

assertion? Explain your response within the context of her poem "Captivity?"

## COTTON MATHER

Cotton Mather (1663–1728) was a Puritan clergyman, writer, and historian from Boston, Massachusetts, who is best remembered for persecuting witches during the late 1600s. During the Salem Witch Trials (1692–1693), Mather served as an advisor to Boston magistrates, attended the trials, wrote sermons against witchcraft, and investigated many of the cases himself. He was, however, a complex thinker and prolific writer on many political and social, as well as scientific, issues. A graduate of Harvard College and recipient of an honorary degree from the University of Glasgow, Mather was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of London and held progressive views for the time; for instance, he advocated for inoculation against smallpox, a position that was opposed by many physicians of the day. Furthermore, in his work *Christian Philosopher* (1721), he attempted to provide a rational foundation for Christianity by reconciling scientific and theological principles.

## *Wonders of the Invisible World*

### *A Hortatory and Necessary Address to a Country Now Extraordinarily Alarum'd by the Wrath of the Devil*

In one of his most famous works, *Wonders of the Invisible World*, Mather gives detailed descriptions of each case in the Salem Witch Trials. In all, nineteen women were accused, tried, and executed and several others were incarcerated for witchcraft.

Let us now make a good and a right use of the prodigious *descent* which the Devil in *Great Wrath* is at this day making upon our Land. Upon the Death of a Great Man once, an Orator call'd the Town together, crying out, *Concurrere Cives, Dilapsa sunt vestra Mœnio!* that is, *Come together, Neighbours, your Town-Walls are fallen down!* But such is the descent of the Devil at this day upon our selves, that I may truly tell you, *The Walls of the whole World are broken down!* The usual *Walls* of defence about mankind have such a Gap made in them, that the very *Devils* are broke in upon us, to seduce the *Souls*, torment the *Bodies*, sully the *Credits*, and consume the *Estates* of our Neighbours, with Impressions both as *real* and as *furiosus*, as if the *Invisible World* were becoming *Incarinate*, on purpose for the vexing of us. And what use ought now to be made of so tremendous a dispensation? We are engaged in a *Fast* this day; but shall we try to fetch *Meat out of the Eater*, and make the *Lion* to afford some *Hony* for our *Souls*?

That the Devil is *come down unto us with great Wrath*, we find, we feel, we now deplore. In many ways, for many years hath the Devil been assaying to Extirpate the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus here. *New-England* may complain of the Devil, as in *Psal.* 129 · 1, 2, *Many a time have they afflicted me, from my Youth, may New-England now say; many a time have they afflicted me from my Youth; yet they have not prevailed against me.* But now there is a more than ordinary *affliction*, with which the Devil is Galling of us: and such an one as is indeed Unparallelable. The things confessed by *witches*, and the things endured by *Others*, laid together, amount unto this account of our *Affliction*. The *Devil*, Exhibiting himself ordinarily as a small *Black man*, has decoy'd a fearful knot of proud, froward, ignorant, envious and malicious creatures, to lift themselves in his horrid Service, by entring their Names in a *Book* by him tendred unto them. These *Witches*, whereof above a Score have now *Confessed*, and *shown their Deeds*, and some are now tormented by the Devils, for *Confessing*, have met in *Hellish Rendezvouzes*, wherein the Confessors do say, they have had their Diabolical Sacraments, imitating the *Baptism* and the *Supper* of our Lord. In these hellish meetings, these Monsters have associated themselves to do no less a thing than, *To destroy the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, in these parts of the World;* and in order hereunto, First they each of them have their *Spectres*, or Devils, commission'd by them, & representing of them, to be the Engines of their Malice. By these wicked *Spectres*, they seize poor people about the Country, with various & bloody *Torments*; and of those evidently Preternatural torments there are some have dy'd. They have bewitched some, even so far as to make *Self-destroyers*: and others are in many Towns

