EMPOWERING POPULARITY:
THE FUEL BEHIND A WITCH-HUNT

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Introduction

On August 19, 1692, Reverend George Burroughs stood among five condemned witches of the Salem community: Martha Carrier, John Willard, George Jacobs Sr., John Proctor, and himself. As Burroughs was led up to the ladder to be hanged, he addressed the crowd in one final plea and ended his speech with the Lord’s Prayer. The ease with which he was able to recite the name of God, thought to be impossible for a true witch, generated doubt among the onlookers as to whether or not the Reverend was actually guilty of witchcraft.\(^1\) After his execution, the crowd in Salem became restive over the fact that a respectable minister had just been hanged for a crime under the disputed circumstances of spectral evidence. However, this distress did not last long, for Reverend Cotton Mather, the most vocal advocate for the use of spectral evidence during the witch trials, addressed the crowd stating that “the devil [had] often been transformed into an angel of light.”\(^2\) The certainty of Cotton Mather’s answer appeased any mistrust among the once restless crowd, and the trials continued as though nothing suspect had happened that day.

Witchcraft has been of interest for a number of reasons in past historical debates. Carol Karlsen argues that witchcraft functioned to correct social imbalances or variations from the standard social behaviors. However, this does not explain all witchcraft accusations since there could be variations in social, political, and economic circumstances in which they occurred. Two of the best-known, large-scale witchcraft

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outbreaks in the western world occurred in Suffolk, England in 1645 and Salem, Massachusetts in 1692. These two occurrences were unlike most other witchcraft outbreaks, but they were eerily similar to one another based on how they developed due to the social, political, and religious climate of the communities, and how the actions of individuals exacerbated them. Each was a majority Puritan community looking for stability after a period of political unrest, willing to turn to a leader who seemed to find answers for the problems the community faced. For Suffolk, that leader was Matthew Hopkins; for Salem, it was Cotton Mather. In this thesis, I argue that both Matthew Hopkins and Cotton Mather took advantage of the political, social, and religious unrest in their respective communities to rise in popularity and establish their name as authorities and experts of witchcraft in the religious and intellectual world.

A number of articles and studies of witchcraft focus on the Salem witch trials and the Suffolk witch-hunts because they are two of the largest and best documented witch-hunts. Furthermore, the Salem witch trials were one of the only large-scale examples of a witch-hunting craze in the English colonies, making it a highly researched event. Much of the primary source material regarding both witch-hunts remains readily available. Trial documents in the form of indictments and transcripts from each witch-hunt occurrence as well as any pamphlets published discussing the proceedings of the witch trials, such as A True Relation of the Araignment of eighteen Witches, are necessary to compare how trial proceedings actually occurred versus how
authorities presented the proceedings to the public. Also pertinent to this study are the works published by Cotton Mather and Matthew Hopkins after the events took place, *The Wonders of the Invisible World* and *A Discovery of Witchcraft*. These documents will support my argument that Mather and Hopkins both took advantage of the political and social climates as well as the social framework primarily used by women in the community to gain popularity and prestige in their respective societies. In addition to the publications of Mather and Hopkins, defending their methods and work, works by Robert Calef and John Gaule have been included in the study as examples of the criticism directed towards Mather and Hopkins during and after their involvement in the witch-hunts.

This thesis draws on both foundational and newly established concepts employed by historians studying witchcraft. Three of the first historians to take on the field of witchcraft were C. L'Estrange Ewen, Brian Levack, and Carol Karlsen. Ewen made a number of primary source documents regarding witchcraft trials available to historians by paraphrasing the legal documents and translating them all from Latin to English. His translations are accepted and used by most historians studying witchcraft, and include a number of new sources that were unused before his translations. More recently, Levack has written and edited a number of books and volumes devoted to witchcraft, providing easier access to primary source documents

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3 Due to the fact that many of the official records from the Suffolk witch-hunts were written in Latin, I relied a great deal on C. L'Estrange Ewen’s *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials: The Indictments for Witchcraft from the Records of 1373 Assizes Held for the Home Circuit A.D. 1559-1736* as a resource for understanding the Suffolk indictments since Ewen carefully translated and summarized each of the 30 indictments.

as well as collecting a number of articles on the topic. Levack’s works are frequently cited and used by historians as general background information in the history of witchcraft. While Levack has provided the general history and accepted facts in regards to witchcraft, Carol Karlsen was one of the first historians to focus on witchcraft in terms of women’s history. Karlsen’s arguments are widely debated among historians since she claims that most women who were accused of witchcraft during this time were not very different from their neighbors, except in holding independent economic power. Since Karlsen’s argument focuses mainly on the social and economic factors behind witchcraft accusations, a number of historians have built on her claims to either further her argument or oppose her assertions. Louise Jackson is one such historian in support of Karlsen’s line of thought. Jackson strives to understand why women who were clearly innocent of their crimes pleaded guilty, even with death on the line. Although more recent historians have further developed both Karlsen and Jackson’s arguments, they are still considered foundational studies of witchcraft.

While Karlsen’s argument is largely accepted, those historians who have argued against it have done so primarily on the basis of religion and gender. Karlsen’s argument comes from the perspective of a women’s historian, focusing solely on how certain actions affected women. While most accused witches were women, this


perspective does not fully account for the various ways gender worked in the early modern period. For example, Malcolm Gaskill claims that women were not the only targets of witchcraft accusations, and were more often the beneficiaries of witchcraft legislation than the victims.\textsuperscript{8} E.J. Kent argues that too few studies have focused on gender in relation to witchcraft and these studies inaccurately portrayed men accused of witchcraft as ‘feminized’ individuals, representing ‘a failure of masculinity’ and embodying negative female traits.\textsuperscript{9} Examining witchcraft through a more multifaceted lens of gender rather than just women’s experiences is a more recent development that has pushed historians to reevaluate their arguments.

Historians have argued that the witch-hunting occurrences in Suffolk and Salem were unique in comparison to other witchcraft events; however, when viewed comparatively, key actions and developments in each craze appear similar in nature. While a number of historians have noted these similarities, they have not compared the involvement of Cotton Mather and Matthew Hopkins. This thesis specifically focuses on how these men took advantage of restless social and political climates to fuel and orchestrate large-scale witch-hunting events in hopes of raising their own profiles and prestige. Without the driving power of these men, individual witchcraft accusations would have been very unlikely to explode into full-blown hysterias. The trials would have lost steam. Historians of witchcraft acknowledge that the social, political, and religious unrest in both of these communities provided the foundations

\textsuperscript{8} Gaskill, “The Devil in the Shape of a Man: Witchcraft, Conflict and Belief in Jacobean England,” 142-171.

for the witch-hunting frenzies that took place, but those same factors could be found in many communities which did not have witch hunting crazes. Historians, however, have not necessarily considered how other actors contributed to or exacerbated structural factors.

This thesis will argue that Hopkins and Mather took advantage of how the women in these communities were gaining agency and fueled women’s behaviors in order to gain popularity. By providing a framework for these women to easily work in, Mather and Hopkins not only encouraged these “crazes,” but also made it possible for women to gain agency in their community by means of accusations. Therefore, although in search of their own popularity and power, Mather and Hopkins aided the expansion of female agency in strict Puritan communities.

In order to understand the similarities between how Hopkins and Mather approached their respective witch-hunts, this work will examine the political, societal, and religious factors that led to the witch-hunts. First, it will explore why most witchcraft accusations happened prior to these two occurrences, and why women often found themselves the targets of these accusations. Focusing on gender, religious unrest, illness, and socio-economic situations, chapter one presents a brief history of how witchcraft accusations developed throughout European history and how these factors influenced the events of Suffolk and Salem. Following this, chapter two details the events of the Suffolk witch-hunts and how they fit into the political, religious, and social situation of England during the 1640s. This chapter specifically focuses on the methods of Hopkins and his rise and fall in English popularity. Next,
chapter three focuses on the Salem witch trials and the influence Mather had over the trial proceedings. The political, social, and religious events surrounding the Salem witch trials will also be discussed thoroughly throughout this chapter. Finally, the fourth chapter compares how Hopkins and Mather similarly took advantage of the precarious political, social, and religious situations of Puritan communities to gain popularity and prestige within their communities and how they simultaneously succeeded and failed in doing so. By focusing specifically on Hopkins and Mather in relation to the Suffolk witch-hunts and the Salem witch trials, it is clear these two men manipulated the tensions within these Puritan communities to create large scale frenzies which they could use to benefit themselves personally.

Although Matthew Hopkins and Cotton Mather only influenced two specific witch-hunts, their actions are important in understanding the role just one individual could play in turning a uncertain societal situation into a large-scale witch-hunt with a few words. Furthermore, the actions of these two individuals resulted in the strengthening of laws surrounding witchcraft trials and legal methods of extracting confessions. It is important to understand how Hopkins and Mather used the unstable societal conditions within Puritan communities to gain fame and prestige within the community, but also how the public’s reaction to their actions affected how witch-hunts were viewed by society thereafter.

In order to understand why the Suffolk witch-hunts and the Salem witch trials occurred, one must first understand why witchcraft accusations happened. How did these two instances fit into the broader pattern of witchcraft? Witchcraft accusations happened for a number of reasons depending on the social and political climate of the area. Gender, religious and political unrest, socio-economic situations, and widespread illness represent just a few of the many potential reasons behind an accusation. The peculiar nature of the Suffolk witch-hunts and the Salem witch trials stemmed from parallel political and social climates, which both instigated witch crazes. This chapter seeks to explore, in a general sense, why most witchcraft accusations happened previous to these two occurrences, and why women often found themselves the targets of these accusations.

The Threat of Independence

Many people worried about social deviance, which included women claiming a more independent role in society. Most women targeted for witchcraft stood out as “others” in their society, whether as economically independent, socially independent, or in a dominant role.10 Midwives often fell victim to witchcraft accusations since they “symbolized women’s control over the health and well-being of others.”11

Women in colonial and smaller communities typically held the role of midwife or

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10 During this time period, women were considered to hold the “dominant role” in society or their relationship if they worked, handled the finances, found themselves in the public sphere, controlled the household, etc. Typically, society expected women to exist only in the private sphere.

11 Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 143.
aided in the birthing room. Although midwives occupied a well-respected place in the community, they could easily fall prey to witchcraft accusations due to the nature of their job. These women were present during every birth in the community and healed people within the community by studying herbal remedies, learning the particulars of the human body, and becoming well versed in illnesses and ailments. Because of this knowledge and skill, “women who healed people or relieved symptoms which doctors had unsuccessfully treated could come under suspicion of using magic in their medical practice…[women] who safely delivered infants that were not expected to survive might find [themselves] accused of witchcraft.”

People believed that women could only obtain these results by means of occult agencies rather than experience. Too much success could thus be dangerous, but so could too frequent failure. For example, in 1648 Margaret Jones was found guilty of witchcraft and hanged after she was supposedly found “to have such a malignant touch, as many persons, (men, women, and children,) whom she stroked or touched with any affection or displeasure, or, etc., were taken with deafness, or vomiting, or other violent pains or sickness.”

Due to poor medical situations, lack of experience, or undesirable medical outcomes Margaret, as well as other midwives, encountered witchcraft accusations. Women had to achieve continuous, but not too much, success as midwives in order to avoid any such suspicions.

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Similarly, women who stood out from the societal norms of the community were suspected of diabolical activities or a covenant with the devil. In England, poor women were typically targeted as witches. However, it was often not the poorest women, those who qualified for poor relief, that found themselves accused of witchcraft, but those just a economic step above them: women who though that they deserved poor relief but were denied it.\textsuperscript{14} In contrast, the English colonies faced the opposite problem of their fellow communities in England. Carol Karlsen argues that most witchcraft accusations in the English colonies by the seventeenth-century originated from societal tensions. Women who held large sums of money or were in line to inherit money from a relative faced a higher likelihood of witchcraft accusations. Because of the unusual system of inheritance within the colonies, women held a more beneficial position within the community to inherit money and land from their families and fathers. In fact, “there were at least a dozen witches [in Salem] who, despite the presence of brothers and sons, came into much larger shares of estates than their neighbors would have expected. In some cases, these women gained full control over the disposition of property.”\textsuperscript{15} Karlsen comes to the conclusion that women without brothers or sons “stood in the way of the orderly transmission of property from one generation of males to another” as was typical within English society, creating a much higher risk of witchcraft accusations.\textsuperscript{16} Once accused of witchcraft, the woman’s property and wealth was taken and redistributed among the next in line, making it a tempting option for greedy family members and relatives.

\textsuperscript{14} Karlsen, \textit{The Devil in the Shape of a Woman}, 77.
\textsuperscript{15} Karlsen, \textit{The Devil in the Shape of a Woman}, 113.
\textsuperscript{16} Karlsen, \textit{The Devil in the Shape of a Woman}, 116.
On top of economic motivations, communities also targeted women whom they perceived as social outliers. A number of women accused of witchcraft stood out as louder members of the community. A woman’s place in stereotypical English society depended on her submissiveness and quiet, polite manner. Women who stood out as louder, opinionated, or independent found themselves suspect, especially when strange or unusual things happened within the community. In one case, Anna Moats “had been persecuted for her failure to conform to the accepted norms of female behavior—instead of fulfilling the expected role of a ‘good’ wife and mother she had been cursing and shouting at her husband and children.”\(^{17}\) Not only did Anna exemplify the fears of women in a dominant role, but she also inverted the basic patriarchal ideals of English society.

Why were women with wealth and social independence more likely to receive witchcraft accusations? These women inverted the patriarchal structure of English and English colonial society. By definition, patriarchy is the societal construct in which men hold power and women are largely excluded from it, shaping and constraining women’s spheres, frameworks, and choices. Although current historians define European societies as patriarchies, the term did not exist until centuries later, making it impossible for early modern contemporaries to understand the concept. Both men and women had gendered spheres of influence in which they worked and existed. Men existed in the public sphere, engaging in politics, trade, business, and work. Women existed in the private sphere, working within the household, taking care of children,

and maintaining the family chores and duties. With this societal model, men had a more dominant role in everyday life while women had a submissive position to men. Most women accused of witchcraft in these societies were social outliers in the established patriarchal society, destabilizing the order in which society functioned. Both men and women found these outliers uncomfortable and sought to rid the community of them.

