

questions, and I know you have many of your own. Gretchen's paper, I know, ends with a question that plagues many of us: Did the Salem witches put the curse on the Boston Red Sox? But I'd like to close with a question from the final lines of Nicole's 'Testimony: Prophecy':

Do you want to cure  
This world of these infections?

## *Dutch New York and the Salem Witch Trials: Some New Evidence*

EVAN HAEFELI

DISCOVERING new documentation on such a well-studied event as the Salem witch trials is a rare thing. Even rarer is contemporary commentary on the trials. Jacob Melyen (1640–1706), a colonial merchant of Dutch origin living in Boston in the summer of 1692, has left us both in the eighty-eight letters copied into his letterbook now located at the American Antiquarian Society. Written mostly in Dutch and concerned primarily with his mercantile activity and events in New York, Melyen's letters add to our factual knowledge and illuminate just how troubled many colonists were about what was happening.

To help understand the significance of the letters and explain why they even exist at all, this essay will outline their context through Melyen's life. It is an important story, joining together the histories of New Netherland, New England, and New York in ways colonial historians often overlook. While there is no evidence that Melyen had any direct involvement in the trials, his letters underscore the vital role New York politics played in this quintessentially New England drama.<sup>1</sup> Given the nature of Melyen's

For their comments and suggestions on translation and interpretation the author would like to thank Willem Frijhoff, Charles Gehring, Mary Beth Norton, Caroline Sloat, Kevin Sweeney, David William Voorhees, and the anonymous reviewers for this journal. All errors and peculiarities, of course, remain his own.

1. Jacob Melyen, Letterbook, 1691–1696, American Antiquarian Society. For a brief discussion of the context of this letterbook and other Dutch New York connections to Boston around this time, see Evan Haefeli, 'Leislerians in Boston: Some Rare Dutch Colonial

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connections, his remarks also offer a valuable entry point into lay public opinion while the trials were in progress. Melyen, a merchant and devout Calvinist, directed most of his comments on the Salem witch trials to Johannes Kerfbijl, a Dutch doctor and elder of the Dutch Reformed Church of New York. In Boston, Melyen associated with the Mathers, the Sewalls, and various leading merchants, including those affected by the witch craze. His letters establish that John Alden found refuge in New York and provide a date for Nathaniel Cary's journey there as well. Melyen's reactions echo the shock and horror of later critics of the trials.

More significantly, Melyen's letters provide chronology that clarifies some questions surrounding the three key contemporary texts on the trials: *Some Miscellany Observations On Our Present Debates Respecting Witchcrafts, in a Dialogue between S & B*; Increase Mather's *Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits Personating Men*; and Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World: Being an Account of the Trials of Several Witches lately Executed in New-England*. He gives quite precise information on the publication of the three texts, each of which was in press in the first half of October 1692. All were available to Boston's reading public by October 28, when Melyen sent copies of each to Kerfbijl in New York. He provides a definitive contemporary identification of Samuel Willard as the author of *Some Miscellany Observations*, suggesting that Willard's effort at anonymity was even more transparent than suspected. Melyen also provides telling evidence about the composition of Increase Mather's text, *Cases of Conscience*. Its original text, presented to the Cambridge Association on October 3, criticized the use of spectral evidence, and hence implicitly attacked the trials that Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World* defended. On October 5 Melyen notes that there was considerable disagreement between the two Mathers. However, they had reconciled by October 12, when *Cases of Conscience* was in press

Correspondence, *De Haelve Maen* 73 (Winter 2000): 77–81. Melyen has become the official spelling, at least in New England, but Melijn is the proper Dutch form of his name. Jacob himself tended to write Melijen or Melyen, which is sometimes anglicized as Melyn.

with a new postscript that had not been shown to the Cambridge Association. This postscript praises the wisdom of the Salem judges, denies that spectral evidence had been decisive in the trials, and supports Cotton's *Wonders of the Invisible World* in its endorsement of the trials. Increase singled out the trial of George Burroughs (probably a Baptist) as a particular example of proper justice. Fourteen ministers, including Samuel Willard, had endorsed the original text, but they had not endorsed the postscript. Willard's dialogue now looks like an immediate response to Increase Mather's postscript. One gets the feeling that things were rather sticky in Boston in 1692.<sup>2</sup>

The private candor of Melyen's letters gives them extra value. For example, regarding the Mathers 'as well as our ministers in general,' Melyen says 'that too much is attributed to the devil and the "witch" or sorcery' (October 5, 1692). He is skeptical of the idea that 'a person can broker a contract with the Devil, the hellish enemy as it is called, and extend his chains so that they bring about at will the deaths of other innocent people, old and young, babies and the unborn, and overthrow the whole rule of God's divine providence.' He blames 'the excessive gullibility of the magistrates' for turning trivial accusations into 'convincing testimony' (July 11, 1692). Here Melyen allies himself with the weight of current scholarly opinion, which is coming to concur that Lieutenant Governor William Stoughton and his fellow magistrates of the special court of oyer and terminer appointed to deal with the witchcraft accusations bear the brunt of blame for the witch craze.<sup>3</sup>

Melyen frequently spoke of the devil, and occasionally men-

2. On *Cases of Conscience* and Willard's response, see Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570–1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 262–64. Melyen's letters allow us to date what Foster already suspected. For the case of Burroughs as a Baptist, and the possible appeal of his conviction to both Mathers as a result, see Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 129–50.

3. See essay by John Murrin in this collection, and Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 308, and *passim*. For an excellent discussion of the political attachment of the Mathers, in particular, to the outcome of the trials, see Foster, *The Long Argument*, 254–64.

tioned witchcraft, but he never believed either was directly at work in Salem. At least not in the way Cotton Mather did. From the first time he mentions the trials in July, he counts the victims to be 'good' and 'honest' people. He sees the accusers acting 'as if possessed by the Devil,' 'ill' and 'as if they were deprived of their sanity and unable to come to their senses.' As a devout Protestant who counted the trials 'another punishment of God' (July 11, 1692), Melyen clearly saw them as the product of malevolence, artfulness, and possible insanity. He did not believe that witches were covenanting with the devil in Essex County. The idea of a diabolical covenant had been articulated and popularized among British Calvinists by William Perkins earlier in the century, but it was always contested in Britain as well as America. When New Englanders endorsed the idea of a diabolical covenant and showed tremendous zeal for persecuting witches, they resembled Scots Calvinists more than their English contemporaries. Though the doubts of men like Melyen would soon triumph on both sides of the Atlantic, it took decades for witchcraft prosecutions to be stopped completely. Scotland was still prosecuting for witchcraft in 1715. England's laws against witchcraft were not repealed until 1736.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike the Mathers, Melyen did not need to pretend that spectral evidence was not the deciding factor in the trials. He never doubted its importance in securing convictions, and it disturbed him deeply. He reported that the accusations were 'taken as substantially true and convincing testimony against the accused, because the possessed say that they see the shape of those they accuse, and that they torment their people by means of witchcraft, even if their real bodies are far away, and that the shapes bite them, pinch them, stab them with pins, yea inflict 100 strange and wondrous torments, that [I] fear too much is believed' (July 11). But Melyen was a devout man who respected ministerial authority and opinion. He could not simply dismiss it out of hand. With-

4. Ian Bostridge, *Witchcraft and its Transformations, c.1650-c.1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 6-37, 203-32.

out his uncertainty we would not have his comments. Shocked and disbelieving, Melyen wrote to Kerfbijl asking if he knew of any texts that refute 'in a godly way these superstitions and mistakes.' Regrettably, we do not have Kerfbijl's side of the correspondence. Lacking it, the most we can do is set Melyen and his letterbook in context.<sup>5</sup>

Before returning to Salem and the witchcraft trials, Melyen's connection to Boston, New York, and the Calvinist communities in both needs to be examined. Melyen's letterbook is an artifact of New York's Glorious Revolution, during which, in 1689, a revolutionary regime that eventually was led by Jacob Leisler had seized control of the colony in the name of King William. Melyen had been an active supporter of Leisler's government from his position in Boston. But because support in New York for the revolutionary government was not universal, the colony was on the verge of civil war by 1691, when the new governor, Colonel Henry Sloughter, finally arrived from England. A number of prominent New Yorkers persuaded Sloughter that Leisler was a traitor to King William, with the result that on May 16, 1691, Governor Sloughter had Leisler and his lieutenant and son-in-law, Jacob Milborne, executed.

