Ann Putnam's Confession (1706)

Ann Putnam was one of the accusers in the 1692 Salem Witch Trials, eventually claiming that 62 members of the community were witches. She was 12 years old at the time. As a result of the claims of Putnam and others in Salem Village, 19 people were executed for being witches. In addition, another accused individual was executed for refusing to submit to a trial, and several others died while in prison awaiting trial or execution. The trials were widely publicized at the time, and they continue to capture public attention through modern representations of the events, such as Arthur Miller’s 1953 play, The Crucible. Significantly, Putnam was the only accuser who issued a public confession, which is reproduced below.

Note: “Goodwife” was used much as we use the titles “Miss” or “Mrs.” today. “Goodwife Nurse” was Rebecca Nurse, one of the women she accused of witchcraft.

"I desire to be humbled before God for that sad and humbling providence that befell my father's family in the year about '92; that I, then being in my childhood, should, by such a providence of God, be made an instrument for the accusing of several persons of a grievous crime, whereby their lives were taken away from them, whom now I have just grounds and good reason to believe they were innocent persons; and that it was a great delusion of Satan that deceived me in that sad time, whereby I justly fear I have been instrumental, with others, though ignorantly and unwittingly, to bring upon myself and this land the guilt of innocent blood; though what was said or done by me against any person I can truly and uprightly say, before God and man, I did it not out of any anger, malice, or ill-will to any person, for I had no such thing against one of them; but what I did was ignorantly, being deluded by Satan. And particularly, as I was a chief instrument of accusing of Goodwife Nurse and her two sisters, I desire to lie in the dust, and to be humbled for it, in that I was a cause, with others, of so sad a calamity to them and their families; for which cause I desire to lie in the dust, and earnestly beg forgiveness of God, and from all those unto whom I have given just cause of sorrow and offence, whose relations were taken away or accused.

[Signed]

"This confession was read before the congregation, together with her relation, Aug. 25, 1706; and she acknowledged it."

"J. Green, Pastor."
Document Analysis

Though Putnam’s statement is described as a “confession,” is she taking responsibility for her actions? If not, then whom or what does she blame?

Putnam was the only accuser to offer such a confession. What might have been her motivation? Note the place where the confession was read and acknowledged. Note the date of the trials (1692) and the date of the confession (1706). What could explain the passage of 14 years between her accusations and her confession?