
Hill, Frances. *A Delusion of Satan: The Full Story of the Salem Witch Trials*.
Cambridge: DaCapo Press, 1995.

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Frances Hill wrote *A Delusion of Satan: The Full Story of the Salem Witch Trials* in response to her disappointing search in 1992 for a factual account of the Salem witch trials. Unsatisfied with the available books on this topic, which usually delve into speculation or pure fiction, Hill had doubts about her ability to write an accurate and thoroughly researched book. As she read the existing sources, Hill realized that as an English woman, she could relate to the Puritans' decidedly English class and gender distinctions that were present in Salem in 1692. Growing up in post-World War II England gave Hill the understanding of the social, cultural, and religious views of a colony that was extremely strict, fearful of evil, and struggling to survive. With *A Delusion of Satan*, Hill probed deep into the mindset of the accused and the accusers. Her work provides the reader insight into the reasons why the Salem witch-hunt and the trials occurred and then dissolved so rapidly.

Hill began the book with a background of Salem Village and a brief mention of Salem Town. Describing daily life in Salem Village, Hill portrayed a life of constant work and religious upbringing. From the time they were five or six, villagers expected their children to help in the houses and on the farms. The people derived pleasure from following the strict religious view, which espoused that anything done just to bring joy was sinful. All of the civic meetings, religious visitations, and recreational play centered on carrying out a duty rather than personal enjoyment. Hill described the Puritans as rigid in their beliefs but flexible enough that they could find sin in any action. They designed punishments to humiliate as well as physically hurt those they found guilty of a transgression.

Hill began her book by documenting the actions and views that led up to the witch-hunt and subsequent trials. She described the family of Samuel Parris, the pastor of the Puritan church in Salem Village. He and his wife lived with their daughter, a son, a niece, and two Caribbean Indian slaves. The couple constantly left their daughter, Elizabeth, and their niece, Abigail Williams, in the care of a slave woman, Tituba. The girls, possibly with a few others, became involved in "fortune telling," which consisted of breaking an egg white into a glass of water and

watching the patterns that the egg white formed. Hill explained that even though accepted contemporary historical belief blames Tituba for the girls' involvement with so-called fortune telling and witchery, the girls actually used paraphernalia commonly used in English witchcraft and sorcery. Tituba would not have had knowledge of these tools because she was born and raised in the Caribbean before she became a slave. The girls played this type of fortune-telling game until they became fearful of what they were "seeing" and began to act hysterical.

At this point, the witch-hunt began and the girls accused people of witchcraft. Hill's prose walked the reader through the girls' accusations of witchcraft against Tituba, and other villagers, including Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne. Hill presented multiple reasons why villagers accused the alleged witches and why the accusers felt the way they did, by providing background information on the people charged with witchcraft and their relationship with their accusers. The speed and cruelty with which the village leaders detained, questioned, and then sentenced the alleged witches was unheard of in previous or subsequent witch-hunts that occurred throughout the world. Hill provided detailed accounts of accusations and testimonies for the reader. Hill's attention to detail and narrative was exquisite and kept the reader involved in an intricate and disturbing factual account.

Hill continued recounting the events of the accusations, trials, and executions until the end of the witch-hunt. However, Hill did not stop at the end of the executions. Rather, she continued to explore the story through the years that followed. She concerned herself with thoroughly retelling the story to the best of her ability. The people who she wrote about become as real as the person who read her book, while she drew the reader into the lives of those affected by the witch-hunt. The reader felt each accusation, each trial, and every execution. At the end of the book, Hill provided a listing of every important person involved in the Salem witch trials and a brief biography for each individual. She also provided the reader with a chronological listing of every major event that happened from the arrival of Samuel Parris in 1689 to the apology of Ann Putnam in 1706.

Hill's inclusion of copies of the original documents and photographs is a welcome addition to a history book. At the very end of the book, Hill included her notes for each chapter and her bibliography. The notes are full of additional information on events, places, and people. Her bibliography is another great resource for additional research into the subject matter. Overall, it is apparent that

Hill strongly believes that those involved were a product of the social structure and religious rigidity of Puritanism.

Frances Hill's *A Delusion of Satan: The Full Story of the Salem Witch Trials* takes its place as an informative and historically accurate retelling. Although Hill strayed into some speculation when she retold rumors documented by other historians, she provided the reader with her insight into the Puritan psyche and allowed the reader to experience the Salem witch trials. Her audience cannot help but care for the people involved.