

Claremont Colleges

Scholarship @ Claremont

CGU Theses & Dissertations

CGU Student Scholarship

Winter 2021

Dressing the Witch: Clothing, the Body, and Accusations of Witchcraft in Puritan New England

Rachel Murrell

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgu_etd



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [History Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Murrell, Rachel. (2021). *Dressing the Witch: Clothing, the Body, and Accusations of Witchcraft in Puritan New England*. CGU Theses & Dissertations, 242. https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgu_etd/242.

This Open Access Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the CGU Student Scholarship at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in CGU Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

Dressing the Witch: Clothing, the Body,
and Accusations of Witchcraft in Puritan
New England

By
Rachel Murrell

Presented to the Graduate Faculty of
Claremont Graduate University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts in History.

We certify that we have read this document
and approve it as adequate in scope and
quality for the degree of Master of Arts.

Faculty Advisor, Janet Farrell Brodie
Claremont Graduate University
Professor, Emerita of History

Faculty Reader, Matthew Bowman
Claremont Graduate University
Associate Professor of Religion and History
Howard W. Hunter Chair of Mormon
Studies

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Methodology.....	5
Historiography.....	11
Chapter 1: Materiality, Society, and Dress in Puritan Theology and Community.....	15
Chapter 2: Puritan Theology, Gender, and the Body.....	26
Chapter 3: Clothing, Appearance, and the Bodies of the Accused in Salem and Beyond.....	31
Bibliography.....	48

Introduction

The early morning of March 1, 1692 saw a large crowd assembled outside of Nathaniel Ingersall's tavern in Salem village, a small settlement a few miles outside of the proper town of Salem, Massachusetts. The beginning of the month of March marked a full month since Betty Parris, Abigail Williams, Ann Putnam Jr., and Elizabeth Hubbard began their terrific contortive fits and claims that they were under the constant attack of witchcraft by certain members of the Salem community. It was three of those accused members, the beggar woman Sarah Good, the perpetual invalid Sarah Osbourne, and the enslaved woman Tituba, that had drawn the massive crowd of onlookers that March morning, a crowd so sizeable that court officials were forced to move the examination of the three accused witches to the larger Salem village meetinghouse. Before they appeared for examination, Good, Osborne, and Tituba were all physically examined by Nathaniel Ingersall's wife for any bodily abnormalities that would mark their allegiance with the devil: a black spot, a wart, or perhaps even a concealed extra appendage. Goodwife Ingersall could find no anomalies despite an ardent search.

Though the bodies of these women did not initially serve as evidence of their accused practices of witchcraft, the testimony of their accusers and the questioning provided by court officials would prove insurmountable. Sarah Good, in particular, was already well known in the community of Salem for existing on the very fringes of society, begging her way from house to house and slandering those who would not give her charity.¹ Several members of the community

¹ See the Deposition of Sarah Gage and Thomas Gage against Sarah Good in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcriptions of the Court Records in Three Volumes* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1977) I, 63.15. Accessed via Scholars Lab, University of Virginia. <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/category/swp.html>. [Cited hereafter as *SWP*. Language has been modernized for ease of reading].

would testify to her general unpleasantness. If anyone in the small village of Salem could be believed to be a witch, it was Sarah Good. Standing before her accusers and judges, Good was immediately called to account on her marked lack of attendance at church, itself an observation loaded with implications of her soul's vulnerability to attacks by the devil and a mark of her physical distance from God. When challenged by the court on her absences, Sarah Good answered that she did not own a suitable set of clothes that would be proper for church wear.² But in the examination following Good's, fellow accused Tituba recounted seeing Good not only cavorting with the devil in public, but doing so while wearing "a black Silk hood with a White Silk hood under itt."³ Given her well-established low social and economic standing within the Salem community, how was it possible for Sarah Good to be adorned with such a costly piece of clothing? More importantly, what broader societal and theological implications did the visual representation of Good's fine clothing hold in establishing grounds for the likeliness of her participation in witchcraft?

Though this infamous period in American history has been examined numerous times and through a variety of methodological avenues, this paper aims to analyze the role in which "soft culture," in particular dress and clothing, played in the search for and accusations made against witches amongst Puritan New England communities in the seventeenth century. Of necessity to this analysis is a thorough examination of early American material culture and the role in which early New Englanders interacted with newfound notions of materiality. This analysis examines two distinct points of contention at the crux of this cultural turn: the maintenance of and visual

² Good's recorded response was that "she came not to meeting for want of clothes," *SWP*, 63.6.

³ *SWP*, 125.5

adherence to rigid social class standards through clothing and the visual interpretation of clothing and the body in accordance with Puritan theological standards contemporary to the period.

Through examining a familiar historic event through the lens of material culture, this thesis aims to present evidence for the social perpetration and persecution of witchcraft through visual clues present in clothing and the physical body.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 examines the growing adoption of and controversies surrounding the visual display of material wealth and social standing through clothing and dress within Puritan society. With the opportunity for social mobility available to all social classes in the prosperous conditions of the early New England economy, visual cues traditionally established through dress that signaled societal divides by class became increasingly ambiguous. This in turn led to the establishment of sumptuary laws regulating the wearing of fine apparel to those who could prove the wealth of their estate in court. I argue that these favorable socio-economic conditions created the basis for societal disruption in Puritan communities across New England and set the precedent for accusations of criminality centered upon transgressions of dress as retaliation against these disruptions.

Chapter 2 addresses Puritan theological concepts surrounding the body, in particular, the unclothed body. As Chapter 1 engages with the presence of certain modes of dress signaling a wearer's potential for criminality and social transgression, Chapter 2 asserts that a lack of proper clothing on the body represented just as serious an offense. In Puritan theology, the physical body often served as visual evidence of the state of one's soul. The absence of clothing and baring of the naked body therefore signaled an inherent moral corruptness that left a soul vulnerable to attacks from the devil and susceptible to engaging in practicing witchcraft. This chapter also contends that the symbiotic nature between the physical body and soul in Puritan

theology extended to the clothing worn on the body, which allowed for the validity of the presentation of visual evidence of flaws and weaknesses in the wearer's soul.

Chapter 3 interrogates the recorded evidence of transgressions manifested in the clothed and unclothed body appearing in accusations of witchcraft across New England in the seventeenth century. Relying on preserved witchcraft trial records from the period, this chapter documents the prevalence of offenses centered on dress and the body in recorded testimonies intended to provide evidence of accused witches engaging in the practice of witchcraft.

It is important to note that this thesis does not attempt to prove that the persecution of witchcraft using clothing and the body as vehicles is the sole means of interpreting and understanding the witchcraft crises that many New England communities faced during their formative years. Rather, this thesis seeks to utilize an analysis of a specific subset of material culture to assist in theorizing one means in which accusations of witchcraft served as broad attempts to correct and assert Puritan social and theological norms in the midst of perceived threats amongst Puritan New England communities. Through this study of clothing and its relationship to those accused of witchcraft in seventeenth century New England communities, this analysis hopes to provide a fuller understanding of the implications of appearance in accusations of witchcraft and the importance of clothing and the body in Puritan society and theological belief. Additionally, this analysis seeks to demonstrate that a specific focus on clothing and appearance in accusations of witchcraft served as a vehicle for residents of these communities to mark what historian John Demos refers to as “signposts of weakness” in an overall social system.⁴ As this study will demonstrate, the history of early New England's

⁴ John Putnam Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 276.

interaction with notions of materiality in their developing social and economic worlds further underscores the importance that the role of clothing played in signposting what Puritan communities in New England believed was evidence of weakness in their established social and economic order. This thesis contends that the visualization and realization of these weaknesses summarily and conveniently devolved into evidence of witchcraft.⁵

Methodology

Thousands upon thousands of scholarly works have been produced in analysis of the genesis and procedure of the witchcraft crises in early New England, namely the witch trials that occurred in Salem, Massachusetts at the close of the seventeenth century. A cursory search of the keywords “Salem witch trials” returned over two thousand books, articles, reviews, and chapters dedicated to the unpacking of such a controversial and popularly studied historical event.⁶ This analysis, however, marks a significant step in a new direction, focusing instead on studying witchcraft crises through the lens of material culture theory. For the purpose of this study, I rely on Jules David Prown’s definition of material culture as the study through artifacts of the beliefs—values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions—of a particular community or society at a

⁵ In this regard, I largely follow the larger “functionalist” school of thought concerning episodes of witchcraft hysteria, in that these episodes functioned to reinforce the boundaries of culturally accepted norms and served to exert social control over threats posed to a society’s given structures. See Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 277.

⁶ Keyword search completed on April 27, 2019, accessed via Claremont Colleges Library database search.
<https://ccl.on.worldcat.org/search?databaseList=245%2C239%2C1708%2C638%2C251&queryString=salem+witch+trials>.

given time.⁷ In this study, the term “artifacts” refers to a broad variety of materials including primary accounts and descriptions, court records, and publications contemporary to early American Puritan society that lend insight to the imbued meaning of clothing, adornment, and the body, with the goal of demonstrating how clothing impacted and shaped accusations of witchcraft in Salem and other communities.

The choice to view such an often-studied period through the lens of material culture is one that comes with several important benefits. Perhaps no other field gives historians such deep and comprehensive access to a certain historical period or person than the field of material culture. Central to this notion is the fact that humans are capable of expressing themselves through both material things and the written word, and to leave the legacy of material things untouched compromises the fullness of historical thought. The essence of the symbiotic relationship between things and humans is that they equally impact one another; there exists a mutual exchange of identity in which both human and object retain impressions of the other. By studying this unique exchange, we can deduce the power of these material objects in both reflecting and shaping the historical societies and values in which they existed.