Melyen describes how Leisler's execution put him in a very difficult position because he was among the thirty persons exempted from Sloughter's general pardon of Leisler's supporters. In Melyen's understanding of the matter, this exclusion from the pardon was on the basis of 'some Expressions' in his letters to Leisler that Sloughter had seized after taking over the government. Basically, Melyen had addressed Leisler as the Lieutenant Governor of New York and thereby acknowledged the legitimacy of Leisler's regime. He wrote in a letter to the imprisoned Leislerian, Peter DeLanoy, who also happened to be Melyen's attorney and business associate, 'I must confess my erroour, of not keeping coppys of all my letters, I writ to Lieutnt Governr Leisler, under that Title

5. Citations to translations below.

and apprehension of being so by vertue of the Revolution.' Melyen complained that he had 'little thought, he [Leisler] would have let my letters, with which I had served him in love, fall into the hands of some of my invittered Enemies who will not fail to study all crafty means to Ruine me.' Though he had faith in the justness of his cause, concluding 'I desire to trust in God, and fear them not, as long as K[ing] W[illiam] prospers,' he took measures to protect himself as well. After this episode, Melyen began to keep copies of his correspondence, which is the origin of the letterbook now at the American Antiquarian Society. He further requested DeLanoy to 'pray send me what Coppys of letters you have of mine [ . . . o]f what I writ to Leisler.'<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the letterbook reflects Melyen's efforts at damage control in the disastrous aftermath of New York's Glorious Revolution. It runs from the spring of 1691 through the winter of 1694 and ends with a brief clutch of entries in 1695 and 1696.

From the safety of Boston, Melyen attempted to exonerate the Leislerians. The letterbook shows him collecting documents, working with the Mathers to send Jacob Leisler, Jr., to carry the Leislerian case to England, and keeping in close touch with friends and allies in New York. But he was, after all, still a merchant, and business concerns permeated his letters. A postscript to a letter about buying molasses in Boston provides a vivid example of how trade and politics coexist in his correspondence: 'No news from Urop at least none such as will please your Jacobitich Tories and murdering Hellhowns, and Ravening Beasts of Pray, I pray God, to bless the King, and Queen William, and Mary, and the good upright, and true Protestants, and for all Implakable hardharted Impertinent Hippocrites, the Lord destroy, and confound all those, his, and his churches Enemies that will not repent — so fare well.' His hatred of the anti-Leislerians (whom he called Jacobites) seemed to know no bounds. 'It seems that the party of King James, with all the filthy scum of godless evildoers has taken

6. April? 1691, Melyen Letterbook, 1 recto and verso.

the upper hand' in New York, he wrote to a correspondent in Holland in July 1691, 'to the great sorrow of all pious people throughout the entire land.'<sup>7</sup>

Those who supported the Leislerian cause saw themselves as participants in an Atlantic-wide drama, an ideological struggle of unprecedented proportions. Melyen's correspondent Johannes Kerfbijl had been saying since 1690 that 'this war is not an ordinary war, but a one as we have not yet seen during our days; those belittling so much the power of France, and thinking that it will be so easily subjugated, do not know it; may God grant that in Europe they give her such a drubbing that she will neither have the desire nor the power to undertake anything from Europe against these colonies.' It is critical to keep this broader imperial and political context in mind when considering Melyen's comments on Salem. His letterbook is full of commentary on New York politics, the War of the League of Augsburg in Europe, the colonial American merchant community, and the coastal trade between Boston and New York in the 1690s. More pressing concerns overshadow his references to the Salem witch trials. But that he took the time to comment on the trials at all indicates how unusual and disturbing they were to this committed Protestant.<sup>8</sup>

Born in Amsterdam and raised in New Amsterdam, Jacob Melyen was both an insider and an outsider in Puritan Boston. He came to America in 1641, the year after his birth and baptism into Amsterdam's Dutch Reformed Church. His father Cornelius was patroon of Staten Island in the Dutch colony of New Netherland. An elder in New Amsterdam's Reformed Church, Cornelius was a political opponent of New Netherland's last two directors, Willem Kieft and Pieter Stuyvesant. Despite his bitter conflicts with the administration, Cornelius did not leave New Netherland

7. Melyen to Captain Abram Schellinger, July 15, 1691; Melyen to Daniel Schellinx Jacobs, July 25/15, 1691, Melyen Letterbook.

8. Joannes Kerfbijl to Abraham de Peyster, October 3, 1690, in *De Peyster Papers*, BV, 29, New-York Historical Society. A translation of the letter is available in a companion volume at the New-York Historical Society, Dingman Versteeg, *Translations of Dutch Letters to Abraham De Peyster* (n.p., n.d.), 1.

until after the Staten Island settlement was destroyed by a Lenape attack in 1655. Then he took fifteen-year-old Jacob and the surviving members of his family to New Haven, where they swore allegiance to England.<sup>9</sup>

The move to New Haven bears eloquent witness to the religious and political affinities of the Melyen family for Calvinist oligarchy. They left New Amsterdam at a time when Jews, Quakers, and Lutherans were agitating for religious freedom and some of the republican directors in Holland were showing sympathy for their cause. Of all the places they could have moved to, they chose New Haven—the most strictly Puritan of the English colonies. The England they swore allegiance to was governed by the militantly Protestant Cromwellian Protectorate, a government that had only just made peace with the United Provinces of the Netherlands in 1654. A significant part of the English propaganda supporting the war against the Dutch had denounced the toleration of religious diversity favored by the Dutch Republicans.<sup>10</sup>

The fundamental compatibility of the Melyens' Dutch Reformed beliefs with those of Puritan New England is borne out by the family's ability to live for decades in New Haven without serious incident. Jacob himself lived in New Haven until he was twenty-six. The only trouble he got into was for sex (something very easy to do in New Haven). First he got into some legal trouble for flirting 'outrageously' with one Sarah Tuttle. Later, he seduced his future bride, Hannah Hubbard of Wethersfield, using 'a cunning and intentional misreading of Scripture.' But this seems to have been about the extent of his unruliness. After he married Hannah, he lived the life of a respectable, godly man.<sup>11</sup>

9. Paul Gibson Burton, 'Cornelis Melyn, Patroon of Staten Island and some of his Descendants,' *New York Historical and Genealogical Register* (January 1937): 3-15 for Cornelius, and (April 1937): 135-39 for Jacob.

10. Steven Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism: Ideologies and the Making of English Foreign Policy, 1650-1668* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 88-89.

