

# An Invitation to Satan: Puritan Culture and the Salem Witch Trials

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Stone, Alia, "An Invitation to Satan: Puritan Culture and the Salem Witch Trials" (2018). *MAD-RUSH Undergraduate Research Conference*. 1.  
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Alia Stone

An Invitation to Satan: Puritan Culture and the Salem Witch Trials

Fall 2017

HIST 395

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In early 1692, the devil paid a visit to Massachusetts. While he was there, he beguiled people into his service, encouraging them to wreak havoc within their communities. A number of Puritans living within the town of Salem believed the devil was present after a group of young girls claimed to have been bewitched, setting off a morbid chain of events that became one of the most infamous and widely known witch hunts in history. These witch hunts would last for over a year and result in the deaths of around twenty people, and the detainment of hundreds more as neighbors turned on each other and suspicion gripped the town tighter than Satan himself ever could. The belief in Puritan culture of the devil and of witchcraft made it easy for these claims to take hold. The accusations and proceedings of the Salem Witch Trials can be traced to the paranoia, superstition, and overall straitlaced culture of the strict Puritan community.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For further information related to early New England, consult Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (London: Harvard University Press, 2009); as well as Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1939). Information pertaining to the New England Puritans can be found in Francis J. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1995); William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism; Or, The Way to the New Jerusalem as Set Forth in Pulpit and Press from Thomas Cartwright to John Lilburne and John Milton, 1570-1643* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938); Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *The Puritan Oligarchy: The Founding of American Civilization* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1947). For an overview of the history of witchcraft in New England, consult Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1998). For in depth works on the Salem Witch Trials, see Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Knopf, 2002); Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); David K Goss, *Daily Life During the Salem Witch Trials* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2012); Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Devil's Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witch Trials* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Marilynne K. Roach, *The Salem Witch Trials: A Day-by-Day Chronicle of a Community Under Siege* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002); Frances Hill, *A Delusion of Satan: The Full Story of the Salem Witch Trials* (New York: Doubleday, 1995); Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem* (New York: George Brazillier, 1969). Research pertaining mainly to the relationship between religion and witchcraft at Salem can be found in David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgement: Popular Religious Beliefs in Early New England* (New York, Knopf, 1989). For primary sources, see Robert Calef, "More Wonders of the Invisible World," in *The Witchcraft Delusion in New England: Its Rise, Progress, and Termination*, vols. 2 and 3, ed. Samuel G Drake (New York: B. Franklin, 1970); W. Elliot Woodward, *Records of Salem Witchcraft, Copied from the Original Documents*, vol. 1, (Roxbury, MA: Da Capo Press, 1971); Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, (Boston: n.p. 1692); Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Village Witchcraft: A Documentary Record of Local Conflict in Colonial New England* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993). For comparison to another witch hunt that took place around the same time in Connecticut (one that is completely disregarded in this paper), see Richard Godbeer, *Escaping Salem: The Other Witch Hunt of 1692* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). There are many interpretations as to why these events took place including social tension, Native American attacks on the northern

Salem's Puritans were not the dour, lifeless people, nor did Puritans not always dress in all black, or reject joy in all its forms. They enjoyed wearing colored garments, played instruments, sang and danced, went to gatherings and held festivals, drank alcoholic beverages, ate grand meals, and even enjoyed pleasures of the flesh.<sup>2</sup> Puritans were, however, stern and strict people for the way in which they allowed themselves to indulge in these behaviors; they viewed any activity that could bring copious amounts of joy to a person as dangerous. These activities were potentially sinful and they could distract a person from work or even worse, from prayer. Activities of this nature had to be approached with caution and restraint.<sup>3</sup>

Work was a staple of Puritan society, and there was never a shortage of it to be done. The people made everything they needed to perform day-to-day tasks by hand, and often by themselves, leaving little time for much else. Families often worked from sunrise to sunset, breaking only for meals, and of course, for prayers. Both men and women worked, and worked hard, and even children were not spared. Children were in fact, hardly given childhoods for they were expected to work,<sup>4</sup> and in any household, there was a clear lack of children's toys. If families owned books, they were usually only religious texts.<sup>5</sup> While boys may have enjoyed work related activities such as hunting, crafting, and fishing as outlets, girls had nothing of significance to stimulate their minds and senses, often facing drudgery tasks associated with the household that led easily to boredom and displeasure.<sup>6</sup>

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frontier, fits as a result of expired grain, class differences, sexism, and many more. This paper will mostly be concerned with the interpretation that focuses on the afflicted girls and the clergymen that believed their stories.

<sup>2</sup> While sex outside of marriage was illegal, Puritans viewed marital sex as a sacred gift from god.

<sup>3</sup> Hill, 4-5; Roach, xvii

<sup>4</sup> Childhood in Salem frequently was over by seven years of age.

<sup>5</sup> Many Puritans and especially girls did not have a formal education beyond that which permitted them to read the bible.

