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Discord of the Devil:

The Pueblo Revolt, the Salem Witchcraft Trials and how the Spirit World Helped Make America

by John J. Kucich



Spiritualism in America is generally said to begin in 1848 with the Rochester Rappings, when two teen-aged farm girls, Kate and Margaret Fox, claimed to have spoken with the ghost of a murdered peddler through a series of knocking noises heard throughout their small cabin. The religion they started, with its séances, trance speakers, spectral music and ouija boards, is usually regarded as a marginal movement created by and for a credulous fringe of whites. Yet spiritualism in America long precedes the first European contact, and extends far beyond the religious movement that briefly flourished in the Fox sisters' wake. Regular communication with a spirit world features prominently in Native American cultures, and Europeans and Africans brought spiritualism with them to America's shores. As important as it was to each cultural group, spiritualism also helped shape the terms by which these cultures interacted from the earliest days of contact to the present.

Spiritualism announced its presence in colonial times in spectacular fashion with two contemporaneous events almost a continent apart. The Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692 and the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 are vivid examples of the range of spiritualist discourse present at least since the beginnings of European colonization in America. They inform American culture down to the present as moments where spirituality and politics were from the beginning inextricably intertwined and as models for how movements and beliefs cross the social boundaries that make up our nation.

PART 1: NUEVO MEXICO

By 1680, the Pueblo Indians and Spanish colonists had fought over control of the upper Rio Grande for generations. From their first contact, political conflict was mediated through religion, with the front line located between the Pueblo kivas and the churches built by Catholic missionaries. Pueblo culture survived the first century of Spanish conquest. The Franciscan friars never completely erased native religion, and by the middle of the century, mixed-race New Mexicans, or mestizos, often formed a bridge between underground native ceremonies and official Catholic ones, participating in both and subtly transforming each. Yet a Spanish crackdown on Pueblo medicine men in the 1670s showed that Spanish tolerance of Pueblo spirituality was wan-

ing, and served to unify the pueblos in resistance to Spanish cultural domination. Pueblo spiritual leaders soon sparked a rebellion. In 1680, having contacted Pueblo guardian spirits, a medicine man named Popé convinced most of the Rio Grande pueblos to join



together in revolt, killing or driving out the missionaries living in the pueblos and, after several weeks of bloody fighting, forcing the entire Spanish colony out of New Mexico. The phrase "discord of the devil," used by one of the friars to describe what Popé had unleashed, illustrates how, in the narrative battle of the Pueblo Revolt, a principal goal was to control the spiritualist terms of the conflict.

As the Pueblo Indians rebuilt their traditional sacred structures, their kivas and estufas, from the remains of Catholic missions, the Spanish commander, Antonio de Otermín, and his fellow settlers huddled in a ragged fort at El Paso, gathering supplies and courage for an attempt to reconquer New Mexico in 1681. His effort, with all its Spanish implements of war and its Catholic rhetorical armaments, drew on Pueblo spirituality as surely as his army drew on the manpower of Pueblo converts. Nothing illustrates this more clearly than the

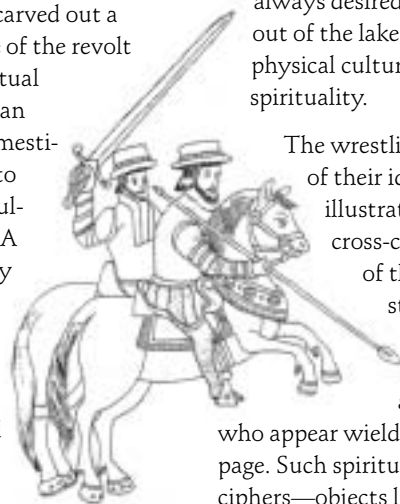
primary sources through which the Spanish piece together their narrative of the revolt, the native informants who appeared before the scribes traveling with Otermín's small army. (This testimony is collected by Charles Hackett in *Revolt of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico and Otermín's Attempted Reconquest, 1680-1682*.) Deciding what to call these members of various pueblos takes us to the core of their import. Much of their testimony revolves around competing terms (and competing inflections of Pueblo spiritualism) for the position they occupied between Spanish and Indian cultures: "mestizo" and "coyote." Moreover, their struggle over the terms of their identity prefigures the various strategies that would be used to negotiate the cross-cultural terrain of spiritualism throughout American history.