11. John M. Murrin, 'Magistrates, Sinners, and Precarious Liberty: Trial by Jury in Seventeenth-Century New England,' in *Saints and Revolutionaries: Essays on Early American History*, eds. David Hall, John M. Murrin, and Thad W. Tate (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 181. His younger brother Isaac outdid him, organizing drinking par-

After leaving New Haven with an English wife, Jacob Melyen moved easily through the Anglo-Dutch world of greater New England and New York. He was one of the original Associates from New Haven who established the town of Elizabeth, New Jersey, in 1666—on lands just across the creek from his father's Staten Island estate. Stuyvesant's regime had ended with the conquest of New Netherland only two years before. When the Dutch reconquered New York City in 1674, Melyen moved into what was now renamed New Orange, honoring William of Orange's takeover of the Dutch Republic in 1672. When New Orange was returned to the English, Melyen stayed on. After working for ten years in New York as a leather-dresser (like his father) and urban magistrate, he moved to Boston, where he lived until his death in 1706. He maintained frequent contact with New York as a merchant, politician, and property owner. He never forgot his father's claim to Staten Island and pursued it intermittently with both Dutch and English authorities until 1699. In 1703 he and his wife took in the son of fellow Dutch New Yorker Johannes de Peyster, so that he could attend a nearby school. De Peyster, who had spent the previous year in Boston as a political exile because of his Leislerian sympathies, wrote that he and his wife would have 'tranquility of mind, to know that our child will be in such good hands here, and that he will receive the same care as if he was at home with ourselves.'<sup>12</sup>

Despite their ethnicity, Jacob Melyen and his family were not outsiders in New England. They easily integrated into the upper levels of New England society. Jacob held several offices in Boston's government. His son Samuel graduated from Harvard in

ties on the Sabbath and cavorting for hours with the young Hester Clark, who then lived in John Davenport's house. See also Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 130-31; Burton, 'Cornelis Melyn' (April 1937): 135-36.

12. Johannes de Peyster to Abraham de Peyster, July 16, 1703, *De Peyster Papers*, 89. Burton, 'Cornelis Melyn' (April 1937): 136-38. The documentation of the Melyen's relationship to Staten Island is contained in 'Melyn Papers, 1640-1699,' New-York Historical Society, *Collections*, 1914, 97-138.



1699 and served as the minister of the Presbyterian Church of Elizabeth, New Jersey, from 1704 to 1708. His daughter Abigail became Samuel Sewall's second wife in 1719 (he was her third husband).<sup>13</sup>

The strength of the Melyen family's Protestant ideology can be gathered from the 1689 commonplace book of Jacob's son Samuel. It is all in English and Latin, like that of any other New England student. But the year it was composed, the year of the Glorious Revolution, the year the Leislerians seized power in New York while Jacob Melyen supported them from Boston, ensured that it became a highly political text as well. It contains historical anecdotes dating back to the reign of Henry VIII's Catholic daughter, 'Bloody Mary,' and prayers and ballads replete with militant Protestant and fierce anti-Catholic sentiment. There are even notes on the interrogation of a French soldier captured in the recent attack on Salmon Falls. This curious book illuminates the extraordinarily well-informed and committed engagement of the Melyen household in the Anglo-Dutch Protestant struggle on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>14</sup>

Melyen's close ties to other Dutch New Yorkers who shared his easy relationship to New England Protestantism underscores the strength of his commitment to the Calvinist cause on the religious and political fronts. The connection is revealed in a collection of letters written from Boston to Abraham de Peyster (brother of Johannes) housed at the New-York Historical Society. Seventeen years younger than Jacob Melyen and one of the richest merchants in New York, Abraham de Peyster had risen rapidly in that colony's politics. Born in New Amsterdam to a family of prominent Amsterdam merchants, young Abraham was sent there to study the family business with his relatives returning to

13. His niece Joanna married Jonathan Dickinson, the famous Presbyterian minister and first president of the College of New Jersey. Dickinson probably became acquainted with Joanna after he replaced her cousin Samuel in Elizabeth's pulpit. Burton, 'Cornelis Melyn' (April 1937): 138; (July 1937): 226-29 [Samuel and Abigail]; (October 1937): 363-64 [Joanna].

14. Samuel Melyen *Commonplace Book*, 1689, Massachusetts Historical Society, Ms. SBd-7.

New York in 1684—just as Jacob Melyen was departing. Though he was only twenty-seven years old, Abraham was quickly appointed a militia captain and alderman of the city of New York. A comrade of Jacob Leisler, de Peyster was a prominent early supporter of the revolution. He distanced himself from Leisler's government soon after it ran into difficulties, a move that some Leislerians felt was betrayal. It gained him the confidence of the anti-Leislerians and De Peyster survived politically. After Colonel Sloughter took over, he became mayor of New York City.

A letter of October 3, 1690, from Melyen's friend and confidant, Dr. Johannes Kerfbijl indicates why Abraham may have distanced himself from Leisler's regime. Kerfbijl, who had fled to Boston in April as opposition to Leisler's rule began to develop, shared Leisler's hostility towards the French Catholic threat, but he was upset by the colony's political divisions. He feared that a few French privateers could destroy the colony's economy, 'principally at this time, now that all minds are so much divided and exasperated against each other that very few would bother about the ruin of the commonalty if they could only attain their private revenge.' Maybe, he went on, 'if matters at New York should begin to be somewhat better settled in the government,' he and his wife would return 'next year.' By June 1691, only weeks after the execution of Leisler and Milborne, Kerfbijl was, indeed, back in New York. Kerfbijl's comments to de Peyster suggest that both had probably decided that New York had become ungovernable under Leisler. As an elder in New York's Dutch Reformed Church, Kerfbijl may have fled to avoid the strife that bitterly divided his congregation. At the same time, Abraham de Peyster, one of the most important men in the colony, could not afford to be caught in the collapse of a troubled revolutionary government. Though neither stood with Leisler in the end, both were staunch Protestants who supported the cause and people that Leisler had died for, as Abraham's subsequent career makes clear.<sup>15</sup>

15. Joannes Kerfbijl to Abraham de Peyster, October 3, 1690 *De Peyster Papers*, 29, Versteeg, *Translations*, 1-3; Burton, 'Cornelis Melyn' (April 1937): 137 finds Jacob Melyen standing surety for Kerfbijl and his family in Boston on April 28, 1690.

Governor Bellomont, a Whig who favored the Leislerians, appointed Abraham to his council. In his correspondence with De Peyster, Bellomont rails against what he calls the 'Jacobite party' in New York and discusses ways to ruin prominent anti-Leislerians like Dominie Godfrey Dellijs of Albany and James Graham, the Speaker of New York's Assembly who had pushed for Leisler's execution (Melyen's correspondence makes his own hatred of Graham quite clear). Abraham could not be receiving such letters without being somehow party to the Leislerian cause. When Abraham's council duties forced him to join Bellomont in Boston, letters from Leislerians, including Dr. Samuel Staats, who had served on Leisler's council, kept de Peyster abreast of the situation in New York. Then there is a break in the correspondence until August 1702, when Abraham's younger brother Johannes writes to him from Boston revealing the connection with Jacob Melyen.<sup>16</sup> Though Johannes never ceased to miss his friends and family in New York, he found much to admire in New England. 'It is here a different world,' he told his brother. 'Quarrels are unknown; nor do we know of such satanic intentions as are harbored by some in New York.' He noted with pride how well his teenage son blended into New England society, speaking English fluently and 'proudly.' After a year Johannes wrote, 'Our boy does not care for Jorke,' happily noting, 'He is entirely English and a Bostonian.' When Johannes and his wife returned to New York they left their son behind in Boston 'to continue his studies in English and French.' They left him in the care of some 'very careful old people' who lived near an 'excellent school.' They were none other than 'Mr. Jacob Melyn' and his wife.<sup>17</sup>

16. *De Peyster Papers passim*. David S. Lovejoy, *The Glorious Revolution in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 357-58.