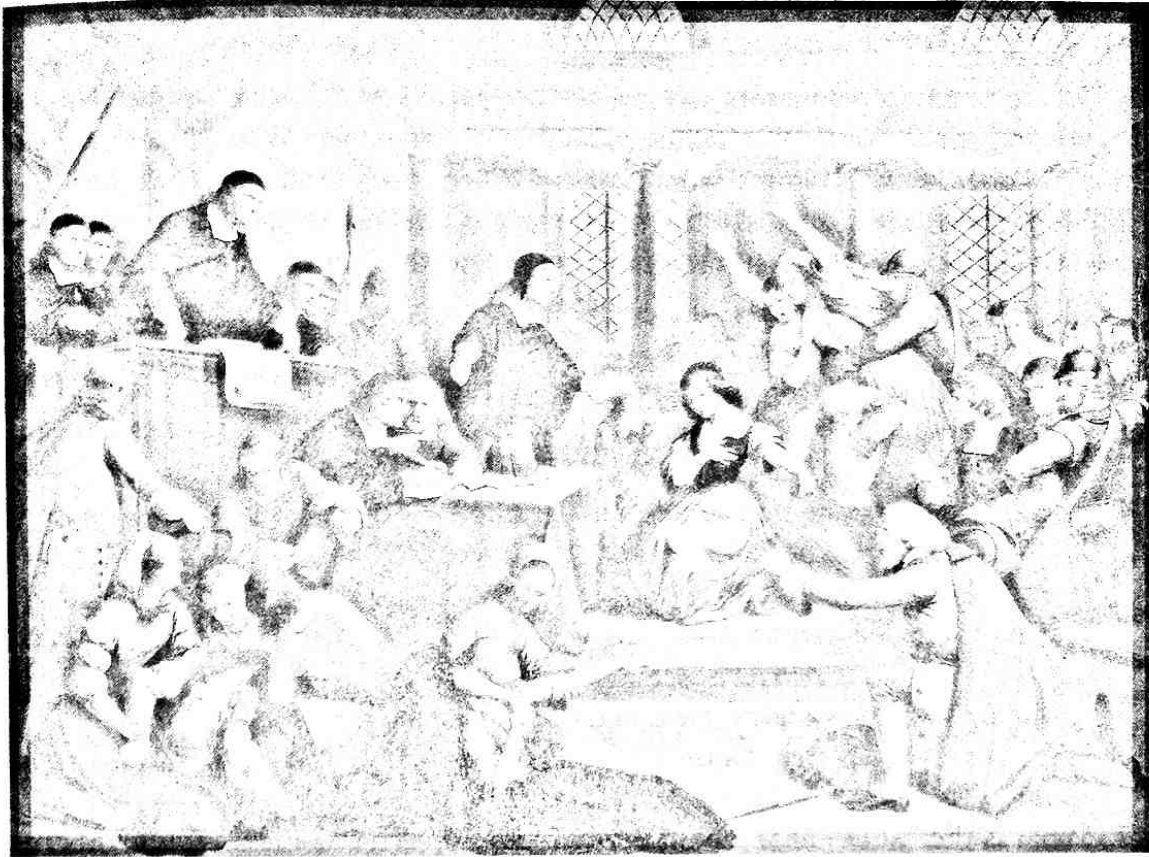
here and there languishing under their *Evil hands*. The people thus afflicted, are miserably scratched and bitten, so that the Marks are most visible to all the World, but the causes utterly invisible; and the same Invisible Furies do most visibly stick Pins into the bodies of the afflicted, and *scale* them, and hideously distort, and disjoint all their members, besides a thousand other sorts of Plagues beyond these of any natural diseases which they give unto them. Yea, they sometimes drag the poor people out of their chambers, and carry them over Trees and Hills, for divers miles together. A large part of the persons tortured by these Diabolical *Spectres*, are horribly tempted by them, sometimes with fair promises, and sometimes with hard threatnings, but always with felt miseries, to sign the *Devils Laws* in a Spectral Book laid before them; which two or three of these poor Sufferers, being by their tiresome sufferings overcome to do, they have immediately been released from all their miseries and they appear'd in *Spectre* then to Torture those that were before their Fellow-Sufferers. The *Witches* which by their covenant with the Devil, are become Owners of *Spectres*, are oftentimes by their own *Spectres* required and compelled to give their consent, for the molestation of some, which they had no mind otherwise to fall upon; and cruel depredations are then made upon the Vicinage.<sup>2</sup> In the Prosecution of these Witchcrafts, among a thousand other unaccountable things, the *Spectres* have an odd faculty of cloathing the most substantial and corporeal Instruments of Torture, with Invisibility, while the wounds thereby given have been the most palpable things in the World; so that the Sufferers assaulted with Instruments of Iron, wholly unseen to the standers by, though, to their cost, seen by themselves, have, upon snatching, wrested the Instruments out of the *Spectres* hands, and every one has then immediately not only *beheld*, but *handled*, an Iron Instrument taken by a Devil from a Neighbour. These wicked *Spectres* have proceeded so far, as to steal several quantities of Money from divers people, part of which Money, has, before sufficient Spectators, been dropt out of the Air into the Hands of the Sufferers, while the *Spectres* have been urging them to subscribe their *Covenant with Death*. In such extravagant ways have these Wretches propounded, the *Dragooning*<sup>3</sup> of as many as they can, in their own Combination, and the *Destroying* of others, with lingring, spreading, deadly diseases; till our Countrey should at last become too hot for us. Among the Ghastly Instances of the *success* which those Bloody Witches have had, we have seen even some of their own Children, so dedicated unto the Devil, that in their Infancy, it is found, the *Imps* have sucked them, and rendred them Venemous to a Prodigy. We have also seen the Devils first batteries upon the Town, where the first Church of our Lord in this Colony was gathered, producing those distractions, which have almost ruin'd the Town. We have seen likewise the *Plague* reaching afterwards into other Towns far and near, where the Houses of good Men have the Devils filling of them with terrible Vexations!

