The Crucible and the Reasons for the Salem Witch Hunt

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Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION 2

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 6

3. WITCHES IN REALITY 9
   3.1 SPurring THE WITCH HUNTS 9
   3.2 Witches IN REALITY AND MYTH 11
   3.3 Witches IN SALEM 13

4. THE CHURCH AND ITS MINISTERS 17
   4.1 SAMUEL PARRIS 18
   4.2 REVEREND JOHN HALE 21
   4.3 GOVERNOR WILLIAM PHIPS 22

5. SECULAR INTERESTS 24
   5.1 JUDGES 24
   5.2 THE ACCUSATIONS OF THE GIRLS 28
   5.3 NEIGHBOURS 32

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION 36

REFERENCES 40
   PRIMARY SOURCE 40
   SECONDARY SOURCES 40

APPENDIX 42
1. INTRODUCTION

The Burning Times is one of the darkest periods in the history of humankind, and few people do not know at least what occurred during that time. It is commonly known under the name “The Burning Times”, since people condemned for witchcraft, were often burned at the stake. This image is also the prevailing idea of the witch hunts. As it was a widespread idea that a person was cleansed from their sins by fire, it was in most places a custom to burn those condemned to death for having dealt with witchcraft. However, in many cases the alleged witch was first executed before the actual burning. In Sweden there is only one example of a person being burned alive at the stake. On the continent burnings as a form of execution were more common.1 “In England or Massachusetts she [or he] …[was] hanged, often far from a quick and clean death.”2 This was also the case in Salem as will be seen, due to the fact that the people in the colony migrated to Massachusetts in order to avoid persecution. This, then gives an explanation to why the convicted were hanged and not burned as is usually thought in cases of witchcraft. This was the era of the great witch hunts when many people were condemned to death since they were said to be witches who, it was claimed, had forsaken God in order to pledge allegiance and loyalty to the Devil. By doing this they also contracted their souls to be forever tortured in hell, when they died. This was said to be done either through the Master of Lies (as the Devil was also called) who supposedly met the witch himself, and promised to give her all she wanted in this life of riches, vengeance on their enemies, and whatever else they would happen to want. Usually this help was promised for a certain period of time, ranging from anything from a few years to as long as they lived. The second possible method was that a person acting in the Devil’s place, promised the same things and under the same conditions. Regardless of the method employed, this pledge was then signed with the witch’s own blood, to make it binding.3 The witch in turn, was thought to receive vast magical powers to achieve his or her goals, and could also get assistance from demons that did as was commanded when certain words were spoken or special rituals were executed. At least this idea was what was thought and commonly spread, not least by the Church which fuelled these beliefs the best they could. This was almost unanimously feared by everyone living at this

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time, and the Church did what it could to expel these horrible deeds. However, the situation was much more complex than it first appears to be. Some of the most plausible reasons will be discussed in this essay to show how these fit the witch hunt in Salem. The aim is to give as clear motives as possible to what occurred in order to explain the situation there.

The Burning Times had its height from the 13th century and up until the 18th century, but it had existed long before that in minor scale, for example during the time of the Roman Empire. Even though Malleus Maleficarum is heavily biased and prejudiced, it is highly probable that it is right in this historical fact. Witches have been supposed to have been around for a very long period of time and thus it is no wonder that the Romans also dealt with this issue. The witch hunts, however, did not end there, but continued for some time in rural parts and especially in remote geographical areas such as the overseas colonies, and this was the case of the Salem witch hunt in Massachusetts, America. This colony was founded by Puritans who had fled persecution in England, and came there to start anew, a place they at first thought of as their “New Jerusalem.”

This is also the place Arthur Miller has written about in his book *The Crucible*. In this text, the year is 1692 and the witch trials have diminished and are almost over in Europe. The story in *The Crucible* begins with how the paranoia and the following witch hunt started in Salem. It tells a terrible story of how this little outpost was seized and carried away by paranoia, which developed into a virtual witch hunt and all the consequences thereof. Nevertheless, even though *The Crucible* is about these things, yet it does not fail to describe the events in a sad and touching way, since neither side of the conflict is neglected. Through this, the reader gets to understand or at least perceive the motives behind the actions of the people involved. However, paranoia cannot solely be blamed for the witch hunt, since much of what happened cannot be explained or understood if greediness and envy between neighbours are not taken into consideration too. It also shows how most people tend to conform to what the majority of others around them think.

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5 Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*, (New York, U.S.A. Penguin Books, 1976), 5 All subsequent references to this text will be inserted in the text within parenthesis.
The purpose of this essay is to examine and discuss what the reasons behind the witch hunts in Salem were and attempt to explain why and how they could occur. In order to do so, the following questions have been chosen in order to narrow down the field of interest, as the topic in itself is very vast, even when considering a single event such as this one. That there is no simple explanation behind the rise of a witch hunt, will be clearly visible. Therefore, the focus will be on these issues:

- Were there really people who can righteously be termed witches, and in that case, who were these?
- Who were those who accused others for being witches?

To be able to do this, it has been essential to look into the beliefs of this age both in general and Salem in particular. What made humans so susceptible to belief in witches and other dark powers, which they believed were plaguing them? Were they only superstitious or was there something more to these claims?

The main source for this essay is *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller, and therefore the focus will be upon the events which took place in Salem. Miller used the witch hunts in Salem to make comments and protest against the persecution of the Communists in the U.S. About Arthur Miller, himself, can be added, as Margo Burns states:

Miller created works of art, inspired by the actual events for the artistic/political purposes Miller intended: first produced on Broadway on January 22, 1953, it was in response to the panic caused by irrational fear of Communism during the Cold War which resulted in the hearings by the House Committee on Unamerican Activities.6

Margo continues to tell us to please note that:

The play premiered before anti-Communist Senator Joseph McCarthy's actual participation started on Feb. 3, 1953. The House Committee on Unamerican Activities (HCUA), however, began their inquiries earlier than McCarthy's participation. Elia Kazan's testimony before it -- which is assumed to have influenced Miller -- was on April 12th, 1952.7

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7 Burns
Even though Miller commented on the communist aspect this essay will focus on the historical witch hunt in Salem. These will be discussed from this view as this example, although late, displays all the major aspects of this era in a clear and easily comprehended way. It also gives a valuable insight in how people of that age thought as Miller has tried to keep quite close to the historical facts where he has been able to do so. Another book that has been valuable in the research is *Witch, Wicce, Mother Goose* by Robert W. Thurston, that offers essential material for a researcher in this topic.
2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

What is the historical background of the Puritan colony which was named Salem? Is there anything that could have hinted at the horrible things which were to take place there, or did the witch hunt and the trials of supposed witches come as a total surprise to everyone, no matter what status they had in the community?

These questions will be dealt with in this chapter, as it will attempt to give an overview of how this terrible situation came into existence. Many of these issues will be discussed more in depth in the following chapters. Why did this period of suspicion and accusations occur?

To understand better what was happening in Salem at the time of the witch hunts, we should start by looking at the background of the people who arrived as settlers and founded the small community. They were all members of the religious branch of the Protestants within the English Church called Puritanism. Its members who held this particular faith thought that the Church of England had not gone far enough in reforming the doctrines and structures of the Church. According to Mark Noll, “they wanted to purify their national Church by eliminating every shred of Catholic influence.” These people were also persecuted in England because they held these views and did everything to try and get the Church of England to change its standpoint in this matter. Geographically, the settlement of Salem was surrounded by vast forests and the wilderness caused the inhabitants to feel paranoia, since they did not know what was out “there”. In this small community, the inhabitants had their social status and roles, and knew everyone’s reputation. This naturally added to the possibility of witch hunts. Equally, the Native Americans living in the surrounding area, viewed as heathens by the inhabitants of Salem, sometimes raided and attacked them. This spurred their religious beliefs and made them cling even tighter to their faith, regarding with suspicion everyone and anything that could not be made to fit its definitions.

The small colony was founded in 1626, which makes it one of the oldest colonies in that area. Due to the fact that the Puritans thought of it as their “New Jerusalem” it was given the name Salem. It is the poetic name for Jerusalem, a name that was already in use when the Bible was written. Since the people founding Salem were strictly religious and followed the teachings of the Bible, it was only natural for them to choose such a name. That this outlook

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9 Noll
10 Thurston 169
on life was going to cause problems after some time is quite understandable, especially when considering that they did not allow any “vain enjoyment”(4), such as dancing, playing games and so on. Furthermore, children were supposed to act like small adults and only do as they were told and otherwise be nice and quiet when not spoken to. Given such a situation it is no wonder that some girls in the settlement were yearning for some attention and to be someone, and thus saw directing accusations towards other persons as an opportunity to achieve this end.