17. 1702 was a difficult year for Leislerians and the De Peysters. Edward Hyde, Viscount Cornbury, had just arrived in New York as its new governor. A Tory, Cornbury seemed determined to undo everything that Bellomont and the Leislerians had accomplished in the past few years, he dismissed Abraham from the council and Johannes, who had been involved in the treason trial of the Anti-Leislerian Nicholas Bayard just the year before, fled to Boston before he could be put on trial. He stayed in Boston for a year.

The Leislerian affinity for Puritan New England is evident in letters preoccupied with Johannes's not very successful efforts to sell goods from New York in Boston. Johannes de

The connections between the circles of Abraham de Peyster and Jacob Melyen were quite close. When Jacob Melyen digressed to comment in horror on the witch-hunt at Salem, it is mostly in Dutch and mostly to Abraham's initial correspondent, Johannes Kerfbijl. Kerfbijl had lived in New York since the 1670s, when he undoubtedly began his acquaintance with Jacob Melyen. There is no hard proof of their relationship until the Glorious Revolution gave it a deeper significance. Kerfbijl and his wife apparently stayed with Melyen, or at least visited him frequently during their temporary exile in Boston. For the rest of the 1690s, Kerfbijl was a regular correspondent, a trusted confidant, and occasional business partner. Most importantly, Melyen respected Kerfbijl for his religious and scientific learning and probity. For these reasons he was the man Melyen turned to for answers when chaos erupted at Salem.<sup>18</sup>

Religiously and politically, Melyen saw eye to eye with New England's Puritan elite. God and the devil were as real to him as to Cotton Mather. In other words, Melyen can be considered a 'Puritan,' as the term is employed in colonial American scholarship. This means that he was a fervent supporter of the Reformed Church, be it Dutch or English, and a vicious opponent of anything that smelled of popery. His recent experiences with New York made it clear to him how deadly political differences within a presumably homogeneous Reformed community could become. This made him exceptionally wary of the magistrates in charge of the Salem witch trials. Many of them had collaborated with the government of the Dominion of New England. In New York, these men had led the opposition to Leisler.

Peyster to Abraham de Peyster, December 14, 1702, *De Peyster Papers*, 69; Versteeg, *Translations*, 114; Johannes de Peyster to Abraham de Peyster, June 14, 1703, *De Peyster Papers*, 74; Versteeg, *Translations*, 129; Johannes de Peyster to Abraham de Peyster, June 28, 1703, *De Peyster Papers*, 87; Versteeg, *Translations*, 174; Johannes de Peyster to Abraham de Peyster, July 26, 1703, *De Peyster Papers*, 89; Versteeg, *Translations*, 179.

18. Melyen to Judith Blagg, June 6, 1691, Melyen Letterbook, mentions that they had been at his house earlier that year. In May 1697, Kerfbijl and his wife purchased Melyen's New York home from him. In 1728 the property was sold to the Trustees of the Jewish Congregation and on it New York's first synagogue was erected, Burton, 'Cornelis Melijn' (April 1937): 137.

The obvious connections between the Salem witch trials and the Leislerian persecutions must have been very troubling to Melyen. Both trials were instigated by men tainted by their association with the Dominion of New England government that had just been overthrown in the Glorious Revolution of 1689. Joseph Dudley, the future governor of Massachusetts, had been Jacob Melyen's nemesis ever since Dudley presided over the trial that had condemned Jacob Leisler and many of his associates, all Melyen's friends, the year before. Thomas Newton, the prosecutor at the Leislerian trials in New York in 1691, had become the prosecutor at the Salem witch trials.<sup>19</sup>

If only for political reasons, then Melyen had reason to mistrust what was happening at Salem. But as a Dutch Reformed Protestant he was accustomed to a greater degree of skepticism about witchcraft than his English neighbors. In fact, at the same time witchcraft and the role of the devil in everyday life were proving so deadly in Essex County, Dutch divines were calling into question their very existence. In 1691 the Amsterdam minister Balthasar Bekker (1634–98) had published the first two parts of his tome that ran for over 1,000 pages, *De Betoverde Weereld* (*The Enchanted World*). Bekker argued that Reformed Calvinism had erred in its belief that Satan played an active role in the world. The devil was to be understood figuratively, as a symbol of evil, not literally as an entity actively intervening in Christians' lives. In the Bible, Bekker claimed, witchcraft referred to the superstitious idolatry of heathens, not the work of a creature called Satan. The witchcraft of the seventeenth century should be considered no more than a collection of superstitious beliefs that did little more than undermine Christian fellowship. Misguided scholars and devious, cunning men would only foster the ignorance of common people if they proclaimed the power of the devil to affect people's lives through witchcraft. Although removed from his

19. See John Murrin's essay below; Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 170; Foster *The Long Argument*, 252–54, 259–60.

post in 1692, Bekker persisted in publishing the last two parts of his book the following year.<sup>20</sup>

Bekker was the first prominent Reformed minister to publicly call into question Satan's power in the world. But he was not the first Dutchman to do so. Versions of his argument had already been circulating among Mennonites, Lutherans, and even Catholics in the Netherlands for several decades. Bekker's work ignited a tremendous print debate over witchcraft in the Netherlands. Of the 175 works printed on the topic, 131 opposed him. Yet his ideas were not suppressed. And, after losing his post in the church, he received a pension from the government, so that he was able to live out his few remaining years in peace and security. His book was never banned. Abbreviated translations of his work soon spread his ideas to Germany, France, and England, providing Calvinists everywhere with a potent religious argument against witchcraft.<sup>21</sup>

As the opposition to Bekker's work demonstrates, most Dutch believed in witchcraft. What set them apart was their unwillingness to take it to court. Dutch magistrates had been very hesitant about prosecuting witchcraft since around 1600. Historian Robin Briggs points to the United Provinces as the place where 'the contrast between a flourishing underworld of witch-doctors and official skepticism about persecutions emphasizes the substantial independence of the two elements.' In other words, believing that witchcraft exists is not enough to prosecute suspected witches. The Dutch carried their reluctance to pursue witchcraft accusations over to America. As a result, New Netherland was probably the only North American colony whose annals were devoid of any

20. G. J. Stronks, 'The Significance of Balthasar Bekker's *The Enchanted World*,' in Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra and Willem Frijhoff, eds., *Witchcraft in the Netherlands from the Fourteenth to the Twentieth Century*, trans. Rachel M. J. van der Wilden-Fall (Rotterdam: Universitaire Pers, 1991), 149–56.