This is the Descent, which, it seems, the Devil has now made upon us. But that which makes this Descent the more formidable, is; The *multitude* and *quality* of Persons accused of an interest in this *Witchcraft*, by the Efficacy of the *Spectres* which

take their Name and shape upon them; causing very many good and wise Men to fear, That many *innocent*, yea, and some *vertuous* persons, are by the Devils in this matter, imposed upon; That the Devils have obtain'd the power, to take on them the likeness of harmless people, and in that likeness to afflict other people, and be so abused by Præstigious *Dæmons*, that upon their look or touch, the afflicted shall be odly affected. Arguments from the *Providence of God*, on the one side, and from our *Charity* towards *Man* on the other side, have made this now to become a most agitated Controversie among us. There is an *Agony* produced in the Minds of Men, lest the Devil should sham us with *Devices*, of perhaps a finer Thred, than was ever yet practised upon the World. The whole business is become hereupon so *Snarled*, and the determination of the Question one way or another, so *dismal*, that our Honourable Judges have a Room for *Jehoshaphat's* Exclamation, *We know not what to do!* They have used, as Judges have heretofore done, the *Spectral Evidences*, to introduce their further Enquiries into the *Lives* of the persons accused; and they have thereupon, by the wonderful Providence of God, been so strengthened with *other evidences*, that some of the *Witch Gang* have been fairly Executed. But what shall be done, as to those against whom the *evidence* is chiefly founded in the *dark world*? Here they do solemnly demand our Addresses to the *Father of Lights*, on their behalf. But in the mean time, the Devil improves the *Darkness* of this Affair, to push us into a *Blind Mans Buffet*, and we are even ready to be *sinfully*, yea, hotly, and madly, mauling one another in the *dark*.

The consequence of these things, every *considerate* Man trembles at; and the more, because the frequent cheats of Passion, and Rumour, do precipitate so many, that I wish I could say, The most were *considerate*.

But that which carries on the formidableness of our Trials, unto that which may be called, *A wrath unto the uttermost*, is this: It is not without the *wrath* of the Almighty God himself, that the *Devil* is permitted thus to come down upon us in *wrath*. It was said, in *Isa. 9 · 19*, *Through the wrath of the Lord of Hosts, the Land is darkned*. Our Land is *darkned* indeed; since the *Powers of Darkness* are turned in upon us: 'tis a *dark time*, yea a black night indeed, now the *Ty-dogs* of the Pit are abroad among us: but, *It is through the wrath of the Lord of Hosts!* Inasmuch as the *Fire-brands* of *Hell* it self are used for the scorching of us, with cause enough may we cry out, *What means the heat of this anger?* Blessed Lord! Are all the other Instruments of thy Vengeance, too good for the chastisement of such transgressors as we are? Must the very *Devils* be sent out of *Their own place*, to be our Troublers: Must we be lash'd with *Scorpions*, fetch'd from the *Place of Torment*? Must this *Wilderness* be made a Receptacle for the *Dragons of the Wilderness*? If a *Lapland* should nourish in it vast numbers, the successors of the old *Biarmi*, who can with looks or words bewitch other people, or sell Winds to Marriners, and have their *Familiar Spirits* which they bequeath to their Children when they die, and by their Enchanted Kettle-Drums can learn things done a Thousand Leagues off; If a *Swedeland* with *Familiar Spirits*, but also by their Enchantments drag many scores of poor children out of their Bed-chambers, to be spoiled at those Meetings; This, were not altogether a



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TOMPKINS HARRISON MATTESON, *THE TRIAL OF GEORGE JACOBS, 5TH AUGUST, 1692*, 1855, OIL ON CANVAS, PEABODY ESSEX MUSEUM, SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS.

In 1855, American artist Tompkins Harrison Matteson (1813–1884) painted this depiction of the courtroom trial of George Jacobs, who was accused of witchcraft by his granddaughter, found guilty, and hanged. (See color insert, Image 14).

matter of so much wonder! But that *New-England* should this way be harassed! They are not *Chaldeans*, that *Bitter and Hasty Nation*, but they are, *Bitter and Burning Devils*; They are not *Swarthy Indians*, but they are *Sooty Devils*; that are let loose upon us. Ah, Poor *New-England*! Must the plague of *Old Ægypt* come upon thee? Whereof we read in *Psal. 78 · 49*, *He cast upon them the fierceness of his Anger, Wrath, and Indignation, and Trouble, by sending Evil Angels among them.* What, O what must next be looked for? Must that which is there next mentioned, be next encountered? *He spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the Pestilence.* For my part, when I consider what *Melancthon* says, in one of his Epistles, *That these Diabolical Spectacles are often Prodigies*; and when I consider, how often people have been by *Spectres* called upon, just before their Deaths; I am verily afraid, lest some wasting *Mortality* be among the things, which this Plague is the *Forerunner* of. I pray God prevent it!

(1693)



TOMPKINS HARRISON MATTESON, *THE TRIAL OF GEORGE JACOBS, 5TH AUGUST, 1692*, 1855, OIL ON CANVAS, PEABODY ESSEX MUSEUM, SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS.

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## 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