

Coming to Terms with the Salem Witch Trials

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FOR SEVERAL YEARS I have been approaching the Salem witch trials from two different directions.¹ Breaking out in 1692, they became the last major upheaval that afflicted the English Atlantic world between the third Anglo-Dutch War of 1672–74 and the 1690s. The Dutch reconquest of New York for fifteen months in 1673–74 reconfigured the politics of that colony and established patterns of partisanship that would prevail until after 1700. In 1675–76, King Philip's War devastated New England, generated massacres on both sides, and led to the enslavement of hundreds of Indians. While all of the New England governments survived the crisis intact and were finally able to win the war, it was only with significant support from the praying Indians, the Mohegans, and the Pequots. New England's victory inflicted civil war upon the Indians within the recognized boundaries of Plymouth, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. By contrast, when an Indian war erupted at almost the same time in

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Virginia, it tore the colony apart. As the government collapsed, the settlers—not the Indians—descended into civil war.²

Less than two years later England experienced its own upheaval, the Popish Plot and Exclusion crisis, which raised issues about Roman Catholics and the royal succession that would not be resolved until the Glorious Revolution of 1688–89. That crisis in turn led to the overthrow of colonial governments in New England, New York, and Maryland. The Salem witch trials erupted just as Massachusetts finally began to resolve the uncertainties created by the overthrow of Governor Sir Edmund Andros in 1689.³

During the upheavals these societies attacked different enemies, people who became scapegoats for all of the turmoil. Indians fulfilled that role in Virginia. The government fell apart because Sir William Berkeley and his most dangerous antagonist, Nathaniel Bacon, could not agree on how best to wage war against neighboring Indians. Instead they began to fight each other. England turned against Catholics, hysterically during the Popish Plot crisis, and in a more measured way during the Glorious Revolution. In England's North American colonies, fear of Catholics,

2. On events in New York, see John M. Murrin, 'English Rights as Ethnic Aggression: The English Conquest, the Charter of Liberties of 1683, and Leisler's Rebellion in New York,' in William Pencak and Conrad Edick Wright, eds., *Authority and Resistance in Early New York* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1988), 56–94; Murrin, 'The Menacing Shadow of Louis XIV and the Rage of Jacob Leisler: The Constitutional Ordeal of Seventeenth-Century New York,' in Stephen L. Schechter and Richard B. Bernstein, eds., *New York and the Union* (Albany: New York State Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution, 1990), 29–71; Charles Howard McCormick, *Leisler's Rebellion* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989); and David William Voorhees, "In Behalf of the True Protestants Religion": The Glorious Revolution in New York' (Ph.D. dissertation: New York University, 1988). Two provocative and imaginative recent studies of King Philip's War are Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998); and James D. Drake, *King Philip's War: Civil War in New England, 1675–1676* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999). On Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia, see Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1975).

3. Important recent studies of England's crisis include Mark Knights, *Politics and Opinion in Crisis, 1678–81* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Richard L. Greaves, *Secrets of the Kingdom: British Radicals from the Popish Plot to the Revolution of 1688–89* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); and Jonathan I. Israel, ed., *The Anglo-Dutch Moment: Essays on the Glorious Revolution and Its World Impact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

especially those in New France, galvanized the people of Boston who overthrew Andros in April 1689. It, more than any other factor, fused together Jacob Leisler's coalition that ousted Lt. Governor Francis Nicholson in New York and took over the colony's government. The Maryland rebels of 1689 also justified their actions as a victory of Protestantism over Catholicism.⁴

During the Salem crisis these themes came together in a new way. Accusations of witchcraft fused terrors inspired by Indians and French Catholics with new fears of internal subversion from people—mostly elderly women, many of whom had enjoyed reputations for conspicuous piety—who, the trial court believed, had made explicit compacts with Satan to undermine the people of God in New England.⁵

An effort to explain what society chose which scapegoat has long been one of my major concerns. A second theme has been the relationship between witchcraft and bestiality. For decades after the founding of New England, bestiality was to men what witchcraft was to women, a satanic act constituting an unforgivable sin. Puritans hoped that God could forgive an offender, but humans did not dare even to try without provoking divine wrath. Before 1692 only two men had been executed for witchcraft, both because they were unlucky enough to have wives who were the prime suspects and were also executed. No woman was tried for bestiality. Instead, through the search for animal familiars associated with accused witches, female bestiality became a subcategory of witchcraft. By the last quarter of the seventeenth century, both bestiality and witchcraft were becoming forgivable offenses. For men accused of bestiality, the result was beneficial. No one in colonial New England was executed for this offense after 1674. But for those accused of witchcraft, this shift became catastro-

4. David S. Lovejoy, *The Glorious Revolution in America* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972); Richard R. Johnson, *Adjustment to Empire: The New England Colonies, 1675-1715* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981); and Lois Green Carr and David William Jordan, *Maryland's Revolution of Government, 1689-1692* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974).

5. For a careful, thorough, and brilliant synthesis of these themes, see Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).

phic. At Salem all of those executed insisted on their innocence instead of confessing and asking forgiveness.⁶

The Salem tragedy could not have happened without a dramatic reversal of thirty years of judicial restraint in resolving complaints about witchcraft. This essay explores how and why that transformation occurred.

I

On October 8, 1692, not long after what turned out to be the last execution for witchcraft in the history of colonial New England, Thomas Brattle, one of the best educated laymen in the region, summarized what the Salem witch trials meant to him: 'What will be the issue of these troubles, God only knows; I am afraid that ages will not wear off that reproach and those stains which these things will leave behind them upon our land. I pray God pity us, Humble us, Forgive us, and appear mercifully for us in this our mount of distress. . . .'⁷ As predictions go, Brattle's was superb. Millions of people around the world who know nothing else about colonial British America have heard of the Salem witch trials. Yet, as appalling as they were, they were not even the worst judicial atrocity of the colonial era. That distinction goes to the New York slave conspiracy trials of 1741, in which thirteen slaves were burned at the stake, sixteen slaves and four whites were hanged, and seventy slaves and seven whites were banished, most of them to the West Indies. Yet hardly anyone other than professional historians has heard of those trials.⁸

6. John M. Murrin, "'Things Fearful to Name': Bestiality in Early America,' in Angela N. H. Creager and William Chester Jordan, eds., *The Animal Human Boundary* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press; 2002), 115-56.

7. 'Letter of Thomas Brattle, F.R.S., 1692,' in George Lincoln Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases, 1648-1706* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), 190.

8. The fullest history of these trials is Thomas J. Davis, *A Rumor of Revolt: The 'Great Negro Plot' in Colonial New York* (New York: Free Press, 1985). Davis argues that an interracial arson and larceny ring was operating out of John Hughson's tavern and that, under eighteenth-century law, several of the accused deserved to hang. But then the trials careened out of control. Ferenc M. Szasz attributes all of the convictions to white panic. See his 'The New York Slave Revolt of 1741: A Re-examination,' *New York History* 48 (1967): 215-30. Both accounts rest overwhelmingly on Daniel Horsmanden's *A Journal of the Proceedings in the Detection of the Conspiracy Formed by Some White People, in Conjunction with*

The Salem witch trials have generally confirmed the negative stereotypes about Puritans that remain deeply embedded in American popular culture. As recently as Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, the trials have represented an attempt by bigoted clergymen and magistrates to increase their power at the expense of the ordinary people who became their victims. To most Americans, the trials also reflected the inherently cruel nature of Puritanism itself. When asked what happened at Salem, most people today will respond that a lot of innocent people were burned at the stake. New York and the southern colonies burned quite a few people at the stake, always slaves, but I have encountered only two such incidents in colonial New England: Maria, an African burned alive for arson in 1681; and Phillis, burned at the stake in 1755 for 'petit treason,' that is, poisoning her master.⁹ Under their Puritan regimes, the New England colonies sharply limited the number of capital offenses, mostly by insisting upon a biblical mandate for any executions. In practice, juries restricted capital crimes even further by demanding, in effect, that an offense be capital under both biblical and English common law before they would impose the death penalty.¹⁰

Murder and witchcraft both qualified under this informal rule, but many other offenses did not. For example, after three early executions for adultery, which the Bible defined as capital but common law did not, juries refused to convict anyone for this offense but instead voted the accused guilty of a lesser crime, such

Negro and Other Slaves, for Burning the City of New-York in America, and Murdering the Inhabitants . . . (New York: James Parker, 1744). The most recent edition is Daniel Horsmanden, *The New York Conspiracy*, ed. Thomas J. Davis (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

9. Albert Cheney Goodell, Jr., *The Trial and Execution, for Petit Treason, of Mark and Phillis, Slaves of Capt. John Codman, who Murdered their Master at Charlestown, Mass., in 1755; For which the Man was Hanged and Gibbeted, and the Woman was Burned to Death. Including also Some Account of Other Punishments by Burning in Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Mass.: John Wilson and Son, 1883). Although Mark was the leader in this plot, only Phillis was burned because she administered the poison. My thanks to John W. Sweet for this citation.