Some members of the pueblos, no doubt aided by the Spanish scribe who recorded their tale, carved out a mestizo position, fashioning a narrative of the revolt that seamlessly marshalls Catholic spiritual rhetoric to retell the struggles of an Indian people in Old Testament terms. In this mestizo position, a colonized people accedes to the spiritualist rhetoric of a dominant culture in the interest of material survival. A member of the Tegua pueblo named only as Juan gave the first account of Popé, describing the medicine man to his Spanish inquisitors as one who "talks with the devil." Juan gave the first word, too, of the cord made from sacred maguay fiber and knotted to signify the number of days until the revolt. These two details indicate how much of Juan's testimony is shaped by Pueblo spirituality. Yet it is more deeply rooted in Christianity. According to Juan, Popé proclaimed "that the devil was very strong and much better than God" and that the Indians were to burn Catholic icons, to renounce their Christian names and marriages, to forswear the Castillian language, and to plant only maize and beans. For Juan, Popé can speak only with the devil, and native spirituality can be understood only in a "God-Satan" binary.

Other Indians, however, used spiritualism to create a "middle ground" located at the juncture of multiple cultures. Juan himself uses the term "coyote" to signify a Spanish-speaking Indian who remains allied to Pueblo culture, and a statement taken the day after Juan's demonstrates this different possibility. Pedro Naranjo, an eighty-year-old member of the Queres nation and a baptized Christian, resists the good-vs.-evil rhetoric of Catholic spiritualism. He, too, mentions that Popé "is said to have communication with the devil" while hiding in Taos, but Naranjo's devil won't remain tied to the Spanish narrative. Popé instead contacts "three figures of Indians who never came out of the estufa," and who said "they were going underground to the lake of Copala." Popé then "saw these figures emit fire from all the extremities of their bodies, and that one of them was called Caudi, another Tilini, and the other Tleume."

These three are neither devils nor gods. They are figures poised between Pueblo and Spanish spiritualisms. For Naranjo, they represent an Indian spiritualism irreducible to Spanish rhetoric, but described nevertheless in terms accessible to his Spanish audience. Here, for the first time in documents of the Spanish reconquest, is an autoethnography, an attempt by a colonized subject to engage with the colonizer's own terms. Naranjo begins here to forge a narrative tradition located between the twin positions of mestizo and coyote. Unlike Juan, Naranjo opens a space for the articulation of a Pueblo culture not reduced to Spanish terms; instead, he seeks to lead a Spanish army bent on reconquest to a recognition of Pueblo difference. In Naranjo's account, Otermín can at least begin to understand that the

Pueblo Revolt began because the Indians "had always desired to live as they had when they came out of the lake at Copala"—an expression of a physical culture inseparable from its traditional spirituality.



The wrestling of Juan and Naranjo over the terms of their identity and the nature of Popé's beliefs illustrate that spiritualism, especially in its cross-cultural manifestations, is a discourse of the borders. It makes the familiar strange, privileges those spaces, such as the mountain caves of New Mexico, farthest from the centers of power, and foregrounds figures like coyote, who appear wielding language full of parody and slippage. Such spiritualist crossings are full, too, of ciphers—objects like the maguay cord that communicate information to a select group, strengthen communal bonds among those in the know, and self-consciously exclude those who aren't. Yet such signs are anything but stable and fixed—they figure wildly, unfixing established meanings and destabilizing the political structures that surround them.

The coyote spirituality of people like Naranjo helped establish a position located between the spiritualist binary of Popé and Otermín. Juan reported that many Indians were ready to fight Otermín's forces to the death, but others were more ready to seek a middle ground. This latter group, according to Juan, argued that the Spanish "must come and gain the kingdom because they were sons of the land and had grown up with the natives." They proved correct. While Otermín had neither the force nor the diplomatic skill to break the Pueblo coalition that Popé had fashioned, a Spanish army under a more moderate governor was able to reconquer the colony a decade later. After another revolt in 1696 failed to drive out the Spanish, both Spaniards and Indians settled into an uneasy harmony out of which emerged a hybrid spirituality unique in North America. The Pueblo Revolt was unique in its effectiveness. It was less singular in its marshalling of spiritualism. While few records of European conquest preserve so strong a record of Indian spirituality, contact between European and Indian peoples in North America

would be marked by competing and hybrid spiritualities to the end of the “Indian Wars” at Wounded Knee and beyond.