However, these were not the only reasons for the witch hunts that began in 1692, although the first witch was accused and sentenced to death already in 1688.12 The same year as the witch hunts began the colony had split into two fractions, one of which was Salem Town, and the other, situated in the northwest, was Salem Village. The villagers did not like the direction the town had taken, which had become more and more capitalistic because of the commerce it had with England. This caused it also to partly move away from the strict view of religion, since it would not have been fruitful to adhere to such strict doctrines. Meanwhile the village was more cut off from such a development, situated as it was some distance away from the coast, and thus its inhabitants were more conservative in sticking to the old ways of life. This led to a division between the two parts, and both regarded the other with suspicion. This can also be seen in the fact that most of the accused individuals were living on the outskirts of the village and thought that they ought to live more like those living in the town. This can clearly be seen on a map displaying where the accused and the accusers lived.13 There are more reasons for what was to come, and light will subsequently be shed on these. As will be shown, there were both personal and religious interests involved. Another very crucial aspect of the issue was the role of a few persons of influence in Salem and the wars between the English people with their Native Indian allies on one side and the French people and their allies on the other. Among these persons were Increase Mathers and his son Cotton, who both held important positions in society and were also involved in giving Sir William Phips his office in Salem. That influential men in the elite accepted the witch stereotype, was also one of the crucial factors which enabled such an event to take place.14 Furthermore they both knew the judges who were sitting in the Court of Oyer and Terminator, and thus had an influence on the

11 Bonniers Lexikon (BONNIER LEXIKON AB, 1995)
14 Thurston 169
outcome of their decisions. This had a profound effect on the outcome of the events in Salem and the area surrounding it.

Due to the religious ideas permeating this small society, it is no surprise that “The Evil One” was seen as the greatest foe and adversary to the faith and lives of its inhabitants. They were liable to believe that when something negative happened it was a manifestation of witchcraft. This belief was also encouraged by the priests and other men of the Church as well as those who could profit from the situation in some way or another, but who did not necessarily think it was true. However, before delving deeper in these matters, we will begin by examining the reality of the claims concerning witches.
3. WITCHES IN REALITY

In connection to the historical background, it is also proper to examine the claim of the existence of witches, in order to get a better idea of this matter, before continuing on to the ideas, intentions and motives of the Church, judges and other people. The following questions will be discussed in this chapter: What are the origins of the phrase “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live”? Who were those who were said to be witches? Was there any particular trait they all shared, or were they just randomly accused? Were they actually dealing with black arts? Were they plotting to overthrow the power of the Church? Or were they outcasts in the society, unwanted persons, mentally deranged or something else? Were there real witches as those in the Church claimed there were?

3.1 SPURRING THE WITCH HUNTS

Before we deal with the issue as to what persons faced the gravest danger of being accused of being witches, we shall begin by examining where the ministers of the Church got their ideas from, and what the meaning of the phrase “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” (Exo 22:18) in the King James Version of the Bible is.15

This well-known phrase is actually an erroneous translation from the Hebrew word Chasaph, which means literally “poisoner” In the words of Reginald Scot:

Chasaph, being an Hebrue word, is Latined Venificium, and in English poisoning, or witchcraft; if you will so have it. The Hebrue sentence written in Exodus 22. is by the 70. [sic] interpretors, translated thus into Greeke…, which in Latine is, Veneficos (sive) veneficas non retinebitis in vita, in English, You shall not suffer anie poisoners or (as it is translated), witches to live.16

Regarding this view, Scot is backed up by Johann Weyer, who similarly held the opinion that “Scripture does not speak of witches in the way that contemporary writers did…and he argues that the Hebrew word used in Exodus for witch should be translated as ‘poisoner’.”17

In the Hebrew Bible there are also several other words, which correspond to different types of magical practices. However, when the Bible was translated into English on King James I’s

16 Reginald Scot, The Discoverie of Witchcraft, (New York, USA, Dover Publications, Inc.), unabridged and unaltered republication of the work originally published in Great Britain by John Rodker in 1930. The spelling in this edition is that of the original in 1584 1972 reprinted 1989, 64
17 Thurston 142
order, they were all translated as meaning the same thing, namely “witch”. King James I himself was for a time Royal Witch Hunter, and the reason why he was so afraid of witchcraft was that he ruled the country at a very uncertain time, and there were many attempts and plots against his royal person. So his paranoia was not unfounded, but to come to the conclusion that there were witches, and not poisoners and other adversaries, is somewhat illogical. However, it is not surprising that he believed in these things, since some people took advantage of the belief in witchcraft, or perhaps also thought it was true themselves. One of these was the infamous Earl of Bothwell, who plotted to become king.\footnote{Thurston 81} To achieve this, he summoned various people who claimed to practice different magical skills, such as perceiving the future, astrologers, a few who were skilled in making poisons etc. Regarding the translation of the Bible, it was translated so as to fit into the social atmosphere of the time.\footnote{Fiona Broome “Fiona Broome”, Homepage, 021603, <www.fionabroome.com/craft/witchbib.htm>} Whether it was done to please the king, or whether it was the freedom of the translators, is impossible to say for sure.

However, there is also another view which must be mentioned here, and according to this view this meaning is implicated already in the Torah. The original word would be makesofha, a term, which has to do with “pray”, but which in the Hebrew Bible only refers to prayers offered to idols. Furthermore, in a collection of Torah and Haftorah texts, (the principle dictionary of Modern Hebrew) by Ben Yehudah, it is commented that if this is interpreted in a gentler way, it calls for giving no credence to claims of witchcraft, since such claims are delusional. In Jewish law the death penalty is infrequently used, and this was also the position of the Catholic Church up until the start of the witch craze in Europe. These passages free the Torah from a justification of this paragraph to justify the witch trials. Even though it is widely claimed that it was King James I who wanted this translation of the Bible, it must be added that in translations which have nothing to do with “his” version of the Bible the word is invariably translated as “witch” or “sorceress”.\footnote{Paul Hume, “The Witches’ Voice Presents the Adult Pagan Essay Series Your Voice Really Does Matter “Thou Shalt not Suffer a Witch to Live””, Diotima. The Witches Voice, Online Professional, 021603 <www.witchvox.com/words/words_1999/e_sufferawitch.html> It is undoubtedly true that the translation and interpretation seem to be a symptom of the time, and thus the question is whether or not it was partial from the beginning. In other words, there is more than enough evidence to suggest that the translation suited the disposition of those who believed in witchcraft.
3.2 Witches in Reality and Myth

According to Robert W. Thurston, there were different kinds of magic in the early modern period. To some extent this belief still exists today, in some groups and in some geographical parts of the world. In some parts of Italy it was said that people born with an innate skill of magic had a caul, at the time of their birth. These persons subsequently became the helpers of their people, and there was no one who regarded this with suspicion, nor believed that these people born with caul should have anything to do with the Devil or any demon whatsoever. Nonetheless, this was not the case in the rest of Europe. However, there are some exceptions to this statement by Thurston, and one such is to be found in Swedish folklore, according to which a person born with such a caul is destined to be successful, be able to tell the future, and is also said to be invincible to ordinary bullets and hence could not be hurt by them. Thurston also distinguishes between various arts of magic, as there existed both high magic and low magic. The high magic could be learned through careful studying of books, that is, it was a learned form of magic. Low magic, on the other hand, was the kind that poor people practised, and this is also the sort of magic the people being accused of witchcraft dealt with, and contrary to the high magic, this variation was innate, or taught from parent to child. These included scrying in water, divination, and other such things, using more simple devices to achieve this. Tituba (Parris’ slave woman) also used one of these methods, and this will be described when explaining Samuel Parris’ role in the witch hunts. In *The Crucible* she is involved in raising the spirits of Ruth’s dead sisters, and also creates a charm for Abigail, which included the drinking of chicken blood. This was entirely in line with her native religion Voodoo. Although this did not occur in reality, it was in fact not unusual to undertake some sacrifice for those who wanted to create some charm or spell. To clarify the various kinds of individuals accused of witchcraft, they can easily be placed into different categories, whereof poor persons were one such category. However, as long as these poor persons did not become too notorious and well known the Church most probably left them alone, since rich people sometimes turned to them for help.

There are also cases where a wise person (skilled in healing, portions etc.) was protected by the community when the witch hunters tried to expose them, thanks to the value they held.

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21 Thurston 57  
22 *Caul* in this context refers to a hood made of the membrane of the foetus  
23 Thurston 63  
24 Thurston 57
for the inhabitants and these persons can be included in another category. As one can clearly see, there was a certain amount of ambiguity and it was not at all certain that alleged witches or wise persons were accused and brought forth to be punished.