Even some accused women seemed to feel similarly, leading to their confessions out of guilt over failing to fulfill their womenly roles. Less common in the colonies but more so in England, a number of women confessed to witchcraft knowing that they would probably die because of their confession. As Louise Jackson explains, “confessions were, in many cases, the result of ill-treatment; however, it is undoubtedly the case that some of the alleged witches do seem to have been quite ready and prepared to make confessions and statements that they had bewitched their neighbours” and family members.18 Women were very aware of the social constructions of their community as well as their submissive, motherly role within society. During the seventeenth century, women defined their role in society as a wife and a mother, so if they failed in their duties as either a wife or mother, they felt as if they were not fitting into the social framework. A confession of witchcraft “could provide a framework to describe a situation in which a woman was frightened or felt

threatened and which she was unable to articulate in any other way.”¹⁹ This could include a woman’s insecurities as a wife or mother as well as any other traumatic events. For example, Prissilla Collit of Dunage confessed to witchcraft stating that the devil had appeared to her twelve years earlier and tempted her to kill her children to escape poverty.²⁰ When women had no other ways to describe how they felt, like with post-partum depression or anger, they turned to the devil as their explanation. Witchcraft was treated as a ‘secret crime’ during this period, meaning that the accused was in theory the sole witness to her meetings with the devil.²¹ If a woman confessed to witchcraft, no one in the community could argue against her or save her because of this. This led to the belief that when women confessed to witchcraft in England, they thought the devil had led them astray in their duties as a wife or mother, causing them to not want to perform their duties or instilling hostility towards their families, husbands, or children.

**Witchcraft as Heresy**

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, Heinrich Kramer, a German Catholic clergyman, wrote *Malleus Maleficarum*, which became the guidebook for witch hunters in Europe throughout the medieval period. As a consequence of religious tensions, large numbers of men and women were burned, stoned, drowned, and hanged for accusations of witchcraft. *Malleus Maleficarum* shaped the ideas and fears

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Europeans held regarding witches, branded them as a threat to society, and inspired officials and inquisitors in their hunt for social deviants. The invention of the printing press in the early fifteenth century allowed for mass production and widespread dissemination of pamphlets, texts, and information across Europe. Kramer published his book in 1486, just a few years after the printing press became an essential part of European society, making it possible for his work to reach a larger audience than was possible in the pre-printing press era when books were not as much of a commercial item. The fact that Kramer utilized the mass production qualities of the printing press ensured that his guidebook would quickly rise in popularity, when it would have most likely failed during any earlier time period.

Kramer’s publication incited multiple witch-hunts throughout the following centuries, most commonly by inquisitors, members of the Catholic Church who sought to combat heresy, and those seeking fame or popularity. His motivation for such hunts can be found within the first few pages of his book, where he asserted, “that the laws highly commend those who seek to nullify the charms of witches.”²² With the occurrence of the Black Death not even a century earlier, Europeans sought to avoid any other possible ailments by taking necessary measures to circumvent future tragedies and rid their community of witches. As a result of this fear, religious and political leaders were not the only people who sought to hunt witches. Lay communities also took it upon themselves to persecute those who posed a threat.

During the fifteenth century, when *Malleus Maleficarum* was published, religious and secular authorities worked closely together throughout Europe. Most communities saw the Church as the “moral police.” Crimes were not only investigated and tried by the secular courts, but often by religious authorities as well. Nearly all European communities held themselves to Christian moral standards, which meant that they were responsible for maintaining a safe Christian environment and preventing the devil’s influence from entering their community. Heretics, people who held a belief or opinion contrary to orthodox religious doctrine, were targets for persecution since heresy was seen as blight on the sacral community. Anyone who questioned religious authorities, religious teachings, the Bible, or deviated from Christianity in any way faced potential persecution as a heretic within their community. The proceedings for persecuting heretics often began among community members who would bring evidence to the secular and religious courts. Once a heresy claim was made against a particular community member, the courts and religious officials would proceed with interrogations and torture of the accused and witnesses until enough information has been retrieved to establish a viable account of the events.\[23\] After questioning, officials would meet, discuss, and decide the fate of the accused community member. This typically resulted in either death or exile from the community in order to maintain a safe Christian community.

Most European witchcraft persecutions during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries fell under the purview of religion and heresy. The Church frequently used a

broad definition of witchcraft to target individuals who threatened the sacral community.24 Jews, for example, were not considered heretics, but they often faced the same persecution as heretics and witches in Christian communities. According to Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, “drinking human blood was a practice the Church frequently attributed to heretics and witches.”25 This type of ‘blood magic’ was seen in a number of cases related to witchcraft, especially women’s witchcraft. In most accused cases of blood magic, women prepared food or drink with female body parts or fluids. They then served these to men, symbolically penetrating men’s bodies and asserting control or power over men’s behavior.26 Because women’s primary role took place in the home, cleaning, cooking, and child rearing, blood magic was one of the easiest ways to connect women to witchcraft cases. One such example was the case of Jewish ritual murder in Trent in 1475. In the case of Trent, the Catholic Church accused Jewish women of practicing blood magic by adding blood from ritual murder into matzo.27 In other countries, such as Mexico, women used what were known as blood remedies to keep their lovers at their sides. These remedies were a mixture of menstrual blood “with hairs from the shameful parts," often served in the New World drinks of cocoa or pulque.28 It was common for colonial Mexican women to use their washwater, menstrual blood, and pubic hair to attract men or keep them from straying.

24 Since most heretical accusations were investigated by the Catholic church, and witchcraft fell under the category of heresy during the fifteenth-century, both women and men had a similar likelihood of facing persecution as a witch.
25 Hsia, Trent 1475: Stories of a Ritual Murder Trial, 89.
27 Hsia, Trent 1475: Stories of a Ritual Murder Trial, 113.
Even if women chose not to use these remedies, “they were familiar with the lore and continually passed it on to other women.”29 The commonality of these remedies is evident within the records of the Mexican Inquisition, which provides numerous examples of women ensorcelling the food of men. Blood magic was common practice in a number of other countries and areas, becoming a defining factor of witchcraft practices in trials and different communities.

Those accused of heretical crimes also often confessed. Some historical evidence suggests that a number of contemporaries knew the crimes to which Jews, heretics, and witches confessed to be false. So why did these individuals confess? During the medieval and early modern periods, secular and sometimes religious courts used torture as a way to get the information they required for prosecution. Women and men often used past rumors they had heard of themselves or common knowledge relating to witchcraft and heresy to shape their false confessions. By doing this, they escaped torture by telling officials exactly what they wanted to hear.30 The use of torture eventually became less prevalent after the inquisitions, but the act of women confessing to past rumors of their witchcraft activities did not.31 While physical torture was phased out of some countries, it was still used in others, such as Scotland. However, “it is clear that the English confessions were often obtained by imposing

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30 Hsia, Trent 1475: Stories of a Ritual Murder Trial, 111.
31 Inquisitions, by definition, were established in 1230 as a court of law developed to root out heresy in a systematic way within the religion. The use of torture surrounding witchcraft subsided around 1500 when the Inquisition began to die down on continental Europe.
physical and psychological pressures on the accused."\textsuperscript{32} Similarly in colonial witchcraft trials, officials chose to psychologically pressure accused men and women.

Of course, secular and religious officials used torture as a means to procure not only witchcraft confessions, but also confessions of other types of heresy as well. Witches almost always fell under the category of heresy because, in order to become a witch, one had to willingly make a pact with the devil.\textsuperscript{33} Some people were able to escape persecution as a witch or heretic by claiming that the devil tricked them into their actions and providing sound enough evidence to support their claims.\textsuperscript{34} Torture was also used as a way to target other religions within the community. Christian communities viewed other religions as an “internal” other, and sought to remove them as quickly as possible. As discussed earlier, Christians sought to target women of other religious groups by associating them with characteristics of witchcraft such as blood magic or dominance. By the late sixteenth century after the Reformation, religious others became more prevalent with the establishment of new Christian religions.

**The Quaker Problem**

While Christians had been targeting Jews for centuries, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw an increase in Christians targeting other Christians. A key example of this occurring in Europe is the persecution of Quakers by Puritans, and


\textsuperscript{33} It is important to note that the exception to this European witchcraft standard was England, where witches were tried for felony, not heresy.

more specifically Puritans accusing Quakers of witchcraft in an attempt to rid their communities of a religious other. England, during the seventeenth century, was overwhelmed by religious tensions between the Anglican Church and Puritans, and the Quakers protest of Puritan practices. Quakers threatened Puritan communities by challenging the social, political, and religious constructs that defined the Puritan lifestyle. As the Quaker religion developed in the mid-seventeenth century, they made choices that were considered uncouth for the time. Quakers were neither passive bystanders nor religiously non-confrontational; in fact, they were active missionaries. This missionary work often required individuals to travel alone from community to community, without any restrictions regarding gender. This meant that both men and women traveled alone to spread their message without any regard to the established religious community of that area, creating territorial disputes and aggravation among Puritans.

Puritan communities in England already struggled with the leniency of the Anglican Church, which dominated most of England during the time, so the fact that Quaker religion specifically focused on protesting against English societal norms and the orthodox Puritan beliefs created problems. Puritans were not the only group to feel threatened by the rise in Quakerism; in fact, most religious and political groups felt unease around Quakers, and more specifically Quaker women. They feared the fact that “Quakers challenged the common Christian belief that women should not

35 The relationship between the Anglican Church, Puritanism, and Quakerism, is more fully discussed in the following chapter.
preach, especially in churches and to men. However, they were not social deviants who completely rejected seventeenth-century gender-constructed roles since they still upheld societal norms regarding marriage and motherhood.”\(^{37}\) In truth, a number of Quaker women worried about transgressing gender norms, deliberating whether their preaching was too forward for a woman, even if it was for God.\(^{38}\) While a few Quaker women questioned whether or not they were transgressing gender norms, the entire Puritan community believed that Quakers overstepped their bounds.

Even when traveling to the New England colonies to escape persecution in England, Quakers faced discrimination and torment before they even reached the new land. Not only were Quakers “fined, imprisoned, whipped, mutilated, banished, and executed” by the communities they traveled to, but they were also linked to multiple witchcraft accusations.\(^{39}\) One of the most famous cases of alleged Quaker witchcraft was the persecution of Ann Austin and Mary Fisher in 1656. Austin and Fisher were two of the first Quaker women to travel to the colonies as preachers. Knowing that these two women were on a boat, the acting Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony Richard Bellingham “ordered both Austin and Fisher stripped naked on board ship and their bodies examined for signs of Devil worship.”\(^{40}\) Both Austin and Fisher were convicted after “brutal and humiliating internal examination” and thrown out of

\(^{37}\) Heather Barry, “Naked Quakers Who Were Not So Naked: Seventeenth-Century Quaker Women in the Massachusetts Bay Colony,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 43.2 (2015), 120.


\(^{39}\) Barry, “Naked Quakers Who Were Not So Naked: Seventeenth-Century Quaker Women in the Massachusetts Bay Colony,” 118.

\(^{40}\) Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 123.
the Massachusetts Bay Colony without a trial.\textsuperscript{41} This type of persecution also occurred in England, where some Cambridgeshire ministers and justices attempted to discredit the Quaker movement by charging them with witchcraft.\textsuperscript{42} In some areas of England, the term Quaker became synonymous with witch, bringing about a number of stories and rumors.\textsuperscript{43} From Quakers bringing about the rain to bewitching followers to harming children, many communities throughout England and the colonies sought to persecute Quaker women as witches to rid themselves of the societal deviants.

**The Influence of the Female Sphere**

More often than not, women were the first to come forward with accusations of other women in the community due to the fact that they spent so much time together and observed each other’s behaviors and actions. They were simply “better placed than men to describe the incidents and activities that conformed to the altered perception of the nature of witchcraft as a criminal offence.”\textsuperscript{44} Within the private sphere, women often spent time with the other women of the community gossiping and performing daily household tasks. During this time, women would share any problems they had in their household, with their husbands and family, or with their neighbors. This was also a time for gossip and rumors about members of the community. Not only did women meet during the day, but they were also present for each other in the birthing room. For nearly all women, childbirth was an essential part of their lives, and because of this, they joined together in the birthing rooms of fellow

\textsuperscript{42} Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution*, 68.
\textsuperscript{43} Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution*, 69-70.
women in the community to aid as a support group.\textsuperscript{45} The gathering of women in the birthing rooms later became known as a social birth. Women spent a great deal of time together accomplishing daily tasks within the community, so it made sense that these women were also the most likely to accuse each other of witchcraft.

Women lived and worked in close proximity to one another, so they knew when another woman of the community overstepped their bounds in the private sphere, and if it happened too often, they might accuse them of witchcraft when the political climate was right. The women specifically targeted by other women were often loud, outspoken, and played a dominant role within their household. While women gossiped among each other, they maintained a submissive, quiet role in the public sphere. This meant that they did not yell, make a scene, or show their anger or frustration in public. Furthermore, women were, in theory, meant to keep their opinions to themselves and leave any negotiating, whether for business or family matters, to their husbands or the male head of household. If a woman was hotheaded or extremely vocal in her opinions, she disrupted the order of the community and drew negative attention to herself. Similarly, women who played a dominant role in the household, such as calculating family finances or participating in the realm of business, also drew suspicion to themselves. Some women “whose husbands were disabled or temporarily absent from the home were suspect figures” merely because they were compelled to act on their families’ behalf.\textsuperscript{46} This behavior completely

\textsuperscript{46} Karlsen, \textit{The Devil in the Shape of a Woman}, 146.
inverted the patriarchal system that the community depended on to function. Women would have been the first, and sometimes only, people to notice these behaviors in other women of the community, especially if they tried to hide their dominant role in the home from their community. Beyond simply accusing other women of witchcraft, “the women who became involved in the process often retailed older grievances and suspicions that had festered but previously gone unremarked to the authorities.” Any past problems or objections to a woman or her way of life came out during her trial, often voiced by the rest of the women of the community.

**Gendered Witchcraft**

In order to fully understand the dynamics of large witch-hunts and trials, one must first understand the role gender played in witchcraft accusations and how it affected the amount of men and women accused and convicted of witchcraft. Much of witchcraft historiography focuses on women and the masculinization of women as witches. However, more recent historians have begun to study witchcraft through a more multilayered lens of gender. During the seventeenth century, it was not unheard of for the community to accuse a man of witchcraft. It was common belief that “both [sexes] are subject to the State of damnation, so both are liable to Satans snares.” While women had a higher likelihood of facing witchcraft accusations, men were not excluded from similar allegations. However, the accusations that men faced as witches differed from those of female witches. Maleficium, the most common type of witchcraft associated with women, was considered black witchcraft, related to the

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harm and injury of people or animals.\textsuperscript{49} According to Malcolm Gaskill, “only about twenty per cent of persons accused of maleficium were male, and in certain jurisdictions the proportion was even smaller.”\textsuperscript{50} Twenty percent seems like a small number in comparison to the then eighty percent of female witches accused of maleficium, but many men faced witchcraft accusations that were non-malefic.

