

RADICALS, CONSERVATIVES, AND THE SALEM WITCHCRAFT CRISIS:
EXPLOITING THE FRAGILE COMMUNITIES OF COLONIAL NEW
ENGLAND

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Introduction: A New Interpretation

What took place in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692, has long served as emblematic of the frailties underlying colonial New England. It was a liminal society on the edge of the “civilized” and, indeed, known world; on the margins geographically, socially, and theologically. The instability of these Puritan communities—religious outcasts living in a geographical outpost, ruled by a king who inhabited another continent—was exacerbated by almost perpetual skirmishes with Native American tribes along their frontier, the still ever-present fear of illness and hunger, and the increasingly obvious failure of their revolutionary Puritan experiment.

Few events in early American history have been so much debated as the Salem witchcraft trials, which were “by far the largest witch panic in colonial America.”¹ Whilst historians have proposed a variety of interpretations as to its cause, two in particular carry weight in the historical community. In their groundbreaking study of the witchcraft crisis, *Salem Possessed* (1974), social historians Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum argued that the underlying cause of the crisis was the fact that by the early 1690s the inhabitants of Salem Village had for decades been sharply divided by family allegiance and economic disparities, and that the accusations “moved in channels which were determined by [these] years of factional strife.”² Their thesis has proven foundational, offering, as Bernard Rosenthal has said “the most ambitious modern attempt to explain the Salem Village episode,” and described by Carol F. Karlsen as

¹ Godbeer, Richard, *Escaping Salem: The Other Witch Hunt of 1692* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10.

² Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed* (New York: MJF Books, 1974), 181.

“influential.”³ Karlsen’s own book, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (1987) has proven equally influential. Looking not just at Salem but all of colonial New England, Karlsen’s most “pressing concern” is “why most witches in early American society were women.”⁴ Mary Beth Norton and Elizabeth Reis strongly support Karlsen’s gender-based approach. In Chapter One, I will examine the historiography on the subject in more depth. For now, let me make clear that I agree that some of the divisions Boyer and Nissenbaum and Karlsen identify existed. It is likely, however, that the community was more complex than the two dominant interpretations seem to suggest, and that it was divided across many lines of difference, which include, but are not limited to, both gender and economic disparities. However, my analysis suggests that previous studies have omitted perhaps the most significant of these divisions. I wish to propose a new interpretive framework.

As I will argue, the Salem witchcraft crisis was the climax of a building divide between “Radicals” and “Conservatives” in colonial New England. My analysis of the event has been significantly informed by earlier studies, especially Karlsen’s gender-focused reading of the event. However, in my own analysis of the key primary sources I will build upon what remains an implication in her work—that this division did not run solely along gender lines but was also played out between the young and the old, the poor and the rich. Building upon the work of Rosenthal in *Salem Story* (1993), I will additionally argue that the actions of both parties were more conscious, on both parts, than earlier scholarship has suggested. At the same time, Boyer and Nissenbaum’s reading of the event as “a political struggle between vying groups of men, and sometimes as a psychological struggle within individual men” is in my view reductive,

³ Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3; Carol Karlsen, “Review of Salem Possessed by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum,” *Signs* 3, no. 3 (1978): 213, www.jstor.org/stable/3173184.

⁴ Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1987), xiii.

attributing all agency in the crisis to the male figures involved, and overlooking the extraordinary number of women and children who played a prominent role.⁵ The men upon whom they confer agency were indeed ordinarily the political and social leaders of the community, but it is an integral element of the crisis itself that it afforded power to a much wider portion of the population.

I identify the “Radicals” as a group of mostly young, female and poor individuals both instigating and reveling in the breakdown of an oppressive community. They were experimenting with a world turned upside-down, a grand social experiment both echoing and inverting the Puritan experiment Salem was built upon. The very society that oppressed them, Puritan New England, had set a precedent for dissent and the formation of a new, radical, society. I will argue the opposing group, the “Conservatives,” consisted of older, mostly male figures trying desperately to maintain the establishment. I will here agree to an extent with Boyer and Nissenbaum that the ‘interpretation’ of the actions of the possessed was proposed with specific intent and was formative in the continuation of the crisis.⁶ I will argue that the witchcraft crisis was not an inadvertent consequence of their fractured society, but a fulfilment of the desires of each group.

Unlike other analyses of the events in Salem, my analysis suggests that this division does not run neatly between accusers and “witches.” I will point to evidence that Radicals strove to uphold their positions through possession and confession; and the Conservatives upheld theirs both as accusers and the elite. Each group, then, was by no means a coherent unit, or at least not one that ensured mutual protection. I see, for example, considerable similarities between the possessed and some of the women (and men) accused or who confessed: indeed, it was not

⁵ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 178.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 24, 25.

unheard of to move from the former to the latter over the course of the trials, as Mary Warren, for example, did. As Norton points out, “the two groups in effect merged into one in the latter stages of the crisis.”⁷ The Conservatives, made up of the colony’s social elite and the majority of non-possessed accusers, formed a more coherent group. Many of them, however, became victims themselves later in the crisis, in the accusations that seem to have originated entirely with the (predominantly) young and female possessed accusers.

Whilst some of the Conservatives fell victim to the crisis themselves, they played a crucial role in defining witchcraft to the villagers, publicising it, and shaping events to their own advantage. A context had been created in which it was neither inappropriate nor illegal to testify against those who dissented from one’s social values, in a court of law apparently bent on eradicating such individuals. The possessed individuals, however, also had agency in their choice of victims. That the motives of the adult relations of the accusers did not always align exactly with those of the possessed accusers themselves, as Boyer and Nissenbaum claim is evident in their accusations of prominent and upstanding members of society.⁸ These accusations were neither supported nor verified by these relations. Of course, many people had no agency in the crisis at all. I have designated these figures in the category of “Victims,” which includes individuals who suffered at the hands of either or both groups. Others fulfil the demographic characteristics of one group whilst promoting the aims of another. I will nevertheless argue that a *general* pattern exists dividing these two groups, and that that division was the core of the witchcraft crisis. The political, social and ecclesiastical anxiety and fragility of colonial New

⁷ Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare: the Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 305--306.

⁸ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 23: “the adults... determined... the direction the witchcraft accusations would take.”

England was manipulated by two opposing groups—the Radicals and the Conservatives—both of whom helped cause, and exploited, the 1692 witchcraft crisis in Salem, Massachusetts.

After discussing the existing historiography and the contributions I intend to make in Chapter One, Chapter Two will examine the social and religious background in New England, investigating how the division I have sketched above was both born from, and contributed to, several circumstances that brought these issues to reach a point of crisis: waning religious orthodoxy within the community; the search for a stable sense of identity in a colonial context; and changing social roles, such as class fluidity and female deviance. In Chapter Three, I will then provide a critical reading of the Radicals. For those who were accused of or confessed to witchcraft, their statements and records of their examinations exist in the transcripts and collected court documents of the preliminary hearings. These initial statements, “augmented by the later, more detailed revelations elicited by the judges in repeated interviews in the Salem prison,” can “offer at least an approximation of what must have been their official testimony.”⁹ For the possessed accusers, a wide body of material exists, written by villagers and the colonial elite alike, detailing their behaviour and much of what they said. However, as in the case of the examinations of accused witches, these records do “present a certain problem of evidence for the modern reader,” being “filtered through the court and written down by a court official.”¹⁰ As this was, as I shall argue, the very group that opposed the Radicals, achieving accuracy in these matters “becomes a textual problem... of weighing competing narratives against each other for their reliability.”¹¹ Even if it is unavoidable to “rely in great part on the materials left by the

⁹ Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 302.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 138.

¹¹ Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 27.

dominant members of society rather than the masses,” I have nevertheless attempted, in weighing different accounts in this fashion, to come as close to accurately representing the Radicals as possible.¹² Chapter Four will analyse the Conservative group. Puritans were prolific writers, and there is therefore copious evidence of their beliefs. I will particularly rely upon the documented sermons of the Salem Village minister Samuel Parris (1689-1696), accounts of the preliminary trials supported by the recollections of ministers such as Deodat Lawson in *A Brief and True Narrative* (1692), and the records in the Salem Village Church Book.

A few notes on documentation and spelling. I have mentioned the necessity of relying on the records of the preliminary examinations. The records of the official court of Oyer and Terminer are not extant, and it is therefore “impossible to know how the witch trials themselves were conducted.”¹³ The preliminary examinations, however, can provide an approximation of the way individuals responded to accusations in the official courts. John Hale, Cotton Mather and Deodat Lawson, who wrote accounts of trials or executions, can help corroborate this.

When quoting from primary sources, I have retained the irregular spelling and punctuation in the majority of cases and noted otherwise when the text impedes understanding. I have, however, modernised their use of letters. I have changed J to I, F to S and U to V silently throughout the historical sources, since they are systematic typographical issues across almost all the seventeenth-century documents. In the use of the trial documents, I have endeavoured to present speech as direct quotations only when it is presented as such in the text itself, but the erratic use of speech marks and style of recording make this difficult. It is not always recorded who was speaking or who was transcribing, but this can often be deduced. Finally, names, as Marion L. Starkey has observed, are the “one subject on which Massachusetts Puritans were

¹² Larzer Ziff, *Puritanism in America: New Culture in a New World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), x.

¹³ Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 207.

splendidly uninhibited.”¹⁴ I have standardised names as best I can within my own text, but there is no way of knowing what, if anything, the “correct” spelling of any name was.

¹⁴ Marion L. Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Inquiry into the Salem Witch Trials* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), vii.

Chapter One

Historiography

In the three centuries since it occurred, the Salem crisis has retained its enduring hold on the popular imagination. Accounts of the crisis began to appear immediately after it ended: Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693) was written during the trials themselves. Interest in Salem witchcraft as a historical study was revived in the nineteenth century when Charles W. Upham published his extensive *Salem Witchcraft* (1867), which remained the benchmark for scholarly analysis for a century. In the twentieth century, two of the most famous works on Salem were published: Marion L. Starkey's *The Devil in Massachusetts* (1949) and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953). Whilst their work is increasingly criticised today, it is essential to note both Upham and Starkey's considerable influence on the Salem witchcraft historiography. Upham's thesis is in some ways a precursor to Boyer and Nissenbaum's, locating the crisis within its wider social and geographical context.¹⁵ Starkey proposes perhaps the first major psychological reading of the crisis.¹⁶ However, as Upham is accused by Boyer and Nissenbaum of focusing "almost affectionately on... petty disputes," and refuted on many counts by Rosenthal, his usefulness and reliability are in question.¹⁷ Equally, Starkey's work is diminished by her commitment to presenting the event as a "Greek tragedy."¹⁸ This narrative style renders her book sensationalist and, on occasion, remarkably inaccurate. The "slight

¹⁵ Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft; with An Account of Salem Village, and A History of Opinions on Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects: Volume I*. (Boston: Wiggin and Lunt, 1867), 15.

¹⁶ Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts*, vi.

¹⁷ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, x.

¹⁸ Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts*, vi.

liberties” she confesses to have taken are in fact glaring.¹⁹ She calls Mercy Lewis a “sly wench,” Sarah Good an “unsavoury crone” and Tituba a “half savage slave” who, in Starkey’s remarkably speculative account, conspires to perform actual witchcraft with a group of “crazed little girls.”²⁰ As a consequence of their sensationalism and unreliability, I have made little use of either Upham or Starkey’s accounts.

Boyer and Nissenbaum have criticised the reliance of pre-1970s historians upon Upham’s “imperfect narrative and analysis.”²¹ Norton and Rosenthal argue this un-analytical approach to Salem history to be ubiquitous. For example, contrary to popular belief, there is no evidence that the possessed girls had taken part in any gathering of teenage fortune-tellers presided over by the slave Tituba, as Rosenthal and Norton have demonstrated.²² This claim, nevertheless, figures in almost every history on Salem.²³ Norton also perceives gaps in the primary documents themselves, which she attributes to a conscious, though un-orchestrated, attempt by those involved and their descendants, to purge the record of evidence of their involvement.²⁴ In spite of the gaps in the record and the flaws of early scholarly analysis, however, there has been a steady outpouring of well-researched and revealing work since the 1970s.

¹⁹ Ibid., vi, vii.

²⁰ Ibid., 17, 41 11, 10, iii.

²¹ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, xi.

²² Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 11; Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 23. For the origin of the fortune-telling myth, see Hale, *A Modest Enquiry*, 132-133: historians have conflated two vague remarks in *A Modest Enquiry*, primarily the dubious statement that he “knew one of the Afflicted persons, who (*as I was credibly informed*) did try with an egg and a glass to find her future Husbands Calling” (*italics mine*). Neither of his remarks are certain to relate to the Salem possessed in particular or even collective activity in general, and they are, as Norton notes (p. 24), left out of his main narrative of how the possession came about.

²³ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 1: “it began in obscurity, with cautious experiments in fortune telling”; Karlsen, *The Devil*, 241: references “several young possessed females in Salem” taking part in fortune telling, but does not make the common mistake of referring to Tituba’s role in precipitating the crisis; Upham, *Salem Witchcraft II*, 3: claims, remarkably, the group of fortune-tellers were “becoming experts in the wonders of necromancy, magic, and spiritualism” under the guidance of Tituba.

²⁴ Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 13.

As my introduction has made clear, there is very little consensus as to the causes of the Salem witchcraft crisis. Boyer and Nissenbaum are unique in their interpretation of the crisis as the result of specific village tensions, but *Salem Possessed* has been cited in almost every work since.²⁵ Their principal thesis is that the crisis was sparked by local conflicts, reflecting the wider conflicts of “a culture in which a subsistence, peasant-based economy was being subverted by mercantile capitalism.”²⁶ Boyer and Nissenbaum persuasively delineate two groups. The first consists of those in favour of Salem minister Samuel Parris, a group with little connection to Salem Town and little political and social influence. The other group opposed Parris, had strong connections to the town and held political power within both the town and village. They contend that the disillusioned, resentful first group made the majority of accusations, broadly against the second group. Their portrayal of the conflicts within Salem Village serves as a useful “lighting flash” to “better... observe” socioeconomic conflicts within New England as a whole.²⁷ However, whilst Boyer and Nissenbaum persuasively account for the motives of the non-possessed accusers, they proceed upon the assumption that adolescent girls, who formed a large portion of the possessed accusers, cannot have had motives of their own, depicting them merely as “passive agents” in “a political struggle between vying groups of men.”²⁸ As a result, their argument can only ever account for the actions of a minority of those involved.

²⁵ For the influence of *Salem Possessed* see for example Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 17: “Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum have argued persuasively that the Village was so contentious because of its anomalous status”; Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 3: “the most ambitious modern attempt to explain the Salem Village episode appears in *Salem Possessed*, where an old idea is probed with new sophistication and insight”; Karlsen, *The Devil*, xii: “the last decade and a half alone has witnessed major interpretations of New England witchcraft by the historians Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum...”

²⁶ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 178.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, xii.

²⁸ Karlsen, “Review of *Salem Possessed*,” 703; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 178.

Considering the statistically proven gender disparities in witchcraft cases, remarkably few historians have published works on the conflation of women and witchcraft. The majority of studies do mention gender at least briefly, but only three significant works focus on gender specifically.²⁹ Karlsen published the first major gender-based study of New England witchcraft, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, in 1987. Reis' *Damned Women* (1997) and Norton's *In the Devil's Snare* (2002) have advanced and reconfigured these ideas. The work of both Karlsen and Norton has been formative for my study. Karlsen argues that any previous analyses that touched on gender addressed only the superficial "misogyny of the period" rather than investigating the systemic gendering of society, economy and religion, an omission she attempts to remedy.³⁰ She presents large quantities of data relating to women and witchcraft in New England, which has been invaluable in support of my own thesis.³¹ Much of her study is based on systems of inheritance in New England, finding that "the women who stood to benefit economically also assumed a position of unusual vulnerability," an influential discovery.³² She concludes that there is no single cause for the gender disparities, but Puritan religious teachings, sexual double-standards, and land shortages all play a part.

Karlsen's book has been particularly significant for my study because she clearly distinguishes between possessed and non-possessed accusers. She notes, as I have, the ideological and demographic similarities between the two groups.³³ She also sees possession as a "power struggle," in which "the possessed and the minister were engaged in a fierce

²⁹ For examples of works that refer to gender, see Godbeer, *Escaping Salem*, 150-154; Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 202-205; Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 133-141. That so few pages of each of these works are dedicated to the most prominent demographic feature of witchcraft accusations is telling.

³⁰ Karlsen, *The Devil*, xiii.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 83.

³³ *Ibid.*, 226, 225-226.

negotiation... about the legitimacy of female discontent, resentment, and anger.”³⁴ Despite the apparent similarities between this interpretation and mine, Karlsen ultimately comes to a very different conclusion as to the nature of possession. Karlsen ends her chapter on possession reminding her reader that “the possessed did not deliberately confront, let alone substantially alter, the cultural values or hierarchical relations of their society.”³⁵ I consider the rebellion and attempted revolution of the Radicals, however, to be both partially conscious and partially successful. She considers the “power struggle” to be completely internalised, with the anger of the possessed “directed inward, on themselves,” not outward, in their accusations.³⁶ By her interpretation, therefore, there are no external social ramifications of possession. By my analysis, however, social hierarchies were externally enforced and, during the witchcraft crisis, externally expressed. She also makes the connection I do of shared efforts between the elite and accusers to “purge” New England “of its female evildoers;” however, she again considers this an unconscious and long-term aim, rather than a conscious and concentrated attack.³⁷ Additionally, Karlsen does not explore the other lower orders of the New England social hierarchies, except as they intersect with gender. Whilst I acknowledge the primacy of gender in witchcraft accusations, by my analysis the particular dynamics of the Salem crisis reflected a broader power struggle.

Norton’s analysis is less specifically gender-oriented, for whilst she concludes that gender may have been the most significant factor in witchcraft accusations as a whole, her thesis is “an exploration of the history of frontier warfare and its impact on the collective mentalité of an entire region,” from which she concludes that the racial beliefs, influx of refugees, and

³⁴ Ibid., 246.

³⁵ Ibid., 248.

³⁶ Ibid., 248.

³⁷ Ibid., 222.

collective anxiety caused by the Indian Wars were amongst the most significant causes of the Salem crisis.³⁸ *In the Devil's Snare* has nevertheless informed my analysis. Norton contends that the events of 1692 are immediately gendered, with the word "Salem" itself evoking "persistent images" of "the misogynistic persecution of women" and "hysterical girls."³⁹ Norton's focus on refugees from the wars in Maine means she studies the role of the possessed and confessors more than most historians. She notes that "as daughters and servants who occupied the lower ranks of household hierarchies, their normal role was... to tend to others' needs" but that "during the crisis others tended to *them*."⁴⁰ She thus touches upon my idea of a division between the upper and lower orders of the hierarchies.

