

Exploring the Text

1. In the opening paragraph, Cotton Mather speaks as a Puritan minister to his congregation — or flock — telling them they are in danger. What rhetorical strategies does he use to impress on them the urgency of the situation?
2. Throughout the speech, Mather makes use of biblical references and passages as evidence. Select at least three and discuss how they support the argument he is making.
3. In this speech, Mather proceeds from a general warning that the devil has come into the community to increasingly specific and frightening allegations of the manifestations of the evil. What are they? How is each calculated to escalate the level of fear?
4. Selecting either paragraph 2 or 3, analyze how through his choice of language Mather dramatizes the battle between the forces of good and evil; note his use of specific words as well as images.
5. During the Salem Witch Trials, a key issue was the inclusion of “spectral evidence” — that is, evidence that cannot be seen. As expressed in this address, what is Mather’s position on the use and usefulness of such evidence?
6. What is it that Mather claims “makes this Descent [of the Devil into the community] the more formidable” (par. 3)?
7. What is the “*wrath unto the uttermost*” (par. 5)? What is the reasoning Mather develops to support his claim?
8. How does Mather characterize “New-England” as the site of this conflict between opposing forces? What significance is there to the fact that “*New-England* should this way be harassed!” (par. 5)?
9. A “hortatory” address calls the audience to action — that is, it exhorts them. What action is Mather urging his Salem community to take, and what rhetorical strategies does he use to encourage them?
10. As a Puritan minister, Mather believed that God had chosen him for a special mission in the New World: to root out evil and establish the kingdom of God. Where in his text do you find evidence of this sense of personal destiny?
11. Look at the painting on page 00. How does it capture the fear and hysteria that Mather calls on in his speech?

JOHN HALE

Reverend John Hale (1636–1700) was a prominent clergyman associated with the Salem Witch Trials who famously reconsidered his support of the trials after his own wife was accused of witchcraft in November 1692. Although the last trial was held in May 1693, the community was left to address legal issues of compensation and the reconciliation of accusers and the accused. In addition, public confidence in authority had been eroded by the magistrates’ willingness to convict on the basis of problematic evidence. Hale, a minister for over thirty

years, was one of the leaders trying to bring about healing in the aftermath of the Salem Witch Trials.

from *A Modest Inquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft*

In 1697, Hale wrote *A Modest Inquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft*, a book that challenged the legal precedents and morality used by the court during the witch trials. The following excerpts are from this book, which was published in 1702, two years after his death. In "The Preface to the Christian Reader," Hale explains his decision to come forward and address the issue; in Chapter XVIII, he attempts to put the tragic events in both scriptural and historical context.

The Preface to the Christian Reader

The Holy Scriptures inform us that the Doctrine of Godliness is a great Mystery, containing the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven: Mysteries which require great search for the finding out: And as the Lord hath his Mysteries to bring us to Eternal Glory; so Satan hath his Mysteries to bring us to Eternal Ruine: Mysteries not easily understood, whereby the depths of Satan are managed in hidden wayes. So the Whore of Babylon makes the Inhabitants of the Earth drunk with the Wine of her Fornication, by the Mystery of her abominations, Rev. 17. 2. And the man of Sin hath his Mystery of iniquity whereby he deceiveth men through the working of Satan in signes and lying wonders, 2 Thes. 2. 3, 7, 9.

And among Satans Mysteries of iniquity, this of Witchcraft is one of the most difficult to be searched out by the Sons of men; as appeareth by the great endeavours of Learned and Holy men to search it out, and the great differences that are found among them, in the rules laid down for the bringing to light these hidden works of darkness. So that it may seem presumption in me to undertake so difficult a Theam, and to lay down such rules as are different from the Sentiments of many Eminent writers, and from the Presidents and practices of able Lawyers; yea and from the Common Law it self.

But my Apology for this undertaking is;

1. That there hath been such a dark dispensation by the Lord, letting loose upon us the Devil, Anno 1691 and 1692, as we never experienced before: And thereupon apprehending and condemning persons for Witchcraft; and nextly acquitting others no less liable to such a charge; which evidently shew we were in the dark, and knew not what to do; but have gone too far on the one or other side, if not on both. Hereupon I esteemed it necessary for some person to Collect a Summary of that affair, with some animadversions¹ upon it, which might at least give some light to

¹Criticisms. — Eds.

them which come after, to shun those Rocks by which we were bruised, and narrowly escaped Shipwrack upon. And I have waited five years for some other person to undertake it, who might do it better than I can, but find none; and judge it better to do what I can, than that such a work should be left undone. Better sincerely though weakly done, then not at all, or with such a byas of prejudice as will put false glosses upon that which was managed with uprightness of heart, though there was not so great a spirit of discerning, as were to be wished in so weighty a Concernment.