Enchanting, conjuring, charming, and sorcery were crimes more associated with male witchcraft and rarely attributed to female witches. In fact, men most commonly faced charges for using evil spirits in order to find the whereabouts of hidden treasure, as well as “fortune-telling and ‘using characters’, as well as using witchcraft to deceive, and on rare occasion, love magic.”\textsuperscript{51} Although historians have often overlooked male witchcraft because the majority of the accused were indeed women, it is vital to understand the gender dynamics of persecution.

Male witches did not face persecution for portraying more feminine traits (unlike women who portrayed masculine traits). In fact, men’s gendered role within the community had little to do with their accusations as witches. A number of historians have suggested that male witches “were ‘feminized’ men who ‘represented a failure of masculinity’ to such a degree that they embodied negative female traits and hence were labeled witches.”\textsuperscript{52} However, male witches cannot be studied with the same criteria as female witches since they had a very different relationship with the

\textsuperscript{49} Kent, “Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593-1680,” 71.
\textsuperscript{50} Gaskill, “The Devil in the Shape of a Man: Witchcraft, Conflict and Belief in Jacobean England,” 145.
\textsuperscript{51} Kent, “Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593-1680,” 71.
\textsuperscript{52} Kent, “Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593-1680,” 69.
legal, cultural, social, and economical institutions of society. Early modern ideas regarding manhood created a different environment for male witchcraft accusations than female accusations. The argument that male witches were “weak-minded,” “passive,” and “powerless” was completely contradicted by the way their accusers described them as well as by the general conceptions regarding witchcraft and those who practiced it. Male witches, although they faced similar consequences as female witches, existed in an incredibly different social and legal environment than women; therefore, their charges cannot be studied under the same criteria as female witches.

Part of the reason for the lack of availability when it comes to male witchcraft sources is the fact that most cases involving male witches occurred during smaller witch-hunts or singular events and were dealt with differently by society. For example, John Godfrey lived in colonial Massachusetts and faced a number of witchcraft accusations beginning in 1659 on top of 132 separate court cases. Godfrey had no specific address and constantly quarreled with the community over his behaviors such as defamation, lying, cursing, drunkenness, profaning the Sabbath, and public smoking. Beyond these charges, Godfrey was blamed for a number of unusual events that occurred throughout the community like animals mysteriously dying or freak accidents that occurred to individuals who crossed paths with him. For peaceable, New England, god-fearing masculine householders, “Godfrey presented the nightmare of a disputatious, mobile, criminal bachelor, roaming free of constraint.”

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54 Kent, “Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593-1680,” 70.
His actions threatened the community and he did not hesitate to use the community’s fear against them to get what he wanted. Godfrey represented the religious other that the Puritan communities of Massachusetts wanted so badly to remove from their lives. The lack of evidence, and Godfrey’s role as a male made the successful prosecution of these accusations more difficult than if a woman had done these same things. In the end, the courts often dropped the charges against Godfrey and let him on his way. Similar cases emerged in early modern England, with similar results. Because of men’s dominant role in society, they faced fewer repercussions if accused of maleficium due to deviant social behavior. Society was simply less likely to believe that men would take part in malefic activities. English and New England societies were less likely to accuse or convict men for the same reasons as women, simply because men existed in a different social and legal environment. While women faced death for overstepping the bounds of the private sphere, it was much more difficult for a man to overstep his bounds of the public sphere.

Although the Salem witch trials and the Suffolk witch-hunts are predominantly known for large numbers of women accusing other women of the community of witchcraft, there were a significant number of men who faced charges as well. Of the nineteen people executed during the Salem witch trials, six of them were men. This means that approximately thirty-two percent of the people executed for witchcraft in Salem were men. Furthermore, large amounts of the people accused of witchcraft were also men, contrary to the popular belief that only women were accused. A great

56 Gaskill, “The Devil in the Shape of a Man: Witchcraft, Conflict and Belief in Jacobean England.”
deal of the witch-hunts throughout England during the early modern period similarly involved higher amounts of male accusations than generally believed. Of the 127 cases analyzed by Kent, “at least forty-one of these cases either refer to men being charged with consulting witches, to find lost goods for example, or are cases where cunning men are prosecuted for witchcraft.”57 The idea of male witchcraft also resonated with contemporaries and must be considered when evaluating specific events. Though typically thought of as a predominantly female topic, witchcraft involves a number of men, whether as prosecutors, accusers, or victims with just as vital roles in the event as women. A comprehensive analysis of the Salem witch trials and the Suffolk witch-hunts cannot occur without first understanding the role of both masculine and feminine gender within these events.

Conclusion

For centuries, witchcraft accusations functioned throughout Europe and its colonies as a way to address deviance from society’s normative behaviors, religion, and customs. While some witchcraft trials focused on the heretical nature of the crime and tried the accused under religious courts, later English witchcraft trials functioned within the legal realm. The trials in Suffolk and Salem, although surrounded by religious influences, were tried by secular courts, but followed the same layout as previous religious witch hunts. Torture, gender, social roles, and religion all played some sort of role in the witch-hunts of the seventeenth century. However, the political and social climate of the period also created the unique situation wherein these hunts

took place, which Matthew Hopkins and Cotton Mather took advantage of in their respective communities.

While a variety of European countries took part in witch-hunts during the early modern period, the Suffolk witch-hunts pose an interesting case for historians. Unlike most witch-hunts, which were smaller and brought on by religious zeal and tensions, the Suffolk witch-hunts were a large-scale event that piqued the interest of most of England. Their proceedings resulted in a number of pamphlets and books describing and analyzing what actually happened in Bury St. Edmonds and the surrounding communities, but the ultimate causes of the Suffolk witch-hunts remain unstudied. What or who fueled this small occurrence into one of the largest witch-hunts of England? The various causes of the witch-hunts reach as far back as the origins of Puritanism within England, but the ultimate catalyst of the hunts was a man named Matthew Hopkins. The actions of Matthew Hopkins along with the political and religious climate of the seventeenth-century created the distinctive environment necessary for such a large-scale event as the Suffolk witch-hunts.

Political Precursors

Within England, the church and state were interlinked in all religious and political matters. After King Henry VIII’s break from the Catholic Church and subsequent establishment as the “Supreme Head of the Church of England” by Parliament’s 1534 Act of Supremacy, the monarch of England was also the kingdom’s religious leader. Although Henry initially separated with the Catholic Church, he only did so in order to divorce his first wife, Catharine of Aragon. In reality, Henry tried to
keep a number of Catholic practices and customs in the Church of England despite his dissolution of all Catholic monasteries and churches. Henry’s minor deviance from Catholic practices with the Church of England, although a separation from Catholicism, was thus not enough of a reformation for some English people. After Henry’s death, England became extremely protestant under his son King Edward I, then Catholic under Queen Mary I, and then moderately Protestant again under Queen Elizabeth I; all in quick succession. After experiencing all of this religious change, some English religious groups felt as though the Church of England needed major reform.

Puritanism became popular during the sixteenth century shortly after the accession of Queen Elizabeth I in 1558 and the reestablishment of Anglicanism (Church of England). This group of English reformed Protestants believed that the Church of England was only partially reformed since it maintained a number of Catholic customs and therefore sought to purify it of its Catholic practices.\(^58\) But in protesting the Anglican Church, Puritans were also protesting the monarchy at the same time and were considered radicals, facing a number of restrictions for their religious practices.

The popularity of Puritanism fluctuated drastically during the seventeenth century. Some historians and contemporaries argue that Puritanism was the heart of the English Revolution in the mid-seventeenth century.\(^59\) In seeking to alter the

\(^{58}\) C.H. George, “Puritanism as History and Historiography,” *Past and Present* 41 (December 1968), 77.

Church of England and do away with bishops, Puritans ultimately sought to alter the political system of England. Having locally selected religious leaders, as the Puritans proposed, would have undermined the monarch’s ability to influence through patronage the religious and political information his people received. In doing this, Puritan communities would be able to elect their own religious leaders and more say in the political situation in England. Strongly siding with the parliamentarian outlook of the English Revolution in 1642, Puritans accomplished many of the reforms and changes they wanted in England. As John Adamson indicates:

…[it was] the Puritan gentry in particular who were the agents of ‘progressive’ political change. It was this social group which challenged the régime of Charles I: first politically, in the Parliaments of 1640; then militarily, in the war of 1642. And finally, in 1645, it was the gentry’s most zealous and energetic element- the radical Puritans, Tawney’s ‘natural republicans’- who created the New Model Army, the radical force that eventually swept away the last vestiges of an already enfeebled monarchy and House of Lords in the Revolution of 1649.\(^{60}\)

The Puritans were a radical force that took action at an opportune moment in English history. They benefitted from strong leadership, a weak monarchy, and enough political zeal among the middling sorts to turn their beliefs and reforms into action.

It took until the mid-seventeenth century for Puritans to gain enough popularity to push their ideal forward. Before the English Civil War, Puritan support mainly came from the middle-class and slowly expanded to the gentry. The gentry who deviated from the Church of England sought a more conservative religious and social experience and became Puritan patrons for the lower and middling sorts. These gentry

\(^{60}\) Adamson, ed. The English Civil War: Conflict and Contexts, 1640-1649, 15.
included Ambrose Earl of Warwick and Robert Earl of Leicester, who were avid supporters of many of the reforms the monarchy sought to make within the church.\textsuperscript{61} With the growing support of the gentry, the middle-class Puritan movement had the backing and popularity necessary for political action. The English Civil War was the peak of Puritan control within England. The Parliamentarians, also known as Roundheads, fought against King Charles I and his Royalist supporters. The Roundheads sought to give Parliament supreme control over the executive administration, while the Royalists fought for the King, absolute monarchy, and the divine right of kings.\textsuperscript{62} Puritans specifically sought to give Parliament supreme control within England because a number of gentry and Members of Parliament (MPs) had joined the Puritan cause. In order to enact the reforms that Puritans wanted within the Church of England, they first had to rid England of its king and replace him with a Puritan majority or leader. They found this leader in Oliver Cromwell, who used the Puritan religious zeal to motivate the New Model Army into successfully winning multiple battles under his command. In the social sphere, he also pushed for a number of social reforms inspired by Puritan ideology. Cromwell and the Long Parliament closed theaters, outlawed gambling and dancing, and even outlawed holidays such as Christmas. Despite these restrictions, Cromwell allowed tolerance of other religions within England including Judaism. Puritans had a hold on Parliament from 1642-1658 when Oliver Cromwell died. At this point, Puritans had no strong leader to succeed Cromwell and became vulnerable to their opposition.

The political popularity of Puritanism was short lived. Although a number of English people sought reform within England, they did not agree with the strict laws or religious zeal that came with the Puritan religion. The fact that Puritans were suddenly thrown into control of English political and religious institutions created a sense of power within their communities that made its way down to the individual level. Suddenly, Puritans no longer had to contend with a monarch for reform within the church; instead, they had a political leader who shared their views and could push their agenda through Parliament due to the radical political climate of the time. Puritans had found themselves on the winning side of war, but some of the ways in which they sought to use their power wreaked havoc within their own communities, who in turn perceived them as fanatical radicals.

**Fuel for the Fire**

Matthew Hopkins was only in his twenties when he traveled throughout Suffolk and Essex Counties with John Stearne as a witch hunter. He was the son of James Hopkins, a Puritan clergyman in Suffolk County who strictly followed conservative Puritan ideology. Little is known about the early life of Hopkins since there are no surviving documents regarding him or his family. Some historians, such as Craig Cabell, argue that “one cannot dispute that all Hopkins documentation was

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deliberately destroyed after his death.”65 Before he died in August 1647, Hopkins led several witch-hunts and published his book *The Discovery of Witches*. His traveling companion, Stearne, was approximately ten years older than Hopkins and was also from the Essex/Suffolk area of England. Despite the fact that most of the credit for the witch-hunts went to Hopkins, Stearne was actually the one who carried out many of the tests on accused witches and wrote Hopkins’ discoveries down in *The Discovery of Witches*. Both Stearne and Hopkins strictly followed Puritan doctrine and ideology while performing their witch-hunts. They abided by the laws of England in their investigations of witchcraft, working around the ban on torture and using legal methods of uncovering witchcraft.

Most of the methods Hopkins and Stearne used in their witch-hunts were adapted from King James I’s 1603 text *Daemonologie*. One of Hopkins’ most popular forms of extracting confession was sleep deprivation: keeping the accused witches awake until they confessed to their crimes. If accused witches would not confess to the crimes of which they were suspected, Hopkins and Stearne then performed a number of physical tests intended to “discover” a person as a witch such as pricking, swimming tests, and looking for witch’s marks. In 1645, Hopkins and Stearne came under trial for their methods regarding swimming tests because a number of people believed them to be inhumane. In *The Discovery of Witches*, Stearne both warned against using the swimming test and defended their use of it:

> the water entreth not into any [witches], when it will into a free person, though

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they swimme both alike; for so they will, if the water be inchanted, but the free person will presently be choaked, when the other lye toppling on the water, striving to get their heads, or themselves under the water, but cannot, neither can they bring out water in their mouthes, though they be foretold of it, nor spit cleare water; for the water enters them not when it will the other Thus farre I have observed, or further: But because it is held unlawfull, I should be sorry to speake any thing, either to give offence to any, or to be a meanes to animate any in such courses.66

Hopkins and Stearne believed that there were a number of physical traits that distinguished witches from the rest of the community, such as the ability to float or swim. Similarly, they used a large needle to prick the bodies of suspected witches in multiple places. If they did not bleed or feel pain when pricked, this evidence supported the case that they were a witch. It was believed that the areas that had no feeling or bleeding when pricked because they were “devil’s marks.” In reality, most of these marks were moles, birthmarks, skin tags, extra nipples, or general skin imperfections that witch finders deemed as unnatural.67 Despite the number of witches accused by Hopkins and Stearne on the basis of these methods, legal authorities later declared them to be unlawful.