Nevertheless, as has been briefly mentioned above, not all the people accused of being witches were healers and other benevolent types. A third category were those who got mentally ill and thought they themselves had the ability to use magic, or thought they had indeed met devils or “The Evil One” in person, and sometimes signed a contract with him too.25 In The Crucible Betty (Elizabeth) Parris can perhaps be regarded as being one such person. Her case will be examined more closely later on. Another historical person was called Gilles de Rais (his full name was Gilles de Montmorency-Laval), who was a prominent person when young, but then became interested in black arts, and later took the help of devil worshippers to conduct his experiments, which among other things involved the sacrifice of children. He, nevertheless, soon realised that he got more out of the actual killing than of the ceremony itself. He adhered to being a good Christian his whole life, and explained that the murders occurred because he was forced to act by an evil force. The lust for young blood had become a disease. There is more to be said about this deranged man, but this is sufficient to show the mindset he had.26 With the common ideas and beliefs at that time, it is not so hard to understand how such an atmosphere could prevail. It was for example believed that all kinds of beings and spirits, both benevolent and malevolent, inhabited the environment, in the woods, at sea, in and around people's habitats etc.. Naturally the impact on people was that they tried to either stay away or act friendly towards these other beings. This would also be a contributing factor to the paranoia that people suffered from in Salem.

However, it was not only the three categories of people described who risked being persecuted, as there were people who took advantage of these beliefs and arts in order to achieve their own goals. In addition to this group there were those who practised legerdemain27 and made their living out of fooling people that there really were masters of magic. Among those who did these things, there were all kinds of people, artists, healers, fortune-tellers, etc, who profited by their skills. Reginald Scot has made an interesting examination of many of the tricks, which were being used, in his book The Discoverie of Witchcraft. According to Scot, some individuals used it wilfully to harm others in various ways and added magical rituals either because they believed that these actually worked or to

25 Scot 5
27 The term legerdemain includes among other things, tricks, illusions and juggling.
make it appear so. To achieve their goals they often employed various kinds of poisons, used parts of corpses etc.

The next and last of the categories of people running the risk of being labelled as witches, and which was undoubtedly the most common, was that of the totally innocent who had never dealt with magic or even pretended to use it. These were poor people, who often had to beg for food, relying on neighbours and friends to survive. However, it is not surprising that they sometimes grew angry with people who refused to help them, and when they walked away muttering, this was sometimes interpreted as though they were issuing curses. There was also a general belief in the evil eye, the evil hand etc. which meant that although the person who had such powers was acting in a kind manner, their “ability” could still be active, and thus, their victims could still be cursed. On several occasions, these factors accounted for many of the accusations as poor people tended to be viewed as acting cantankerously by others, when denied their basic needs.

3.3 WITCHES IN SALEM

In Salem the poor people were the first to be accused. Tituba, a slave, was first accused and confessed to having signed a contract with the Devil, and also pointed out some other women as being her fellow witches. In reality she was beaten and threatened by Samuel Parris to confess this. In The Crucible she is likewise threatened to be beaten by Parris who is supported by Putnam. The women she pointed out as being witches, were Sarah Good and Sarah Osborn, both of them poor women. This is the case both in reality and the play. What is interesting to notice is that when the girls began to accuse rich influential people the witch hunts came to a halt, and soon ceased altogether. In the case of Salem, the accusation which would come to change Governor William Phips’ mind was when his own wife was accused of being a witch. He then gave the directive that no more persons should be arrested on the assumption that they were witches, and it was not long before the trials ended altogether. Miller states that “the congregations did rescind the excommunications [due to confessing to witchcraft], in March 1712. But they did so upon the orders of the government. The jury, however, wrote a statement praying forgiveness of all who had suffered.”

commentary, Echoes Down the Corridor). Concerning the percentage and number of victims who were executed in Salem, Thurston states that “[o]f the 19 convicted witches, 5 were males. Thus among those put to death at Salem, women comprised 70 per cent of the toll. Once again, the proportion approaches the 70-80 per cent proportion of the female victims traditionally given for the witch hunts as a whole.”

Historically, of these 19 victims, all were hanged, except one, Giles Corey. Miller writes about Corey in The Crucible. Giles’ case will be dealt with here, since it gives an insight into how a person’s own beliefs can withstand the most ardent persuasions, and even torture, if the person in question has come to the conclusion that there is more to be gained by not accepting the accusations. In The Crucible, the inquisitors misunderstand his statement that his wife is fond of reading:

GILES beginning to plead: They be tellin’ lies about my wife, sir, I —

....

GILES, beginning to weep: Your Excellency, I only said she were readin’ books, sir, and they come and take out of my house for —

DANFORTH, mystified: Books! What books?

GILES, through helpless sobs: It is my third wife, sir; I never had no wife that be so taken with books, and I thought I find the cause of it d’y’see, but it were no witch I blamed her for. (85-86)

Once again we can see the suspicion that the Puritans held for activities other than work and the matters of the Church, and this comes across very clearly in The Crucible. A contributing factor, is that Giles’ wife also does not want to reveal what books she is reading, and thus it is not strange that the inquisitors become suspicious of it.

When they later accuse Giles of being a witch, both in reality and in the play, he flatly refused to show up in court, because he knew that he would not receive a fair trial and that the verdict was already clear to the judges: guilty. Thus he was apprehended and brought into jail without having been tried first. They attempted to persuade him to confess to the charges through giving him only three mouthfuls of the worst bread imaginable to eat one day and only stale water to drink. This being given alternatively to him, either bread or water, but

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30 No page number is given for this page in The Crucible.
31 Thurston 117
not both on the same day. Still he refused to give in to them, and at last they tortured him by placing a board on his bare chest and putting him under pressure by adding more and more heavy stones upon the board. This was done in order to make him confess that he was a witch, but he refused to do so, not saying a word until the end. Then, when they leaned down to hear what he said, thinking that he wanted to confess at last, he just said: “More weight.” (135). When the extra weight had been added he was finally crushed underneath the heavy load, without confessing to the accusation. This also seems to be the most widely known and commonly accepted account of what took place.

The punishment in England at this time, and thus naturally in New England too, for “standing mute”, was death by being crushed. However this is the only instance in New England where this penalty was employed. It was necessary for the interrogators to get a confession, otherwise the Crown or the provincial government could not confiscate the property. Most people knowing about this rule thought or think that Corey did this to avoid this outcome. However before this happened he had already executed a deed to his sons-in-law. What is more, he was also followed by civil and criminal charges most of his life as is also explained by Miller. (40). All the same, he was never convicted for anything. Whether these charges were true or not will not be discussed here, but whatever his reason for keeping quiet, he kept his silence until he died. In The Crucible, Giles exclaims that he has been “in court thirty-three times and always as plaintiff too” (95). Nevertheless, in adding this statement, Miller lets the reader get the idea that Giles’ is a completely righteous person, who has done nothing wrong in his life which could be accounted for in court. The outcome is still the same and he dies without saying a word that would have convicted him of witchcraft. Only a few people in England had been able to do the same as he did.

It was not only humans who were suspected and in some cases executed in this witch hysteria; two dogs were also hung by their necks, after one of the girls claimed they were the Devil’s disciples and had given her the evil eye. One can obviously claim that the witch hunts and accusations had escalated beyond control. “Furthermore, which is important to mention here, all people who were accused, convicted and/or executed during the witch trials in Salem, were not only from Salem, but from neighboring villages and towns too. Of the 134

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33 Cory
34 Cory
35 Cory
36 Cory
persons who were accused, only 10 lived in Salem. That the event has become known as the Salem Witch Trials is because the trials and jail were situated in Salem.”

This matter is only touched in *The Crucible*, but in the middle of the last act, we see proof that other towns are beginning to protest against the witch hunts. This can be seen when Parris is talking to Danforth, and mentions that there has been a rebellion in Andover. The inhabitants there have “thrown out” the court. On the same occasion he states that Abigail has run away. Parris fears that there will be a riot in Salem too (127). Therefore, it can be noticed that the court are now convicting and sentencing to death individuals of a more prominent status than before, an activity which is causing people to react more severely. It is no longer only those who are deemed as outcasts who are accused.