<sup>6</sup> Hill, 6-7

Religion was more important to Puritan society than work. The only true respite from work was observed on the Sabbath day. On Sundays, Puritans spent their day attending church and in prayer; to do anything else was sinful, and observation of this day or prayer was strictly enforced. On Thursdays, Salem Puritans attended a midweek prayer. For Puritans, holiness was a matter of the soul and evidence of predestination; they understood God predetermined a person to heaven or to hell from the moment of creation. They believed those whom God had chosen for heaven could be identified by their piousness and holy deeds and lifestyles. Puritans expressed piousness by attending church, praying frequently, behaving in a frugal manner, and exhibiting a stellar work ethic. These things all constituted good behavior. Puritans imagined good behavior indicated an afterlife in heaven, and many tried to emulate this behavior, hoping it would earn them a place amongst God's elected.<sup>7</sup>

Children in particular were told stories of hellfire and eternal punishment as a result of sinful behavior. In his way, children were scared into abiding by doctrines and rules. Children were made aware they could die at any time and be thrust into hell or heaven depending on their behavior. Girls were held to an almost higher standard, as any miniscule transgressions on their behalf could be used to deem them as unworthy of salvation. Common tactics used to ensure that people conformed included inspired fear, humiliation, and shame. This led to children usually experiencing considerable anxiety.<sup>8</sup>

The range of Puritan belief in salvation usually extended merely to members of their own communities and other Puritans. They viewed outsiders as suspicious, and people who held different beliefs, creeds, or did things differently were considered dangerous or evil. Because Puritans believed the community shared the consequences of right and wrong, often community

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<sup>7</sup> Hill, 9; Roach, xvii

<sup>8</sup> Hill, 10-11.

actions were taken to atone for the misdeed. As such, they did not hesitate to punish or assault people who they deemed to be transgressors against them and against God's will. The people who found themselves punished were the poor, and women who stood low on the social ladder. These punishments would range from beatings to public humiliation. Certain crimes, however, were viewed as far worse than others and were considered capital crimes, punishable by death. Witchcraft, for example was one of the most well-known capital crimes.<sup>9</sup>

The Puritan belief in witchcraft evolved over the years from its roots in European culture that predated the founding of the religion itself, and because Puritans accepted the existence of the devil, they also believed in the possibility of witchcraft. Witchcraft in Puritan society was often a hallmark of a covenant with the devil either intentional or unintentional. People could unintentionally attract devilish influence by performing little sorceries like fortune telling, or counter magic acts, which were said to attract the devil. Puritans mostly believed those who practiced witchcraft pledged themselves to the devil in order to commit misdeeds.<sup>10</sup>

Puritans believed that once in the devil's grasp, witches began enacting *maleficium*,<sup>11</sup> which aided them in causing harm to others. This varied in use, scale, and in how it manifested itself. Most usually, it was used to harm people close to the witch. A witch used *maleficium* to cause afflictions from illness and death to casting minor injuries upon other people. They also might cause animals to sicken and die, or to become lost. Puritans thought witches could interfere in births, and cause misfortune, death, illness, and deformities to infants, and cause other such issues to arise within their immediate society. This could be done with touches, looks, or utterance of curses. Witches supposedly could act through animals, poppets<sup>12</sup>, and as spectres

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<sup>9</sup> Hill, 10; Roach, xxiii; Karlsen

<sup>10</sup> Hill,

<sup>11</sup> *Maleficium* was given to witches in return for allegiance to the devil, it was the power to work evil magic.

<sup>12</sup> Poppets were doll like trinkets that were believed to allow witches to enact dark magic on specific individuals

in order to commit their hellish acts. Additionally, even positive acts such as healing the sick were grounds for a witchcraft accusation.<sup>13</sup>

Just about anybody could be accused of witchcraft and of devil worship, though women were much more frequently accused than men. Most accused women were past childbearing age, widowed, or without children. On principle, all Native American peoples were subject to accusations of devil worship, as they were viewed to be godless and pagan, and therefore easily influenced by the devil. In fact, due to frequent Native American attacks on other New England towns as a result of the brutal King William's War,<sup>14</sup> Native Americans fell under even deeper suspicion amongst the Puritans. Children too, were not free of suspicion, especially if they were in some way connected to a potential witch, as witches could pass their craft to family members or others close to them. In this way, men were often accused of witchcraft because of their wife's actions. Because witches were also said to operate in groups, it was extremely likely anyone who stepped forward to defend an accused witch, would be accused of witchcraft themselves.<sup>15</sup>

Accusing someone of witchcraft was far easier than actually proving an association with the devil. There was very little concrete evidence to support witchcraft claims. Many judges at witchcraft trials kept a fair air of skepticism about them when faced with accused witches. Often, they required multiple testimonies and multiple witnesses to the same event. Usually, judges looked for confessions. Because the nature of witchcraft was founded in magic, judges had little choice but to permit more circumstantial evidence than usual in the trials.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Roach, xix, xxiii; Karlsen, 6-8; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*