Hopkins gave himself the title of Witchfinder General to create the illusion of being invested with more authority than he had. In reality, he had no formal legal, political, or religious power to lead these witch-hunts. Neither Stearne nor Hopkins had the religious position or the social position to claim authoritative power within the

Given this lack of institutional authority, why was the Suffolk community willing to invest Matthew Hopkins with the authority to lead the witch-hunts? The most obvious answer is that he and Stearne were invited by community leaders to persecute witches and circumvent any blame community members could put on their officials. In a country that had outlawed all forms of torture, community officials and leaders viewed Hopkins and Stearne as experts who provided solutions and methods for procuring confessions of witchcraft without holding any of community leaders accountable for the results. Wealthy Puritan nobility, such as Sir Harbottle Grimston and Sir Robert Rich, provided the funding and backing for Hopkins’ travels and activities throughout Suffolk and Essex counties, making it possible for these various witch-hunts to take place. One of the biggest draws for Hopkins and Stearne to these counties was not only the fact that they were their home counties, but that they were heavily Puritan communities.

**The Power in Witch-Hunting**

The witch-hunts that took place throughout Suffolk and Essex counties in 1645 are commonly referred to by historians as the largest witchcraft panics in England. However, despite the sizeable nature of these hunts, there “is no full account of the actual dynamics of the large trials there.” Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne moved rapidly from community to community in order to avoid skepticism regarding

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their success. Large witchcraft panics were often accompanied by a great deal of skepticism from within the community, so Hopkins attained success by moving quickly and leaving before the community could question his methods or results. This quick paced cycle began in 1644 with the first documentation of Hopkins and Stearne involving themselves in witchcraft trials.

The 1645 Essex Summer Sessions documents are the first records of Hopkins involving himself in legal matters concerning witchcraft. It is not necessarily clear by simply reading the large number of indictments that Hopkins was involved, even though a number of the documents concern witchcraft. However, the most telling evidence that Hopkins was behind the large-scale panic lies on the back of these documents. Although not officially documented, the witchcraft tests that Hopkins and Stearne used can be inferred by the endorsements on the back of the indictments. While some women were convicted of witchcraft due to the mass hysteria of the communities, some women did not have enough evidence against them for a sound witchcraft conviction. These women were often indicted for at least one other crime committed within three months after the first. These follow-up convictions often included evidence that met the criteria for one of Hopkins’ tests. For example, Elizabeth Clarke of Maningtree was convicted of bewitching John Edwardes until he languished and died on July 5, 1645. Clarke’s accusers did not have enough thorough evidence against her to support their claims of witchcraft until December of that same year.
In Clarke’s December indictment, it states:

[Clarke] did entertain four evil spirits, one of them in the likeness of a young white cat called “Holt”: another in the likeness of a “Sandee Spannell” called “Jeremarye”: another in the likeness of a greyhound called “Vineger Tome”: another in the likeness of a black rabbit called “Sacke and Sugar”, so that she might practice witchcraft.\(^\text{71}\)

The claims that Clarke’s accusers made in her second and final indictment solidified their case for witchcraft and ultimately resulted in her conviction as a murderer and conversing with spirits. Coincidentally, Hopkins and Stearne both endorsed the Clarke’s second indictment by physically signing the back of the document, indicating

that they were involved in unearthing the second round of witchcraft accusations against Clarke. Elizabeth Clarke’s case was one of the most popular and was even depicted on the cover of *The Discovery of Witches*.

Matthew Hopkins endorsed a number of indictments within the Essex and Suffolk communities, indicating his direct involvement in convictions and accusations of witches. Anne Leach, Mary Sterling, Ellen Clarke, Elizabeth Goodwin, and Susanna Went all fell victim to Hopkins’ witchcraft tests. Hopkins took advantage of the Puritan community and their social customs in order to establish himself as the Witch-hunter General. He sought to exploit the figure of the witch to maintain a foothold amidst numerous Civil War anxieties regarding masculinity.  


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As Puritan ideology gained power within England, Puritan practices needed to also expand throughout the country. The war gave Puritans a religious zeal that instigated a power struggle among communities that had previously had little ability to actually set the rules of society. Now, Puritans could strictly enforce their own practices by law within their communities and were extremely eager to do so. Matthew Hopkins focused specifically on the Puritan communities of England because of this internal power struggle. His embrace of their religious zeal to enforce Puritan practices within the community not only worked to his own benefit by strengthening his popularity and fame, but also reinforced Puritan anxieties regarding masculinity.

Although Puritanism gained popularity during the Civil War, Puritan communities were still on the defensive when it came to their beliefs. During the early modern period, the military and male body were both thought of as closed, hard, and tight, while femininity was equated with weakness. Within Puritan ideology, the same could be said for the Puritan community considering that masculinity played a large role within the community. Diane Purkiss argues that war created a number of anxieties about gender and masculinity, which was why witchcraft, a representation of feminization and vulnerability of the army, instilled so much concern within Puritan communities. English newspapers constantly compared the English army to witchcraft and wickedness, targeting its vulnerable appearance and playing on the

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English fears regarding feminine susceptibility to the devil and witchcraft.\textsuperscript{74} The number of male endorsements on the 1645 indictments of women further supports the theory of anxiety regarding masculinity. Any perceived threat, such as a woman wielding power or surrounded by strange activity, was eradicated from the community. Since law was now on their side, Puritans could push their religious agenda through the courts. When a case had too little evidence for a sound conviction, the community sought outside aid in accomplishing their goals. Hopkins, although he became Witchfinder General for fame, did not have to try very hard to accumulate fame and popularity. His expertise was in high demand. Hopkins rose so quickly in fame not only because he sought out Puritan communities with societal anxieties, but also because he was invited in.

Despite the high number of women convicted of witchcraft within Suffolk and Essex counties in 1645, a large number of the convictions were actually men. When men were accused of witchcraft, a majority of the time it was a lone accusation (49%), but in other cases they were associated with a woman accused of witchcraft (32.5%) or other men (26%).\textsuperscript{75} Unlike the women accused of witchcraft, typically of the poorer sorts, men accused of witchcraft often had a more substantial income.\textsuperscript{76} Why is this significant? Puritanism was more popular among the lower and middle classes. The men accused of witchcraft were not laborers, but shop owners and businessmen. They did not exude masculinity like the laboring men in the community and fell victim to

\textsuperscript{74} Purkiss, “Desire and Its Deformities: Fantasies of Witchcraft in the English Civil War,” 277.
\textsuperscript{75} Kent, “Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593-1680,” 71.
\textsuperscript{76} Kent, “Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593-1680,” 71.
the community’s societal anxieties. However, of the 14 men accused of witchcraft
during the Essex Gaol Delivery Role of Summer 1645 out of a total of 44, all 14 men
were let free, while 19 women were hanged.\(^77\) Since men had a different relationship
with the legal system than women, especially in Puritan England, their crimes,
although the same as many of the women accused, were excused.

Based on early modern European ideology, the small number of men hanged
for the same crimes as women makes logical sense, especially since Puritan
communities convicted women for stepping out of the bounds of the private sphere or
taking on masculine qualities and adding to gender tensions and anxieties. In order to
convict women of stepping out of their societal bounds, Hopkins and Stearne used
gendered language in their descriptions of the cases involving women. Multiple times
Stearne utilized the word ‘covenant’ to describe the activities of guilty women. For
example, Elizabeth Deekes made “a League and Covenant with the Devil,” and Joane
Wallis, Elizabeth Finch, Anne Randall, and numerous others confessed to making a
covention with the devil or some type of agreement.\(^78\) By describing these convictions
as agreements or covenants with the devil, Stearne and Hopkins sought to target these
women as social outliers. Agreements and covenants represented business
transactions, an aspect of the public, male sphere. Furthermore, these agreements
gave these women power, not only over men, but also over themselves. They were in

\(^{77}\) Ewen, ed. *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials: The Indictments for Witchcraft from the
Records of 1373 Assizes Held for the Home Circuit A.D. 1559-1736*, 224; The National
Archives (TNA) Kew, ASSI 35/86/1/56.

complete control of their actions and influenced the actions of others as well, inverting the foundational ideology of the Puritan social system.

Within a one to two year time period, Matthew Hopkins had scoured Suffolk and Essex counties for possible witches. By 1646, he had “acquired the reputation as the most notorious witch-finder in the history of England.”\(^79\) Within the short time period that he was commissioned to work, his investigations led to execution of approximately 200 witches. In Suffolk specifically, he was responsible for the arrest of “at least 124 people for witchcraft, of whom 68 were hanged.”\(^80\) The large number of hangings and accusations due to Hopkins led to skepticism and the disapproval of many. He took advantage of the fragile nature of the Puritan communities in eastern England, portraying them in a negative light for the rest of England to see. His fame quickly diminished with his reputation as a notable witch-hunter despite the great popularity he had gained at the beginning of the witch-hunts.

**The Legacy of Matthew Hopkins**

Puritan communities faced large amounts of backlash and criticism in the political, religious, and social spheres because of the activities of Matthew Hopkins. His reputation, although quite renowned when he began to expose numerous witches during his witch-hunts in 1645, diminished as he received incredible backlash for his methods, motives, and actions. Multitudes of English people were horrified that Hopkins hanged eighteen people in one day in Bury St. Edmunds, and astounded that

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the Puritan communities followed along with these activities. As Matthew Hale, one of Hopkins’ contemporaries stated, “but what appears still more astonishing, they caused 16 persons to be hanged at Yarmouth, 40 at Bury, and others in different parts of the county to the amount of 60 persons!!” His escapades throughout Suffolk and Essex counties became infamous throughout much of England due to this high mortality rate. One of their biggest opponents, John Gaule, the vicar of Great Staughton, publicly criticized and condemned the actions of Stearne and Hopkins in his weekly sermons and pamphlets. Gaule never physically confronted Hopkins, even though he had the opportunity to when he attended one of Hopkins’s speeches, but he spent numerous hours refuting the claims and methods of the witchfinder. Besides Gaule, numerous other public and political figures condemned Hopkins and Stearne for their actions. Despite his apparent decline in popularity, Hopkins was not so easily forgotten in England. *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft* by John Stearne was published in 1648 as an addition to Matthew Hopkins’ pamphlet titled *The Discovery of Witches: in Answer to severall Queries LATELY delivered to the Judges of Assize for the County of NORFOLK* in 1647. Stearne and Hopkins wrote these works as a defense for their actions throughout East Anglia after a number of criticisms of their methods were published.

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The witchfinders and their supporters were prepared to defend their actions. They published numerous pamphlets for all of the counties they traveled to, giving them all similar titles such as *A true and exact RELATION Of the severall Informations, Examinations, and Confessions of the late Witches, arraigned and executed in the County of Essex* or *A True RELATION Of the ARAIGNMENT Of Thirty WITCHES.* These pamphlets contained claims such as:

One old woman confessed that she had beene a Witch the space of above fifty yeares, in which time she also confessed that she had done many very wicked things in bewitching Cattell, Corne, &c. but above all that she had betwitched seven persons of one family to death… Another of the women Witches confessed that she had bewitched a child to death, and that she had beeene a Witch above five and twenty yeares…

Most of the cases that these pamphlets presented typically focused on the bewitchment of cattle and livestock, but women also confessed to murder under the duress of the witch tests. Hopkins and Stearne used these pamphlets to justify their activities in Suffolk communities and implied that the search for witches should be extended throughout England.

By 1646, Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne found themselves on trial for illegal activity and possible contact with the devil. Norfolk judges suspected Hopkins of “torturing the helpless into making false confessions for [his] own profit,” and sought to destroy his credibility as a witchfinder. Hopkins continued to practice his questionable methods until “some gentlemen, indignant at his barbarity, tied

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86 Jones, *The Ipswich Witch: Mary Lackland and the Suffolk Witch Hunts*, 120.
[Hopkins’] own thumbs and toes, as he had been accustomed to tie those of other persons, and when put into the water, he himself swam, as many others had done before him."^87 Disputes such as this ended many of Hopkins’ questionable practices. Unfortunately for the people of Norfolk, Hopkins and Stearne were not convicted of any charges; however, they did retire from their roles as witchfinders. Although Hopkins died in 1647, his legacy persisted. The Puritan clergy who supported the activities of Hopkins and Stearne made their way to the New England colonies after the passage of the 1662 Act of Uniformity. These Puritans not only brought their

^87 Hale, A Tryal of Witches: At the Assizes Held at Bury St. Edmonds for the County of Suffolk; on the Tenth Day of March, 1664. Before Sir Matthew Hale Kt. Then Lord Chief Baron of His Majesties Court of Exchequer, 24.
conservative religious beliefs with them, but also their zeal for witch-hunting and the precedent of Matthew Hopkins.

**Political and Religious Pushback**

The events that took place in Suffolk and Essex counties in the mid-1640s left Puritan communities with a number of political and religious consequences. Due to the conservative nature of Puritanism in England and their strong push for political and religious reform, other religious and social groups sought to counteract the panicked actions they saw of Puritans during the first part of the English Civil War. As discussed earlier, Quakerism began and flourished in the 1650s as a direct result of the popularity of Puritanism. Quakers emerged as a counter-Puritan group, and made considerable efforts to dismantle Puritan efforts and ideology. There was a substantial amount of print exchange between these two groups, increasing their religious rivalry and dislike. 88 Most of the Puritan following consisted of laymen of the middling sorts, while those who began to support Quakerism were often of a wealthier, gentile class. 89 Even though Quakers had less of a following, their members had enough money to oppose the Puritan community and threaten their beliefs.

While Puritans lived a socially conservative lifestyle, Quakers lived the opposite. Quakers rejected the Puritan belief that women should remain in the home and be mere observers of religious proceedings. Instead, Quakers allowed and even encouraged women, alone or with another female companion, to travel from

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89 Davies, *The Quakers in English Society 1655-1725*, 142.
community to community to preach and spread the Quaker message. This completely went against Puritan beliefs as well as societal norms, threatening conservative Puritan control. With their hold on English society jeopardized, Puritans sought to delegitimize any Quaker actions and arguments by targeting them in court and print. Puritans and Quakers both accused the other group of witchcraft, associating their religious practices with the devil; however, this “worked to the Quakers’ advantage in the hectic push-and-pull of 1650s press campaigns… Ultimately it contributed to the generic accusations of ‘enthusiasm’, ‘frenzy’ and ‘fanaticism’ as a post-Restoration broad brush with which to tar all nonconformity.”

Many non-Puritans were already skeptical of Puritans due to their willing participation in Hopkins’s witch-hunt and quickness to accuse those of different beliefs. Puritans were quick to tie the ‘foaming mouth’ stereotype of Quaker practices to “vomiting fits that characterized earlier possessions” or the expulsions of pines, feathers, or “anything unnatural.” These connections were a stretch for the public to believe and added to the idea of a Puritan ‘frenzy’ that much of England was beginning to adopt. The manner in which Puritans dealt with the Quakers further identified them as fragile and over-zealous. The rise of the Quaker influence in the 1650s, the restoration of King Charles II to the throne, the reestablishment of the Church of England, and the abolition of the Commonwealth of England in 1660 created a hostile environment for the previously thriving Puritan community.

