



**Tituba, Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborne:
A Study of the Accusations and Procedures in the Salem
Witch Trials of 1692**

Spectral Evidence

Spectral evidence is a form of evidence based upon dreams and visions. It was admitted in court during the Salem witch trials by the appointed chief justice, William Stoughton. The booklet *A Tryal of Witches* taken from a contemporary report of the proceedings of the Bury St. Edmunds witch trial of 1662 became a model for, and was referenced in the Trials when the magistrates were looking for proof that such evidence could be used in a court of law.

Spectral evidence was testimony that the accused witch's spirit (i.e. *spectre*) appeared to the witness in a dream or vision (for example, a black cat or wolf). The dream or vision was admitted as evidence. Thus, witnesses (who were often the accusers) would testify that "Goody Proctor bit, pinched, and almost choked me," and it would be taken as evidence that the accused were responsible for the biting, pinching and choking even though they were elsewhere at the time.

Thomas Brattle, a merchant of Salem, made note that "when the afflicted do mean and intend only the appearance and shape of such an one, say G. Proctor, yet they positively swear that G. Proctor did afflict them; and they were allowed to do so; as though there was no real difference between G. Proctor and the shape of G. Proctor."¹

Rev. Cotton Mather argued that it was appropriate to admit spectral evidence into legal proceedings, but cautioned that convictions should not be based on spectral evidence alone as it was possible for the Devil to take the shape of an innocent person.

Rev. Increase Mather became an opponent of spectral evidence - though not until after the Salem hangings had taken place, and not on the basis that it was false testimony by witnesses, but that it might be a deception by demons. He published *Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits Personating Men, Witchcrafts, infallible Proofs of Guilt in such as are accused with that Crime.*, in which he argued that "It were better that ten suspected witches should escape, than that one innocent person should be condemned".



Tituba's Story

Biography:

Tituba

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(excerpts)

Many interpretations of the Salem Trials acknowledge the pivotal role Tituba's confession played in legitimizing the early suspicions and subsequent investigations of witchcraft, seizing on the vivid descriptions of the devil and his minions that she provided to the examining justices. A number of sources also assert that Tituba also introduced supernatural ideas to the "afflicted girls." These scholars claim Reverend Parris had purchased her in Barbados, unaware of the voodoo and witchcraft practices she would eventually undertake under the roof of the Salem parsonage.

In all of the court documents relating to the Witchcraft Trials, Tituba's identity is listed as that of an "Indian Woman, servant" (for example, Warrant vs. Tituba and Sarah Osborne -SWP 745). But as scholars have recently pointed out, somewhere in the development of the Salem lore, Tituba's racial heritage has been transformed and confused-thus she appears in texts variously as "Negro," "half-breed," "colored," or "half-Indian, half-Negro." Assumptions about her origins range from the island of Barbados to Africa to Native American. This confusion necessarily complicates any understanding of the consequential and critical part traditionally assigned to Tituba; we must consider how racial stereotypes and presumptions have contributed to the varying amounts of blame she is forced to bear.

Truthfully, Tituba's story may never be clearly sorted out. Her status as a slave constrains any attempts to uncover official records and papers relating to her. The little glimpse of her life that is available is provided only by the court transcripts themselves. Though Tituba's words may resonate to us through the court records, she cannot tell her version of the events leading up to the Trials, she cannot share her own history and memory of Salem and life before it. In addition to Tituba's own recorded words, we can obtain some information based on what her contemporaries said of her. Beyond these strict limitations however, we can realistically draw no further conclusions as to her racial identity, affinity for witchcraft and stories of the occult, nor motivations for confessing to the accusations.