Furthermore, material culture studies also aid in adding a fuller analysis to the field of gender and class. As noted by historian Leora Auslander, material culture studies assist in “leveling the playing field” in terms of these inequalities present in the written historical record.⁸ Because women have generally had less access and opportunities to leave written records than

⁷ Jules David Prown, “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, no. 1 (1982): 1.

⁸ Leora Auslander, “Introduction: Making Gender with Things,” *Clio* 40, no. 1 (2014): 5.

men, the materials which women of history interacted with play an incredibly important role in adding their voices to the historical record. Within this analysis of clothing in early America comes the added implications of feminist theory and its applications in seventeenth century America. Rather than applying modern feminist theory as it currently understood to this period of history, it is important to differentiate between traditional misogyny and “gynesis,” a term coined by Alice Jardin to denote the metaphoric use of femininity and female bodies to constitute male subjectivity prevalent during this period.⁹ With this framework in mind, we are able to take a more narrow focus on female otherness and how it has been used to define the intersection between theology and the social order while helping to constitute male subjectivity and privilege, a strong subcurrent of this analysis of clothing and its relationship to accusations of witchcraft in Salem and beyond.¹⁰

Of the documented witchcraft cases occurring in seventeenth century New England, the overwhelming majority of accused witches in seventeenth century New England were women. Accusations leveled at male witches accounted for only twenty percent of the total recorded cases for the century.¹¹ Men primarily figured into witchcraft trials either from direct association to an accused female witch or as part of a larger communal dispute, and clothing is markedly absent in records of their trials and accusations.¹² This is not to claim that Puritan men were

⁹ As quoted in Tamara Harvey, “Feminist Theory in Seventeenth Century America,” *Early American Literature* 44, no. 2 (2009): 412.

¹⁰ Harvey, “Feminist Theory,” 412-413.

¹¹ Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 61.

¹² The only exception to this rule discovered in the course of my research, as noted on page 41, is Giles Corey of Salem. A description of his clothing was used to identify him by an accuser.

exempted from accusations of witchcraft with the aim of persecuting women in particular as a sort of punishment or forced subjugation. Indeed, the majority of the accusers in these cases were women, not men. This analysis does, however, acknowledge the intricacies of gender within Puritan cosmology, most notably that evil was inexorably linked to the feminine. Within Puritan theology, as Marilyn J. Westerkamp notes, “the evil proclivity of women rendered female activity in and of itself suspect and, thus, reinforced the installment of passivity as a virtue in women.”¹³ When Puritan society experienced upset, their theological ideologies concerning evil naturally encouraged them to examine and correct the behavior of the women of their communities. These ideologies further contributed to a gendered spiritual anxiety imposed upon women in Puritan New England, as exemplified by the preponderance of women as the sources of witchcraft accusations. Puritan theology surrounding the human body, especially the female body, contributed to these anxieties as well.¹⁴

The gender of most of the accused witches in seventeenth century New England heavily influenced the choice to examine sartorial evidence in this analysis. Clothing is perhaps the most involved object in terms of women’s history, something that women have been traditionally coupled with for centuries. Auslander also reasons that the materiality of objects mirrors that of the body, and therefore produces the notion of gender just as powerfully as the written word.¹⁵ The study of clothing as object holds tremendous weight in conveying historical gender roles and

¹³ Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Women in Early American Religion 1600-1850: The Puritan and Evangelical Traditions* (London: Routledge, 1999) 53.

¹⁴ This is further examined in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

¹⁵ Auslander, “Making Gender with Things,” 7.

acceptable gendered practices. Unfortunately for the purposes of this study, little physical evidence remains of the clothing worn by women in New England during the seventeenth century, let alone articles of clothing that can be traced directly to those who were implicated in accusations of witchcraft. However, this absence of physical evidence does not negate the importance of cloth and clothing in early colonial America. According to respected early American historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, cloth was the single largest import into British America during the colonial period; it built ships, wharves and mansions, defined social and religious boundaries, and facilitated societal rituals.¹⁶ Clothing items produced in this period were expensive, which typically led to an increased second-hand value and continued recycling of garments until they were structurally unsound and unsuitable for continued wear.¹⁷ In instances such as these where physical garments are unavailable for study, reliance on contemporary descriptions, publications, and records of the period concerning clothing are essential to fill in the gaps. In this way, we can understand the societal guidelines that surround dress, adornment, and the body and apply those same guidelines to our analysis of period events.

The study of Puritan culture in particular through a visually-dominant field such as material culture also allows for a fuller understanding of the practical workings of Puritan theology in daily colonial life. Protestant cultures, like that of the early Puritans, are often depicted as societies dominated by the spoken and written word. At its core unencumbered by complicated rites and elaborate liturgies, the ethos of early Protestant theology revolved simply

¹⁶ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Cloth, Clothing, and Early American Social History," *Dress* 18, no. 1 (1991): 39.

¹⁷ Ann Martin Smart, "Material Things and Cultural Meanings: Notes on the Study of Early American Material Culture," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (1996): 9.

around the hearing or reading of the word of God. Because of this, historians of the period have often focused their studies of early American religion on textual and aural means of communication, rarely acknowledging the equal importance of visual communications within Puritan society. But as more recent studies have noted, nonverbal communication was a full and rich part of the religious culture of early America; media that aimed at the eyes instead of the ears was indeed intricate, highly expressive, and an often-used form of communication.¹⁸ At the crux of the importance of visual communications in Puritan society lay the coexistence and coupling of the “invisible” or spiritual world and the “visible” or material world, which served as a fundamental structure of meaning in Puritan New England.¹⁹ Puritan belief held that symptoms of the invisible or spiritual world often manifested themselves as visual cues in the visible world, assuming a rich variety of signs and symbols that guided societal and theological understanding and cohesion.²⁰ This analysis argues that clothing and the appearance of the body served as an essential form of visual communication for Puritan society and functioned as a means to visually interpret the interactions of the spiritual world and the material world. For the Puritans, dress was instrumental in defining age, social status, and gender relations but was

¹⁸ Leigh Eric Schmidt, ““A Church-going People are a Dress-loving People”: Clothes, Communication, and Culture in Early America,” *Church History* 58, no. 1 (1989): 36-37. For an additional study on the importance of visual communications in early America, see Allen I. Ludwig, *Graven Images: New England Stonecarving and its Symbols, 1650-1815* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1966).

¹⁹ Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem* (New York: George Braziller, 1969) 7-8.

²⁰ Sociologist Isaac Reed further defines the “invisible” world of the Puritans as a “bizarre epistemology of memorable providences and evil imps, God’s grace and malicious consorts of the Devil... used to explain both individual lives and the direction and destiny of the collective.” Isaac Reed, “Why Salem Made Sense,” *Cultural Sociology* 1, no. 2 (2007): 220.

likewise expressive of and invested with religious meanings and carried significance as a marker of an individual's spirituality.²¹

Historiography

The literature studying the history of Puritanism in early America and its conceptualization through various aspects of New England culture, society, and theological developments is indeed a vast body. Despite this often overwhelming body of work no stable image of the nature of Puritanism or its American settlement has emerged; rather, American Puritan studies has followed the trajectory of American studies and its larger shifts in historical perspective and interpretation in the past fifty years, namely from intellectually-driven histories to social histories.²² Early conceptions of American Puritanism, namely those appearing out of the progressive movement of the 1920s and 1930s, birthed the well-known stereotype of the Puritan as a fanatic, repressed religious zealot dressed solely in black, obsessed with guilt, superstition, and sexual denial. Progressive historians of this era largely dismissed Puritanism as intellectually impoverished religious dogma that masked broader economic, political, and social motivations of control, particularly concerning the birth of capitalism.²³

The intellectualist movement of the following decades countered these progressive ideals concerning Puritanism and instead examined the Puritans and their religious ideals as genuine

²¹ Schmidt, ““A Church-going People,”” 38.

²² See Roy M. Anker, “The American Puritans and the Historians,” *Reformed Review* 39, no. 3 (1986): 161-173.

²³ See James Truslow Adams, *The Founding of New England* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1921); Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: The Colonial Mind, 1620-1800* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2013).

approximations of their unique circumstances and motives. Foremost in the Puritan intellectualist school of thought was historian Perry Miller, whose voluminous writings on the Puritans sought to unearth a definitive Puritan psyche. In his body of work, Miller broadly positions Puritan theology as an attempt to craft an intellectual system from a mysterious and oftentimes terrifying world, an “instance of a recurrent spiritual answer to interrogations eternally posed by human existence.”²⁴ Miller’s work conceptualized Puritanism at its base as an ideological guide to how men understood themselves within a uniquely American cultural framework. While Miller’s studies of Puritanism overtly prioritized theological ideas rather than social and/or economic factors in shaping this period of American cultural history, his work succeeded in reestablishing studies of Puritanism as a credible source of critical engagement.²⁵

Following Miller’s intellectualist school of thought and continuing to dominate Puritan studies to the present is a historical methodology emphasizing social history, of which this thesis contributes to. This shift has largely transitioned historical focus from the articulate elite to the experiences of the common member of Puritan society in order to craft a fuller glimpse of the lived realities and implications of Puritanism on a cultural level. To accomplish this, these social histories typically rely on extant data, such as court records, wills, and tax ledgers, to paint a more complete picture of the experiences of early Puritans and faithfully reconstruct their social and cultural realities. Perhaps the most significant benefit of this transition in methodology is the

²⁴ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939) 4.

