

Rachel Mitnick

Professor Norton

Hist. 2090

2 December 2015

Elizabeth Hubbard: The Remarkably Credible Servant-Accuser

**Introduction**

Influenced strongly by Puritanism, seventeenth-century New England was strictly hierarchical. Men dominated the social, religious, and political spheres of village and town life, silencing women and subordinating them to domestic activities. Embedded in this structure was the assumption that God intentionally positioned the husband in his patriarchal role as head of his family and household.<sup>1</sup> With women, and especially young women, so marginalized by the patriarchy of seventeenth-century New England, it is remarkable how central to village life they became during the Salem witchcraft crisis of 1692. As Mary Beth Norton observed in *In the Devil's Snare*, the village experienced a rapid reversal whereby women gained a remarkable amount of attention, turning “gender and age hierarchies upside down.”<sup>2</sup> Men began to listen and rely on women as witnesses, and attempted to protect the afflicted from further harm. Consistent use of female testimony in the trials empowered the afflicted women and challenged deeply entrenched gender hierarchies.

Gender, however, was not the only aspect of New England's hierarchy challenged by the trials. Witness testimony relied upon in the Salem witchcraft trials also defied age and status. Three servant women had significant influence in the courtroom during the trials: Mercy Lewis,

---

<sup>1</sup> “Gender, Family, Household—17<sup>th</sup> Century Norms and Controversies,” The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Norton Topics Online, accessed November 5, 2015, [https://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/17century/topic\\_1/welcome.htm](https://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/17century/topic_1/welcome.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare* (NY: Vintage, 2003), 55.

Mary Warren, and Elizabeth “Betty” Hubbard. These three servants were all part of the group of afflicted girls who together were responsible for the accusations and trials of numerous witches during 1692. The fact that a group of servant women played such an important role in the trials is noteworthy and merits investigation. Although Mercy Lewis and Mary Warren had their fair share of time in the courtroom, Betty Hubbard was by far the most credible female servant witness who testified against witches in Salem. The number of Hubbard’s testimonies marked “jurat in curia” [sworn in court] far outweighs the number of sworn depositions by the other servant girls, proving that the court truly relied on Hubbard for evidence of witchcraft accusations.

Examining Betty Hubbard’s extensive array of testimony, deciphering its contents and contextualizing her social situation, provides insight into the remarkable trajectory through which a servant-girl came to hold substantial influence in court. Of the thirty people against whom Hubbard testified in surviving depositions, seventeen were arrested, thirteen were hanged, and two died in prison.<sup>3</sup> Betty Hubbard’s experience testifying before a court that evidently respected her accounts of witchcraft has the potential to help historians and students understand the changing gender and status norms apparent in the Salem witch crisis of 1692.

### **Who was Betty Hubbard?**

By the end of February 1692, Betty Hubbard joined Betty Parris, Abigail Williams, and Ann Putnam Jr. in having fits and seeing visions, becoming one of the original afflicted girls in

---

<sup>3</sup> “Elizabeth Hubbard—Important Persons in the Salem Court Records,” Salem Witchcraft Documentary Archive, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/people?group.num=all&mbio.num=mb15>.

the Salem witchcraft crisis.<sup>4</sup> Hubbard was the seventeen-year old great-niece of Rachel Griggs, and lived with her great-aunt and great-uncle, Dr. William Griggs, in their household after her parents died. Historians have not yet explained the cause of her parents' deaths.<sup>5</sup> As a physician, Dr. Griggs and his wife were generally respected in Salem Village. Hubbard, however, was known as a servant throughout the community after Dr. Griggs bought her indenture from his dead son's estate.<sup>6</sup>

