

What is the conflict between Elizabeth and John Proctor?

[Life](#), [Emotions](#)



Miller effectively creates a sense of tension and conflict between John and Elizabeth Proctor at the beginning of Act two. Act two follows directly on from a very highly charged and climatic note. At the end of act one Abigail and the girls accuse many people in Salem of being witches and a state of hysteria is reached. It is therefore a surprise that act two is not a court scene or trial, merely a domestic scene between John and Elizabeth Proctor.

This variation is a good thing I believe as it helps to keep the reader interested and keeps the play from becoming monotonous. This is a very important scene. Miller I believe created this scene and the love interest between Abigail and John Proctor to make the ending of the play far more dramatic. If a significant rift is created between John and Elizabeth, then surely the ending will become more impressive, because as soon as they have conquered their problems and regained trust in each other following John's fight to free Elizabeth, John is hanged.

This scene is also important to help us understand Elizabeth's dilemma in act three when Danforth asks her whether John had an affair with Abigail. John is unable to tell her what to say so Elizabeth has to decide for herself whether or not to tell the truth, she is unaware that John has confessed to the affair so denies it happened so as not to incriminate him. Act two helps us to understand that she most definitely did know about the affair and had not forgotten, so therefore is lying to protect John in act three despite their rocky relationship.

The audience have already by act two heard only bad words about Elizabeth, so it is likely that they have come to the conclusion that she is not a very

nice person. This is due to Abigail bad mouthing Elizabeth and saying that she is "... a sickly wife" and a "... cold snivelling woman". Because we do not meet Elizabeth until later on in the play we only have the opportunity to form an opinion on Elizabeth's character from what Abigail says about her, which is unfortunately all malicious and derogatory. The language used by Miller in the crucible is archaic, rural American.

Because the play is based upon events, which took place around 311 years ago, to make it seem realistic it is crucial that miller does use such language. An example of the language used, is when John says to Elizabeth, " Aye... its warm as blood beneath the clods", this is definitely not an expression we would use today. Although nowadays we may not understand the language used by Miller perfectly it is important for him to use it in order for the play to become genuine and believable. In his autobiography *Timebends*, Miller discusses the language he found in the court records.

He said that he wanted " to study the actual words of the interrogations, a gnarled way of speaking" Miller also admitted to unintentionally, " elaborating a few grammatical forms himself, the double negatives especially", although Act two is not a court scene I believe that Millers research into the language of the inhabitants of Salem in the 17th Century helped the play to achieve its sense of authenticity. It is important for Miller to create tension within the play to keep the audience interested; he uses this technique in Act two with great affect.

The audience is already aware of the Proctors strained relationship following John's affair with Abigail, and Miller highlights the damage that has been done by the affair perfectly in this scene to create a excruciating sense of tension. At the start of Act two Miller using stage directions and has John on his return from the field taste the meal the Elizabeth has been preparing, he is displeased with it so seasons it. This appears at first perfectly normal and harmless to the audience, however when John hears Elizabeth coming downstairs he jumps away from the stove and proceeds to wash his hands.

It becomes obvious to the audience at this point that their relationship is so strained that John racked with guilt about his affair with Abigail avoids doing anything at all which might aggravate or offend Elizabeth. This huge effort on John's behalf to not offend Elizabeth is blatant when he tells her that the rabbit is " well seasoned" Elizabeth gratefully accepts this praise replying that she " took great care", this is an awkward scene because both are trying to be friendly to one another but it is easy to see they are uncomfortable in each others presence.

It is ironic that John complimented her on the seasoning on the rabbit, since he seasoned it himself; this in particular highlights the conflict between them. At first glance the proctor household appears homely, welcoming and peaceful. John returns home to work and finds his supper ready, cooked for him by his wife who has just finished singing their children to sleep. However this is all very misleading, the conflict between the proctors is highlighted at the very start of act two with the use of monosyllabic sentences from Elizabeth in reply to Johns attempts at conversation.