²⁵ See also Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933); Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

expansion of our understanding of the role of religion and its prominence in Puritan society, especially of the centrality of its social vision and the extent to which it often translated into communal reality.²⁶ As social histories of Puritanism continue to proliferate, historians can also continue to interrogate and trace the overall cohesiveness of Puritan theology—or, as some studies have demonstrated, lack of—as it developed within American history.²⁷

The trajectory of modern Puritan studies has turned sharply to the realm of cultural studies, with a proliferation of cultural histories that investigate specific elements of notions of gender, class, and race within Puritan culture.²⁸ This cultural turn, exemplified in several secondary sources used in this thesis, points to a rejection of a monolithic view of Puritan theology and religious practice typified by Puritan scholars such as Perry Miller. As David M. Robinson notes, “the reassessment of Puritanism now underway reminds us to the extent to which religion in America, or to be more precise, America’s various religions, have been evolving and often unstable conjunctions of intellectual belief and social practice, the more influential because of that evolutionary instability.”²⁹ Also characterizing modern Puritan studies

²⁶ Anker, “The American Puritans and the Historians,” 167.

²⁷ For social histories of Puritan New England, see Darret B. Ruttmann, *Winthrop’s Boston: A Portrait of a Puritan Town, 1630-1649* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965); Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁸ For cultural histories of Puritan New England, see Stephen Foster *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570-1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Andrew Delbanco, *The Puritan Ordeal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

²⁹ David M. Robinson, “The Cultural Dynamics of American Puritanism” *American Literary History* 6, no. 4 (1994) 739.

are notions of post-secularization, namely, that the human experience with Puritan ideologies and beliefs is both a valid and important area of study. While this analysis very much follows in the footsteps of the social history, notions of instability within Puritan culture exemplified through gender and class are foundational to this thesis. This analysis relies on court documents and testimony transcriptions to aid in the unravelling of the broad implications of Puritan theology on social order, gender, the body, and clothing in relation to accusations of crime within Puritan society, further contributing to the notion that cultural elements of Puritanism reveal a far less cohesive cultural unit, a fact which Puritan communities recognized and fought against. From this vantage point, discursive social events such as the prosecution of witchcraft can be further understood within the theological and social context of early Puritan America.

Chapter 1: Materiality, Society, and Dress in Puritan Theology and Community

This study of the impact of dress on accusations of witchcraft in Salem in 1692 would be remiss without a fuller examination of the means in which the residents of Salem, and Puritan New Englanders as a whole, viewed and interacted with the material world around them. In studying the founding of the early Puritan communities, including the development of their economies and this development's impact on established social structures, we may better understand the importance of the material world of seventeenth century New England and its later interactions with accusations of witchcraft during the Salem witch hysteria. This allows for a fuller understanding of the micro-focus of this thesis on the role of bodily appearance within Puritan society, as well as the functional role that witchcraft hysteria in Salem played in maintaining social structures amidst cultural and economic upheavals. The crux of this investigation rests in examining the dichotomy between the development of an open, expansive economic life and the desire for a closed, defined social order, which became increasingly evident as Puritan society progressed into the late seventeenth century.^{30 31}

The Puritan dissenters who first settled at Plymouth Colony in 1620 were no strangers to social and economic upheaval. These colonists fled an England which, in the century prior to their settlement, underwent marked social and economic transformations. The most notable of

³⁰ Phyllis Whitman Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World: Massachusetts Merchants, 1670-1780* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 17.

³¹ This is not to claim that Puritan theology and economic prosperity were inherently incompatible, but that the social changes stemming from developing New England economies marked a sharp transition from the early social environment guiding the founding of these communities. For more on Puritanism and its complimentary relationship to early capitalism, see Mark A. Peterson, *The Price of Redemption: The Spiritual Economy of Puritan New England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

these transformations was the development of what Robert Blair St. George calls the “English bourgeoisie,” a kind of middle class of former freeholders and copyholders who took up the lands once apart of England’s dissolved monastic estates and partook in the robust trade networks established with the Low Countries.³² This new class of society marked a dramatic change from the traditional hierarchy of English society, which emphasized rank based on the notion of the “quality”—a combination of ancestry, bloodline, and property ownership—of its members. As England’s economy began to thrive in the late sixteenth century, this new middling class quickly accumulated wealth commensurate with the wealth of their traditional social superiors. With the growth of such a society confused by these new status lines, a new order of differentiation appeared on the horizon of English society in which the social hierarchy valued quantity over quality.³³

This emerging class of middling Englishmen and their families—most hailing from cohesive geographic and congregational communities—comprised the overwhelming majority of Puritan colonists making the journey to the New World. The homogeneity of these early Puritan settlers naturally demanded a means in which societal hierarchy and social difference could be easily discerned. The need for the clear ordering of social classes was not only becoming increasingly integral to the society which the Puritans had left behind, but was what Puritan theology proclaimed at its core ordained by God. In his 1630 sermon *A Modell of Christian Charity*, Massachusetts Bay Colony founder John Winthrop proclaimed that God “hath soe

³² Robert Blair St. George, ““Set Thine House in Order”: The Domestication of the Yeomanry in Seventeenth-Century New England” in *New England Begins*, eds. Jonathan L. Fairbanks and Robert Trent (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1982) 159.

³³ St. George, ““Set Thine House in Order”,” 160.

disposed of the condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity; others mean and in submission” in order to “hold conformity with the rest of His world, being delighted to show forth the glory of His wisdom in the variety and difference of the creatures.”³⁴ Winthrop’s message underscored a contradictory feature of Puritan theological belief: that the visible display of the glory of God’s creation was found in the remarkable “variety and difference” existing in the natural world, and that these differences simultaneously must remain fixed in their difference to preserve the order of creation. This belief translated directly from Puritan cosmology, which emphasized God’s creation of a “world of differing parts, which necessarily supposes that there must be differing places, for those differing things to be disposed into, which is Order.”³⁵ To achieve this sense of ordained order in their own society, the first century of Puritan settlement marked the adoption of a *quantitative* measure of social power in similarity to the evolving English social structure of which they were formerly a part. For the early Puritans, this social power was largely realized in two means easily measurable within a burgeoning colonial society: success in commerce and the display of material wealth amongst the colonists. Both of these quantitative social measurements fostered a

³⁴ John Winthrop, *A Modell of Christian Charity* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1838). Accessed via Hanover College Historical Texts Collection, Hanover College, <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html>

³⁵ William Hubbard, *The happiness of a people in the wisdom of their rulers directing and in the obedience of their brethren attending unto what Israel ought [sic] to do: recommended in a sermon before the Honourable governor and Council, and the respected deputies of the Massachusetts colony in New-England* (Boston: Printed by John Foster, 1676) 8. Accessed via University of Michigan’s Evans Early American Imprint Collection, <http://name.umd.umich.edu/N00155.0001.001>.

culture of upward mobility amongst Puritan communities that would inevitably clash with the need to maintain a visible and ordered social hierarchy.

The community of Salem, Massachusetts was no exception to this social and theological dilemma. From its inception, the town of Salem functioned as the larger “marketplace” of Essex County, Massachusetts. Unlike the greater Massachusetts Bay Colony, which was founded with the intent of serving as refuge to Puritan objectors, the town of Salem began as an outgrowth of English investment plans to establish maritime trade and a fishing industry in the area.³⁶ By the early 1640s this goal was well accomplished, as Salem merchants had established active trade relationships with the West Indies, Barbados, and the Leeward Islands, in addition to its primary economic relationship with England.³⁷ The economic successes of early Salem, thanks to its abundance of accessible waterways and flourishing fishing industry, brought a wide array of immigrants to Salem’s shores, including artisans, mariners, planters, and fishermen from various regions in England. Though this influx of contributors to Salem’s economy spelled prosperity for the overall community, efforts to fix an identity based on religion and social class were continually challenged as diverse social groups came to claim Salem as their home.³⁸

The material prosperity undergirding this demographic expansion and influx of settlers was, as historian Stephen Innes identifies, widely shared: well before the end of the colonial

³⁶ Hunter, *Purchasing Identity*, 34.

³⁷ D. Hamilton Hurd, *History of Essex County, Massachusetts, with Biographical Sketches of Many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men* (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co, 1888) 65.

³⁸ Phillip English, one of the most prominent and prosperous of Salem’s merchant class, originally came to Salem from the Isle of Jersey and established a large contingent of Jersey emigres in Massachusetts. English and his wife were later accused of witchcraft during the Salem trials in April of 1692. See also Chapter 2, “Much Commerce and Many Cultures” in Hunter, *Purchasing Identity*.

period, the New England settlers had created societies that allowed some three quarters of their households to attain a “middling” standard of living.³⁹ In spite of this, immigration to the colonies declined dramatically by 1640 and led to what Robert Blair St. George notes was a growing disruption of the social order, made possible by a marked lack of new arrivals that typically would be obliged to subsume subordinate positions on the social ladder.⁴⁰ Coupled with favorable economic conditions, colonial social structure increasingly refused to remain fixed. In the Puritan mindset, the eternal order ordained by God began dissolving amidst a culture of pious industry that allowed former indentured servants to die as successful tavern owners and estate holders.⁴¹ But the prosperous economic climate of early Salem and greater New England proved to be fruitful ground for Puritan settlers to experiment with the display of their economic successes via material objects, which concurrently allowed for an attempt to reinstate a semblance of social order via quantitative measurement.⁴² Amongst these material objects, clothing proved to be a convenient means through which order and social standing could be visibly established in an ever-evolving and ever-changing societal landscape.

The expense, value, and scarcity of clothing and textiles as commodities in seventeenth century New England served to transform clothing into a choice medium for colonists to engage in the display of their material wealth. Clothing, unlike domestic furnishings, housewares, and

³⁹ Stephen Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth: The Economic Culture of Puritan New England* (New York: Norton, 1995) 24.

⁴⁰ St. George, ““Set Thine House in Order”,” 160.

⁴¹ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind*, 49.