<sup>14</sup> King William's war, also known as the Second Indian War, was a war fought by the English against the French and Native Americans for

<sup>15</sup> Roach, xx; Karlsen, 10-11; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*

<sup>16</sup> Roach, xxii

Though circumstantial evidence played a large role in trials and accusations, there were other indicators of witchcraft. Most of these indicators were physical, and could be observed on the accused's person. Puritans frequently looked for evidence of a witch's tit, which was a fleshy protrusion on a witch or wizard's body where the devil would nurse.<sup>17</sup> Because the witch's tit may have been located on or around the genitals, or other private areas of the body, the witch's tit was considered vulgar lore. Despite being looked down upon, the presence of the tit was verifiable, and therefore much more concrete evidence than hearsay and circumstance. Similar to a witch's tit was the devil's mark, which was a dark spot on a witch's body that Puritans believed Satan placed there as evidence of a sealed pact or covenant.<sup>18</sup> Accused persons could expect extensive and intrusive bodily searches as teams of trusted midwives and women attempted to find evidence of a tit or a mark.<sup>19</sup>

Puritans also believed that occasionally someone could resist the temptations of witchcraft and of the devil, and fight to stay true to their connections to God. These people were given the label of "possessed" and evidence of possession could be observed in fits, throes, and phantom pains such as pricks and pinches. It was assumed the person was in a very difficult struggle to resist the beguilements of the devil and the witches, so they behaved unusually. The possessed were viewed as victims of the devil rather than perpetrators themselves. Due to their status as victims, Puritans thought these were the only people able to indicate witches already residing in the community. Specifically, the possessed were encouraged to implicate those who had bewitched them.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Many reports detail that while the devil nursed at the witch's tit (also called a witch's teat), witches could also support other animals or magical creatures on the witch's tit.

<sup>18</sup> Plenty of scholarship suggests that somewhere during the course of the trials, the witch's tit and the devil's mark would become intertwined and widely believed to be one and the same.

<sup>19</sup> Karlsen, 12-13; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Karlsen, 10-11; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*

In the late winter of 1691, the Reverend Samuel Parris<sup>21</sup> became concerned. The two girls living within his household had begun acting strangely. The Reverend's nine-year-old daughter, Betty Parris,<sup>22</sup> and his eleven-year-old<sup>23</sup> niece, Abigail Williams<sup>24</sup> had taken ill. This illness, however, had extremely unusual effects on the children. They had fits, outbursts and nonsensical ramblings, and scrambled under furniture. At a loss about this odd behavior, Parris and other adults began trying to label the bizarre behaviors of the children. After local physician, William Griggs, examined the girls, it was decided the girls were under the influence of "An Evil Hand", or in other words, witchcraft.<sup>25</sup>

Reverend Parris made himself content to take the advice of his compatriots as they urged him to await God's actions in clearing up the ailments of the girls. Others, however, were more eager to discover the source of the girls' ailments in a faster fashion. Encouraged by a Mary Sibley, Tituba and John Indian,<sup>26</sup> the Parris's slave couple, crafted a witch cake<sup>27</sup> to be fed to a dog in the interest of determining whether or not the girls were truly bewitched. This was considered a somewhat occult way of revealing evidence of witchcraft, and members of the

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<sup>21</sup> Samuel Parris was a controversial public figure in Salem Village. As the Reverend of the church, Parris held an extremely precarious position in Salem, since the village had prior been relatively unable to keep a minister in the church for more than a couple years. Parris found himself well liked by some members of the community and disliked by others, effectively splitting the town into two factions of people.

<sup>22</sup> Though her name is Elizabeth Parris, the girl went by Betty, which is helpful in differentiating her from her mother who shares the same name.

<sup>23</sup> Some reports claim that she was twelve; it seems that her actual age was uncertain.

<sup>24</sup> Evidence suggests that Abigail Williams was a refugee from the northern frontier. It is said that she was living in the Putnam household as a result of her parents having been killed by Native Americans. Certain scholars believe that her afflictions could have been the result of an affliction similar to post traumatic stress, but this interpretation of her behavior will not be focused on within this paper.

<sup>25</sup> John Hale, *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft, and How Persons Guilty of That Crime May Be Convicted: And the Means Used for Their Discovery Discussed, Both Negatively and Affirmatively, According to Scripture and Experience* (Boston, n.p., 1702), reprinted in George Lincoln Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases, 1648-1706* (New York, Scribner's Sons, 1948; reissued, New York, Barnes and Noble, 1968), 413-414; Robert Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World: Or The Wonders of the Invisible World Display'd in Five Parts* (London, n.p., 1700), reprinted in Burr, *Narratives*, 342.

<sup>26</sup> For the Parris's male slave, the names Indian John and John Indian tend to be used interchangeably.