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37 Cory
4. THE CHURCH AND ITS MINISTERS

The previous chapters have discussed the phenomena of witchcraft and described those individuals who risked getting accused of this crime. This chapter will continue by looking closer at the actions of the Church, and its ministers and link them with The Crucible. These institutions and their representatives had an important role in the society of the time. What views and ideas on the issue of witches did they harbour? They were keen on bringing forth the matter of witchcraft, as this was a common belief amongst the people, and by including it in sermons and masses, they used it to ensure that the people stayed true to the Christian faith. This belief is also clearly shown in Malleus Maleficarum. The authors of this text, Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, were ambitious and clever men of their time, who rose high in the hierarchy of their respective Church orders. Malleus Maleficarum is commonly known as “the Hammer of Witches” as its name is in English, and was second only to the Bible as the most read book of the time. It dealt with the issue of witches and discussed how people were to recognise them and their deeds, how they should be brought to confess and what their punishments ought to be. It was originally written in Latin, but was later translated into other languages, such as English, and German. Compared to other works of today it can be said to equal Mein Kampf, in its topic, due to the similarity in attacking and pointing out certain groups as being harmful and dangerous to others and society in general. Furthermore, it discusses the matter from one point of view only, and argues that whatever else is being said is a lie, and that everything not within the faith of the Church is evil, as the Devil must be involved in it in one way or another. In other words, what is outside the faith is thereby always evil, but to varying degrees depending on the purpose with which the action was intended. Needless to say, the text is thus filled with prejudice, misogyny etc. In its time, it acted as a handbook for witch hunters, and its contents were widely taken as being the absolute truth. It was an important book at the beginning of the massive witch hunts which occurred in Europe and one which fanned the flames, so to speak, adding to the common hysteria. The situation in Salem, although historically late in comparison to the European witch hunts was no exception to the rule.

Although this book is not mentioned in The Crucible, there is evidence that the ministers working in Salem certainly did know about the witch hunts and trials in Europe and naturally there were people trying to profit out of this situation. Some ideas, which are dramatized in The Crucible, can also be suspected of having been influenced by this book. One example is
how the accused individuals are treated when they attempt to defend themselves, both in how they assume things about the accused and the way questions are asked. The latter are formed in such a way, that the suspicions will be confirmed.

One instance of this is when Proctor is asked to say the Commandments, and he gets stuck on the last one. Although this does not directly prove his guilt it is seen as curious. Another event is when his wife Elizabeth is assumed to have used a needle and a poppet in order to torture Abigail, when in fact she has received this poppet as a gift from Mary Warren and has no knowledge at all about the needle which is stuck into it. Yet a third example is when they directly assume that the books Martha reads are evil, because she has kept them hidden. As Giles states when he tells Hale why they have imprisoned his wife Martha: “I never said my wife were [sic] a witch, Mr. Hale; I only said she were [sic] reading books!” (71) Since the Puritans did not promote any leisure activities, it is not hard to figure out why she hides the books and refuses to talk about them.

As can be clearly seen in the case of Salem, there are two main reasons why the witch hunt was spurred on by the holy men of the Church; namely greed, and ardent religious belief in the will of the Christian God. Let us continue with looking closer at those individuals, who, in *The Crucible*, can be said to display these different traits.

4.1 SAMUEL PARRIS

Regarding greed, the most striking example of such a character is Samuel Parris, who appears to want the best for his parishioners but in reality merely desires more wealth for himself, since he is used to having a higher standard of living than what is available to him in Salem. This becomes evident, when Proctor is engaged in a discussion with the Reverend John Hale:

HALE: Mr. Proctor, your house is not a Church; your theology must tell you that.

PROCTOR: It does, sir, it does; and it tells me that a minister may pray to God without he have [sic] golden candlesticks upon the altar.

….Since we built this Church this Church there were pewter candlesticks upon the altar….But Parris came, and for twenty week [sic] he preach [sic] nothin’ but golden candlesticks until he had them….I think, sometimes, the man dreams cathedrals, not clapboard meetin’ houses.” (65)
Here it is plain what Parris is really after, and using religion as a cover he strives to get it, at the cost of others’ labour. This is a very convenient way for a person not used or not willing to make any hard physical work to achieve success. One can also see that he is used to higher standards since he historically brought two Indians (as slaves) with him when he moved to Salem with his daughter. However, only his slave woman is mentioned in *The Crucible* and her name is Tituba. She plays an important role in the beginning of the witch hunt.

Samuel Parris began suspecting that there were witches labouring in the village, after his daughter Betty was struck with a curious disease both in reality and in the play. *The Crucible* states that this happens after she and her cousin have been engaged in a black magic ritual, together with Tituba, in a clearing in the woods. Historically, this took place after they had attempted to find out the future husbands of the girls through using a raw egg in a glass of water, thus creating a primitive scrying ball. The pattern which then appears is supposed to reveal the face of the man who the girl is going to marry. However, something went wrong, (most probably because they knew this was forbidden and felt guilt for doing it) and suddenly Betty believed that she saw a coffin instead, and was terribly afraid that this meant that she was going to die soon.38 That Arthur Miller altered this in his book does not matter, since the outcome is the same.

There is no doubt that Parris knew how witchcraft worked since he lived in a time where it was common knowledge that the many learned men of the Church had studied and commented on this matter. Most, if not all ministers, had become aware of these studies in order to enlighten themselves, as they were always on watch for potential dangers to the Church and God. Otherwise, they believed that evil forces could overthrow the Church and condemn all people to Hell. Whether or not Samuel Parris believed in witches and their powers himself, or just used them as a sort of scapegoat to reach his own goals will be left open to discussion, but regardless of what he believed, he nevertheless came to use the belief for his own purposes.39 Thurston has stated that:

Parris had tried his luck at business several times but had repeatedly failed. He was a bitter man who saw enemies in all who seemed to thwart his economic advancement. Probably because of his own sense of failure and conspiracies against him, he stressed that the colony and the village in particular was under attack by evil forces. In December 1689 Parris was regularly mentioning the devil and witches in his

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sermons, a common theme in the contemporary Massachusetts Churches. Given the broader difficulties of the colony at this time, surely many of his parishioners were receptive to the message.40

Thurston here clearly shows what kind of a man Samuel Parris really was, and the same qualities are also hinted at by Miller too, in the discussion between Reverend Hale and Proctor. *The Crucible* gives an interesting and highly probable account of what occurred. It comes as no surprise that his own daughter should react the way she does, since she and the others have done something that was not looked kindly upon by her father. Thus, she may act possessed in order to escape his being angry with her, and also to escape the everyday life in the colony. It may also be that the ideas permeating the society were causing a psychosomatic reaction which is triggered by certain events and that she really thinks she is seeing what is not there. Nevertheless, by doing this she most probably also discovers a way to become important and thus get attention, along with the other girls who are involved in pointing out witches. Given what is known about Parris, another highly probable reason for her behaviour is that her father, Samuel, very likely takes advantage of the fact that he had a child. Hence one can suspect that he persuades her to act in this way, in order to encourage the situation and thus improve his own prospects of achieving his own goals. In other witch trials in Europe – which Parris must have known about as he originally came from England – there had been children involved in discovering and revealing witches among them. In *The Crucible* Parris also shows that he is aware that the accusations are a pretense, in that he attempts to convince the court that Mary Warren is lying when she tries to tell the truth about the supposed witches:

PARRIS: Then you will confess, will you not? It were attacking spirits that made you faint!

MARY WARREN: No sir, I —

PARRIS: Your Excellency, this is a trick to blind the court!

HATHORNE: How could you think you saw them unless you saw them?

MARY WARREN: I — I cannot tell you how, but I did. I — I heard the other girls screaming, and you, Your Honor, you seemed to believe them, and I — It was sport in the beginning, sir, but then the whole

40 Thurston 118
Regardless of whether he was aware of her behaviour or not he must have become very worried when his daughter was struck down by illness. Considering the general belief in witchcraft it is no surprise that he would jump to the conclusion that it was the work of dark powers, since no normal cause was to be found. However this may be, he certainly was one of the major driving forces behind the prosecutions, which took place in the colony, and he also tried to get the judges to believe that the accusations were true, both in the *The Crucible* and in reality.

### 4.2 The Reverend John Hale

The second most important person, concerning the ecclesiastics, is the Reverend John Hale, or Reverend Hale, as he is called by the others. Like Parris, he was a man of the Church, and similarly, an outsider to the people of Salem both in *The Crucible* and historically. He was summoned there as no one in the neighbourhood was well versed in exorcism and demonology, that is, to judge whether or not witchcraft was actually alive in Salem. This is the second essential ingredient to make a witch hunt possible, because without a man of Hale’s position it would have been impossible, as he claimed to be an expert of witchcraft. Although Parris did what he could to set the stage for such an event, he would not have been able to make it happen without Hale. The latter was a middle-aged man and had also participated in former witch trials and examinations of accused persons in the past. John Hale was also a steadfast believer in witchcraft, and started to doubt its existence only when his own wife happened to come under the suspicion of being a witch. He had written a book in which, although not apologizing for what he had done, he nevertheless gives an explanation why these events came to happen. This book is called *A Modest Inquiry Into the Nature of Witchcraft*.\(^{41}\) According to George Lincoln Burr who also includes Mr. Hale’s work in the book *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases, 1648-1706*,\(^{42}\) of which he is editor, this is a very rare book which has only been published twice, once in 1702 and then in 1717, and the latter is even rarer than the first edition. Burr does not give any explanation regarding why its

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availability was so limited, but one can suppose that during this time in history it was not very popular to harbour the belief that the idea of witches was not true.

