CHAPTER 4

Absence and Accusation: Reclaiming the Witch Child

BEYOND DORCAS/DOROTHY GOOD

In addition to Dorcas/Dorothy Good, at least 22 children under the age of 18 were accused of witchcraft during the Salem witch panic, with the only evidence offered against them from ‘spectral’ sources. Each of these children ‘confessed’, although evidence suggests that torture was used in some cases. Yet despite the undoubted horror of their stories, the names of the accused children are not among those commonly associated with the trials or their aftermath. In this chapter, I therefore consider readings of the accused child as marginalised in order to examine the occlusion of their stories from so many histories of the trials. However, rather than simply offering a process of retrieval in which the stories of these ‘witch-children’ are told more fully, I also aim to consider the status of the accused children within the narratives of the trials to ask why they have received so little attention compared to the ‘afflicted girls’ and to consider how a reading of their relative omission from Salem’s story has wider implications on readings of children in historical narratives. I also intend to examine the difficulty of discussing these children in isolation from accused family members to consider how their stories are so often deemed less important or significant—in terms of how and what they signify about the wider trials—than those of Salem’s adults.

As has been discussed in Chap. 3, Dorothy/Dorcas Good has become the poster child for the much-wronged child witches of Salem in many...
historical and fictional narratives. Yet, while she may have been the youngest child witch, one of the only accused children from Salem Village, and the first so accused, she was followed by accusations against more than 20 other under-18s and others still situated as children in some contemporary, historical, and fictional narratives. These children and young people lived across Massachusetts Bay, hailing from Topsfield, Andover, Billerica, and beyond, with Andover one of the two principal centres for witchcraft claims: 45 of Andover’s residents were jailed for witchcraft, including three who were hanged and one who died in prison, and the total accusations exceeded those in Salem Town and Salem Village combined. Many children were accused after accusations against other members of their families, others prior to the accusations of their parents, and some were accused by their own parents. All of them confessed to their crimes and implicated others, frequently those already arrested but sometimes offering new names. And many had family members executed on their testimony, if frequently in tandem with the evidence of others. Yet despite the horror of this group history, few of the names of these accused children are known beyond the most detailed histories and a handful of YA novels, and none have had the impact on the ‘popular imagination’ of Salem’s afflicted girls. Only Richard Hite’s book, *In the Shadow of Salem*, discusses them at any length at all.

The association with their families may be one of the reasons for the occlusion of many of the accused children’s stories in that they appear to act as what Rose terms ‘the point of [...] constant slippage’.¹ For in attempting to write about the accused children as a group, they constantly slip into other narratives: the accusations against and hangings of parents such as Martha Carrier and John Proctor, and grandparents such as George Jacobs Sr.; their status as accusers as well as accused, frequently accusing their own parents and other family members; and the historical focus that so often passes over their own stories to reflect on how they may have impacted on those considered more significant to the event and the resultant story of it, as has already been seen in some narratives of Dorcas/Dorothy Good. As such, there has been relatively little interest in the children’s confessions of their own witchcraft. The historical positioning of Dorcas/Dorothy as signifier for the accused children does work in this sense, but such a claim is undermined by the differences in each accused child’s case. Yet both similarities and differences tell us something about the role of accused children: in the similarities, we can see children as
important in their testimonies about others; and in the differences, the problem of a group designation with a representative member returns.

In Europe and Africa, children have long been accepting as playing a significant and signifying role in the history of witchcraft as accused witches as well as innocent victims of witchcraft and accusers of adult witches. In Mora, Sweden, the 1669–1670 panic saw the identification of 70 witches, the majority of whom were children. In Trier, in 1585, ‘scores of children’ confessed themselves to be witches. And in Würzburg, more than a quarter of the 160 witches executed between 1627 and 1629 were children. Such figures show that the 10 per cent or so of accused witches that have been positioned as children in Salem’s accounts (given known figures) as probably less than the most extreme of European cases, but still as a statistically relevant group. In discussing these events, Sebald comments: ‘“The innocence of the little ones” is a phrase of dubious veracity since historical events suggest otherwise. Nowhere has this optimism stumbled over more obstinate obstacles than during the great witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.’ He also comments: ‘Starting in the 1580s, the role of children turned active and assumed epidemic proportions. From that time until the mid-eighteenth century, the vast majority of the witch trials involved children, either as victims, victimizers, or both.’ Sebald therefore shows how the medicalised discourse of witchcraft extends beyond Salem in his claim to ‘epidemic proportions’. He also troubles an assumed innocence of childhood but immediately restates in as a desired characteristic through the ‘optimism’ of its ‘veracity’.

Yet, despite the ‘epidemic’ role of accused child witches in early modern European trials, the role of the accused children in Salem’s panic and in New England witch trials more widely has rarely been quantified or much commented upon. While one might only speculate upon the reasons, absence always being difficult to quantify, this is worth a little speculation. One reason might be other focal points from the trials in histories thus far, such as the female/male demographic split; a consideration of accused witches of an advanced age in assessing how far Massachusetts’ accused witches meet the ‘old crone stereotype’; and the impact of social class on witch accusations. Carol F. Karlsen considers such issues in her work on women and witchcraft in Colonial New England, in which she does consider the role of accused children; however, her focus is largely on female children and as a foil to her considerations of older women. For example, her table on the ages of accused (not convicted) female witches in Massachusetts 1620–1725 notes three accused female witches under
the age of 10 and 23 accused aged between 10 and 19 years old.\(^6\) This data is of limited use to my investigation as only female witches are included and we do not know how many of these are related to the Salem trials; although in any case, Karlsen claims, ‘a closer look at the evidence suggests that women under forty were, in fact, unlikely witches in Puritan society’.

Yet this data is still of value to this work in its assumed link to New England Puritanism, and also in that if women under 40 (a total of 49 in the 20–39 age group) were ‘unlikely’ witches, then female children were even less so, and male children less so again (although this is not Karlsen’s concern in this text).

As can be seen from the tables in Chap. 1, the majority of accused children came from the small town of Andover and were accused in what has been figured as the second wave of the trials. As Hite discusses at some length, Andover’s troubles began in earnest in July when the afflicted girls were called in by Joseph Ballard, a concerned husband, to diagnose whether his wife Elizabeth’s illness was caused by witchcraft. Although the town had already fallen under suspicion with the earlier arrest of Martha Carrier, she was not a native resident and was unpopular in the town due to the assumption that she and her family had brought smallpox to the region on their arrival. It was the response of the afflicted girls to Ballard’s request that took the trials in a new direction entirely, and the town’s children bore much of the brunt of their accusations, with at least 18 children implicated and at least five new accusers (not counting those also accused unless they claimed affliction too). In this sense, Levack and other historians’ claims to an ‘epidemic’ seem apt, as does the medicalised discourse so frequently employed.\(^8\)

The accusations were familiar from Salem’s earlier court cases: children ranging in age from eight to 18 were charged with covenanting with the devil; sending their shapes out to harm Salem’s afflicted girls; and—in a newer trope—being baptised into the devil’s service, a diabolic twist on the afflicted children’s status as bound girls, and one that was primarily relevant to Andover’s children. The accused also attended witch meetings, hurt other children, and used poppets to cause harm. As such, both the accusations against and the confessions of the children tallied with those of the adults before and after their examinations in many ways. We might therefore argue that the already problematic line between adulthood and childhood in Salem was further troubled by children’s status as accused: the two groups were accused in the same way; they were questioned in the same way; and their status in court seemed no different from each other.
Despite their ages, it is therefore difficult to locate Andover’s under-18s as children at all: in the eyes of the law, they were adults. And yet, as these cases will show, their status remained subtly different in that their importance lay primarily in their accusations against adults rather than in their own confessions to witchcraft.

