

Blacklisted

The witches of Salem (Meeting Point, page 86)

Summary of the recording:

The recording immerses us in the Puritan town of Salem and presents some austere characters such as Reverend Parris who wages war against sinners and thus forbids his nieces to do things which would not be pious or respectful of the Puritan ethic. They have to stick to strictly righteous activities, namely going to church and reading Bible verses. However, one day, some girls of the village start behaving in a suspicious way and seem bewitched or possessed by the devil. People in Salem start gossiping and decide to have the Reverend do something about it. The girls are put under enormous pressure and are forced to accuse some townspeople of witchcraft, a forbidden activity for which any suspect is considered a criminal and an accomplice of the devil. This leads to an even more acute wave of hysteria in the village, and many people are sentenced to jail for practicing witchcraft.

Script de l'enregistrement

Part 1

For Betty Parris, and her cousin Abigail Williams, life in seventeenth century Salem was strict. As daughter, and niece, of the Reverend Parris, they were not allowed to have games or toys. Such play was a sign of idleness, when they should be concentrating on chores and Bible verses. Betty, Abigail, and other girls didn't tell the Reverend they were spending evenings by the kitchen fire with his Caribbean slave, Tituba. Tituba would entertain them with magic, fortune telling, and stories from her native island of Barbados: such activities were strictly forbidden by Puritan code. 0'46"

Part 2

In January, Betty and Abigail began to exhibit strange behaviour; screaming, twitching and rolling on the floor. The village doctor was certain that the girls were the victims of witchcraft. The first public display of their affliction came the last Sunday, in January. As her father read from the pulpit, Betty Parris screamed and fell into a fit. Other girls, including twelve-year-old Ann Putnam, followed. One barked like a dog, another flapped her arms like a bird. Others writhed as if being choked. Frightened by the hysteria, the townspeople begged the girls to identify their wicked tormentors. 1'34"

Part 3

With pressure mounting, the girls finally cried out three names: Tituba, Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborne. A slave, a homeless beggar, and a sickly old woman who had married her servant: three social outcasts who were despised and distrusted by the townspeople. When the three accused witches appeared before the magistrates, Osborne and Good maintained their innocence. But Tituba, perhaps frightened after being beaten by Reverend Parris, confessed, and claimed that there were other witches in Salem. Her admission of witchcraft sparked a wave of paranoia and accusations. 2'20"

Part 4

The girls began to point fingers at other townspeople. They claimed that spirits of the alleged witches would secretly visit and hurt them. No one was safe from their accusations. There was Rebecca Nurse, the gentle grandmother and pious churchgoer. John Proctor, the wealthy farmer, who had warned against the girls outbursts. Even Dorcas Good, the little four-year-old, who had spent months chained to the prison wall. By the middle of Spring, more