Hubbard almost certainly was influenced by the involvement of her master and great-uncle in the witchcraft crisis. Dr. Griggs was the first physician to diagnose the afflicted girls with witchcraft as the cause of their ailments, pronouncing that they were "under an evil hand" rather than injured by natural causes.<sup>7</sup> According to Frances Hill's analysis of Hubbard in *A Delusion of Satan*, Dr. Griggs's work as a physician exposed his niece to the bustling interactions of people in Salem Village. Hill assumed that Betty Hubbard came with her uncle on his house calls, meeting many of his patients along the way. Hill wrote that perhaps Hubbard "sometimes stayed overnight at the parsonage or with Mary Walcott when her uncle went home. Mary Walcott, also seventeen, lived only a few hundred yards from the Parrises."<sup>8</sup> Although there is no conclusive evidence that Hubbard travelled with her uncle on his house calls, Hill logically assumed that the nature of Dr. Griggs's position as a travelling physician enhanced his niece's knowledge of the community. Possibly her uncle's position allowed Hubbard to get closer and gain access to the homes of witches she would eventually accuse, as well as to her

---

<sup>4</sup> Frances Hill, *A Delusion of Satan: The Full Story of the Salem Witch Trials*, (Cambridge: De Capo Press, 1995) 35.

<sup>5</sup> Hill, *A Delusion of Satan*, 38.

<sup>6</sup> Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> "Dr. William Griggs—Important Persons in the Salem Court Records," Salem Witchcraft Documentary Archive, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/people?group.num=all&mbio.num=mb15>.

<sup>8</sup> Hill, 35.

friends' homes to gossip about their experiences with people in the community. But even if she did not travel with Dr. Griggs on his outings, at home Hubbard would have been able to listen to her uncle discuss his experiences in the field, from which she could learn intimate details about his patients' personal lives. Dr. Griggs was evidently quite open to diagnosing patients with witchcraft afflictions, and his niece followed in suit.

Betty Hubbard, joining the afflicted girls at age seventeen, was one of the oldest in the group. Betty Parris was nine, Abigail Williams was eleven, and Ann Putnam Jr. was twelve when they were first afflicted in 1692. Joining the group in the next few weeks, Mary Walcott was seventeen and Mercy Lewis was twenty.<sup>9</sup> Although she was one of the oldest, especially when she initially joined, Hubbard's slightly advanced age by no means meant she was the leader.<sup>10</sup> Yet, according to Mary Beth Norton, "because Betty Hubbard was the first afflicted person older than fourteen, her torments could well have tipped the balance toward legal action."<sup>11</sup> Hubbard's relative maturity might well have contributed to her credibility in court.

### **Court Testimony**

In *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt*, Bernard Rosenthal and others compiled the legal documents from the 1692 trials and organized them in chronological order. In this comprehensive record, I found thirty depositions and statements by Betty Hubbard accusing

---

<sup>9</sup> "Important Persons in the Salem Court Records," Salem Witchcraft Documentary Archive, accessed November 6, 2015, <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/people?group.num=all&mbio.num=mb32>.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Devil's Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 88.

<sup>11</sup> Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 22.

people of witchcraft.<sup>12</sup> Of the thirty surviving statements prepared for court, Hubbard was sworn in court in twenty-four of them. When Stephen Sewall, the court clerk, wrote on the surviving depositions “jurat in curia,” historians can conclude that those depositions were heard by the trial court. The court was relatively selective in the testimonies it considered accurate, especially in light of the massive array of spectral evidence introduced that summer. As Norton points out, for instance, “Susannah Sheldon’s many lurid visions seem not to have been recast as depositions, which could well indicate prosecutorial skepticism about the validity of her testimony.”<sup>13</sup> With this apparent skepticism in mind, it is striking and significant that Hubbard, a servant-girl, has at least twenty-four surviving depositions and statements in which she was sworn before the court. Documents with the notation “sworn before the grand inquest” below the deposition indicate that Betty Hubbard initially testified before the grand jury. Twenty-one of her surviving depositions in Rosenthal’s volume demonstrate that Hubbard testified before the grand jury.<sup>14</sup> Hubbard testified in court significantly more than the other two servant girls in her group. Compared to Hubbard’s twenty-four, Mary Warren testified in court sixteen times, and Mercy Lewis formally testified only twelve times.<sup>15</sup>

There are plausible explanations that may provide insight into why the court did not consider Mary Warren and Mercy Lewis as trustworthy as Hubbard. Warren’s role as both an accuser and a confessor in the trials made her less likely to be trusted by the court. Her transformation from afflicted girl to confessing witch likely undermined her credibility as a

---

<sup>12</sup> This number does not include the indictments where no depositions were available to read in the Rosenthal volume.