In *The Crucible* John Hale is described as a strict but kind middle-aged man, who firmly believes in the existence of witchcraft and does what he does solely for his strong faith, and therefore has no ulterior motives. Like the rest of his fellow believers he has engaged in this issue due to his belief that if they did not do all they could to defend the Christian faith, Satan would take over the world. This makes him accept the invitation to Salem. He is also one of the persons who start doubting the veracity of what is happening. In reality this takes place before his book mentioned above was written, but in *The Crucible* we can also see that he does not consider things to be true just because someone refers to an event which has taken place. Historically, since he wrote a book concerning this and other matters dealing with the issue of witchcraft, there is no doubt that he was quite capable of drawing his own conclusions and sticking to them, once he had made up his mind.

Miller has not omitted this trait in *The Crucible*, and thus portrays Hale as a zealous but fair man. The turn the events take makes him more and more doubtful whether or not witchcraft exists and he finally changes his mind. John Hale then tries to redeem himself by attempting to help those imprisoned for witchcraft. These events were also what made him begin to question the whole matter and caused him to change his opinions about it. Sadly in reality, Hale came to this conclusion only when his own wife was accused.

### 4.3 Governor William Phips

Although Phips is not mentioned in *The Crucible*, he nevertheless must be mentioned here since he was the man who was put in charge of the court. Sir William Phips was born on February 2, 1651 in contemporary Maine. His name was originally spelled Phipps.43 Of the persons mentioned hitherto, he was one who had a crucial role in the ending of the Salem witch trials. Furthermore, he was the man who was responsible for the Court of Oyer and Terminer, which was where the accused people were brought to face trial and sentence from the judges.

That Phips came to Salem was due to the fact that the former governor had been removed from his office in a bloodless demonstration and, thanks to the influence Increase Mather

had.\textsuperscript{44} Phips thus became the new governor. When Phips came to Salem the witch hunts had already caused many people to be thrown in jail awaiting their trials. Hence Phips was immediately faced with overcrowded jails and was forced to do something to take control of the situation. He then formed the Court of Oyer and Terminer mentioned above, and its name alluded to its purpose: “The archaic name meant that it was to hear and determine cases.”\textsuperscript{45} This court was unusual in its constitution, because its members “were drawn from the governor’s advisory council, and its chief justice was William Strroughton, the lieutenant governor. This body was highly unusual in its assignment and composition. Unlike the courts that had previously handled witchcraft cases in New England, it was supervised only by the governor, not by any superior magistrates.”\textsuperscript{46}

Due to the wars that raged during that particular time Phips had to leave Salem for a period, hence leaving the court without any supervision at all. This is the time period which Miller writes about in \textit{The Crucible}. When Phips finally came back, the situation was out of control, which can clearly be seen in Miller’s play. Therefore, he first banned the usage of spectral evidence, which by its very nature was impossible to validate.\textsuperscript{47} Soon after, he also prohibited the arresting of supposed witches, and went on to release 49 of the 52 persons still in prison. In doing this, he also shut down the court he had founded and hence also took away the means of continuing the witch hunt.

William Phips believed in witchcraft until he found that he could not hold on to that belief when his wife was accused of the same. It was also at this time that he ordered the trials to end.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{44} Mather’s was a Puritan clergyman who had a large influence in what occurred in the colony, among other things.
\textsuperscript{45} Thurston 120
\textsuperscript{46} Thurston 120
\textsuperscript{47} Spectral evidence meant that the accuser used to claim that the accused person attacked him or her in spiritual shape, and this spirit form was usually set free when the accused person was asleep, but sometimes also when they were awake.
\textsuperscript{48} “Phips, Sir William”
5. SECULAR INTERESTS

Naturally there were other interests involved than just the ecclesiastical ones. Some interests that will be dealt with in this chapter are those of the judges in the Court of Oyer and Terminer, the girls who made the initial accusations, and the neighbours in Salem. These, as will be shown; were prone to accept and believe in the charges they were dealing with, and without this willingness, there would not have been any executions, since, in that case they would not have sentenced anyone to death. This is also an essential part of the witch trials. Besides this fact there was also an “absence of review and appeals courts that oversaw the work of the original tribunals.” This was the case in Salem, especially since the governor had to leave on other businesses for a while, leaving the court without any supervision whatsoever.

5.1 JUDGES

What is particularly interesting concerning the five judges sitting in the Court of Oyer and Terminer, is that they all were prominent persons in the colony, but nevertheless lacked judicial education. This was very unusual since the common practice at the time was to have persons who were well versed in law and order, that is, such persons who had judicial education. Miller lets these five judges be represented by Judge Hathorne and Deputy Governor Danforth. Judge Stroughton and Judge Sewall – two of the other judges in Salem who have no active role in *The Crucible* – are only mentioned incidentally by Danforth, when he tells Herrick to go to the court and bid them take a recess, as he means to hear the evidence which he wants Proctor to lay forth. Miller also gives a description of Hathorne and Danforth. The former is portrayed as “in his sixties, a bitter, remorseless Salem judge” (85), while the latter is “in his sixties [too], of some humor and sophistication that does not however, interfere with an exact loyalty to his position and his cause” (85). Miller has here created the essence of how the judges most probably were, as they took their offices most seriously.

Even though there were claims that the accused had been to Sabbath and had met the Devil there, had intercourse with him and other devils, ate human flesh and made magic concoctions on parts on babies’ bodies, this was rarely considered in the court in Salem.

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49 Thurston 169
50 *Sabbath* in this context is another term for the gathering of witches.
Instead the defendants were convicted on claims by others that they had used magic to harm them or their animals in some evil way. This is also the case in *The Crucible*, where people are accusing others of harming them in various ways, although no animals are mentioned. An example of this is when Mrs Putnam is quick to support Tituba’s forced confession that Sarah Osborn appeared with the Devil. Mrs. Putnam than recalls that Osborn has thrice been her midwife and in all of the occasions, the babies have died (47). On this subject Thurston states:

> The Salem jury returned guilty verdicts on the basis of testimony given by local residents, especially the afflicted girls. Pacts with the devil played a relatively minor role in the trials; witnesses instead referred repeatedly to *maleficia*, including physical harm and killing of animals, adult persons and children. Fear of evil acts by witches was so great that a four-year-old girl, Dorcas Good, daughter of an accused woman, was held in chains in Boston for nine months. She was never the same again.\(^5\)

Miller’s text focuses on the jealousy, greed and animosity which exists between the neighbours Proctor and Abigail, and Parris’ attempt to gain wealth. These themes in the story interweave with each other and also lead to the accusations and sentences of those who are accused.

Historically speaking, the judges in Salem were also rather quick to sentence the accused to death, in comparison to other areas – for example in Boston. This is also clear from the way Danforth acts in *The Crucible*, and he also defends the existence of the court a few times throughout the story, and gets annoyed when individuals question his authority. For example, he gets angry with Herrick when the latter has allowed Hale to visit the prisoners, and equally, Danforth does not care when Parris tells him that Andover has experienced a riot and has cast out the court there. He appears to totally disregard the rumours about this matter. Overall, judges were mostly quite reluctant to discuss cases of witchcraft and when they did, they often took advantage of having the opportunity to change their verdict.\(^5\)

The verdicts in Salem differed also from the cases in Europe. In Europe, witches were burned or decapitated but in Salem, those who confessed to being witches were thought to have lost their magical powers and broken the assumed contract with the Father of Lies. Thus they had turned away from evil, and ceased to be dangerous to people and domesticated animals. However, if they did not confess, the accused were sentenced to death by hanging. That not all of them confessed in order to save their own lives, depended on their faith.