Yet while the culture that emerged in New Mexico was remarkable for the durability of its spiritual synthesis, the Pueblo Revolt is merely one of the earliest episodes of cross-cultural spiritualism that would recur throughout American history. Indeed, a dozen years later and almost a continent away, Massachusetts would be embroiled in a spiritualist upheaval following hard on the heels of an Indian revolt, King Philip’s War, very nearly as successful as Popé’s. Though markedly different in its spiritualist referents and less overtly shaped by all-out intercultural warfare, the Salem Witchcraft Trials nevertheless offer striking, indeed, at times, uncanny, parallels to the spiritualist world of the Pueblo Revolt.

PART 2: SALEM

Witchcraft in Salem Village began with girls in the household of the village minister. In the winter of 1692, Elizabeth Parris, the minister’s nine-year-old daughter, Abigail Williams, the minister’s eleven-year-old niece, and two neighbors a few years older began suffering from a mysterious ailment characterized by hallucinations, trance-like states and pinching sensations. Samuel Parris soon exhausted nearby medical resources, and a neighbor, suspecting witchcraft, had Parris’ slaves, John and Tituba, bake a witchcake using the afflicted girls’ urine. According to English folklore, the cake, when fed to a dog, would reveal the name of whoever cast the spell. Though the mechanism remains unclear, the girls quickly accused three women of tormenting them in spectral form. Two, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne, were middle-aged white women of low status, typical of the people who had been fingered for witchcraft in New England. The third was Tituba.

Where exactly to place Tituba is one of the most enduring controversies surrounding events in Massachusetts in 1692. Scholars argue with equal and opposite certainty that she is either African or Caribbean Indian when the dominant lesson of Tituba, it seems to me, is her ethnic ambiguity. Like the Indians who mingled Pueblo and Catholic elements into their testimony before Otermín’s scribes, Tituba’s intervention in the Salem Witchcraft Trials is not simply Yoruba or Arawak; it is at once both and more. Tituba’s background (she was born in the Caribbean and sold to Samuel Parris in her teens) suggest that she was familiar with both African and Native American folklore. Her testimony proves she was certainly familiar with English folklore as well. If it has proven difficult to pin one distinct identity to Tituba, it is all the more important to keep several in mind when assessing her role in Salem. Like the “native informants” of the Pueblo Revolt, Tituba’s borderline status is more significant than the term we use to identify it.



Opposite: Spanish Cavalry.
Above: Witch signing the Devil’s book.

The witchcake was baked on February 25th, 1692. On February 29th, warrants were issued for the arrest of Tituba, Sarah Osborne and Sarah Good on charges of afflicting the four girls. The accused were examined the next day. Sarah Good at first denied the charge of witchcraft, but then abruptly accused Osborne of tormenting the children. Osborne also denied the charge, but accused no one in turn. At this point, there had been corroboration of the charge of witchcraft, but only from Good, who, though she acted the part of a cross and spiteful witch before the court, had neither confessed nor provided any convincing details. Tituba was then called before the judges. (Her testimony is collected in Paul Boyer’s and Stephen Nissenbaum’s *Salem Witchcraft Papers*.) The examination is a remarkable example of a person at the very bottom of society playing a very dangerous verbal game with a powerful questioner, Judge John Hathorne:

- (H) *Titibe what evil spirit have you familiarity with*
- (T) *none*
- (H) *why do you hurt these children*
- (T) *I do not hurt them*
- (H) *who is it then*
- (T) *the devil for ought I know*
- (H) *did you never see the devil.*
- (T) *the devil came to me and bid me serve him*
- (H) *who have you seen*
- (T) *4 women sometimes hurt the children*
- (H) *who were they?*
- (T) *goode Osburn and Sarah good and I doe not know who the other were Sarah Good and Osburne would have me hurt the children but I would not shee furdre saith there was a tale man of Boston that shee did see*