<sup>27</sup> A witch cake was meant to be made of meal and the urine of an afflicted person and then fed to an animal, in this case, a dog. Should the afflicted person truly be bewitched, the animal would exhibit similar symptoms to the afflicted individuals.

church were dubious of the results. Reverend Parris, in particular, later scorned Sibley for this suggestion.<sup>28</sup>

Eventually, as a result of intense questioning and pressure from adults, in March the girls finally admitted to being possessed, bewitched, and otherwise under the influence of the devil. Further questioned as to who had bewitched them, the girls pointed out Tituba. They also claimed two other Salem Village women, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne, were their other tormentors. They complained that the women poked them and prodded them, bit them, and injured them in a variety of other unpleasant ways. They also claimed to see the spectres of these women everywhere around them at any given moment.<sup>29</sup>

While the Parris household was in shambles due to the unfortunate conditions of the girls, other young women and girls within the town had also begun experiencing symptoms of witchcraft similar to those of Abigail Williams and Betty Parris. All of these girls corroborated the stories of Abigail Williams and Betty Parris, targeting Tituba, Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborne as the sources of witchcraft. The girls all shared a significant commonality with the Parris girls in that they all had dabbled in white magic of their own.<sup>30</sup> Prior to these events, the girls had come together in a group to attempt to tell their fortunes and discover the nature of the men they would one day marry. To do this, the girls suspended an egg white in a glass; however,

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<sup>28</sup> Hale, *A Modest Enquiry*, in Burr, ed., *Narratives*, 413-414; Deodat Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative of Some Remarkable Passages Relating to Sundry Persons Afflicted by Witchcraft, at Salem Village, Which Happened from the Nineteenth of March, to the Fifth of April, 1692* (Boston, n.p., 1692), reprinted in Burr, *Narratives*, 162-163; Samuel Parris, *Church Records*, March 27, 1692, as referenced in Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*.

<sup>29</sup> Hale, 414-415

<sup>30</sup>There have been instances of debate amongst scholars as to whether or not the girls had actually delved into fortune telling, but the overwhelming majority of scholars on this topic tend to agree that the girls did in fact participate in this activity. As such, this paper will treat their involvement in this activity as fact.

a spectre resembling a coffin unexpectedly appeared within it. This led to panic in the girls, and opened the door for them to allow the devil into their lives.<sup>31</sup>

While the symptoms the afflicted girls experienced may have manifested as a result of guilt, stress, or fear as to what they believed they had unleashed upon themselves, the pressure from adults to define their troubles as bewitchment may have lessened the burden on them, since possessed persons were frequently viewed as victims as opposed to perpetrators. Even the nature of those accused as tormentors made it easier for them to assert their bewitchment. The women, Tituba, Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborne made for easy targets, as they all held the status as social outcasts. Tituba was an Indian slave,<sup>32</sup> who had claimed that her previous mistress in her country of origin had been a witch, made for an obvious answer to the question of who could have bewitched them. Sarah Osborne was a bed ridden old woman who could not attend church services. Sarah Good, the village beggar, and furthermore, a rather miserable individual, was not well liked by those living in Salem. In the eyes of the townsfolk, it was easy to see that each of the women fit the description of either witches or of those who might have pledged themselves to Satan. The three women would then be arrested and questioned.<sup>33</sup>

Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne both vehemently denied the accusations of witchcraft and subsequent ill will towards the girls. Predictably, they both scrambled to assert their status as good Puritans who lived to serve God. Tituba, however, during her questioning delivered some

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<sup>31</sup> John Hale, *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft, and How Persons Guilty of That Crime May Be Convicted: And the Means Used for Their Discovery Discussed, Both Negatively and Affirmatively, According to Scripture and Experience* (Boston, n.p., 1702), as quoted in Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 1; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*,

<sup>32</sup> Tituba's actual ethnicity is still a matter of debate amongst historians. Some believe her to be a Native American, others think her to be a slave from the Caribbean, and some believe her to be of African heritage. For the purpose of this paper, Tituba will be referred to as an Indian.

<sup>33</sup> Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World*, in Burr, *Narratives*, 343; Hale, *A Modest Enquiry*, in Burr, *Narratives*, 414; *Warrant vs. Tituba*, reprinted in W. Elliot Woodward, ed., *Records of Salem Witchcraft, Copied from the Original Documents*, (New York: De Capo Press, 1971), 41-42; *Warrant vs. Sarah Good*, in Woodward, *Records*, 11-12.

of the most damning pieces of evidence for all three of the women and subsequently, Salem itself. Tituba openly confessed to the witchcraft accusations, telling the townsfolk the devil had in fact coerced her into bewitching the girls. She offered detailed description about the devil himself, claiming he appeared to her in bestial forms like those of dogs or hogs, and he bid her to hurt the children despite her reluctance to do so. She also verified that Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne along with herself all served the devil in tormenting the girls. Even more chillingly, she revealed she believed that in addition to herself, Sarah Good, and Sara Osborne, there were four other women and a man (none of whom she could name) that forced her into the devil's services. Tituba's confession startled all of Salem and to this day baffles even historians who seek answers to why she felt compelled to answer to the accusations laid before her. However, it is possible her position as a slave in the Parris household may have made her far less likely to adamantly reject the questions asked of her.<sup>34</sup>