⁴² These material objects, as John Demos notes, served as a physical representation of the net worth of an individual, their “money in the bank”. John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971) 53.

other material objects that are typically confined to the home, served as a representation of wealth easily seen and consumed by members of New England communities. In the formative years of the various settlements across New England, colonists relied almost exclusively on the import of clothing from England until the waning migration of the 1640s necessitated the establishment of domestic cloth making efforts.⁴³ Despite the establishment of cloth production in the colonies—namely, the production of wool and linen—the majority of textiles, especially those destined for use in the construction of fine clothing, continued to be imported.⁴⁴ This kept the cost of clothing substantially high in the colonies; John Demos notes that a man’s suit or a woman’s fine petticoat would have equaled the cost of a young steer, or a half dozen goats, or ten bushels of wheat in 1650.⁴⁵ Embellishments such as lace, ribbon, and embroidery incurred a substantial extra cost to the wearer, and were arduous in their construction and application as they were manufactured entirely by hand. The presence of appraisals of cloth and clothing is notable in probate documents of the era, and often figured as substantial portions of a decedent’s estate. Moreover, the expense of clothing necessitated longevity in construction and often passed between several generations, providing a sense of recognizability and identity for the wearer. For these Puritan communities, clothing served as a vehicle for the display of material wealth while simultaneously establishing communal identity.

⁴³ Frances Little, *Early American Textiles* (New York: The Century Co., 1931) 31.

⁴⁴ It is important to acknowledge that while imported cloth served as visible evidence of material wealth, it also had the potential to remind that, as Phyllis Hunter notes, “dealing in transatlantic trade forced Puritans to breach their carefully constructed communities and reach beyond family or religious channels to deal with foreign merchants.” Hunter, *Purchasing Identity*, 23.

⁴⁵ Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 54-55.

For English society in the seventeenth century, dress was integral to establishing social hierarchy and identity. Dress and appearance functioned as a visible signal of cultural cues such as gender, occupation, and social rank. Puritan theological concerns surrounding clothing further heightened its symbolism within society and its role in establishing social hierarchies. The power of clothing within Puritan society stemmed directly from notions concerning visible sainthood, which linked a person's "subjective intentionality (the hidden "inward act") and objective behavior (the visible "outward act")."⁴⁶ Puritan theologian Richard Baxter opined that clothing "is hanged out to tell the world what you are, as a Sign at an Inn-door acquaints the passenger that there he may have entertainment."⁴⁷ A person's appearance, therefore, possessed the capability to reveal the truth of a person's soul, both their potential for sinfulness and godliness. Proud clothing, made of expensive fabrics or with excessive ornamentation such as lace, ribbons, or gold and silver thread, therefore displayed a proud heart.⁴⁸ For Puritan communities, dress and appearance were essential in establishing visible markers of salvation amongst God's elect while also potentially highlighting the inner defects of a sinful nature.

Clothing also served particular importance in signifying gender boundaries and spiritual identity, especially in the case of women. In addition to clothing acting as a general sign of social status, a woman's clothing also served as outward evidence of her virtues and piety. This

⁴⁶ Martha L. Finch, "'Fashions of Wordly Dames': Separatist Discourses of Dress in Early Modern London, Amsterdam, and Plymouth Colony" *Church History* 74, no. 3 (2005) 506.

⁴⁷ Richard Baxter, *A Treatise of Self-Denial*. By Richard Baxter, Pastor of the Church at Kederminster (London: Printed by Robert White, for Nevil Simmons at the Princes Arms in Saint Pauls Church-yard, 1675) 176. Accessed via University of Michigan Early English Books, <http://name.umd.umich.edu/A27053.0001.001>

⁴⁸ Martha L. Finch, *Dissenting Bodies: Corporealities in Early New England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) 109.

fundamental notion is the crux of Cotton Mather's *Ornaments for the daughters of Zion*, published a year before accusations of witchcraft swept Salem village. Mather accuses the women of Puritan New England of "often transgressing" rules concerning modesty of apparel, and warns women that "for a Woman to Wear what is not evidently Consistent with *Modesty*, *Gravity*, and *Sobriety*, is to Wear not an *Ornament* but a *Defilement*; and She puts off those Glorious *Vertues*, when she puts on the Visible *Badges* of what is Contrary thereunto."⁴⁹ Heavily ornamented clothing was taken as visual evidence of a defect of the soul, of tangible reference to the presence (or lack thereof) of the fundamental spiritual ornaments of women: modesty, gravity, and sobriety, traits essential to every pious woman. The Puritan minister William Prynne specifically cited "effemination" as the major cause of society's woes in a 1628 speech, lamenting on the "strange and monstrous vanities" ever more frequently appearing on the streets.⁵⁰ While a woman's choice of clothing could demonstrate her piety, it could also serve as a visible emblem of inner corruption, "the *Tokens* of a Plague in the Soul."⁵¹ Taking upon the dress of a "Harlot" was to both identify oneself as embodying the sins of the harlot and open oneself to the "Calamities" afforded to those like the harlot living in sin.⁵² Excesses of dress were directly attributed to those women in league with the devil, a visual distinguishment

⁴⁹ Cotton Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion. Or the Character and Happiness of a Vertuous Woman* (Cambridge: S.G. & B.G., 1691) 55. Accessed via University of Michigan's Evans Early American Imprint Collection, <http://name.umd.umich.edu/N00500.0001.001>. [Emphases in original]

⁵⁰ As quoted in Diana de Marly, *Dress in North America: The New World 1492-1800* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1990) 38.

⁵¹ Mather, *Ornaments*, 54.

⁵² Mather, *Ornaments*, 58.

between those who served God's purpose and those who served the devil. Cotton Mather went as far as to argue that those women "whose Rayment is too *Costly*" were unfit for the support of the government and the church, and unworthy of the civil and sacred protections provided by each.⁵³

With clothing and appearance so established as markers of both social status and visible sainthood, growing access to wealth and social mobility amongst Puritan communities threatened to upset God's ordained order. Though Puritan leader Cotton Mather insisted that "the *Ranks* of People should be discerned by their *Clothes*," designation of social hierarchy through clothing became increasingly difficult as wealth and social mobility expanded in early New England.⁵⁴ This is evident in the attempt by colonial legislatures to regulate and control dressing outside one's social rank via sumptuary laws. The first of these laws, adopted by the Massachusetts General Court in 1634, specifically banned the "wearing of silver, gold, & silk laces, girdles, hatbands" and the making or buying of "any apparel, either woolen, silk, or linen, with any lace on it, silver, gold, silk, or thread."⁵⁵ In 1639, the court banned the wearing and making of lace within the Massachusetts colony completely, citing "much complaint of the excessive wearing of lace, & other superfluities tending to little use or benefit, but to the nourishing of pride & exhausting of men's estates, & also of evil example to others," while also banning short sleeves "whereby the nakedness of the arm may be discovered in the wearing thereof."⁵⁶ Twelve years

⁵³ Mather, *Ornaments*, 56.

⁵⁴ Mather, *Ornaments*, 56.

⁵⁵ Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England* (Boston: W. White, 1853) I, 150.

⁵⁶ Shurtleff, *Records*, I, 274.

later, the court at Massachusetts once again passed a statute detailing their collective contempt for those who transgressed societal rank via their clothing:

[We] declare our utter detestation and dislike that men or women of mean condition, educations, and callings should take upon them the garb of gentlemen, by the wearing of gold or silver lace, or buttons, or points at their knees, to walk in great boots; or women of the same rank to wear tiffany hoods or scarves, which though allowable to persons of greater estates, or more liberal education, yet we cannot but judge it intolerable in persons of such like condition...⁵⁷

A similar statute passed by the Connecticut legislature in 1676 stated that “it is farther ordered that all such persons as shall for the future make or wear or buy any apparel exceeding the quality and condition of their estates or that is apparently beyond the necessary end of apparel for covering or comeliness, shall forfeit for every such offence ten shillings.”⁵⁸

A burgeoning of the middling class in growing merchant villages such as Salem consistently challenged sumptuary laws with their new-found wealth. Heavy fines were levied upon those who violated these laws; only residents whose estates were valued at £200 or more were permitted to “take upon them” the garb and ornamentations described above.⁵⁹ In May of 1663, John Kindrick was fined in Essex County quarterly court for his wife’s “excess in apparel,

⁵⁷ Shurtleff, *Records*, III, 243.

⁵⁸ J. Hammond Trumbull and Charles Hoadly (eds.), *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut* (Hartford: Brown & Parsons, 1850) II, 283.

⁵⁹ Gary North, “The Puritan Experiment with Sumptuary Legislation,” *Freeman* 24, no.1 (1974).

wearing a silk hood, scarf and French fall shoes.”⁶⁰ In another session of Essex County court in 1675, eight separate women were fined “for wearing a silk hood and scarf,” while the following year, one Hanah Poland was presented to the court for “excess in apparel” and “was fined for wearing a silk hood and scarf and for her strong fashion admonished.”⁶¹ The court at Northampton, Connecticut in 1676 summoned thirty six women en masse to court on account of their “overdress,” namely, the wearing of silk hoods.⁶² These laws and subsequent transgressions revealed, as Martha L. Finch notes, a widespread fear rooted in the Puritan community of “the inability to fix a person’s true identity; using such deceptive self-fashioning to seduce unsuspecting victims undermined the doctrine of visible sainthood and threatened the moral health of the civil community.”⁶³ In the eyes of members of Puritan New England society, changes in fashion, imitation by members of the lower classes of their social superiors, the increase in the affluence of the lower class, and the unwillingness of members of society to keep in their original stations into which they had been born undoubtedly pointed to a society on the brink of destruction.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ George Francis Dow, *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1913-1921) vol. III, 66.

⁶¹ Dow, *Records and Files*, vol. VI, 73 & 134-35. As noted by Patricia Trautman, “women, regardless of social class, fell victim most often” to New England sumptuary laws. Patricia Trautman, “When Gentlemen Wore Lace: Sumptuary Legislation in Seventeenth Century New England,” *Journal of Regional Cultures* 3, no. 2 (1983): 14.

⁶² Alice Morse Earle, *Two Centuries of Costume in America, 1620-1820* (New York: Macmillan, 1909) 63.

