
Reverend Hale's Evolution in "The Crucible" by Arthur Miller

How can a trial turn a religious minister into a man separated from a town's power structure? In *The Crucible*, Reverend Hale is sent to Salem to deal with an alleged outbreak of witchcraft. At the beginning of the play, Hale is a confident man, having just cured a witchcraft outbreak in his hometown of Beverly. As the play goes on, he experiences the injustices of the court system, which lead to his eventual separation from the court. Although Reverend Hale is a man confident in his religion when he is first brought to Salem, his strict religious beliefs deteriorate as he witnesses the injustices in the Salem theocracy.

At the time of his arrival in Salem, Reverend Hale is full of arrogance about his ability to put an end to the suspected witchcraft and dark arts. Reverend Hale comes to Salem from Beverly, a town in which he recently cured a case of witchcraft. Because of this success, it "...never raised a doubt in his mind as to the reality of the underworld or the existence of Lucifer's many-faced lieutenants"(33). Reverend Hale's confidence in the existence of the Devil results in his becoming overconfident in his religious beliefs. When he first meets Reverend Parris, the minister of Salem, Hale is carrying a stack of books, which Parris says are very heavy. In response, Hale says "They must be; they are weighted with authority"(36). The books that Reverend Hale transports are weighty both literally and figuratively. Literally, the books are large and abundant with knowledge about witches and the supernatural world. Figuratively, the books are "weighted with authority": they have the ability to condemn anyone believed to be a witch.

At the conclusion of Act I, Hale asks the group of girls about the people they saw with the devil. An assortment of responses arises: "I saw Goody Hawkins with the Devil!", "I saw Goody Bibber with the Devil", "I saw Goody Booth with the Devil"(48). Hale is ecstatic, yelling "Glory to God! It is broken, they are free!"(48). At this point, Hale believes that all the girls are revealing the truth. It is not until Hale dives deeper into the case that he uncovers the lies that Salem holds. As Abigail Williams winds her web of lies, Reverend Hale begins to separate himself from his core beliefs. When Abigail accuses Elizabeth Proctor of witchcraft in the court, Hale finds it his duty to go question the Proctors. To look for signs of witchcraft, he makes John, a man who is in contempt of Reverend Parris' religious practices, recite the Ten Commandments. When he fails to say all ten, Elizabeth says "delicately: Adultery, John"(67). This statement reveals to Reverend Hale that Elizabeth is a pious woman, who shows no signs of witchcraft. The obvious innocence of Elizabeth creates suspicion in Reverend Hale of what Abigail had been saying in court; in fact, Abigail's lie about Elizabeth is the catalyst in Hale's skepticism of the court.

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Once the court begins executing the accused witches unless they confess, Hale finally fully sees the injustice and corruption in the court, and his religious beliefs deteriorate. This injustice is evident when John testifies in court to save his wife by confessing his own affair. The judges ask Elizabeth if John had ever had an affair and she answers in a way designed to save her husband. When the judges hear this lie told by Elizabeth, they sentence her to death. Hale steps in and says, "I may shut my conscience to it no more--private vengeance is working through this testimony!"(114). Any outstanding connection to the court is broken at the end of Act III, when Hale says. "I denounce these proceedings, I quit this court!"(120). Later on in Act IV, Hale feels guilty. "There is blood on my head! Can you not see the blood on my head!"(131). He grows farther apart from his religious morals when he begins telling the accused to lie in order to save themselves from execution.

With great determination, Hale separates himself from the Salem theocracy after finally discovering its true injustice. During the play, Reverend Hale evolves from a strict minister to a man deeply at odds with the proceedings in Salem. Hale feels that it is his fault that so many people have died under his watch--a feeling which leads him to where he is at the end of Miller's script. Such regrets are common in classic drama: in *Antigone* by Sophocles, King Creon refuses to bury Antigone's brother, a war hero, due to his strict enforcement of unfair laws. His hubris results in the death of his wife as well as his removal from his position of King. If Hale had been so ignorant as to go without uncovering the injustices of the court, and had more closely resembled Creon in *Antigone*, many more people could have died. As Miller indicates, it is important that people with power do what is right and just, as they are able to influence the masses.

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