The bewitched girls themselves played roles beyond accusation during the examinations of these women. They found themselves looked to and relied on during these examinations in order to verify the claims made by the women. Their contributions were crucial to the decision to jail the three women for their inclinations towards witchcraft and dark magic. Particularly during the examination of Sarah Osborne, the girls were vocal when asked if she was one of the women who had bewitched them. Every one of the gathered girls agreed they had seen spectres of Sarah Osbourne, and she appeared to them to torment them. In their own examinations afterwards, the girl's stories of how the women tormented them were eerily similar and consistent. Their usage of the same descriptors, same experiences, same time frames and the same order in which they reported happenings, along with their verifications that all the other girls were being afflicted,

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<sup>34</sup> *Examination of Sarah Good*, in Woodward, *Records*, 17-19; *Examination of Sarah Osburn*, in Woodward, *Records*, 36-38; *Examination of Titiba Indian*, in Woodward, *Records*, 44-48.

imply these accusations had been rehearsed into coherent stories. At any given time, the girls played off one another in their accusations.<sup>35</sup>

The girls also tended to pay very close attention to the things the accused persons said. Whether this be listening to the stories they told, or searching for opportunities to interject, the girls seemed to keep a very close eye, and ear, on the proceedings. One of the “bewitched” girls, Ann Putnam, Jr., took notice of Tituba’s testimony. During her questioning, Tituba made comment of a yellow bird that suckled at the fingers of Sarah Good. This yellow bird would later make an appearance again, as Abigail Williams claimed Goodwife<sup>36</sup> Martha Corey had a bird that sucked at her fingers in much the same way that Tituba had described. Another bewitched girl, Ann Putnam, Jr., tried to claim Deodat Lawson had a yellow bird atop his hat during a sermon, but would be quieted by the people around her. As per usual, the other afflicted girls supported these claims.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, as seen in the examination of Goodwife Corey,<sup>38</sup> the girls exhibited keen observational skills, reacting to the gestures the woman made while being questioned. The girls watched for certain behaviors in Goodwife Corey, such as the woman’s nervous lip biting, or the clenching of her hands. Seizing the opportunity to behave in a manner that would implicate Corey’s guilt, when she performed these behaviors, the girls would howl and cry out. They claimed in biting her lip, wringing her hands, and curling her fingers, Martha Corey was biting them, pinching them, and tormenting them. Without much evidence to support her innocence, the girls’ courtroom behavior proved to be weighty evidence that she was in fact responsible for

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<sup>35</sup> *Elizabeth Hubbard vs Sarah Good*, in Woodward, *Records*, 29-30; *Ann Putnam Jr. vs Sarah Good*, in Woodward, *Records*, 31-32; *Abigail Williams v. Sarah Osborn and Sarah Good*, in Woodward, 40-41.

<sup>36</sup> Goodwife was a prefix used for married women of lower social class; Mrs was reserved for high class ladies.

<sup>37</sup> *Examination of Tituba Indian*, in Woodward, *Records*, 44-48; Deodat Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative of Some Remarkable Passages Relating to Sundry Persons Afflicted by Witchcraft, at Salem Village Which Happened from the Nineteenth of March, to the Fifth of April, 1692*, Boston, n.p., 1692, reprinted in Burr, *Narratives*, 154-156.

<sup>38</sup> It is worth noting that Goodwife Martha Corey was also an elderly woman.

their torment. Additionally, the girls became even more vocal during Martha Corey's examinations. During her questioning, Martha Corey denied witchcraft accusations, requesting to be allowed to go pray. She insisted she was "a gospel woman" to which the girls wasted no time in jeering she was not a gospel woman, but in fact a gospel witch. This would become a norm for the girls when presented with accused women; to writhe, shriek, and become unruly during questionings, settling down only after their supposed tormentors were put in jail.<sup>39</sup>

The accusations after this point did not slow down. The girls continued to accuse people of witchcraft, leading to even more arrests.<sup>40</sup> The circle of bewitched individuals grew<sup>41</sup>, Ann Putnam, Jr.'s mother notably joining the ranks. However, during the trials and hearings, the main witnesses tended to repeatedly be the same group of girls and family members. Thomas Putnam and his family tended to serve as the main prosecutors. In addition, the Putnam family through the afflicted Ann Putnam Jr, Ann Putnam Sr, and Mercy Lewis,<sup>42</sup> played a significant part in determining who was accused of witchcraft. The Putnam family also supported the controversial Reverend Samuel Parris, in the face of other members of the town who disagreed with his position as the Village's Reverend. Their conference with the Parris girls as well implies that their decision to accuse certain individuals may have been the result of the girls' acute awareness of the tensions that plagued Salem Village, and impacted their families. It is entirely plausible their involvement in the witchcraft claims and accusations were a catharsis of the frustrations associated with being at the center of local conflict.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative*, in Burr, *Narratives*, 154-157; *Edward Putnam and Eliziel Cheever v. Martha Corey*, in Woodward, *Records*, 59; Calef, *More Wonders*, in Burr, *Narratives*, 343-344.