What we do know is from the historical documents is that Tituba was in fact a slave in the Parris home at the time of Betty and Abigail's initial sufferings. Tradition holds that she was married to another slave, John Indian, and the couple was purchased by Reverend Parris during time he spent in Barbados. Tradition, however, does not a history make. Tituba and John Indian did reside with the Parrises; Samuel Parris had a plantation in Barbados, and he owned two slaves after he returned to Boston, and she could have come from Barbados. However, the story that Tituba struck the "fatal spark" and ignited simmering tensions in Salem Village by enthraling the local teenage girls with her stories of African or Caribbean voodoo and magic spells must be recognized for what it is --a story. It was not her "voodoo spells and stories" which, in fact, caused the girls' initial hysterics but their practice of forbidden fortune telling.
(excerpt end)

The Examination of Titibe (March, 1692)

(H) Titibe what evil spirit have you familiarity with

(T) none

(H) why do you hurt these children

(T) I do not hurt them

(H) who is it then

(T) the devil for ought I know

(H) did you never see the devil.

(T) the devil came to me and bid me serve him

(H) who have you seen

(T) 4 women sometimes hurt the children

(H) who were they?

(T) goode Osburn and Sarah good and I doe not know who the other were Sarah good and Osburne would have me hurt the children but I would not shée further saith there was a tale man of Boston that shée did see

(H) when did you see them

(T) Last night at Boston

(H) what did they say to you they said hurt the children

(H) and did you hurt them

(T) no there is 4 women and one man they hurt the children and then lay all upon me and they tell me if I will not hurt the children they will hurt me

(H) but did you not hurt them

(T) yes, but I will hurt them no more

(H) are you not sorry you did hurt them.

(T) yes.

(H) and why then doe you hurt them

(T) they say hurt children or wee will doe worse to you

(H) what have you seen a man come to me and say serve me

(H) what service

(T) hurt the children and last night there was an appearance that said Kill the children and if I would no go on hurting the children they would do worse to me

(H) what is this appearance you see

(T) sometimes it is like a hog and some times like a great dog this appearance shée saith shée did see 4 times

(H) what did it say to you

(T) the black dog said serve me but I said I am a fraid he said if I did not he would doe worse to me

(H) what did you say to it

(T) I will serve you no longer then he said he would hurt me and then he lookes like a man and threatens to hurt me shee said that this man had a yellow bird that kept with him and he told me he had more pretty things that he would give me if I would serve him

(H) what were these pretty things

(T) he did not show me them

(H) what else have you seen

(T) two cats, a red cat and a black cat

(H) what did they say to you

(T) they said serve me

(H) when did you see them

(T) Last night and they said serve me but shee said I would not

(H) what service

(T) shee said hurt the children

(H) did you not pinch Elizabeth Hubbard this morning

(T) the man brought her to me and made me pinch her

(H) why did you goe to thomas putnams Last night and hurt his child

(T) they pull and hall me and make goe

(H) and what would have you doe Kill her with a knif Left. fuller and others said at this time when the child saw these persons and was tormented by them that she did complain of a knif that they would have her cut her head off with a knife

(H) how did you go

(T) we ride upon stickes and are there presently

(H) doe you goe through the trees or over them

(T) we see no thing but are there presently

(H) why did you not tell your master

(T) I was a fraid they said they would cut off my head if I told

(H) would not you have hurt others if you could

(T) they said they would hurt others but they could not

(H) what attendants hath Sarah good

(T) a yellow bird and shee would have given me one

(H) what meate did she give it

(T) it did suck her between her fingers

(H) Did not you hurt mr Currins child

(T) goode good and goode Osburn told that they did hurt mr Currens child and would have had me hurt him two but I did not

(H) what hath Sarah Osburn

(T) yesterday shee had a thing with a head like a woman with 2 leggs and wings Abigail williams that lives with her uncle mr Parris said that shee did see this same creature and it turned into the shape of goode osburn

(H) what else have you seen with g osburn

(T) an other thing hairy it goes upright like a man it hath only 2 leggs

(H) did you not see Sarah good upon elisebeth Hubbar last Saturday

(T) I did see her set a wolfe upon her to afflict her the persons with this maid did say that shee did complain of a wolf