2. I have been present at several Examinations and Tryals, and knew sundry of those that Suffered upon that account in former years, and in this last affair, and so have more advantages than a stranger, to give account of these Proceedings.
3. I have been from my Youth trained up in the knowledge and belief of most of those principles I here question as unsafe to be used. The first person that suffered on this account in New-England, about Fifty years since, was my Neighbour, and I heard much of what was charged upon her, and others in those times; and the reverence I bore to aged, learned and judicious persons, caused me to drink in their principles in these things, with a kind of Implicit Faith. *Quo semel est imbuta recens servabit odorem, Testa diu.*² A Child will not easily forsake the principles he hath been trained up in from his Cradle.

But observing the Events of that sad Catastrophe, Anno 1692, I was brought to a more strict scanning of the principles I had imbibed, and by scanning, to question, and by questioning at length to reject many of them, upon the reasons shewed in the ensuing Discourse. It is an approved saying *Nihil certius, quam quod ex dubio fit certum*; No truth more certain to a man, than that which he hath formerly doubted or denied, and is recovered from his error, by the convincing evidence of Scripture and reason. Yet I know and am sensible, that while we know but in part, man is apt in flying from a discovered error, to run into the contrary extream.

*Incidit in Scyllam qui vult vitare Charybdim.*³

The middle way is commonly the way of truth. And if any can shew me a better middle way than I have here laid down, I shall be ready to embrace it: But the conviction must not be by vinegar or drollery, but by strength of argument.

4. I have had a deep sence of the sad consequence of mistakes in matters Capital; and their impossibility of recovering when compleated. And what grief of heart it brings to a tender conscience, to have been unwittingly encouraging of the Sufferings of the innocent. And I hope a zeal to prevent for the future such sufferings is pardonable, although there should be much weakness, and some errors in the pursuit thereof.

²Quote from the Roman poet Horace that reads, "The jar will long retain the odor of that with which it was once filled." — Eds.

³Latin. "Into Scylla falls he who tries to keep clear of Charybdis." A reference to Homer's *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus and his crew must navigate the narrow strait between Scylla (a rock) and Charybdis (a whirlpool). — Eds.

5. I observe the failings that have been on the one hand, have driven some into that which is indeed an extream on the other hand, and of dangerous consequences, viz. To deny any such persons to be under the New Testament, who by the Devils aid discover Secrets, or do work wonders. Therefore in the latter part of this discourse, I have taken pains to prove the Affirmative, yet with brevity, because it hath been done already by Perkins of *Witchcraft*. Glanvil his *Saducismus Triumphatus*, Pt. 1. p. 1 to 90 and Pt. 2. p. 1 to 80. Yet I would not be understood to justify all his notions in those discourses, but acknowledge he hath strongly proved the being of Witches.
6. I have special reasons moving me to bear my testimony about these matters, before I go hence and be no more; the which I have here done, and I hope with some assistance of his Spirit, to whom I commit my self and this my labour, even that God whose I am and whom I serve: Desiring his Mercy in Jesus Christ to Pardon all the Errors of his People in the day of darkness; and to enable us to fight with Satan by Spiritual Weapons, putting on the whole Armour of God.

And tho' Satan by his Messengers may buffet Gods Children, yet there's a promise upon right *Resisting*, *he shall flee from them*, Jam. 4. 7. *And that all things shall work together for the good of those that Love the Lord*, Rom. 8. 28. So that I believe Gods Children shall be gainers by the assaults of Satan, which occasion'd this Discourse; which that they may, is the Prayer of, Thine in the Service of the Gospel.

Chapter XVIII

I shall conclude this Discourse with some Application of the whole.

1. We may hence see ground to fear, that there hath been a great deal of innocent blood shed in the Christian World, by proceeding upon unsafe principles, in condemning persons for Malefick Witchcraft. . . .
3. But to come nigher home, we have cause to be humbled for the mistakes and errors which have been in these Colonies, in their Proceedings against persons for this crime, above fourty years ago and downwards, upon insufficient presumptions and presidents of our Nation, whence they came. I do not say, that all those were innocent, that suffered in those times upon this account. But that such grounds were then laid down to proceed upon, which were too slender to evidence the crime they were brought to prove; and thereby a foundation laid to lead into error those that came after. May we not say in this matter, as it is, Psal. 106. 6. *We have sinned with our fathers?* And as, Lam. 5. 7. *Our fathers have sinned and are not, and we have born their iniquities?* And whether this be not one of the sins the Lord hath been many years contending with us for, is worthy our serious enquiry. If the Lord punished Israel with famine three years for a sin of misguided zeal fourty years before that, committed by the breach of a Covenant made four hundred years before that: 2 Sam. 21. 1, 2, Why may not the Lord visit upon us the misguided zeal of our Predecessors about Witchcraft above fourty years ago, even when that Generation is gathered to their Fathers.