⁶³ Finch, *Dissenting Bodies*, 111.

⁶⁴ North, “The Puritan Experiment.”

Chapter 2: Puritan Theology, Gender, and the Body

Like clothing, the visual attributes of the physical body also played an extremely important role in public communication of Puritan theology, saintliness, and godliness. In her analysis of sexuality and the body in Puritan New England, Astrid Fellner points to the Puritan formulation of the body as a physical microcosm of divine order.⁶⁵ Though Puritan belief largely supported this view of the body as representation of the divine and container of the soul, it also recognized its inherent weaknesses. The physical body, according to Puritan theology, was the most vulnerable part of a person's total being.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, it was the body that did the soul's bidding and acted as protector of the soul; the physical body served as path to the soul. A weak or infirm body rendered the individual's soul even more vulnerable to the attacks of the devil. Cotton Mather surmised that "the malignant Vapours and Humours of our Diseased Bodies may be used by Devils, thereinto insinuating as engine of the Execution of their Malice upon those Bodies."⁶⁷ Since women's bodies on the whole were considered substantially weaker than that of men's, it was believed that the devil could reach women's souls more easily and breach these "weaker vessels" with more frequency.⁶⁸ Thus, the inherent weakness of the female body served as larger representation of the path through which evil could enter into the broader church body.

⁶⁵ Astrid Fellner, "'A Compleat Body of Divinity': Visions of Sexuality and the Body in Puritan New England" in *A Full-Bodied Society*, eds. Francois Poirier and Louie Barrow (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010) 34.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997) 96.

⁶⁷ As quoted in Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 233.

⁶⁸ Reis, *Damned Women*, 93.

As potential liabilities in the defense against attacks of the devil, Puritan communities paid special attention to the presentation of the bodies of their female members, evidenced in the predominant association of women with accusations of witchcraft. This theological classification of the spiritual weakness of women's bodies also contributed to the preponderance of women accusers. As Elizabeth Reis notes, "women were more likely than men to be convinced of their own complicity with the devil, and given such convictions about themselves, they could more easily imagine that other women were equally damned."⁶⁹

The physical body of the Puritan woman proved as equally problematic and symbolic as the choice of clothing that adorned it. John Demos, in his work *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of New England*, makes an interesting and important conjecture concerning the role of the female body in the culture of Puritan New England. Demos speaks briefly on the transitional period of menopause and the theological implications of this bodily phase for women, arguing that the loss of the ability to have children was a loss of their definition of womanhood, a physical closing of their bodies to their God-given purpose.⁷⁰ A woman no longer able to bear children, as Demos notes, held substantial consequences in terms of social identity; she was effectively stymied and betrayed by her own physical body. Demos also points to the fact that of the women who were accused of witchcraft in Salem, close to half fell within the age range of 41-60, the prime age for the beginnings of menopause.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Reis, *Damned Women*, 121-122.

⁷⁰ Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 155.

⁷¹ See Table 5., Age of Witches (Salem group) in Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 65.

Astrid Fellner likewise contends that a semiotic language of the body existed in Puritan New England in which symptoms figured as signs, which were comprised of tangible signifiers such as trembling, panting, or fainting.⁷² The convulsive fits that plagued the young women accusers of Salem village were understood as physical embodiments of the internal war being waged for their souls, and were taken as tangible evidence of the presence of witchcraft. The loss of ability to bear children during menopause would also fit squarely within this worldview, in that this loss of “God-given” ability marked a loss of bodily usefulness, and therefore, a further spiritual separation from God. For the Puritans, the natural world held significance in that its events were signs to be read as possible brought about by the supernatural, and the attribution of personal and collective significance to events such as sickness or physical abnormalities was practiced at large by Puritan society.⁷³ The physical workings of the body, from relative symptoms of fitness or illness, symbolized either the health or instability of the soul in a tangible form.

Like dress, the appearance of the body served as another integral mode of communication in Puritan society. The naked and unclothed body, in particular a woman’s bared body, constituted serious religious and criminal offense. Cotton Mather warned that women who exposed parts of their bodies to “common view” also exposed themselves to the vengeance of heaven.⁷⁴ Accusations of criminality followed those women who dared expose themselves unnecessarily, including accusations of inciting lust and activating men’s “sinful natures”:

⁷² Fellner, ““A Compleat Body,”” 41.

⁷³ Isaac Reed, “Why Salem Made Sense,” 226.

⁷⁴ Mather, *Ornaments*, 53.

But there is a *Nakedness* of the *Skin* which is also, and as much, to be accounted Criminal. The *Face* is to be Naked because of what is to be *Known* by it; the *Hands* are to be Naked, because of what is to be *Done* by them. But for the Nakedness of the *Back* and *Breasts*, No Reason can be given; unless it be that a Woman may by showing a *Fair-Skin* Enkindle a *Fire* in the Male Spectators...⁷⁵

In similarity to Puritan perceptions of clothing, the body served as outward revelation of the inner, and a bare body belied an interior nature rife with corruption and sin. An English pamphlet published in 1678 extolled the way in which “the *Devil* makes use of the windows of our bodies, for Death by Sin to enter into our Souls. ... THERE is not any Woman or Maid but knows that *Eves* nakedness, which the Scripture makes mention of, was a consequence and mark of her Crime...”⁷⁶ Evidence of criminality abounded in women’s unclothed bodies, in both their capability to incite sin in others and as signs of depravity of the soul. The nakedness of a woman’s body effectively belied her willingness to provide a “window” in which the devil could enter unencumbered.

The visual and richly symbolic medium of dress served to communicate a multiplicity of meanings in Puritan society; saintliness as much as sinfulness might be communicated through clothes.⁷⁷ Likewise, the body, especially the female body, communicated layers of imbued

⁷⁵ Mather, *Ornaments*, 54.

⁷⁶ Jacques Boileau, *A Just and Seasonable Reprehension of Naked Breasts and Shoulders Written by a Grave and Learned Papist* (London: Printed for Jonathan Edwin, 1678) 16 & 24. Accessed via University of Michigan, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A28570.0001.001/1:5?rgn=div1;view=toc>.

⁷⁷ Schmidt, ““A Church-going People,”” 48.

meaning in both its clothed and unclothed states. Transgressions of dress and body abounded in New England society, challenging entrenched Puritan social structures and the communities founded upon them. The small village of Salem was no exception. When Ann Putnam Jr., Elizabeth Hubbard, Abigail Williams, and Betty Parris began to suffer terrifying fits and displayed evidence of physical harm, it was evident that the devil and his servants had invaded the village. The fate of those unfortunate enough to face accusations of witchcraft would rest, to a great degree, in their appearance; their dress and the state of their bodies illuminate the records of the Salem witch trials and provide tangible evidence for the social persecution of witchcraft.

Chapter 3: Clothing, Appearance, and the Bodies of the Accused in Salem and Beyond

In sifting through the records of witchcraft cases in seventeenth century New England, the overwhelming majority of cases involving or mentioning articles of clothing or dress can be found in witchcraft trials occurring in the second half of the century, primarily from communities in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Searching the transcribed records of the Salem witch trials for the keyword “clothes”, for example, returned over twenty separate court documents in which the word was used. Records of witchcraft from Connecticut from 1650 and beyond are likewise peppered with references to clothing and appearance.

General analysis of the appearance of the word “clothes” in these documents pointed to its use most commonly in describing the clothing—or lack thereof—of the accused, utilizing clothing as evidence of identification of the accused, or acknowledging the promises of clothing as a temptation/reward from the devil for participating in witchcraft.⁷⁸ These categories, however, were certainly not exclusive and sometimes resulted in conflicting testimonies. In one examination, Tituba accused Sarah Good of cavorting with the devil in silks and finery, while in another deposition recorded on the very same day, Goodwife Good was described as appearing in her witchy exploits before a tormented Elizabeth Hubbard, “barefoot and barelegged.”⁷⁹ Samuel Sibley confirmed Elizabeth Hubbard’s vision of Good, adding that she also appeared

⁷⁸ Search for keyword “cloath” completed March 29, 2019 using the “Search” feature on the University of Virginia’s digital transcription of the Salem Witchcraft Papers, <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/search/?terms=cloath&year=&month=&day=>. Though clothing is mentioned sparsely in earlier cases of witchcraft across New England, descriptions of clothing in these early witchcraft cases most commonly figure into establishing the identity of the witch within the community.

⁷⁹ *SWP*, “Examination of Tituba, as recorded by magistrate Jonathan Corwin,” 125.4 & “Deposition of Elizabeth Hubbard v. Sarah Good,” 62.30.

with “all her naked breast” on display.⁸⁰ Either accusation was direct evidence of criminality and sin on the part of Good, whether it was the obvious transgression of social standing via dress or the sinful baring of her unclothed body. That Good would defy her well-known low social standing and dress in the garb of her superiors would certainly have lent meaningful evidence towards her criminal tendencies and highlighted her disregard for established social and economic boundaries. That she would be willing to bare her naked body to her peers also confirmed her depravity and made claims of her perpetration of witchcraft all the more credible.

Accused witch Sarah Good’s history within Salem Village was one fraught with social and economic upheaval. Born the daughter of a relatively wealthy innkeeper, Good was summarily cheated out of her inheritance by her mother and stepfather after her father’s death in 1672. Good soon after married the penniless indentured servant Daniel Poole, who died shortly after the marriage and left Good saddled with his debts and funeral expenses. The debts incurred from Good’s first marriage to Poole followed her to her second and final marriage to William Good. In 1686, William and Sarah Good forfeited to the court three acres of land to compensate for the unpaid debts accumulated by Poole.⁸¹ It was shortly after this settlement that William and Sarah Good began their well-known career of begging in and around Salem Village, homeless and destitute.