Although it might be impossible to tell the stories of each of the accused children in this analysis, or to claim that the cases I intend to recount are any way representative of an entirely imaginary whole as each case had its differences from the others—or indeed claim that such an approach might be desirable—this chapter will analyse narratives of just a few of the accused children, before further considering the reasons for their marginalised status and looking at those historical and fictional accounts that do tell their stories in order to analyse how these constructions of childhood might impact a wider understanding of the role of Salem’s children.9

**CHILDREN ON TRIAL**

One fact of the trials of which I was unaware until undertaking a thorough reading of the court records—and one that I did not find discussed in any of the histories I have read, with the qualified exception of Hite, who mentions the indictments of four Andover ‘minors’, including 18-year-old Richard Carrier—was that, although it is widely noted that Abigail Hobbs was subject to a full trial despite her young age, she was not the only child to face trial in addition to the usual process of an examination followed by prison until released on bail, as was the case with most of the accused children of Essex County.10 Abigail may have been the only child found guilty of witchcraft, as will be discussed in Chap. 6, but five others were also tried: Johanna (12) and Hannah Tyler (13), Mary Barker (13), William Barker Jr. (14), and Margaret Jacobs (16). While he did not come to trial, John Proctor’s son, William (17), had three indictments returned ignoramus; 13-year-old Stephen Johnson was indicted for affliction and coven- nanting with the devil, but no record of any trial survives; and 18-year-old Richard Carrier was also indicted with no trial record found. Of the four younger children for whom some (if limited) trial documents exist, the Barker children confessed, but there is no record of the Tyler children having done so. Yet this statistic is little discussed or even referenced in histories of Salem.

Mary and William Barker Jr. were from Andover, the town with the highest level of child and adult witchcraft accusations but which entered
the story at a relatively late point in the proceedings. Despite the common surname, Mary and William were not brother and sister, but first cousins, although they later married each other in 1704: Mary was the daughter of John and Mary (Stephens) Barker; William Jr. was the son of William and Mary (Dix) Barker. Mary was arrested on August 25 along with her uncle, William Barker Sr., for afflicting Abigail Martin, Rose Foster, and Martha Sprague. She was examined on August 29, confessing that Goody Johnson made her a witch and that she had afflicted those she was accused of hurting ‘by squeezeing her hands’. She also confessed to being at a witch meeting with her uncle and claimed that she had been threatened by Goody Johnson and Goody Faulkner. Mary also said that ‘she was Lost of god and all good people’. She was indicted on January 13, 1693, for afflicting Rose Foster and Abigail Martin, and despite her release on the same day—along with her cousin, William—on recognizance to her father and John Osgood Sr., she came to trial at the very late juncture of May 10, 1693. Described as ‘Single woeman’ by the court reporter—Mary would likely have been 13 at this point—she pleaded not guilty to the two charges. The jury, led by Captain John Putnam, accepted her plea and Mary was discharged.

While no arrest warrant survives for William, it is likely that his arrest came after that of his father and cousin as he was not examined until September 1. At his examination, William was accused of witchcraft against the same three complainants as Mary: Martha Sprague, Rose Foster, and Abigail Martin which, according to the record, ‘he did not deny but could not remember’. As the examination progressed, however, William confessed to being ‘in the snare of the devil’ for just six days; to a baptism by the devil in Five Mile Pond; and to afflicting Martha Sprague but ‘Saith he is sorry & hates the devill’. Neither his confession, the short duration of his claimed pact with the devil, nor his repudiation and apology were sufficient to avoid a trial. We know that at least some of the afflicted were present for his examination as he ‘struck [them] down […] with his eyes’ and that, after his confession, he ‘could then take the afflicted persons by the hand without doeing ym any harme’. On September 16, he gave evidence against Mary Parker for afflicting Martha Sprague with him. The indictments made against him were for covenanting with the devil and for afflicting Martha Sprague, with both issued on January 13, the same day as those of his cousin. Like Mary, he was then released into the guardianship of his uncle and John Osgood Sr. and, like Mary, he was tried, pleaded not guilty, and found not guilty by a jury on May 10, 1693. On September
13, 1710, John Barker petitioned for the restitution of both children (now grown and married six years), from which we learn that William was imprisoned for six weeks, although similar detail is not available for Mary.\textsuperscript{18}

The cases of the Barker cousins are of interest to this analysis of the accused children for many reasons. While the principal wave of the trials was largely over with the cancellation of the court of Oyer and Terminer in October, trials of both adults and children resumed in January under the Supreme Court of Judicature. In addition, while the majority of Andover children were released on bail into the care of their families and other adults (although this came later for the Barker children; winter was already fully at hand by January), this did not guarantee that they would not be indicted and/or recalled for trial: as was the case with Abigail Hobbs, the assumption that children were not hanged in Salem is therefore up for question. Children, as well as adults who were accused in the later phases of the trials, therefore showed that confession was no guarantee of a stay of execution; indeed, the later the accusation and despite the cancellation of the Court of Oyer and Terminus, the more likely were the judges to proceed to a full trial, confession or no confession. And finally, while the jury chose to accept the not guilty pleas of Mary and William Barker, there was still every chance of being found guilty at trial, no matter that the accused were children.

Oddly, perhaps, given their status as two of only six children to be tried for the crime of witchcraft in Salem, the case of the Barker children garners very little attention in histories or in fiction. Chadwick Hansen’s \textit{Witchcraft at Salem} discusses the testimony of William Barker Sr., but not that of his son and niece. Rosenthal’s \textit{Salem Story} mentions William in passing, but only as part of an argument that the ‘afflicted girls’ of Salem were sometimes boys. William is mentioned in terms of his accusations of others; his own fate is irrelevant, and Mary is not mentioned at all.\textsuperscript{19} Hite’s work on the accused of Andover does discuss the cousins, but only in terms of the many indictments of children on January 13, 1693 and their eventual marriage on which he comments: ‘Marriages between first cousins did not occur that frequently in Massachusetts Bay colony, but they did happen. In this case, their shared experience in jail created a bond far stronger than the usual one between cousins. The witch hunt brought these two together’.\textsuperscript{20} As such, they are anomalies, but with such aberrance explained away by the already aberrant nature of the trials. Mary also features in a contemporary letter written by Francis Dane—an Andover town minister whose family was decimated by the witchcraft accusations—in which he
defends those of his congregation who had been accused and which Hite quotes in full. Of Mary, Dane says: ‘Some Children, that we have cause to feare that dread has overcome them to accuse themselves in that they knew not. Stephen Johhnson Mary Barker the daughter of Lieftenant Barker, and some others…’. But Hite does not tell of either child having been tried for their supposed crimes.

The accused Tyler children also lived in Andover. Twelve-year-old Johanna and 13-year-old Hannah are often confused in histories of Salem due to similarities in their names and ages, but Rosenthal et al. record their stories separately, alongside that of their elder sister, 16-year-old Martha. Hite tells us that Hannah was tried and acquitted but that Martha and Johanna were never tried; in fact, according to the court records, only Martha was not tried, with both of her younger sisters facing trial; again, a possible reason for the occlusion of their stories. The records for the Tyler children are scarce, lacking arrest warrants and evidence against them. Instead, the examinations of five children—Martha and Johanna, plus Dorothy and Abigail Faulkner Jr., and Sarah Wilson Jr.—are summarised in a single document against Abigail Faulkner, where their confessions were only to the guilt of Abigail Sr. in making them witches; in this document, at least, there is no interest in their own status as confessed witches. However, an examination of Johanna immediately follows, in which she confesses that Goody Faulkner and the black man persuaded her to set her hand to a book, to afflict Sarah Wilson and Sarah Phelps, and to attend a witch meeting at Chandler’s pasture, in return for the promise of fine clothes; by this time, such confessions followed a well-worn formula. Johanna figures in the recognisance for herself and her sister Martha of January 13, 1693, and Rosenthal et al. tell us that the two girls were cleared with many others on May 10. Despite their claim in the biography section that Johanna was tried and found not guilty, there are no extant records of indictments or trial.