<sup>13</sup> Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 208.

<sup>14</sup> The fact that Hubbard testified before the grand jury three times fewer than she did before the trial court must have been due to the fact that prosecutors sometimes brought in additional witnesses to testify before the trial court who had not previously been involved in the grand jury proceedings.

<sup>15</sup> Norton, *In he Devil’s Snare*, 321.

witness. Lewis, whose family had been the target of Indian attacks in Maine, experienced a traumatized childhood.<sup>16</sup> As an orphaned refugee from Maine, Lewis was an outsider whose background of family violence may have contributed to her exaggerated—and even nutty—expressions of affliction. Neither Warren nor Lewis was from Salem Village, whereas Hubbard lived on the edge of the Village and she and her relatives were notably part of the community. Like Warren and Lewis, Hubbard and her guardians were not originally from Salem Village. The Griggses moved to the Village from Gloucester sometime between 1685 and 1689, and bought their niece’s indenture from Dr. Griggs’s son Isaac’s estate in Boston.<sup>17</sup> Yet as Hubbard’s great-uncle, Dr. Griggs, became a prominent physician in the community, the family quickly assimilated. A combination of these factors may have contributed to the court’s lesser reliance on Warren and Lewis during the trials.

Nineteen of Betty Hubbard’s depositions accused the alleged witch of afflicting not only herself but also her friends. Significantly, in one instance in which Hubbard testified against Sarah Buckley in court, Hubbard only accused Buckley of afflicting Mary Walcott and Ann Putnam Jr.—Hubbard herself was not afflicted by Buckley but proved loyal to her friends by defending them.<sup>18</sup> When she accused an alleged witch of afflicting others, it was almost consistently the same people each time. Mary Walcott, Abigail Williams, Mercy Lewis, and Ann Putnam Jr. were most commonly on Hubbard’s list of others afflicted. By looking at those Hubbard listed as afflicted, and those who listed her in the same cases, it is clear that there existed a tightly knit group of girls who were very loyal to one another within the larger circle of

---

<sup>16</sup> Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare*, 50.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 19-22.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Rosenthal et al, *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 284. Hereafter *RSWH*.

the afflicted people. The girls Hubbard often named in her depositions returned the favor by supporting her in many other cases as well.

The fact that Betty Hubbard exclusively used spectral evidence in her testimony before court made it even more surprising that the jury often found her so credible. In every single one of her thirty statements in *RSWH*, including her twenty-four depositions sworn in court, Hubbard used spectral evidence to substantiate her claims. During the Salem witch crisis, prosecutors used various forms of evidence to prove that defendants were guilty of witchcraft. According to the legal scholar Jane Moriarty, “much of the evidence used to convict the Salem defendants was premised on testimony about observations of behaviors that the experts had ordained to be causally related to witchcraft.”<sup>19</sup> But accusers, such as Hubbard, often had difficulty connecting their accusations with palpable evidence that they could physically present before the judges’ eyes. Hubbard consistently appeared afflicted in the presence of the court, but had no tangible, visible proof that connected those afflictions to the accused witches. The court had no way of knowing if Hubbard fabricated her afflictions. Thus, spectral evidence, while increasingly common, remained controversial. Accusers presented spectral evidence by describing for the jury, wrote Rebecca Eaton, “the description of physical harm to person or property committed by the ‘spectres’ of the defendants, described by those who are deemed as the ‘afflicted.’”<sup>20</sup> Such evidence could only be seen by the afflicted. Prominent clergymen such as Cotton Mather and Samuel Willard spoke out against the court’s use of spectral evidence. In light of the historical controversy surrounding the court’s use of spectral evidence, it is surprising that the court would

---

<sup>19</sup> Jane Campbell Moriarty, “Wonders of the Invisible World Prosecutorial Syndrome and Profile Evidence in the Salem Witchcraft Trials,” *Vermont Law Review* 26, no. 43 (2011): 44, accessed November 7, 2015, [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1740712](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1740712).