Though she began her life in comfort as the daughter of a successful innkeeper, Sarah Good served as a constant reminder to the Salem villagers that social and economic security

⁸⁰ *SWP*, “Samuel Sibley v. Sarah Good,” 63.28.

⁸¹ Dow, *Records and Files*, IX, 579.

were precarious commodities.⁸² Good's experiences also belied the relative permeability of the social and economic boundaries of Salem, though powerfully imagined as they were by the community at large. The death and remarriage of a parent, as in Good's case, could easily destroy the economic outlook and prospects of a child. In particular, Good's history of social role reversals very plausibly explains her reluctance to appear in church without the proper attire. Good's prior economic status before her father's death no doubt informed her of what constituted "proper" clothing for church meetings, and her inability to maintain this standard of dress and appearance later in life was the deciding factor in her reluctance to appear at church.⁸³ As records demonstrate, her reluctance to appear at church meeting served as one of the critical factors in accusations of witchcraft directed towards Goodwife Good.

Much like her lack of—and simultaneous supernatural appearances of—clothing, Sarah Good's physical body would further betray her, though not through the initial search for physical abnormalities performed by Goodwife Ingersoll on the morning of March 1, 1692. It was Good's own husband, William, that would insist just four days later that he had previously spotted "a wart or teat" just beneath Goodwife Good's right shoulder; William Good even asked Goodwife Ingersoll how she could have missed such an evident abnormality in her examination.⁸⁴ The

⁸² Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974) 205.

⁸³ Boyer and Nissenbaum further attribute Goodwife Good's ungrateful and abrasive personality to her unfortunate economic mobility, and argue that had Good "been *born* to the poverty she was forced to endure in her adulthood, it is unlikely she would have acted as she did," *Salem Possessed*, 205.

⁸⁴ *SWP*, "Testimony of William Allen, John Hughes, William Good, and Samuel Braybrook v. Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne, and Tituba," 63.19.

discovery of a physical malformation on an accused witch was of great evidential importance in witchcraft proceedings, so much so that oftentimes special committees were appointed with the task of performing the examinations.⁸⁵ A witch's teat, besides undoubtedly serving as a physical signal of an internal flaw of the soul, served as substantiation of the commonly acknowledged practice of keeping a "familiar" in beliefs surrounding witchcraft. It was not unusual, Puritans believed, for a witch who had given herself body and soul to Satan to have a familiar or imp "suckle" at some location on their bodies; the creatures and the marks they left behind on witches' bodies signified a total bodily possession by the devil.⁸⁶ Tituba also accused Sarah Good of suckling a familiar, more specifically, a yellow bird that appeared to "Suck Good between the fore finger & Long finger upon the Right hand."⁸⁷ In June of 1692, Good was physically examined once more for anomalies, this time by a committee of no less than ten women. Though they also found nothing abnormal adorning Good's body, Sarah was eventually convicted by the magistrates of Salem village of practicing witchcraft and consorting with the devil, and was summarily executed on July 19, 1692.

The ten-woman committee that was tasked with the examination of Good also examined five other women accused of practicing witchcraft: Bridget Bishop, Rebecca Nurse, Elizabeth Proctor, Alice Parker, and Susanna Martine. Two of those women, Rebecca Nurse and Elizabeth Proctor, had also been accused of appearing to their victims wearing only their shifts, a social and communal equivalent of appearing completely naked. Upon examination, Bishop, Nurse,

⁸⁵ Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 180.

⁸⁶ Reis, *Damned Women*, 112-113.

⁸⁷ *SWP*, 125.4.

and Proctor all were found to have “a preternatural Excrescence of flesh between the pudendum and Anus much like to teats & not usual in women & much unlike to the other three that hath been searched by us & that they were in all the three women near the same place.”⁸⁸ Similarly, Margaret Jones, accused of witchcraft in Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1648, was found to have a “teat in her secret parts as fresh as if it had been newly sucked” and was later discovered “with her clothes up” while in prison.⁸⁹ The importance of the findings of these physical examinations cannot be overstated; here was visual proof of the inner defects of the souls of these women. The proximity of the abnormalities to their genital areas was also of significance, implying sexual complicity with the devil or a familiar on the part of the witches.

John Demos makes an interesting assessment of the “nursing” witch in casting it as the moral opposite of the traditional nursing mother.⁹⁰ Like the transitional period of menopause signaled both the physical and metaphorical the end of a woman’s God-given abilities and “usefulness”, the image of the nursing witch served as a perversion of God’s intended life-sustaining functions for women’s bodies. Salem village resident Susannah Sheldon accused Bridget Bishop of pulling out her breast to nurse “a thing like a black pig it had no hair on it and she put it to her breast and gave it suck and when it had sucked on breast she put it [to] the other and gave it suck.”⁹¹ The images of these “nursing” witches dramatically subverted their

⁸⁸ SWP, “Physical Examination of Bridget Bishop, Rebecca Nurse, Elizabeth Proctor, Alice Parker, Susannah Martin, and Sarah Good, No. 1,” 13.20.

⁸⁹ As quoted in Westerkamp, *Women in Early American Religion*, 64.

⁹⁰ Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 182.

⁹¹ SWP, “Statement of Susannah Sheldon v. Bridget Bishop, Mary English, Phillip English, Giles Corey, and Martha Corey,” 13.18.

traditional, God-given physical roles as givers and sustainers of life. In addition, Bishop's allegedly public baring of her breast would have added to the perception of inner sinful corruption. An accused woman also in the transitional state of menopause, as Bishop was, was doubly damning in terms of physical representation of her distance from God.

Like Goodwife Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne's body and its physical state would be used to further accusations of witchcraft against her. Sarah Osborne was also initially questioned about her noticeable lack of attendance at Sabbath meetings, and when questioned further, Osborne admitted that a devilish voice had told her to stay away from Sabbath meetings. When asked why she had yielded to the devil's demands to "never go to meeting since," Osborne replied, "alas. I have been sick and not able to go."⁹² Osborne's admission of bodily infirmity, while perhaps a valid excuse for not attending church services, was also summarily an admission of the infirmity of her soul. The weakness of Osborne's physical body, the vessel which Puritan belief established as protector of her soul, left her vulnerable to attacks from the devil. A woman like Osborne who displayed symptoms of a lengthy illness also displayed signs of the sinful nature of her internal soul.⁹³ As a testament to her propensity for illness, Sarah Osborne would not live long enough to receive an indictment for her supposed practice of witchcraft. Osborne died while in custody in the Boston jail on May 10, 1692.

For some of the accused witches, their bodily transgressions were not the first of their crimes in Massachusetts society. John Demos notes that of those who were accused as witches in

⁹² According to testimony of the village and Osborne's husband, Osborne had been absent from Sabbath meetings for a total of a year and two months. *SWP*, "Examination of Sarah Osborne," 95.2.

⁹³ Reed, "Why Salem Made Sense," 227.

Salem in 1692, half of them had previously been charged with the commission of other crimes. Of the examined categories of criminal offenses, the second most popular crime charged of those who were later accused of witchcraft was theft.⁹⁴ Among the most popular items in these cases of theft: linens and clothing. It proves certainly telling, then, to note several accused witches testified that the devil attempted to lure them to his service with the promise of clothing and “pretty things,” as Tituba would recount.⁹⁵ Deliverance Hobbs testified that her encounter with Satan included a promise “that If she would put her hand to the [Satan’s] book [he] would give her some Clothes...,” whilst both Mary Bridges Jr. and Johanna Tyler spoke of the devil’s promise of “fine Clothes” for their allegiance and service.⁹⁶ Sarah Wardwell’s confession that she “wanted” the fine clothing that the devil had offered her could certainly be translated as verbal affirmation of her own lust for fine dress, further proof of the weakness of her own soul.⁹⁷ In the 1671 case of witchcraft against Elizabeth Knapp of Groton, Massachusetts, Knapp confessed that the devil presented a “treaty of a covenant and proffered largely to her: viz. such things as suited her youthful fancy, money, silks, fine clothes.”⁹⁸ In the case against Goodwife Ayers of Hartford, Connecticut in 1662, Ayres herself offered her accuser “fine lace” to adorn

⁹⁴ See “Table 9. Crimes of the witches” in Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 77.

⁹⁵ *SWP*, 125.4

⁹⁶ *SWP*, “Examination of Deliverance Hobbs in Prison,” 70.2, “Examination of Mary Bridges, Jr.,” 18.1, “Examination of Joannah Tyler,” 130.1.

⁹⁷ *SWP*, “Examination of Sarah Wardwell, copy,” 134.1.

⁹⁸ David D. Hall, ed., *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History 1638-1693* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2005) 200.

her clothing in return for her accuser's silence.⁹⁹ The lure of fine clothes for these accused witches fit perfectly within the spectrum of Puritan belief that clothing, especially opulent clothing, served as visible representation of inner sinfulness.

It is important to note that although these women were tempted with fine clothes by the devil, no account or testimony exists of either Mary Bridges Jr., Tituba, or Johanna Tyler actually appearing in their promised finery. For these women, the lure of fine clothing sufficed to explain their propensity for sinfulness and witchcraft. But the same could not be said of accused witches Judah White or Bridget Bishop. Like Sarah Good, Judah White was also accused of actually appearing to her victims wearing fine clothing. Judah White, a maidservant, allegedly appeared to Abigail Hobbs with Sarah Good on the way to Hobbs' own examination, wearing "fine Clothes in a Sad coloured Silk Mantel, with a Top knot and an hood," an outfit much similar to that of her fellow accused witch Sarah Good's.¹⁰⁰ Historian Mary Beth Norton argues that in the case of Judah White, her appearance in fine clothes unbefitting of her social rank served as physical evidence to her observers and accusers that White had successfully completed a diabolical pact with Satan, and received her fine clothing as a reward.¹⁰¹

Accusations of witchcraft against Bridget Bishop also centered on descriptions of her clothing. Bishop, as one of the most recognized of the accused and condemned witches of the

⁹⁹ Hall, *Witch-Hunting*, 153.