The argument that the crisis was caused by the perfect, explosive combination of a variety of factors, a "perfect storm," is a common one throughout the historiography.⁴¹ In *Salem Story*, Rosenthal, a highly influential colonial historian, proposes no singular theory as to the causes of the crisis, ultimately concluding "attempts to explain by a single theory what happened in 1692 distort rather than clarify the events."⁴² He is more concerned with what happened than why it happened. His thesis was initially conceived as an exercise in cultural memory, but upon undertaking his research, he realised misconceptions around the events were as prevalent in scholarly perspectives as cultural perspectives, and his book became an attempt to contrast image with reality, to present "the story of what actually happened in 1692, as opposed to how the story

³⁸ Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴¹ Emerson W. Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft: The Salem Trials and the American Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 6.

⁴² Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 4.

has been told.”⁴³ Rosenthal spends much of the book revoking the myths created or perpetuated in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. His account is perhaps the most thorough of all of the Salem historiography I have engaged with and, unusually but unsurprisingly, refrains entirely from making unfounded speculations. He notes the power divisions between authorities and the lower orders, and, crucially, posits that both those I call Conservatives and those I call Radicals could have been consciously fraudulent. Rosenthal’s conclusions have therefore been invaluable in the formation of my argument.

⁴³ Ibid., 5.

Chapter Two

The Background to the Crisis: Fragile Communities

Before considering exactly how the two groups I discussed in the Introduction developed in Salem and what they hoped to achieve by their exploitation of their fragile community, we need to understand in what ways their community was fragile. I will therefore briefly present a history of the political and social status of New England before 1692.

Puritanism

Puritanism arose in England in the 1560s, as a term for “those who wished to purify the practices within the Church of England.”⁴⁴ Only later did it come to be used to label adherents to a specific theological doctrine. According to Larzer Ziff, Puritanism was a response to the changing state of economic affairs in Britain.⁴⁵ A 400 percent increase in portable wealth in Europe, coinciding with the end of feudalism, “abandoned large numbers of people to the social chaos of masterlessness.”⁴⁶ Millions were displaced both from “their position in the medieval social hierarchy” and, literally, from their land.⁴⁷ Puritanism provided a new hierarchy and belief system that could supplant the lost feudalistic hierarchy and improve upon the emerging values of capitalism.

⁴⁴ Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 32.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁴⁷ Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 11.

The primary feature of Puritanism is the central role of grace—“that inward supernatural cleansing of perception which signified salvation.”⁴⁸ Puritans believed grace was divinely allocated to a select group, the elect, before their birth. This “doctrine of predestination” was divisive, positing that “a stark abyss yawns” between the elect and others.⁴⁹ Yet whilst it created divisions, it healed others.⁵⁰ As grace was never knowable for certain, no outward signs, neither wealth nor virtue, were unquestionably indicators of salvation. The signs of salvation were “located primarily in the soul.”⁵¹ As a result, the Puritans endorsed the semi-egalitarian philosophy that “no calling or vocation was intrinsically more gracious than another.”⁵² However, the *existence* of hierarchies was not just accepted but foundational to Puritan thought, even if their *usefulness* in determining divine worth was discarded.⁵³ In heaven, there were no hierarchies, but they remained a necessary function on earth to ensure proper worship.⁵⁴ Puritanism revolved around social contracts: between man and wife, parent and child, minister and masses.⁵⁵ These covenants mirrored that between God and man, thus uniting “the duties of civil obedience with the duties of Christian worship” and providing leaders whose responsibility it was for the spiritual salvation of their “inferiors.”⁵⁶

Initially, Puritans remained within Britain, trying to reform the Church of England from the inside.⁵⁷ In the early seventeenth century, in defiance of the new Laudian practices, a small

⁴⁸ Kenneth Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 57.

⁴⁹ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 17; Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 8.

⁵⁰ Miller, *The Seventeenth Century*, 17.

⁵¹ Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 28.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁵ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 8.

⁵⁶ Miller, *The Seventeenth Century*, 412.

⁵⁷ Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 32.

group separated themselves from the church.⁵⁸ Even to other Puritans, this separation appeared heretical.⁵⁹ In fear of punishment, and taken with a desire to set up their own church, one of these separatist congregations emigrated to the Netherlands, and was part of a group that, twelve years later, went on to America.⁶⁰ This group, the “*Mayflower* Pilgrims,” founded Plymouth Colony in 1620.⁶¹ Over the following decades, the Pilgrims were joined by other, non-separatist, groups, who insisted they remained “reformers within the Church of England,” not separatists. Colonisation was encouraged by the authorities, who then saw it as “a means of curing the social ills of a nation plagued with landless men.”⁶² These colonies, however, were not funded by the crown but by private entrepreneurs who would risk their finances in the hope of “profitable returns.”⁶³ Thus the English authorities “generously, even lavishly,” gave a group of non-separatists a “charter to Massachusetts Bay, and obligingly left out the standard clause requiring that the document remain in London,” an omission of which John Winthrop and his “revolutionaries” took full advantage.⁶⁴ On June 12th 1630, passengers from the *Arbella* landed at Salem.⁶⁵ This group had founded the Massachusetts Bay colony.⁶⁶

Although their charter was essentially a commercial document, creating a “joint-stock trading company,” which “evolved” into the government of Massachusetts, the Puritans believed that they had a *sacred* errand to settle the New World.⁶⁷ Unlike later manifestations of this idea,

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956), 14.

⁶⁵ John Winthrop, “Journal: Landing at Salem, June 12, 1630,” in *The Puritans*, ed. Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, (New York: American Book Company, 1938), 126.

⁶⁶ Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 49.

⁶⁷ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 59; Sacvan Bercovitch, introduction to *The American Puritan Imagination: Essays in Reevaluation*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 1.

the Puritan errand “was profoundly eschatological.”⁶⁸ America took on a “precise and complex” typological significance: their purpose was to “create a New Jerusalem” in New England.⁶⁹ It became, as Sacvan Bercovitch argues, the “modern counterpart of the wilderness through which the Israelites reached Canaan,” indeed the “antitype” of that journey, which was but a foreshadowing of “the journey now by a *Christian* Israel to the long-awaited ‘new heavens and a new earth’.”⁷⁰ As John Winthrop famously said aboard the *Arbella* in 1630, they would be a beacon to the Christian world, “a City upon a Hill,” with “the eies of all people” upon them.⁷¹ God would “delight to dwell” among them.⁷² This typological symbolism became an integral part of New England culture.

Massachusetts, 1620-1692

The colony soon began to consider itself a cohesive entity, despite the original divisions between separatists and non-separatists.⁷³ In the following decades, the colony faced an era of dramatic political upheaval that both consolidated and threatened its perception of itself as an independent entity. New Englanders were dismayed to see the short-lived Commonwealth in England go “whoring after toleration, ignoring the model city built specifically for her redemption.”⁷⁴ They were not, therefore, particularly concerned about the Restoration, and initially appeared to have little to fear from Charles II, although the Restoration did to an extent

⁶⁸ Bercovitch, introduction to *The American Puritan Imagination*, 7.

⁶⁹ Bercovitch, introduction to *The American Puritan Imagination*, 7; Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Longman, 1987), 205.

⁷⁰ Bercovitch, introduction to *The American Puritan Imagination*, 8, 9.

⁷¹ John Winthrop. “A Modell of Christian Charity,” in *The Puritans*, ed. Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (New York: American Book Company, 1938), 199.

⁷² Winthrop, “Christian Charity,” 198.

⁷³ Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 50.

⁷⁴ David Minter, “The Puritan Jeremiad as a Literary Form.” In *The American Puritan Imagination*, edited by Sacvan Bercovitch (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 46.

bring “new demands for conformity to the ceremonies of the Church of England.”⁷⁵ Charles promised in 1662, “to confirm and preserve their charter,” with the condition that liberty of conscience be provided for other protestant denominations.⁷⁶ No action was taken, however, until the King’s attention was free to turn to New England in 1676 after a series of domestic and international problems.⁷⁷ This was followed by a decade of indecision during which the King, through his agent Edward Randolph, attempted to determine the political status of the colony.⁷⁸ New England was plagued with rumours that they were about to become a royal colony.⁷⁹

In May 1686, after the coronation of James II, Randolph arrived in Boston carrying the dreaded “revocation of the Massachusetts charter and the King’s commission for a new government.”⁸⁰ With the original charter, the Massachusetts Bay Company could choose its own officers.⁸¹ As the company had evolved into the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the governor of the Company had become “in effect an elected political leader.”⁸² The revocation of the charter meant Massachusetts lost its right to election. As Kenneth Silverman argues, Puritan theology relied upon the idea that “church and state, Moses and Aaron, were coordinate authorities.”⁸³ Such interference from the crown was thus a blow not only to the independence, but the entire “Puritan character” of the state.⁸⁴

⁷⁵ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Randolph soon set about integrating the Church of England into the colonies. Ten days after his arrival he tried to establish an Anglican ministry in Boston.⁸⁵ In December 1686, the new governor, Edmund Andros arrived.⁸⁶ He presided over “the Dominion of New England,” a territory including “Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, New Hampshire, Maine, and the Narragansett country,” which would also incorporate Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York and the Jerseys by 1688.⁸⁷ Andros “abolished the Assembly,” “limited town meetings,” and “required juries to admit more non-Congregationalist jurors.”⁸⁸ Such unfavourable change, however, was short-lived. In 1689, when the colonists heard news of the Glorious Revolution in England, the Andros administration was overthrown, “in a bloodless *coup d’état*.”⁸⁹ The colonists made clear that their anger had been with the administration, not Royal authority: they remained “orderly, loyal subjects of the king.”⁹⁰

The new monarchs William and Mary told Increase Mather, in an echo of Charles II’s promise, that the colonists “‘*should have their Ancient Rights and Privileges Restored and Confirmed unto them*’—if it were in [their] power.”⁹¹ Some in New England “called for independence,” others for “a military government,” and most to return to the original charter.⁹² England went to war with France, again diverting attention from the colonies.⁹³ In the following years, colonists “lobbied vainly” for the restoration of the original charter.⁹⁴ It was only in 1692,

⁸⁵ Ibid., 62.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 63.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid..

⁸⁹ Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 230; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 6.

⁹⁰ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 71.

⁹¹ Ibid., 73.

⁹² Ibid., 72.

⁹³ Ibid., 74.

⁹⁴ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 6.

as the witchcraft crisis began, that the colony learnt of the impending arrival of Sir William Phips, their new governor, along with their new charter.⁹⁵

A “Mentality of Invasion”

As a relic of the “long-lived public sense of vulnerability” the Puritans had developed as “a persecuted minority in England,” they retained the impression that “troublesome and vast change could come at any time.”⁹⁶ Their geographical liminality, combined with the fear of invasion, caused a perpetual sense of fragility. In both senses, the threat was very real. The earlier English colonisation efforts, the 1585 Roanoke colony and the 1607 Jamestown settlement, had suffered years of hunger, illness, and extreme weather, combined with (often self-provoked) hostilities with the indigenous populations. Any of those difficulties may have been the cause of the disappearance of the former and starvation leading to cannibalism in the latter.⁹⁷ Indeed “starving times” were also experienced in both Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay.⁹⁸ Voyages to and from England were long, precarious and inevitably resulted in multiple fatalities. The colonists were clinging to the edge of a hostile continent, scattered along the coastline almost as if yearning towards their homeland, and yet separated by a vast ocean. The sense of emptiness must have been astounding in the early years, so very far from home in a land inhabited by, in their eyes, only savages.

These “savages” were themselves one of the primary causes of the colonists’ sense of impending invasion. The colonists took part in the Pequot War (1636-37) and King Philip’s War

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 55.

⁹⁷ David Brown, “Skeleton of teenage girl confirms cannibalism at Jamestown colony,” *The Washington Post*, last modified May 1, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/skeleton-of-teenage-girl-confirms-cannibalism-at-jamestown-colony/2013/05/01/5af5b474-b1dc-11e2-9a98-4be1688d7d84_story.html?utm_term=.50583969de4a&wpisrc=nl_az_most.

⁹⁸ John Putnam Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 373.

(1675-77), the latter of which destroyed “more than a dozen” colonial settlements, and left “several tribes slaughtered.”⁹⁹ What historians call King William’s War (1677-1678 and 1688) confirmed the settlers’ belief that they lived amongst hostile peoples.¹⁰⁰ Their fragile communities “were wiped out,” “their property holdings destroyed” and “families that had lived in Maine for two or three generations and had sunk deep roots in the soil were either killed or forced to abandon their homes.”¹⁰¹ Such accounts are, of course, increasingly perceived as problematic. Norton, who wrote this particular account, is not alone in portraying the white settlers as the sole victims in King William’s War, nor indeed does she recognise the irony in lamenting the loss of the colonists’ “deep roots in the soil” at the hands of Native Americans. This, however, closely resembles the colonists’ own perception of events.

The threat of invasion was not purely internal. The colonists were also at risk from foreign nations. The Netherlands was at war with England throughout the 1670s and “made no distinction between mother country and colony,” seizing vessels “wherever New England traded.”¹⁰² France, with its competing claims to the northern Americas, was an even more potent threat.¹⁰³ Perhaps the largest threat, however, was the mother country. The constant re-organizations of their system of government engendered a “mentality of invasion” that permeated every aspect of their lives.¹⁰⁴ As Karlsen has shown, many colonists feared losing the small amount of land allocated to them in the town territories, perhaps reflecting their fears for the colony.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 19.

¹⁰⁰ Norton, *Devil’s Snare*, 11: referred to by contemporaries as the First and Second Indian Wars.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 55.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁰⁵ Karlsen, *The Devil*.

The geography and natural environment of the colonies caused further anxiety. Although better prepared for the climate than had been their Virginian predecessors (and more fortuitously located, away from the southern swampland), the Massachusetts Bay colonists still constituted an untrained group in an alien land, unequipped with the necessary resources to confront the “harsh and invasive” elements, such as “lightning to split houses, drought to blast wheat, and lethal measles, scarlet fever, and smallpox.”¹⁰⁶ Their unsanitary conditions and close quarters led to regular epidemics.¹⁰⁷ Though this was no different to England, the results were potentially cataclysmic in a place with so small a population. The colonists’ propensity to interpret all such events as marks of God’s judgement further increased the anxiety such events engendered.¹⁰⁸

The Lower Orders of the Hierarchy

Another source of conflict and anxiety in New England was the very hierarchy it rested upon. Nominally a society of equals—in which any individual could receive grace, and indeed, as Cotton Mather complained, many more women did than men—in reality New England was anything but.¹⁰⁹ It was a society in which every social relation emulated the hierarchical covenant between God and the people, with “husbands superior to wives, parents to children, masters to servants, ministers to congregants, and magistrates to subjects.”¹¹⁰ The family was both a “little Church” and a “little Commonwealth,” in which all members had direct access to God, but were also compelled to serve him “indirectly” through “serving their superiors within the domestic frame.”¹¹¹ This had the insidious result of making challenges to the patriarchal

¹⁰⁶ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 56.

¹⁰⁷ Ziff, *Puritanism in America*.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*.

¹¹⁰ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 164.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 16, 164.

authority, in effect, “a challenge to God’s authority.”¹¹² Whilst women, the poor, and the young constituted the lower orders of society in the Old World, the New World had held new promises for them. They cannot but have been disappointed to find Christian Israel still meant a life of servitude, misery, and unrealised dreams.

It is perfectly possible, without being anachronistic, to posit that New England women may have found subordination less palatable than their European counterparts.¹¹³ Women in Europe were second-class citizens, in law and in society. Initially, Puritanism appeared to offer an alternative. Puritanism’s rhetoric of equality played out in reality during periods when it “stood in opposition to the established church,” when women served as essential activists “on behalf of the faith.”¹¹⁴ But, as Puritan communities began to settle, the willingness of female colonists to “challenge established authority” became troubling.¹¹⁵ Anne Hutchinson famously became a religious leader during the Antinomian Controversy.¹¹⁶ As Karlsen notes, Hutchinson denied the accusation that she was antinomian—a belief that grace “relieved Christians of responsibility for obeying the moral law”—yet as a result of her “personal assumption of religious leadership” and “outspoken theological views” she was accused of heresy, excommunicated, and banished—as well as being informally accused of witchcraft.¹¹⁷ This response sent a “clear and emphatic message” that such challenges to masculine authority were no longer to be tolerated.¹¹⁸ The hypocrisy of Puritan “spiritual equality” was physically depicted in the Puritans’ “‘seating’ the congregation in ranked order, according to sex, wealth, and age,” a continual reminder of the

¹¹² Ibid., 164.

¹¹³ Ibid., 165.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 191.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 172.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 191.

“primacy” of gender identity.¹¹⁹ When the lower orders became the primary players in the witchcraft crisis, this would have been starkly played out in their movement from their allotted “inferior” positions in the meetinghouse. Ministers persisted in this hypocrisy, but were careful to distinguish “between spiritual and civil equality,” in their unenviable task of balancing “a radical theology with a conservative social system.”¹²⁰ I will argue that exposure to this rhetoric of radical theology helped inspire the Radicals’ revolt against the conservative social system.

New Englanders considered themselves “enlightened” in terms of “woman's place in society and in their cosmology.”¹²¹ They contested the traditional Christian view of women’s inherent evil: Eve’s sin was not so much a sin but “an inevitable consequence of her nature—weak, unstable, susceptible to suggestion”.¹²² Women went from being a “necessary evil,” to “a necessary good.”¹²³ According to minister Samuel Willard, the covenant between husband and wife closely resembled equality.¹²⁴ This paradoxical state of quasi-equality was evident in Puritan women’s everyday lives. As Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has argued, wives could be heavily involved in their husbands’ occupations, responsible for “conveying directions, pacifying creditors, and perhaps even making some decisions about the disposition of labor,” as a “deputy husband.”¹²⁵ However, women could serve as deputy husbands only because it could not permanently challenge “the patriarchal order of society.”¹²⁶ Indeed its very wording reinforced it.

¹¹⁹ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 54.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹²¹ Reis, *Damned Women*, xvi.

¹²² Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 97.

¹²³ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 173.

¹²⁴ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 8.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 39, 9.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 238.

This is a prime example of Bercovitch's observation that "the New England Way... was the ideology of a new culture encased in outmoded, quasi-biblical forms."¹²⁷

Like other seventeenth-century women, the New England woman was a "femme covert." Any personal property a woman owned was in legal reality that of her father or husband, and changed hands between them as she did, and unless her husband specifically signed a premarital contract stating otherwise, she could neither "own nor acquire property," nor "enter into a contract or write a will."¹²⁸ Widows were "ensured maintenance," but rarely retained control of the possessions and home she had seen as her own.¹²⁹ Additionally, "the woman alone in early New England" was considered "an aberration."¹³⁰ A widowed or otherwise single woman failed to fulfil her divinely appointed role as a helpmeet, nor could she "spen[d] herself to perpetuate the race."¹³¹

For the large servant and enslaved class, and even larger class of the poor, New England was also no utopia. Poorer women, living at the intersection of gender and economic disparity, could find themselves "reduced to abject poverty by the death of a parent" or husband, "for no woman could support herself on the £5 or £10 a year female servants earned."¹³² Because there were "limits to what could be attained, cleared, and (especially in this era) defended," land shortage was a pressing problem, particularly in Salem, where, by 1690, most land had been parcelled out to earlier generations.¹³³ As Karlson has noted, the later generations in Salem mostly "lived as adults on subdivided lands or moved on," and those who remained were

¹²⁷ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America* (London: Routledge, 1993), 34.