This is not the case for her sister, Hannah, however. Hannah’s name appears with five others—Mary Osgood, Deliverance Dane, Sarah Wilson, Mary Tyler, and Abigail Barker—in an extraordinary document from January 3, 1693 in which the six explain how the witch trials moved to Andover and that their confessions resulted from being ‘consternated and affrighted even out of our reason’ and ‘our nearest and dearest relations, seeing us in that dreadful condition, and knowing our great danger, apprehended that there was no other way to save our lives’ except by ‘confessing ourselves to be such and such persons as the afflicted represented us to
be’.26 The document concludes by telling how they each renounced their confessions, only to be told that some of them would be ‘going after [Samuel] Wardwell’, who had renounced his confession only to be hanged. Rosenthal et al. note that this document was likely presented in early January 1693 when ‘these women’ were facing trial, and it is notable that 13-year-old Hannah is included by Rosenthal in their designation of status as ‘these women’ and that her signature was held valid enough to appear on this claim. This petition is also important as it tells us that the high number of confessions among the Andover children and adults were due to a strategy: that of staying alive. Yet, of course, its success was only partial as four more children—and many adults—were tried before the trials finally ended. An indictment of Hannah for afflicting Rose Foster was recorded on January 5, and her trial followed in quick succession on the same day. The trial document tells us that she was also indicted for cov- nanting with the devil and had therefore ‘becom a detestable Witch’; like the Barker children, she pleaded and was found not guilty.27 Her name was not included on the January 13 recognisance for her two sisters, so we can assume with some confidence that she had been set free by this point. However, this does put Rosenthal et al.’s claim that Johanna was tried and found guilty in some doubt, unless her trial came after her release from prison on bail, as occurred in other cases.

While each of these cases of children on trial has its differences from every other, particularly, in terms of their position within the court documents and later historical narratives, the occlusion of their status as tried in most historical accounts of Salem can only be read as an absence, no matter the difficulties in doing so. Because while these children and the witchcraft claims against them were deemed important enough for them to face trial and the very real possibility of conviction and death by hanging, the relative absence of these stories from narratives of Salem skews such accounts to focus solely on adult witches, with child witches relegated to a supporting role. But given that such a high percentage of accused children—more than 25 per cent—were tried, their status as accused witches in their own right, rather than simply as the accusers of others, merits far more consideration, particularly when looking where to assign blame and when analysing data of the accused in Salem. After all, to be a child was no defence in Salem, and it was perhaps only by the late entry of Andover into the proceedings and the fact that most of the accused children were from this period that no child was hanged.
A Family Affair: The Carrier Children

However, in focusing on the importance of the accused witch as child in the trials, this is not to claim that their role within their families was not also of paramount importance in the pattern of accusation: each of the children discussed so far, including Dorcas/Dorothy Good, was accused along with other family members. Another family hard hit by the witchcraft accusations in Andover was the Carriers; but even though four children were accused and only one adult in the same immediate family, with two of those children tortured into giving evidence, it is the mother who gains most attention in history. Andover’s first accused witch, Martha Carrier, gained a certain notoriety as one of the victims of the trials: designated as ‘This rampant Hag’ and ‘Queen of Hell’ by Cotton Mather, her neighbours lined up to accuse and, ultimately, convict her, testifying to mysterious deaths of cattle, bodily complaints that only healed after her arrest, and an eloquent anger when crossed.28 Her four children also testified against her. Carrier and her husband Thomas (who was never accused, along with their youngest child), were suspect from their arrival in Andover because they had apparently brought with them a smallpox epidemic that resulted in 13 deaths, including seven from their own extended family. Yet it was not until May 28 that Martha was arrested by John Ballard, the constable for the South End of Andover, and brought to magistrates for questioning. She was hanged on August 19, 1692. However, four of her five children remained imprisoned on suspicion of witchcraft, while other family members were also both implicated in her guilt and became accusers against her and others: as Hite discusses in his history of the Andover witches, the majority of the Andover witchcraft cases were family affairs, despite the intervention of the afflicted girls.

Yet Carrier was not the first of her family to be so accused or even the first whose arrest also implicated their own children. Carrier’s brother-in-law, Roger Toothaker, was arrested on May 18, after boasting of witch-hunting abilities through the use of countermagic that he claimed he had taught to his nine-year-old daughter, Margaret. Margaret and his wife Mary, sister of Martha Carrier, were arrested along with Carrier; although Roger and Margaret were never brought to trial—with Toothaker himself one of the victims of the trial due to his death in prison on June 16—Mary was tried and found not guilty. Among the scanty trial records of Margaret is the May 28 complaint against her and many others for afflicting Mary Walcott, Abigail Williams, Mercy Lewis, Ann Putnam Jr., and ‘Others
belonging to Salem Village or farmes’. As was the case with many others, suspicion of witchcraft first fell upon her due to accusations against her parents; but, unusually, she was directly implicated by her father, who according to one testimony claimed that he had ‘said his Daughter had kild a witch’ by using a spell herself: taking some urine from the accused person, bottling it, and leaving it in an oven overnight until the witch was dead; an accusation not just of countermagic, therefore, but of murder. Mary Lacey Jr. placed Margaret at a witch meeting in her examination of July 21, and Andrew Foster and Elizabeth Johnson Jr. testified against her further, although in each case she was referred to only as the child of one or other of her parents: nobody seemed to know her name. While she exits the official records at this point, it is known that she was released from prison and assumed that she died during an Indian raid on the Toothaker home just three years later, on August 5, 1695.

With so little information available from the records on Margaret, it is no surprise that she does not figure much in narratives of the trials; but there are a couple of exceptions. In Chadwick Hansen’s explosive 1969 work, *Witchcraft in Salem*, in which he posits that witchcraft was real and that the accused were frequently guilty, he claims: ‘if the testimony concerning Roger Toothaker and his daughter may be taken at face value—and there is reason to believe it may—we have one case of murder by witchcraft—one case in which occult means were used to take a human life away’. Later, he adds in a discussion about those that had gone free after the fall of the Court of Oyer and Terminer: ‘among the latter were some thoroughly unsavoury wretches, like Dr. Roger Toothaker and his daughter’. While it is easy to dismiss such claims, especially given Hansen’s error regarding Roger Toothaker who had died in prison before this point, the positioning of nine-year old Margaret—only ever constructed in relation to her named father, despite the claim to murder by witchcraft—as both a practicing witch and responsible for her actions in the claim to ‘unsavoury wretches’ still continues to be read and to influence other works. After all, many fictions (especially YA fictions) based on the trials make some assumption of witchcraft as real. In Kathleen Kent’s novel, *The Heretic’s Daughter*, for example, Sarah Carrier claims:

Being with Margaret was like standing inside the casing of a lantern, one that kept the warmth in and the stinging insects out. I refused to think it peculiar if at times, gazing up at the tops of trees, she nodded to the air and said, “Yes, I will.” Or if, in carving out little hollow places in the snow, she
placed her ear close to the ground to listen to some music only she could hear.\textsuperscript{34}

While Kent may romanticise the child as witch in her work with a description of Margaret’s magic being in and of nature, compared to Hansen’s outright condemnation, both narratives naturalise the link between the child and witchcraft discussed in Chap. 1 of this work in that Margaret’s status as witch is never questioned, although Sarah is not implicated in her cousin’s witchcraft in this work, disturbing any claim to a congruity across narratives of Andover’s children. As such, while no record of Margaret’s examination survives and neither was she indicted nor tried, Margaret’s legacy remains one of witchcraft in such narratives.

The two eldest Carrier children, Richard and Andrew, were arrested together on July 21 for ‘Sundry acts of witchcraft [sic]’ against Mary Warren ‘&c’, thereby placing Mary as one of the afflicted girls invited to Andover.\textsuperscript{35} Mary Lacey Jr. also spoke against Richard and his brother: during her examination, she testified that she saw ‘Young Carrier’ sit upon Warren’s stomach, and that ‘farther there is a little Boy at Deacon ffrys yt is an unhappy Boy & I think he Joynes in this Witchcraft his Name Is Andrew Carrier & he hurts frys Child because fry beat him’.\textsuperscript{36} This is an interesting testimony for many reasons. The Carriers were from Andover, previously from Billerica; yet the two Salem Village Marys knew them enough to name them. Further, Mary Lacey Jr. names Andrew as a ‘little Boy’, although he would have been 15 or 16 at this point. She also accuses him of beating a child because his father beat him: there is no question of indicting a man for harming a child based on this evidence, but a child is being accused of hurting another child by spectral means with such an accusation signalling a legally validated guilt. Finally, as with Dorcas/Dorothy, there is no sense at all of disbelief that a child might hurt or even kill another child, thus further disturbing the idea of the ‘obedient’ Puritan child in many histories.