<sup>20</sup> Rebecca Elise Eaton, “The Legitimacy of Spectral Evidence During the Salem Witch Trials,” *Victoria University of Wellington* (2013): 9, accessed November 7, 2015, <http://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10063/3217/thesis.pdf?sequence=2>.

rely so heavily the testimonies of a servant-girl whose only information seems to have been spectral. The court must truly have trusted Betty Hubbard.

During examinations, Betty Hubbard consistently appeared in trances, often for extended periods of time. Hubbard spent Elizabeth Proctor's entire examination in a deep trance, unable to speak. In April 1692, Betty Hubbard testified against Proctor in court and described the trance she had previously experienced during Proctor's examination. Hubbard declared, "I saw the Apperishtion of Elizabeth procktor the wife of john procktor sen'r and she immediately tortor me most greviously all most redy to choak me to death... and so she continewed afflecting of me by times till the day of hir examination being the IIth of April and then also I was tortured most greviously during the time of hir examination I could not spake a word."<sup>21</sup> Hubbard's deposition against Proctor was the only time she described her inability to speak, but similar language in her other depositions indicates that she experienced trance-like symptoms relatively often. In nine of Hubbard's sworn depositions, she described having been afflicted by the accused witch during his or her respective examination. Deodat Lawson's description of trances in *A Brief and True Narrative* helped me characterize and confirm Hubbard's symptoms as trance-like.

Although Lawson did not explicitly mention Betty Hubbard, he described the trances her group of afflicted girls often demonstrated during examinations. Lawson wrote, "The eyes of some of them in their fits are exceeding fast closed, and if you ask a question they can give no answer, and I do belive they cannot hear at that time, yet do they plainely converse with the Appearances, as if they did discourse with real persons."<sup>22</sup> Lawson's depiction of the girls' trances confirmed Hubbard's statements about her trance-like experiences. His language—

---

<sup>21</sup> Rosenthal, *RSWH*, 175.

<sup>22</sup> Deodat Lawson, *A brief and true narrative of some remarkable passages relating to sundry persons afflicted by witchcraft, at Salem village*, (Boston: Benjamin Harris, 1692), 9.



describing the girls' inability to speak or hear—mirrored Hubbard's language throughout her depositions. Although published after the trials, Lawson's confirmation of Betty Hubbard's actions during the 1692 examinations support what she later claimed in her formal depositions, adding to her line of credibility as a witness.

### **Challenges to Hubbard's Credibility**

Betty Hubbard's record of remarkable credibility in court did not come without its challengers. Although she was never charged with witchcraft, she was accused of being untruthful and religiously deviant. On May 29, 1692, Clement Coldum made a statement challenging Hubbard's trustworthiness and faith. Recounting one night when Coldum brought Hubbard home from church on his horse, he described that "she desired me to ride faster, I asked why; she said the woods were full of Devils, & said ther & there they be, but I could se none; then I put on my horse, & after I had rid a while, she told me I might ride softer, for we had out rid them. I asked her is she was not afraid of the Devil, she answered me no, she could discourse with the Devil as well as with me."<sup>23</sup> By May 1692, Hubbard had already begun accusing witches of associating with the devil. Thus, it is fascinating that, if Coldum's account was accurate, Hubbard had been so open about conversing and conspiring with the devil.