¹²⁸ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 7; Karlson, *The Devil*, 83.

¹²⁹ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 7.

¹³⁰ Karlson, *The Devil*, 75.

¹³¹ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 9.

¹³² Karlson, *The Devil*, 79, 229.

¹³³ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 154.

consistently “less well off than their parents.”¹³⁴ Such land shortages disproportionately affected women, whose “shares of their fathers’ estates... would be reduced in favor of their brothers.”¹³⁵ As marriage was partially an economic transaction, this led in turn to a greater proportion of women who never married.¹³⁶

The extremes of youth and age also existed in the lower orders of the hierarchy. The social constraints upon adolescents are perhaps best demonstrated in a witchcraft case that preceded Salem, that of the Goodwin children in Boston, recorded by Cotton Mather—who had the eldest daughter, Martha, living with him for the duration of her possession—in *Memorable Providences* (1689).¹³⁷ Silverman describes the Goodwins as “not possessed but turbulently rebellious,” expressing “severely repressed desires and disapproved behavior.”¹³⁸ The children “would climb over *high Fences*” or be tempted to “sling [people] dovnstaires.”¹³⁹ Sometimes they enacted a barely disguised attempt to evade the household tasks of Puritan youths. Tortured throughout the day, at “about Nine or Ten at Night they alwaies had a Release from their miseries, and *ate & slept* all night.”¹⁴⁰ Under the guise of possession they acted out the fears of those “who denounced the rising generation for wanting to explore sex, taunt their parents, and deride the ministry,” unsettling the society that “demanded” their “utter submission.”¹⁴¹ On the

¹³⁴ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 206.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Cotton Mather, *MEMORABLE PROVIDENCES, relating to VVITCHCRAFTS And POSSESSIONS. A Faithful Account of many Wonderful and Surprising Things, that have befallen several Bewitched and Possessed persons in New-England. Particularly A NARRATIVE of the marvellous Trouble and Releef Experienced by a pious Family in Boston, very lately and sadly molested with EVIL SPIRITS. Whereunto is added, A Discourse delivered unto a Congregation in Boston on the Occasion of that Illustrious Providence. As also A Discourse delivered unto the same Congregation; on the occasion of an horrible Self-Murder Committed in the Town. With an Appendix, in vindication of a Chapter in a late Book of Remarkable Providences, from the Calumnies of a Quaker at Pen-silvania* (Boston: R.P., 1689), 18.

¹³⁸ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 90.

¹³⁹ Mather, *Memorable Providences*, 14, 15.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴¹ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 90.

other extreme, the elderly faced the very different difficult of being a burden to their communities, particularly older women, who were rarely self-sufficient, and attracted resentment and suspicion once past the age of childbearing.¹⁴²

Christian Israel Falling

Whilst the lower orders began to chafe against the flaws in their utopia, the ecclesiastical elite developed their own anxieties about the state of Christian Israel. Their “cittie on a hill” began to show the very signs of deterioration and sin that overwhelmed the Old World. This “insidious religious and social deterioration” was in part imagined, based upon the premise that “fire, war, disease and drought represented divine punishment for... internal rot,” but in many ways it was very real.¹⁴³ Around the 1670s, the clergy’s efforts to halt this decay resulted in the first American Puritan jeremiads. The jeremiad had been imported as “an immemorial mode of lament over the corrupt ways of the world,” but was transformed in the Puritan context “into a vehicle of social continuity and control.”¹⁴⁴ The standard format contained an “implicit recognition of a causal sequence: the sins exist, the disease breaks out; the sins are reformed, the disease is cured.”¹⁴⁵ As this suggests, the jeremiads were by no means lamenting something irretrievably lost. Instead they were establishing the spread of anxiety as a means of community control.¹⁴⁶ After all, Winthrop had known God would not “beare with such faileings at our hands as hee doth from those among whome wee have lived.”¹⁴⁷ As time went by, however, jeremiads expressed an increasing sense of despair. Declension was becoming “so chronic” that New

¹⁴² Karlsen, *The Devil*, 69, 71.

¹⁴³ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 57.

¹⁴⁴ Bercovitch, *Rites of Assent*, 79.

¹⁴⁵ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1953), 27.

¹⁴⁶ Bercovitch, *Rites of Assent*, 34.

¹⁴⁷ Winthrop, “Christian Charity,” 198.

England could only “perpetually condemn itself.”¹⁴⁸ Ministers recognised that the jeremiads were not having the desired effect: but “what else could they do?”¹⁴⁹

There was plenty for the jeremiads to lament. They listed the almost endless “afflictions an angry God had rained upon them,” including “crop failures,” “shipwrecks” and “unsatisfactory children,” whom Cotton Mather referred to as the “*Adulterous Generation*.”¹⁵⁰ This perceived decay, the leaders believed, was only the social articulation of their religious decline, which threatened their entire purpose in America.¹⁵¹ Indeed, the decline in young people experiencing grace led, in 1662, to a contentious theological compromise: the right to have one’s children baptised was no longer to be confined to the recipients of grace.¹⁵² This “Halfway Covenant” marked a definite recognition of the breakdown of religious orthodoxy.¹⁵³

In 1672, Alice Thomas of Boston was convicted for owning a brothel.¹⁵⁴ By the 1680s, Silverman attests, “taverns proliferated, and drunkenness, many alleged, was rampant.”¹⁵⁵ In a desperate attempt to curb this moral decline, a Reform Synod was set up in Boston from 1679-80.¹⁵⁶ It attempted to discover and reform the evils plaguing New England.¹⁵⁷ The Synod identified such infractions as apostasy, heresy and loss of family discipline as well as “naked breasts, mixed dances” and “swearing.”¹⁵⁸ In its remedy, the synod “affirmed the need for strict

¹⁴⁸ Miller, *From Colony to Province*, 28.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁵⁰ Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 6; Mather, *Ornaments*, 18.

¹⁵¹ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 57-58.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁵⁷ Miller, *From Colony to Province*, 33.

¹⁵⁸ Miller, *From Colony to Province*, 35; Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 59.

family governance” and “singled out tighter supervision” of those who came to be the Radicals.¹⁵⁹

Salem, 1630-1692: The Town and the Village

From its inception in Salem Village, the witchcraft crisis quickly spread to the village’s surrounding area, in an “increasingly wide orbit.”¹⁶⁰ Thus it is necessary to ask why the wider Salem environs were susceptible to crisis, and why Salem Village in particular was the first place in New England to break under pressure. Salem Town was one of the first towns founded in New England.¹⁶¹ The settlement of Salem Village began in the 1630s, and it became a separate parish in with its own preacher in 1672.¹⁶² After several failed attempts, a church was finally founded in 1689, with the controversial Samuel Parris as its minister.¹⁶³ The history of Salem Village was, therefore, as “contingent and precarious” as that of the colony itself.¹⁶⁴ Throughout the later part of the seventeenth century the villagers contended with the townsfolk over their right to a separate, fully functioning church; self-governance; and full voting rights. Salem Town had lost several former agricultural regions to independent townships, and actively blocked Salem Village doing the same, for the village increased tax revenues and “provided the food which the Town proper could not supply.”¹⁶⁵

These external tensions, as Boyer and Nissenbaum argue, caused ruptures within the village itself. Some desired independence, others “continued to identify themselves primarily

¹⁵⁹ Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 244.

¹⁶⁰ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 57.

¹⁶¹ Miller, *From Colony to Province*, 19.

¹⁶² Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, xvii.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

with Salem Town.”¹⁶⁶ The Salem Village church was the “ecclesiastical expression” of the village’s break from the town, and consequently, inter- and intra-family disputes sprung up around the ordaining of a minister.¹⁶⁷ All of these anxieties culminated in Salem Village. Once the crisis had begun, however, anxiety and fragility within surrounding towns also proved sufficient to support a crisis. The problems in Salem Village, after all, including “difficulties between ministers and their congregations,” insufficient land, and power conflicts,” existed throughout New England.¹⁶⁸ Boyer and Nissenbaum argue that the specific Salem situation was itself the cause of the crisis, but I contend that Salem’s situation does not adequately explain the divisions that existed or the extent of the crisis. I will argue that the village-specific tensions served as a catalyst for colony-wide anxieties.

The peculiar position of New England and of Salem accounts for the anomalous position both held in relation to witchcraft. As Brian P. Levack notes, across the colonies “there were only occasional trials in New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia, and only one of these, a prosecution in Maryland in 1685, ended with an execution.”¹⁶⁹ In New England, however, of a population of around 100,000, “234 New Englanders were indicted or presented” for witchcraft in the seventeenth century, 36 of whom were executed.¹⁷⁰ Evidently, New England had something the other colonies did not, a distinction that must have applied in particular to Salem, which accounted for the majority of these figures. In Salem, 185 individuals were accused, 59 of whom were tried and 20 executed.¹⁷¹ These figures serve to further emphasise that

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 43.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 64, 115.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 180.

¹⁶⁹ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 204-205.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 205.

¹⁷¹ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 51.

Salem was “extraordinary” in its intensity and that it was merely the extreme example of something “extraordinary” within New England as a whole.¹⁷² Cotton Mather himself, Bercovitch believes, considered Salem “a model of New England.”¹⁷³

¹⁷² Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 205.

¹⁷³ Bercovitch, *Rites of Assent*, 106.

Chapter Three

The Radicals

When it began it was nameless. There was an affliction spreading like a sickness amongst the young girls of Salem Village.¹⁷⁴ They shrieked, ran, were contorted by fits—and people could not conceive of why. The girls “said little about what was troubling them,” so observers sought answers for themselves.¹⁷⁵ Epilepsy was discussed then disregarded.¹⁷⁶ Hysteria, at that time considered “a phenomenon centered in women’s sexual organs,” seemed unlikely.¹⁷⁷ Sometime in February 1692, a village doctor made a suggestion that stuck: possession.¹⁷⁸ The first individuals to be “possessed” were probably Betty Parris and Abigail Williams, Reverend Samuel Parris’ daughter and niece, aged nine and eleven respectively. Once possession had been suggested to them, they agreed it was the cause of their troubles. They began to cry out against the “witches” who possessed them. First to be accused was Tituba, a West Indian slave in their household. By the end of February, Ann Putnam Jr. and Elizabeth Hubbard made accusations against Tituba and two Salem Village women, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne; and Hubbard was old enough to legally testify.¹⁷⁹

In anticipation of the imminent arrival of the new governor, the village set up an informal court system to “try” the witches. Tituba, Good and Osborne were soon arrested. Possession began to spread to nearby villages, from Andover, Ipswich and Lynn. Grown men and women

¹⁷⁴ Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts*, 22.

¹⁷⁵ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 232.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁷⁷ Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 307; Karlsen, *The Devil*, 233.

¹⁷⁸ Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 19.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 22, 21: people under fourteen were considered “incapable of testifying under oath in court in capital felony cases.” Hubbard was seventeen, Putnam twelve.

began to make accusations too. As accusations increased, panic became widespread. Former Salem minister Deodat Lawson described the preliminary court sessions as “thronged with Spectators.”¹⁸⁰ The accusations made by the possessed began sharply to diverge from the accepted witchcraft model, with men, ministers and prominent colonists being accused. In May, Phips, the new governor, arrived to find a colony wracked by division, overflowing prisons, and no means of handling the situation.¹⁸¹ He established the court of Oyer and Terminer, consisting of some of New England’s most prominent colonists, to officially try the witches. Bridget Bishop, the first to be tried, was convicted and hanged in June. For almost a month, the accusations halted—then the cycle of possession, accusation and conviction continued unabated.¹⁸² The possessed girls were sent to Andover, to help identify witches in a suspected case of possession.¹⁸³ On that day, “fifty persons” were “accused of witchcraft and thirty or forty sent to prison.”¹⁸⁴

Eventually, in the autumn of 1692, after nineteen hangings, one pressing to death and several deaths in prison, public opinion began to turn against the trials.¹⁸⁵ The adult group of accusers, sensitive to this change in public opinion, stopped making accusations, and began to pay no heed to those of the possessed. In October Phips returned from the north. He found the court questioned over its use of spectral evidence, a growing suspicion that some of the accused were innocent, and an accusation against his own wife. Phips declared an end to the trials, the last of which took place in May 1693. A year and four months after the crisis began, it was over.

¹⁸⁰ 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: Benjamin Harris, 1692), 4.

¹⁸¹ Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 167.

¹⁸² Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 51.

¹⁸³ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 104-105.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁸⁵ Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 4. No one seems certain as to the number of deaths in prison. Most accounts state either 3, 4, or 5. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 20: Sarah Good was pregnant when imprisoned. Perhaps the lower figures do not account for what most historians consider the probable death of her infant in prison.

The Demographic Makeup of the Radicals

Considering the propensity of historians to conflate possessed with non-possessed accusers, it is perhaps surprising to note the extent to which the possessed formed a distinct demographic group. Data provided by Karlsen and Norton provides compelling evidence for the singularity of this group. Accusers as a whole were both men and women, though principally men. Whether male or female they resembled one another in age, social position, and marital status, and were collectively representative of the adult population as a whole, with their gender irrelevant to “the type of people” they accused.¹⁸⁶ In recorded New England possession cases, however, however, eighty-six percent were female. Whilst there were a handful of possessed males in Salem, the fact that women were the overwhelming majority amongst the Salem possessed accounts for and justifies descriptions of them as a “distinctly female group.”¹⁸⁷ The majority of non-possessed accusers were between twenty and sixty, but the majority of possessed accusers were under thirty, with “a highly concentrated cluster in the range of sixteen to twenty-five.”¹⁸⁸ They were not therefore the children they are presented as in popular culture, but mostly in “their late teens and early twenties.”¹⁸⁹

The possessed also inhabited a distinct social and economic position. Significantly, like many witches, they inhabited a “subordinate position in the social structure.”¹⁹⁰ Indeed, the majority of the New England possessed were servants, with little to no prospects of domestic or economic security.¹⁹¹ Servants were “incorporated into the family government that ruled the

¹⁸⁶ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 223.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 305.

¹⁹⁰ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 223.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 227.

children,” thus rendering their servitude a state of perpetual dependency.¹⁹² The possessed therefore collectively made up “the most powerless among the powerless—children, females, and servants.”¹⁹³

Whilst the possessed share few characteristics with the populace as a whole or non-possessed accusers, they share a similar demographic makeup to the witches themselves. Most obviously, and in keeping with common lore, the majority of accused “witches” were female. In Salem, 185 witches were accused. Of these, 141 were female. Women made up 52/59 tried, 26/31 convicted, and 14/19 hanged.¹⁹⁴ It is therefore evident not only that women were not only more susceptible to accusation than men but also to going to trial, and formed large majorities of those convicted and executed. Though men were, on occasion, accused on the strength of their own merit (or lack thereof), many more were suspected due to their personal relationships with accused female witches.¹⁹⁵ In New England cases from 1620-1725, about 78 percent of accused witches were female.¹⁹⁶ The uncommonly high percentage of males amongst those executed in Salem may be attributable to the divergence from common accusation patterns on the part of the possessed. Confessing witches, interestingly, were almost entirely female.¹⁹⁷ The age of witches also tended towards one extreme, but the opposite pole. Whilst the accusations themselves were spread fairly evenly across adult women, “*once accused*, old women at Salem were more likely than middle-aged women to be tried, convicted, and executed.”¹⁹⁸ Karlsen breaks down these figures into even more alarming statistics that confirm this particular demographic trait. Of the middle aged women accused, roughly half were prosecuted, then half again of that group

¹⁹² Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 244.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 242.

¹⁹⁴ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 51.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

hanged.¹⁹⁹ Of the old women accused, three-quarters were prosecuted and almost three-quarters again were hanged.²⁰⁰

Finally, witches resembled the possessed in their socioeconomic position. Around 20 percent of the accused were “either impoverished or living at a level of bare subsistence.”²⁰¹ Although the majority therefore were not living in absolute poverty, their position was otherwise precarious. Access to inheritance was one of the most significant factors determining witchcraft accusations. They were usually one of two extremes: women cheated of their rightful inheritance and reduced to relying upon the community for their support, or women who, by chance or by the choice of their husbands and fathers, “stood in the way of the orderly transmission of property from one generation of males to another.”²⁰²

In light of the demographic similarities between the possessed and the witches, and considering they both diverged from social norms prior to or during the witchcraft crisis, it is puzzling that scholarship has almost without fail posited them as opposing parties. Boyer and Nissenbaum for example fail to recognise any connection between the possessed and the accused, yet they nevertheless note that, as each group demonstrated “possession” behaviours and began to confess, “the distinction between accuser and accused, between afflicter and afflicted, threatened to vanish.”²⁰³ Indeed the only real distinction between witchcraft and possession, as the colonists saw it, was whether or not an individual had signed the Devil’s book.²⁰⁴ The very word “possessed” meant their minds and bodies had been taken over by

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 78.

²⁰² Ibid., 116.

²⁰³ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 211.

²⁰⁴ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 11.

witches.²⁰⁵ I will argue that, rather than opposing one another, the possessed and the witches collectively made up one of the two groups in contention: the “Radicals.” I use that term in particular in reference to their ultimate desire to uproot their society and build a new one in its place. I do not argue that all of the accused witches were Radicals. Many of them fall into a third group: the Victims. The Victims protested their innocence, remained within the confines of the social structure, and often lost their lives as a result of their commitment to submission. Rebecca Nurse, one of the executed witches, is a prime example.²⁰⁶ Even as her likely fate became increasingly obvious, Nurse merely gently protested her innocence, imploring God for her protection: “Oh Lord, help me,” whilst spreading out her hands in a gesture of resignation.²⁰⁷ Not all Victims were executed: nor were they all accused. They merely represent those who had no stake in the witchcraft crisis and were buffeted by its changing winds.

The conflict may have been between two parties therefore, but the split in the village was not a dichotomy but a division into three distinct groups. The group of Radicals, I will argue, consists of the possessed, confessing witches, and those of the accused who resisted authority and social norms. They were almost all female, either very young or relatively old, and likely to be suffering from disillusionment in New England. For the possessed, the women they accused may have represented their own dismal future. What we know of their lives after the crisis confirms the hopelessness of their situation: most died in poverty, many unmarried, and several others disappeared from the record entirely.²⁰⁸ This reality was sharply at odds with the exceptionalist American self-identification that already pervaded colonial political culture. The Radicals were ideally placed for rebellion, and later, attempted revolution: they had been

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 225.