(T) shee funder said that shee saw a cat with good at another time

(H) what cloathes doth the man go in

(T) he goes in black clouthes a tal man with white hair I thinke

(H) how doth the woman go

(T) in a white whood and a black whood with a tup knot

(H) doe you see who it is that torments these children now

(T) yes it is goode good she hurts them in her own shape

(H) & who is it that hurts them now

(T) I am blind noe I cannot see

Salem Village

March the 1't 1691/2

written by

Ezekiell Chevers

Salem Village March the 1't 1691/2

(Essex County Archives, Salem -- Witchcraft Vol. 1 Page 6)

Fate

Though Tituba was not executed for her participation as a "detestable Witch," she was forced to languish in jail for thirteen months after Parris refused to pay her imprisonment costs. She was finally freed from jail when an unknown person redeemed her jail fees and took her from the Village. Nothing is known about her life beyond Salem Village.

Sarah Osborne

Biography

Sarah Osborne

Written By Meghan Carroll

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(excerpt)

Born in Watertown, Massachusetts in about 1643, Sarah Warren married Robert Prince, a Salem Villager who purchased a 150-acre farm next to Captain John Putnam's. Putnam was Prince's neighbor and also his brother-in-law and the executor (along with Thomas Putnam) of his will. When Prince died prematurely in 1674, he left his land entrusted to his wife Sarah with the provision that upon their coming of age, it be given to his and Sarah's two sons -- James, who was six-years-old at the time, and Joseph, who was two. However, soon after her husband's death, Sarah hired an indentured Irish immigrant by the name of Alexander Osborne as a farm hand and paid off his indenture. Rumors spread about Sarah and Alexander's living together and eventually the two were married. Sarah, then attempted to overtake her children's inheritance and seize control of the estate for herself and her new husband, thus breaking her deceased husband's will. Legal battles ensued between Osborne and her children, who were the rightful heirs of Prince's land and were defended by the Putnams. Such conflict continued until February of 1692 when Sarah Osborne became one of the first three persons accused of witchcraft in Salem.

In Court

H = Judge Hawthorne O = Sarah Osborne

(H) what evil spirit have you familiarity with

(O) none.

(H) have you made no contract with the devill

(O) no I never saw the devill in my life

(H) why doe you hurt these children

(O) I doe not hurt them

(H) who do you imploy then to hurt them

(O) I imploy no body

(H) what familiarity have you with Sarah Good

(O) none I have not seen her these 2 years.

(H) where did you see her then

(O) one day agoing to Town

(H) what communications had you with her,

(O) I had none, only how doe you doe or so, I did not know her by name

(H) what did you call her then Osburn made a stand at that at last said, shee called her Sarah

(H) Sarah good saith that it was you that hurt the children

(O) I doe not know that the devil goes about in my likeness to doe any hurt

Mr Harthorn desired all the children to stand up and look upon her and see if they did know her which they all did and every one of them said that this was one of the woman that did afflict them and that they had constantly seen her in the very habit that shee was now in, thiere evidence do stand that shee said this morning that shee was more like to be bewitched than that she was a witch Mr Harthorn asked her what made her say so shee answered that shee was frighted one time in her sleep and either saw or dreamed that shee saw a thing like an indian all black which did pinch her in her neck and pulled her by the back part of her head to the dore of the house

(H) did you never see anything else

(O) no.

it was said by some in the meeting house that shee had said that shee would never be teid to that lying spirit any more.

(H) what lying spirit is this hath the devil ever deceived you and been false to you.

(O) I doe not know the devil I never did see him

(H) what lying spirit was it then.

(O) it was a voice that I thought I heard

(H) what did it porpound to you.

(O) that I should goe no more to meeting but I said I would and did goe the next Sabbath day

(H) were you never tempted further

(O) no

(H) why did you yeild thus far to the devil as never to goe to meeting since.

(O) alas. I have been sike and not able to goe her housband and others said that shee had not been at Meeting this yeare and two months.