<sup>40</sup> Even four year old girl, Dorcas Good, daughter of Sarah Good, was arrested for witchcraft and jailed with her mother under the suspicion that Sarah Good had been training her as a witch.

<sup>41</sup> The exact group of individuals who were involved in the trials tended to fluctuate as to who was active and who the members of the accusing group were as the trials went on. What is important however, is that the girls tended only to act as a group when in the process of accusing others.

<sup>42</sup> Mercy Lewis, 17 years of age, lived within the Putnam household and worked as the family's servant.

<sup>43</sup> Calef, *More Wonders*, in Burr, *Narratives*, 344, 370; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*.

Furthermore, the methods at which the afflicted individuals went about expressing their sufferings at the hands of the devil took a great many forms. The more rambunctious, younger children like Abigail Williams and Ann Putnam, Jr., tended to act out and misbehave, especially in the midst of church sermons. They would interrupt services and belittle the texts and sermons. Ann Putnam, Sr., however, an older, more refined woman would have fits that could be soothed only by having prayers read to her. While the younger children were keen to behave in ways that would garner attention, Ann Putnam, Sr.'s fits and torments could be eased with prayer, most likely intended to attest to her status as a good Puritan woman under the influence of an evil hand.<sup>44</sup>

Occasionally, the girls attempted to change the narrative of their bewitchment. Mercy Lewis notably, a month or so into the proceedings, made an effort to shift her influence from hellish to heavenly. She still made claims she adamantly refused to partake in the devil's food, or to sign the Devil's Book<sup>45</sup> though she was frequently prompted to do so. However, at one point she reported she had seen a man in white who led her to a place of light and glory where masses dressed in glittering white garments and sang hymns. She claimed she wanted to stay in that place. The other girls also agreed they had been to such a place and seen such a man, and he warned them when they were to have fits. These claims were however, dismissed. Some reports even suggest that the girls were told that these heavenly visions were clever tricks enacted by Satan. They were encouraged to report any similar visions that they had. Eventually, not receiving the desired response, these visions ceased.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative*, in Burr, *Narratives*, 154-158.

<sup>45</sup> Signing the Devil's Book sealed a covenant with Satan, and changed a person's status from possessed, to that of a full-fledged witch

<sup>46</sup> Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative*, in Burr, *Narratives*, 160-161.

Naturally, the girls returned to weaving their accusations, and as a result, the prisons in Salem began to fill up.<sup>47</sup> A Court of Oyer and Terminer<sup>48</sup> was put together to hear cases, with the intent to expedite the decluttering of Salem's prisons. The town was on the edge of paranoia and in a state of hysteria thanks to the girl's successful upheaval of Salem society. As a result, townsfolk hoping to get to the bottom of the Village's witchcraft epidemic came out with the intention of providing the necessary evidence to condemn those they believed had slighted them with *maleficium*. The first trial, held in June, gave the first in a series of death sentences.<sup>49</sup> Bridget Bishop, was to be hanged for witchcraft. The western area of the town where this execution would take place later become to be known as Gallows Hill<sup>50</sup> for all the hangings that took place upon it. Bridget Bishop's execution proved tricky for the girls and those who had testified against her, as it was a criminal offense in New England for anyone to lie and cause the death of another. In the interest of preserving their innocence, the girls and those involved in Bishop's trial had little choice but to produce other witches.<sup>51</sup>

The next sitting of the court produced five more death sentences. Initially, however, it had been merely four death sentences. Rebecca Nurse, a matronly old woman who tended to have been relatively well liked, was acquitted of the crime. Upon hearing that she had been found not guilty, the afflicted girls flew into a frenzy. They cried out and made such a ruckus the

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<sup>47</sup> Because Massachusetts had previously lost its charter, the town had no means of actually trying any of the accused for witchcraft and had to wait for the new governor, Sir William Phips, to arrive from England with the new charter.

<sup>48</sup> "Oyer and Terminer," meaning "hear and determine."

<sup>49</sup> Contrary to popular believe, the only method of execution used in Salem was that of hanging. No witches were drowned or burned at the stake. The only other deaths directly in relation to the trials were the deaths of those who died in jail, and an outlier who was pressed to death.

<sup>50</sup> Or Witches' Hill.