10. For a fuller discussion, see John M. Murrin, 'Magistrates, Sinners, and a Precarious Liberty: Trial by Jury in Seventeenth-Century New England,' in David D. Hall, John M. Murrin, and Thad Tate, eds., *Saints & Revolutionaries: Essays on Early American History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1984), 152-206.

as lewd and lascivious behavior tending to adultery. In like manner, the Puritan colonies did not include crimes against property on their lists of capital offenses because only the common law, not the Bible, authorized execution for these offenses. The Salem witch panic stands out, in part, because the judicial execution of twenty people within three months became an event of enormous drama in a region that hanged comparatively few offenders and in a colony that had hanged only five people for witchcraft before 1692, and only one of those after 1656. On the world stage, the trials stood out because they came near the end of the early modern European witch hunt that had started around 1550 and continued for a century and a half, although the pace slowed considerably after about 1660.¹¹

In a word, even within the history of New England witch trials, the Salem panic became a unique event in the scale of the trials and was almost unique in the way that they developed. To see how and why, we need to look at the regional pattern of witch trials before 1692.

II

As New England historians have been pointing out for more than a century, the settlers brought their folk beliefs and their religious convictions with them to America. Fear of witchcraft was part of both their folklore and their high theology. This point cannot be contested, and yet although the settlers in other colonies brought similar beliefs with them, nobody was executed for witchcraft outside New England except for one woman in Maryland in 1685 and five people in the tiny island colony of Bermuda. There, between 1651 and 1655, four women and one man were hanged. The court accepted the testimony of black witnesses against white defendants and even hanged a white woman for bewitching a mu-

11. The European witch hunt has generated an enormous literature. An excellent place to begin is with the essays in Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen, eds., *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). For the pattern of witch prosecutions in Massachusetts, see Richard Weisman, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion in 17th-Century Massachusetts* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984).

latto. In 1671 another woman was convicted and sentenced to death, but the governor reprieved her. Altogether twenty-three people were accused in Bermuda between 1651 and 1696.¹² Within New England, executions occurred only in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Haven, not in Plymouth, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, or Maine. The combination of a learned clergy and a learned and pious magistracy probably was almost a necessary precondition for serious witch trials in the mainland colonies. (I do not know enough about Bermuda to evaluate the situation there, although the Puritan element of the population led the fight against witches.) Accusations arose outside New England, but even when a case went to trial involving a Virginia woman, it did not lead to a fatal result. In the Protestant Netherlands, magistrates stopped cooperating in witch accusations after about 1590, and the trials soon ended, just as they were beginning to peak throughout the rest of western Europe.¹³

In most early New England trials, adult men brought accusations against post-menopausal women. In nearly every case within this pattern, the complaint involved *maleficium*, some evil deed that the victim attributed to the accused—a dead cow or pig, a child who suddenly took ill, or something of that kind. In New England, as in western Europe, witchcraft was overwhelmingly a female crime. Women accounted for more than 80 percent of the accused. Even many of the men who fell under suspicion were secondary targets who happened to be closely related to the primary suspect, a woman.¹⁴

12. See Francis Neal Parker, 'Witchcraft in Maryland,' *Maryland Historical Magazine* 31 (1936): 271-98, esp. 282-84; and J. H. Lefroy, *Memorials of the Discovery and Early Settlement of the Bermudas or Somers Islands, 1511-1687*, 2 vols. (London: Bermuda Government Library, 1879), 2: 601-32, esp. 602, 605. In addition, one woman was stoned to death on the streets of Philadelphia near Independence Hall while the Constitutional Convention sat there in the summer of 1787. But this event was not a judicial procedure, and it occurred after independence. See Edmund S. Morgan, 'The Witch and We, the People,' *American Heritage* 34 (1983): 6-11.

13. See the case of Grace Sherwood in Virginia (1706), in Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 433-42. On the Netherlands, see J. H. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilization in the Seventeenth Century and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 59-60.

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

We do not know much about these early trials, but between 1647 and 1656, ten women and one man were executed. Why were there no executions for twenty-seven years after the founding of Plymouth, or seventeen years after the founding of Boston? Plymouth never showed much interest in witchcraft. Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Haven probably had few women past childbearing years prior to the mid-1640s. The hunt pursued by Matthew Hopkins, England's 'Witch Finder General,' that began in 1645 may well have triggered anxieties about witches on the other side of the Atlantic. Altogether about sixty people were accused in New England between 1647 and 1663. Of the first twelve to be tried, eight were executed, most of them in Connecticut, which remained the center of New England witch trials into the 1660s.¹⁵

Massachusetts hanged four women for witchcraft in the early years, but doubts soon arose about all of these trials, partly because none of the accused confessed. In 1648 Margaret Jones, a healer and cunning woman, became the first to die. So far as the record shows, she was only vaguely accused of *maleficium*. She may have been executed for practicing white magic. Apparently the court was influenced by Matthew Hopkins's methods of interrogation, for it borrowed some of them. At least one contemporary strongly objected to the execution. Then Elizabeth Kendall was condemned and executed for bewitching a child who died, even though the parents never accused or blamed her. The child's nurse accused her to deflect criticism from herself for leaving the child out in the cold too long. After the execution, the nurse was jailed for her neglect but died in prison before coming to trial. Both magistrates and ministers began to grow suspicious of *maleficium* as an adequate basis for convicting anyone of witchcraft. They wrote the laws, and early New England statutes defined

15. For Matthew Hopkins, see Jim Sharpe, 'The Devil in East Anglia: The Matthew Hopkins Trials Reconsidered,' in Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts, eds., *Witchcraft in Early Modern History: Studies in Culture and Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 237-54.

witchcraft in terms of compact, not *maleficium*. A witch was a person who 'hath or consulteth with a familiar spirit.'¹⁶

The conviction rate began to fall sharply. In the next forty-five trials after the first twelve, only seven people were executed. The turning point in Massachusetts was the trial of Mistress Anne Hibbins of Boston in 1655–56. The widow of a magistrate, she was convicted by a jury in the Court of Assistants on the basis of *maleficium*. The magistrates, or judges, rejected that verdict, which brought the case before the General Court sitting as a unicameral body. There the deputies outvoted the magistrates, convicted Hibbins, and condemned her to hang. The magistrates and ministers were convinced that an injustice had occurred and thereafter, for more than three decades, they acted as a powerful brake upon witch accusations. Between the Hibbins trial and the Salem outbreak, Massachusetts convicted only two people (the verdict against Elizabeth Morse in 1679 was overturned) and hanged only one for witchcraft—Mary Glover, an Irish Catholic, who confessed to the offense in 1688.¹⁷

III

In Connecticut and New Haven, the judicial system found a more lethal path to the same result by 1663. Between 1647 and 1654, seven people were tried for witchcraft (four women and one man in Connecticut, two women in New Haven), and all were convicted and hanged. Then the two colonies began competing for the residency and the political and medical services of John Winthrop, Jr. Between 1655 and 1661, four more persons were prosecuted in the two colonies, and all were acquitted. In a subtle

16. The quotation is from the Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641), which was widely copied throughout the region. All of these statutes are assembled in David D. Hall, ed., *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History, 1638–1692* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 315–16. For the Jones and Kendall cases, see 21–23, 24–25. See also the Alice Lake case in Hall, 28.

17. See the comprehensive list of witch accusations, trials, and results in John Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 401–09. For Anne Hibbins and Mary Glover, see Hall, ed., *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 89–91, 265–79.

and persuasive piece of historical analysis, Walter W. Woodward concludes that Winthrop played a major role in the acquittal of at least two of them, and probably all four.¹⁸

Then Winthrop departed for England where he negotiated a royal charter for Connecticut that, among other things, united the two colonies under Hartford's jurisdiction. In his absence Connecticut launched a major witch hunt, the worst in English America before Salem. The Hartford and Salem trials were similar in other important respects as well. The primary accusers in Hartford were a girl and a young woman, not the adult males who brought most witchcraft accusations before 1692. And spectral evidence played a major role in the Hartford trials.¹⁹

Eight-year-old Elizabeth Kelly accused Goodwife Ayres's specter of tormenting her. The charge acquired weight when Kelly died soon after crying out against Ayres. Then Ann Cole, a young married woman in the throes of a conversion experience, became 'possessed' and cried out against several people. At least thirteen individuals were accused, some of whom fled the colony. The trials alarmed several observers because some of the accused did not at all resemble the accepted stereotype of a witch. One of them was Judith Varlet, sister-in-law of Pieter Stuyvesant, director general of New Netherland. In the trials, six women were convicted, four of whom were hanged. Then Winthrop returned from England to find Hannah Hackleton and Elizabeth Seager still in prison awaiting execution, Seager for adultery as well as witchcraft. Although he took months to reach a final decision, Winthrop refused to sanction either execution and by 1670 persuaded the colony to remove adultery from its list of capital crimes. (Because Puritans considered adultery a legitimate cause for divorce, the repeal had the unexpected consequence of turning

18. Walter W. Woodward, 'The Magus as Mediator: Witchcraft, Alchemical Healing, and Authority in the Connecticut Witch Hunt of the 1660s' (unpublished essay, 1999, revised 2001). Woodward has recently completed a dissertation on Winthrop at the University of Connecticut.

19. The documentary record of these trials is collected in Hall, ed., *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 147-63.