¹⁰⁰ SWP, "Examination of Abigail Hobbs, April 20, 1692," 69.2. "Sad coloured", as Alice Morse Earle notes, refers to a "quiet" tint of color rather than a somber black or gray. See Earle, *Two Centuries of Costume in America*, 27.

¹⁰¹ Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002) 131.

Salem trials, bears a marked similarity in background to her fellow accused witch Sarah Good. Like Goodwife Good, Bishop found herself responsible for her first husband's considerable debts following his death in 1678, forcing the sale of her family's land to address her husband's numerous obligations.¹⁰² Bishop remained destitute until her marriage to second husband and sawyer Edward Bishop Sr., which marked a drastic improvement in Bishop's economic status. Along with her new stepson Edward Bishop Jr. and his wife Sarah, Bridget Bishop operated an unlicensed yet well-visited tavern along one of Salem village's main thoroughfares. The Bishop tavern, unlike its three officially licensed counterparts in Salem village, quickly garnered a reputation as a place for late night conviviality and questionable activities by the time of the witch trials in 1692. In his testimony against Sarah Bishop, Bridget's daughter-in-law who was also accused of witchcraft, the Reverend John Hale related that Sarah "did entertain people in her house at unseason-able hours in the night to keep drinking and playing at shovel-board whereby discord did arise in other families & young people were in danger to be corrupted."¹⁰³

Besides her family's notoriety for keeping a business that consistently verged on "great prophaneness and iniquity," records of testimony against Bridget Bishop during the witchcraft trials reveal that the Salem village inhabitants recognized Bishop's ostentatious choice of clothing. In his testimony against Bishop, Richard Coman described her as appearing in his bedroom late one night "in her Red paragon Bodys and the rest of her clothing that she then

¹⁰² Dow, *Records and Files*, VII, 319-320.

¹⁰³ *SWP*, "The Rev. John Hale v. Sarah Bishop," 14.1. For a lengthy period of time, Bridget and her daughter-in-law were often confused as one person.

usually did wear.”¹⁰⁴ William Stacy was likewise visited by the spectre of Bishop at night, describing her as wearing “a black cap, & a black hat, and a Red Coat with two Eakes of two Colors.”¹⁰⁵ The detail with which Bishop’s clothing is described by Stacy and Coman point to the remarkability of her dress and, without explicitly stating it, the expense of it. Though the color red in and of itself did not imbue the same sinful meaning in Puritan culture that modern audiences associate it with today, a bright and lasting red dye was incredibly expensive compared to the more subdued rust tones of the madder root dye commonly used to produce the color red.¹⁰⁶ A brightly-colored garment such as the one worn by Bishop would have been received as a statement of pride and an outward display of a lack of piety. The fabric from which Bishop’s most recognized ensemble was made would have also drawn scrutiny. Her paragon bodice, in this case, refers to the type of fabric of Bishop’s bodice, a fine camlet weave fabric of animal hair blended with expensive silk fibers, usually imported.¹⁰⁷ A dress length of this fabric, usually around five or six yards, was of great expense when compared to common homespun wool and linen stuffs. The fineness and expense of a garment made with paragon fabric,

¹⁰⁴ “Bodys”, in this case, typically referred to the modern day equivalent of “bodice,” meaning either the upper half of a woman’s dress or also a common dress-like garment of the period comprised of a boned bodice and skirt sewn as one piece. *SWP*, “Testimony of Richard Coman v. Bridget Bishop,” 13.13.

¹⁰⁵ *SWP*, “Deposition of William Stacy v. Bridget Bishop,” 13.8.

¹⁰⁶ At the time, brilliant red dyes were typically manufactured from cochineal, an insect discovered in Mexico and imported from the New World. See also Elena Phipps, *Cochineal Red: The Art History of a Color* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010).

¹⁰⁷ Florence M. Montgomery, *Textiles in America, 1650-1870: A Dictionary Based on Original Documents, Prints and Paintings, Commercial Records, American Merchant's Papers, Shopkeepers' Advertisements, and Pattern Books with Original Swatches of Cloth* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007) 317.

especially one that required a large amount of this fabric, served as a memorable characteristic of Bishop's appearance for the Salem community.

William Stacy's testimony likewise mentions Bishop's red bodice, but also adds that her bodice was decorated with "two Eakes of two colors." Eakes¹⁰⁸, in this case, likely refers to some sort of decorative addition to Bridget's apparel, akin to ribbons or trim. Stacy's testimony confirms that Bridget's clothing was not only expensive in its foundation, but was also decorated with trim of a variety of colors. Further corroboration of the evidence of Bishop's decorated clothing can be found in the testimony of Samuel Shattuck, the local dyer. Shattuck states that Bishop "brought me a pair of Sleeves to dye & after that Sundry pieces of lace," and that "just after the dying of these things" the Shattuck's eldest child was stricken with unexplained fits.¹⁰⁹ Shattuck's testimony alludes to the fact that Bishop possessed several different articles of clothing in her wardrobe that were dyed, in addition to the dyed bodice mentioned in Coman and Stacy's testimonies. Furthermore, Shattuck's testimony confirms that Bridget not only incorporated decorative elements such as lace in her apparel, but that Bishop also went to the expense of dyeing these pieces of lace decoration.

The Coman, Stacy, and Shattuck testimonies confirm that Bridget Bishop was well-known within Salem society for her choice of clothing and for cultivating a remarkable appearance, as well as dressing well outside of her middling social standing. It is also feasible that Bishop's past experiences with poverty and lowered social standing in between her two marriages added to the judgment that her clothing was doubly inappropriate for her social

¹⁰⁸ The Oxford English Dictionary defines "eke" as "an addition; a piece added on." See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "eke, n.1," <https://www.oed.com>

¹⁰⁹ *SWP*, "Testimony of Samuel Shattuck and Sarah Shattuck vs. Bridget Bishop," 13.10.

standing, as was the case with Sarah Good. These three testimonies reinforce the notion that for the village of Salem, the determination of Bishop's guilt in accusations of practicing witchcraft was, quite literally, woven into her appearance and her choice of clothing. Bishop's case is a prime example for the social persecution of witchcraft through appearance and clothing, especially concerning Bishop's reputation for transgressing theological and social boundaries of appearance in Puritan society.

Transgressions of social status via dress also figured into the case against accused witch Elizabeth Clawson of Stamford, Connecticut. Clawson's accuser, Katherine Branch, claimed to have seen the apparition of Goodwife Clawson "having on a silk hood & a blue apron."¹¹⁰ A prior encounter between Clawson and Katherine Branch's employer, Abigail Wescot, reveals the importance of this accusation. Goody Clawson, who was known for her open hostility to the Wescots after a dispute several years earlier, had once publicly heckled Abigail Wescot, calling her a "proud slut" and proclaiming that "[you're] proud on your fine clothes and you look to be mistress but you shall never be [mine]."¹¹¹ Clawson's statement reveals more than just an obvious animosity towards Abigail Wescot; there are clear implications of class hierarchy present, most notably that Wescot is Clawson's social superior and has the ability to wear "fine clothes," a fact which Clawson apparently resented. Branch's claim that she saw Clawson subsequently wearing a silk hood in her testimony accusing Clawson of witchcraft, coupled with

¹¹⁰ John M. Taylor, *The Witchcraft Delusion in Colonial Connecticut, 1647-1697* (New York: Grafton Press, 1908) 111.

¹¹¹ Taylor, *The Witchcraft Delusion*, 107.

Clawson's earlier encounter with Abigail Wescot, points to a transgression of social status through dress on Clawson's part.

Clothing further figured integral to the establishment of accusations of witchcraft through its power in establishing identity. Several of the sufferers at the source of the accusations of witchcraft proved the identity of their tormenters by the clothes that they were wearing. In his testimony accusing Goodwife Seager and Goodwife Greensmith of cavorting with the devil in the woods, Hartford resident Robert Stern recognized both women as he "knew the persons by their habit or clothes having observed such clothes on them not long before."¹¹² Samuel Gray, in his testimony against Bridget Bishop, insisted he recognized Bishop in his bedroom late one evening. Though he did not know Bishop by name, Gray instantly knew Bishop on account of her clothing, testifying that "he did see the same Woman in the same Garb and Clothes, that appeared to him as aforesaid... Yet both by her Countenance and garb doth Testify that it was the same Woman that they now Call Bridget Bishop." In the case of Sarah Osborne, the children afflicted by her witchcraft positively identified her in court, stating that "they had constantly seen her in the very habit that she was now in."¹¹³ Susanna Martin, another accused witch, was also positively identified by Bernard Peach as appearing to him "in her hood & scarf and the same dress that she was in before at meeting the same day."¹¹⁴

The courts of Salem even encouraged those afflicted by witchcraft to take note of the clothing of their tormenters in order to positively identify them. As a means of testing the

¹¹² Hall, *Witch-Hunting*, 156.

¹¹³ *SWP*, "Testimony of Samuel Gray v. Bridget Bishop," 13.9., "Examination of Sarah Osborne as Recorded by Jonathan Hathorne," 95.2.