And on it goes, with Tituba a half step (and only a half step) ahead of Hathorne’s questions, giving short answers to his most probing questions, then elaborating in response to his follow-up questions. Like Naranjo’s description of Popé, Tituba’s is a classic narrative of the

middle ground, taking suggestions from Hathorne and giving them back in a form familiar enough to meet his expectations and unusual enough to highlight Tituba's cultural difference. Some elements of Tituba's testimony, most notoriously the yellow bird, were picked up by accusers in good improvisational fashion; others were well within the discursive fabric of European witchcraft, from witches riding sticks to secret meetings to names in a devil's book, and appeared throughout the testimony heard before the court. Significant parts of Tituba's testimony, however, stand apart. An unusual number of animals appear in her testimony, from dogs to hogs to birds to rats to wolves, and a number of bizarre figures, like "a thing with a head like a woman with 2 leggs and wings" and "an other hairy thing it goes upright like a man," that appear nowhere else. Such elements signal a West Indian shift in the evolving narrative, an insertion of elements drawn from the heterodox spiritualism of the Caribbean into the field of English witchcraft.

Tituba's testimony, like the testimony of the Pueblo Indians before Otermín's inquest, is characteristic of the contact zone between cultures; it adopts elements of a dominant culture while infusing them with difference. Her extension of the setting to include Boston, her hint of upper-class involvement, and her vivid descriptions of imps and animal familiars made her account of witchcraft at once more believable, more alien, and more terrifying than earlier accounts of witchcraft in New England. Spiritualism within a monocultural context is often striking in its ordinariness—the discourse of New England witchcraft, for example, was typically suffused with the petty details of domesticity. The creative adaptations of cross-cultural spiritualism, however, disrupt the familiar norms and expectations. Such disruptions are, in a word, uncanny. In cross-cultural settings like Salem and New Mexico, Tituba's and Naranjo's spiritualist testimony can only be (to use the German version of the word) *unheimlich*, "un-home-like" or "un-settling," to their European listeners. What had appeared to be familiar and recognizable—Catholic spirituality or European witchcraft—to white observers was revealed, though this cross-cultural spiritualism, to be alien, hostile, and laced with the Other.



Tituba telling West Indian tales to the Salem children.

Such a potent use of spiritualism, indeed, can be seen as an act of ghostly sabotage against the colonial system. A woman as powerless as Tituba couldn't have sabotaged the system that enslaved her any more effectively. Her compelling account of occult activity unleashed the political unconscious of Puritan New England, fueling the judicial frenzy that left 156 people imprisoned, four of whom died in jail, one of whom was pressed to death and nineteen of whom were hanged. Few slave revolts in the mainland colonies resulted in as many deaths. Tituba herself proved too valuable to hang: she was rewarded for her cooperation with her life, and sold to pay her jail fees.

Witchcraft in Massachusetts, as in New Mexico, was closely linked to colonial dispossession—for the English as for the Spanish, devilry was virtually synonymous with Indian culture. Yet the excesses of Salem made English colonists skeptical of witchcraft, and as European settlers consolidated their hold on America,

they had less need to demonize the spiritual beliefs of its aboriginal inhabitants. Witchcraft didn't wholly disappear. Scattered New Englanders were accused well into the next century, but episodes were local and generally confined to the lower classes, where the lore of witchcraft mingled with other European folklore and fragments of more elite

occultism. Those elements, combined with the religious revivals of the Great Awakening, with their emphasis on direct spiritual contact and their religious theater of trances and speaking of tongues, would lead, though a circuitous path, to the farmhouse outside of Rochester where the Fox sisters would hear their mysterious rappings. By 1848, New Mexico and New England were part of one nation, and spiritualism would again play a key role in negotiating cultural conflict on this vastly larger American stage.

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This article is drawn from the book *Ghostly Communion: Cross-cultural Spiritualism in 19th Century American Literature*, forthcoming this fall from University Press of New England.