<sup>51</sup> Hoffer, *The Devil's Disciples*, 172; *Death Warrant v. Bridget Bishop*, in Woodward, *Records*, 170-171; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 7.

jury was sent back. When it returned, Rebecca Nurse was found guilty of witch craft, and sentenced to death. She and the other five women were taken to Gallows Hill to be hung.<sup>52</sup>

Sarah Good, too, was found guilty, and sentenced to death on the same day as Rebecca Nurse. She was urged to recite the Lord's Prayer to prove her position as a good Puritan woman. She performed relatively well, but unfortunately, at the end, she mistakenly said, "hollowed be thy name," as opposed to the correct "hallowed be thy name." As such she was deemed to have uttered a curse instead, and this contributed to her swift condemnation. At her execution, she was encouraged by a present Reverend, Nicholas Noyes, to confess, yet clung tight to her innocence, telling him, "I am no more a Witch than you are a Wizard, and if you take away my Life, God will give you Blood to drink."<sup>53</sup> Even correctly recited prayers alone, however, was not enough to save everyone. George Burroughs<sup>54</sup> at his execution declared his innocence with a perfect recitation of the Lord's Prayer. This stalled the execution a bit, before Cotton Mather<sup>55</sup> lent his support to the execution as he gave a speech fervently insisting this was trickery by the devil and the execution must continue, which it did.<sup>56</sup>

Other accused persons stood up for themselves and attempted to prove their innocence in other ways. At her execution, Mary Esty, sister of Rebecca Nurse, after saying some emotional goodbyes, made note of her innocence but accepted her fate. Although she too was encouraged to confess, like many others, she refused to do so. Holding her ground she confessed her

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<sup>52</sup> Calef, *More Wonders*, in Burr, *Narratives*, 358; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*

<sup>53</sup> Calef, *More Wonders*, in Burr, *Narratives*, 358. Interestingly enough, Nicholas Noyes would die years later of a hemorrhage, which many of the people would take as a sign that Sarah Good had been innocent after all.

<sup>54</sup> George Burroughs was formerly a Reverend in Salem, though he was later ousted from the Village and went to Maine. After being accused of witchcraft by Abigail Williams, he was brought back to Salem and convicted on the grounds of spectral evidence; the girls reported visions of seeing Burroughs's deceased wives, and the report vision was so incredibly detailed that it was taken as concrete evidence.

<sup>55</sup> Cotton Mather, from the Mather family was a prominent social figure and somewhat of a religious authority in Salem Village, as well as an avid supporter of the witch trials.

<sup>56</sup> Calef, *More Wonders*, in Burr, *Narratives*, 347 and 358 and 360-61.

unwavering faith in God and gave a dignified request that no further innocent people be killed in this onslaught. She petitioned the judges to take heed in their future proceedings. Esty also refused to point fingers at other people, an act other accused witches rarely had the grace to do. Notably, Giles Corey<sup>57</sup> in his own way also protested these unjust charges raised against him. He refused to confess or even testify before a jury. As a result, those in charge attempted to put him through a torture called *peine fort et dure*,<sup>58</sup> in order to coerce him into speaking. He accepted this, and as a result became the first person in New England to be pressed to death.<sup>59</sup>

With her last words, Mary Esty rebuked the practice of many of the accused to try and insinuate others as witches. The women were encouraged to confess for their crimes against Salem, its people, and God. This was because they were expected to repent, and in repenting they could begin to resolve themselves of their sins. Many of the accused witches may have realized that a confession was the only surefire way to avoid an execution. Of all the cases that went to trial and resulted in a verdict, none of the confessors were executed.<sup>60</sup> A confession to the crime of witchcraft did however, require a person to report who had bewitched them to begin with. In addition to the girls' activism in threading the seeds of suspicion throughout the already panic-stricken town, the accused added to the ever-growing number of accusations by sacrificing others in the interest of saving their own skins.<sup>61</sup>

The trials continued to plague the town as these accusations spread like wildfire, and by October of 1692, nineteen people had been hung for witchcraft, there had been one death by pressing, and some others were wasting away in prison.<sup>62</sup> By then, there were around two

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<sup>57</sup> Husband to Martha Corey, accused because of this connection

<sup>58</sup> A torture method in which heavy weights such as stones are piled up on the body, the weight gradually becoming heavier and heavier until the person finally gives in.

<sup>59</sup> Calef, *More Wonders*, in Burr, *Narratives*, 368-369 and 367; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 8.

<sup>60</sup> Around 50 people are thought to have confessed to the crime and not one of them was executed for the crime.