Connecticut into what was almost certainly the divorce capital of Christendom by the eighteenth century. The colony terminated several thousand marriages, most often on petition of the wife.²⁰)

Winthrop, as Woodward shows, fought witch trials, not with modern science, but with occult weapons. Although probably no Antinomian himself, he developed a close relationship with one in London before coming to America.²¹ He certainly was immersed in alchemy, astrology, and high-toned magic. As a physician, he may well have visited half the households in the two colonies by the early 1660s. In short, when Winthrop denied that some particular person was a witch, his opinion carried great weight because of his vast knowledge of the occult.

By 1663 Massachusetts and Connecticut had reached a common ground on witchcraft. In both colonies people had been accused or even executed whom educated men considered innocent. Magistrates and ministers in Massachusetts, and at least the magistrates in Connecticut, turned against *maleficium* as adequate evidence for conviction of witchcraft. The rash of executions stopped, although by 1663 Connecticut (including New Haven) had already hanged eleven people, and Massachusetts four.²²

IV

For nearly thirty years after the Hartford panic subsided, New England seemed to be reacting to witchcraft in much the same way as most of Western Europe at that time. With magistrates re-

20. Sheldon S. Cohen, "'To Parts of the World Unknown': The Circumstances of Divorce in Connecticut, 1750-1797," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 11 (1980): 275-93. By contrast, the number of divorces in Massachusetts remained in the hundreds. See Nancy Cott, 'Divorce and the Changing Status of Women in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts,' *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d ser., 33 (1976): 586-614.

21. See David Como, 'Puritans and Heretics: The Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Early Stuart England' (Ph.D. dissertation: Princeton University, 1998). Como demonstrates that London experienced a major Antinomian crisis between 1628 and 1631, just as the exodus to Massachusetts Bay was being organized. The younger Winthrop kept up a steady correspondence with one of the leading Antinomians, with whom he also shared occult interests.

22. On the question of *maleficium* versus a compact with Satan as a basis for witch trials, see especially Weisman, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion in 17th-Century Massachusetts*.

luctant to credit accusations of *maleficium*, conviction for this offense became extremely difficult. Executions for witchcraft became quite rare—only one between 1663 and 1692. Accusations continued, of course. Fifty-eight survive for these years, or about 1.8 per year, down from about four per year between 1647 and 1663 in a region that now had a much larger population and no shortage of post-menopausal women. Pressure for more trials came from below, mostly from men who believed that some woman had used occult means to harm them. Restraint was imposed from above.

In 1652, for instance, the town of Rowley accused John Bradstreet of familiarity with the devil, who appeared to him and asked if he could do Bradstreet a favor. '[G]o make a bridge of sand over the sea. Go make a ladder of sand up to Heaven and go to God and come no more,' Bradstreet replied. The court merely fined him twenty shillings for lying. Even when Elizabeth Morse, a cunning woman of Newbury, was convicted and sentenced to hang in 1680, the magistrates rejected the jury's verdict and released her into the custody of her husband. The most revealing example of ministerial restraint occurred in 1672 in the Groton parsonage of the Reverend Samuel Willard. Elizabeth Knapp, a servant girl, began having fits, then could not pray and started to bellow horrible blasphemies. In her agony she insisted that several local people, or their specters, were tormenting her. Satan's direct assault on Willard's family had to be embarrassing for a minister, and the temptation to blame everything on local witches must have been great. But Willard did the courageous thing. He proclaimed Knapp possessed, not bewitched, and refused to accept any of her accusations. Satan, after all, is a liar. Spectral evidence, to Willard, could not be a legitimate basis for convicting anyone. Instead he prayed with Knapp for an extended period until her fits went away. In his written account of her ordeal, he refused even to name the people whom she had accused.²³

23. See Hall, ed., *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 87-88, 197-212, 230-59.

Witch trials in New England had not yet run their course. But before they could revive, the restraint shown by magistrates and ministers after 1663 would somehow have to disintegrate.

v

Massachusetts endured a severe crisis of legitimacy throughout the 1680s and into the 1690s. In 1680 the Crown took over New Hampshire, which Massachusetts had been governing, and in 1683 appointed Edward Cranfield as royal governor. He promptly established what historians who have studied his regime regard as the most ruthlessly mercenary government that ever ruled a mainland English colony. Cranfield and his lieutenant governor, Walter Barefoot, set about plundering the settlers in every way that they could think of. As Mary Rann put it in 1684, they came into New Hampshire 'like a parcel of pitiful beggarly curs . . . ; come to undo us both body and soul; they could not be contented to take our estates from us, but they have taken away the gospel also, which the devil would have them for it.' But the devil, it seems, had more urgent business in Massachusetts.²⁴

The magistrates and ministers of Massachusetts had to wonder whether Cranfield's administration was a foretaste of what the Bay colony could expect, especially after 1684 when the English Court of Chancery vacated the Massachusetts Charter of 1629. After James II became king in 1685, he united Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Plymouth, Rhode Island, and Connecticut into the Dominion of New England, dispatched Sir Edmund Andros as governor in 1686, and then ordered Andros to add New York and the Jerseys to the Dominion. Andros was a far more principled man than Cranfield, but he did establish an auto-

24. For two excellent studies, see Theodore B. Lewis, 'Royal Government in New Hampshire and the Revocation of the Charter of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, 1679-1683,' *Historical New Hampshire* 25, n. 4 (1970): 3-45; and Richard R. Johnson, 'Robert Mason and the Coming of Royal Government to New England,' *Historical New Hampshire* 35 (1980): 361-90. Mary Rann's deposition, Nov. 7, 1684, is in Nathaniel Bouton, ed., *Documents and Records Relating to the Province of New Hampshire* (Concord: George E. Jenks, State Printer, 1867-1943), 1: 508-9.

cratic regime that legislated and taxed without an elective assembly. He also compelled the Puritans to tolerate public worship in Boston according to the Anglican Book of Common Prayer.²⁵

This intrusion of royal authority alarmed the clergy, especially Increase Mather and his precocious son Cotton. Was a godly society still possible in New England? Did the magistrates and ministers still have the power to achieve it? To demonstrate God's special relationship with the people of the region, Increase Mather mobilized many other clerics to provide him detailed accounts of God's special favors to New England, and Mather published this material as *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences* in 1684.²⁶ Cotton Mather followed with his *Memorable Providences* five years later, an account and a defense of the trial and execution of Goody Glover for witchcraft in 1688, a case that involved *maleficium*, spectral evidence, and tormented children, in this instance boys. Both Mathers emphasized the importance of witchcraft. Both suggested that New England must be special to the Lord if Satan devoted so much energy to trying to destroy it. Both, in other words, expected Satan to do the work of God, a dangerous assumption under anyone's theology.²⁷

The Dominion of New England also became a crisis for the magistrates. Would they serve the Andros regime? Of those later involved in the Salem trials, Bartholomew Gedney and Nathaniel Saltonstall both served on the Dominion Council. Of judges from Boston who served on the Salem court, William Stoughton, Wait Winthrop, and John Richards had also served on the Dominion Council. Far from being dominated by old-line Puritans, about half of the magistrates in the witch trials were prominent men

25. Outstanding accounts of the Dominion of New England and the Glorious Revolution in Boston include Johnson, *Adjustment to Empire*, and Richard S. Dunn, *Puritans and Yankees: The Winthrop Dynasty of New England, 1630-1717* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), ch. 9-11.

26. Increase Mather, *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences (1684)*, facsimile reproduction with an introduction by James A. Leverner (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1977), esp. ch. 5-7.

27. Cotton Mather, *Memorable Providences, relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions* (Boston, 1689), reprinted in Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 89-143.

who had deviated too far and too publicly from the New England Way. All of them supported the overthrow of Andros when the Glorious Revolution came to Boston in April 1689, but some of them clearly hoped for a more moderate version of royal government, which they received with the Charter of 1691. As a group they could not afford to appear soft on witches. Wait Winthrop showed no sign of continuing the role that his father had played in stopping Connecticut's witch panic. Stoughton had been badly compromised by his service on the Superior Court of the Dominion and on a special Court of Oyer and Terminer that crushed a tax strike in Essex County and jailed and severely fined the Reverend John Wise, among others. Stoughton became the fiercest witch hunter of them all. Any court presided over by him would not pursue the moderating policy that the Court of Assistants had followed for more than thirty years.²⁸

VI

The Salem witch panic has become one of the most carefully studied episodes of the early modern Atlantic world. Salem Village has become one of the best known communities of that era. To specialists in American colonial history, an awkwardly high percentage of the village's families have become familiar companions: the Putnams and the Porters; the Reverend Samuel Parris, his daughter Betty, his niece Abigail Williams, and his Indian slaves Tituba²⁹ and John Indian; the three Towne sisters (Rebecca

28. See Viola F. Barnes, *The Dominion of New England: A Study in British Colonial Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), 87–90, 115–18.