Webster, “On shaky ground: Quakers, Puritans, possession and high spirits,” 189.
Webster, “On shaky ground: Quakers, Puritans, possession and high spirits,” 187.
With the Restoration came the quick reestablishment of the pre-Civil War doctrine and laws. King Charles II, the new English monarch, was once again in control of the church and state. In order to reassert his authority and validate his power, Charles II instituted the Act of Uniformity in 1662, which specified the official form of public prayers, administration of sacraments, and other rites of the reestablished Church of England. This act also required that church officials adhere to the newly redone Book of Common Prayer. In sum, this act reinstituted the features of the Anglican Church that Puritans had done away with during the English Civil War. It labeled Puritans as dissenters and religious outliers in a country that they had controlled only a few years earlier, requiring them to seek their religious education and interests outside of the law.\(^{92}\) This led to a major upheaval within Puritan communities in England and an exodus of Puritan clergy members to the New England colonies. Within a decade, Puritans had not only lost their popularity among the English people, but they had once again become religious dissenters and political outcasts. The power and influence of Puritanism had diminished with the rise of religious opponents who threatened basic social and societal norms within the Puritan communities. The fanatic activities of the Puritans proved to the rest of the country that England would not be a Puritan nation; they would remain a religious minority without the ability to dominate any institutions of authority.

Chapter 3: That Would Be Enough: The Tipping Point of Spectral Evidence

Witchcraft in the English colonies took on a different form than it did in England. Many colonies were primarily settled by those categorized as religious and social others, such as Catholics, Puritans, and those in trouble with the law. The majority of people who traveled to the colonies from England sought new beginnings, economic success, and religious freedom. The Massachusetts Bay Colony was one of the larger colonies during the seventeenth century, specifically made by and for Puritans who wanted to practice their religion without the looming presence of the Church of England. The Puritans who settled in the colonies believed the Church of England expressed too many of the Catholic sentiments that should have abandoned by Protestant religions. Although these Puritans had their own community within the colonies where they could practice their religion freely, they still felt threatened by those with different religious and social views. The Salem witch trials of 1692 embodied the social and religious tensions present within the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the surrounding communities as the only large-scale witch-hunt in the English colonies. While the trials that took place in England influenced those in Salem, there were key differences in the trials and their proceedings that altered their outcome.

Puritan Overflow and Control

With the political unrest in England throughout the seventeenth century, Puritans fled to the New England colonies to form the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1628. In this colony, Puritans could practice their religion freely without the
overbearing control of the English government. The start of the English Civil War and the establishment of religious tolerance in the mother country provided these colonists with even more freedom to rule their colony as a haven for Puritans. With the reestablishment of Charles II as the king of England, a number of Puritan clergy from Suffolk and Essex counties of England fled to the Massachusetts Bay Colony for a new start and a chance to live far from the direct rule of the monarchy. In 1662, King Charles II passed the Act of Uniformity which reinstated a number of sacraments and rites that the Puritans had done away with during the Commonwealth of England. The reestablishment of the Book of Common Prayer as well as episcopal ordination of any religious leaders were two key components of this act. 93 When this act passed, thousands of Puritan clergymen refused to take the required oath, resulting in the Great Ejection. Over 2,000 clergymen were expelled from the Church of England, and many found refuge in the Massachusetts Bay and Salem areas of the colonies where this act had no power.

Although Massachusetts Bay Colony was a religious refuge under King Charles I and II, it became anything but during the reign of King James II. Due to numerous political differences between the Massachusetts Bay colonists and the English monarchy, King Charles II revoked the royal charter in 1684. This action effectively did away with any political freedoms or choices the colonists had in their community in response to their reluctance to acknowledge the king’s role in their governance. After Charles’s death in 1685, King James II sought to secure his control

over the colonies politically. In 1686, he created the Dominion of New England, which allowed him more direct control over the New England colonies and their political and legal structures. James assigned new political leaders to the colonies, choosing men who would enforce the laws of England and respect the rule of the monarchy. One such man, Governor Sir Edmund Andros, governed the new Dominion of New England. Andros attempted to make a number of legal and structural changes to the colony and strictly enforced the dominance of the Church of England by opening and promoting Anglican churches and services in the Puritan colony. An example of this was his restriction of “the number of traditional town meetings to only one a year, and that only for the routine election of local officials.”

His changes greatly disrupted the previous way of life for the Puritan colonists and were meant to bring the economic and social structure of the New England colonies closer to those of England. However, there was pushback from the colonists in regards to these reforms. Colonists had more opportunities than they would have in England to own their own land and had different relationships regarding trade and resources due to the different crops available in the colonies. The reforms that Andros tried to implement, while creating parallels to the English system, disrupted the benefits of the original colonial structure.

In 1689, the Dominion of New England collapsed after Glorious Revolution took place in England, when King William III, the son-in-law to James II, successfully

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invaded England and claimed the throne of England in 1688. In North America, the colonists overthrew Andros.\textsuperscript{96} These events presented an opportunity for the Massachusetts Bay colonists to regain their charter and reestablish Puritan control in their community. Reverend Increase Mather, a highly prominent leader, went to England in order to regain the original charter for the colony. However, William believed that by reinstating the original charter, the Massachusetts Bay Colony would, once again, institute an uncompromising Puritan government within the colonies. In order to prevent this, he set up the Province of Massachusetts Bay. This combined several provinces in order to diminish the Puritan power among colonial leadership and politics. Furthermore, the new charter granted non-Puritans the right to vote, which Increase Mather had tried to avoid.\textsuperscript{97} The expanded territory of the colony along with the extended voting rights diminished the control Puritans had over the governance and structure of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

\textbf{The Internal Other}

The settlement of New England colonies created a hotbed of religious tensions. The Massachusetts Bay Colony was founded primarily by and for Puritans escaping to a place where they could freely practice their religion without the overbearing control of the monarchy and the Church of England. These Puritans created a community in which they could govern and live by the ideology of their religion. However, Puritans were not the only group of people to seek refuge and freedom in the colonies; various other religious groups did the same. Puritans, Quakers, Catholics, and Anglicans all

\textsuperscript{96} Murrin, “Coming to Terms with the Salem Witch Trials,” 311.
\textsuperscript{97} Marion L. Starkey, \textit{The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Inquiry into the Salem Witch Trials} (New York: Dolphin, 1961), 131.
traveled to the colonies for either religious or economic freedoms that they struggled to find at home.

Although Puritans had no aversion to the idea of a theocratic society, they did not believe that King Charles I or II were sufficiently godly enough to fill the role of leader. One of the main problems Puritans had with England was the fact that an “unfit” king was the religious and secular leader.98 Despite their antipathies to England’s united system of religious and secular practices, Puritans in the New England colonies created an environment that made it impossible to participate on a secular level in a meaningful way, like voting, without agreeing with the Puritan religious doctrine that the colony leaders supported. One example of this was the case of Anne Hutchinson. In 1637, Anne Hutchinson, a midwife, was put on trial by the Boston community for heresy and a year later was excommunicated from the church, banished from the colony, and labeled a heretic.99 The charges brought up against Anne were specifically tied to her religious and secular role within the community.

In the Puritan faith, women were not able to participate within church services or publicly share their religious opinions. If a woman shared her religious opinion in public, it was a direct affront to the preacher and his interpretation of the Bible. A public or leadership role was outside a woman’s expertise. However, it was well within women’s purview, in the eyes of the Puritan church, to hold gatherings of women to discuss passages of the Bible and that week’s sermon. Anne Hutchinson held these types of meetings and upwards of sixty men and women came to listen to

99 Karlsen, The Devil in the Shape of a Woman, 15.
her thoughts on the Bible.\textsuperscript{100} These meetings became so popular that a number of the colony’s ministers were up in arms. They believed these meetings were unorthodox since Hutchinson had begun to share her personal interpretation of the Bible, which differed from the direct teachings of the church. Her teachings sparked public debates in Boston and created a great deal of religious tension within the community.

Hutchinson criticized “the theological positions held by many of the clergy” and, according to Puritan clergyman Hugh Peter, “women who assumed to preach God’s word called into question not only the hierarchical relations between preacher and hearer but the ordered relations between husband and wife, and magistrate and subject.”\textsuperscript{101} In the end, Hutchinson was banished from the Boston community due to her religious disagreement and provocation of disorder. Religious leaders saw her meetings as unorthodox and believed she overstepped her bounds as a woman practicing Puritanism; however, she did nothing illegal in the secular realm to merit such punishment. The religious dissidence she created within the community and the following she had begun to accumulate threatened the religious control of the colony and the social order.\textsuperscript{102} Although she was not tried for witchcraft, Hutchinson’s trial has a number of parallels to Puritan witchcraft cases and demonstrates the religious tensions that Puritans felt within their own community even after leaving England.

Beyond disputes within the Puritan religion itself, Puritans struggled as the colonies became more and more religiously diverse. Quakers posed the greatest threat

\textsuperscript{101} Karlsen,\textit{ The Devil in the Shape of a Woman}, 15, 122.
to the Puritans, especially after 1681 when William Penn founded Pennsylvania, a colony created by Quakers that welcomed religious freedom. Up until this point, Puritans attempted to hinder the spread of Quakerism throughout the New England colonies. They expelled most Quakers from the Puritan communities in the Massachusetts Bay Colony on the grounds of vagrancy. Quakers accepted that women could travel by themselves or with a female companion to preach the gospel in various communities, seeking converts.\textsuperscript{103} Puritans, on the other hand, rejected this. However, King Charles II banned the Massachusetts Bay Colony from imprisoning or targeting people on the basis of their religious affiliation, specifically Quakers.\textsuperscript{104} Puritans responded to this ruling by accusing Quakers of witchcraft instead of specifically targeting them for their religion. An example of this type of reaction can be seen in the cases of Ann Austin and Mary Fisher who, in 1656, were arrested for witchcraft before even stepping off of the boat from England. These two women posed such a threat to the Boston Puritan community by identifying as Quakers that “the windows of their cells were boarded up and a fine of £5 was levied on anyone who tried to speak with them. After five weeks of confinement, they were thrown out of the colony without a trial.”\textsuperscript{105} Despite the threat colonial leadership felt Quakers presented to the community, Quakers still found a number of sympathizers among the people. Eventually, accusations of witchcraft relating to Quakerism in Puritan communities decreased after the events in Salem in the 1690s.

\textsuperscript{103} Barry, “Naked Quakers Who Were Not So Naked: Seventeenth-Century Quaker Women in the Massachusetts Bay Colony,” 119.
\textsuperscript{104} Karlsen, \textit{The Devil in the Shape of a Woman}, 124.
\textsuperscript{105} Karlsen, \textit{The Devil in the Shape of a Woman}, 123.
Quakers were not the only religious rivals that Puritans faced in the colonies. Catholics and Anglicans also sought out a place of religious freedom outside of England. Although most Anglicans traveled to the New England colonies for economic reasons, they still faced discrimination and tension with the Puritan communities. Catholics often found themselves ostracized and forced to the Rhode Island colony.\footnote{Murrin, “Coming to Terms with the Salem Witch Trials,” 311; Many Catholics also went to Maryland, which was originally founded as a safe haven for Catholics in the colonies.} This colony was considered a safe haven for those who had nowhere else to go because its founder, Roger Williams, did not believe in using the state to compel religious beliefs. This was where Anne Hutchinson found herself after she was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and where her devoted followers relocated as well. Puritans were successful in keeping their colony and communities religiously uniform; however, their persistence in ridding their communities of any type of “other” led to the mass hysteria surrounding the Salem witch trials.

Puritans ideology in regards to women, especially in New England, conflicted on a number of different levels. The most fundamental of these conflicts was the dispute concerning the strength of a woman’s soul and body. On a spiritual level, a woman’s soul was “no more evil” than a man’s, yet a woman’s body \textit{was} weaker.\footnote{Elizabeth Reis, “The Devil, the Body and the Feminine Soul in Puritan New England,” \textit{The Journal of American History} 82:1 (1995): 15.} Because of this discrepancy, a woman was inadvertently more susceptible to the devil. The devil could more easily breach a woman’s soul because of her weaker body, counteracting the fact that her soul was just as sound as a man’s. On the other hand, New England Puritans valued the “frail, submissive, and passive” qualities of a
woman’s feminine body because they meant that the female soul was also more susceptible to Christ.\textsuperscript{108} Ideally in Puritan New England, women were no more evil than men; in fact, some would even consider them more pure and susceptible to Christ’s influence. In reality, however, the susceptible nature of women’s bodies condemned them as predisposed to the influence of the devil and of weaker will. Although Puritans also believed men were capable of witchcraft, it was not a matter of natural susceptibility; therefore, the community had less of a reason to worry.

New England ministers preached to their congregations about inviting God into their souls. Individuals relied on prayer and church to open their body and souls to Christ. However, in the midst of witchcraft allegations, these exact practices were what could condemn a woman of witchcraft. As Elizabeth Reis points out, “ironically, the active pursuit of sustenance and spiritual fulfillment was not only futile, given the soul’s unrelenting appetite, but it invited Satan’s abuse, conceived as rape and possession.”\textsuperscript{109} This active pursuit of spiritual fulfillment was exactly what Cotton Mather promoted at the beginning of the Salem trials. He preached that listeners should focus on prayer and making amends with God. This advice may have influenced the one of the most dangerous changes to the Salem witch trials: spectral evidence.

**Inheriting the Witch Craze**

Cotton Mather was not the first person in his family to advocate his Puritan ideology. In fact, his father, Increase Mather, acted as a spokesperson for the Puritan

\textsuperscript{108} Reis, “The Devil, the Body and the Feminine Soul in Puritan New England,” 16.
\textsuperscript{109} Reis, “The Devil, the Body and the Feminine Soul in Puritan New England,” 24.
community during the renegotiations of the Massachusetts Bay Colony charter. In order to make a name for himself and not live in the shadows of his father’s achievements, Cotton Mather needed to establish his own identity as a theologian and leader. Before the Salem witch trials occurred, Mather had already risen to some level of prominence as a Puritan preacher, following in the footsteps of his father. He gained his initial popularity as a minister, but continued to rise in fame as an author, publishing more than 400 books and pamphlets. Despite the advantage Cotton gained from growing up under the influence of his father, he never surpassed Increase in popularity and continued to have a strained relationship with him.