While the Carrier boys appeared in numerous accusations, they are perhaps best known for the records of their own examinations—ratified later in a letter from John Proctor—that testify to their torture in order to gain the desired confession. On July 22, Richard, Andrew, and Mary Lacey Jr. and Sr. were examined. The record begins:

\begin{verbatim}
22th July 1692 Richard Carrier Aged 18 Years & His Brother Andrew @ 16 Years Richd Carrier & his brother brought into Court who vtnto Many
\end{verbatim}
Qestions propounded returned Negatiue Answers to all & ye afflicted per-
sons sd they Saw ye black Man & there Mother wth others Stand before ym
on ye Table to Hinder there Confession.'37

This record is interesting because Richard is named while Andrew is more
frequently positioned as ‘his brother’; because neither the questions nor
the negative answers are detailed; and because it is assumed the two boys
would have confessed if they were not stopped from doing so by super-
natural means. Yet the judicial response to these assumptions was to tor-
ture the two boys rather than their mother or the alleged others who were
apparently preventing them from speaking; and, of course, the torture
achieved the results required by the judges, thus disturbing to its utmost
any remaining assumption of a semblance of a fair trial in Salem. In the
meantime, the judges questioned Mary Lacey who made further extensive
allegations against the older Carrier brothers. When their examination
recommences, the record states: ‘The afflicted persons were Greuously
tormented yt Rchd and Andrew were Carried out to another Chambber—
And there feet & hands bound a Little while after Richd was brought In
again. Q Richd though you have been Verry Obstinate Yett tel us….’38 As
such, this record contradicts that of earlier: far from the boys’ denials of
witchcraft being the fault of their mother and the ‘black man’, or because
they were telling the truth, it is Richard’s own obstinance that accounts
for his previous silence at this point in the narrative. Under torture, how-
ever, Richard spoke, followed by his younger brother and, later, his little
brother and sister, Thomas and Sarah.

The account of the Carrier boys’ torture, along with that of his own
son, William, is reiterated and explained further by John Proctor, petition-
ing the court for clemency for the accused from prison. Proctor’s petition
came the day after the Carrier boys’ examination, on July 23. He begins
by accusing their accusers, the judges, and the jury who, he says, ‘nothing
but our innocent blood will serve in their turn’.39 He explains that all
those in prison are innocent, despite accusations against them including
from some of their own number: ‘Two of the 5 are (Carriers Sons) Young-
men, who would not confess any thing till they tyed them Neck and Heels
till the Blood was ready to come out of their Noses, and ‘tis credibly
believed and reported this was the occasion of making them confess that
they never did.’ He adds:
My Son William Proctor, when he was examin’d, because he would not
confes that he was Guilty, when he was Innocent, they tyed him Neck and
Heels till the Blood gushed out at his Nose, and would have kept him so
24 Hours, if one more Merciful than the rest, had not taken pity on him,
and caused him to be unbound.\textsuperscript{40}

This appeal to the magistrates shows us that torture was used on at least
two occasions during the trials on children (and on Richard Carrier, who
had just turned 18); to the best of my knowledge, based on extant docu-
mentary evidence, overt physical torture was only used at one other point
of the trials, though it is possible, of course, that relevant documents have
been lost or that other instances of torture were never recorded. While this
appeal did not save John Proctor’s own life, at least his children and the
Carrier boys were spared.

There is less extant documentary evidence available concerning the
younger Carrier children than on their older brothers. Ten-year-old
Thomas Jr. appears solely in the short record of his own examination on
August 10, in which he confessed that he had been a witch for a week and
that his mother, Martha, had taught him witchcraft and baptised him in
the river; and in the following examination of Elizabeth Johnson Jr., who
claimed that she and Thomas had afflicted Sarah Phelps, Mary Walcott,
and Ann Putnam (probably Jr.).\textsuperscript{41} Neither record lists the questions asked
of Thomas, and his answers are summarised in the third person only.
Seven-year-old Sarah’s examination contains more detail and is set out in
the question-and-answer format more commonly used in the records of
earlier trials, although at points it slides into third-person narrative. And,
as with earlier trials, both the construction of the report—termed ‘Sarah
Carrier’s confession’—and its content show the assumption of guilt and
the leading questions that characterised the trials of adults too, beginning:
‘How long hast thou been a witch?’\textsuperscript{42} Sarah made a full and frank confession
to her status as a witch and her mother’s role in making her so in
response to such leading questions.

While not much may be known of the younger Carrier children from
the court records, they and their elder siblings figure more prominently
than some others in both history and fiction, possibly due to their infa-
mous mother, Martha, or to the extent of the accusations within this sin-
gle family. In Hite’s comprehensive work on the Andover section of the
trials, he considers the reasons behind Mary Lacey’s attacks on the eldest
sibling, Richard Carrier:
One almost wonders if Mary Lacey had a specific grudge against Richard Carrier. They were both eighteen years old—it would be all too easy to suggest that she felt an unrequited attraction for him. It is far more likely though that the earlier reasons cited for her confession were still at work: she may have genuinely believed in her own guilt, she may *have* in a sense been guilty (if she did actually use poppets with the intent of harming others), and she certainly thought Richard’s mother was not only a witch but also the designated “Queen in Hell”.

While this focus on sexuality is uncommon in accounts of the Salem trials, later accounts and fictions explore this possibility as one explanation of the afflicted girls’ behaviour, as discussed in Chap. 1. Hite’s take is that ‘an unrequited attraction’ could have been behind Mary Lacey’s attacks on Richard Carrier, although even he finds this somewhat unlikely, which begs the question of why mention it at all. Hite’s speculation also calls attention to a further aspect of the afflicted-accused relationship that has not yet been explored in any depth: that all the accused children were accused primarily by other children. Of course, most adults were also accused primarily by children, at least in the early stages of the trial process; yet this child-on-child cycle of accusation and counter-accusation—given that Lacey, like many others, was also accused by other children herself—formed a major part of the trials.

Hite also considers the implications of the Carrier children’s accusations against their mother:

Martha Carrier died without knowing the fate of her children. Of the five that were living, four (ranging in age from eighteen-year-old Richard to seven-year-old Sarah) languished in jail, charged with being among their mother’s minions. Only three-year-old Hannah was spared suspicion, and even that is surprising given that four-year-old Dorothy, the daughter of the executed Sarah Good, had been charged. […] The accused children had to live out their lives knowing they had helped seal their mother’s fate, though in the case of the two younger ones, their examination came after she had already been condemned to death.

This account claims to be about the ‘fate’ of Martha Carrier’s children; yet their temporary imprisonment and the impact that this would have had on their childhood and later adulthood appears secondary to Hite’s disturbing claim to their role in their mother’s death, ‘knowing that they had helped seal their mother’s fate’. Even Cotton Mather, hardly Martha
Carrier’s biggest fan, was moved to point out that she was not put to death on their testimony; yet Hite seems willing to sacrifice fact for drama, a move that does not doubt the children’s innocence of witchcraft but is happy to make at least her eldest two sons complicit in their mother’s death. Further, this account positions Dorothy, as she is named here, as an anomaly against the three-year-old Hannah and in her position as the youngest accused child, even if still through an assumption that she could, or should, be representative.

The Carrier children were discussed by Mather in his post-trials work, *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, in which he claims:

> Before the Tryal of this Prisoner [Martha Carrier], several of her own children had frankly and fully confessed, not only that they were Witches themselves, but that this their Mother had made them so. This Confession they made with great Shews of Repentance, and with much Demonstration of Truth. They related Place, Time, Occasion; they gave an account of Journeys, Meetings and Mischiefs by them performed, and were very credible in what they said. Nevertheless, this Evidence was not produced against the Prisoner at the Bar, inasmuch as there was other evidence to proceed upon.45

Mather happily spins the facts to suit his narrative in this account, ignoring the initial denials of guilt by Richard and Andrew and their subsequent torture as stated in the record of their examination in his claim that the children had ‘frankly and fully confessed’; as such, he also ignores the dynamics of the trial in positioning such confessions as freely given, rather than in response to arrest and subsequent leading questions. Mather further elides any differences between the children, positioning the ‘several […] children’ with a singular voice. This narrative appears to presuppose Mather’s presence in the courtroom during the examination of these children in his claims to the credibility of their evidence and their ‘great Shews of Repentance’ and ‘much Demonstration of Truth’: both truth and repentance are able to be seen in this account, both by Mather and—one assumes, given the acceptance of these claims as opposed to the torture resulting from their denials—the judges. This ties in with the visual aspect of spectral evidence, and the assumption that what is seen is real and beyond any need for interpretation, despite the necessarily subjective nature of such reports. But, again, Mather’s narrative shows of how little account most accused child witches were to anyone but themselves: it is
only in their evidence against their mother (even if it was not admitted in her trial and did not contribute to her death, despite the already-discussed gruesome speculations by those such as Hite that they were culpable) that their testimony matters, an approach that has been born out in too many later histories.