29. Peter Charles Hoffer's *The Devil's Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 8–16, revives the old nineteenth-century contention that Tituba was of African descent. He uses the plausible argument that there were no surviving Carib Indians in the West Indies by the late seventeenth century. Elaine G. Breslaw successfully addresses this issue in *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem: Devilish Indians and Puritan Fantasies* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), ch. 1 and, more briefly, in 'Tituba's Confession: The Multicultural Dimensions of the 1692 Salem Witch-Hunt,' *Ethnohistory* 44 (1997): 535–56. She traces Tituba's origins to the South American mainland and has even located the region where her name was common. All contemporary sources identify her as Carib or Indian, none as African. I assume that New Englanders were capable of telling the difference.

Nurse, Mary Easty, and Sarah Cloyse); Elizabeth and especially John Proctor, made famous by Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, who was fatally accused by his servant Mary Warren; and the village's former ministers, Deodat Lawson, a chronicler of the outbreak, and George Burroughs, a victim of the trials. In the 1970s and 1980s, an important scholarly contribution to the subject appeared every three or four years.³⁰ In the 1990s they virtually became annual events, and interest still shows no sign of abating.³¹

These studies have taught us an enormous amount and have brought us very close to understanding this tragedy in most of its dimensions. The strong scholarship on witchcraft accusations prior to the Salem outbreak has provided an indispensable con-

30. Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem* (New York: George Brazillier, 1969); Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem-Village Witchcraft: A Documentary Record of Local Conflict in Colonial New England* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1972, reissued by Northeastern University Press, 1993); Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974); Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, 3 vols. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1977); Demos, *Entertaining Satan* (1982); Weisman, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion in 17th-Century Massachusetts* (1984); Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (1987).

31. Larry Gragg, *Quest for Security: The Life of Samuel Parris, 1653-1720* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990); Hall, ed., *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England* (1991); Enders A. Robinson, *The Devil Discovered: Salem Witchcraft 1692* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1991); Gragg, *The Salem Witch Crisis* (New York: Praeger, 1992); Richard B. Trask, ed., *'The Devil hath been raised': A Documentary History of the Salem Village Witchcraft Outbreak of March 1692* (Danvers: Danvers Historical Society, 1992; reissued in Danvers by the Yeoman Press, 1997); Richard Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); James F. Cooper, Jr., and Kenneth P. Minkema, eds., *The Sermon Notebook of Samuel Parris, 1689-1694* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia for the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1993); Frances Hill, *A Delusion of Satan: The Full Story of the Salem Witch Trials* (New York: Doubleday, 1995); Breslaw, *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem* (1996); Hoffer, *The Devil's Disciples* (1996); Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: A Legal History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997); Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Emerson W. Baker and John G. Reid, *The New England Knight: Sir William Phips, 1651-1695* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Bryan F. Le Beau, *The Story of the Salem Witch Trials* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998); Laurie Winn Carlson, *A Fever in Salem: A New Interpretation of the New England Witch Trials* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999); and most recently Norton, *In the Devil's Snare* (2002). Rosenthal and Trask are putting together a complete and more accurate edition of Salem witchcraft documents that will be organized chronologically rather than case by case.

text for the trials. For thirty years before the Salem crisis, the demand for action against witches had welled up from below. The magistrates and most ministers had been showing restraint. Salem reversed that momentum and eventually even that alignment. That pattern seems clear enough, but comprehending what propelled this reversal has left more than a few puzzles.

The clergy played an ambiguous and often an unheroic role in the accusations and the Salem trials. In Boston, Samuel Willard, who had contained Groton's potential witch hunt twenty years earlier, opposed the trials. Cotton Mather became an advocate and an apologist, even after arguing against the conviction of any accused person solely on the basis of spectral evidence. Increase Mather, who did not return from England until the middle of May 1692 and then found the panic well under way, had deeper reservations than his son but also decided to defend the results of the trials. In Essex County, the senior minister was John Higginson, pastor of the Salem Church. He almost certainly opposed the trials but not openly. By contrast his junior colleague Nicholas Noyes joined with Samuel Parris of Salem Village and John Hale of Beverly in actively pursuing the accused and supporting the trials.³²

One way of approaching the panic is to assume a series of roughly concentric circles, beginning with the Parris household, then extending out into Salem Village, from there into Salem Town (where the trials took place) and the rest of Essex County, and finally into Boston and the province of Massachusetts Bay as a whole. Why did the magistrates of Salem Town believe the accusations arising in the village? Why did the judges from Boston, after receiving cautious advice from their own ministers, turn into active witch hunters themselves? Restraint could have been imposed at each of these levels. It was not. It returned only after nineteen people had been hanged, one had been pressed to death, and at least four others had died in prison.

32. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, is excellent on the clergy's support for or resistance to the trials.

VII

Conventional wisdom on the outbreak of the panic starts with the Samuel Parris household. In the winter 1691–92 Tituba, a Carib Indian slave, supposedly met frequently with nine-year-old Betty Parris, Betty's eleven-year-old cousin Abigail Williams, twelve-year-old Ann Putnam, Jr., and several teen-aged girls of the village, mostly to tell fortunes. Then Betty began to experience ominous fits, and so did the others as the seizures moved up the age hierarchy of the participants. For nearly two months, the Reverend Samuel Parris tried to follow Samuel Willard's Groton precedent. He treated the outbreak as a manifestation of diabolical possession, not witchcraft. He prayed with and for the girls. Sometimes neighboring ministers participated in the ritual, and first the village congregation and then the entire province held a solemn fast to beseech the mercy of the Lord upon the community. Then Mary Sibley, a full member of the village church, persuaded John Indian, who was Tituba's husband and a slave to Parris, to make a witch's cake out of rye meal and the children's urine and feed it to a dog who was, no doubt, suspected of being the familiar of someone who had bewitched the girls. Parris discovered this attempt at 'white' witchcraft. These 'Diabolical means' enraged him but also convinced him that the children were indeed bewitched. Evidently this occult activity worked, for at the end of February, he and his supporters began looking in earnest for the witches, starting with his own household.³³

The first part of this story—the fortune-telling—rests upon an extremely thin documentary base. No source contemporary with the accusations and the trials mentions Tituba telling fortunes or instructing the girls in these activities. Five years after the trials, Cotton Mather and the Reverend John Hale provided the only

33. David Hartley, 'Explaining Salem: Calvinist Psychology and the Diagnosis of Possession,' *American Historical Review* 101 (1996): 307–30. For Parris's version of the witch's cake, as recorded in the village church records, see Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Village Witchcraft*, 278–79.

written evidence that we have. Both traced the origins of the crisis to fortune-telling, but neither placed these events in the Parris household or named Tituba as a participant.

Let us examine these statements in some detail. According to Mather's 1697 biography of Governor Sir William Phips (the first royal governor under the new charter) Phips arrived in the colony at a moment³⁴

when Scores of poor People had newly fallen under a prodigious *Possession of Devils*, which it was then generally thought had been by *Witchcrafts* introduced. It is to be confessed and bewailed, that many Inhabitants of *New-England*, and Young People especially, had been led away with little *Sorceries*, wherein they *did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God*; they would often cure Hurts with *Spells*, and practice detestable Conjurations with *Sieves*, and *Keys*, and *Pease*, and *Nails*, and *Horseshoes*, and other Implements, to learn the things for which they had a forbidden and impious Curiosity. Wretched Books had stoln [*sic*] into the Land, wherein Fools were instructed how to become able Fortune-Tellers: . . . And by these Books, the Minds of many had been so poisoned, that they studied this *Finer Witchcraft*, until, 'tis well, if some of them were not betray'd into what is Grosser, and more Sensible and Capital. Although these *Diabolical Divinations* are more ordinarily committed perhaps all over the *whole World*, than they are in the Country of *New-England*, yet, that being a Country Devoted unto the Worship and Service of the Lord *Jesus Christ* above the *rest of the World*, He signalized his Vengeance against these Wickednesses, with such extraordinary Dispersations as have not often been seen in other places.

Hale recorded his fear that³⁵

some young persons . . . have tampered with the Devil's tools so far that hereby one door was opened to Satan to play these pranks, *Anno* 1692. I knew one of the afflicted persons who (as I was credibly informed) did try with an egg and a glass to find her future husband's

34. Cotton Mather, *The Life of Sir William Phips*, ed. Mark Van Doren (New York: Stratford Press, 1929), 130-31.

35. Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem*, 30, quoting John Hale, *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft, and How Persons Guilty of that Crime may be Convicted* . . . (Boston: B. Green and J. Allen, 1702), 132-33. This treatise was written in 1697. Norton believes that Susannah Sheldon, who died unmarried by 1697, was the young woman mentioned by Hale who became mentally unbalanced through fortune-telling. *In the Devil's Snare*, 311.

calling, till there came up a coffin, that is, a specter in likeness of a coffin. And she was afterwards followed with diabolical molestation to her death, and so died a single person—a just warning to others to take heed of handling the Devil's weapons lest they get a wound thereby.

Another, I was called to pray with, being under sore fits and vexations of Satan. And upon examination I found that she had tried the same charm, and after her confession of it and manifestation of repentance for it, and our prayers to God for her, she was speedily released from those bonds of Satan.

Bernard Rosenthal, whose book on Salem is one of the most careful accounts of the tragedy yet written, accepts Parris's claim that John Indian, not Tituba, prepared the witch's cake. Rosenthal doubts that Tituba had much of anything to do with the preliminaries to the formal witchcraft hearings. And yet she, not John Indian, was arrested and accused of witchcraft.