Increase Mather was well known as a leader in the Boston Puritan community. Besides helping to renegotiate the colony charter, he was a renowned author, pastor at the Boston church, and president of Harvard College. No matter how much Cotton Mather tried to break free from his father, Increase’s accomplishments eclipsed those of Cotton. Their relationship was strained, not only as father and son, but also as two Puritan ministers. As Cotton attempted to establish himself professionally outside of his father’s fame and influence, he pushed the bounds as a Puritan minister. He faced great amounts of criticism from his peers, including his father, as well as common people to whom he preached. One contemporary critic of Mather, Robert Calef, argued that one particular published work of Mather’s, *Memorable Providences*, laid the groundwork for the Salem witch trials. Calef claimed that “Mr. Cotton Mather was the most active and forward of any minister in the country in those matters, taking home one of the children, and managing such intrigues with that child, and printing
such an account of the whole in his *Memorable Providences*, as conduced much to the kindling of those flames, that in Sir William's time threatened the destruction of this country.” ¹¹⁰ Mather did not shy away from sharing his personal opinions in his publications and pushed his supporters to follow his line of thinking. Besides Calef, a number of other critics blamed Mather for kindling the flames of the Salem witch trials through his numerous publications leading up to the trials as well as the actions he took at the beginning of the trials.

Although Mather greatly influenced the Salem witch trials, he never attended any of the trials. However, he was involved in the 1688 Goodwin witchcraft case in Boston. In this case, Ann Glover, the housekeeper for the Goodwin family was accused and hanged for witchcraft. John Goodwin had accused Glover of bewitching his children and causing them to be ill and act strange. ¹¹¹ Mather recorded the events of this trial in his publication *Memorable Providences*, which documented his interpretation of the proceedings and evidence of witchcraft that came up during the case. His published account of the Goodwin trial became one of the most popular and well-read witchcraft cases in the colonies. It was “presumably known not only to ministers and doctors but also to young girls” like those who lived in Salem and initiated the Salem witch trials.¹¹²

His involvement in the case made Mather “more zealous than the other ministers in his efforts to help the Goodwin children.”

Mather’s dedication to the Goodwin children influenced him when it came to the Salem witch trials. He sought to save them from their hysterical fits through prayer and faith, during which he became attached to the children and determined to protect them. Regardless of his vigorous efforts to condemn accused witches in Salem and push his Puritan agenda, Mather still

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empathized with the afflicted children of the community. Throughout the trials in Salem, Mather asked to take in any children affected by the trials or whose parents were accused by the court.\textsuperscript{115} Based on this information, Mather clearly had more than one motive for involving himself in the witch trials of Salem: his Puritan agenda and his interest in the care for the children.

**Setting the Stage**

The development of the Salem witch trials did not just occur overnight. In fact, Cotton Mather laid the groundwork for it with his publications and actions over a number of years. His experiences with the 1688 Boston witchcraft trial set the stage for his involvement in the Salem trials four years later. Although he was not personally involved in the Salem trials, he set up the court system, advised those in charge of the trials, and prompted the people of Salem to continue their hunt. Outside of Mather’s own actions, the New England Puritan idea of spectral witchcraft specifically influenced the initial accusations and continued to wreak havoc on the Salem community.

Unique in comparison to any other witchcraft case in England or the colonies, the officials of Salem were persuaded to consider spectral evidence when determining the verdict. By definition, spectral evidence in the case of a witchcraft trial was “the appearance of the accused as a specter [physically or in a dream] seen by the afflicted.”\textsuperscript{116} The decision to allow spectral evidence in court was not a popular

\textsuperscript{115} Werking, “‘Reformation Is Our Only Preservation’: Cotton Mather and Salem Witchcraft,” 237.
choice among Puritan ministers, but its key supporter was Cotton Mather. In his “The Return of Several Ministers,” Mather encouraged the use of spectral evidence, while instilling caution regarding its use. Mather cautioned that, “there may be matters of presumption which yet may not be reckoned matters of conviction, so ’tis necessary that all proceedings thereabout be managed with an exceeding tenderness towards those that many be complained of, especially if they have been persons formerly of an unblemished reputation.”¹¹⁷ This passage clearly indicates that Mather recognized the pitfalls of the use of spectral evidence in the court. He acknowledged that people could take advantage of its allowance and that these visions of neighbors could actually be the devil’s trickery, which is why he cautions the court to be considerate of the moral and legal background of the accused. If the accused had no record of misdemeanors and there was no hearsay to support the accusations, then the spectral evidence presented against the accused was probably untrue. However, despite his words of caution, Mather finished his publication with a definitive statement in the favor of allowing spectral evidence in the case of Salem:

Nevertheless, we cannot but humbly recommend unto the Government the speedy and vigorous prosecution of such as have rendered themselves obnoxious according to the direction given in the laws of God, and the wholesome statutes of the English nation, for the detection of witchcrafts.¹¹⁸

The approval from a Puritan minister on such a controversial issue as spectral evidence created much debate among on-looking Puritans throughout New England.


¹¹⁸ Boyer, Salem-Village Witchcraft: A Documentary Record of Local Conflict in Colonial New England, 118.
and England. It had never before been used in the New England colonies during witchcraft prosecutions, and although it brought faster results, it also contributed to the number of cases tried and convicted in Salem.

**A Witch-Hunt to End Them All**

The influence of Cotton Mather’s publications regarding witchcraft and how the Salem officials should have dealt with it took a toll on the community. His writings fueled the fire, creating a frenzy to rid the colony of witches. Opening the body and soul to God, as Mather urged, left the possibility that one’s neighbors had instead welcomed the devil. These trials demonstrated how quickly the words of one could encourage the destruction of a community. During these trials 19 men and women were hanged for witchcraft; however, 165 were imprisoned and found guilty. The fact that no person who confessed was executed was an oddity among contemporary witchcraft trials. Some historians argue that “the Salem court hanged the most courageous people it encountered and rewarded those too cowardly to stick by the truth, that they were indeed innocent.”\(^{119}\) This pattern of prosecutions ran counter to all other witch-hunts of the time period. In any other witch-hunt, people who confessed guaranteed themselves a death sentence. Salem, however, defied the standard witchcraft model on most counts.

The Salem witch trials began among a group of teenage girls, including Mercy Lewis and Ann Putnam, Jr., Abigail Williams, and Elizabeth Hubbard, who accused a number of the women in Salem of witchcraft after they were caught in the woods late

\(^{119}\) Murrin, “Coming to Terms with the Salem Witch Trials,” 338.
at night. In April 1692, Mercy and Ann took the lead in the accusations; however, they claimed that the witches were still controlling them in court, which was not typical of witchcraft accusations. According to the court records, “Neither Mercy nor Ann Putnam Jr. could make a sound, and Abigail Williams’s hand was jammed forcibly into her mouth by unseen powers.”

Mercy, Ann, and Abigail struck fear into the deeply religious community of Salem as well as the surrounding Massachusetts Bay Colony. Once they began to accuse men and women of witchcraft, more and more accusations began to come out. By June 15, 1692, Cotton Mather had taken great interest in the events unfolding in Salem and encouraged the use of spectral evidence since only one of the first ten people tried for witchcraft was hanged.

Of all the people accused by Mercy, Ann, Abigail, and Elizabeth, Bridget Bishop was the first to face execution.

Throughout her examination, Bridget Bishop denied all witchcraft charges brought against her. Despite her pleas of innocence, the actions of Mercy, Ann, Abigail, and Elizabeth ensured that the court would see her as guilty. As the trial went on, John Hawthorne claimed that “then she turned up her eyes, and the eyes of the afflicted were turned up.” By playing the part of possessed victims, the four girls discredited any claims of innocence Bishop made during her trial. In contrast to Bridget Bishop, Titiba, also accused of witchcraft by the group of girls, confessed to witchcraft and eluded the death penalty. In fact, Titiba claimed that “the devil came to

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122 Woodward, Records of Salem Witchcraft: Copied From the Original Documents, 142.
me and bid me serve him” and that “we ride upon stickes,” naming both Goody Osborne and Sarah Good in her confession.\footnote{Woodward, \textit{Records of Salem Witchcraft: Copied From the Original Documents}, 44-45.}

A majority of the women accused of witchcraft during the trials did not fit the standard stereotype of witches in other countries and communities. Most of the women were married, mothers, of the middling class, quiet, and middle-aged. These women were not targeted as vagrants or oddities in their community, but as colleagues in league with the devil.

As the trials went on, more and more men of the court found themselves on the other side of the stand, and on August 19, 1692, four of these men were hanged for
witchcraft. George Burroughs, Martha Carrier, George Jacobs, Sr., John Proctor, and John Willard were all called to the stand and convicted by women who were swept up in the frenzy. The women who accused them, including servants and grandchildren, later recanted their testimony, but it was too late for the court to overturn their verdict. Willard and Proctor had both made comments early on in the trials suggesting that the afflicted parties lied about the spectral events and the witchcraft accusations, and Willard even implied that “the afflicted and the judges were the real servants of Satan.” Of the four official days of execution in Salem and the months of trial, Cotton Mather only attended the August 19th execution. His attendance was a show of support for Reverend Burroughs, whose wrongful conviction was evident in his ability to perfectly recite the Lord’s Prayer before his death, but Cotton Mather’s presence also renewed the fire under the trials. He calmed the hysteric mobs, led prayer, and preached to the crowd from horseback; however, his support and endorsement of the Salem trials was starting to cause resentment and anger among his critics and those in the Salem community.

The Salem witch trials came to an end with an accusation against Lady Mary Phips, the wife of William Phips, the governor of the Province of Massachusetts Bay. The accusers within the Salem community had grown too confident in their ability to convict and reached too high on the socio-economic ladder. The publications from Cotton Mather endorsing the witch trials were overwhelmed by enormous amounts of

124 Murrin, “Coming to Terms with the Salem Witch Trials,” 342.
125 Murrin, “Coming to Terms with the Salem Witch Trials,” 342.
127 Murrin, “Coming to Terms with the Salem Witch Trials,” 343.
backlash from critics and those who felt that the prosecutions and accusations had been taken too far. Not only had the use of spectral evidence been abused throughout the trials, but also the use of torture conflicted with the values New England Puritans held so dear. Many were horrified by the fact that Martha Carrier was convicted of witchcraft when her own children testified against her, but only after the children faced torture. In the end, the criticism of church officials and people of the Province of Massachusetts Bay snuffed out the religious zeal that had originally fueled the Salem witch trials and cut short Cotton Mather’s rise in popularity.

**Colonial Backlash**

News of the events of the Salem witch trials not only spread through the colonies, but most of Europe as well. The people of England used the trials as an example of the developing uncultured behaviors amongst the colonial settlers, maintaining that people living in England were more civilized in general. New England colonists reinforced these sentiments by choosing to not discuss or acknowledge their participation in the Salem trials. A number of colonists were embarrassed by the events, and hoped to forget the witchcraft frenzy that swept them up. Although the witchcraft trials in Salem proceeded like most other witch-hunts in England and Europe, the allowance of spectral evidence in court prosecutions led to different results than previously seen. Officials in Salem still used the prick test, torture, touch test, and other witch finding tactics while gathering evidence; however,

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128 Murrin, “Coming to Terms with the Salem Witch Trials,” 342.
the Salem trials had a much more outwardly religious focus than previous witchcraft trials in New England.

In the New England colonies, witchcraft trials before 1692 stemmed more from economic and social factors rather than religious, excluding Quaker witchcraft accusations. The laity had a much different understanding of witchcraft than the Puritan clergy, taking a much more economic approach. Since witchcraft trials were held in the secular courts and were tried under secular law, the accusations that appeared before the court stemmed from disagreements, economic misfortune, or social differences. Very rarely did someone willingly confess to the witchcraft accusations brought before him or her, or add to the evidence. In Salem, this was not the case. With the inclusion of spectral evidence, the trials took on a much more religious outlook. With the encouragement of Cotton Mather and his constant defense for the events of the Salem trials, the people of Salem turned to accusations based purely on “preternatural” events. Not only did the rely on spectral evidence for the basis of their testimonies, but a number of the people accused even confessed to signing the devil’s book and elaborated on the specific aspects of witchcraft that they took part in. Later critics and historians questioned the use of spectral evidence in the secular court, arguing whether or not it was credible evidence since it could not be physically procured, but relied on hearsay. Despite the overwhelming employment

and later backlash of spectral evidence, Cotton Mather was the only one held responsible in the public eye.

After the trials had ended, Governor Phips requested Cotton Mather write an account of the Salem trials since he so adamantly supported and invigorated those who testified using spectral evidence. In his book *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, Mather attempted to take a temperate tone while describing the events of Salem. However, the result “was anything but temperate, and some of Mather’s more excitable enemies among historians have gone so far as to call it insane.” As it turns out, the courts of Salem took all spectral evidence presented to them at face value after Mather’s suggestion to consider it during the trials with a grain of salt.

In his own defense, Mather wrote:

> The multitude and quality of Persons accused of an interest in this Witchcraft, by the Efficacy of the Spectres which take their Name and shape upon them; causing very many good and wise Men to fear, That many innocent, yea, and some vertuous persons, are by the Devils in this matter, imposed upon; That the Devils have obtain’d the power, to take on them the likeness of harmless people, and in that likeness to afflict other people…

Mather continued to believe that his advice regarding spectral evidence was taken out of proportion, and maintained that there might have been a number of innocent people tried for witchcraft who were truly innocent. Mather believed that ministers should have been included to hear the spectral testimonies. He argued that the devil could take on any shape, including that of the innocent in order to torment the afflicted;

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however, this was difficult to expose in a secular court. Critics of Mather argued that the use of any spectral evidence at all was unnecessary in the trials and continued to blame him for the deaths at Salem for years after the trial’s end. Mather never involved himself with any witchcraft trials after those in Salem, partially because of his career, but mostly due to the backlash he faced with his involvement in Salem. Although the trials made a name for Cotton Mather outside of his father’s influence, his rise in popularity was not viewed by all as a positive occurrence.