[\(Essex County Archives, Salem -- Witchcraft Vol. 1 Pages 6-7 \)](#)

(Ann Putnam, Jr. v. Sarah Osborne)

The Deposition of Ann putnam who testifieth and saith that on the 25'th of february 1691/92 I saw the Apperishtion of sarah osborn the wife of Allexandar osborn who did immediatly tortor me most greivously by pinching and pricking me dreadfully and so she continewed most dreadfully to afflict me tell the first day of march being the day of hir examination and then also she did tortor me most dreadfully in the time of hir examination: and also severall times sence sarah osborn has afflicted me and urged me to writ in hir book

(Reverse) Ann putnam ag't Sarah Osborne

[\(Essex County Archives, Salem -- Witchcraft Vol. 1 Page 10 \)](#)

Fate

Sarah Osborne Died in Prison, May 10, 1692

Sarah Good

Biography

Sarah's father was John Solart, an innkeeper who committed suicide in 1672 by drowning himself. His estate was divided among his widow and children, but his daughters' shares were to be in his widow's control until the daughters were of age. Sarah's mother remarried and Sarah's stepfather had control of Sarah's inheritance.

Sarah's first husband was Daniel Poole, a former indentured servant. When he died in 1682, Sarah remarried, this time to William Good, a weaver. Sarah's stepfather testified later that he gave Sarah and William her inheritance in 1686; Sarah and William sold the property to settle debts that year; they were held responsible for the debts Daniel Poole had left.

Homeless and destitute, the family relied on charity for housing and food, and begged for food and work. When Sarah begged among her neighbors, she sometimes cursed those who did not respond; these curses were to be used against her in 1692.

In Court

The examination of Sarah Good before the worshipfull Assts John Harthorn Jonathan Curren

(H.) Sarah Good what evil spirit have you familiarity with

(S G) none

(H) have you made no contract with the devil,

(g) good answered no

(H) why doe you hurt these children

(g) I doe not hurt them. I scorn it.

(H) who doe you imploy then to doe it

(g) I imploy no body,

(H) what creature do you imploy then,

(g) no creature but I am falsely accused

(H) why did you go away muttering from mr Parris his house

(g) I did not mutter but I thanked him for what he gave my child

(H) have you made no contract with the devil

(g) no

(H) desired the children all of them to look upon her, and see, if this were the person that had hurt them and so they all did looke upon her and said this was one of the persons that did torment them -- presently they were all tormented.

(H) Sarah good doe you not see now what you have done why doe you not tell us the truth, why doe you thus torment these poor children

(g) I doe not torment them,

H who do you imploy then

(g) I imploy nobody I scorn it

(H) how came they thus tormented,

(g) what doe I know you bring others here and now you charge me with it

(H) why who was it.

(g) I doe not know but it was some you brought into the meeting house with you

(H) wee brought you into the meeting house

(g) but you brought in two more

(H) Who was it then that tormented the children

(g) it was osburn

(H) what is it that you say when you goe muttering away from persons houses

(g) if I must tell I will tell

(H) doe tell us then

(g) if I must tell I will tell, it is the commandments I may say my commandments I hope

(H) what commandment is it

(g) if I must tell you I will tell, it is a psalm

(H) what psalm

(g) after a long time shee muttered over some part of a psalm

(H) who doe you serve

(g) I serve god

(H) what god doe you serve

(g) the god that made heaven and earth though shee was not willing to mention the word God her answers were in a very wicked, spitfull manner reflecting and retorting aganst the authority with base and abusive words and many lies shee was taken in. it was here said that her housband had said that he was afraid that shee either was a witch or would be one very quickly the worsh mr Harthon asked him his reason why he said so of her whether he had ever seen any thing by her he answered no not in this nature but it was her bad carriage to him and indeed said he I may say with tears that shee is an enemy to all good.

(Salem Village March the 1t 1691/2)

Written by Ezekiell Chevers

Salem Village March the 1t 1691/2)

[\(Essex County Archives, Salem -- Witchcraft Vol. 1 Page 6 \)](#)

Fate