¹¹⁴ *SWP*, "Deposition of Bernard Peach v. Susannah Martin," 92.12.

validity of her claims of witchcraft against Martha Corey, Ann Putnam Jr. was instructed to “take good notice” of what clothing Corey wore the next time she appeared to Ann. To prevent her from positively identifying the specter of Corey, Ann Putnam claimed that Corey’s apparition had blindfolded her so that Ann “should not tell us what clothes she [Corey] had on.”¹¹⁵ In the case against Martha Corey’s husband Giles, the afflicted Mary Warren proved able to describe Giles Corey “in all his garments, both of hat Coat and Colour of them with a Cord about his waist, and a white Cap on his head” when he appeared to threaten her in prison.¹¹⁶ Amidst her numerous bodily afflictions, Salem resident Samuel Perley’s daughter often claimed to see her accused spiritual oppressor Elizabeth Howe and described to her parents the detail of Howe’s clothing.¹¹⁷ Accused witches were also identified by traits of their physical bodies, especially if those bodies were malformed. Katherine Branch of Stamford, Connecticut described a second apparition that appeared to her as being “hook backed” and “crump backed.”¹¹⁸ In all of these cases, though the tangible physical presence of the witch was often lacking, the appearance of their distinctive clothing or body was enough to establish their identity and prove their perpetration of witchcraft.

For those women accused of transgression in terms of dress, as well as those who displayed bodily infirmity, their identities as those full of sin and prone to devilish attacks had already been well established in Salem society and beyond. Those marginal identities, formed on

¹¹⁵ *SWP*, “Deposition of Edward Putnam and Ezekiel Cheever v. Martha Corey,” 38.12.

¹¹⁶ *SWP*, “Examination of Mary Warren in Prison,” 135.2.

¹¹⁷ *SWP*, “Deposition of Samuel Perley et ux v. Elizabeth How,” 72.7.

¹¹⁸ Richard Godbeer, *Escaping Salem: The Other Witch Hunt of 1692* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 37.

account of their appearance, quickly and easily transformed into an identity grounded in the
perpetration of witchcraft.

Conclusion

The Salem witchcraft trials of 1692 remain an object of fascination in American memory for a number of reasons, though this analysis hopes to further encourage new areas of consideration for such a well-studied event. Through looking at such a popular event for analysis through the nontraditional lens of material culture studies, we are afforded a greater perspective and a fuller analysis of the events of 1692. A close study of Puritan theology and society reveals a people deeply concerned with the destruction of their society through social upheavals manifested in appearance and dress. Puritan regard for the “invisible” and “visible” elements of their world translated into a highly symbolic consideration of the more mundane aspects of daily life; each illness, infirmity, or disaster signaled an attack from invisible demonic forces. This mode of thought also translated to the richly symbolic medium of dress, where dressing in the garb of one’s social superiors or dressing in overstated opulence signaled an inner defect of the soul.

The Puritan founders idealized their settlements across New England as a fulfillment of God’s calling to establish a pure society of God’s elect. Though these communities strove to establish common affections and transparent social relations displayed in plain and modest bodies, the realities of social mobility fostered by growing New England economies stymied these efforts.¹¹⁹ By the close of the seventeenth century, the fear of a disorderly society straying from the founding ideals of these New England communities was a growing reality, represented in attempts by Puritan legislators to reign in increasing amounts of social transgressions through dress. As noted by Perry Miller, gradation in costume according to rank was the visible sign of a

¹¹⁹ Finch, *Dissenting Bodies*, 101.

social philosophy based upon the law of nature and further sanctioned by revelation, and changes to this code were therefore interpreted by Puritan communities as declensions.¹²⁰ These unsettling revelations demanded correction. In accordance to their covenant with God and each other, those within Puritan society who refused to exhibit godliness threatened the moral and social order of the entire community, laying open all bodies and behaviors to public scrutiny and disciplinary action.¹²¹

When accusations of witchcraft began to surface in the early months of 1692 in Salem village, they were accompanied by a variety of testimonies in which clothing and the body played a central role. Claims quickly surfaced of accused witches dressing in clothing far above what would normally be afforded to their social position. Accused witches were, on more than one occasion, tempted with the promise of fine clothing by the devil; evidence suggests some of them had been convicted of stealing clothing in the past. Other accused women were well-known for wearing clothing that tended to verge on opulence. Moreover, the bodies of these accused women were also used to their disadvantage. Their age, tendency for infirmity, and physical appearance were utilized as signals for proclivity to practicing witchcraft. Puritan belief concerning the inherent weakness of the female body perpetuated a sense of spiritual anxiety and encouraged communities to look for evil—or the cause of it—amongst their female members. The women accused of witchcraft in seventeenth century New England were doubly damned by Puritan theological belief concerning the female body and the clothes that adorned it.

¹²⁰ Miller, *The New England Mind*, 48.

¹²¹ Finch, *Dissenting Bodies*, 101.

In a society obsessed with the visual and convinced that their way of life may be at stake, the events of the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692 and beyond consistently fit the narrative governing Puritan society at the time. It is the purpose of this analysis to demonstrate that the broadening of viewpoints to include the “mundane” aspects of everyday life, the “soft culture” which is so often overlooked, often guide us to relevant and new-found areas of thought. Though the events of history often do not make sense through the lens of modern thought, these new avenues of analysis opened by material culture studies allow better understanding of past events as they happened within their own cultures, societies, and times.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Baxter, Richard. *A Treatise of Self-Denial. By Richard Baxter, Pastor of the Church at Kederminster*. London: Printed by Robert White, for Nevil Simmons at the Princes Arms in Saint Paul's Church-yard, 1675.
- Boileau, Jacques. *A Just and Seasonable Reprehension of Naked Breasts and Shoulders Written by a Grave and Learned Papist*. London: Printed for Jonathan Edwin, 1678.
- Boyer, Paul and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds. *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcriptions of the Court Records in Three Volumes*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1977.
- Dow, George Francis. *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County*. Salem: Essex Institute, 1913-1921.
- Hall, David D., ed. *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History 1638-1693*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2005.
- Hubbard, William. *The happiness of a people in the wisdom of their rulers directing and in the obedience of their brethren attending unto what Israel ought [sic] to do: recommended in a sermon before the Honourable governor and Council, and the respected deputies of the Massachusetts colony in New-England*. Boston: Printed by John Foster, 1676.
- Mather, Cotton. *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion. Or the Character and Happiness of a Vertuous Woman*. Cambridge: S.G. & B.G., 1691.

Shurtleff, Nathaniel B., ed. *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*. Boston: W. White, 1853.

Taylor, John M.. *The Witchcraft Delusion in Colonial Connecticut, 1647-1697*. New York: Grafton Press, 1908.

Trumbull, J. Hammond and Charles Hoadly, eds. *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*. Hartford: Brown & Parsons, 1850.

Winthrop, John. *A Modell of Christian Charity*. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1838.

Secondary Sources

Anker, Roy M.. "The American Puritans and the Historians." *Reformed Review* 39, no. 3 (1986).

Auslander, Leora. "Introduction: Making Gender with Things." *Clio* 40, no. 1 (2014).

Boyer, Paul and Stephen Nissenbaum. *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.

Demos, John Putnam. *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

———. *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony*. London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

De Marly, Diana. *Dress in North America: The New World 1492-1800*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1990.

- Earle, Alice Morse. *Two Centuries of Costume in America, 1620-1820*. New York: Macmillan, 1909.
- Fellner, Astrid. ““A Compleat Body of Divinity”: Visions of Sexuality and the Body in Puritan New England” in *A Full-Bodied Society*, edited by Francois Poirier and Louie Barrow. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010.
- Finch, Martha L.. *Dissenting Bodies: Corporealities in Early New England*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- . ““Fashions of Wordly Dames”: Separatist Discourses of Dress in Early Modern London, Amsterdam, and Plymouth Colony.” *Church History* 74, no. 3 (2005).
- Godbeer, Richard. *Escaping Salem: The Other Witch Hunt of 1692*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Hansen, Chadwick. *Witchcraft at Salem*. New York: George Braziller, 1969.
- Harvey, Tamara. “Feminist Theory in Seventeenth Century America.” *Early American Literature* 44, no. 2 (2009).
- Hunter, Phyllis Whitman. *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World: Massachusetts Merchants, 1670-1780*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Hurd, D. Hamilton. *History of Essex County, Massachusetts, with Biographical Sketches of Many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men*. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co, 1888.
- Innes, Stephen. *Creating the Commonwealth: The Economic Culture of Puritan New England*. New York: Norton, 1995.

- Karlsen, Carol F.. *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- Little, Frances. *Early American Textiles*. New York: The Century Co., 1931.
- Miller, Perry. *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939.
- Montgomery, Florence M.. *Textiles in America, 1650-1870: A Dictionary Based on Original Documents, Prints and Paintings, Commercial Records, American Merchant's Papers, Shopkeepers' Advertisements, and Pattern Books with Original Swatches of Cloth*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007.
- North, Gary. "The Puritan Experiment with Sumptuary Legislation." *Freeman* 24, no.1 (1974).
- Norton, Mary Beth. *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692*. New York: Vintage Books, 2002.
- Prown, Jules David. "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method." *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, no. 1 (1982).
- Reed, Isaac. "Why Salem Made Sense." *Cultural Sociology* 1, no. 2 (2007).
- Reis, Elizabeth. *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Robinson, David M.. "The Cultural Dynamics of American Puritanism." *American Literary History* 6, no. 4 (1994).
- Schmidt, Leigh Eric. "'A Church-going People are a Dress-loving People': Clothes, Communication, and Culture in Early America." *Church History* 58, no. 1 (1989).

- Smart, Ann Martin. "Material Things and Cultural Meanings: Notes on the Study of Early American Material Culture." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (1996).
- St. George, Robert Blair. "'Set Thine House in Order': The Domestication of the Yeomanry in Seventeenth-Century New England." In *New England Begins*, edited by Jonathan L. Fairbanks and Robert Trent. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1982.
- Trautman, Patricia. "When Gentlemen Wore Lace: Sumptuary Legislation in Seventeenth Century New England." *Journal of Regional Cultures* 3, no. 2 (1983).
- Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. "Cloth, Clothing, and Early American Social History." *Dress* 18, no. 1 (1991).
- Westerkamp, Marilyn J.. *Women in Early American Religion 1600-1850: The Puritan and Evangelical Traditions*. London: Routledge, 1999.