The key to this puzzle may lie with the dog. When a witch's familiar was subjected to this occult treatment, the witch was supposed to rush to the scene to restore her control. If Parris accurately reported (in the village church records, no less) that John Indian had supplied the witch's cake, we need only assume that Tituba, no doubt busy with her housekeeping chores, was the next person to come through the door. Her arrival probably triggered the first accusation. The combination of the witch's cake and her testimony and confession then launched the panic. Although the formal charges were brought by several adult males of the village, the girls must have accused Tituba of something to trigger these proceedings.

When the grand jury took up her case in May, it rejected the formal indictment, which accused her only of covenanting with Satan by signing his book, not of tormenting the girls. Tituba was never brought to trial and was eventually sold outside the colony, apparently to cover her jail costs. To the grand jurors, the witch's cake was not an issue probably because it was meant to help the girls, not harm them. Maybe there really was some fortune-telling in the village, but it probably had nothing to do with the

initial cry against Tituba. Because Cotton Mather and John Hale both linked fortune-telling to the onset of the crisis, we should be associating it with the older girls who began making accusations in March and especially with Susannah Sheldon whose afflictions and accusations began in the last week of April, not with Betty Parris and Abigail Williams in the Parris household in January or February. But we do have evidence that Parris probably whipped Tituba to force her to confess and that her several confessions, for all of their esoteric content, were carefully measured performances. She refused to accuse anyone except the other two women who had been denounced with her, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne. We do not know whether she or one of the girls was the first to name them.³⁶

Carol Karlsen's analysis of the afflicted girls makes a narrower fortune-telling hypothesis plausible, but only for accusers outside the Parris household. Other than Betty Parris, Abigail Williams, and Ann Putnam, Jr., most of them were orphans, victims of the Indian wars. They had been taken into households that were probably more intensely pious than the northern frontier families into which they had been born, but they were not at all certain who, if anyone, now had a responsibility for finding husbands for them. That fortune-telling would appeal to these teen-aged girls makes a lot of sense, and Hale clearly believed it happened. When one of them conjured up a coffin instead of a potential husband, she became unhinged and turned accuser.³⁷

By March 1 Parris had finally abandoned his assumption that the afflicted were possessed, not bewitched. Once he began encouraging accusations of witchcraft, the crisis escalated ominously. The first three to be denounced represented, I suspect, the sort of women the afflicted girls feared they might become—disreputable,

36. Compare Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 21–29, with Breslaw, *Tituba*, 93–101. Rosenthal quotes the indictment and assumes it was approved, but the reverse side of the document is marked 'Ignoramus' and signed by the foreman of the grand jury, which means that the jurors refused to indict her. Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, III: 755. For Susannah Sheldon, see Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 140–44, 311.

37. See Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, ch. 7.

impoverished, powerless, or all three. Sarah Good and Tituba matched these requirements, and so perhaps did Sarah Osborne, who had fallen on hard times. Yet Sarah Good was still in her child-bearing years, and Sarah Osborne had two living sons by a previous marriage, although she was engaged in legal action to try to disinherit them. The Salem accusations undermine Karlsen's argument that most witch accusations, especially those that led to executions, were about property. Prime suspects, she claims, were women who stood to inherit property and had no male heirs. They were blocking the orderly transmission of property from one generation of males to the next. Whatever the crisis was really about, this issue explains little, if anything, about the Salem trials.³⁸

Instead the accusations reflected the factional struggles of Parris's congregation and of village politics. As Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum have shown, the accusers' families were strong supporters of Parris's ministry; the accused had resisted his appointment, and many of them worshipped in neighboring churches. The accusers lived on the remote west side of the village; the accused resided on the east side, closer to commercial Salem Town and the Ipswich Road. As this pattern took hold, the 'afflicted' also accused some respectable people. The girls were, I suspect, beginning to denounce the kind of women they feared they never could become, such as the three Towne sisters, all of whom were full church members, respectable matrons, and mothers with no lack of male heirs. Rebecca Nurse had eight children, Mary Easty seven, Sarah Cloyse eight by her two marriages. Among other victims who were condemned, Susannah Martin had seven adult children, Sarah Averill Wildes had an adult son who was a constable of Topsfield, and John and Elizabeth Proctor had two sons.³⁹

38. See Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, ch. 3.

39. Robinson, *The Devil Discovered*, ch. 15 contains very useful biographical information, including family connections, for the first seventy-five people to be accused. Rebecca Nurse and Mary Easty were both hanged. Sarah Cloyse was never brought to trial because the grand jury twice refused to indict her, in June and in September. We do not know why. See Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, I: 221-23.

Whatever was tormenting the afflicted, a lack of male heirs among the accused was not the trigger for the judicial proceedings. When women became the primary accusers, other factors took hold. One may have been child and spousal abuse, especially among the men who were brought to trial. The Reverend George Burroughs, the only minister to be executed in seventeenth-century New England, certainly fits that pattern. John Proctor whipped his servant, Mary Warren, when she began accusing other people, only to have her turn on him instead. Ann Putnam, Jr., accused John Willard's specter of whipping her infant sister to death. Rosenthal plausibly interprets this charge as a projection of guilt by young Ann away from her own mother and onto Willard, who was hanged.⁴⁰

The Salem panic resembled, though on a more terrible scale, what had happened thirty years before at Hartford. Into mid-April, Salem seemed almost a reprise of the Hartford outbreak. The primary accusers were young women. Even more than at Hartford, when John Winthrop, Jr., had arrived just in time to stop the trials, the result was a massacre. New England had learned how to contain accusations of *maleficium* levelled by men against a particular woman. It did not know how to respond when women turned against other women—and against some men. In both Hartford and Salem the accusers were among the least privileged and least powerful people in New England, and they hurled their accusations successfully at some powerful and well-connected people. I suspect that their very lack of power and standing, when combined with their visible and obvious torments, gave them credibility in the all-male theater of high theology and formal courtroom proceedings. With New England again at war with the northern Indians, the ability of many of the 'afflicted' to survive earlier attacks may have seemed a providential endorsement of their accusations against almost anyone.

40. Hoffer's *The Devil's Disciples* emphasizes the connection between child abuse and the males who were accused. For Ann Putnam, Jr.,'s accusation against Willard, see Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 40.

Thirteen people were accused at Hartford. Fourteen were accused in Salem Village through April 18. Then on April 13 Ann Putnam, Jr., who was quickly seconded by others of the afflicted, accused Abigail Hobbs of Topsfield of tormenting her. Soon Bridget Bishop of Salem Town was also accused. When Hobbs, who was only fourteen years old, was interrogated on April 19, she provided a spectacular confession of her meetings with Satan in order to do his work in New England. A survivor of the Indian attack at Casco Bay in 1689, Hobbs connected the witch accusations in Salem with the Indian crisis in Maine. Within days Ann Putnam, Jr., cried out against the Reverend George Burroughs, who had spent most of the 1680s as a preacher in Maine.⁴¹

The Salem witch crisis was no longer a local event. As it reached the Maine frontier, it evoked the danger of destruction from external enemies, supplied by Catholic New France and less-than-loyal New England traders, such as Philip English and John Alden, and supported from within by untold numbers of witches eager to carry out the satanic plot. Some of the confessors, probably doing their best to say what their interrogators wanted to hear, were quite explicit. William Barker, Sr., of Andover, claimed that Satan maintained 307 witches in New England, and his explanation sent a chill through the court:⁴² 'Satans design was to set up his own worship, abolish all the churches in the land, to fall next upon Salem and soe goe through the countrey, He sayeth the devil promised that all his people should live bravely that all persones should be equal; that there should be no day of resurection or Judgement, and neither punishmentt nor shame for sin' In Boston, Cotton Mather shivered when he realized that 'at prodigious witch-meetings the wretches have proceeded so far as to Concert and Consult the Methods of Rooting out the Christian Religion from this Country.' Satan also had a political objective: 'it may be feared that, in the horrible Tempest which is now upon ourselves, the design of the Devil is to

41. See especially Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 78-81, 118-19.

42. Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, 1: 66.

sink that happy Settlement of Government wherewith Almighty God has graciously enclined Their Majesties to favour us.' Satan was determined to destroy the royal charter negotiated mostly by Increase Mather, the father of Cotton.⁴³

VIII

One of the more baffling features of the Salem crisis, and the least studied aspect of the trials, is the response of the magistrates in Salem Town. They were deeply involved in the settlement of the Maine frontier and had badly mismanaged the northern Indian war that had broken out in late 1688. Very likely, as Norton argues, they were quite prepared to blame the devil and his witches for their own failures. Most other explanations of their witch-hunting zeal make little sense. Young women, closely tied to a church faction that considered Salem Town a corrupting influence on community life in Salem Village, somehow convinced John Hathorne, Jonathan Corwin, and Bartholomew Gedney to credit their accusations against a growing group of people with strong connections in Salem Town. For Hathorne the problem seems particularly acute. His sisters, Ann and Elizabeth, had married Joseph and Israel Porter, respectively. In the village Joseph Porter was the arch rival of the Putnam clan, which was already emerging as the source of most of the local allegations. Perhaps Hathorne resented his sisters. His father had used all of the family's lands in the village as marriage portions for the two women, but then John's wealth was in trade. Still, his familial connections tied him directly to the anti-Parris faction in village and church politics, not to the Parris and Putnam households that were generating the accusations. He did have familial reasons for resenting the Reverend George Burroughs, but those motives do not explain his prosecutorial zeal during the seven weeks before anyone accused Burroughs.⁴⁴

43. Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 211, n. 1.