In the end, Cotton Mather spent most of his time after the Salem witch trials defending his actions to the public and his critics while the colonies tried to forget they even happened. Cotton Mather provided too much leeway in the usage of spectral evidence thinking that he would be able to help council the court on how to proceed. His expectations regarding his involvement proved fatal for a number of people in Salem and left him with a negative reputation among the colonists, exactly what he did not want.
Chapter 4: Satisfied: The Balance of Ethics and Fame

Both the Salem witch trials and the Suffolk witch-hunts followed a similar pattern in their political and social developments. Because the Salem witch trials were later than the Suffolk witch-hunts, there were a number of influences from the events that unfolded in England such as the influx of Puritan ministers to New England after the Restoration. However, those involved in the Salem witch trials did not deliberately emulate the Suffolk witch-hunts. Matthew Hopkins and Cotton Mather each exploited the paranoia of their respective communities in a similar fashion and one can draw a number of parallels between their experiences with the criticism and backlash of their communities. These two witch-hunts stand out from other witch-hunts throughout the centuries due to the mass hysteria that surrounded the events and the embarrassment that followed. This chapter seeks to explore the parallels between how Matthew Hopkins and Cotton Mather exploited the political and social events of their respective communities in order to achieve prestige and fame for their work.

Political Shame

As discussed in previous chapters, the political climate leading up to both the Suffolk witch-hunts and the Salem witch trials had Puritans on edge. There was a great deal of change occurring in both communities, eroding strong Puritan power. In England, the English Civil War and the emergence of anti-Puritan religions such as the Quakers created uncertainty among Puritan communities. While Oliver Cromwell was in power, Puritans had a great deal of political power and ability to push their

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135 Webster, “On shaky ground: Quakers, Puritans, possession and high spirits,” 189.
beliefs regarding the English monarchy and the Church of England. As Quakers pointed out, Puritans struggled to deal with their new political influence in England and became frantic in their attempts to shut down criticism and backlash for their actions.

The Quakers were not wrong in their assessment of the Puritans’ ability to deal with political power. Although they challenged the authority and ability to rule of a number of English monarchs before the English Civil War, such as Charles I, they struggled to gain popularity for their own changes and acknowledgement of their legitimate authority.\(^{136}\) The laws and regulations Cromwell passed in the beginning of his rule became quickly unpopular among the general populace. In fact, Puritans struggled to figure out how to switch from offensive to defensive tactics. They spent years attempting to push their political agenda and beliefs, so when the time came to actually follow through with their political plans they felt pressure from other political factions.\(^ {137}\) While they received support from the upper class as well as the lower and middling sorts, Puritans began to buckle under the political and social pressure the English Civil War created for the new government.

Furthermore, with the outbreak of the English Civil War, a number of new political and religious groups emerged as the country struggled to find a legitimate ruler. Each political group had a different agenda, making the Puritan grasp on power weak in comparison to monarchial rule. There was great opposition to their changes

\(^{136}\) Woolrych, “Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Saints, 64.

and beliefs, and Puritans had to prove their capability as rulers and lawmakers with the help of their supporting benefactors. This uncertainty about whether their power was stable created an overall feeling of unrest for most Puritans, who felt the need to prove their ability to control political and social situations and problems.

Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony felt this same type of pressure as their colonial charter was revoked and they had to beg the English monarchy and Parliament to reinstate it. Puritan colonists had become arrogant from the lack of monarchical control in the colonies and felt empowered to rule the colony as (in their eyes) an improved version of the English government. King Charles II acknowledged the defiance of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, revoked their charter, and subsequently sent in English authorities to govern the colony with methods more in line with the English government. Colonial leaders not only had to accept the orders of the king with the revocation of their charter, but also had to plead for their charter back.

Before this political embarrassment, the Massachusetts Bay Colony had been reprimanded by Charles regarding their social behavior thirty years prior. Due to the rivalry between the Puritans and the Quakers, the Puritan colonists had found ways to discriminate and harass Quakers who sought refuge in the colonies. After a number of cases of Quakers being targeted by Puritans due to their religious beliefs, Charles issued as statement to the colonial leaders insisting that they refrain from discriminating against Quakers. The embarrassment of being reprimanded by

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140 Baker, A Storm of Witchcraft: The Salem Trials and the American Experience, 76.
Charles in the 1650s and then having the colonial charter revoked by him in 1684 was immense. It left colonists in a place of political and religious instability. The strength of their community was broken by the king and his ability to take away their right to representation and self-governance, and the power of their religion and religious beliefs was shaken by their need to grovel to the king. Furthermore, a number of Puritan magistrates had been criticized for having “deviated too far and too publicly from the New England Way” during the time of the Dominion.¹⁴¹ These magistrates later felt as though they could not afford to appear soft on witches during the Salem witch trials, proving that they were not traitors, but dedicated to the Puritan cause. The shame that came with these incidents left the Massachusetts Puritan colonists in a similar position as English Puritans during the English Civil War.

Both communities had an air of uncertainty about them as the political climate surrounding them was drastically changing. Neither group had a guaranteed right to rule anymore and constantly fought to defend their beliefs to the king and his supporters. The environment was one of paranoia, shame, and political uncertainty, which Hopkins and Mather clearly exploited. They saw this as an opportune time to step into the public as a source of knowledge and authority in worlds in which authority felt shaky and undermined. Hopkins accepted the position of Witchfinder General while Mather started to involve himself in Boston witchcraft trials. Both of these men made a name for themselves early on by providing insight and clarity to the chaos that came with witch-hunts. They did not ask for advice, but instead gave

¹⁴¹ Murrin, “Coming to Terms with the Salem Witch Trials,” 323.
straightforward answers as to why witch tests, in the case of Hopkins, and spectral evidence, in the case of Mather, were the definite solution to the situation. During these uncertain times for Puritans, these men presented themselves as the source of wisdom and certainty in their respective circumstances.

**Religious and Social**

Based on the events leading up to the Suffolk witch-hunts and the Salem witch trials, it is difficult to discern whether or not subsequent hysterias stemmed primarily from religious or social reasons. Instead, most factors leading to witchcraft accusations, tests, and trials were a combination of religious and social causes, not easily distinguishable. While both of these events took place in Puritan communities, some of the contributing factors to the witch-hunts had no relation to religion whatsoever, yet the main cause for participation in the hunt was to rid the community of the devil’s influences. Since England and the New England colonies both treated witchcraft as a secular crime rather than a religious one, but the ostensible reason for witch-hunts was to rid the community of the devil, the causations of these trials are an ambiguous combination of religious and social. The mixture of religious and secular methods that Hopkins and Mather used to incite witchcraft accusations exemplify this ambiguity.

Although Hopkins promoted the use of secular methods when it came to witch tests, he also provided some religious guidance similar to that of Mather with the Salem community. One such instance was their position on the use of spectral
evidence during witchcraft cases. While Hopkins did not go the same lengths as Mather in promoting its use, he clearly felt as though it could not be ignored:

I cannot deny but [spectral evidence] may be just grounds of suspicion, and cause of questioning them, but not always certaine, besides the unlawfulness held by Divines. But these cannot be denied to be just grounds as aforesaid. As when one shall be given to cursing and banning, with imprecations upon slight occasion, and withall use threatnings to be revenged, and thereupon evill to happen.  

In making this statement, Hopkins did not approve of the use of spectral evidence in the same way Mather did, but in a much more moderate sense. He did not believe that it could be used in the courts or as definitive evidence to convict a person of witchcraft; however, spectral evidence raised enough questions that it could launch the questioning process, which might result in a trial. Many of the indictment documents from the Suffolk witch-hunts, such as those of Anne Leach, Rebecca Jonas, and Anne Cade, were a result of spectral evidence that was introduced to the court and which presented enough of a case that follow up questioning was necessary.  

Cotton Mather, unlike Hopkins, openly promoted the use of spectral evidence and was one of the only people to do so in any witchcraft trials. His suggestions regarding spectral evidence, although taken out of context by the Salem council, show the same hesitance regarding its absolute reliability when it came to court cases. In fact, Mather originally advocated for a Puritan clergyman to sit on the Salem council in order to oversee the court’s rulings in regards to the spectral evidence provided.

142 Stearne, *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft*, 34.
143 TNA Kew, ASSI 35/86/1/60,63-64,73-74.
Mather, like Hopkins, knew that people could take advantage of the metaphysical aspect of spectral evidence when they did not have enough (or any) physical evidence to support their claims.\(^{145}\) Hopkins and Mather both expressed concern over the fact that people could fake accusations in order to target someone in the community whom they disliked. While Hopkins countered this issue by only allowing spectral evidence to lead to questioning and nothing more, Mather was confident in the fact that he would be allowed to sit on the Salem council and advise the members on how best to proceed. However, he was never invited to sit on the council, so he had no control over how the court considered spectral evidence after he endorsed its use.

Besides spectral evidence, both witch-hunts also had a number of secular causes that played key roles in how the hunts developed. For example, most of the deaths in the Suffolk witch-hunts resulted from the different witch tests that Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne employed in order to find witches within the community. These tests rarely included any religious aspects such as reciting the Lord’s Prayer, but instead focused more on the physical aspects of the witch.\(^{146}\) Hopkins and Stearne promoted the swimming test, pricking, searching the body for witch’s marks, or looking for the presence of an imp. Although some of these tests, such as the swimming test, were later questioned by authorities regarding their legality and their ethical acceptability, Hopkins strongly advocated for these methods.\(^{147}\) While the

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\(^{146}\) Reciting the Lord’s Prayer was a common test that was used by the church to determine whether or not a person was in collaboration with the devil. If the accused could not recite the prayer, they were believed to be under the influence of the devil.

authorities of Salem also performed witch tests on several of the accused people throughout the trials, they were not used nearly as frequently as they were in Suffolk. Part of the reason for this may have been the scrutiny and criticism that Hopkins and Stearne later endured for their methods.

The causes of the Salem witch trials were much more apparently religious than the Suffolk witch-hunts simply because of Cotton Mather’s influence on their proceedings. However, there were still a number of non-religious factors that influenced the outcomes of the trials. As Carol Karlsen argues throughout her book *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, a number of the women who were targeted as witches in the Salem community were economic outliers. Many of these women were either widows with economic independence, or women who were in the position to inherit money. These factors made it difficult for some women to fit within the private sphere. Some found their intrusion into the public sphere threatening to the general balance of society and sought to rid the community of these women by driving them out of town or using the devil as an excuse to convict them of witchcraft and end their social deviance. Furthermore, Reverend Burroughs was hanged for witchcraft even after he perfectly recited the Lord’s Prayer in front of the entire community. The fact that the community chose to disregard this new piece of evidence suggests that the Salem witch trials were not solely caused by religious factors, but had numerous ties to secular and social factors as well.

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148 Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 73.
Despite the religious factors of the Suffolk witch-hunts and the Salem witch trials, neither hysteria was solely influenced by religious causes. In fact, some of the only religious factors in either of these events were the consideration and use of spectral evidence and the belief that the devil’s influence explained social deviance. The idea that God or the devil could use dreams to influence a witch or the victim of witchcraft was a heavily debated topic throughout each of these trials. Most of the superficial causes for the witchcraft accusations revolved around economic and social factors within the Puritan communities, but by using witchcraft as a means of addressing these economic and social issues, the Suffolk and Salem communities both created ambiguity as to whether the main cause for the accusations were religious or social.

**Theoretical Leaders**

Throughout the Suffolk witch-hunts and the Salem witch trials, Hopkins and Mather were seen as the public faces of the proceedings. However, upon closer examination, these two men had little to do with the physical events of the community. Hopkins and Mather both provided the intellectual framework that was necessary to initiate the witch-hunts in their communities, but often avoided participating in the actual hunting process.150 Their involvement included publications and speeches promoting the various witchcraft incidents, and helped to shape how the community addressed and dealt with these issues, but the extent of their involvement in the physical witch-hunting process relies on their personal motivations for inciting the

hunts in the first place. The religious backgrounds and upbringing of Matthew Hopkins and Cotton Mather bring into question how much of their motivation was religious or social. Hopkins, although raised in a heavily religious Puritan household, seemed to have had little personal religious motive behind his activity in the Suffolk witch-hunts, only claiming the witchfinder title after receiving payment for his pending work in the community.\(^{(151)}\) His interest in witchcraft in the Suffolk area clearly began after Sir Harbottle Grimston and Sir Robert Rich offered him monetary compensation for his services as a witchfinder, yet the motivations of Grimston and Rich were purely religious and in support of growing Puritan cause.\(^{(152)}\) However, Mather had no financial motive for becoming involved in the Boston or Salem witch trials. Mather emphasized in his journals his desire to help the children who experienced the loss of their parents due to witchcraft or fell victim to acts of witchcraft.\(^{(153)}\) Although this seems to be a religious motive, Mather also sought to outshine his father’s achievements. His father was a well-known theologian who had already published a number of successful books and pamphlets throughout the colonies as well as act as the preacher of Boston. Increase Mather also found great political success by acting as the liaison for the Massachusetts Bay Colony’s efforts to reobtain their charter in 1692. In his quest to surpass his father’s achievements, Cotton Mather used witchcraft trials to gain a following of his own.

Hopkins chose to involve himself more in the questioning and court process than Mather did. Since Hopkins was commissioned as a witchfinder, he could not as easily stand by and not participate in the witchcraft proceedings since he was specifically called in to find witches in the community. He had to promote and escalate the witch-hunts to make national news. However, based on the indictments, Hopkins spent much of his time delegating tasks rather than completing them himself. For example, John Stearne earned the name “witch pricker” throughout Suffolk county since he was the one actually administering the witch tests. Hopkins’s name only came up in indictment documents when there was not enough hard evidence to convict a person of witchcraft. Although Stearne administered the tests, Hopkins had the final say in interpreting the test results. By doing this, Hopkins controlled how many people were convicted of witchcraft in each community. Because of this method, Hopkins had to move quickly from community to community in order to avoid unrest when the community began to question his motives and decisions. The speeches he gave regarding his success as a witchfinder promoted the tactics that he used, but also instructed others on how to find witches within their own communities. This prompted a number of witch-hunts throughout England, including the case of Mary Lackland of Ipswich, who was burned at the stake for witchcraft in 1645.

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154 TNA Kew, ASSI 35/86/1/83,86.  
155 TNA Kew, ASSI 35/86/1/60,62,72.  
Mather directly involved himself much less in the Salem witch trials than Hopkins did in Suffolk. Originally, Mather sought to completely involve himself in the trial process and therefore published pamphlets that spoke about the necessity of spectral evidence. His promotion of spectral evidence was contingent on the fact that he believed he would be welcomed on the Salem council to help guide its implementation. This, however, did not happen, and Mather had no way to control the events of the Salem witch trials or what the court would do with his energizing speeches and pamphlets. Mather engaged with the Salem witch trials from a distance after that, inciting action and convictions from his home in Boston by writing pamphlets and sermons. In fact, he only appeared in Salem once during the trials to show support for a fellow reverend who was being hanged for witchcraft. Once he set the framework and provided a newly validated method for accusing people of witchcraft, he chose to simply provide commentary on the proceedings and gain popularity as a preacher. He preached about using Puritan values to ward off witchcraft and the devil, and used his sermons as a way to gain popularity in the colonies since he was not able to physically participate in the trials.