21. Hans de Waardt, *Toverij en Samenleving: Holland 1500–1800* (Den Haag: Stichting Hollandse Historische Reeks, 1991), 255–58; Stronks, 'The Significance of Balthasar Bekker's *The Enchanted World*,' 149–56; and Willem Frijhoff, 'The Emancipation of the Dutch Elites from the Magic Universe,' in Dale Hoak and Mordecai Feingold, eds., *The World of William and Mary: Anglo-Dutch Perspectives on the Revolution of 1688–89* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 201–18.



hint of witchcraft. When witchcraft accusations emerged in the area, it was after the English conquest of 1664. And all the accusations came from communities of transplanted New Englanders.<sup>22</sup>

Was there something about New England communities that turned witchcraft beliefs into witchcraft trials? It can be shown that a variety of Dutchmen seemed to think so. New Netherland's last Director-General, Pieter Stuyvesant, had so much respect for his English Calvinist neighbors he tried to get them to settle in his colony. In the early 1660s, shortly before the conquest of New Netherland, he was eagerly negotiating with members of New Haven Colony to settle in what eventually became Newark, New Jersey. He proved willing to grant them virtually everything they wanted, which was basically complete civil and religious autonomy. He even agreed to deny defendants the right of appeal in 'all Capitall sentences wherein the partys are Convinced by owne Confession.' However, he made an exception 'in dark & dubious matters, especially in Witch craft such Sentences of Death shal not be put in Execution, as with approbation oft the Governor General & Counsel in tyme beinge.'<sup>23</sup> His suspicions must have been piqued after his sister-in-law Judith Varlet was accused in the Hartford witch craze of the 1660s. When Judith's brother Nicolas went to Hartford to defend her, Stuyvesant sent along a few lines in her defense: 'wee realy beleeve & out her knowne education, Lyfe Conversation & profession off faith we deare assure, that Shee is innocent of such a horrible Crimen & therefore I doubt not he [Nicolas] will now as formerly fynde your honnrs [of Hartford] favour & ayde for the Innocent.'<sup>24</sup>

22. Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 186; see (anonymous) 'Witchcraft in New York,' *New-York Historical Society, Collections*, 1869, 273-74, and 'Trial for Witchcraft,' in *Documentary History of New York*, 4 vols., eds., Edmund B. O'Callaghan and Berthold Fernow (Albany: Weed, Parson & Company, 1851), 4:85-88.

23. 'Concession to be granted to the Englishmen, who desire to Settle on the Kil van Kol, 20 July, 1663,' Edmund B. O'Callaghan and Berthold Fernow, eds., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, 15 vols. (Albany: Weed, Parson & Company, 1853-1887), 13:281.

24. O'Callaghan and Fernow, eds., *Documents*, 14: 518. See also John Putnam Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 71.

Stuyvesant was not alone in seeing something peculiar in New Englanders' obsession with witches. In the summer of 1680, two Dutch Labadists (Calvinists so extreme they deemed only a few New Englanders to be truly of the elect) passed through Boston to catch a ship back to England. After landing in London, one of them noted in his journal, 'I must mention another word about Boston, which is, that I have never been in a place where more was said about witchcraft and witches. From time to time persons had been put in prison, and executed; and a woman was in prison and condemned to die, when we left there. Very strange things were told of her, but I will not repeat them here.' The woman was Elizabeth Morse, imprisoned on May 20, 1680, for practicing witchcraft. Though tried and convicted by the jury, she was released in 1681 by magistrates unconvinced of her guilt.<sup>25</sup>

As the Morse case reveals, even in New England the progress of witchcraft persecutions depended heavily on the attitudes of the magistracy. The Salem witch trials of 1692 represented a radically different situation. They combined all the elements that characterized witch-craze disasters across Europe: the local autonomy of the court; the important stake of clerical figures in the trials; the turmoil of war; political instability; and belief in diabolism. The Salem witch trials collapsed once this deadly combination of circumstances was dissolved. Melyen's letters confirm the confusion in Massachusetts, while shedding new light on the role Dutch New York played in restoring order to the province.<sup>26</sup>

In a tantalizingly brief and enigmatic comment, Melyen forces us to consider the role of New York's Reformed community in putting a stop to the Salem witch trials. On October 12, the day Governor Phips claimed that he halted the trials, Melyen wrote his correspondent Dr. Johannes Kerfbijl the following: the 'witch-

25. Jasper Danckaerts, *Journal of Jasper Danckaerts, 1679-1680*, Bartlett Burleigh James and J. Franklin Jameson, eds. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 290; David D. Hall, ed., *Witch-hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History, 1638-1692* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 230-59.

26. Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Longman, 1987), 170-211.

craft is going to be halted. A result of your letter. Many are thankful to you.' It is unclear exactly whose letter this was or what it contained, but it is worth trying to figure out.<sup>27</sup>

It seems that several letters may have been circulating in Boston in early October to encourage Phips to stop the trials. Several years later, Cotton Mather gave credit to the 'Dutch and French ministers in the province of New York' for influencing Phips's decision to reprieve and pardon 'many of them that had been condemned.'<sup>28</sup> On October 5, someone in New York, possibly the Dutch Reformed minister Henricus Selijns, composed a response (in Latin) to a series of questions (also in Latin) about witchcraft. Joseph Dudley is given credit for propounding the questions, but the evidence for this is not entirely clear. Although he had been appointed chief justice of New York in 1691, he had spent most of his time in Roxbury since early the following year.<sup>29</sup> On October 11, 1692, Peter Peirot, Godfrey Dellius, and Rudolph Varick all endorsed Selijns' letter on witchcraft.<sup>30</sup> Peirot was a Huguenot minister. The rest were Dutch Reformed. All of them had actively opposed Leisler's regime.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, on October 12 Selijns, Varick, and Dellius wrote a letter to the Classis of Amsterdam complaining about the continuing legacy of Leislerian troubles.<sup>32</sup>

27. Melyen to Johannes Kerfbijl, October 12, 1692, Melyen Letterbook.

28. Cotton Mather, *Life of Phips* (Boston, 1697), 79, and *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702), 62.

29. Richard R. Johnson, *Adjustment to Empire: The New England Colonies, 1675-1715* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1981), 282. Foster, *The Long Argument*, 260, notes that Dudley 'was back in Roxbury during much of 1692.' The letter on witchcraft has been translated and published as 'Questions concerning Witchcraft, laid before the most reverend clergy from Belgium and France,' *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 2nd ser., 1 (1884-85): 348-58. The current location of the original is unknown. The identity of the original author is unclear, but textual evidence suggests only one person composed it. The document begins, 'At New York, Oct. 5, 1692.' The endorsement of the clergy at the end of the document reads, 'In our church congress, 11 October, 1692.' See also Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 286.

30. Hugh Hastings, ed., *Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York* (Albany: James B. Lyon, 1901), 2: 1046.

31. Howard Hageman, 'Domines and Witches,' *De Haekve Maen*, 53 (Fall, 1990): 4-6. See also David William Voorhees, 'In Behalf of the True Protestants' Religion: The Glorious Revolution in New York' (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1988), Appendix I: The Clergy's Alignment, 430-31.

32. Hastings, ed., *Ecclesiastical Records*, 2: 1041-45.

Why was the letter solicited from the New York ministers? It is sometimes claimed that Dudley did so at the instigation of Phips.<sup>33</sup> It seems more likely that Dudley may have solicited the statement on his own accord. Opposition to the witch trials (and hence, potentially, Governor Phips) was clearly building up by early October. On October 8, 1692, the Reverend Thomas Brattle of Boston composed a letter claiming that much of Boston's secular and clerical elite were opposed to the trials.<sup>34</sup> Although Phips claimed he was away campaigning against the Abenakis all summer, and returned on September 29 to find opposition to the trials suddenly widespread, Emerson Baker and John Reid have recently pointed out that he was never away from Boston for more than three weeks at a time the whole summer. Phips had plenty of time to solicit the opinions of the New York clergy before the crisis period of early October.<sup>35</sup> Finally, the French and Dutch ministers who endorsed the statement on witchcraft were not all of the French and Dutch ministers currently present in the colony. They were, however, all of the anti-Leislerian French and Dutch ministers in the colony. Since Phips was an outspoken advocate of Leisler and the Leislerian cause, this seems rather significant.<sup>36</sup>

Who wrote the letter endorsed by the New York clergymen? One historian of Dutch New York, Howard Hageman, who writes of 'a strong feeling that the author of the reply to Dudley was Selijns himself,' has no really solid evidence to offer other than to observe that Dudley and Selijns had become acquainted during the recent Leislerian troubles. Also, he claims Selijns was 'clearly the most outstanding thinker' among the ministers endorsing the letter. Selijns's learning was famous then and now. 'Many historians,' Hageman points out, 'feel that he was the most competent dominie to serve in the colonial Reformed church.' Hageman also

33. For example, (anonymous), 'Witchcraft in New York,' New-York Historical Society, *Collections*, 1869, 274.

34. Brattle, 'Letter,' in George Lincoln Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases, 1648-1706* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), 184.