Another such account of the accused children’s position in the trials is given by Mary Beth Norton. The Tyler sisters, the Barker children, and the Carriers are included in Norton’s summary of the Andover children’s involvement in the trials, offering a more sustained consideration of the accused children than in many histories; yet, it is a curious take and is worth quoting and analysing at some length. Norton claims:

A careful reading of the surviving records reveals the crucial significance of confessions by children and youths (below the age of twenty-five) both in confirming earlier identifications of witches and in creating new ones. When Richard, Andrew, Sarah, and Thomas Carrier Jr. all confessed and implicated their mother, that seemed to verify the testimony against her by other witnesses. The same was later true of William Barker Jr., and the children of Abigail Faulkner, Mary Bridges, and Mary Tyler. Furthermore [...] young people seemed especially likely to identify [...] others for the first time. Thus Betty Johnson, the Post-Bridges sisters, and William Barker all supplied the names of new suspected witches. These unmarried Andover young people, like their parents and unlike the afflicted girls of Salem Village (who gloried in saying “no”, if only to the devil), obediently did as they were told. Directed by the magistrates to confess, they readily did so. Their mothers, aunts, fathers, and uncles sometimes initially resisted the demands for confession, but they did not. Dutifully, they acknowledged their culpability and that of others. Ironically, precisely because they behaved like ideal New England children, they—in company with the afflicted, who went to the opposite extreme—helped to cause the executions of several Andover residents.46

This passage appears extraordinary to me for many reasons. To begin, the first sentence troubles our understanding of childhood in Salem still further, as Norton claims ‘the crucial significance of confessions by children and youths (below the age of twenty-five)’. For the purposes of this work, I have confined my understanding of childhood to 18 and below, with explanations for each category, but this assumption of a new category of ‘youth’ is curious in that there is no categorisation of where childhood stops and ‘youth’ begins; as such, childhood and youth are separate from
each other but both belong to the under-25 category. And what the ‘crucial significance’ of these confessions is about, for Norton, is not the impact on the children and young people’s own lives or their significance as accused child-youth witches within the trials, but in their accusations—named by Norton as ‘confessions’ (although this also follows the language of many trial documents)—towards others. As such, these children are only relevant in their confessions on behalf of adults who were already accused and in accusing new people, and each of these appears to signify a culpability rarely placed on the accused children by other historians and writers about the trials, with the qualified exception of Hite. Martha Carrier may have been accused of all manner of sins by her neighbours already, but according to Norton it is in the testimony of her own children that ‘verified’ such claims that her guilt was confirmed, thus privileging their testimony above that of the adult accusers. Similarly, the children and nephews/nieces of other accused witches are assigned guilt in telling of their own culpability; no matter the above-discussed letter from John Proctor that explained such confessions were the result of fear to the point of distraction and the urging of their relatives to protect themselves. 

In the first sentence, Norton’s term ‘significance’ may be about importance at this stage of the narrative, but it can also be read to consider why and how these children mattered or how and what they signified; yet given her claim to ‘crucial’, Norton does not name most of the children she discusses, figuring them rather in terms of their parents, thereby positioning their signification not in terms of their own lives but in relation to those parents. Further, significance is also read in what these children tell about Puritan society and their relative ‘obedience’, again in relation to adults. Norton places these children and ‘youths’ in opposition to their elders in her claim that the parents ‘sometimes initially resisted the demands for confession, but they did not’. But according to documentary evidence, this decision to lump all confessing children of accused witches together is misleading: Richard and Andrew Carrier were tortured into confession, having initially resisted. William Barker Jr. ‘did not deny’ that he had afflicted people at the beginning, but neither did he confirm it, saying only that he ‘could not remember’; it is only as the trial progressed that he admitted to his guilt. And no confession survives for Hannah Tyler; the only assumption that she did, at some point, confess comes from the appeal to the court before her trial in which she recants her confession along with her co-accused. In this demonisation of the accused
Andover children, at no point does Norton mention that confessions were forced or recanted, or that they resulted in trials.

And finally, for this claim, Norton does what no other historian (to the best of my knowledge) has done: in this one paragraph, she reiterates the guilt of the afflicted children—who ‘gloried in saying “no”’ and ‘went to the opposite extreme’—and places the accused children alongside them as guilty in the deaths of innocent adult ‘witches’: both are ‘extremes’ and the status of these Andover children is never that of the accused for Norton: their role is of accusers only and, as such, ‘they helped to cause the executions of several Andover residents’. In no other history of the trials have the accused children been so vilified and all children been found so unequivocally guilty: afflicted or accused, Norton’s children cannot escape their culpability. That they did so through behaving as ‘ideal’ Puritan children—obedient to their elders—does not excuse them. Norton’s analysis positions those discussed here within an adult legal status of responsibility, further troubling who and what were children in Salem.

‘The Strength of Margaret Jacobs’

At the age of 16, Salem’s Margaret Jacobs is one of the accused who sits problematically within a claim to childhood in narratives of the trials due to varying assumptions on the relative ages of children and adults between narratives and within legal designations. Like many others, her accusation was a direct or indirect result of her family relations: she was arrested on May 10 along with her grandfather, George Jacobs Sr. on the accusation of Abigail Williams who claimed that Jacobs Sr. ‘had made Margaret set her hand to the book’ and ‘also that the said Margaret had hurt her pretty much to day & at other times & brought her the book several times to night but not before’. Margaret’s father had already fled in fear of such an accusation, and her mother, Rebecca—despite a mental illness of some years’ duration—would be arrested not long afterwards, eventually spending 11 months in jail to Margaret’s nine. Yet Margaret’s tale, even among such a litany of tragedy as this, is often related with a peculiar poignancy, one which results in her being called ‘hero’, ‘brave’, and similar appellations in some historical accounts.

At the time of Margaret’s arrest at this still-early stage of the trial section of the panic, the accused were being offered a stark choice: confess and live or deny the charges and be hanged for witchcraft. Although we
know that this was frequently the case when looking at the trials in retrospect, Margaret’s evidence shows how blatant the technique of intimidation was and how early in the process it began; far earlier than the majority of accusations against Andover’s children in the subsequent months. As Norton comments:

Margaret’s recollection of what Hathorne and Corwin told her at her May 11 examination marks the earliest explicit record of what eventually became of the magistrates’ most controversial tactics: preserving the lives of confessors so they could testify against others, while simultaneously prosecuting people who refused to admit their guilt.48

While Norton’s commentary acts to highlight the importance of this narrative in helping us to understand why so many of the later accused confessed and implicated others in their supposed crimes, it also does what so many other comments on Salem’s children do: that is, it positions Margaret’s importance primarily in terms of others rather than the effects on Margaret herself.

Yet while Margaret was a frontrunner or exemplar of this judicial technique, she was also anomalous in that she was the only confessed witch to recant her confession, to hold to that recantation, and survive: Samuel Willard Sr. also retracted his confession, but died on the gallows for his honesty. Before this stage was reached, however, Margaret was sufficiently frightened for her life to accuse three others (that we know of as the record for her May 11 court examination has not survived): the Reverend George Burroughs, Alice Parker, and her grandfather, George Jacobs Sr. She even appeared at Parker’s trial as an afflicted girl, as the court records noted: ‘Margaret Jacobs Charged [Parker] also to her face with seeing her in the North field on fryday night last about an hour within Night in appari-tion’.

