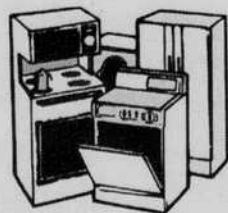


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Bewitched

The influence of the Puritan religion hits the Salem witch trials, causing hundreds of deaths

BY HEATHER CRABTREE
FREELANCE REPORTER

Sarah Good's hands trembled as she looked around the crowded room and denied she was a witch. But the more she denied her innocence the more she was questioned.

In February of 1692, Good was arrested on suspicion of witchcraft in Salem village, Mass. Good, Sarah Osborne and Tituba were the first women accused of witchcraft by a group of children who physicians had concluded were under the influence of Satan.

The children's illness was the beginning of the hunt for evil. Even before the witch trials in November of 1692 had concluded, 19 people were hung, one man died while being tortured and five others died in jail while awaiting trial.

The Puritan religion was a large factor in the witch trial outcomes, according to "Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England" by University women and gender studies Professor Elizabeth Reis. The book looks at the relationship between the Puritan religion and the witch trials and also discusses the reasons more women than men were accused of witchcraft.

Although the book focuses primarily on the women of the trials, it helps provide an understanding of Puritan religious beliefs. Puritans viewed the world in black and white, good and evil, Reis said.

"In their world, either you were for the devil or against him; either you were on God's side or the devil's," Reis said. "You were either a sinner or a saint, a witch or not a witch. There was no middle ground."

But the Puritan's black-and-white view of the world was only one factor in the witch trials.

"To them, fears of the devil were real and had significant meaning, just as we might have real fears of terrorism, for example, today," Reis said.

The witch trials are only a semi-accurate name for the events that took place in 1692. According to Reis' book, witches were people who made an active choice to join with the devil instead of waiting for Christ.

This viewpoint is contrary to the religious beliefs of true witches according to the "Complete Book of Witch Craft" by Raymond Buckland and "To Ride a Silver Broomstick: New Generation Witchcraft" by

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* 37,900 UO students have enrolled in FPEP at the Health Center since July 2000.
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