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\(^5\) Thurston 122
\(^5\) Thurston 119
Thurston tells us:

…in Massachusetts the judiciary did not aim to force defendants to confess…those who did were not executed. Apparently the Puritans thought that a confessing witch might be redeemed and returned to the community. But for the God-fearing member of the faith, it was often too much mental anguish to confess to abhorrent deeds in order to save one’s life. Surely God would punish those who lied by admitting to witchcraft, and the stigma of having acknowledged oneself a witch might never completely disappear.53

However, in one instance in The Crucible, Sarah Good is hanged, although she claims that the Devil is going to fetch her and Tituba. Historically, as well as in Miller’s story the first two individuals to be accused were Sarah Good and Sarah Osborn (second only to Tituba) and both of these women were poor individuals who had to rely on others in order to survive. Only Sarah Good plays a part in The Crucible, and although Miller created an intriguing story, one must doubt that she acted in this way in reality. The only scene Sarah Good is actively involved in, in the play, is when she and Tituba share a prison cell. This renders it impossible for the reader to know what has occurred before her imprisonment, save that she was mentioned by Tituba when the latter was forced to confess. Although the events taking place in the prison cell may be a somewhat false description, something like this could nevertheless have happened. The accusations and events had in any case gone too far and the verdict was already decided. Hence it was too late for the judges to recall their verdict without losing face. Regardless whether it was this way historically or not it really does not make sense in the rest of Miller’s play for them to suddenly deviate from their own ideas and therefore it is to be viewed as a discrepancy in his text. We will examine this matter more thoroughly to make clear that this is the case. In the play, when Herrick fetches Tituba and Sarah from the prison cell on order to place them in another, they both claim that they are waiting for the Devil to come for them and to take them to Barbados, Tituba’s native country. Sarah further states that he really is a nice man who dances etc, but that the climate in this northern location is too cold for him and freezes his soul (121f). These comments are most probably due to the interrogations and the fact that the imprisonment has broken her will to tell the truth. She might also have become convinced that what she says really is the truth.

In reality, an attempt was made to persuade accused persons to confess certain things, which the interrogators wanted to hear, and amongst other things the individual was allowed only to answer yes or no to the questions, which were formed as statements. These statements

53 Thurston 121f
were also put in such a fashion that whatever answer was given it would still have made the interrogated individual guilty of the assumed deeds. How this was done can be seen in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers (1648-1706)*, where Burr gives an account of how the examination of Sarah Good was undertaken. Furthermore this is also shown in *The Crucible* when Martha Corey is questioned by Hathorne, and he insists that she has done certain things which could be defined as witchcraft, and she defends herself denying that this is true. An example of this type of interrogation is when he says: “Why do you hurt these children?” and she replies: “I do not hurt them. I scorn it.” (84). Here we can see the actual technique in use, and Miller has here followed the actual protocol of the court proceedings which Burr related in his book.

The strange thing on this occasion is that according to Salem’s view of witchcraft and witches, individuals who confessed were allowed to live, while those who did not, were executed by hanging. In the case of Sarah Good, she was hanged, and this does not make sense in the play, since according to Miller, she obviously confessed to having dealt with the devil. For example, in *The Crucible*, Proctor refuses to sign a written confession, which states he is guilty of certain evil deeds, and because of his refusal he is hanged. If he is to be hanged for not admitting to witchcraft, then Sarah Good would have been released, and vice versa.

Tituba, too, was in reality, as well as in the text, accused and put in prison, but later set free since it became clear that she had been forced by Parris to admit to the accusations against her. Miller gives an account of this situation as though she really is guilty, although he also let the reader know about the forced confession, but this is only to create an intriguing story. Tituba’s case may also be similar to that of Sarah Good in that she has found it easier to confess than to deny the accusations. Although Miller slightly alters this, he nonetheless does not state that Tituba is hanged. He simply omits telling what happens to her, after her change of prison cell. Both in the play and historically, all but one of the people executed in the witch hunts in Salem, save the ones who died in prison, were hanged.

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5.2 THE ACCUSATIONS OF THE GIRLS

As is described in *The Crucible*, the girls who utter the accusations in Salem have an important role in what subsequently occurs. Even if they cannot be said to be completely liable for the witch hunts, they nevertheless add to the hysteria which permeates the small community. Arthur Miller names five of the twelve girls involved in the accusations; however, as with the number of judges, their number is unimportant as Miller also points out, since they all behaved in a similar fashion in regard to this matter. As stated above, the Puritans did not allow children to behave as children normally do, but believed that they were miniature versions of adults, and were thus expected to act that way. Furthermore, they were told not to look into the eyes of people they spoke to, not play or dance, as this was thought to be vain entertainment, and they were also to dress in a certain manner. Naturally this was hard on the children, and therefore it is no surprise that the girls acted in the way they did. There is nothing mentioned about the situation for boys in Salem, but presumably they had more freedom. There is historical evidence\(^{55}\) that the girls began to take an interest in occult knowledge, something which they also experimented with to some extent. Miller reveals this in his own way, in a discussion the girls have after they have been discovered in the clearing in the woods, together with Tituba.

ABIGAIL:…Listen now, if they be questioning us, tell them we danced — I’ve told them as much already.

MERCY: Aye. And what more?

ABIGAIL: He knows Tituba conjured your sister to come out of the grave.

MARY WARREN: What’ll we do? The village is out! I just come from the farm; the whole country’s talkin’ witchcraft! They’ll be callin’ us witches, Abby!

Abby, we’ve got to tell. Witchery is a hangin’ error, a hangin’ like they done in Boston two years ago! We must tell the truth, Abby! You’ll only get whipped for dancin’, and the other things. (18-19)

\(^{55}\) Thibeault
We see proof here that the girls know they have done something, which is not tolerated by the society they live in, and are trying to come up with means of avoiding being punished for it. By admitting to a part of it, but not everything, they hope to escape reprimands. Already, Abigail can be seen taking the leading role in what is to happen, because, as the others act nervously and afraid, she remains calm and exercises rational thinking. It is thus no surprise that she would not change her mind, even when she realizes that others would suffer and even die, because of her and the other girls’ actions. It is also obvious that she is the one who keeps the group together, and it is she who comes up with the idea of accusing other people.

According to Miller’s version of the witch hunt in Salem it is Abigail who is the leader in this respect. The reason why she this is so, because she has had an affair with John Proctor and wants him for herself.

Tituba became involved in these activities, in reality as well as in The Crucible, because she was from the West Indies and was knowledgeable about the Voodoo culture, and she knew things which in the Puritan society were considered as being the Devil’s work. When the girls were finally discovered, Tituba was naturally the first to be accused, both in Miller’s account of the events in Salem and historically, since she was an easy scapegoat, being both a slave and from another culture. Moreover, when they were discovered, they could not continue with their interests without being seen as heretics or suchlike, which in turn would be devastating for them. Hence, in order to turn any suspicion from themselves, a logical strategy for the girls was to start accusing people of being witches. This was also a way of making themselves seen and heard, a great change from being almost or completely neglected in the puritan society.

However, there is another explanation for their behaviour in The Crucible, mainly Abigail’s jealousy of Proctor’s wife, and her desire to get rid of her in order to be able to be with John Proctor herself. This is clearly mentioned in the beginning of the story, when the girls speak about what to do, and Betty exclaims: “You drank a charm to kill John Proctor’s wife! You drank a charm to kill Goody Proctor!” (19). The others girls, on the other hand, only seem to keep this up because of fear of being exposed and there is also the additional fact that suddenly they had an opportunity to be noticed, and not be restricted by their normal social norms. That is, (in The Crucible) with the exception of Ruth Putnam, a daughter of the Putnam family who is to be one among the more prominent families who accused people of dealing with witchcraft. According to The Crucible, Ruth has joined the other girls because her mother Ann wants her to find out whether Ruth’s sisters died due to witchcraft.
To accuse people is also a convenient way to get rid of persons that they do not like. This was also the case in reality. Moreover the affair between John Proctor and Abigail Williams is most certainly an addition by Arthur Miller, since historically Abigail was only eleven years old at the time and Proctor about 50. In the play Miller has altered their age, and Abigail is 17, while Proctor is in his mid-thirties. However, Miller attempted to add yet another dimension to his play, and it operates as another reason for why people started accusing others.

Another aspect, which certainly contributed to the hysteria to a large extent, was, and is in the text, that the atmosphere at the time in this community was very tense due to the wars raging in its vicinity. This also comes through in a threat Abigail uses to get the other girls to keep quiet and stay united:

…And Tituba conjured Ruth Putnam’s dead sisters. And that is all. And mark this. Let either of you breath a word…about the other things, and I will come to you in the black of some terrible night and I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you. And you know I can do it; I saw Indians smash my dear parents’ heads on the pillow next to mine, and I have seen some reddish work done at night, and I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down! (20)

Here we can also see that she attempts to control the situation so that she, and indirectly the other girls, will not have to face the responsibility of their actions. Naturally she does not want everyone to know that she wanted Tituba to help her to deal with Elizabeth, Proctor’s wife, through casting an evil charm on her (which included drinking chicken blood). This she did in order to get John Proctor for herself. This would not improve her situation, and she undoubtedly would also be punished most severely for this. Other people in Salem would not be so easy to deal with as her comrades were in such a situation, and she most probably would be found guilty of witchcraft and perhaps hanged.