44. On Hathorne, see Robinson, *The Devil Discovered*, 32-35, and Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 104-5, 125, and passim. Burroughs's second wife, who died in 1688, had been the widow of John Hathorne's deceased younger brother. Burroughs had apparently treated her with 'unkindness.' On the Putnam-Porter rivalry, see Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, ch. 5-6.

By March 1 one of Corwin's sons was among the afflicted, the first child outside the village to be so affected, but since the only mention of this fact is an offhand remark in Tituba's first examination, the incident probably did not amount to much.⁴⁵ None of the Salem magistrates had attended college. They probably shared none of the learned reservations about witchcraft that were already circulating among Samuel Willard, the Brattle brothers, and Robert Calef in polite Boston society.⁴⁶ Corwin and Gedney had compromised their Puritan credentials through willing service on the Council of the Dominion of New England. Hathorne had also been implicated, but only as an Essex County justice. In the early hearings he set a tone of wrathful righteousness, and the others seem to have followed his lead. Apparently he never asked himself whether diabolical possession, rather than malefic witchcraft, might better explain the torments of the afflicted. In the critical preliminary hearings in March and April, he asked only how and why, not whether, the accused tormented the afflicted girls and John Indian, who had quickly become one of the accusers.⁴⁷

Not even evidence of fraud in the accusations dampened the zeal of the magistrates. As Rosenthal points out, someone was sticking pins in the afflicted girls, and presumably it was not anybody's specter. Somebody must have tied the hands of one of them so tightly that the ropes had to be cut, a problem not easily explained by hysteria. Some of the afflicted were lying at least some of the time, although I doubt that fraud can explain the bulk of the accusations. Yet the magistrates, and later the Court of

45. Trask, ed., *The Devil hath been raised*, 11.

46. Samuel Willard's principal critique of the trials pitted Salem against Boston. See his 'Some Miscellany Observations on our Present Debate respecting Witchcrafts, in a Dialogue between S. & B. By P. E. and J. A.' (1692), reprinted in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 122 (1986): 218-36. Historians have never been sure who 'P. E.' and 'J. A.' were supposed to be, but most assume that 'S.' was Salem and 'B.' Boston. Similarly, I assume that when Thomas Brattle described the Salem magistrates as 'Salem Gentlemen,' he was being bitterly sarcastic. Burr, ed. *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 170. New Englanders seldom used the term before the eighteenth century.

47. The pattern was obvious on the first day of the hearings. See Trask, *The Devil hath been raised*, 4-16.

Oyer and Terminer, never took the elementary precaution of separating the afflicted and examining them one by one to compare their stories. As the accusations spread into outlying towns, the magistrates even sanctioned torture (tying suspects' neck and heels for hours) to elicit several confessions.⁴⁸

Soon the jails in Essex County and Boston were full of people denounced as witches, including a large contingent of grandmothers, many of whom were church members. Yet the inter-charter government did not bring them to trial. Aging Governor Simon Bradstreet, the widower of poet Anne Bradstreet, may have been the one important public official who still stood for the tradition of restraint. Once the accusations and arrests spread beyond the village, his son, Dudley Bradstreet, became the first magistrate to compel an accuser to post bond before prosecuting, a small gesture but probably an indication of the family's position.⁴⁹

This restraint at the province level crumbled when two saviors arrived to resolve the impasse and launch the trials. On Saturday, May 14, 1692, a vessel bringing Governor Sir William Phips and the Reverend Increase Mather arrived from England. According to an account that reached Maryland, Phips gathered the inhabitants of Boston together and addressed them:⁵⁰

Part of the speech was that God had sent him there to serve his country and that he would not abridge them of their ancient laws and customs, but that all the laws, liberties and privileges that were practicable should be as before and should be maintained and upheld by him. Then he read his commission and letters patent, but when they were about half read he ordered it to cease as the Sabbath was begun, and he would not infringe the Lord's day; and he ordered all firing of guns and acclamations to be put off till Monday morning. On Monday

48. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, ch. 2-3 makes a powerful case for some conspicuous fraud among the accusers. For the use of torture, see 61-62. Mary Easty, in her moving petition to the court after her conviction, urged the judges to separate the accusers and question them individually. Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, 1: 303-04.

49. On the Bradstreets, see Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 30, 53.

50. Joshua Brodbent to Lt. Governor Francis Nicholson of Maryland, June 21, 1692, in J. W. Fortescue, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies, 1689-1692, Preserved in the Public Record Office* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1901), 653, n. 2283. This document is a detailed abstract, not a literal text.

morning the Council waited on him in the Council Chamber, and there was a debate of six hours whether the reading should begin where it was left off or be read *de novo*. The latter course was taken, because a good thing could not be too often read over.

The witch frenzy terrified Governor Phips. His first decision about the accused, according to Robert Calef, was to order 'that Irons should be put upon those in Prison,' although we know that some of them had been in chains since March. On May 27 Phips created a special Court of Oyer and Terminer to sit in Salem and try the accused witches. That court was an illegal body. Under the Massachusetts Charter of 1691, only the legislature (the General Court) could create a law court. This provision, which differentiated Massachusetts from other royal colonies, was one of the valuable concessions that Increase Mather had obtained from the Crown during the long and tedious negotiations that had accompanied the drafting of the charter. Phips and Mather both understood that clause, and Phips had read it, perhaps twice, to the people of Boston on May 14 and 16. Much of the business undertaken by the new General Court elected in late May 1692 involved the legislative reconstitution of the province's court system. Yet the governor, no doubt with Mather's approval, created the Salem court by prerogative action rather than wait for the results of the legislative process.

Old Governor Bradstreet had been reluctant to proceed hastily to a trial of the witches. Phips and Mather were afraid not to. Phips appointed Thomas Newton as attorney general for the trials. A year earlier, Newton had led the public prosecution of Jacob Leisler and Jacob Milborne in New York. Both had been convicted of treason and executed after the court refused to allow them to appeal to England. In Massachusetts, the panic that had started in the Parris household, spread to Salem Village, and then engulfed Salem Town, had finally reached the most powerful people in Boston. As of May 14, the date that Phips arrived, forty-three people had been accused of witchcraft. By June 6, the number had

reached sixty-eight, an escalation that no doubt contributed to the governor's alarm.⁵¹

Before the court convened, Judge John Richards requested Cotton Mather's advice about procedure. Mather cautioned against overreliance on spectral evidence. 'It is very certain,' he explained, 'that the devils have sometimes represented the shapes of persons not only innocent, but also very virtuous.' The best evidence would be an open confession, but sometimes even a confession should not be believed. Mather warned against the use of torture, cautiously approved using the ability to recite the Lord's Prayer as a test of innocence, urged the court to search for puppets, presumably with pins in them, and sanctioned the use of what might be called reverse spectral evidence. That is, if someone should wound a specter, and the suspected witch should then possess the same wound, that evidence would be valid. Finally, Mather recommended that even some confessing witches — 'lesser Criminals' only, he explained—should be forgiven and not executed, provided they would make 'some solemn, open, Public & Explicit renunciation of the Devil.' He was suggesting that even witchcraft might be a forgivable offense, a claim that

51. Robert Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (1700), in Burr, *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 349; and for the escalating number of accusations, Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 120, chart 2. On the illegality of the court, see Thomas Hutchinson, *History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts-Bay*, 3 vols., ed. Lawrence Shaw Mayo (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 2: 37. Hutchinson was chief justice of the Superior Court of Judicature when he wrote that part of his history. For the relevant clause in the 1691 charter, see Abner Cheney Goodell et al., eds., *The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay: To Which are Prefixed the Charters of the Province*, 21 vols. (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1869–1922), 1: 14–15. The General Court met on June 8 and a week later passed a statute continuing the laws then in force into November. Clearly it could also have created a court of oyer and terminer had the governor asked it to do so, but he was not willing to wait even two weeks for it to act. Another law passed on June 28 provided for the holding of county courts until the legislature made other arrangements. Goodell, ed., *Acts and Resolves*, 1: 27, 37. Thomas Newton's activities have not left many traces, but see Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, III: 867–69. For his career in New York, see Paul M. Hamlin and Charles E. Baker, eds., *Supreme Court of Judicature of the Province of New York, 1691–1704*, 3 vols., New-York Historical Society, *Collections*, vols. 78–80 (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1959), 1: 112. Peter Charles Hoffer argues that creation of the trial court was a legitimate exercise of the governor's prerogative. See *The Devil's Disciples*, 135.

I have never encountered in any other witch trial of the early modern era.⁵²

In this ominous environment, the trials finally began.