But Margaret’s recantation was both too little and too late: all three were hanged on her evidence and that of others.50

Much of what we know about Margaret’s case can be gleaned from two extant documents, which I quote here in full. The first is a letter written to her still-absent father (who, like Shakespeare’s fictional Macduff some 100 years earlier, had cut and run leaving his wife and children to suffer the consequences, despite Margaret’s generous address):

From the Dungeon in Salem-Prison, August 20, 92
Honoured Father,
After my Humble Duty Remembred to you, hoping in the Lord of your good Health, as Blessed be God I enjoy, tho in abundance of Affliction, being close confined here in a loathsome Dungeon, the Lord look down in mercy upon me, not knowing how soon I shall be put to Death, by means of the Afflicted Persons; my Grand-Father having suffered already, and all his Estate Seized for the King. The reason of my Confinement is this, I hav- ing, through the Magistrates Threatenings, and my own Vile and Wretched Heart, confessed several things contrary to my Conscience and Knowledg, tho to the Wounding of my own Soul, the Lord pardon me for it; but, Oh! the terrors of a wounded Conscience who can bear. But blessed be the Lord, he would not let me go on in my Sins, but in mercy I hope to my Soul would not suffer me to keep it in any longer, but I was forced to confess the truth of all before the Magistrates, who would not believe me, but tis their pleasure to put me in here, and God knows how soon I shall be put to Death. Dear Father, let me beg your Prayers to the Lord on my behalf, and send us a Joyful and Happy meeting in Heaven. My Mother poor Woman is very Crazey, and remembers her kind Love to you, and to Uncle; viz., D.A. So leaving you to the protection of the Lord, I rest your Dutiful Daughter,
Margaret Jacobs.  

While we cannot know if this letter ever reached her father, it serves now to give us a more personal account of what it meant to feel responsible for the fate of others and, conversely, the peace to be found in honesty and, despite everything, in the goodness and justice of God, even if his human representatives on earth had failed Margaret and all others so terribly. However, in doing so, this letter also works to trouble an assumed divide between the afflicted girls and accused children still further: after all, Margaret was not the only child to straddle both sides of the fence, with Abigail Hobbs and Mary Warren appearing for both sides at the early stages of the trials (Dorcas/Dorothy was also both accuser and accused, but never appeared in court as an ‘afflicted girl’), followed by all of the Andover children in the later stages. There were no accused children who maintained their innocence from the first accusation; none except Margaret to recant and hold to it; and none except Margaret, and Andrew and Richard Carrier, to assert their innocence at all in the extant records. Such a letter as this reminds us why that might be: although we know from our retrospective position that no children were hanged, those so accused did not.

Margaret was eventually indicted for afflicting Elizabeth Hubbard sometime around September 14, 1692, although Rosenthal et al. tell us
that the date is an approximation. However, she was not brought to trial until the following January, with Calef reporting an extraordinary reason why she avoided a September trial that may well have resulted in her execution, with witches who were still claiming their innocence frequently executed at that time. Calef claims: ‘At the time appointed for her Tryal, she had an Imposthume [abscess] in her head, which was her Escape.’ It is a curious claim, that illness was an excuse for not executing a witch when innocence was not. Rosenthal et al. note that this posited reason for her survival ‘seems unlikely’ and postulate that her young age might be one possible alternative; however, given that the 14-year-old Abigail Hobbs was found guilty and sentenced to death and that four other children were brought to trial, despite her full and frank confession, this also seems unlikely.

Margaret was finally brought to trial in January 1693, and the second document written by her—in a timely reminder that there were Salem children who could write beyond a ‘mark’, and not just in the devil’s book—was a letter to the magistrates, probably intended as evidence at this trial although there is no documentary record of its having been admitted. It reads:

The humble declaration of Margaret Jacobs unto the honoured court now sitting at Salem, sheweth,

That whereas your poor and humble declarant being closely confined here in Salem goal for the crime of witchcraft, which crime thanks be to the Lord I am altogether ignorant of, as will appear at the great day of judgment: May it please the honoured court, I was cried out upon by some of the possessed persons, as afflicting them; whereupon I was brought to my examination, which persons at the sight of me fell down, which did very much startle and affright me. The Lord above knows I knew nothing, in the least measure, how or who afflicted them; they told me, without doubt I did, or else they would not fall down at me; they told me, if I would not confess, I should be put down into the dungeon and would be hanged, but if I would confess I should have my life; the which did so affright me, with my own vile wicked heart, to save my life; made me make the like confession I did, which confession, may it please the honoured court, is altogether false and untrue. The very first night after I had made confession, I was in such horror of conscience that I could not sleep for fear the devil should carry me away for telling such horrid lies. I was, may it please the honoured court, sworn to my confession, as I understand since, but then, at that time, was ignorant of it, not knowing what an oath did mean. The Lord, I hope, in
whom I trust, out of the abundance of his mercy, will forgive me my false
forswearing myself. What I said, was altogether false against my grandfather,
and Mr. Burroughs, which I did to save my life and to have my liberty; but
the Lord, charging it to my conscience, made me in so much horror, that I
could not contain myself before I had denied my confession, which I did
though I saw nothing but death before me, chusing rather death with a
quiet conscience, than to live in such horror, which I could not suffer.
Where, upon my denying my confession, I was committed to close prison,
where I have enjoyed more felicity in spirit, a thousand times, than I did
before in my enlargement.

And now, may it please your honours, your declarant, having, in part,
given your honours a description of my condition, do leave it to your hon-
ours pious and judicious discretions, to take pity and compassion on my
young and tender years, to act and do with me, as the Lord above and your
honours shall see good, having no friend, but the Lord, to plead my cause
for me; not being guilty in the least measure of the crime of witch-craft, nor
any other sin that deserves death from man; and your poor and humble
declarant shall for ever pray, as she is bound in duty, for your honours hap-
piness in this life and eternal felicity in the world to come. So prays your
honours declarant.

Margaret Jacobs

This document is couched in terms used in both previous and later pleas
for clemency from the judges, possibly disturbing any claim that Margaret
had written this herself, but its language is interesting in several points.
Firstly, and as mentioned in Chap. 2, Margaret positions the afflicted girls
as not just afflicted but as ‘possessed’; as such, the question is raised again
of what differentiates the afflicted from the accused if both can be used by
the devil. This letter further testifies to the power of the accused girls to
cause terror in the accused within the courtroom; no matter that many of
the accused were the same age or younger than Margaret herself, it appears
that they—as well as the judges—had the power of life and death in their
hands: ‘they told me, if I would not confess, I should be put down into the
dungeon and would be hanged, but if I would confess I should have my
life’. And this letter, as did Margaret’s letter to her father, also shows that
a denial of witchcraft was not a denial of the existence of the devil: ‘I could
not sleep for fear the devil should carry me away’. Margaret’s plea for her
life is a testament to a strong belief in the forces of the supernatural in
Salem and to why the testimony of the afflicted girls was taken so seriously.
Indeed, it raises certain questions: if Margaret’s belief in the devil was this
strong, how far would that also be true of the afflicted girls? Was Margaret an anomaly or proving the rule among the young of Salem? And, if she was representative in this case, the fears of the accused for their immortal souls must have been terrifying indeed, while the extent of deliberate and knowing lies by the afflicted must be, if not brought into question, at least open to further examination.

Like her mother, Margaret was found not guilty and discharged; but she was not to leave prison until May due to the family’s straightened circumstances after George Jacobs Sr.’s estate was seized, leaving the family destitute. Upham reports that Margaret’s outstanding jail fees were finally and generously paid by a stranger, a fisherman named ‘Gammon’, who took pity on her, although she and her family eventually paid him back; however, Rosenthal notes: ‘This story is difficult to confirm or refute.’ She finally leaves the records—as do so many—with a 1710 petition from her finally returned father for restitution for his father’s estate and the prison costs of Rebecca and Margaret.57

In later narratives of Margaret’s case, she appears largely in a highly sympathetic light, her status as anomalous among both the children and adults of Salem in her courage to face death knowingly for telling the truth well recognised. Starkey constructs Margaret as ‘an upright girl’ and notes that she was allowed to visit her grandfather and Burroughs in prison, receiving a pardon from them both for her accusations; indeed, her grandfather changed his will (useless as it was, his estates all being forfeit to the crown and the unwarranted greed of Sheriff Corwin) to favour her.58 Hill, similarly, figures Margaret as ‘this brave girl’ in her narrative.59 But the last word must go to Rosenthal, who tells her ‘extraordinary story’—one that he figures as ‘a reason for some of the sentimentality of the nineteenth century’—in terms of what she might have been, had she chosen another road.60 He writes:

Mary Warren and Margaret Jacobs offer models of absolute polarities as to the choices that an accused young woman might make. As Mary Warren, free from prison, relentlessly accused one person after another of heinous crimes, Margaret Jacobs remained in prison facing death. That the two young women reached their crossroads at approximately the same time offers a guidepost to viewing the episode retrospectively, but for people living at the time the implications were closer, starker, more difficult to assess. Margaret and others had no reason to believe that in the end people as young as she would not go to the gallows: From their perspective, they
faced hanging, and one does not often find people with the strength of Margaret Jacobs.  