Furthermore, historically it was also unusual to listen to children’s testimonies in court and consider them as true. There have been many attempts to discover and explain why the girls acted in this way historically, and the one that seems most reasonable is the one discussed above. Other less probable explanations, but none the less worth mentioning, are the prevalence of mental disorders and fungus in the rye-crops which gave an effect similar to LSD, and epilepsy.

The first of these probable explanations, that is, mental disorder, is possible, but not very believable when seen in a larger context, since many other inhabitants of Salem would not

56 Thurston 121
have given this explanation much credit simply due to the testimony of only one or two girls. Most likely, the girls would have appeared disillusioned and behaved strangely in other contexts too, not only when seen in terms of witchcraft and malevolent persons and actions. However, they could have been influenced by the beliefs of that time, since there was a widespread belief in witches and the Devil.

The second of these explanations, that fungus in the rye-crops would have caused these “symptoms”, whether real or imagined, could explain partly what happened, but not completely, as the situation was very complex. Moreover, this explanation does not give a satisfactorily answer, since there is no evidence at all that the effects of such a poison should have been the case in Salem, nor elsewhere.\(^{57}\) A person who has taken drugs, or fungus as in this case, which causes hallucinations can very likely experience the things these girls claimed to have been victims of. However, “[the poisoning of the fungus ergot], is often accompanied by gangrene, convulsions and agonizing death.”\(^{58}\) Regarding the hallucinations it could be a probable explanations, but not when considering the rest of the symptoms. In the unlikely event that there was ergot involved in the events, the fact that they were young, especially Betty and Abigail, for example, would suggest that they were most probably also more susceptible to the hallucinatory effects of the fungus. That so many others began talking about witches and dark powers in this scenario, was due to mass psychoses, which is entirely possible regarding the other troubles in the community at that time. Thus, this may also have been a probable factor which contributed to the hysteria which seized the area, and held it spellbound for a period.

In *The Crucible* we also get a great insight into the mindsets of the girls, and that they were all but unanimous in their reasons for the accusations, and that not all of them were so adamant in their belief concerning witches. That the other girls accept Abigail as their leader is also evident when Mary Warren has been persuaded by Proctor to tell the truth, that is, that they are all imagining the whole thing. Parris also commands her to show the judges that she fainted on purpose, when people thought that evil spirits attacked her. She is also urged by Proctor to do so. When Mary tries to explain the truth of the matter, the other girls, led by Abigail, start to imitate her, claiming she has bewitched them and that she is a witch, as is shown in this quotation:

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\(^{57}\) Thurston 174  
\(^{58}\) Thurston 174
DANFORTH: …Is it possible, child, that the spirits you have seen are illusion only, some deception that may have crossed your mind when —

ABIGAIL: Why, this — this — is a base question, sir.

DANFORTH: Child, I would have you consider it —

ABIGAIL: I have been hurt, Mr. Danforth….To be mistrusted, denied, questioned like a —

…

ABIGAIL, in an open threat:….There is — suddenly, from an accusatory attitude, her face turns, looking into the air above — it is truly frightened.

…

…a wind , a cold wind has come. Her eyes falls on Mary Warren. (108)

Mary Warren becomes terrified and Proctor attempts to intervene by saying that they are only pretending, but Abigail’s charade is very convincing as she continues by accusing Mary of sending her shadow to attack her. This causes Danforth to be more convinced that what Abigail says is true. Here we see a case of what was earlier described as spectral evidence.

However, it appears as though Abigail is either finally stricken by her conscience, or maybe only trying to escape judgment, because as Miller tells us in “Echoes Down the Corridor”, in the end of The Crucible, she escaped and appeared again in New Orleans, making her living as a prostitute.

5.3. Neighbours

In the same ways that there are only a number of girls involved in witchcraft, the neighbours are equally reduced to a few key persons. Miller still manages to create a sense of how it must have been in Salem at the particular time, and captures the essence of the accusations. Although it is not stated clearly in The Crucible, most of the accusers came from Salem Village, situated on the coast. Without the animosity between the neighbours it would not have been able to start a witch hunt, since of necessity, there have to be people accusing each other in order to keep the process alive.59

Among such people were the Putnams, an influential family in the community, who were strict Puritans, and thought that the inhabitants in Salem Town were drifting away from the

59 Thurston 169
religious life. As mentioned above, in The Crucible the Putnams also take advantage of Tituba’s knowledge (which in reality was viewed as suspect in the eyes of the Puritans) to find out whether Ruth’s sisters have died due to witchcraft and not of natural causes. Thus it makes perfect sense that these individuals are very eager to keep accusing others, in order to make themselves appear innocent. Historically, they were also hardworking farmers who owned most of the land in Salem Village. They were among those who wanted to separate Salem Village from Salem Town since they thought the townspeople had become too individualistic and capitalistic. Moreover, they were among those who helped Parris in his demands to get more wages, in order to obtain a better life. Thus, this division suited them very well and through the witch hunt they could attack their adversaries. When looking at the map of where the accusers and the accused lived in the community, it can plainly be seen that the accused were situated mostly to the middle of the map, in the outskirts of the village and towards Salem Town on the other side of Ipswitch Road (see Appendix). Other people in the village also seized the same opportunity to accuse, and one can also assume that with the uncertain and hard times they lived in, this came about due to a will to keep the community united. This being the case, they simply could not allow some people to be too individualistic, and certainly could not allow them to drift away from the Christian faith which was the strongest unifying factor between them, and which they also felt separated them from the savage and pagan surroundings. Considering this, it is not difficult to see that the fear of things they did not understand and their cultural beliefs fuelled the idea that “The Evil One” with a force of demons was leading a charge on their community, and that it was a punishment from God for not living as they should. The Putnams are used by Miller as a typical example of what kind of motives there are behind the accusations and this example also give an insight into why the accused are on one side of the community and the accusers on the other, and why these two groups are quite clearly defined on the map.

However, even if a person joined the accusers and pointed out someone as a witch, these people were not safe from being seen as witches themselves. They may have been somewhat more secure, but this security was a very vague and illusive one, since it only lasted as long as they harboured the same belief as the rest of the group. Moreover, if they began to doubt the sincerity of the accusations, they could easily be seen as witches and evil-doers themselves, as if the witches had won them over on their side etc.

Two persons in The Crucible who are typically just doing what they are told, without any critical awareness, are Marshal Herrick and his deputy Ezekiel Cheever. These two are in charge of going around Salem and arresting those individuals who, when it is decided, will be
taken into custody while waiting to be tried before the judges in the Court of Oyer and Terminer. An example of this is when they come to fetch Elizabeth Proctor. When John Proctor states that he wants Cheever to fetch Mary in order to ask her about the poppet which Mary has given Elizabeth as a gift, Cheever then says that he cannot leave Elizabeth out of sight, as he is forbidden to do so. The same thing occurs with Marshal Herrick, when he explains to Proctor: “I have nine men outside. You cannot keep her. The law binds me, John, I cannot budge” (77).

Both of these men of the law either do not dare to think for themselves or they may also be convinced that Elizabeth, in this case, really is a witch. By the way they are portrayed in The Crucible, one gets the impression that it is the first alternative; that is, they dare not question their orders and disregard the law in this case. Given the circumstances, this would otherwise not have been so strange, since the readers have also been told earlier that Proctor and Cheever know each other quite well. There are a few other examples which reveal the mindset of Herrick, and show that he is also relying on higher authorities to tell him what to do. It could be that he does so out of fear. At one point, when he and Cheever fetch Elizabeth to take her into custody and Proctor attempts to stop him from chaining her: “In God’s name, John, I cannot help myself. I must chain them all” (78). It can thus be seen as an example of how easily people can be persuaded to hand moral responsibility over to others, in this case to the Deputy Governor Danforth. This they choose to do consciously or unconsciously, instead of listening to their own conscience, and do what they believe is right. One more possibility is that they use their superiors as scapegoats in order to be able to do what they want themselves, although they do not want to let it be known. By hiding behind the orders of a higher authority, they can do what they want, without having to be personally responsible for their actions. Yet another example is when Herrick has allowed Hale to meet the prisoners and is asked by Danforth for an explanation, and he answers that Parris had allowed Hale to do so, and he could not oppose Parris in this matter.