²⁰⁶ William Elliot Woodward, *Records of Salem Witchcraft Copied from the Original Documents: Vol I* (Roxbury: Privately Printed for W. Elliot Woodward, 1864), 83.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 83, 84.

²⁰⁸ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 228.

dangerously exposed to a rhetoric they did not serve to gain from, and lived in a state that was simultaneously oppressively hierarchical and frighteningly fragile, more specifically in a village whose status was even more precarious.

A Conscious Rebellion

The term “rebellion” implies at least a partial awareness of one’s behaviour. Few historians have attempted to definitively argue that the possessed were involved in organised fraud, perhaps with good reason. It is futile to assert unequivocally that the possessed were consciously faking possession, none of them having left any documentation to either confirm or deny such a hypothesis. There is a compelling argument that it would hardly be surprising for these girls to experience their temptations and rebellions as being instigated by the Devil: as Karlsen puts it, “if a culture’s belief system incorporates the concept of demonic possession, it is rational for people within that culture to become possessed,” and experience the torment of temptation and resentment “in much the same way their spiritual leaders say they will.”²⁰⁹ However, I will present some evidence supporting the hypothesis that, at least some of the time, the possessed were not so indoctrinated by their culture’s belief system as to be insensible to the self-driven nature of their behaviour. Rosenthal, amongst the primary Salem historians I have engaged with, is the only one who consistently argues for fraud. He contends that “our historians, on the whole, have patronized the late-seventeenth century community of Massachusetts Bay... this argument, that we must see it from their perspective, carries an implicit codicil that, given their perspective, they could not have seen it the way we smarter moderns can.”²¹⁰ Certainly witchcraft beliefs were far more accepted then than now, especially amongst the elite. Indeed

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 235.

²¹⁰ Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 185.

Rosenthal is willing to “understand the decision[s] of [the judges] in the context of another era,” but it is much harder to make that argument in the case of the possessed.²¹¹

The questions raised through the physical evidence are the most compelling argument that the possession was fraudulent. In many cases, Rosenthal argues, “clear evidence exists that accusers were claiming to be tormented by pins being stuck in them and were showing the magistrates the pins.”²¹² Neither “hallucinations” nor “hysteria” can “plausibly account for the accusers bringing and using the pins they claimed the witches employed to attack them.”²¹³ As Rosenthal notes, it is, of course, possible, that “in the heat of [an] examination” the possessed might simply have “failed to notice” another of the possessed sticking pins in her—“secretly, before a crowd of people”—but it is highly unlikely.²¹⁴ The alternative is a calculated act of bringing pins to an examination with the aim of using them as evidence during the trial: a tiny, but entirely damning piece of evidence for fraud. Other physical phenomena, such as Susannah Sheldon’s hands being tied so tightly she could not untie them herself, are, as Norton notes, unlikely to have been self-inflicted.²¹⁵ On another occasion noted by Rosenthal, Ann Putnam was found bound to the floor: a position that requires “either the devil or some human resourcefulness, a plot rationally set.”²¹⁶ Discounting actual demonic possession or the possibility that the possessed were victims of a conspiracy they had not consented to, at least some of the possessed must have colluded with others in order to fake elements of possession. As we will later see, a sense of camaraderie existed amongst the possessed and could certainly answer for such seemingly “inexplicable” occurrences. Deodat Lawson observed how the

²¹¹ Ibid., 20.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 38.

²¹⁵ Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 307.

²¹⁶ Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 39.

possessed could “foretel when anothers Fit was a-coming, and would say, *Look to her!*,” a possible sign of collusion.²¹⁷ Another occurrence that implies their complicity was the accusation of Nehemiah Abbot Jr. Though Ann Putnam and Mary Walcott both claimed he was afflicting them, Mercy Lewis expressed doubts, and “after some discussion the accusers agreed that the specter had looked very much like Abbot but had not been him after all.”²¹⁸ Famously, an unnamed possessed girl reportedly told a neighbour she ““did it for sport... they must have some sport.””²¹⁹ Sarah Churchill told Sarah Ingersoll that her confession in court was false and spoken under coercion.²²⁰ Although this pertained to her confession rather than her possession, it casts doubt upon the authenticity of possession by demonstrating Churchill’s ability (and by extension, that of the rest of the possessed) to testify in court, confidently and in detail, about spectral events in which she did not believe.

Of course, awareness of one’s own fraud in *physical* afflictions does not preclude a belief in the spiritual aspects of possession. Although it does seem unlikely, it remains possible that the possessed faked their fits and carried pins, but genuinely believed there were malefic forces upon them. That is not to say, however, that they did not seek the same aims as those who consciously faked possession. Like modern-day sufferers of anorexia, those who had internalised their society’s belief systems and their conflicting pressures (to rebel against and succeed within society) may have suffered the playing out of repressed desires upon their own bodies as the unconscious psychological expression of what others consciously desired. Unlike confessors, they chose an outlet for their “unbearable psychic tensions” which did not bring “to the surface

²¹⁷ Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative*, 9.

²¹⁸ Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 98.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

²²⁰ William Elliot Woodward, *Records of Salem Witchcraft Copied from the Original Documents: Vol II* (Roxbury: Privately Printed for W. Elliot Woodward, 1864), 200.

of normal consciousness” their rage and resentment at their situation.²²¹ I concede that this explanation, proposed by Karlsen, may explain the behaviour of those of the possessed who appeared genuinely to believe in their own possession, perhaps those who “had the most to lose by overt rebellion.”²²² A considerable number of the possessed, however, were recorded as taking part in situations such as I have described above, where collusion or physical evidence precludes a psychological explanation. I will thus proceed, as Rosenthal does, upon the basis that at least some of the afflicted girls were purposefully perpetrating fraud, and that others, if not consciously fraudulent, at least unconsciously pursued the same aims.

Young Rebels

As Deodat Lawson spoke to Samuel Parris in Parris’ home in March, Abigail Williams “was at first hurried with violence to and fro in the room... stretching up her arms as high as she could, and crying *Whish, Whish, Whish!*... After that, she run to the Fire, and begun to throw Fire Brands, about the house.”²²³ The rebellion began with such actions. It appeared neither political nor particularly coherent. Possession had been suggested to the girls and may have appeared to them the perfect legitimisation of their brewing discontentment. They enacted a rebellion by taking a variety of liberties all legitimised by the label of possession.

So definitely was their behaviour a rebellion from Puritan standards that it can be contrasted systematically to expectations upon young women. Such joyous and exhilarating physical behaviour as that of Williams was expressly forbidden. Cotton Mather’s treatise on womanhood, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, published that year, demanded “*She must not*

²²¹ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 249.

²²² *Ibid.*, 249-250.

²²³ Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative*, 3.

*be a Dancer.*²²⁴ Dancing, “wherein persons leap and fling about so like *Bedlams*,” was a sin.²²⁵ For women to speak in public was considered “immodest,” but the possessed regaled the community with extensive and elaborate tales.²²⁶ Most significantly, their behaviour directly contradicted their religious training. Religious education was taken very seriously in New England. Parents were “required by law to hold regular family prayer, to teach their children, servants, and apprentices the word of God,” including teaching them to read the Bible and ensuring they spent Sundays in church.²²⁷ The possessed were in fact remarkable in the “unusually thorough” religious training they received.²²⁸ As Karlsen notes, “in some households young people were catechized more thoroughly than in others, and it was in just such godly environments that possession was most likely to occur.”²²⁹ A significant proportion of the possessed were daughters, relations or servants of ministers, or from otherwise “pious and conscientious” families.²³⁰ Such training enabled them to distinguish clearly between godly behaviour and sinful behaviour. Perhaps it was also this training that inclined them towards enacting the latter.

Mary Warren, who walked the fine line between possession and confession, was stood before the court. “Oh! I am sorry for it,” she cried out, wringing her hands, then fell into a violent fit.²³¹ “Oh Good Lord save me!” she shouted.²³² When finished shrieking and writhing, she declared to the court that, some nights earlier, believing she could see Martha Corey (a convicted witch) and grasping at her, she instead grasped her master John Procter: “and pulled

²²⁴ Mather, *Ornaments*, 18.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

²²⁶ Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 196.

²²⁷ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 231.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 230.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 231.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*.

²³¹ Woodward, *Records Vol. I*, 120.

²³² *Ibid.*

him downe into [her] lap.”²³³ In this short performance, Warren defied many of the expectations of the behaviour of a Puritan woman in public. There are even obvious sexual undertones to her pulling her master to her lap, but the startlingly physical nature of her speech and actions would be in itself inappropriately sensual in Puritan society. Such physical rebellion was one of the hallmarks of possession behaviour. Lawson described the violence of the fits as “preternatural,” being far beyond “the Ordinary force of the same person when they are in their right mind.”²³⁴

Much like the Salem possessed, *Memorable Providences* depicts evident physicality in Martha Goodwin’s possession. Cotton Mather’s critic Robert Calef implied that the Salem cases not only resembled the Goodwin case, but might have been a conscious emulation of it. The possessed individuals in Salem most likely would have heard some account of this significant occurrence within the colony, and perhaps found the idea of such liberation enticing. Robert Calef believed Mather had therefore ““conducted much to the kindling of those flames”” at Salem.²³⁵ Such statements testify to the temptation the possessed felt not towards the Devil, but by tales of liberation. For the story of Martha Goodwin is unquestionably one of liberation. Mather said “she frequently told us, that *if she might but steal, or be drunk, she should be well immediately.*”²³⁶ Sometimes she would be engaged in joyous games of make-believe, “mounted... upon her *Aerial Steed*; which carried her Fancy to the Journeys end.”²³⁷ Mather, perceptively, came to the conclusion that the devils in her, in inducing “Sauciness,” “Impertinencies,” and an obvious aversion to Puritan religion, wished “to disturb [him] in what [he] was about.”²³⁸

²³³ Ibid., 131.

²³⁴ Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative*, 9.

²³⁵ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 87.

²³⁶ Mather, *Memorable Providences*, 19-20.

²³⁷ Ibid., 29.

²³⁸ Mather, *Memorable Providences*, 33.

The possessed did not just rebel physically. As Lawson began to preach to the village in March, Abigail Williams—ostensibly in a state of possession—demanded of Lawson “*Now stand up, and Name your Text!*”²³⁹ After he read it, she scoffed “*It is a long Text.*”²⁴⁰ When not possessed, these individuals “treated their ministers with the respect due to God’s representatives,” but once overtaken by possession, they “stopped their ears when their ministers preached or mocked them in their pulpits.”²⁴¹ This active hostility towards the representatives of the church is surely indicative of the individuals and institutions their rebellion was in reality directed against.²⁴² As Norton points out, only during the Antinomian Crisis and occasional periods of Quaker missionizing would the clergymen of New England have been “so directly challenged in their pulpits.”²⁴³ Indeed, women were not usually permitted to speak in church.²⁴⁴ In the testimonies of the possessed there is a rebellious undertone in the sheer fantastical element to their visions, and the discontentment they just barely disguise. Their visions were full of violence—almost every one of their testimonies contains a phrase similar to “beating me almost choking me to death”—and whilst this was ostensibly committed against them, it was, of course, they who were imagining it.²⁴⁵ It is tempting to suspect that the violence permeating these visions was directed elsewhere, perhaps towards authority figures who enforced their hierarchical inferiority. Their discontentment is obvious through their fantasies of what the Devil could give them. When Mercy Lewis testified against her former master George Burroughs, she

²³⁹ Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative*, 3.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 247.

²⁴² Ibid., 11.

²⁴³ Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 55.

²⁴⁴ Thomas Maule, *Truth held forth and Maintained According to the Testimony of the holy Prophets, Christ and his Apostles recorded in the holy Scriptures. With some Account of the Judgements of the Lord lately inflicted upon New-England by Witch craft. To which is added, Something concerning the Fall of Adam, his state in the Fall, and way of Restoration to God again, with many other weighty things, necessary for people to weigh and consider. Written in true Love to the Souls of my neighbours, and all Men, which includeth that Love to them, as to my self* (New York: Printed by William Bradford, 1695), 125.

²⁴⁵ Woodward, *Records Vol. I*, 67.

stated “mr Burroughs carried me up to an exceeding high mountain and shewed me all the Kingdoms of the earth and tould me that he would give them all to me if I would writ in his book.”²⁴⁶ There is something poignant in that her most enticing fantasy is one of absolute power.

Samuel Abby, testifying against Mary Easty, told the courts, “the woman desired me to goe to Tho : putnams to bring Ann putnam to se if she could se who it was that hurt Mircy lewes : accordingly I went : and found Abigail williams along with ann putnam and brought them both to se mercy lewes : and as they ware a goeing along the way both of them said that they saw the Apperishtion of [Mary Easty]...”²⁴⁷ This statement reveals much about the possessed and their rebellion, most obviously that it was at least somewhat successful. Abby was a grown man, running around town in search of teenage girls, from whom he and other adults desired advice. The other obvious element of this statement is that the possessed were working as a group. Looking for Putnam to bring her to Lewis, Abby finds Putnam with Williams, and takes them both to their fellow possessed. Along the way they *collectively* accuse Easty (surely the psychological argument cannot explain simultaneous collective visions). The possessed were afforded unprecedented respect, and their opinions adhered to. It was a power so foreign and probably so alluring that they could hardly help but exploit it. Bolstered by their camaraderie, they collectively converted their rebellion into something far more radical.

Change at the Root

Although the initial stages of the crisis can be called nothing more than a rebellion, the outlet for that rebellion was one destructive to human life. Perhaps executions seemed distant and unlikely during the first months—after all, the possessed cannot have expected their

²⁴⁶ Woodward, *Records Vol. II*, 118.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

newfound power to stretch to the extent it did. In addition, the lack of stable government meant that, when the trials began, all such sentences would be indefinitely postponed. After the execution of Bridget Bishop, reality must have set in. Indeed, there was a brief respite from accusations. Then the revolution began in earnest. It became more and more a movement of radicals, intent upon not just moving around within the confines of their society, but in uprooting that society in its entirety, and planting something else in its place. Abetted by the defiant accused and unbridled confessors, the possessed—validated by the community and hungry to gorge upon a freedom they had just barely tasted—attempted to carry out a revolution. By now well aware of the destructive force of their actions, the girls continued to accuse. The destruction of human life became not a consequence but a tool. Their revolution was destructive in two ways. In one sense, it was literally destructive, causing chaos, flight, imprisonment and death. In another, perhaps more lasting sense, it shook the foundations of society itself. Albeit temporarily, the future of the colony hung in the balance.

To begin with, the wider community did not perceive the destruction of human life as excessive. After all, these were witches. But as the crisis played out, the girls began to demonstrate the full extent of their power. The first witches accused followed the conventional pattern of accusation, and were thus endorsed by the community. Tituba was a slave, Good a “pauper,” and Osborne a “bedridden old woman.”²⁴⁸ Some of the next accused, however, were church members and “the wives of prosperous freeholders.”²⁴⁹ The girls had diverged from established model of who witches were, and accused those who might otherwise have been untouchable. These divergent statements are distinguishable in the trial records for conspicuously

²⁴⁸ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 32.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

not being supported by “the sworn testimony of adult relatives.”²⁵⁰ The authorities could only feasibly ignore these accusations by “raising questions about the credibility of possessed persons and confessing witches,” which would in turn question the entire system of witch beliefs and potentially backfire upon the authorities themselves.²⁵¹ It was only towards the end of the crisis, with public opinion vehemently against them, that accusations could validly be ignored. Incapable of undoing the possessed without also undoing themselves in the process, the authorities were reduced to underhand—and embarrassing—methods such as “ignoring accusations against the well-to-do or by allowing, if not encouraging, them to escape.”²⁵² In a society where the apparent “authorities” were forced to secretly encourage accused criminals to escape, the balance of power, even over legal proceedings, must have moved elsewhere.

Karlsen attributes the divergence of the possessed from the accepted model of witchcraft accusations to the possessed “imperfectly understanding their cultures’ unspoken witchcraft assumptions,” and argues as confirmation that “the evidence in no way suggests that the possessed intended to defy New England’s established codes.”²⁵³ This argument possesses little merit. There is also no definitive evidence that they did *not* intend to do so. Indeed, the circumstantial evidence suggests that they intended just that. Karlsen herself almost arrives at this conclusion in noting that “John Procter, staunch defender of his wife’s innocence and outspoken critic of both the possessed and the proceedings, was the next witch accused and the first male... followed by Mary Easty... Easty, too, had expressed her outrage at what was happening.”²⁵⁴ The (apparently unconscious) implication here is that Procter and Easty were

²⁵⁰ Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 308.

²⁵¹ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 41.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 253.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

accused not because they fit the pattern of witchcraft accusations or the desires of the wider community, but because they had criticised and interfered with the workings of the possessed.

To wield the power to accuse and ensure the execution of others within a community is to wield the power to disturb the foundations of that community. In Salem, in the hands of the young, the poor, and women—the traditionally powerless—this power became not just to disturb the foundations but to overturn them entirely, with the lower orders of the society able to “command the power of life and death.”²⁵⁵ It was therefore not only physical but also social destruction that was exacted. To exacerbate this social destruction, the girls did not use their power at random. They began to accuse men, significant in itself, but specifically those men who had mistreated women. Ann Putnam, Lewis, Williams and Sheldon testified that they had seen the ex-wives of George Burroughs—their minister, master, and superior—in their visions. Putnam told the court two women had been murdered, and told her “that their blood did crie for vengeance against him,” and that she believed they “should be cloathed with white Robes in heaven, when he should be cast into hell.”²⁵⁶ A more plausible tale of Burroughs’ spousal abuse was recorded by his former servant Hannah Harris. Harris remarked that on one occasion, when his wife “had Laine In Not above one weake [after childbirth],” he “fell out” with her and “kept her by Discorce at the Dore” until she became so ill that Harris thought she would die.²⁵⁷ The possessed, defending and avenging victims of domestic abuse, had exposed Burroughs’ alleged mistreatment of women. Perhaps, had Burroughs never committed these very human sins, no accounts of supernatural sins would have been raised against him. Warren’s implicitly lascivious

²⁵⁵ Susan Balée, “Captives of Their Imagination: Salem in 1692. Review of Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*,” *Hudson Review* 56, no. 2 (2003): 381, <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a2h&AN=10576865&site=ehost-live>.

²⁵⁶ Woodward, *Records Vol. II*, 115.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

and openly physical behaviour toward Proctor has already been noted as rebellious. But in context, it was radical: she was accusing her master of witchcraft. Harris and Lewis, in their statements against Burroughs, were doing the same. Their possession afforded them a radical opportunity to not only publicise and condemn the treatment they suffered at the hands of their “superiors,” but to enact in a literal fashion the reversal of power roles, and consign their masters, controllers and tormentors to prison or death.