IX

Cotton Mather's advice probably explains why Bridget Bishop became the court's first victim. She had been formally accused of witchcraft in 1680. After that her specter acquired the nasty habit of invading the bedchambers of adult men and hopping around the room or sitting on their chests. One witness even claimed, years earlier, to have found puppets in the wall of a house she had recently occupied. Although she insisted on her innocence—a claim that had worked in her favor twelve years earlier—the jury condemned her. The evidence seemed to meet Mather's insistence on something more than the spectral torment of the girls, although as the indictments made clear, she was brought to trial because her specter afflicted her accusers at the preliminary hearing. A resident of Salem Town, she insisted that she had never been in Salem Village before and did not know any of the afflicted accusers. But her reputation had preceded her, and it doomed her to the gallows. She died on June 10.⁵³

Tituba, who had confessed to signing the devil's book, was not even indicted. Now Bishop, who insisted on her innocence, was hanged. A deadly pattern was beginning to emerge. At Salem no one who confessed was ever executed. Everyone who was executed insisted that she or he was no witch, even after it was becoming obvious that a confession might save the person's life. No other witch trials that I have heard of developed such a pattern. The Salem court hanged the most courageous people it encountered and rewarded those too cowardly to stick by the truth, that they were indeed innocent. As Esther Forbes has sug-

52. Cotton Mather to John Richards, May 31, 1692, in Kenneth Silverman, ed., *Selected Letters of Cotton Mather* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 35-40.

53. Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, 1: 83-109.

gested, the people executed at Salem deserve to be honored as 'the most distinguished group of Christian martyrs this country has produced.' They died because they would not 'belay their souls.'⁵⁴

After the Bishop trial, the court took a recess to consult with the ministers, more formally this time. 'The Return of Several Ministers Consulted,' which was dated June 15 and was probably written by Cotton Mather, repeated his reservations about spectral evidence without telling the court what evidence might be acceptable.⁵⁵ With more than one hundred people already accused, including one minister, the Reverend George Burroughs, the court began to attract public criticism. William Milborne, a Baptist minister in Boston and the brother of Jacob Milborne who had been hanged for treason in New York the previous year, collected signatures for a petition to the General Court which pointed out that the jails were filling with people accused of 'witchcraft only upon bare specter testimonie many whereof we cannot but in Charity Judge to be Innocent' and warned of 'A woeful chain of consequences [that] will undoubtedly follow besides the uncertaintie of ye exemption of any person from ye like accusation in ye said province.' Milborne doubtless knew that Attorney General Thomas Newton had hounded his brother to death and was about to prosecute George Burroughs, a fellow Baptist whom Milborne had probably met when they both ministered to nearby Maine congregations at Casco (Burroughs) and Saco (Milborne) in the 1680s. One of the first questions that Burroughs had been asked in his preliminary hearing in May was whether he had baptized all of his children. He had not. An accusation of witchcraft could make telling scapegoats of the Baptists. But the upper house (all the Salem trial judges were members) sent the sheriff to bring Milborne before it and compelled him to post £200 with two sureties to appear before the next Superior Court 'to answer for . . . writing and publishing the said seditious

54. Esther Forbes Papers, box 6, folder 5, 'Confession,' American Antiquarian Society.

55. Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem-Village Witchcraft*, 117-18.

and scandalous papers.' Questioning the court's procedures, even in a petition for redress, had become a crime.⁵⁶

By then the trials had resumed, and the court established two new landmarks. In late June it condemned five women to death, three of whom were full church members (Susannah Martin, Rebecca Nurse, and Sarah Wildes). When the jury initially acquitted Nurse, who had a strong reputation for piety, the afflicted accusers raised such a tumult in the court that Stoughton sent the jury out to deliberate again, and this time he got a verdict of guilty. All five were hanged on July 19.⁵⁷

Most historians have concluded that by late June the judges had decided to ignore the advice of the ministers altogether and were willing to convict on the basis of spectral evidence alone. Wendel D. Craker has strongly challenged this view. He insists that when the court could not find collateral evidence, it did not bring an accused person to trial. But the question remains whether he has established anything more substantial than a highly technical point. In effect, the Bishop case became the governing precedent. Spectral evidence, as the wording of the indictments makes clear, defined the actual crime. But then the court accepted any other testimony involving *maleficium* that it could find and used it to comply, at least nominally, with the guidelines established by the clergy. The technique worked in that it enabled both Mathers to defend the results of the trials despite the court's overwhelming dependance on spectral evidence. But the conventional wisdom about Salem remains valid. Without spectral evidence there would have been no executions and probably no trials. Spectral evidence prompted the court to validate precisely the kind of tes-

56. The Milborne documents are printed in George H. Moore, 'Notes on the History of Witchcraft in Massachusetts; with Illustrative Documents,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 2 (1882): 171, n. 1. Burroughs' Baptist beliefs were elicited in Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, 1: 153. See also David William Voorhees, "Fanatics and Fifth Monarchists": The Milborne Family in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic World,' *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 129 (April and July 1998): 67-75, 174-82.

57. For an outstanding account, see Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, ch. 5.

timony about *maleficium* that judges and ministers had been rejecting for more than thirty years.⁵⁸

x

By July the afflicted had become a pack of young terminators against whom no defense was possible. Anyone who pleaded not guilty was doomed. Those who confessed were saved, at least for the present. As the court grew suspicious of those who confessed, it began to demand proof of sincerity by insisting that the confessor name others who had participated with her or him in a witches' sabbath. Soon it often insisted that the names include people who had not yet been brought to trial, much less executed. The momentum of the trials threatened, if unchecked, to consume most of the grandmothers of Essex County.

By then the cohort of accusers, and the circle of the accused, were both expanding wildly. When some afflicted girls went to Andover to challenge Satan, their accusations may have seemed almost random because their families had not been linked to many of the Andover people, but the cycle of denunciations for witchcraft quickly got out of control. Boys began to have fits and join the accusers. And relatives of an accused person began to urge her to forswear herself in the presence of the living God, at least until the madness passed, and thus save her life.⁵⁹

On August 19 the court hanged five more persons. Four of them were men, including George Burroughs and John Proctor. This shocking challenge to the accepted stereotype of a witch drew Cotton Mather, Thomas Brattle, and Robert Calef to the scene. The spectacle confirmed Mather's support for the trials but probably turned Brattle and Calef into grim and determined opponents. Something seemed amiss in each of the five convictions. John Willard was a constable who made many arrests in the

58. Wendel D. Craker, 'Spectral Evidence, Non-Spectral Acts of Witchcraft, and Confession at Salem in 1692,' *The Historical Journal* 40 (1997): 331-58.

59. For the fullest analysis, see Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, esp. 233-36, 254-65.

early phase of the panic but then began to sympathize with the accused, to the point where he even suggested that the afflicted and the judges were the real servants of Satan. George Jacobs, an elderly cripple who needed two canes to walk, was hanged even though two of his accusers, including his sixteen-year-old granddaughter, recanted their testimony. John Proctor had suggested in the opening weeks of the crisis that someone ought to whip the afflicted and bring them to their senses, as he did with his servant, Mary Warren. She soon accused him, then recanted her accusation, but finally managed to rejoin the afflicted accusers. George Burroughs recited the Lord's Prayer without flaw at the gallows, but while a failed attempt had helped convict others, his success did not save him. As he was turned off the scaffold, the enormous crowd surged forward, perhaps to rescue him, but Cotton Mather, mounted on his horse, 'addressed . . . the People . . . to possess [convince] the People of his guilt; saying That the Devil has often been transformed into an Angel of Light,' according to Robert Calef, an eye witness; 'and this did somewhat appease the People, and the Executions went on. . . .'⁶⁰ Martha Carrier had been convicted after her own children confessed and testified against her, but they had been tortured.⁶¹

The prosecutions continued. Sixty-year-old Giles Corey showed his contempt for the court by refusing to accept trial by the court or 'by God and the Country'—that is, by jury. Under an old common-law rule never invoked before or again in colonial New England, he was pressed to death on September 16. Six days later six more women and one man were hanged, the last people to be executed for witchcraft in colonial America.⁶²

60. Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 360–61.

61. For these cases see Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, 1: 151–78 (Burroughs), 183–96 (Carrier); 2: 473–86 (Jacobs), 677–90 (Proctor); 3: 819–52 (Willard).

62. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, ch. 8. Nearly all accounts of Giles Corey, drawing upon an entry in the church records of Salem Town, give his age as eighty. But Esther Forbes found a record of 1644 describing him as a 'boy,' which usually meant someone under 14 years of age. If so he would have been no more than 62 in 1692. Forbes did not give her source. See her 'Giles Corey,' Esther Forbes Papers, box 6, folder 5, American Antiquarian Society.