People who stood up for their beliefs and refused to believe that there were witches, were often also much likely to be accused of being witches themselves. This is a contributing factor regarding why so many of the inhabitants of Salem either kept quiet or accused someone, even if they thought it wrong to do so and would not have done it had they themselves not been afraid. This is not a single isolated event in history, but one which has been repeated at various times and situations. Proctor, who is one of the few individuals in The Crucible, who dares to speak up against the accusations, exclaims at one point concerning his wife:
If she is innocent! Why do you never wonder if Parris be innocent, or Abigail? Is the accuser always holy now? Were they born this morning as clean as God’s finger? I’ll tell you what’s walking Salem — vengeance is walking Salem. We are what we are in Salem, but now the little crazy children are jangling the keys of the kingdom, and common vengeance writes the law! This warrant’s vengeance! I’ll not give my wife to vengeance! (77)

Here we can see that John Proctor is very clear-sighted. He does not accept the claims that there is any witchcraft in Salem, and neither is he afraid to speak his mind about the matter. In The Crucible, he seems to be the foremost individual who recognizes this (and dares to say so openly), during the hunts and imprisonments of the accused. Even later when people are found guilty and are being executed, he still sticks to his beliefs. He also steadfastly refuses to sign a confession where he admits to being a witch himself. This he does in order to deny the judges and the accusers the use of his name when attempting to make others confess (141).

The readers also find that he is the one who, despite his affair with Abigail before the story begins, is one of the strongest voices of reason in all this madness that is stirred up during this period.
6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this essay has been to find out the reasons for the witch hunts in Salem as reflected in *The Crucible*, and who the people accused of being witches were. Who were the ones who accused them and what motives were there? Furthermore, how could this happen? This could not have been done thoroughly if disregarding whether or not there was any truth behind the stories and claims of magic and witchcraft, since it is also essential in giving a true account of the subject in question. The entire matter is permeated by the beliefs of the era in which these events occurred. Without taking these into consideration a research in this subject would be quite pointless. Clearly the motives behind the witch hunts had mostly completely different reasons for accusing and executing those labelled as witches. A majority of these reasons had nothing whatsoever to do in reality with black magic and witchcraft. In order not to get lost in this vast subject, the choice has been to focus on one special occasion. One witch hunt that is very well known is the one taking place in Salem in 1692 and therefore it was interesting to see how it is depicted in Miller’s story *The Crucible*. Although the Salem Witch Hunt happened late in the witch hunt period (also commonly known as The Burning Times), it has taken a front position and has as such been much debated.

To understand the matter, it has been necessary to see what background Salem had and also to find out what background the people inhabiting the colony had. Important was also to look at the role religion played in the lives of these people as it influenced their daily lives immensely.

In chapter 2 the background to the events in Salem is presented. Here it is plain that Salem’s background was all but peaceful; wars were fought between the settlers and the Native American tribes in the area, and people in Salem have also been raided at times. The dark forests that loomed nearby and surrounded the town and village parts of Salem were therefore a source for the paranoia which seize the inhabitants. This made them more suspicious of people who did not act the way they were supposed to do. The paranoia also clearly shines through in Miller’s story and it is plain that this also has an important role in the events. The Puritans had accordingly very strict views about what was fitting and appropriate too. Furthermore, the inhabitants were also divided into two geographical, but also religious, fractions and this seems to have played an essential role in the accusations. This can be seen in the two parts of village and town that Salem consisted of.
In chapter 3, the issue of witches in reality and whether there were magic abilities at all was raised. The origins of the idea of witchcraft are discussed, showing that there are different explanations for it. One view is that the word “witchcraft” is falsely translated to better fit the need at the time, and that it really meant “poisoner” instead of one inferring the use of witchcraft. Another view is that it would come from the Hebrew word meaning “praying to idols”. Furthermore, the chapter shows whom the people who were thought to be witches, were in reality and how they are depicted in myths and tales.

The common beliefs of people were a significant part of this picture, and although there were persons who made their living on helping people as wise men and women, with supposedly magical skills and knowledge, many of the ones accused were poor persons who were forced to beg in order to survive.

Others were such who did not quite fit into the society they lived in, and were thus seen as for example anomalies and/or heretics. There have been people who claimed to be skilled in magic and who made their living this way, and naturally there were those mentally ill who were convinced that they could do certain things by magical means.

The victims in Salem as described in *The Crucible* are innocent inhabitants who happens to draw attention to themselves in some way, and thus gaining the ill will of others. The possible exclusion from this is that Tituba practises some magic in the beginning of the story. However, this can be explained with her origin and she is definitely not a devil-worshipper or witch as the Puritans want to make it. It is also an example of how the Christians historically attempted to eradicate every threat to their life style, and how they looked within as well as without for these threats towards them.

Throughout the happenings in Salem, a few voices are raised against the madness and paranoia, and one man who stands out from the beginning is John Proctor, who, although he is not completely spotless himself, attempts to act reasonably and to end the accusations. In doing this he is himself condemned and hanged in the end, but he never turns away from what he thinks is right.

Another man who follows his own ideals is Giles Corey, who is also sentenced to death, because he tries to save his wife from being hanged as a witch. This shows that there are indeed people who manage to make up their own minds about the matter and that not all only follow blindly what others states is the right thing to do.

Chapter 4 continues with examining the ministers of the Church, in this case the Puritan, and how they act and historically acted in this situation, according to their own minds and religious perspective – or lack of it in some instances. The reader of *The Crucible* as well as a
student of the historical aspect will see that there are different motives that spur the various men of the Church. For example, we have Reverend Samuel Parris, who is more concerned with how he will be able to benefit and earn as much as he possibly can. He wants higher wages and he is also one who speaks very eagerly about the horrors of witchcraft during his sermons. This is a way for him to achieve his goals, and it has nothing to do with religious matters, which serves him only as a platform from which he can gain more wealth and comfort.

Another of the ministers of the Church is Reverend John Hale, who is the counterpart to Parris. Although Hale is summoned there to help in the witch hunts, since he is well versed in demonology and exorcism, he nevertheless starts to doubt the truth of the accusations, and ends up attempting to help those accused, working to put an end of the accusations and the death sentences of those regarded as guilty. He, too, is a man of the Puritan Church, but he is completely devoted to the religious aspect. Hence we see that not all ministers are greedy and selfish, but that some also tries to reconcile what they have done, in some way.

Chapter 5 deals with how secular interests played an important role in the witch hunts. First the role of the judges are examined and their views on the matter are compared to opinions and actions of judges in other countries. The judges in Salem are quite quick in comparison to other places to believe the accusations and every person who faces trial are condemned after being found guilty of charge. Interesting to notice is that they are not treated as in most other places. Instead, they can confess that they have been dealing with witchcraft and thereby their lives are spared. This was, historically, not at all the usual custom when dealing with alleged witches. In reality too, Salem was an exception to the general norm concerning this issue.

The girls whom start to accuse are also looked more closely upon, and their motives discussed from different angles. It is plain that in the beginning the accusations were meant to cover up their own deeds. Later, as well, they continue to accuse due to the fact that they suddenly become important and people pays attention to by “branding” others as witches. Thereby they changed their status in society. Tituba does show them what they view as magical skills, but this is done because the girls themselves are interested in the matter. Neither is it an unwanted issue for the girls until they are exposed by Parris, and have to blame Tituba in order to escape suspicion themselves.

This is then followed by an examination of the neighbours and what possible interest they can have in accusing persons whom they sometimes knew very well. Some historical aspects are looked upon as well, in order to compare the situation in The Crucible and make it
understandable. Especially when they knew what the outcome of their actions could be. Once again we see how personal affairs and greed come into the picture, and people accuse their neighbours in order to profit themselves.

As the reader has noticed, there are a few crucial ingredients that work together in bringing forth a witch hunt such as occurs in Salem. The four absolutely essential factors are: Firstly, the elite accepts the witch stereotype. Secondly, there must witch hunters who are willing to pursue this matter. Thirdly, there has to be tensions among the inhabitants of the place in question, and the people must be willing to accuse each other. Fourthly, and lastly, there has to be a readiness to accept the slightest rumour about witchcraft in order to proceed with it judicially.

Furthermore, there are three other events which also contribute to the rise of the witch hunts, but these are not vital to the process in question. The location on the periphery of a state (in this case England) is the first of these. The second is that the place is relatively tightly knit. Lastly, the inability to get the verdicts viewed and tried again, and no supervision of the existing courts contributed as well, to the situation at hand.

As we can see, all these factors are not vital to make the event of the witch hunts possible, but in the case of Salem, 1692, all of them came together at once.

The main source has been *The Crucible*, which is a play written by Arthur Miller, in 1953. Miller describes the events in the colony very well, even though he alters some parts of it in order to make it more interesting and also partly due to the absence of historical facts.
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APPENDIX

This map over Salem shows the two parts of the colony, where the Ipswich road is located. Furthermore, it gives a clear understanding of where the accusers and accused were located as these are marked on it. The closer it gets to Salem Town, the higher the number of accused people.