The Witches as Rebels: Unruly Turbulent Spirits

Paradoxically, in their rebellion the possessed were joined by the very men and women they were persecuting. Whilst this chapter has focused thus far on the rebellion and radicalism of the possessed, accused and confessing witches played a crucial role. Accused witches played significant roles even before the crisis, as rebels. They were often individuals with a “reputation for various forms of religious or moral deviance.”²⁵⁸ As such, those of the accused who can be considered as members of the Radicals were likely to be those accused primarily by the Conservatives, who opposed everything the Radicals stood for, although undoubtedly the often indiscriminate accusations of the possessed also resulted in the prosecution of fellow Radicals. Although they never assumed a supernatural role through which to more actively seek an uprooting of society, the accused Radicals often persisted in their deviance throughout the trial period, openly questioning the court and even New England’s system of authority itself, sometimes to their death. Their persistent dissent in the face of the authority’s attempts to prevent it is the reason these individuals can be considered Radicals, not just rebels, even if they did not or could not fully participate in the Radical revolution. The confessors enacted a more obviously Radical role. The role of confessed witches was inherently precarious, even in light of the

²⁵⁸ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 153.

temporary hiatus upon executing confessors. Yet it was also one that provided an intoxicating level of freedom. Like the behaviour of the possessed, that of accused and confessed witches systematically countered Puritan behavioural standards. They also spoke at length in public: before the crisis, the accused often damned themselves by speaking their minds to their neighbours. Women were expected to accept their role as housewife²⁵⁹ Yet confessing witches admitted to “allowing the Devil to perform their daily work for them.”²⁶⁰ The radical social attitudes of the men and women who were accused of and confessed to witchcraft in Salem were significant factors in bringing about the rebellion, and eventually attempted revolution.

“Goodwife Biber som time liveing amongst us I did observe her to be a woman of an unruly turbulent spirit.”²⁶¹ So testified John and Lydia Porter again Sarah Bibber, and they were not alone. The phrase “unruly turbulent spirit,” or variations upon that theme, is a regular occurrence in the accusations. One of the first witches accused, Sarah Osborne, may never have confessed to witchcraft; but she did confess to hearing voices tempting her not to go to church, indicative of her own ambivalence towards it.²⁶² So serious was such an infraction that it could be read as synonymous with diabolism: several witches “had been named in ecclesiastical courts for such crimes as non-attendance at church” and “Sabbath-breaking.”²⁶³ In confessing to the voices in her head, Osborne was publicly proclaiming a level of hostility toward the church. This was proclaimed even more boldly in the case of Martha Corey. Soon after she had been accused, Parris, in his typical conniving fashion, pointedly preached that one amongst the congregation

²⁵⁹ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 170.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁶¹ Woodward, *Records Vol. II*, 203-204.

²⁶² Woodward, *Records Vol. I*, 37.

²⁶³ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 154.

was a devil.²⁶⁴ Corey “went immediately out of the Meeting-House,” slamming the door “violently” behind her.”²⁶⁵

As consequential as women’s inability to submit to the church was the inability to behave as any good female, perhaps even any good Puritan citizen, ought. Sarah Good’s “Spitefull” and “Mallitiously bent” “Turbulant... Sperritt” was such that Samuel Abby and his family, who had been hosting the vagrant Goods, “could not suffer her to Live in their howse any Longer.”²⁶⁶ Mather instructed women “be careful that you don't *Speak too soon*, because you cannot fetch back and eat up, what is uttered” and “be careful that you don't *Speak too much*, because that when the Chest is always *open*, every one counts there are no Treasures in it.”²⁶⁷ Bibber was described by Joseph Fowler as “very much given to tatling & tale Bareing makeing mischief amingst her neighbors.”²⁶⁸ Mary Parker “scolded att” her husband.²⁶⁹ Martha Carrier was a “Malicious woman” who “gave forth several threatning words.”²⁷⁰ In speaking too much and too soon, these women rebelled against the hierarchy. Just as lack of religiosity was interpreted as synonymous with witchcraft, so was “women’s refusal to subordinate themselves to men with institutional authority over them” for “the record shows the lack of deference for male neighbors to be a common thread running through the many sins of witches.”²⁷¹

As Susanna Martin’s examination began, Ann Putnam, in a fit, threw a glove at her. Martin laughed.²⁷² “What, do you laugh at it?” exclaimed the incredulous judge.²⁷³ “Well I may

²⁶⁴ Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative*, 8.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Woodward, *Records Vol. I*, 231.

²⁶⁷ Mather, *Ornaments*, 65.

²⁶⁸ Woodward, *Records Vol. II*, 204.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 155.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 62, 61-62.

²⁷¹ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 150.

²⁷² Woodward, *Records Vol. I*, 197.

²⁷³ Ibid.

at such folly,” Martin responded.²⁷⁴ Asked her thoughts on the possessed, she retorted “why my thoughts are my own, when they are in, but when they are out they are anothers.”²⁷⁵ When Mercy Lewis observed that Martin had taken her time in getting to court when she “can come fast enough in the night,” Martin calmly responded “no, sweetheart.”²⁷⁶ She admitted even to the most dangerous of things: asked if she had compassion for the possessed she said she did not and, being told that the whole congregation thought she was a witch, she responded, “let them think what they will.”²⁷⁷ As Levack points out, this was “a protest against her male social and political superiors, which “took the form of a heroic protest against the courts that investigated her.”²⁷⁸ Martin was just like the possessed girls in court: indignant, self-righteous, and outspoken. The distance between them was small but significant: they stood on opposite sides of the court.

The position of confessor was an ambiguous and uncertain one. Confessors were in a sense the most threatening figures in the whole process, not only being accused of witchcraft but confirming the reality of witchcraft and of the satanic deeds they had helped commit. Indeed, “such confessors as Mary Post and Samuel Wardwell actively encouraged others to join them in admitting guilt,” exposing the horrifying extent of diabolism.²⁷⁹ Yet as well as being the only group that could unquestionably be called an enemy to society, they also held real and substantial power. Confessing witches were given most of the responsibility for recording and reporting events in the spirit world to the concerned magistrates. They were also obliged to name and report on their fellow witches. It later became obvious that the confessors were not being

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 199.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 199.

²⁷⁸ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 155.

²⁷⁹ Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 306.

executed, presumably in order to allow them to continue reporting on others, but it is likely they were eventually going to be executed, had the crisis not been brought to a halt.²⁸⁰ Confessors became simultaneously the most dangerous people in the community, and the safest people to be. This probably explains why such a “considerable number chose to convict themselves” in Salem.²⁸¹

Confession could be forced, as in the case of Sarah Churchill. Another confessor who was initially hesitant was Deliverance Hobbs. In the face of repeated questioning and presumption of guilt, she moved from insisting “I have done nothing” to, in a moment of extreme pressure, confessing.²⁸² She slipped into the role with ease, or at least a sense of the inevitable. The next time Hobbs appears in the accounts, she seems comfortable, even exhilarated, in her new role, continuing “in the free acknowledging herself to be a Covenant Witch.”²⁸³ She began to tell vivid tales of a Devil’s sacrament, and seemingly comfortably accused several others.²⁸⁴ It may have been a difficult position to accept, especially if one did not come to it freely. But once accepted, it provided unparalleled freedom and enviable bodily security. The wildness and extravagance of the confessors was limitless, and they were therefore able to articulate much more explicitly the causes of their protest, including blatantly admitting to their discontentment. From Samuel Wardwell’s examination, it is clear that discontentment was the sole cause of his temptation towards the Devil, as he confessed quite plainly that the Devil would provide him with job security and “promised him he should live comfortably.”²⁸⁵

²⁸⁰ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 92.

²⁸¹ Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 9.

²⁸² Woodward, *Records Vol. II*, 188.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 192.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 148, 149.

As Levack argues, we can interpret the content of confessors' visions and confessions—often depicting “a world turned upside down”—as “symbolic protests against the established order.”²⁸⁶ As with the possessed, the use of violence in these confessions serves as a good indicator of the underlying violence behind their rebellion. The confession of Abigail Hobbs illustrates the primacy of violence in the confessions. After she confessed to sticking thorns into dolls made of the possessed, a magistrate asked “was it about the middle of her body?”²⁸⁷ “Yes,” she replied, apparently revelling in this lurid behaviour, “and I stuck it right in.”²⁸⁸ Confessors were able to employ the same rhetoric of violence as pervaded the accounts of the possessed, except there was no reason confessors could not place themselves in the role of perpetrators. More than a subversive rebellion therefore, the rebellion of the confessors was an outright confrontation with authority.

The Witches as Radicals: The Devil's Kingdom

The accused, of course, did not consciously contribute to revolution. They had willingly enacted conscious infractions of the social code, but they did not take up a supernatural guise through which they had the power of revolution, either by choice or because they were executed before such an option became apparent. Nevertheless, in the eyes of society, all “witches” were radicals and revolutionaries. They became the Devil's footsoldiers, using possession as an attempt to “enlist others in the Devil's cause.”²⁸⁹ Their very existence (or perceived existence) seemed a threat to the prevailing social order. As Levack argues, the witch was a “heretic” guilty

²⁸⁶ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 155.

²⁸⁷ Woodward, *Records Vol. I*, 175.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 12.

of treason against God.²⁹⁰ This religious radicalism was combined with the “enormous political conspiracy” of alliance with the Devil and the social radicalism of, as we have seen, “striving to turn the world upside-down, inverting the divinely established hierarchical order of society and rejecting all its moral norms.”²⁹¹ The accused, therefore, effectively became non-consensual players in the revolution.

As the crisis continued, confessing witches began to embody an increasingly radical role. They exaggerated their own crimes in order to cause further damage, heedless of personal loss. They balanced upon a fine line between their temporary immunity from execution and its apparent likelihood in the future. This position left them free to participate however they chose in a rebellion, with little left to lose. Confessors, therefore, actively branded themselves revolutionaries. Yes, they confessed, they were going to destroy the social order and uproot the community entirely: they wanted to destroy New England. During Ann Foster’s examination, she confessed to witchcraft and to being privy to the plot of the witches to destroy first Salem Village, then all of New England, and set up a kingdom of the Devil. In a remark that undoubtedly provoked widespread alarm, she claimed “there was three hundred and five in the whole Country and that they would ruin that place ye Vilage.”²⁹² The discussion amongst these three hundred witches “was that they would afflict there to set up the Divils Kingdome.”²⁹³ It was plain that the “Divils Kingdome” would constitute a radical overturning of New England’s social order. The Puritan experiment had been the creation of a radical new state, God’s kingdom. The Radicals thus inverted this entirely. “Satan’s grand design, the clergy taught, was

²⁹⁰ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 65.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Woodward, *Records Vol. II*, 138.

²⁹³ Ibid.

to overthrow God's kingdom,” and set up one of the Devil.²⁹⁴ Furthermore, the oppression the Radicals had suffered in God’s kingdom would not be forgotten. The lower orders of the hierarchy would claim their revenge. In her confession, Rebecca Eames claimed the Devil had (successfully) tempted her by promising her the “powr to avenge herself.”²⁹⁵

The inability of the Radicals to truly cohere as a group without destruction is inevitable. Any real radical change in their society required destruction. It was inherent in the aims of the Radicals—a complete uprooting of that society—that they accuse in some part indiscriminately. This they certainly did at times, on more than one occasion accusing one of their own number. Their intention was destruction, and whilst this did have some specific victims such as the women who embodied the possessed youths’ own future, former masters, and colony leaders, it was also carried out upon their sisters in the movement, their friends, and often even on themselves. Although in reality they hurt those whom they accused and their families, these victims were in their minds merely collateral. Their direct victims, those they actually intended to hurt, were those in power, to bring about enough destruction to bring down the hierarchy they rested upon. Destruction was their *modus operandi*, and they were as much at risk from one another as outsiders were.

However, there were moments of constructive behaviour between the Radical groups. In the examination of the confessor Rebecca Eames, the magistrates made a unique decision. She was accused of possessing Mary Warren and Mary Lacey, so “she was bid to take warin [Warren] and lascy [Lacey] by ye hand and beg forgivnes.”²⁹⁶ Apparently at a loss now this development prevented them from pushing against one another to cause their various

²⁹⁴ Reis, *Damned Women*, 65.

²⁹⁵ Woodward, *Records Vol. II*, 144.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

destructions, Eames “did so and they forgave her.”²⁹⁷ It is a compelling image: Eames taking Warren and Lacey by the hand in the courtroom, a gesture of forgiveness but perhaps also of camaraderie, and of striking a deal. Perhaps the judges meant to calm the force of accusations and confessions, and to wrest back control from the forces in the community that were becoming stronger than them. They achieved quite the opposite. Immediately after shaking hands, Eames began freely to confess more information about her own witchcraft, and to accuse her own son.²⁹⁸ Lacey immediately *confirmed* and expanded on Eames’ story, which was then expanded upon once more by Eames: “his mother did not know she sd but she might se him for she saw a burlling thing before her.”²⁹⁹ Eames’ final statement amounts to telling Lacey, “I wasn’t there, but you are probably right.” Of course, neither of them were there. They had just collectively and spontaneously created this story. For a brief moment, it becomes starkly obvious that they are united in seeking destruction. Ostensibly they turned against Eames’ son, but in reality they turned against the authorities, in demonstrating their ability to wrest control and channel the community in ways in which the authorities had no choice but to acquiesce. The Radicals had become accusers, victims, judge, jury, and guilty parties, all at once. This was not a contradiction in their ranks but rather a function of the revolution itself. They, the lower orders, had become all the significant players within the community. The courtroom turned over to women, as the Radicals blatantly enacted roles from which they had dispossessed the Conservatives. “Witches” and the possessed may have been on two different sides of the courtroom, but ideologically, they were on the same side.

The peculiar combination of forces that converged in Salem, led, as might be expected, to peculiar results. Whilst all cases of rebellion, possession, and confession could be considered

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid..

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

part of a Radical attempt to overturn society, Salem led the charge. Not only was it by far the largest witch-hunt in New England history, it was unique not only in the sheer number accused and executed, also for a preponderance of possessed and confessors in particular.³⁰⁰ At least fifty-eight people became possessed during the crisis, with at least fifty confessing.³⁰¹ It was a movement dominated by the Radicals.

In spite of the depth and scope of this Radical movement, it cannot unequivocally be called a success. When the Conservatives abruptly began to pay no more heed to the accusations of the possessed, the Radicals were forced to recognise the limits of their power and were “were relegated once again to... their proper roles: servers, not served; followers, not leaders; governed, not governors; the silent, not the speakers.”³⁰² Nevertheless Karlsen concedes that “the possessed were able to carry the day,” and indeed in the short term she is right: wealthy, powerful and god-fearing men and women were hanged at the specific demand of the possessed.³⁰³ They had purged their own particular demons: the men, masters, and ministers who sought to reinforce the position Puritan society afforded them. They had killed off those who represented their own hopeless future. They had made themselves persons of importance, becoming, for the first time in their lives, “the main actors in the social drama.”³⁰⁴ The accused had contributed their share, particularly the confessors. Together, they had moved from being the least powerful members of society to those who daily held its fate in their hands, as the former leaders watched in apprehension, powerless to predict or prevent their next move. Although the revolution, as incomplete and temporary, cannot ultimately be called a success for the Radicals, it is important not to understate the significance of what they did achieve.

³⁰⁰ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 39.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 301.

³⁰³ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 248.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 251.

For a while, the Radicals had held the balance of power, and crashed through the colony wreaking destruction. The Conservatives took the reins, capitalising on their rebellion. But the Conservatives lost control of the reins, as perhaps did the Radicals themselves, who revelled in the uncontrollable destruction they had launched, heedless and indeed careless of their own potential danger, whilst the Conservatives clung on for dear life. In deciding to capitalise on the rebellion, the Conservatives had not counted on the extent of the Radicals' discontent or their capacity for attempted revolution. Their plan backfired. Lawson believed that Satan afflicted people "that *Christ's Kingdom may be divided against it self*, and so be weakened."³⁰⁵ The Radicals achieved just that. The true success of the Radicals was to have engineered a situation in which the horses were driving themselves, and the authorities, in spite of themselves, were terrified.

³⁰⁵ Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative*, 10.

Chapter 4

The Conservatives

What turned the events in Salem from a successful revolution into a crisis was the existence of an opposition party. The Conservatives consented to the crisis from the first stirrings of rebellion, although they did not recognise the complicity of the Radicals in bringing it about, merely interpreting the events before them as worked to their advantage. They therefore *permitted* events to devolve into a crisis. The fear a witch-hunt would inspire seemed the optimal method for keeping their seemingly divergent population in hand. Like the Radicals, the Conservatives were suffering from disillusionment, though in a very different sense. The third-generation Puritan leaders—those who led the colony at the time of the crisis—believed early New England to have succeeded in fulfilling all their collective hopes. In many accounts, the first fifty years of the colony, the times of Cotton Mather’s grandfathers John Cotton and Richard Mather, became a mythologised “golden age.”³⁰⁶ The third generation of leaders lamented the fracturing of identity and of church power, and the geographical and ideological declension around the colony. The appellation “Conservative” reflects this. I do not use the term to reflect any specific political doctrine. They were not conservative in terms of wider Western thought at the time: indeed the Puritan ideology was inherently radical.³⁰⁷ But Conservative remains the most appropriate denominator, in that they desired to return to an idealised past, or at the very least to ensure the continuance of a (hierarchical) status quo.

³⁰⁶ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 122.

³⁰⁷ Miller, *The Seventeenth Century*, 416.

The Demographic Makeup of the Conservatives

The Conservatives, much like the Radicals, were made up of two otherwise separated groups: the non-possessed accusers and the political, judicial and ecclesiastical authorities (whom I shall refer to for convenience as the “elite”). As with any broad historical grouping, not all of those demographically suited to these roles were ideologically adherents to their philosophy. Notably, many ecclesiastical leaders, particularly the Mathers, who were “representative of their kind—ministers who were also intellectuals,” could also be considered “elite,” and yet many of them passionately opposed the trials.³⁰⁸ As in any such “war,” there were dissenters, neutral figures, and those who were simply caught in the crossfire. But, as Norton reminds us, “*the judges of the Court of Oyer and Terminer were the very men who led the colony both politically and militarily.*”³⁰⁹ It is impossible to doubt therefore that at least a significant proportion of those in charge were in favour of the trials, including the methods used and the results. Alongside sources of more localised power—minister Samuel Parris and former minister Deodat Lawson of Salem Village—they were a small group, but the only one with the ability to legitimise the accusations and convert them into real-life acts of violence. The non-possessed accusers served, on the whole, as the footsoldiers of the elite. They may or may not have been aware of their conscription to this cause, but they certainly unwittingly helped to spread the propaganda, and vehemently to fight a portion of the enemies of the elite.