Mather and Hopkins focused on delegation and fostering a sense of purpose in their respective Puritan communities instead of physically taking part in the witch-hunts. They were able to gain popularity through speeches, sermons, and pamphlets. Despite their quick rises in fame, these men also quickly gained a variety of critics who felt as though Mather and Hopkins had taken advantage of their positions in order to promote their own causes. Since they each relied so heavily on others to enact what
they preached, they had little control over the consequences of their words. They became the public face for the witch-hunts, but also the first targets for ridicule once those hunts became discredited.

**Backlash and Justifications**

After the Suffolk witch-hunts and the Salem witch trials, Hopkins and Mather continued to write about their causes. While presumably they originally intended to summarize the events of the witch-hunts and highlight their accomplishments, they were instead forced to defend the activities that occurred during the trials.\(^{158}\) At the conclusion of the witch-hunts, both Hopkins and Mather received increasing amounts of criticism for the events of the trials.

Most of the resistance that Hopkins faced as he traveled around Suffolk County stemmed from his apparent use of torture throughout the witch-hunts. In *The Discovery of Witches* Hopkins spent a great deal of space congratulating himself on his accomplishments as a witchfinder and explaining the necessity for witch-hunts to continue. However, Hopkins died soon after his publication was released, so he was unable to defend his methods to the public when he faced criticism. In order to try to save Hopkins’ reputation as a witchfinder, John Stearne published *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft*. This book added to Hopkins’ original work, and also mounted a defense of their methods. To justify the numerous physical tests Hopkins and Stearne performed, Stearne provided a variety of successful instances in which the witch tests led to the identification of a witch. In one particular example, Stearne

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\(^{158}\) Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem*, 169.
stated, “at Codman in Suffolke, being told how a woman there carried her selfe, I caused her to be searched againe, and there was alteration of the markes, and the woman presently confessed it, and made a large confession; and so it hath been common in all our proceedings, and a great cause for keeping them…” Despite the numerous examples that Stearne cited, his team faced a great amount of opposition from courts and the public.

John Gaule was the most outspoken critic of Hopkins’s methods and activities throughout Suffolk County. His main focus was the legal issues surrounding the witch tests that Hopkins and Stearne consistently performed. His biggest concern was the swimming test, which he believed functioned as a form of torture, illegal in England at the time. Although his publication Select Cases of Conscience touching Witches and Witchcraft was released after the witch-hunts had concluded, it was well read throughout England and the colonies. The arguments that Gaule made against Hopkins did not go unnoticed and were further supported when Hopkins and Stearne were questioned in Norfolk for the methods in witch-hunting. The official questioning of Hopkins embodied the aggravation much of Suffolk had begun to feel towards his witch-hunts and methods.

Much of Mather’s defense for his participation in the Salem witch trials, The Wonders of the Invisible World, focused on his introduction of spectral evidence into the witchcraft trial process. He spent a great deal of time in his book justifying how

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159 Stearne, A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft, 17.
he originally intended spectral evidence to be used and how the Salem community mistook his advice. In defense of his promotion of spectral evidence, Mather maintained:

…it is to be hoped, That among the Persons represented by the Spectres which now afflict our Neighbours, there will be found some that never explicitly contracted with any of the Evil Angels. The Witches have not only intimated, but some of them acknowledge, That they have plotted the Representations of Innocent Persons, to cover and shelter themselves in their Witchcrafts; now, altho’ our good God has hitherto generally preserved us from the Abuse therein design’d by the Devils for us, yet who of us can exactly state, How far our God may for our Chastisement permit the Devil to proceed in such an Abuse?  

In this passage, Mather presented a clear defense of his suggestion to allow spectral evidence during witchcraft trials. Mather pointed out that a number of witches during the trials confessed to spectral witchcraft in order to harm community members. However, he also acknowledged the possibility of false accusations based on spectral evidence. These misidentifications could not be blamed on Mather since the false accusations were, in themselves, a work of the devil’s trickery and allowed by God for the chastisement of Puritans. Beyond his defense of spectral evidence, Mather reiterated much of what he had been saying preceding and during the witch trials in reference to how Puritan communities could ward off witchcraft.

The same year that Cotton Mather published The Wonders of the Invisible World, his father published Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits Personating Men, Witchcrafts, infallible Proofs of Guilt in such as are accused with that Crime. In this publication, Increase Mather condemned the same activities that his son was

promoting in Salem. After numerous pages spent disproving the validity of spectral evidence, Increase Mather finished by saying, “It were better that Ten Suspected Witches should escape, than that on Innocent Person should be Condemned.”

Increase Mather’s work was well respected in the religious community due to his reputation as a pastor, but Cotton Mather’s work was well read among those seeking justification for his decisions and the decisions of the judges due to his constant advocation of the witch hunts. Despite their disagreement on spectral evidence, Increase Mather supported his son when it came to other critics, such as Robert Calef.

Robert Calef’s *More Wonders of the Invisible World* was a direct response to Cotton Mather’s role in the Salem witch trials. Because of how popular Mather had become during the Salem trials, Calef feared that he would, once again, try to stir up a frenzy that would lead to new witchcraft trials. His publication was well received in the colonies and damaged the positive reputation that Mather had built for himself during and after the trials. After eight years of work and compilation, Calef published a book that rebuked Mather’s influence during the trials. He not only included sections from Mather’s own *Wonders of the Invisible World*, but also letters of regret from the Salem jury, accounts from surviving family members of the Salem “witches,” and an apology from Samuel Parris, the minister in Salem during the witch trials. Despite his lack of status within the colonies, Calef was able to quickly destroy the reputation that Cotton Mather had worked so hard to build up.

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163 Increase Mather, *Cases of Conscience concerning evil SPIRITS Personating Men, Witchcrafts, infallible Proofs of Guilt in such as are accused with that Crime. All Considered according to the Scriptures, History, Experience, and the Judgment of may Learned men* (Boston: Benjamin Harris, 1693), 66.

Both men faced major public criticisms during and after their work with their respective witch-hunts. Although Hopkins faced less backlash than Mather, his early death meant he had less opportunity to justify his actions. Their publications, meant to celebrate their achievements, were used against them to oppose the fatal choices they made. The opposing publications of Gaule and Calef diminished the popularity that Hopkins and Mather sought to gain from their leadership in the witch-hunts, and also influence a number of later publications, such as Francis Hutchinson’s famous eighteenth-century essays, which sought to prevent witch-hunts such as those in Suffolk and Salem from happening again. In fact, the greatest popularity Hopkins and Mather experienced was during the witch-hunts themselves. Their books were attempts to further their prestige and provide written proof that their work bettered the communities in which the events took place. However, they also provided public space to contest whether the swimming test and spectral evidence were unethical. The publications of Gaule, Calef, and Hutchinson became widespread staples of English and colonial libraries as important works, further damaging any prestige or lasting popularity that Hopkins and Mather sought to gain from their experiences.\textsuperscript{165} After the fact, most Englishmen and colonists acknowledged the Suffolk witch-hunts and the Salem witch trials to be an embarrassment.\textsuperscript{166} The events furthered the belief that Puritans were fanatical and overzealous; therefore, many Puritans tried to distance

\textsuperscript{165} Not only was John Gaule’s book referenced during witch trials in the New England colonies, but these works were found in a number of prestigious libraries of the time. E. Millicent Sowerby, ed., \textit{Catalogue of the Library of Thomas Jefferson} (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1959), 204.

\textsuperscript{166} Baker, \textit{A Storm of Witchcraft: The Salem Trials and the American Experience}, 255.
themselves from such behaviors. Hopkins’s and Mather’s aspirations for fame and prestige became their downfall and ticket to infamy.

**Situational Irony**

Matthew Hopkins and Cotton Mather took advantage of the political turmoil within their respective communities in order to achieve their goals of fame and prestige during their lifetimes. Mather took guidance from how Hopkins conducted the witch-hunts in Suffolk. By the 1690s, the publications of Hopkins and Stearne were widely circulated throughout England and the colonies. Their ideas regarding spectral evidence as a way to establish witchcraft convictions were known and debated amongst theologians and scholars. Mather most likely had read the works of Hopkins and Stearne as well as those of their critics. Since Hopkins was not criticized for his allowance of spectral evidence in the Suffolk witch-hunts, Mather believed he could expand on this practice in Salem without facing any major debate.

Comparing the two witch-hunting events, Hopkins and Mather sought to make a name for themselves by exploiting legally and spiritually questionable methods of trying people as witches. Although torture had been deemed illegal in England, Matthew Hopkins used it during the witch-hunts, without labeling it as such. Since Hopkins and Stearne claimed that their tests physically proved whether a woman was a witch, they were able to get away with their methods, such as the swim test and pricking, for several months without raising suspicion. Mather similarly took advantage of the fact that there were few guidelines in place in regards to spectral evidence as definitive confirmation of witchcraft, but chose to disregard them.
Although different circumstances, the use of torture and spectral evidence during trial proceedings proved detrimental to the community and provided support for the critics as a way to discredit the work of Hopkins and Mather.

In the end, Matthew Hopkins and Cotton Mather sought to benefit from the precarious political situations of the respective communities. They both looked for societal clues as to what would set off a frenzy within the Puritan communities and exacerbated these fears through speeches and writings. Enthralled by the sudden recognition of their communities, these men took risks in the hopes of gaining prestige within them. However, the emotional rush Mather and Hopkins felt as they reached their goals of overshadowing the accomplishments of others and achieving fame in each community quickly led to their defeat. Within years of their respective witch-hunts ending, both Mather and Hopkins became infamous for their activities and disdained by the public. Instead of achieving prestige and overwhelming popularity for their work, Cotton Mather and Matthew Hopkins fell short of their goal.
Conclusion

Despite being a well-respected pastor, an upstanding member of the community, and passing all of the witch tests, Reverend George Burroughs was hanged on August 19, 1692. His death puzzled a number of members of the Salem community, but their doubts were stifled by the passionate speeches of Cotton Mather. Mather’s words and his certainty in the court’s decision quieted many who found themselves skeptical of the spectral evidence mustered against the pastor. Others, however, were unconvinced and worked to discredit Mather and his influence over the community. The string of events Mather created during the Salem witch trials of 1692 paralleled the events in which Matthew Hopkins found himself fifty years earlier in Suffolk, England. The parallels between the experiences of Hopkins and Mather suggest that these two men saw the same opportunity in invoking a large-scale witch-hunt for popularity and prestige.

Witchcraft was not always perceived as a legal crime to be tried by the secular courts, nor did it appear as a large-scale event in many countries. The fact that both England and the New England colonies had mass outbreaks of witchcraft hysteria points to factors that differ from the majority of witchcraft outbreaks. However, between the two outbreaks, there were a great deal of similarities that stood apart from other occurrences of witchcraft accusations. The social, religious, and political climate within the two Puritan communities shared the same uncertain atmosphere that left each community with a sense of panic. The ambiguous nature of the Puritan communities due to the English Civil War and the revocation of the Massachusetts
Bay Colony charter, respectively, created environments in which Hopkins and Mather could easily take charge.

The apparent distrust of differing behaviors, religions, and ideas within these two Puritan communities during the seventeenth century reflect the atmosphere of uncertain control. In both instances Puritans had gained and then quickly lost power to the hands of the monarch and the religion they protested. Within these tumultuous communities, Puritans sought to regain power in any way they could; Matthew Hopkins and Cotton Mather provided them with an opportunity. Hopkins and Mather took advantage of the ambiguous interpretations of how to prove witchcraft in order to stir up frenzies within their communities. By doing this, they were able to portray themselves as dependable leaders during a string of uncertain events, providing answers to the apparent witchcraft problem that plagued the communities. While Hopkins’s methods focused on physical tests such as the swimming or prick test, Mather advocated for the use of spectral evidence. Despite the few laws regarding either of these methods, Hopkins and Mather used the momentum of the frenzy to push their agendas and gain prestige for their innovative approaches.

In studying these large-scale witchcraft trials, it is important to understand the role Hopkins and Mather played in their creation. The speeches and publications of these two men filled an already unstable society with frightful stories, and nurtured fear and dangerous notions in the minds of Puritan communities.\(^{167}\) Having fostered this fear within the community, these men portrayed themselves as the only ones who

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could restore a sense of stability among the people. They took advantage of the frenzy they designed to provide their already planned solutions to the growing witchcraft problem. Hopkins and Mather found a way to temporarily provide a sense of security through their words and leadership, each hoping to also establish a name for himself in the process.

Although Hopkins and Mather worked on the assumption that their leadership would be taken at face value, and that their new roles as the faces of their respective witch-hunts would solidify their authority, this was not the case. Their methods led to criticism among religious, political, and public leaders who sought to prevent men like Hopkins and Mather from gaining such influential power concerning witchcraft again. In fact, some, such as Francis Hutchinson, dedicated their lives to ending the possibility that one individual could build a witch-hunting frenzy. Many critics banded together to speak out against Hopkins and Mather, relying on each other to support the end of witchcraft.  

In the dedication of his publication, Hutchinson even stated, “I humbly offer my book as an argument on the behalf of all such miserable people, who may ever in time to come be drawn into the same danger in our nation.” The works of men like Gaule, Calef, and Hutchinson helped to discredit Hopkins’s and Mather’s defenses of their actions. This led to the quick erosion of the prestige and fame Hopkins and Mather sought to gain from these experiences.

Understanding the influence Matthew Hopkins and Cotton Mather had over these witch trials and how the public responded to them is necessary when trying to understand why these two witch-hunting experiences were different than the majority. The simultaneous occurrence of political, religious, and social uncertainty within these two specific Puritan communities laid the groundwork for Hopkins and Mather to step in and take advantage of the already present instability and fear. Their ability to convince their communities that torture and spectral evidence were plausible means of addressing their witchcraft problem was a direct result of the fear that their stories and speeches encouraged. However, their methods also resulted in criticism, the loss of their sought-after popularity, and eventually the discrediting of mass witch-hunts among English communities.
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ASSI 44/5: Jane Holmes Trial

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A True Relation of the Araignment of eighteen Witches. That were tried, convicted, and condemned, at a Sessions holden at St. Edmunds-bury in Suffolke, and there by the Judge and Justices of the said Sessions condemned to die, and so were executed the 27 day of August 1645. As also a List of the names of those that were executed, and their severall Confessions before their executions. With a true relation of the manner how they find them out. London: I.H., 1645.


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