By then mounting lay resistance had finally found a way to reach the government. The accusers cried out against the Reverend Samuel Willard of Boston, a vocal critic of the trials, and then against Lady Mary Phips, the governor's wife who had, in his absence, signed a release for one of the accused known personally to her. The governor had spent part of the summer in Maine fighting Indians, but not nearly as much time as he later implied in letters to his superiors in England.⁶³ After the last executions, he stopped the trials, to the great rage of Judge Stoughton. Perhaps at this time William Milborne, though already castigated by the court, petitioned the legislature to intervene and stop the trials.⁶⁴ When the General Court met again in October, resistance to the court took the form of a contest over the wording of a public call for a day of fast. Opponents of the trials won in the House of Representatives by a margin of thirty-three to twenty-nine.⁶⁵ Thomas Brattle's powerful critique of the trials was circulating in manuscript by some point in October, and the Dutch Reformed clergy of New York contributed their own criticism of spectral evidence. So did Increase Mather, speaking for most of the clergy of Massachusetts, in his *Cases of Conscience*.⁶⁶

Once the General Court set up a complete court system, the trials resumed briefly in January, but under the governor's orders the Superior Court no longer entertained spectral evidence, and all new trials ended in acquittals. Several who had been condemned but not hanged in September and three who had already

63. Marion L. Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Enquiry into the Salem Witch Trials* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1949), ch. 18-19. The most careful study of Phips's role in the crisis is Baker and Reid, *The New England Knight*, ch. 7.

64. For the text of this undated petition, see Moore, 'Notes on the Bibliography of Witchcraft,' 246-47.

65. M. Halsey Thomas, ed., *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729*, 2 vols. (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1973), I: 299.

66. For Brattle, see Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 165-90; for the Latin text and an English translation of the Dutch Reformed critique, edited by Albert C. Goodell, see *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 2d ser., 1 (1884-85): 348-58; Increase Mather, *Cases of Conscience concerning Evil Spirits Personating Men, Witchcrafts, Infallible Proofs of Guilt in Such as are Accused with that Crime . . .* (Boston: Benjamin Harris, 1693). Despite the date on the title page, *Cases of Conscience* was circulating by October 1692.

confessed but had not yet stood trial were condemned to hang. Stoughton did his best to rush them to the gallows, but Phips released them all. The trials finally ended.⁶⁷

XI

The Salem tragedy emerged from a lethal combination of excessive Puritan zeal and the anxieties aroused by defection from Puritan standards. Cotton Mather, most of the clergy in or near Salem Village, Magistrate John Hathorne, and Increase Mather in his willingness to defend the trials after rejecting spectral evidence, provided the unrelenting zeal. But the afflicted girls, the other Salem magistrates, and most of the judges from Boston were people who had deviated too far, too conspicuously in the opposite direction.

Satan tormented the girls by urging them to sign his book, a phenomenon that seldom occurred in witch outbreaks elsewhere in the Atlantic world or in earlier New England trials. Tituba introduced this aspect of Satan's malice on March 2, the second day of her interrogation, and thereafter it reverberated through the entire crisis.⁶⁸ It represented the obverse of the conversion experience that ministers had been demanding from young people for half a century. It reflected the girls' terror that they stood on the very precipice of damnation. They projected this anxiety and guilt first onto disreputable adult women in or near Salem Village and then upon others who had led godly lives but whose families opposed Samuel Parris. The girls' torments, which they blamed on specters, gave these claims credibility. So did the special status of the orphans. As frontier survivors of Satan's malice inflicted through the northern Indians, they may well have seemed providential messengers of God's special regard for New England, despite the region's erring ways.

67. For the 1693 trials, see Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, III: 903-44.

68. See Trask, ed., *'The Devil hath been raised,'* 23-25. In an undated but later deposition, Ann Putnam, Jr., testified that Sarah Good had urged her to sign the book as early as February 27, but I am suspicious of that claim. Nobody mentioned the devil's book in the extensive interrogations of March 1. Compare Trask, 18, with 3-16.

Most of the judges, by contrast, had cooperated much too willingly with the Dominion of New England, a royal regime that truly did threaten to undermine the godly commonwealth of the seventeenth century. Stoughton in particular had offended the people of Essex County by imposing severe punishments on the men who dared protest against taxation without representation. A life-long bachelor in a society that considered marriage a duty, he was also, I suspect, a misogynist. These judges needed forgiveness, and they projected this need upon the people accused of witchcraft. When Mary Lacey, Jr., confessed in open court that she had actually worshipped Satan, a magistrate—was it Stoughton, the chief justice?—reassured her ‘you may yet be delivered if god give you repentance.’ ‘I hope he will,’ she replied. She survived. At first the judges may have spared confessors to pry information from them. They could be hanged later. But by September any such strategy would have turned a judicial massacre into a holocaust.⁶⁹

For the first time in the great witch hunt of the early modern era, open confession to the crime became a way to escape punishment, not guarantee it. By August and September this perversion of traditional justice had become so manifest and so grotesque that most people in the colony recognized it for the moral monstrosity it had become. Even the trial jurors later admitted that ‘for want of Knowledge in ourselves, and better Information from others,’ they had believed evidence that ‘we justly fear was insufficient for the touching the Lives of *any*’ [my emphasis] and had brought ‘upon our selves, and this People of the Lord, the Guilt of Innocent Blood, which Sin the Lord saith in Scripture, he would not pardon, 2 Kings 24.4, that is we suppose in regard of his temporal Judgments.’⁷⁰ When Phips stopped the trials, hardly anyone but Stoughton protested.

People still believed in witches after 1692, but the Salem trials

69. Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, II: 520.

70. Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World*, in Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 387–88. This statement was made in December 1696. We do not know how soon after the trials the jurors concluded that they had been horribly mistaken. Nor do we know how many juries were involved in the trials.

had left them with no credible way to identify who was or was not a witch. The early trials had turned the magistrates and ministers against ordinary *maleficium*. Salem discredited the validity of a compact with Satan as evidence for witchcraft, especially if the only proof was spectral. Robert Calef took the argument one step farther. He challenged Cotton Mather to produce any scriptural passage that supported the very notion that such a compact was even possible. Mather could not defeat Calef on those terms. His reply conceded nothing, certainly not its own feebleness, although the weakness of his position seemed obvious to Calef.⁷¹

The trials had other long-term consequences. Ministers began to shy away from using Satan in their sermons. By the 1730s they would discover that hellfire could be just as terrifying to a congregation weeping for its sins but did not carry the same risks. The preaching style of Jonathan Edwards probably was an indirect offshoot of the trials.⁷²

Controversy aroused by the trials split the elite into what might loosely be described as political versus cultural anglicizers. Both Mathers defended the trials, despite the overwhelming reliance on spectral evidence, and both of them seemed to think that Satan's onslaught was an attempt to destroy the Charter of 1691, which had been mostly the handiwork of Increase Mather. Robert Calef and Thomas and William Brattle, along with John Leverett, embraced the early English enlightenment, and the Brattles founded the Brattle Street Church in 1699. Calef and Thomas Brattle were eloquent in their condemnation of the witch trials. By 1707 the Brattles and Leverett had outmaneuvered Increase Mather to gain control of Harvard College. England's enlightenment had found a new base in the bastion of Puritan orthodoxy.⁷³

71. Worthington C. Ford, ed., 'Mather-Calef Paper on Witchcraft,' *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 47 (1913-14): 240-68.

72. See Reis, *Damned Women*, ch. 5.

73. See 'Letter of Thomas Brattle,' and Calef's *More Wonders of the Invisible World*, both in Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 165-90, 289-393. See also Samuel Eliot Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), II: ch. 23-24; and Norman Fiering, 'The First American Enlightenment: Tillotson, Leverett, and Philosophical Anglicanism,' *New England Quarterly* 54 (1981): 307-44.

Popular culture also responded to the trials. At Salem, women had taken over the public sphere for a whole summer, with catastrophic results. The judicial system had learned how to handle a witchcraft accusation aimed at a woman by a man. But when women accused other women, the result was a massacre. At first the men of Essex County reacted defensively. For several years after the Salem trials, every woman who requested a criminal jury in the Essex Court of Sessions got acquitted. But around 1700, not only in Essex but in all of New England, the double standard of sexual behavior, which had been in some peril under the Puritan regime, revived with amazing vigor. Men refused to plead guilty to any sexual offense except making love to their wives before their wedding day. Some men even denied that charge, usually by invoking the biblical two-witness rule, and nearly always won an acquittal. Juries acquitted men of nearly every sexual offense except incest. Increasingly women appeared in court only to be humiliated. The law became—almost, but not quite—an arena for men only.⁷⁴

Popular culture Europeanized in one other, quite dramatic respect. People still believed in witches, but the courts would no longer protect any victim of this crime. The result, I suspect, was a huge resurgence of folk magic. The best evidence comes from a century later, pulled together in recent studies of the early life of Joseph Smith. Magic became a major folk weapon in a society presided over by enlightened judges and lawyers.⁷⁵

In North America, probably more than elsewhere, the Enlightenment had strange, unexpected results.

74. See especially Cornelia N. Dayton, *Women Before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639–1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). Dayton's study rests primarily upon New Haven Colony and County. My own reading of the published or manuscript court of sessions records for York, Essex, Middlesex, Suffolk, Plymouth, Bristol, New London, New Haven, and Hartford counties persuades me that the resurgence of the double standard occurred throughout New England. For several years after 1692, juries in the Essex County court of sessions routinely acquitted women. When I read these records, they were in the Essex County Courthouse in Salem. They have since been moved to the Massachusetts Archives at Columbia Point in Boston.

75. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World* (Salt Lake City, 1987); John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

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