The elite were all adult men of high social standing, and were a small enough group that they can be listed by name. Parris, Lawson, Nicholas Noyes of Salem Town, John Hale of Beverly and Cotton Mather were the few ministers who, at least to some extent, supported and encouraged the trials (this is disputed in the case of Mather, as we shall see and as I have

³⁰⁸ Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596-1728* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), vii.

³⁰⁹ Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 299.

mentioned above, but owing to his well-recorded ambivalence, standing in the community and influence through his extensive published works, he deserves a place on this list nonetheless). In terms of the political and judicial authorities, Sir William Phips, the Governor, played a significant role in abetting the Conservatives, even if he was insufficiently directly involved to be one himself. Without Phips, the official trials could not have taken place. Other political and judicial authorities, made up primarily of the men on the court, were William Stoughton, Jonathan Corwin, Thomas Danforth, Bartholomew Gedney, John Hathorne, John Richards, Peter Sargent, Wait Winthrop, and Samuel Sewall and Stephen Sewall. Another member of the court, Nathaniel Saltonstall, resigned after the first execution, in June, and therefore probably did not endorse the means or ends of the rest of the elite.³¹⁰ Some of these men are more prominent than others in the existing trial documents, notably Stoughton, lieutenant governor of the colony and Chief Justice of the court; Samuel Sewall, one of the most prominent men in the colony, who wrote prolifically and who famously apologised for his role in the trials; and Hathorne, who conducted the majority of the preliminary examinations.³¹¹

Some people crossed the line between the elite and the non-possessed accusers. Some of the elite, including Parris, also testified against people, becoming non-possessed accusers.³¹² Otherwise, the non-possessed were “quite representative of the larger population.”³¹³ Mostly from the “lower and middling ranks of society,” about ninety percent were adults and nearly seventy percent men, across a broad age range.³¹⁴ They fit the conventional image of an accuser: they usually “knew their witches, often well.”³¹⁵ Whilst they were perhaps “representative” of

³¹⁰ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 10.

³¹¹ Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 25.

³¹² Woodward, *Records I*, 49.

³¹³ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 184.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

the population as a whole, that rendered them primarily people of middling means and middling status. They therefore stand quite distinct from the servant-girl possessed or the low-to-middling status accused. The Conservatives therefore consisted almost entirely of those who stood to benefit at least somewhat from the continuation of the status quo and of Puritan ideology.

A Colony Slipping from their Grasp

When he preached *A Modell of Christian Charity* to some of the first settlers of Salem in 1630, Winthrop attested “God almightie in his most holy and wise providence hath soe disposed of the Condicion of mankinde, as in all times some must be rich some poore, some highe and eminent in power and dignitie; others meane and in subjeccion.”³¹⁶ Perry Miller, one of the foremost scholars of Puritanism, asks why exactly Winthrop took the occasion of the voyage to the New World to remind his followers so firmly of their inherent social inequality. He concludes that “it is as though, preternaturally sensing what the promise of America might come to signify for the rank and file, Winthrop took the precaution to drive out of their heads any notion that in the wilderness the poor and the mean were ever so to improve themselves as to mount above the rich or the eminent in dignity.”³¹⁷ Sixty years later, it was evident Winthrop's attempt to drive this idea from the minds of the ‘rank and file’ had not sufficed. The “promise of America” had already taken hold.

Winthrop was amongst those first-generation settlers so revered by the third generation, as epitomised by the ardent Cotton Mather. In his *Magnalia*, Mather's biography of Winthrop named him as “Nehemias Americanus” after Nehemiah, the prophet “who rebuilt the walls of

³¹⁶ Winthrop. “Christian Charity,” 195.

³¹⁷ Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness*, 5.

Jerusalem.³¹⁸ Winthrop and his generation had unquestionably succeeded in forming an orderly and efficient colony. Their skill at setting up a “civilized” society, rather than falling back on provincial and uneducated behaviours, was at least part of this success. Massachusetts was the place in the English-speaking world where schooling was most widely available for children.³¹⁹ Education was “a sincere response to the observation that in the absence of other insurances of cultural continuity... schooling must serve that function.”³²⁰ Schooling served therefore not merely to civilise the colony but to inculcate its newest members with a firm sense of their mission and their place within it as individuals: a sense more than conspicuous in the writings of Mather, Parris and Sewall. Lacking “other traditional restraints” or an agent for “implicit conformity to the limits of the conscience,” education was supposed to serve as a “means of shaping the individual to a psychological acquiescence in the norms of his community.”³²¹ Yet in many—significantly, often those who were unlikely to have been afforded much formal education—these supposedly “ingrained” beliefs were absent, or at the very least questionable.

The declensions recorded in the Reform Synod were evidence of the breakdown of hierarchy, a disaster compounded by the general precarious nature of the colony. As John Demos points out, male dominance was “an assumed principle” in early New England, in the sense that men reserved all rights to “vote and hold public office,” were “leaders in religion,” and dominated “marital and family relations and everyday affairs”; however according to Demos this

³¹⁸ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana; or The Ecclesiastical History of New-England, from its first planting, in the year 1620, unto the year of our Lord 1698. In seven books. By the reverend and learned Cotton Mather, D. D. F. R. S. And pastor of the North Church in Boston, New-England. In two volumes. Volume I. With an introduction and occasional notes, by the Rev. Thomas Robbins, D. D. and translations of the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin quotations by Lucius F. Robinson, LL. B.*, ed. Thomas Robbins (Hartford: Silas Andrus & Son, 1853), 118; Bercovitch, *Rites of Assent*, 80.

³¹⁹ Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 68.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ *Ibid.*

was of no consequence to those who were barred from these roles.³²² Demos attributes the massive gender inequalities in witchcraft accusations to “sex-roles generally,” as detailed above, considering it as merely part of the character of the times.³²³ In spite of this confessed male dominance and unbalanced gender figures in witchcraft trials and executions, in Demos’ view “there is little sign of generalized (or ‘structural’) conflict between the sexes;” he dismisses the inequalities as entirely tempered by the fact “in private life there was considerable scope for female initiative.”³²⁴ Demos’ blatantly dismissive (and mildly sexist) interpretation of the state of hierarchy in New England is right in one sense: it is true, there were no outright rebellions of the sexes, nor indeed any of the lower orders. That Demos perceives that an age without female suffrage movements, workers uprisings, and explicit teenage rebellion as being unquestionably an age in which discontentment across such groups did not exist is somewhat puzzling, yet could not be easily disproven, were it not for one thing: there *was* one such rebellion. The trials do not so much *contain* evidence of conflict over the hierarchy as they *are* evidence.

The breakdown of hierarchy more generally could be perceived through infractions of good behaviour. From his arrival in Salem Village in 1689, Parris evidently recognised evidence of such behavioural breakdown, such as the Reform Synod attempted to counter, within the community. In his first sermon he considered it necessary to remind his congregation to behave in a godly fashion, in order to prepare to receive grace.³²⁵ In the people accused of witchcraft in Salem, the desire to break out of Winthrop's hierarchy and the desire to break the Reform Synod’s behavioral rules converges. When Martha Corey was convicted and condemned to hanging, she was subsequently excommunicated. When Parris went to tell her of her

³²² Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 63.

³²³ Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 63.

³²⁴ Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 63.

³²⁵ Samuel Parris, “Sermon: September 19, 1689,” *Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcription Project*, 1, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/parris16890919.html>.

excommunication she was “very obdurate justifying herself” and “condemning” her own discovery.³²⁶ Her “imperiousness” would not “suffer much” discourse, and when offered prayer she was “willing to decline.”³²⁷ Her “imperiousness,” whilst appropriate in neither gender, is notable in particular for being so distinctly unfeminine. Corey had committed a double infraction: against religious behavioural codes, and against her role as a dependent bound to deference.³²⁸ Parris had preached his jeremiads, along with the rest of the New England clergy, exhorting their congregations to “return to God’s purpose in founding New England.”³²⁹ The political and ecclesiastical elite had organised the Reform Synod, overthrown the Andros government, and fought for a resumption of their original charter. Cotton Mather and other prominent social figures had published behavioral guides, such as *Ornaments*, and a wealth of publications on the history and glory of the Puritan state. In short, they had tried by all reasonable means to prevent this declension. When presented with an opportunity to show the dangers of divergence by example: and later, to simply kill off dissenters, they could not resist taking it.

As with the Radicals, it is essential to question if the Conservatives really believed in the witchcraft they engaged with. Rosenthal considers it possible that some did not. He argues that the view that witchcraft was still universally accepted in 1692 is simply inaccurate, that Cotton Mather “would not have written so obsessively on behalf of the existence of his invisible world if some universal view of the subject had existed.”³³⁰ On one occasion, the magistrates brought Deliverance Hobbs in for her examination without announcing her, and asked the possessed who

³²⁶ Samuel Parris, “Church Book Belonging to Salem Village,” *Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcription Project*, 12, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/villgchurchcrd.html>.

³²⁷ Parris, “Church Book.”

³²⁸ Woodward, *Records I*, 38.

³²⁹ Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 247.

³³⁰ Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 25.

it was: “Mercy Lewes do you know her... Do you know her? Speaking to another: but both were struck dumb.”³³¹ Usually so forthcoming with incriminating information upon whichever of the accused was in the room, without prior warning of her identity they were speechless. Moment later, however, Ann Putnam identified her.³³² This test “appears to have been designed to test the accuracy of their charges,” yet the magistrates, “having provided the test, seemed not only unembarrassed but uninterested in the failure of the two to identify her.”³³³ Their refusal to use logic and interrogate this lapse further raises questions about the sincerity of the judges’ beliefs.

Norton, however, like most historians, argues that the community “believed unhesitatingly in the existence of witches” with “very few exceptions.”³³⁴ It is likely that the incidents noted by Rosenthal are evidence of perhaps a “gullibility” or wilful blindness towards evidence that disproved the reality of witchcraft, rather than conscious disbelief.³³⁵ There is little that suggests disbelief in all their published writings, and, as a group firmly entrenched in the culture and religion of their society, it would indeed be inconsistent for the Conservatives as a whole *not* to believe in witches. In sheer terms of age; skepticism towards witchcraft was surely more likely for the possessed teenagers, who would in adulthood become the first generation for whom witchcraft beliefs were not ubiquitous, than an older Conservative man who was born at the height of the European witchcraft crisis. However, there are plentiful examples of the Conservatives manipulating witches, the possessed, or the situation itself, in order to *use* the witchcraft they most likely believed in to further their own ends. Belief in witchcraft and a willingness to exploit its existence need not be mutually exclusive. Silverman describes Cotton Mather’s interactions with the young Goodwins as a kind of “*folie à deux*,” as “he played out his

³³¹ Woodward, *Records II*, 186.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 44.

³³⁴ Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 6.

³³⁵ Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 18.

longing for evidence of Spirit while they played out their hostility to it.”³³⁶ As Silverman suggests, it was possible to be a sincere believer in and opponent of witchcraft and to desire its presence at particular moments. And indeed, in this situation, Mather had a purpose to wait for such a moment. He consciously selected books to present to Martha Goodwin whilst she was under possession, in order to note her ability to distinguish between good and evil. He proudly announced that, under possession, she could not “read the Psalms in ancient meter, nor could she read from the Bible when it was presented to her” (implying Satan was in her, directing her to avoid the holy) but she read with “delight” from “a certain *Prayer Book*.”³³⁷ Thus at the height of the conflict over the Andros government and relations with the crown and the Church of England, Mather crowed that Satan could recognise the corrupt nature of the Church of England’s Book of Common Prayer.³³⁸ He had not faked belief in witchcraft to come to this conclusion. But he had certainly pushed its hand.

To argue that the Conservatives, on the whole, sincerely believed in witchcraft and used the crisis to expose and exterminate their enemies implies that the Conservatives believed in every case that those who displayed signs of rebellion (those they wanted to bring down) coincided with those who were witches (those they were morally and legally permitted to bring down). This argument relies far less on circumstantial evidence than it may seem. The conflation of witch with rebel, as we shall later see, was an inherent part of the New England consciousness, and Parris regularly reminded his congregation of it. He preached in March 1692 that, whilst a devil might mean “any wicked Angel or Spirit,” or indeed “the Prince or head of the evil Spirits,” it might just as well serve for “vile & wicked persons,” just as Christ called

³³⁶ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 93.

³³⁷ Mather, *Memorable Providences*, 24.

³³⁸ Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 215.

Judas a devil.³³⁹ The signs of rebellion that they so wanted to quash were often one and the same with known witchcraft behaviours, and there was therefore no need for men, at least some of whom were surely decent, rational beings, to ask themselves if they were merely attempting mass murder upon those who disagreed with them. The majority were probably genuinely struck by an overriding conviction that those who rebelled against proper Puritan behaviour and contributed to the conflict or dissension in the community were genuinely guilty of witchcraft. Whether genuine or merely the thinnest of guises, the professed conflation of witch and rebel served as an excuse for waging, as Parris called it, a “war” against those who did not serve the aims of this particular utopia.

An Opportunity for Interpretation

The exploitation of the crisis by the Conservatives came in two ways and two waves. The first, which they made use of throughout the crisis, was their power of interpretation. As the century progressed and the New England ministers found themselves with less and less direct influence, they had quickly turned their hand to “seeking influence through interpretation of events rather than leadership in them.”³⁴⁰ It took little alteration to apply this method to their current situation. Even before it began, the clergy’s interpretation of witchcraft laid the groundwork for the crisis. Mather’s involvement in the Goodwin case contributed significantly to a continued awareness and expectation of witchcraft in New England. In the year and a half between that case and Salem, Mather “continually reminded his congregation” of the existence of an invisible world, an effect that was multiplied by the “size of his congregation and the

³³⁹ Samuel Parris, “Sermon: March 27, 1692,” *Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcription Project*, 148, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/sermons/parris16920327.html>.

³⁴⁰ Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 227.

frequency of his preaching.”³⁴¹ This direct influence, as well as his printed account of the case, enabled him remind a significant portion of New England of the continued threat of witchcraft.

Parris was uniquely placed to disseminate not only fear of witchcraft amongst the community, but to promote his own interpretation of specific local concerns. These personal and local concerns are reflected in the way he “unconsciously prepared his congregation for witch-hunting” by “depicting a satanic menace both outside and within the village for years before the hunt.”³⁴² His aforementioned first sermon betrays a desire for some kind of impending judgement to purge sinners, and provides a stark warning: “unless there be a present fulfilling of an evil threatened many, too many, will little regard it.”³⁴³ Parris’ sermon thus foreshadowed the events he had such a formative role in. In this same sermon, he laid out the behaviour he expected from his new congregation. “You are to... love me best,” he told Salem Village, to “obey me,” and “endeavour by all lawfull means” to make his work as light as possible.³⁴⁴ In light of such a cloying and pleading need to be loved, it is little wonder he did not remain aloof from the village conflict (nor indeed solve it) but became a principal player. As such, his pulpit became one from which to preach partisanship and interpret events as he saw fit. It is true, as Boyer and Nissenbaum argue, that Parris was not responsible for the village conflict; nor, perhaps, did he “deliberately provoke” the crisis.³⁴⁵ But he certainly had been wishing, as early as 1689, for some such shock to the village’s system.³⁴⁶ Parris is thus emblematic of the complicity of the Conservatives in bringing about the trials to purge the town of the reformist menace.

³⁴¹ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 88.

³⁴² Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 58.

³⁴³ Parris, “Sermon: September 19, 1689,” 2.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁴⁵ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 177.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

The Conservatives had laid the groundwork for a crisis between good and evil, so the nameless rebellion of Abigail Williams and Betty Parris must have appeared providential. It now lay in their hands to fully exploit the situation. They did so by labelling the affliction “possession.” As the crisis progressed, Parris took to his pulpit to continue his association of rebellion against Puritan norms as coincident with witchcraft. “Christ knows how many Devils there are,” Parris announced on March 27th.³⁴⁷ Like Judas amongst Christ’s disciples, the devils could be found amongst the members of his church. Thus, no one could “build their hopes” upon being church members: “this you & I may be, & yet Devils for all that.”³⁴⁸ He also took pains to emphasize his dichotomous thinking, that the church members could be one or the other, saints or devils: “the scripture gives us no medium.”³⁴⁹ The people of Salem Village were regaled with such threats and warnings on at least a weekly basis.

Besides using his power of interpretation for the edification of the community, Parris can also be considered as using it to openly incite division. In his conviction that the crisis represented a “war”—a theory that perhaps had some weight—Parris attempted to conscript ordinary villagers as the footsoldiers of the elite. He cites the Bible: “These shall make War with the Lamb, & the Lamb shall overcome them.”³⁵⁰ His division remarkably resembles the reality of the situation. He poignantly argued “now in all wars are two parties. And so here.”³⁵¹ On one side was the “Offended Party,” “the Lamb and his followers.”³⁵² On the other was the “Offending Party,” consisting of “Anti-christ... & all her Assistants, instruments of Satan, &

³⁴⁷ Parris, “Sermon: March 27, 1692,” 147.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 150.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 151.

³⁵⁰ Samuel Parris, “Sermon: September 11, 1692,” *Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcription Project*, 152, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/sermons/parris16920911.html>.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid.

instigated by that Dragon to this War.”³⁵³ And of course, in his interpretation, the “Victory” was ensured to Christ and his followers.³⁵⁴ He warned, rather presciently, of the likely fate of many of the Radicals– “sometimes the Devil looseth his Volunteers in War.”³⁵⁵ He warns too of the eternal fate of the rebels; “it is true Christ may conquer thee... & make thee throw away thy Weapons of Rebellion” but “this is not ordinary; & if thou shouldst dye a Rebel in the fight then thou art damned for ever... be we cautioned agst. making war with the Lamb.”³⁵⁶ He concludes by associating the two forms of rebellion: those who are “against the Lamb” are “against the Peace & Prosperity of Zion.”³⁵⁷ He may have meant this spiritually, but the undertones, in light of the rhetoric that pervaded New England, are obvious: those against God (the rebels) are against the success of New England, and vice versa. His interpretation thus justifies the judicial punishment of what would otherwise be a religious infraction. The inhabitants of Salem had been duly warned. Conform, or face the consequences of your rebellion. For “here are no Newters. Every one is on one side or the other.”³⁵⁸

Thus recruited to the cause of the elite, the non-possessed accusers were well equipped to hunt out these servants of the Devil. Having internalised the interpretation of the elite, they too began to place that interpretive framework upon the situations they encountered. They were also able to destroy their own enemies in the ongoing conflict amongst the faction in and around Salem. In this sense Boyer and Nissenbaum are correct. Their analysis only reveals this small part of the pattern, however. As I have demonstrated, the non-possessed accusers were evidently adherents to a wider interpretive framework alongside their personalised and localised one.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 156.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 155.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

Additionally, the importance of non-possessed accusers' interpretations can be placed within the larger pattern of Conservative interpretations. As Norton argues, most adult males in Salem Village "believed in the validity of the fits suffered by the children and young women in their households," and therefore permitted their actions to be understood as possession.³⁵⁹ However, John Procter had "little sympathy" or "patience" for Mary Warren.³⁶⁰ Consequently, she could not press charges against anyone until later in the crisis. Norton describes this system as one in which "adult male gatekeepers"—heads of households, preliminary magistrates, and judges—formed a tiered system through which to filter accusations and actions, only legitimising those which were beneficial to them (before, of course, the possessed were so many, the witch conspiracy apparently so large, and the fervour of the community apparently so extreme that they were bypassed).³⁶¹ The rebellion might belong to the Radicals. But, in the initial stages at least, it was closely controlled by the Conservatives.