4. But I would come yet nearer to our own times, and bewail the errors and mistakes that have been in the year 1692. In the apprehending too many we may believe were innocent, and executing of some, I fear, not to have been condemned; by following such traditions of our fathers, maxims of the Common Law, and Presidents and Principles, which now we may see weighed in the balance of the Sanctuary, are found too light. I heartily concur with that direction for our publick prayers, emitted December 17, 1696, by our General Assembly, in an order for a general Fast, *viz.* "That God would shew us what we know not, and help us wherein we have done amiss, to do so no more: And especially that whatever mistakes on either hand, have been fallen into, either by the body of this people, or any order of men, referring to the late tragedy raised among us by Satan and his Instruments, through the awful Judgment of God: He would humble us therefore, and pardon all the errors of his Servants and People, that desire to love his Name, and be attuned to his land." I am abundantly satisfied that those who were most concerned to act and judge in those matters, did not willingly depart from the rules of righteousness. But such was the darkness of that day, the tortures and lamentations of the afflicted, and the power of former presidents, that we walked in the clouds, and could not see our way. And we have most cause to be humbled for error on that hand, which cannot be retrieved. So that we must beseech the Lord, that if any innocent blood hath been shed, in the hour of temptation, the Lord will not lay it to our charge, but be merciful to his people whom he hath redeemed, Deut. 21. 8, And that in the day when he shall visit, he will not visit this sin upon our land, but blot it out, and wash it away with the blood of Jesus Christ.
5. I would humbly propose whether it be not expedient, that some what more should be publicly done then yet hath, for clearing the good name and reputation of some that have suffered upon this account, against whom the evidence of their guilt was more slender, and the grounds for charity for them more convincing. And this (in order to our obtaining from the Lord farther reconciliation to our land,) and that none of their surviving relations, may suffer reproach upon that account. I have both read and heard of several in England, that have been executed for Capital crimes, and afterwards upon sence of an error in the process against them, have been restored in blood and honour by some publick act. . . .
9. Another extream we must beware of, is, *viz.* Because our fathers in the beginning times of this Land, did not see so far into these mysteries of iniquity, as hath been since discovered, Let us not undervalue the good foundations they laid for God and his people, and for us in Church and Civil Government. For Paul that eminent Apostle knew but in part; no wonder then, if our Fathers were imperfect men. In the purest times in Israel, there were some Clouds of ignorance over-shadowing of them. . . .

Now he that shall reject all the good in doctrine and practice, which was maintained, professed and practiced by so many Godly leaders, because of some few errors found among them, will be found to fight against God. A dwarf upon a giants shoulders, can see farther than the giant.

It was a glorious enterprize of the beginners of these Colonies, to leave their native Country to propagate the Gospel: And a very high pitch of faith, zeal, and

courage that carried them forth, to follow the Lord into this wilderness, into a land that was not sown. Then was New England holiness to the Lord, and all that did devour them, or attempted so to do, did offend, and evil did come upon them. And the Lord did graciously remember this kindness of their Youth, and love of their Espousals; In granting them many eminent tokens of his favour; by his presence with them in his Ordinances, for the Conversion of Souls, and edifying and comforting the hearts of his Servants: By signal answering their prayers in times of difficulty: By protecting them from their Enemies; By guiding of, and providing for them in a Desart. And the Lord will still remember this their kindness unto their Posterity, unless that by their Apostasy from the Lord, they vex his Holy Spirit, to turn to be their Enemy: And thereby cut off the Entail of his Covenant Mercies; which God forbid. *Oh that the Lord may be with us, as he was with our Fathers; and that he may not leave us, nor forsake us!*

Finis.

(1697, 1702)

Exploring the Text

1. What is the purpose of John Hale's opening paragraph? Why does he include so many quotations from the Bible?
2. In the following paragraphs, Hale details why he believes he is qualified "for this undertaking" (par. 3). What are the grounds he describes to establish his ethos with his Puritan audience?
3. Why does Hale emphasize from the outset that this discourse in the aftermath of the Salem Witch Trials must proceed "by strength of argument" (par. 8)?
4. What does Hale mean by the "misguided zeal of our Predecessors" (par. 15)? Is this description sufficiently strong for the occasion, or should he have used a more condemnatory phrase?
5. While Hale is concerned with the larger theological issues of repentance and redemption, he also recommends some very practical measures to prevent further suffering of individuals within the community. What are these?
6. What does Hale mean in this statement, "A dwarf upon a giants shoulders, can see farther than the giant" (par. 19)?
7. What was the "glorious enterprize" that Hale reminds his readers of at the end (par. 20)? Why does he raise this point near the end of his text?
8. Historians emphasize the anguish Hale felt about the witch hunt, the trials, and, most of all, the executions. Where in this text do you find evidence of his personal regret?
9. Reverend John Hale wrote this apologia not in the heat of debate or battle but as a reflection. In it he fully acknowledges the burden he and other leaders must bear for the hysteria, the division, and the executions. What rhetorical strategies does he employ in this document to promote healing within the community of Salem? Include in your analysis a discussion of his tone in this document.