35. Emerson W. Baker and John G. Reid, *The New England Knight: Sir William Phips, 1651-1695* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 154-55.

36. Baker and Reid, *New England Knight*, 210.

points out that the six days between October 5 and 11 were 'a very short time for four dominies to compose a lengthy letter. That suggests to me that Selijns received the letter, composed the reply, and then obtained the consent of his colleagues to become signatories.'<sup>37</sup>

The case for Selijns as author of the text can be backed up with some additional indirect evidence. In October 1692, Selijns wrote the Classis of Amsterdam that he 'had a conference' with Dudley on the 'pretended witchcraft, or an unknown sickness' in Massachusetts 'as soon as was possible.' Then, upon the 'joint petition of his Dutch, English, and French colleagues, they requested to have their judgment (on these subjects) in writing. Thereupon the persecution for such cause ceased.' I take this to indicate that they endorsed the statement originally composed by someone else, possibly Selijns. Selijns did write an account of the trials 'on a separate paper' and sent it to the Classis.<sup>38</sup> Selijns never actually took credit for answering the questions on witchcraft, but he clearly opposed the trials, conferred with Dudley about this, and secured the endorsement of several of his colleagues to a series of questions that upheld witchcraft beliefs while denying the power of spectral evidence.

The answers endorsed by the anti-Leislerian Dutch and French clergy are not the only statements made by the clergy of New York on the matter. Another series of responses to the same set of questions was made by John Miller, the Anglican chaplain to the English garrison in New York from 1692 until 1695. It is a brief

37. Hageman, 'Domines and Witches,' 4-5.

38. The dating of Selijn's letter is confusing. The entry heading reads: 'Classis of Amsterdam: Acts of the Deputies: New York. 1692, Nov. 10th. Extract from a letter, dated December 30, 1692, signed by Rev. Selyns.' The entry itself notes that it 'refers to his previous letter of October 12.' I take this to mean that in December an extract was made of a letter dated November summarizing a letter from October. See Hastings, ed., *Ecclesiastical Records*, 2: 1046. Again, the current location of all of these original letters is frustratingly unclear. I have checked Edward Corwin's Dutch transcription, upon which the published version in the *Ecclesiastical Records* is based, at the archives of the Reformed Church of America, housed in the Gardener A. Sage Library of the New Brunswick Theological Seminary. They conform to what was published. Perhaps the original letters might still be found somewhere in Holland.

abstract, in English, of the questions, and likewise a curt series of answers that largely agree with the Latin answers, although without the same display of learning and reasoning. Both arrived at the same conclusion. As Miller bluntly put it: 'I suppose them not to be maliciously enchanted by any sorcerer, but deluded by the Devil to promote the misery of mankind.'<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, there is no date associated with the Miller document, which makes it impossible to know exactly when the letter from the New York clergy arrived and how it helped halt the witch trials. If they did endorse the letter on October 11 in New York, how could Melyen write of its effects in Boston the following day? One possible explanation is that one or the other of the letters is dated New Style, which was ten days ahead of the English calendar at this point. This would have given a document just enough time to be carried from New York to Boston. Melyen had been living in Old Style time most of his life, and he seems to use the same dating system for his English American and Dutch American correspondents. When he writes to people in the Netherlands he includes both the Old Style and the New Style dates, indicating that he is operating primarily in Old Style time. As for the Dutch ministers in New York, they had dated letters Old Style/New Style until about 1683, after which they slipped into exclusively Old Style dates. By 1693 the Amsterdam Classis began responding to this chronological dissonance by double dating its correspondence to America, an apparent recognition that its American colleagues were going to be living in Old Style time indefinitely.<sup>40</sup>

The simplest and, as Mary Beth Norton believes, the 'most likely explanation' is that Melyen (or his son, who copied many of the letters into the letterbook) simply misdated the entry. Norton argues that the date could have been added 'to his letterbook

39. 'Witchcraft in New York,' 275-76. See also Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 287.

40. The Dutch had switched to the new Gregorian calendar in the sixteenth century, along with much of the rest of Europe and continued to use New Style dates in America for quite some time after the English conquest. See the dating of the correspondence in Hastings, ed., *Ecclesiastical Records*, 2: *passim*.

some weeks after he actually wrote the rough draft of the missive recorded there, and that '12 October' was a retrospective, inaccurate guess.' This is difficult to prove. His dating elsewhere in the letterbook seems quite accurate, no matter how hasty the summaries of the letters.<sup>41</sup>

Was there anyone else in New York in a position to help stop the Salem witch trials? Selijns gives the impression that he and Dudley had played a crucial role in ending the trials, but Melyen does not give credit to either of them. If they had played any noticeable role, he most certainly would have mentioned it, for he hated them both with a passion. In his eyes, each had played a crucial role in Leisler's downfall. Selijns had openly opposed Leisler. Melyen once commented to Kerfbijl that he 'is curst of young and old for his effisiatnes of lending the ladder to helpe to hange his old communicants L[eisler] etc.'<sup>42</sup> As for Dudley, Melyen was convinced that the Anti-Leislerians had been inspired 'by the Instigations of the Devil, and the Horredness of Dudly the New England traitor, and divers others of like Stamp.'<sup>43</sup> If either man had done anything as commendable as helping to stop the witch trials, Melyen surely must have had something to say. At the very least, he must have been suspicious.

I would like to at least suggest an additional possibility: that Dr. Johannes Kerfbijl wrote the decisive letter. This would certainly agree with Melyen's statement that 'your letter' had helped bring the trials to a close. Kerfbijl was a respected intellectual and church elder of Selijns's congregation. Unfortunately, he has left behind few traces of his existence and has consequently been lost sight of by historians. But this is no reason to discount him as a significant player in the events of 1692. After all, he was clearly a highly respected figure in the colonial Dutch community and

41. Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 406 n.50. I would like to thank Mary Beth Norton for her many thoughts on this problem. On Melyen's son copying the letters, see Melyen to Jacob Leisler, Jr., October 4, 1691, and Melyen to Abraham Gouverneur, January 25, 1691/2, Melyen Letterbook. I would like to thank David Voorhees for drawing this to my attention.

42. Melyen to Kerfbijl, July 30, 1691, Melyen Letterbook (original English).

43. Melyen to Jacob Schellinger, July 30, 1691, Melyen Letterbook (original English).

Melyen was pushing him to think about the issues raised by the Salem trials as early as mid-July. A learned man whose English was probably not particularly good, Kerfbijl may have preferred to compose a document in Latin rather than English. He could then have forwarded it to Boston on October 5, giving it time to have an impact there by October 12.