Destruction of the Dissenters

The second way in which the Conservatives made use of the crisis was the more openly destructive: in the extermination of their enemies. Whilst the characteristics of those who the Conservatives would desire to destroy have been covered elsewhere, I will briefly note here who exactly would embody such traits, and if indeed these individuals were those who were accused. Both personal relationships and their probable genuine belief in witchcraft and possession prevented the Conservatives from recognising that a large contingent of their opponents existed not just amongst the accused, but amongst the possessed. The Radicals on their radar were the older group, those whose social rebellions were more explicitly stated, whose economic positions

³⁵⁹ Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 72.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

were unusual or precarious, and who had been sources of conflict and dissent: the old women living precariously “on the margin of subsistence,” those women who stood to inherit in place of men, or those people of any age who explicitly or implicitly questioned Puritan religiosity or morals.³⁶²

Boyer and Nissenbaum’s study, whilst acknowledging that “human beings rarely fit... neatly into... categorical boxes,” nevertheless posits half of those I have labelled Conservatives as primarily “Puritans,” whilst “their opponents” were “capitalists,” making the struggle one between old and new economic orders.³⁶³ I agree with Karlsen that, whilst some women considered Radicals were “beneficiaries of the new economic order,” others were not and, most importantly, “all witches stood symbolically opposed to—and were therefore subversive of—that order, in that they did not accept their assigned place within it.”³⁶⁴ As well as socially subversive of that order they were economically liminal beings, “poor” but “not usually the poorest women in their communities”; rather than relief recipients, “those just above them on the economic ladder.”³⁶⁵ They were those who held a “special position” in relation to “society’s rules from transferring wealth from one generation to another.”³⁶⁶ Hostility to the church, including very significantly “overt repudiation of ministerial authority,” as well as “sabbath-breaking” and “blasphemy,” were marks of those the Conservatives perceived as Radicals.³⁶⁷ As noted in the previous chapter, they were often characters who were particularly outspoken or aggressive. Finally their nature as members of the Radicals could be perceived in specific infractions or mere

³⁶² Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 149.

³⁶³ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 106.

³⁶⁴ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 217.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

accidents. After Martha Carrier and her children caught smallpox in 1690, “the town responded as if she had deliberately created an epidemic.”³⁶⁸

This perception of whom the “rebels,” or Radicals, were is reflected in accusations. As shown above, women were disproportionately those who served as problems within Puritan communities. As mentioned in the previous chapter, women were proportionately more likely to be accused but also proportionately more likely again to go to trial and be convicted. This in turn supports my thesis: women were not so much a majority of those who caused local problems in Salem Village (and thus would be perceived as a threat by the non-possessed accusers) as they were the majority of those who caused problems in Puritan society in general (and thus would be eradicated by the elite). Although in different proportions, they did nevertheless form a majority of the accused for both sets of Conservatives, the elite and the non-possessed accusers, with their overlapping enemies. Economically, women who prevented “transmission of property from one generation of males to another” did indeed “account for most of New England’s female witches.”³⁶⁹ At the convergence of social and economic problems was the single woman. Although the majority of women accused were married women, so were the majority of women in New England. Proportionally, there was an “overrepresentation of women alone among females accused.”³⁷⁰ Such women were neither wives nor mothers, nor were they likely to be able to support themselves in the spheres in which they were permitted to work: “service remained the main occupation open to them.”³⁷¹ The remarkable correlation between those positions and actions that troubled the Conservatives and those of the accused can surely not be

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 99.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 116, 115.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 73.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 229.

attributed to mere coincidence. With a legal justification for their accusations, the Conservatives “followed the biblical injunction in Exodus 22:18: ““thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.””³⁷²

In their eagerness to rid the colony of dissenting elements, the judges were not always judicious about the methods of trial they employed. Dr. John Cotta was a qualified English physician “widely respected in the seventeenth century” for his publications on witchcraft trials.³⁷³ He believed that, whilst “presumptions are alone not sufficient prooffe” for conviction, they could stand as evidence during a trial, alongside “diligent and judicious inquisition,” as would be used “as in al other cases of judgements & inquisitions.”³⁷⁴ He wholeheartedly accepted the testimony of possessed individuals, and of the use of witch’s marks upon the body as evidence.³⁷⁵ The trial by touch (asking the accused to touch the possessed, and laying weight to the fact it might “cure” them) was another “miraculous” and “wonderfull” test.³⁷⁶ To an extent, the judges at Salem can be considered as following Cotta’s guidelines. They too accepted trial by touch and the accusations of possessed individuals. It is possible they also tried to ensure their “inquisition” was “diligent and judicious,” as recommended by Cotta. Boyer and Nissenbaum consider the chaotic result of the presence of the possessed at the trials to be “rooted in the magistrates’ determination to accept only evidence which... they could observe with their own eyes,” as part of a wider attempt to ensure “due process and empirical method” in the trials.³⁷⁷

³⁷² Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 113.

³⁷³ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 156.

³⁷⁴ John Cotta, *The Triall of VVitch-craft: Shewing the Trve and Right Methode of the Discouery: with a Confutation of erroneous wayes. By Iohn Cotta, Doctor in Physicke* (London: George Purslowe for Samuel Rand, 1616), 101.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁷ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 15-16.

The judges cannot so easily be vindicated, however. Cotta urged not just diligence but “weighing & pressing circumstances into the bone & marrow.”³⁷⁸ Sheer quantity of trials and testimony can hardly be called such a pressing examination considering the leading questions and, on occasion, presumption of guilt, as in the case of Deliverance Hobbs cited in the previous chapter. Cotta’s injunction that expertise in examinations “was not a knowledge of theology but medical training” was entirely disregarded.³⁷⁹ Therefore, the magistrates can hardly be said to have adhered to Cotta’s advice in their examinations, and, that being so, may have handed out judgements that were certainly of dubious morality, and on occasion potentially of dubious legality. The magistrates were condemned by the public at the time and shortly afterwards for their acceptance of spectral testimony, which “too easily” lent itself “to fakery and deception.”³⁸⁰ Although no one knows for sure how much weight such testimony was afforded in the Court of Oyer and Terminer, it was collected voluminously in the preliminary investigations.³⁸¹ As we shall later see, opposition to such forms of testimony by Increase Mather and others was in fact what brought the trials to a close.

Further evidence of excessive zeal on the part of the elite in condemning the Radicals is the suspicion of torture that hangs over the trials. Some historians deny it entirely: Demos, for example, claims that “contrary to popular belief, physical torture was *not* used to extract confessions.”³⁸² Others, such as Karlson, are unsure of where it was applied but believe it “clearly was in some cases.”³⁸³ Certainly, to modern minds, a form of torture *was* used: psychological torture. Some confessors later retracted their statements, arguing, as Sarah

³⁷⁸ Cotta, *The Triall of VVitch-craft*, 101.

³⁷⁹ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 156.

³⁸⁰ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 16.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁸² Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 10.

³⁸³ Karlson, *The Devil*, 13.

Churchill did, that they had been threatened and coerced by magistrates and family members.³⁸⁴ Nor can physical torture be discounted. John Proctor wrote a letter to “Mr. Mather” from prison that Richard and Andrew Carrier “would not confess any thing till they tyed them Neck and Heels till the Blood was ready to come out of their Noses,” and that the judges had done the same to his own son.³⁸⁵

Those who deny the role of torture in the trials disregard the fate of Giles Corey. He refused to be tried, an action traditionally punished under English law by “the *peine forte et dure*,” a barbaric punishment entailing “placing heavy stones on a defendant’s prone body until he either entered a plea or died.”³⁸⁶ Whilst this was, admittedly, torture countenanced by the law, it was not commonly enforced and certainly *could* have been relaxed on this occasion.³⁸⁷ Yet it was not. After two days of excruciating torture, Corey died.³⁸⁸ The legality of such torture seems hardly relevant. By 1692, prolonged forms of execution were hardly the norm. The evident horror of Calef and others at the time testifies to Corey’s death being perceived as torture, then as now.³⁸⁹ Corey was a rebellious individual with a history of violence and a criminal record.³⁹⁰ If they could not try him, it seems the magistrates were willing to resort to crueller methods to ensure his elimination from their community.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Boyer, and Nissenbaum, *The Salem Witchcraft Papers*, 689-690.

³⁸⁶ Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 277.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Samuel Sewall, “The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729: Selected excerpts from Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 5, Series 5, 1878, pages 358 - 464.” *Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcription Project*, last modified 2010, http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/diaries/sewall_diary.html.

³⁸⁹ Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 278.

³⁹⁰ Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 166.

The Role of the Ministers

Cotton Mather's engagement with witchcraft, as we have seen, began before Salem. Whilst he often embodied the mindset of the Conservatives and on occasion supported their actions, he was notably more conscientious and less vindictive than many of his contemporaries, notably Parris and Stoughton. The Goodwin case and its aftermath in Boston "persuaded him to abhor irresponsible accusations of witchcraft."³⁹¹ Indeed it is evident throughout *Memorable Providences* that Martha Goodwin was accusing people, whose names he did not once reveal to the public.³⁹² He had also, however, "resolv'd" to never "use but just one grain of patience" with those who denied the existence of witches.³⁹³ In his grappling between these convictions, he exposes both the allure of the Conservative mindset, and its inherent immorality. In May, Mather wrote to John Richards, recently appointed to the newly formed court of Oyer and Terminer.³⁹⁴ He wrote that, whilst he believed witches existed and some were capable of crimes worthy of execution, there were others who, in spite of being witches, did not warrant so harsh a punishment.³⁹⁵ Even more cautiously, he believed "that the identification and conviction of *all* witches demands the most extreme caution."³⁹⁶ This argument, it is true, was often accompanied by "disturbing qualifications."³⁹⁷ In a letter sent to Phips in June, he ended his reasoned remarks by urging that the trials continue.³⁹⁸ Tellingly, he later removed this final clause from published versions.³⁹⁹ Mather famously appeared at the hanging of Burroughs and four others in August and attempted once more to instill the necessity of the trials into the minds of the crowd after

³⁹¹ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 94-95.

³⁹² Mather, *Memorable Providences*, 13.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁹⁴ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 98.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

they had been shaken by Burroughs' perfect recitation of the Lord's Prayer.⁴⁰⁰ Sewall wrote in his diary that Mather had said "they all died by a Righteous Sentence."⁴⁰¹ Indeed, as with Martha Goodwin's reading of the Book of Common Prayer, Rosenthal argues Mather may have had cause to convince himself of Burroughs' guilt. In his trial, Burroughs claimed it had been so long since he had taken the Lord's Supper that he could not remember it.⁴⁰² To make matters worse, he confessed only his eldest child had been baptised.⁴⁰³ Burroughs was emblematic of the colony's declension, and he was a minister, a position in which he had great power to indoctrinate his flock, as Mather was well aware. How "Righteous" indeed it must have seemed for him to be accused of diabolism.

On the whole, however, Mather's support of the trials seemed more personal than political. Silverman recognises that the magistrates were primarily older men and friends of the Mather family, explaining perhaps Cotton Mather's condescension to their attitudes.⁴⁰⁴ Having been such a precocious child, Mather was already an established figure and minister in Boston, so it is easy to forget he was only a young man of twenty-nine in 1692. He was "insecure" and prone to crippling deference and anxieties.⁴⁰⁵ He had, like most ministers, preached the jeremiads and glorified the history of his famous grandfathers. But many such ministers deplored the trials, his father Increase Mather included. It was possible to recognise and lament the declension of New England without resorting to mass executions. Cotton Mather undoubtedly appreciated the first phase of the Conservatives' scheme: interpretation, to edify the public and instill fear. He did not, however, support unregulated murder. He specifically implored Richards not to overstate

⁴⁰⁰ Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 256.

⁴⁰¹ Sewall, "Diary."

⁴⁰² Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 130.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 101.

⁴⁰⁵ Miller, *From Colony to Province*, 201.

the importance of spectral testimony, which Stoughton, in his Conservative vigour, “enthusiastically endorsed.”⁴⁰⁶ Mather thus distanced himself from the “reckless and severe” court the Conservatives promoted.⁴⁰⁷ After the first execution, in June, Mather presented the aforementioned statement on behalf of himself and twelve other ministers, titled *The Return of Several Ministers*, to Phips and his council.⁴⁰⁸ He firmly disregarded spectral evidence and indeed any testimony of the possessed, raised doubts about the wisdom of the touch test, and of the public examinations.⁴⁰⁹

Cotton Mather’s conflicted attitude towards the trials is significant, as it began increasingly to resemble that of the populace as a whole. The actions of both the Radicals *and* the Conservatives had become too destructive, and too apparently indiscriminate. Hale’s wife had been accused, and Margaret Thatcher, “one of the wealthiest women in Massachusetts” and mother-in-law of one of the magistrates, Jonathan Corwin.⁴¹⁰ The crisis slipped yet further from their control. John Alden, an established member of the elite, had been accused, as well as, perhaps worse, Phips’s wife Lady Mary Phips.⁴¹¹ Unable to disavow such accusations without also disavowing earlier accusations of the possessed they had endorsed (and the resulting executions), the Conservatives found themselves unable “to disengage themselves from the consequences of a stereotype they had promulgated.”⁴¹² Yet the stakes were high: as members of their own number were increasingly accused, it became plausible that the Radicals might attempt to wipe out the Conservatives entirely. Only the efforts of several dissenting ministers—“at first

⁴⁰⁶ Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 203; Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 99.

⁴⁰⁷ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 99.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁰ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 41.

⁴¹¹ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 41.

⁴¹² Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 243.

hesitantly, and finally with a telling stroke”—and some bungling action on the part of the Conservatives, ultimately stemmed the tide.⁴¹³

On October 3rd, Increase Mather, along with a group of prominent ministers, presented Phips with a treatise, later published as *Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits Personating Men* (1693).⁴¹⁴ Increase vigorously challenged the court, under the argument “it were better that ten suspected witches should escape, than that one innocent person should be condemned.”⁴¹⁵ Cotton, crippled by doubt and compliance as usual, was one of very few ministers not to sign it.⁴¹⁶ In light of the opposition of such influential men, it might appear surprising that the trials did not come to an end sooner. The fact remains that, in spite of the significant influential and ideological power of the clergy, New England was not a “hegemonic theocracy,” and the civil authority was not technically bound to any opinions of the clergy.⁴¹⁷ Phips, however, was not committed to Conservative aims to the extent that others, such as Stoughton, were. Phips owed his position as Governor to Increase, and once he had returned, paid “serious attention” to Increase’s concerns.⁴¹⁸ On October 29th, Phips dismissed the court, “freed on bail many of the imprisoned, and urged the judges to find other ways of relieving the remaining prisoners.”⁴¹⁹ Phips permitted a final court to be scheduled, the “Court of Assize and General Jail Delivery” which was instituted in January 1693, and “exonerated almost fifty accused, and condemned three of witchcraft.”⁴²⁰ Stoughton, the “most obsessive” of the Conservatives, was unimpressed by the perceived weakness of the courts and attempted to push through the executions of the

⁴¹³ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 10.

⁴¹⁴ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 10; Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 113.

⁴¹⁵ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 10.

⁴¹⁶ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 114.

⁴¹⁷ Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 70.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁴¹⁹ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 153.

⁴²⁰ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 118; Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 153-154.

three as fast as possible, along with another five individuals “who had been convicted through special judicial actions,” prompting Phips, to Stoughton’s fury, to stay all of these judgements.⁴²¹ Those were the last convictions. In May, Phips “granted a general pardon.”⁴²² The crisis was over.

Retreating and Retracting

Not everyone was persuaded by *Cases of Conscience*. Soon after it was presented to Phips, with public opinion already leaning towards repudiating the trials, Cotton Mather’s *Wonders of the Invisible World* was published, with excruciatingly bad timing.⁴²³ It argues that “devils have broken loose in New England,” thus implicitly encouraging the judicial bodies who were endeavouring to stop them.⁴²⁴ Calef was convinced, not without cause, that “by continuing to cast out alleged demons and to promulgate his pneumatology, Mather was brewing new Salems,” at which more people would be “legally murdered.”⁴²⁵ Though “legal murder” was most likely not Mather’s intention, he was legitimising the actions of those who endorsed just that. Stoughton never apologised, and defended his zeal, and the results, “to the end.”⁴²⁶ Parris’ role in the crisis continued to plague him. Now embroiled in community conflicts arising from the trials as well as the pre-existing divisions, Parris was so contentious a figure that he felt compelled to resign in 1696.

There is evidence that, years after the crisis, Parris was still perceived by some of his congregants as guilty of instigating and encouraging the trials. On 26th November 1694, some

⁴²¹ Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 151; Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 154.

⁴²² Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 154.

⁴²³ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 114.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁴²⁶ Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 195.

former church members explained why they had stopped attending his church: having seen “those whom we had Reason to esteem better than our selves thus accused, blemished, & of their lives bereaved,” they recognised the existence of human agents in the supernatural crisis, and endeavoured, not unwisely, to avoid Parris.⁴²⁷ The Salem congregation’s retrospective recognition of Parris’ complicity serves as compelling proof of the role he played in the crisis, along with his fellow Conservatives. They name several pieces of evidence in their testimony against him (all recorded, interestingly, by his own hand). They simultaneously cast aspersions on the possessed, considering one of Parris’ most considerable faults to be “his easy & strong faith & belief of the affirmations and accusations made by those they call ye afflicted.”⁴²⁸ The trial methods were also circumspect, and they condemned his “approving & practising unwarrantable & ungrounded Methods for discovering what he was desirous to know referring to ye Bewitched or Possessed Persons,” including the touch test.⁴²⁹ The reference to what he was “desirous to know,” recalls Cotton Mather, manipulating the “possession” of Martha Goodwin to achieve the result he was “desirous” of. Parris’ detractors even go so far as to imply the trials were, indeed, a conscious physical destruction of dissenters. They claim he used the possessed “pretending to inform himself and others wo were ye Devils Instruments.”⁴³⁰ No more damning verdict of Parris’ ulterior motives in supporting the trials, nor of his guilt, can be found. Yet Parris did not remain entirely unrepentant. He conceded that same year that he could “truly sympathise” with those who had “unduly suffered.”⁴³¹ He had done, he stated, “as *I apprehended* was duty,” but he “*may* have been mistaken” (italics mine).⁴³² Parris, evidently, could not

⁴²⁷ Parris, “Church Book,” 23.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 25.