This comparison between the two young girls, while constructing them under a binary of just two possible responses to their positions, still figures the trigger for that response as the same: that of fear, both of the death penalty in this world and, as we saw in Margaret’s own testimonies, judgement in the next. As such, Margaret Jacobs’ story is a curious one in that—much as the afflicted girls did—her accusations sent innocent people to their deaths, albeit that they were made under enormous emotional and psychological pressure and possibly in response to the expected ‘obedience’ of which Norton writes in terms of later accused children; yet, in what is drawn as a binary contrast, her recantation figures her rather as a hero than a villain as the afflicted have frequently been described. Recalling the biblical claim that ‘there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons’, Margaret is constructed as far more brave than those who claimed their innocence and that of others from the outset and frequently died for their assertions. As such, despite Rosenthal’s claims that such an episode was ‘more difficult to assess’ for people at the time, Margaret Jacobs’ position in history is one that has been rewritten under a tide of sentimentality that has lasted way beyond Rosenthal’s claim to the nineteenth century, obscuring somewhat the complex nature of such a case in the need to assign to Margaret not just a verdict of innocence but one that exalts her above those children demonised by Norton for their obedience.

**Narrating Elizabeth Colson**

While there are many more tales of accused children that have received little attention, I wish to close this consideration of individual and family cases of accused children with Elizabeth Colson (also named variously Coulson, Collson, Colsen, and Carlson in court records and narratives), a child who both confirms and disrupts other accused child narratives as representative of a nebulous whole. An inhabitant of Reading, 15-year-old Elizabeth was arrested along with her mother, Mary (although no arrest warrant for Mary survives), her aunt Sarah, and her grandmother, Lydia Dustin, who died in prison on March 10, despite being found not guilty. Elizabeth was complained of by Nathaniel Ingersoll and Thomas Putnam at an early stage of the trials—May 14—alongside eight others, although
Colson was the only accused child and the only person on the list from Reading; like many others, she was accused of acts of witchcraft against Ann Putnam (probably Jr.), Mercy Lewis, Mary Walcott, Abigail Williams, and other afflicted girls of Salem Village; how they knew her name and in what respect they knew her is not clear, given the 15-mile distance between the two towns. A warrant for her arrest was issued to the Constable of Reading on the same date; however, the Officer’s Return states that ‘I have made a Diligent Search for ye aboue named Elizabeth Collson and find shee is fled and by the best Information she is att Boston in order to bee shipt ofe; and by way of Escape to bee transported to some other Countrey’. Although this report claims agency in that ‘shee is fled’, it also positions Elizabeth as largely in the hands of others in the passive voice of ‘to bee shipt off’ and ‘to bee transported’; possibly on account of her young age, though this is necessarily speculation. While Elizabeth was eventually captured exactly four months later on September 14, she remained hidden long enough to avoid facing the Court of Oyer and Terminus. In the meantime, another arrest warrant was issued on May 17; evidence was given against her by Susannah Sheldon on the same date.

By the time of her arrest in Cambridge, Elizabeth was aged 16. Forty-three-year-old William Arnold describes a September 10 attempt at her arrest thus:

I saw said Elisab. Colson run from ye back dore and gott over into John Dixes field. and I called to her being not far from her and asked why she ran away for I would Catch her. she said nothing, but ran away and quickly fell down and got up againe and ran again shaking her hand behinde her as it were striking at me. […] I Endeauered to sett my dog upon her, and ye dog would not minde her but went ye Contrary way, and yn I offering to Strike at her wth my Stick she seemed to run under ye fence and so disappeared.

This account, while it may appear comical when read in full due to the abject failures of Arnold not just to catch her but even to get his dog to obey him, it also shows the length that adults would go to in an attempt to apprehend a 16-year-old girl—threats, an attempted beating, and an attempted (if not achieved) dog attack—while giving testament to the fear this man had of the young girl witch: the claim that she looked as if she might strike him, even from a distance; a claim in the wider text of ‘a great Cat’ that ran at him; and his fear when she seemingly disappeared. But it
also gives testament to Elizabeth’s own fear: that she ran, perhaps literally, for her life, falling and stumbling, but managing to escape, if only for a few more days. In common with Margaret Jacobs, where fear was a factor in both accusation and confession, the driver for so much of children’s (and adults’) behaviour is the same.

Apart from one more claim against her around the time of her attempted arrest, nothing further is heard of Elizabeth in the records until a mittimus of December 10, 1692. By this point, her mother, aunt, and grandmother had been found not guilty; however, Rosenthal et al. tell us that, while they may have briefly been freed, they were returned to prison for non-payment of jail fees. Elizabeth was released on March 2; her mother and aunt on March 23; and, as already noted, her grandmother died in prison in the intervening time, on March 10. The dates suggest the possibility that bail money was found for Elizabeth first due to her young age; but this again is necessarily mere speculation.

So why discuss Elizabeth’s Colson’s case, as opposed to any of the other accused children not yet considered? Elizabeth both confirms and troubles the type of the accused Essex County child. Like so many others, the warrant for her arrest was tied to accusations against older family members, with an assumption that witchcraft had been passed from mother to daughter throughout the family line. Yet she bucks the trend in that she is the only child known to have escaped, if only for a few months; many accused adults, including the Philip English family, also escaped or were helped to freedom, although it often cost them in the confiscation of their property. Her story is also frequently passed over in histories beyond a line or two, and she has failed, as yet, to make any appearance in the fiction of Salem. Her case might well therefore be considered one of recuperation and reclamation rather than an analysis that expands our understanding of child witches in Salem as a group; yet this story also serves to show how difficult it is to position the accused children in this way, due to the differences and anomalies between each case.

**Accusation and Absence**

In considering these accused children (and wishing I had space to devote to narratives of John Proctor’s children, the Faulkner children, the Johnson children, the Bridges children, Sarah Phelps, and Sarah Wilson Jr.), I have claimed that their stories are largely absent from narratives of the trials; yet, of course, all the information I have been able to find depends on such
narratives being present. How, then, can we consider the accused as absent from accounts of the Salem witch trials?

To begin, we must consider what it means to claim absence and what a reading of what, by definition, is not there is relevant to this enquiry. Jacques Derrida considers readings of absence in the archive. Considering Freud’s archive, he asks: ‘We will always wonder […] what may have burned of his secret passions, of his correspondence, or of his “life”. Burned without him, without remains and without knowledge. With no possible response, be it spectral or not […] without a name, without the least symptom, and without even an ash.’ While I have considered this concept in an earlier work, this quote struck me anew on reading it again—in an almost uncanny sense, of what I expected to be an unproblematic return and which turned out to be something else entirely, something that Freud figures as unhomely or unheimlich—due to the language that suddenly seems to be talking about Salem and other witch-hunts, with its appeal not just to what we do not know about Salem—missing documents of full trials; the potential for missing ‘witches’; the unknown fates of some of the afflicted and accused children—but to burning, to ‘without remains’, and to ‘no possible response, be it spectral or not’.