Kerfbijl provides a compelling link between Leislerian and anti-Leislerian opposition to the Salem witch trials. Like Abraham de Peyster, Kerfbijl had taken a moderate stance in the Leislerian conflict. Though a friend of the arch-Leislerian Melyen, he had returned to New York after Leisler's execution, presumably to take on the difficult task of restoring harmony to the bitterly divided Dutch Reformed community. Since he had sat out the most divisive period of the struggle in Boston, he was in the rare position of being something like a neutral figure. Perhaps Dudley, recognizing a likely moderate, had given Kerfbijl the questions to answer in writing. Kerfbijl would have been aware of the widespread sentiment against the trials in New York and could have shared a copy of his response with the clergymen. They could have then endorsed it on October 11 and forwarded it to Boston. There it would have reinforced the groundswell of educated opposition to the trials and, as Cotton Mather noted, contributed to the definitive ending of the trials. But perhaps an earlier copy, untainted by anti-Leislerian associations, was transmitted to the Boston elite through Melyen. It would have helped provide Phips with the theological justifications for stopping the trials on October 12 that the Mathers were not able to deliver. Hence Melyen's gratitude for 'your letter.'

Melyen's observations make it difficult to locate the Salem witch trials within the prevailing political climate. Phips and the Mathers—men who supported the Leislerian cause in New York—supported the trials because they were conducted under the auspices of the government they had created under the new charter. But the magistrates who conducted the trials had also served the Dominion of New England. In New York, their fellow col-

laborators with the Jacobite regime had been thrown out of office. The New York collaborators regained power and took their revenge on Jacob Leisler and his supporters. In New England, the Salem witch trials seem to have served a similar expiatory function. In neither case were the hotter sorts of Protestants guilty of judicial murder. It was men tainted by close collaboration with imperial government who used the courts to deadly effect in both New York and Massachusetts.

From the perspective of Dutch New York, the intricacies of the moment created strange bedfellows. Anti-Leislerians in New York could condemn the trials. But so could pro-Leislerians. Sympathizers with both positions in Massachusetts came out against the trials and forced a rift in the compromise that had forged the new Charter government. Phips turned on Stoughton. The Mathers almost turned on each other. The winners, in the end, were Joseph Dudley, who became governor, and Samuel Willard, who became president of Harvard. But they do not deserve all the credit for mobilizing opposition to the trials. Melyen's letters demonstrate that godly men who otherwise supported Phips and the Mathers (not to mention Leisler) also could oppose the trials.

It was a bitter, bloody, and confused time. One can sympathize with Melyen as he surveyed the situation. 'Tis sayed it will quickly go well with Christians, if villainous theavs, robbers, murtherers, and blasfeaming cursers, and drunken whoremongers were once removed from places of power, and gover[n]m[en]t, but as long as these wolvs come under the visard of Protestants, and others barfaste, break into Christs flock, and worry his sheep, whilst the rest stand still, and look on, now pray consider what Peace, as long as the whordoms, and witchcrafts of Isabell are so many, if the name of Protestants will please the almighty, than these abominable filthy wretches now in powr at York, who have murthered, and persecuted two true Protestants to death [Leisler and Milborne] whose blood is crying under the alter how long Lord, etc.'<sup>44</sup> At

44. Mellyen to Jacob Schellinger, July 30, 1691, Melyen Letterbook.

Salem he believed 'distempered creatures or leagerdemains' and 'wicked and mallissius people who fained themselves bewitcht possesst or lunatick' had the run of the courts. The 'magestrate believing them so much,' he sighed, 'they have hanged 20' (January 12, 1692/3). Good Calvinist that he was, Melyen was shocked but not, it seems, surprised by the evident depravity of human nature all about him.

A note on the documents. The letters were copied at some point after they were written, and at least sometimes this was by Melyen's son, resulting in some spelling (and possibly dating) errors. Most of the excerpts are in Dutch, which I have translated. But several are in English. It is a peculiarly Dutch-inflected English, combining elements of Dutch orthography with English phonetics. The copyist plays a bit fast and loose with his vowels and consonants, but not much more so than many of his contemporaries. The most notable feature is his use of the 'ij.' In Dutch this is pronounced 'aye,' and the 'ij' is often, even in Dutch, written as 'y,' sometimes with, sometimes without an umlaut. If the reader keeps this in mind, and turns the 'ij' into an 'ey' or 'y' then his writing becomes perfectly understandable in spoken English.

Jacob Melyen Letterbook, 1691-1696,  
American Antiquarian Society, mss.

Letter from Jacob Melijn to Doctor Johannes Kerfbijl

July 11, 1692

. . . comt noch een ander swaere strafe Godts onder ons, daer sijn ontrent 20 of meer menchen in en ontrent Salem, die als van den duivel beseten sijn, en worden met wonderlicke stuipen en vallende sieckdens, en worden met groote en seltsame pijnen getormenteert. En als van sinnen berooft en weder tot verstant comende, beschuldigen sij veel braeve luiden voor tovenaers en toveressen, 3 a 4 predicanten genomineert en een van de selve leijt in isers geboijt, en wel 200 beschuldicht en meest



in gevangens gesmeeten. Mr. Willard oock genomineert van dese onsin-nige menschen; Capiteijn Aldin en veel fatsoenelick luiden hebben al bij 2 maanden gevangen gelegen. Een is gehangen. 6 a 7 noch ter doot veroordeelt van die beschuldigde, tot groote droefheijt van haer vrienden. Ent geheele lant, door een overgroote gelonigheit [gelovigheit] van de Magestraet, dat wat de getormenteerde oft beseetene tegens iemand in brengt met andere bueselachtijge sijrcomstantijen, behoort als waeragtijge en geloofwaerdige getuigeniss aengenomen te worden, tegen de beschuldigde, want de besetene seggen dat se haere gedaentens sien van die, die sij beschuldigen, en dat se door de kunst van toverij haer luiden tormenteren, al sijn hare waere lichamen ver van daer, en dat die gedaentens haer bijten, knijpen, met spelden steeken, jae 100 vremde en wonderlicke tormententatien [tormentatien] aendoen, dat vrees [ick] te veel gelooft wert, de heere wilt het versien, en bewaere een iegelick int waeragtijge geloue aen godt, tot wederstant der duivelen en der duivelsche Coustinaren [kunstenaaren], wiens werk het is waer het haer mogelicke godes wtvercorenen te verlijden.

Mijn heer ick twijfel niet of Ue hebt veel geschiedenissen van toversche verhalen geleesen, en hebt light well een boecxken by UE: die de misgeloven en abuysen seer godlick aenwijzen, en wederleggen, indien UE mijn een conde toesenden tot mijn eijgen voldoening en onderrechting, want het strijt tegens na mijn verstant, de Regel van Godts woort, dat een menschen Contrack met de Duivel, soot genoemt wort, de helche vijant can comissioneren en sijn ketting verlongen om naer haer gelieften andre onosehve [onnozele] volwassen en onmondige menschen, creaturen en vruchten te dooden bederven ende gehele regeeringe van Godts voorsienicheijt omverwerpen. wat dienst UE by schrijven en boek leening mij sult gelieven te doen sal dankbarelick arkent ent boeck sorguldigh [sorgvuldigh] weer om gesonden worden. Ick heb Mr. Mather om it raers en lesens waerdlich gebeden, maer noch niets geobtineert dat versonden can worden, grote wonderheeden staen int ent vant spell te verwachten twelck de pen niet can vertrouwen, te meer also dudley uitgeeft copy van mijn brieven heeft, tsij door helcot de Quaker, of Adolfs folck dorr Koner, of door wat duivels Cunst of Instrument weet ick niet. hiertoe comt noch dat well 14. a 16. huisen en shaps en waerhuijsen op den 5ten Julij 1692: ant noort ent te baston verbrant sijn naest de watersij van Major Clarks soode [roode] brick muer en so tot aen de naeste straet, niet ver van Mr. Milborns.