John, full of good intentions, begins to tell Elizabeth about the farm and tries to engage in conversation with her, however she meekly replies to his questions with short, abrupt sentences such as " That's well", " Aye, it would" and " Aye, it is". By manipulating the sentence structure Miller is able to show Elizabeth's reluctance to speak to her husband, and highlight the distance and awkwardness present between them. After complimenting Elizabeth on the meal John, talks about the farm and says with a grin " I mean to please you Elizabeth. And she answers, " I know it John. " However, before she answers, she pauses, and " finds it hard to say. " This means that she might not think he honestly wants to please her, or make their marriage work. Since this is quite a dramatic moment, I think that on stage at this moment the lighting should focus on Elizabeth, and if present the orchestra should be silent to emphasize her hesitation. It becomes very clear in this scene that John is desperately trying to regain Elizabeth's trust.

The fact that she is cold and distant towards him creates a great sense of strain and the conflict is plain to see. Miller is able to illustrate this conflict between them by using stage directions, he has John walk over to Elizabeth and kiss her, Elizabeth receives his affection with disappointment, she is still cold and unforgiving. Miller shows us that words are not necessary to convey feelings, the expressions of the actors and their body language is enough and can sometimes be more convincing in a subtle way.

When I watched the film made about the play it struck me that in the scene between John and Elizabeth a table had been positioned between them, this acted as a physical barrier. This is actually of great significance and subtly

shows the audience that there are obstacles that stand in the way of the proctors, keeping them apart, namely Abigail. Watching the film helped me to see that stage props can be used to great effect, and can often play a significant part in the enhancement of dramatic scenes such as this one.

Gradually the tension between the Proctors escalates and soon they are arguing, this is brought about when Elizabeth says " You came so late I thought you'd gone to Salem this afternoon" to John. We know from the stage directions, which direct the actor's body language that John realises Elizabeth is implying that he went to see Abigail. Miller portrays the tension between them by using exceptionally short sentences that help to show the coldness and curtness that they show towards each other.

In this act John and Elizabeth have several blazing arguments and between each argument there is a lull, it becomes apparent that all the personal disagreements and grudges within the town are coming to a head. Like in a crucible, which is a melting pot everything is being brought to the surface and is breaking down, society is collapsing within the town and amongst the town's people. Because Miller builds up several arguments between John and Elizabeth, he prevents this scene from becoming boring and keeps the sense of tension between John and Elizabeth very much alive.

Whenever the audience begin to believe that the Proctors have resolved their problems another argument breaks out, this stopping and starting prevents the audience becoming frustrated with the constant squabbling and makes sure the sense of tension and conflict is maintained. The series of

smaller outbursts between them then conclude into a huge argument in which Elizabeth says to John " She (Abigail) has an arrow in you yet, John Proctor, and you know it", this is true, despite the fact that Abigail is in Salem and far away from the Proctors she is still causing arguments between them and is driving a wedge between them.

Elizabeth knows that John is still physically attracted to Abigail and that she has a hold on him. She creates a strong sense of conflict because John hates Elizabeth's accusations and resents her for continuing to bring up the past when he simply wants to be forgiven and allowed to have a fresh start and be a good husband to her. It is excruciating to watch this scene between the Proctors and see jealousy, suspicion and mistrust tearing them apart however the tension and conflict created is so strong that the audience feels compelled to watch on.

When Hale interrupts the Proctors argument and invades their privacy the sense of conflict between the Proctors eases and the tone of the play and atmosphere changes. John and Elizabeth realise that they must work together to eradicate any suspicions or accusations of them being witches, this causes great tension because it is very hard for them to join forces and act as though nothing between them had happened. Following a huge argument they must help each other and keep up appearances.

This is a very subtle and clever way of creating tension. Throughout Act two in the crucible Miller creates a sense of conflict and tension between the Proctors using a number of different methods. Doing this I believe is a

brilliant way of keeping the audience interested and making the ending of the book more dramatic. Not only however does this in particular scene help to ensure that the audience wish to watch on, but it also ensures that they understand key events in the play, such as Elizabeth's denial of John's affair.

In act two the audience discover that Elizabeth does know about John's affair so therefore can work out the later on in the play Elizabeth says that John did not have an affair to protect him, not because she simply did not know. I think that were it not for this scene then the whole of the story would be a lot more complicated and harder to understand. So in conclusion although the tension and sense of conflict that Miller creates between the Proctors make Act two an interesting scene, it also affects the rest of the play and the audience's understanding of events to come as a whole.