On June 29, James Kettle testified against Elizabeth Hubbard, attacking her moral character. Kettle was testifying in defense of Rebecca Nurse, whom Hubbard had accused of witchcraft. In an attempt to discredit Hubbard's previous testimony, Kettle declared in his deposition that when he was at Dr. Griggs's residence "one a sabath day about the last of may in 1692 having some discourse with Elizabeth hubberd and I found her to speack severall untruthes

---

<sup>23</sup> Rosenthal, *RSWH*, 379.

in denying the sabbath day and saying she had not been to meeting that day but had only been up to James Houltons.”<sup>24</sup> By accusing Hubbard of lying about her whereabouts during the Sunday church service, Kettle hoped to raise doubts about her credibility and sincerity. Yet neither Coldum’s nor Kettle’s depositions were marked “jurat in curia,” which means they were probably not sworn in court. Thus, Hubbard maintained her credibility even in the face of harsh, slanderous accusations of deceit.

## Conclusion

Despite her challengers, it is clear that the court consistently found Betty Hubbard mature and reliable throughout the Salem witch trials. The twenty-four instances in which her statements were sworn in court far outweighed those of the two other afflicted servant girls, Mary Warren and Mercy Lewis. From the surviving depositions, we know that in addition to her reliable testimonies, Hubbard was also a reliable friend to a particular group of her fellow afflicted girls, Mary Walcott, Abigail Williams, Mercy Lewis, and Ann Putnam Jr. She supported their accusations by naming either one or all of them as afflicted in her depositions. Hubbard’s case is important to study because her story acutely represents a moment of reversal in Puritan New England, in which traditional hierarchical standards of gender and status were flipped upside down. She was a unique character during an undeniably unique moment in American history, and her legacy should be remembered along with other powerful women battling crippling circumstances.

---

<sup>24</sup> Rosenthal, *RSWH*, 433.

## Betty Hubbard and the Legal Process\*

Total statements prepared for court	30
Formal depositions “jurat in curia”	24
Statements in which Hubbard claimed herself afflicted	28
Formal depositions in which Hubbard claimed herself afflicted “jurat in curia”	23
Statements in which Hubbard named others afflicted	21
Formal depositions in which Hubbard named others afflicted	19
Depositions before the Grand Jury of Inquest	21
Statements in which Hubbard used spectral evidence only	30
Formal depositions in which Hubbard used spectral evidence only	24
Formal depositions in which she claimed to be afflicted <i>during</i> the examination	9

\* This chart is based on the surviving documentation available in Bernard Rosenthal’s *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt*.

### Acknowledgements

Thank you to Lauren Bergelson, Cassidy Clark, Zoe Jackson, John Hall, and especially Professor Mary Beth Norton for all your help in reviewing and commenting on my paper. With your suggestions and guidance, I significantly improved my argument.

### Works Cited

- Eaton, Rebecca Elise. "The Legitimacy of Spectral Evidence During the Salem Witchcraft Trials." *Victoria University of Wellington* (2013). Accessed November 7, 2015.  
<http://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10063/3217/thesis.pdf?sequence=2>.
- "Gender, Family, Household—17th Century Norms and Controversies." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Norton Topics Online*. Accessed November 5, 2015.  
[https://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/17century/topic\\_1/welcome.htm](https://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/17century/topic_1/welcome.htm).
- Hill, Frances. *A Delusion of Satan: The Full Story of the Salem Witch Trials*. Cambridge: De Capo Press, 1995.
- Hoffer, Peter Charles. *The Devil's Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- "Important Persons in the Salem Court Records." *Salem Witchcraft Documentary Archive*. Accessed November 5, 2015.  
<http://saalem.lib.virginia.edu/people?group.num=all&mbio.num=mb15>.
- Lawson, Deodat. *A brief and true narrative of some remarkable passages relating to sundry persons afflicted by witchcraft, at Salem village*. Boston: Benjamin Harris, 1692.
- Moriarty, Jane Campbell. "Wonders of the Invisible World Prosecutorial Syndrome and Profile Evidence in the Salem Witchcraft Trials." *Vermont Law Review* 26, no. 43 (2011).

Accessed November 7, 2015.

[http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1740712](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1740712).

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

Rosenthal, Bernard, et al, eds. *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.