This matters to our analysis because, even in the possibility of a spectral response or the ‘ash’ that is not there, we hope for a return, a resurrection. Every denial, every ‘without’, brings an uncanny return because it seems that what is not there is just as important as what is. As Rosenthal et al. claim: ‘The surviving witchcraft legal papers, though extensive, are far from complete. Even the most cursory perusal […] will show significant gaps in which now missing documents can be presumed to have been originally produced and used.’ They add: ‘Some of these documents may still be awaiting discovery, either in private, unknowing hands or buried away in institutions and not yet uncovered.’ While I will discuss the Salem archive further in Chap. 8 of this work, its relevance here is that any claim to an absence is also based on a simultaneous claim to presence: that we know what is absent and also what cannot be known. In terms of Salem’s children, then, absence can be quantified in terms of its relative status to the presence of others and as what we expect to see or feel we should see but do not—for example, in the focus on Dorcas/Dorothy and the afflicted girls to the exclusion or occlusion of the accused children—but also, as in Derrida’s terms, the knowledge that there is much we do not know but still want to know.
Of course, to consider the 24 or so accused children (those 17 or under) as totally absent from contemporary records would be disingenuous at best and misleading at worst, particularly considering that the records themselves are necessarily incomplete due to both the time lag between seventeenth-century Essex County and the twenty-first-century time of writing and the loss of almost all records of the trials themselves; yet even in the still relatively large volume of extant records and contemporary commentaries, the accused children rarely take centre stage. There are a number of likely explanations for this. The first is that almost no children were accused in the early stages of the trials: Dorcas/Dorothy Good was first on March 23; followed by Abigail Hobbs on April 18, with the bulk of the accusations centring on the July-September time period. Similarly, only Dorcas/Dorothy, the Proctor children, and possibly Margaret Jacobs came from Salem Village: the majority of the accused children—with one or two notable exceptions, such as Abigail Hobbs and Elizabeth Colson—lived in Andover. Further, nearly all of the accused children were also accusing children, giving testimony against others, so records focus on both aspects of their role. Additionally, no children were executed, even though Abigail was sentenced to death. And, finally, most of the accused children had one or more parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and/or cousins who were also accused witches, and even Cotton Mather constructed their testimony as primarily important in how it impacted on the guilty status of said adult family members.

However, my claim to an absence of the accused children in the histories of the trials still seems fair. After all, in over 300 years since the culmination of the trials, not a single history has been dedicated to Salem’s children, either accusers or accused, and their role in the witch panic; and while chapters galore have been dedicated to the afflicted girls, and multitudes of papers have been written in an attempt to discover the truth behind their actions, the same cannot be said about the accused children, with Hite’s work on Andover the only study to consider them at any length. Even if others devote some space to a single accused child, they rarely consider these children either as accused, given they were so frequently also accusers; as a group; or beyond one or two individual cases, such as that of Dorothy/Dorcas Good. As such, Essex County’s accused children remain peripheral to Salem’s story: an afterthought, only relevant where their lives touch on accused adults or afflicted girls. It may be that the very claim to innocence that has so often been voiced to support the executed and accused adults is responsible, in that the innocence of children accused of witchcraft is
taken for granted. And it is in their signification of something other—the known innocent child which, therefore, does not need to be read—that they cannot be seen; adult analysis glides right past to move onto more contentious groups. After all, there is no mystery about the accused: they are simply an innocent group and, as such, they have no individuality and no stories to tell.

Yet, as we have learned from Mather’s blood-and-thunder sermon on the duty of children to their parents, the innocence of childhood in seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay was not assured and needed guidance, even if a number of accused adult witches, such as Rebecca Nurse, compared their own innocence to that of ‘the child unborn’. Even Hite, in his welcome consideration of why so many young people were accused in Andover, notes the following document, claiming a possible reason that younger people were targeted for accusation. An order issued by the town’s selectmen on March 14, 1692 reads:

And where there is grievous Complaints of great prophaneness of the Sabbath both in the times of exercise and at noon time to the great dishonour of God (illegible) and all of religion & the griefe of many serious Christians, by young persons, we order and require of tything men & constables to take care to prevent such great & shameful miscarriages, which are so much observed and Complained of.

As such, the town records noted that young people in Andover were causing problems, at least on the Sabbath day, to such a degree that constables and townsmen were required to step in, and this during the process of the trials so close to home. While history occludes the names and ages of those so accused, the designation of them ‘as young people’ puts all such under suspicion and reiterates Mather’s later polemic that children were not necessarily the perfectly obedient Puritan children but far more like Wordsworth’s Romantic child some 100 years later, one that may come ‘trailing clouds of Glory’ from heaven at birth, but who is overshadowed by ‘shades of the prison house’ as they begin to grow. As such, any claim to the innocence of the accused children as that which can be taken for granted is overshadowed by contemporary accounts of childhood and ‘youth’; by many historians’ assumptions of guilt in the actions of the afflicted girls; and by the fact that so many of the accused straddled the divide between accused and accuser. Yet their stories deserve far more attention than they have received so far.
Notes

1. Rose (1986) *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London, Verso, 2005), p. 67.
2. See Chap. 1 for further details on the Mora trials.
3. Sebald, p. 57.
4. Sebald, p. 31.
5. Sebald, pp. 35–36.
6. Karlsen, p. 64.
7. Karlsen, p. 65.
8. Particularly given I am writing this early on lockdown in London at the time of the 2019–2020 Coronavirus pandemic, where the movement of just a few people from the centre of origin has caused a wider and more deadly spread in other countries, no matter than China is still positioned as the epicentre of the outbreak.
9. A more comprehensive look at the histories of the Andover children can be found in Richard Hite’s *In the Shadow of Salem*; although this work is not always factually consistent and frequently relies on conjecture, it focuses on childhood more than any other work on Salem. Mary Beth Norton discusses the history of Abigail Hobbs in her seminal work, *In the Devil’s Snare*. My accounts of these children in this section are informed by these works, as well as by court documentation and other works. My thanks to these two authors.
10. Hite, p. 173.
11. Hite, pp. 199–200.
12. Rosenthal et al., p. 550.
13. Rosenthal et al., p. 559.
14. Rosenthal et al., p. 560.
15. Rosenthal et al., p. 825.
16. Rosenthal et al., p. 571.
17. Rosenthal et al., p. 663.
18. Rosenthal et al., p. 861.
19. Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, p. 55.
20. Hite, p. 183.
21. Hite, p. 166.
22. Hite, pp. 211–212.
23. Rosenthal et al., p. 660.
24. Rosenthal et al., p. 661.
25. Rosenthal et al., p. 961.
26. Rosenthal et al., pp. 737–738.
27. Rosenthal et al., pp. 750–751.
28. Mather, *On Witchcraft*, p. 128.
29. Rosenthal et al., p. 323.
30. Rosenthal et al., p. 318.
31. Hite, p. 211.
32. Hansen, p. 86.
33. Hansen, p. 190.
34. Kathleen Kent (2008) *The Heretic’s Daughter* (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company), p. 40.
35. Rosenthal et al., p. 471.
36. Rosenthal et al., pp. 472–473, 474.
37. Rosenthal et al., p. 479.
38. Rosenthal et al., p. 483.
39. Rosenthal et al., p. 486.
40. Rosenthal et al., p. 486.
41. Rosenthal et al., pp. 540–541.
42. Rosenthal, p. 541.
43. Hite, p. 92.
44. Hite, p. 98.
45. Mather, *On Witchcraft*, p. 125.
46. Norton, pp. 264–265.
47. Rosenthal et al., p. 254.
48. Norton, p. 161.
49. Rosenthal et al., p. 261.
50. Although Rosenthal et al. note: ‘Although Margaret Jacobs later confirmed counterfeiting in the cases of George Burroughs and George Jacobs Sr., no confirmation of an admission of her counterfeiting against Alice Parker survives’; p. 262n.
51. Rosenthal et al., p. 549.
52. Rosenthal et al., p. 637.
53. Calef in Burr, p. 366.
54. Rosenthal et al., p. 230n49.
55. Rosenthal et al., pp. 742–743.
56. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, p. 122.
57. Rosenthal et al., pp. 874–875.
58. Starkey, pp. 198, 231: she uses the phrase, ‘an upright girl’, twice.
59. Hill, p. 138.
60. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, p. 49.
61. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, p. 50.
62. Luke 15:7, international version, [https://biblehub.com/luke/15-7.htm](https://biblehub.com/luke/15-7.htm) [accessed 9 March 2020].
63. Rosenthal et al., p. 271.
64. Rosenthal et al., p. 626.
65. Rosenthal et al., p. 732.
66. Rosenthal et al., p. 732.
67. Jacques Derrida (1995) *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), p. 101.

68. I also discuss Freud’s concept of absence and archive in my earlier 2020 work, *Louisa May Alcott and the Textual Child* (London: Palgrave Macmillan); however, as explained, I selected a slightly different quote for analysis here.

69. Rosenthal et al., p. 47.

70. Rosenthal et al., p. 158.

71. Hite, p. 109.

72. Wordsworth, ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’, p. 702.