<sup>61</sup> Woodward, *Records*; Burr, *Narratives*; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*; Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*

<sup>62</sup> A dog was also executed on grounds of bewitching the girls.

hundred (and climbing) people who had been accused, one hundred and fifty of whom were in prison. The prisons in Salem had become so full that incoming prisoners had to be sent to the nearby Ipswich Prison. All the while, the girls were being paraded around New England to uncover the presence of even more witches. However, faith in them and their judgement seemed to be dwindling. During one instance in which they had been sent for, the girls fell into a fit at the sight of an old woman crossing a bridge, clearly attempting to enact their usual ploy to have her accused. Much to their surprise however, they received little to no reaction and were paid no heed. Upon realizing this, the girls immediately withdrew. They were no longer receiving the encouragement they had come to expect, and were discouraged by this.<sup>63</sup>

Further support for them dwindled when the people of Salem began to believe that the devil could take on the form of innocent people. Therefore, testimonies given by the girls would soon come under scrutiny as the devil's testimonies. Not only was this lack of faith being felt among the townspeople but also amongst those involved with the cases. Rumors of Reverend John Hale's<sup>64</sup> wife appearing to the girls as a spectre took a significant toll on his ability to suspend his doubts about the girls' testimonies. Spectral evidence too then slowly began to lose favor as a method by which people could be accused. As a result, Governor William Phips dissolved the Court of Oyer and Terminer, implementing in its place a Superior Court that would no longer accept such instances of nontangible evidence. At this point it had become incredibly clear that the girls had taken this charade too far, so much so that others began to suspect the girls had concocted the whole epidemic for no reason other than sport.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Calef, *More Wonders*, 372-373; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 9.

<sup>64</sup> John Hale was a reverend who deeply involved himself from the begging in the accusations and trials.

<sup>65</sup> William Phips to William Blathwayt, February 21, 1693, in Burr, *Narratives*, 198-202; *Daniel Elliot for Eliz Proctor*, in Burr, *Narratives*; Roach, 334.

After the Superior Court was established in Salem, Governor Phips began making efforts to extricate people from the miserable conditions of Salem's crowded prisons, allowing people out on grounds of bail and other such policies. The Superior Court heard the remaining trials, this time requiring solid and undisputable evidence in order to pass a guilty verdict. Most that went to trial in this new court were relieved to find themselves not guilty of witchcraft. Seven people who had, under the Court of Oyer and Terminer, been found guilty and scheduled for an execution were saved by the rulings of the Superior Court. Soon all of the accusations would all be dealt with in a bloodless manner by early 1693. Just like that, the hysteria that had gripped the town would cease almost instantly. During the denouement of the trials, Increase Mather<sup>66</sup> had made a comment that began to reflect the thought process of everyone involved in these next proceedings; "It were better that ten suspected witches should escape, than that one innocent person should be condemned."<sup>67</sup>

In the aftermath of these trials, Salem would gradually return to some degree of normalcy. Retributions would be attempted to be made to the families of the dead, though the lives of these people would never again be entirely whole. Samuel Parris would eventually be driven out of Salem by these very people. Following suit, many of the girls would eventually leave Salem as well, go on to have families, and to perhaps put the events of that fateful year behind them. Ann Putnam Jr, notably, would attempt to join the Salem Church in 1706, and apologize profusely for her hand in the deaths of many of her fellow townsfolk. She believed them to be innocent and she begged forgiveness of the people she had hurt. Chalking her

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<sup>66</sup> Father of Cotton Mather, a member of the prominent Mather family and therefore viewed as a religious and moral social authority.

<sup>67</sup> Increase Mather, *Cases of Conscience*, as cited in Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, p. 10; William Phips to William Blathwayt, February 21, 1693, in Burr, *Narratives*, 198-202; Calef, *More Wonders*, in Burr, *Narratives*, 376-386.

involvement in the macabre events up to a delusion of Satan, she would be wracked by guilt until her death in 1715. Others like Abigail Williams's fates would come to be lost to history; after their involvement in such an infamous course of events, they would fall away from recorded history entirely. Many of those who facilitated the trials would do the opposite. Officials such as Deodat Lawson, John Hale, Robert Calef, and the Mathers would attempt to document the trials and the events leading up to them. Many would use their accounts to attempt to justify their roles in the unfathomable happenings that swept through the town and stole into their lives.<sup>68</sup>

In examining the Salem experience during 1692 to 1693, it becomes impossible to separate the success of the accusations in wracking Salem to its roots from the overtly religious culture of the town. Their unwavering belief in the presence of Satan in their lives provided the necessary first step for the girls to begin the twisted game that would define their community for ages to come. Presented with the opportunity to escape punishment for dabbling in white magic, the girls unintentionally found themselves under a spotlight. An unusual experience for Puritan children, especially Puritan girls, to find themselves in, the girls seemed taken by the limelight, and the subsequent opportunity to break free of the confines that their strict culture had set on them. They would revel in their newfound fame and recognition, the ability to speak out and even more than that, to be heard. The town would believe them, and unwittingly encourage and engage in their charade. While a matter of life and death, the girls would abuse their new-found power, dragging the town along, until it became too late for them to back out, and they found themselves trapped in a convoluted snare of their own design. Having been at the center of the chaos for so long, fear of what awaited them in that strict society when the truth inevitably was

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<sup>68</sup> Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 309-313.

revealed, kept the girls on their path of destruction. The girls kept Satan alive in their community, and played upon that fear, bringing infamy to the little town of Salem.

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