courtroom, be he any colour of the rainbow, but people have a way of carrying their resentments right into a jury box.” Whilst Proctor’s concern for justice outstrips his concern for his reputation when he confesses to having an affair with Abigail, John Proctor says “ I have known her sir! I have known her”.

By telling the truth about his affair it shows that Abigail is making false accusations of Elizabeth harming her so that she can be with John. He did this so he could prove that Abigail has dissembled the town by naming nonexistent witches, the result of justifying that Abigail is a fibber would be that all the people accused of witchcraft would be released, therefore

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helping the community. In conclusion, both John Proctor (towards the end of the play) and Atticus Finch are ideal paradigms of men of conscience regardless of their differences. This is shown by their moral and ethical judgements and pronouncements and their ability to prefer right over wrong. Their correct deeds and behaviour make them renowned as respectable and influential individuals in their communities.