⁴³² Ibid.

entirely regret the reasons he had led his community into “war.” But his speech is permeated with a sense of guilt at the results. In 1692, he had encouraged a stark segregation within the community. By 1694, he begged, “let all bitterness... be put away from you... & be ye kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christs sake, hath forgiven you.”⁴³³

Public “atonements and justifications” for the trials persisted well into the eighteenth century.⁴³⁴ Samuel Sewall put up a bill sometime in 1696, which he then read aloud in church, professing a desire to “take the Blame and Shame of it,” and ask “pardon.”⁴³⁵ The Conservatives involved, as responsible adults, were expected to apologise for their complicity. This same expectation did not hang over the accused, who were considered victims; the confessors, who could be considered as trying to spare their own lives; or the possessed, who were mostly adolescents. Some, however, notably Ann Putnam Jr., did later apologise. Her confession, on the occasion of her joining the church on 25th August 1706, is indicative of similar shades of regret amongst the Radicals. She began her confession begging to be “humbled before God” to have been “made an instrument for yt accuseing of severall persons of a grievous crime.”⁴³⁶ Like Parris, Putnam thus removes direct blame from herself, portraying herself as having “ignorantly and unwittingly” become a victim of a “great delusion of Satan.”⁴³⁷ Nevertheless, her sense of regret is acute. Recognising the scope of the trials, she acknowledges the sufferers to be not only those who were executed, but the whole colony. She had, she realised, helped bring “upon

⁴³³ Ibid..

⁴³⁴ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 44.

⁴³⁵ Sewall, “Diary.”

⁴³⁶ Joseph Green, “Records of the Salem-Village Church as Kept by the Reverend Joseph Green,” *Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcription Project*, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/green.html>.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

myself & this land the guilt of innocent blood.”⁴³⁸ The very confession itself is testament not just to her regret but to her resignation. In 1692 she had been one of the possessed accusers, engaged in a fierce battle against authority, hierarchy, and Puritan structures. In 1706, she was applying to be a church member.

The majority of New Englanders had lent their belief, attention, and implicit endorsement to the crisis. John Hale, who supported the trials (Sewall even describes him as being at the Burroughs execution along with Cotton Mather), changed his mind towards the end of the crisis, not least because his wife had been accused.⁴³⁹ In his invaluable account of the trials, *A Modest Enquiry*, he deftly demonstrates the feelings of all those who found themselves in the midst of a crisis they had not started: “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.”⁴⁴⁰ Hale considered perhaps the cause of “the Lords letting Satan loose to torment and accuse so many” that New Englanders could learn in the future to “search out the truth more exactly.”⁴⁴¹ When his neighbour had been “the first person that suffered on this account in *New-England*” fifty years earlier, “reverence” to the authorities had caused him to “drink in their principles in these things, with a kind of Implicit Faith,” just as Cotton Mather had during the Salem crisis.⁴⁴² The Salem crisis, however, had enlightened him. The ultimate conclusion of Hale’s argument lends itself, if not to a disbelief in witchcraft, to a skepticism towards it. He argues that, to those who doubt “*there was a going too far in this affair,*” the number of persons accused went “to about an *hundred,*” and “it cannot be imagined

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Sewall, “Diary”; Miller, *From Colony to Province*, 195.

⁴⁴⁰ 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: B. Green and J. Allen, for Benjamin Elliot under the Town House, 1702), 171.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 172.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 10.

that in a place of so much knowledge, so many in so small a compass of Land should so abominably leap into the Devils lap at once.”⁴⁴³ On October 17th, 1711, there was a reversal of attainder, with the innocence of the victims legally restored.⁴⁴⁴ The sentences were overturned, and damages awarded.⁴⁴⁵ Skepticism, it seemed, had set in. When one New England woman was accused in 1724, “the magistrates considered submitting the accusers to a medical examination to determine whether or not they were sane.”⁴⁴⁶ Salem had effectively broken down witchcraft belief in New England.

In the aftermath of the witchcraft crisis, the sense of loss of the Puritan character of the state became profound. Hale saw the witchcraft crisis not as a solution to declension but as a symptom: evidence that such declension was in no way halted by the crisis.⁴⁴⁷ Their errand had been “greatly neglected and despised,” in particular amongst those “born, or bred up in the Land.”⁴⁴⁸ As I have demonstrated, such fears of declension existed prior to the crisis. The crucial difference after the crisis was a sense of finality and resignation. The Conservatives recognised that they had put all they had into one last fight against those threatening the Puritan character of the state, yet change persistently advanced. Cotton Mather never lost his sense of anxiety about the collapse of standards in the colony, and his conviction of what New England had lost left him profoundly “saddened.”⁴⁴⁹ At the same time, he began to promote concepts such as “toleration” that were outright blasphemy to orthodox Puritan doctrine.⁴⁵⁰ To show himself a “true

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁴⁴ Woodward, *Records II*, 216.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Karlsen, *The Devil*, 43-44, 45.

⁴⁴⁷ Hale, *A Modest Enquiry*, 171.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 349.

⁴⁵⁰ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 144.

Englishman,” he endorsed and spent his life encouraging the Toleration Act, and ceased, at least publicly, to regard Episcopalians as a threat.⁴⁵¹ In his *Magnalia*, published in 1702, he was less supportive of the Salem trials than ever before.⁴⁵² He had come to recognise that “New England should not be confused with the New Jerusalem.”⁴⁵³ He, like his contemporaries, now understood the “futility” of resisting the fall of an “exclusivist Christian Israel,” and the attendant changes to New Englanders.⁴⁵⁴ When Samuel Sewall heard of the revocation of the charter in 1685, he wrote ““this Monday we begin palpably to die.””⁴⁵⁵ Ziff’s analysis of this remark is indicative of the aims, and the failure, of the Conservatives. From his initial role as “special judge” in the Salem crisis to his “recantation of his complicity” afterwards, Sewall “acted out his culture’s initial protest against and ultimate acquiescence in” Puritan New England’s death.”⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁵² Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana; or The Ecclesiastical History of New-England, from its first planting, in the year 1620, unto the year of our Lord 1698. In seven books. By the reverend and learned Cotton Mather, D. D. F. R. S. And pastor of the North Church in Boston, New-England. In two volumes. Volume II. With an introduction and occasional notes, by the Rev. Thomas Robbins, D. D. and translations of the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin quotations by Lucius F. Robinson, LL. B.*, ed. Thomas Robbins (Hartford: Silas Andrus & Son, 1853), 17.

⁴⁵³ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 349.

⁴⁵⁴ Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 269; Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 139.

⁴⁵⁵ Ziff, *Puritanism in America*, 245.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

Conclusion: The Unacknowledged Heritage of American Radicalism

When Paul Revere made his famous “midnight ride” to Lexington in 1775, he became symbolic of a new conception of America, one entirely separate from Great Britain.⁴⁵⁷ A war was still being fought, and there were Americans on both sides.⁴⁵⁸ But the colonies had both collective and individual identities sufficiently cohesive to be able to openly declare their complete separation from their European origins. From anxious entities unsure of their allegiances, the colonies had become an “imagined community” of their own.⁴⁵⁹ The pervasive sense of fragility that had existed less than a century earlier was increasingly irrelevant. The loss of political fragility had a profound effect on the character of New England. The populace was no longer anxious, neither willing nor eager to seek and destroy scapegoats. The “perfect storm” had passed.⁴⁶⁰

The America that came into formation during the American Revolution was one that would have horrified the Conservatives. With the increase in “new migrants” and the decline of reformist religiosity, the Puritan character of the state had degraded.⁴⁶¹ Growth and movement “strained and broke apart households, churches and neighborhoods,” contributing to the degradation of New England’s enclosed societies.⁴⁶² New England lost its social character too, as Puritan theology itself was appearing increasingly challenged in an increasingly tolerant

⁴⁵⁷ Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 274.

⁴⁵⁸ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution: How a Revolution Transformed a Monarchical Society into a Democratic One Unlike Any That Had Ever Existed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 176.

⁴⁵⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁴⁶⁰ Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft*, 6.

⁴⁶¹ Wood, *The American Revolution*, 125.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 129.

society.⁴⁶³ As an example of such social change, “premarital pregnancy increased in every decade of the eighteenth century” until the American Revolution, indicative that “external controls of sexual behavior imposed by church, courts, and parents were breaking down,” whilst the “internalized morality” of the nineteenth century “had not yet developed.”⁴⁶⁴ As Boyer and Nissenbaum point out, New England communities were increasingly forced to concede that “they were made up of a diverse mixture of imperfect and self-seeking human beings, and they largely abandoned the effort to be anything more.”⁴⁶⁵

Nevertheless, America in 1776 would have disappointed the Radicals as much as it would have horrified the Conservatives. In 1776, the hierarchies Puritanism had borrowed from feudalism (and reinforced) were still very much apparent.⁴⁶⁶ For the Puritans, the symbolic interpretation of their journey and of their mission in the New World relied upon its “eschatological import” as a promised land.⁴⁶⁷ The new America saw itself as a desacralized promised land. For all its religious fervour, its mission was not biblical, and it was far from the “Christian Israel” the Puritan fathers had sought. However, it borrowed some of their rhetoric to construct an exceptionalist ideology. According to Bercovitch, the “status of visible sainthood” with which Puritanism endowed America has an importance in subsequent American thought that “can hardly be overestimated.”⁴⁶⁸ He considers the concepts of “American dream, manifest destiny,” and “redeemer nation” as direct descendants of Puritan thought.⁴⁶⁹ Such ideologies are not so firmly grounded in theology as they had been under Puritanism, however, being founded on Enlightenment ideas of the individual, the nation, and improvement. The exceptionalism of

⁴⁶³ Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 399.

⁴⁶⁴ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 122.

⁴⁶⁵ Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 105.

⁴⁶⁶ Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness*, 144.

⁴⁶⁷ Bercovitch, *American Self*, 113.

⁴⁶⁸ Bercovitch, introduction to *The American Puritan Imagination*, 12.

⁴⁶⁹ Bercovitch, *American Self*, 108.

the new America was in its “pushing back the boundaries of darkness and barbarism and spreading light and knowledge,” making America, to the revolutionary generation, “the Enlightenment fulfilled.”⁴⁷⁰ However, as in Puritanism, the dominant ideology and rhetoric brought little substantive change to the lives of many of its citizens. Over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women’s role was systematised into the “cult of domesticity,” which propagated the virtues of “piety, purity,” and “submissiveness.”⁴⁷¹ Not only did men still govern women, but the rich still governed the poor; masters still governed servants, and, increasingly, slaves; the young were still repressed, the old were still scorned. The promise of equality in 1776, as in 1692, served as a reminder of the exclusion of these lower orders from the benefits of their society’s collective vision. Their society remained bound in the hierarchies that had characterised almost every European community, and had been carried to the New World by the Puritans.

In light of the evolution of New England following the witchcraft crisis, it would be easy to conclude that the crisis represented failure on the part of both Radicals and Conservatives. On the part of the Conservatives, I argue that was indeed in the case. Men of wealth and social standing have remained leaders of public life in every period since 1692. But that is not all the Conservatives were, nor all they stood for. They were Puritans, with an all-encompassing and non-negotiable ideal for America: their purpose “was to create a New Jerusalem.”⁴⁷² Such a state, if it had ever really existed, certainly never did so again after 1692. The world that went on without them retained many of their hierarchies, it is true, but these hierarchies had never been original to Puritanism. They were “the heritages of the past, the ideals, if not always the

⁴⁷⁰ Wood, *The American Revolution*, 191.

⁴⁷¹ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 152, doi: 10.2307/2711179.

⁴⁷² Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 205.

actuality, of the previous centuries.”⁴⁷³ The idea “that men should be arranged in serried ranks, inferiors obeying superiors,” was “the essence of feudalism.”⁴⁷⁴ Puritanism itself mostly died out, along with the Puritan state. Only the hollowed-out remnants of their rhetoric remained. The Radicals had more success than the Conservatives. They did not overthrow the Puritan hierarchical system permanently in 1692. More than three hundred years later, however, the direct heritage of the ideals of the Radicals can be traced through American history.

Some, such as Perry Miller, argue the witchcraft crisis “had no effect on the ecclesiastical or political situation” of their society, but I argue otherwise.⁴⁷⁵ For the Radicals, their attempted revolution in 1692 was just beginning. They had checked, if only temporarily, the power of the Conservatives. The fragility of the colony in 1692 allowed the Radicals—the lower orders of social hierarchies—to, so to speak, get their foot in the door. In 1859, when John Brown raided Harper’s Ferry, he also failed.⁴⁷⁶ Brown was sentenced to death, along with most others of his party who had not died during the raid.⁴⁷⁷ In his trial, he framed his failed rebellion as one against the hierarchy (this time, a racial hierarchy): “had I so interfered in behalf of the rich, the powerful, the intelligent, the so-called great... and suffered and sacrificed what I have in this interference, it would have been all right; and every man in this court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward.”⁴⁷⁸ In 1921, at the Battle of Blair Mountain, the United Mine Workers

⁴⁷³ Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness*, 144.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Miller, *From Colony to Province*, 191. See also Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 212: “there is a lot to support [Miller’s] view. We have seen that Stoughton’s behavior certainly did little to hurt his political career, and the subsequent politics and social behavior of Massachusetts Bay colony for the most part did indeed seem to progress as if the trials had never happened. Wars with the French and with the Indians continued to hold paramount interest, and the daily business of farming the land, trading, and further establishing the fledgling culture that was less than a century old continued undiverted from its course by the event that had absorbed the colony’s attention for a year.”

⁴⁷⁶ W. E. B. DuBois, *John Brown: A Biography* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), 138.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 183.

⁴⁷⁸ ‘Remarks by John Brown in Redpath, 340,’ quoted in DuBois, *John Brown: A Biography*, 184.

strike also failed.⁴⁷⁹ The strike broke up, the union membership plummeted, and hundreds of protesters were imprisoned.⁴⁸⁰ And long before either of these events, in 1773, a group of rebels threw tea into Boston Harbour to protest their economic oppression under royal authority.⁴⁸¹ In the immediate aftermath of the Boston Tea Party, the British took reactionary steps towards the colonies.⁴⁸² Each of these episodes exploited anxieties within in their community. Each of them constituted an uprising on the part of the oppressed group, quickly countered (in the short term) by a counter-revolution. Each of them failed. Yet they all ultimately brought their society one step closer to achieving their aim. Slavery was abolished in the United States with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. The Battle of Blair Mountain raised awareness of the plight of coalminers, which became one of the primary concerns of the New Deal in 1933.⁴⁸³ And in 1783, the Treaty of Paris established the colonies' independence from Great Britain.⁴⁸⁴ The "archetypal rebellious adolescent" Benjamin Franklin, who in later life represented the United States at the signing of that treaty, was the descendant of the rebellious, "possessed" Martha Goodwin.⁴⁸⁵ The "restless spirit" inside her and her generation had been "stripped of the... legitimating guise of demonic possession."⁴⁸⁶ Levack calls the witch "the quintessential rebel."⁴⁸⁷ In American history, it would seem, the witch and the possessed were the model rebels. Salem was the first uprising in a history of American radicalism.

⁴⁷⁹ Robert E. Weir, *Workers in America: A Historical Encyclopedia: Volume I* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013), 67.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁸¹ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 233.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 236.

⁴⁸³ William C. Blizzard, *When Miners March*, ed. Wess Harris (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 378.

⁴⁸⁴ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 594.

⁴⁸⁵ Silverman, *Cotton Mather*, 91.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁷ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 65.

Conceptions of America's ideals today are those of the Founding Fathers of the American Revolution.⁴⁸⁸ These ideals emphasise freedom, toleration, rights. This conception would appear to differ considerably from the real aims of some of the first established English-speaking outposts in the New World. Over time, "typology took on the hazy significance of image and symbol," and the "divine plan" lost its "strict grounding."⁴⁸⁹ The original Puritan mindset is epitomised in Winthrop's reminder that "in all times some must be rich some poore, some highe and eminent in power and dignitie; others meane and in subjeccion," attempting to render inequality as inherent in the New World, as the old.⁴⁹⁰ The American Revolution began in the model of the Salem Radicals, but was of a far less radical character. This diluted radicalism resulted, as Bercovitch argues, in today's "figural America" that is in itself inherently capable of reform, having refigured "the moral and political terms of renovation," co-opting a "radical" mindset and making it, paradoxically, part of the mainstream "American Way."⁴⁹¹ The result is a society built upon an egalitarian rhetoric, in which hierarchies nevertheless exist, but by that very rhetoric are rendered difficult to question. In short, although the Enlightenment America would have been abhorrent to the Conservatives, it did not function so differently to Puritan New England as it might seem, nor to the English tradition the Puritans inherited. Gordon S. Wood, whilst admiring the Founding Founders, nonetheless admits "they hoped to destroy the bonds holding together the older monarchical society—kinship, patriarchy, and patronage—and to put in their place new social bonds of love, respect, and consent."⁴⁹² In other words, they wished to keep their hierarchies, but to create ideological compulsions to compliance, rather than physical institutions such as the church or crown.

⁴⁸⁸ Wood, *The American Revolution*, 369.

⁴⁸⁹ Bercovitch, *Rites of Assent*, 147.

⁴⁹⁰ Winthrop. "Christian Charity," 195.

⁴⁹¹ Bercovitch, *Rites of Assent*, 19, 59.

⁴⁹² Wood, *The American Revolution*, 229.

Salem, therefore, aside from individual rebellions by those such as Hutchinson, was the first of many rebellions against the imported European hierarchies existing upon American soil. It took place long before the Declaration of Independence proclaimed “that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive... it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.”⁴⁹³ Perhaps today’s progressive rebellions and radical movements within America rely upon American ideals that are not the heritage of Washington, Jefferson, and Madison. Perhaps their origin lies almost a century earlier, in a much more radical uprising. Perhaps “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” have been insufficient for centuries of radicals working in the model of the Salem Radicals.⁴⁹⁴ In 1692, Ann Foster confessed to the court that the witches at Salem wanted to “afflict there to set up the Divils Kingdome.”⁴⁹⁵ The lower orders of society have ever since retained this as their vision: an unstratified, subversive—and, from the perspective of the upper orders, diabolical—“Kingdome” of their own.

⁴⁹³ “Declaration of Independence: A Transcript,” *The U.S. National Archives: America’s Founding Documents*, last modified October 5, 2016, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ Woodward, *Records II*, 138.

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