dus blijve Ue dienaar en vrient,

Jacob Melijn

Translation:

July 11, 1692

... another punishment of God has come among us, there are about 20 or more people in and around Salem, who are as if possessed by the Devil, and are ill with wonderful convulsions and falling and tormented by great and strange pains. And as if they were deprived of their sanity and unable to come to their senses, they accuse many honest people of being sorcerers and witches, naming 3 or 4 ministers and one of them lies in irons, and some 200 have been accused and most of them thrown into prison. Mr. Willard<sup>45</sup> was also named by these ridiculous people; Captain Alden<sup>46</sup> and many decent people have been sitting in prison for 2 months already. One has been hung.<sup>47</sup> 6 or 7 of the accused have been condemned to death, to the great sorrow of their friends. Throughout the countryside, the excessive gullibility of the magistrates has caused that which the tormented or possessed people bring in against someone together with other trivial circumstances to be taken as substantially true and convincing testimony against the accused, because the possessed say that they see the shape of those they accuse, and that they torment their people by means of witchcraft, even if their real bodies are far away, and that the shapes bite them, pinch them, stab them with pins, yea inflict 100 strange and wondrous torments, that [I] fear too much is believed, the Lord wants to provide for, and maintain each in the true belief in God, in opposition to the devils and their devilish artificers, whose work it is whenever possible to seduce god's elect.

45. The Reverend Samuel Willard of Boston, who was accused in early July, around the time of Melyen's writing. The court quickly dismissed the accusation without calling its proceedings into question. Clearly, however, the accusation drove home to Jacob Melyen that something dreadful was happening in Salem. On the accusation and its abrupt dismissal, see Robert Calef, 'More Wonders of the Invisible World,' reprinted in Burr, *Narratives of the Salem Witch Trials*, 360; Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 93, 178; and Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 224-25. John Willard had already been examined by the court on April 18, though he would not be executed until August 19, 1692; for his case, see Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 115-20. Stephen Foster demonstrates that the Salem witch trials marked the eclipse of Increase Mather's leading role in the colony by Samuel Willard, who would replace him as president of Harvard in 1701, in no small part because he was willing to publicly criticize the Salem trials, while the Mathers continued to defend them. See *The Long Argument*, 264-68.

46. John Alden, a prominent merchant of Boston, was examined at the end of May. Imprisoned in Boston, he made his escape to New York by the beginning of October, as Melyen's letter of October 5 establishes. For his case, see Robert Calef, 'More Wonders of the Invisible World,' 352-55.

47. Bridget Bishop was hanged on June 10, 1692. On her case, see Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 67-85.

Sir, I do not doubt that you have read many histories of devilish proceedings, and may well have a pamphlet that points out and refutes in a godly way these superstitions and mistakes, that you could send to me for my own satisfaction and instruction, for in my opinion it goes against the Rule of God's word, that a person can broker a contract with the Devil, the hellish enemy as it is called, and extend his chains so that they bring about at will the deaths of other innocent people, old and young, babies and the unborn, and overthrow the whole rule of God's divine providence. Whatever service you would be pleased to do me in loaning a book when next you write shall be gratefully acknowledged and the book will be carefully returned. I have asked Mr. Mather<sup>48</sup> for something special and worth reading, but have not yet obtained anything that can be sent, great wonders are to be expected at the end of the play such as the pen cannot trust, the more as Dudley<sup>49</sup> claims to have copies of my letters, be it from Helcot the Quaker, or Adolfs people through Koner, or by what Devil's art or instrument I know not. On top of this, on the fifth of July 1692 some 14 or 16 houses, shops and warehouses burned on the north side of Boston, near the waterside from Major Clark's red brick wall and on to the next street, not far from Mr. Milborns.<sup>50</sup>

Your servant and friend,

Jacob Melijn

Doctor Joanis Kerfbyll      Boston August 30th

1692  
Mijn bovenste van 15d deser in haest Referere meest aen de ingesloten pampieren als oock aen Joanis Hartman, daer dese megaet. Dat UE govnr te verwachten state pr. eerst te arrijveren. Van Sr. Williams tocht naert oosten. Dat onse agents verwachten met naeste schip van Englant. Van see suckses en andere geode verwachtingen bij lant aen Coning Wm. En onse sijde, van de droevige tidinge van Jamaika, van de droevige proseduren onder ons aengaende de toverij, then lesten dat de sijne

48. It is unclear which one, Increase or Cotton, he is referring to.

49. Joseph Dudley.

50. William Milborne, a Baptist minister and brother of Jacob Milborne, Leisler's second-in-command and fellow victim of execution. William circulated a petition opposing the court at Salem for which he was thrown in jail. His express concern was that, once George Burroughs, a fellow Baptist minister, had been convicted, the witch-hunt could turn into a general persecution of Baptists. See Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 129-50, and especially, David William Voorhees, "Fanatiks and Fifth Monarchists": The Milborne Family in the Seventeenth Century Atlantic World,' *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, 129 (April and July 1998), 67-75, 174-82.

van 17d Julij ontfangen heb, en versoek de 13L-10s in goet flower te senden pr Evert. Dit sijn de hoofstucken van dese geschreven bij mij UE dienaer Jacob Melijen by lant pr Joanis Hartman. (heb oock om de mercurissen geschre[ven])

*Translation:*

August 30th 1692

My above [letter] of the 15th of this [month] in haste I refer mostly to the enclosed papers as well as to Joanis Hartman, who is accompanying this letter. That your governor is expected to arrive.<sup>51</sup> Of Sir Williams [Phips'] expedition to the east. That our agents expect the next ship from England. About the success at Sea and other good expectations by land for King William and our side. Of the melancholy news from Jamaica, of the melancholy proceedings among us concerning witchcraft. And lastly that I have received his [letter] of July 17 and am trying to send the £13-10s. in good flour directly. These are the main points of this [letter].

Written by me, your servant Jacob Melijen

By land with Joanis Hartman (I also wrote about the newsletters)

Letter from Jacob Melijn to Doctor Johannes Kerfbijl

October 5 1692

... Domestick. Seedert my lesten pr Beekman, of Jacob van Tilburg is niets in de toverij verder geprossideert, beijde de Mr. Mathers sijn beesich elck een boecksken te laten drucken die Matterij aengaende. En wort gesecht haer opeenien veel van elck ander verschillen, doch naedat can bemerken bij baijde, als oock van onse predicanten int gemeen, de Duijvell, en de witch oft toverconst veel te veel wert toegeschreeven, also gedruet sijn sall Ue van elck een toe senden, en wat sich varder dien aengaende openbaeren sall, vertrow Ue van Mr. English, en sijn vrouw, als oock van Captn Aldin veel sult connen verstaen, wij hoopen hier dat de grootste hitte en fury gestopt is, alsoder veel dingen voorvallen die de Magestraet wat schijmen [schijnen] te versetten, de onse hebben een Rijcke franse prijse wt Canidase Rievier, vol en soet van Vranckrijck gelaeden opgebracht, en veel meede godt in genaede bevolen en met Ue naest verder sult hooren, hier meede godt in genaede bevolen en met Ue liefste van ons allen seer gegroet, verblijve Ue DW vrient en dienaer. Jacob Melyen bij Cristiaen Lowrier

51. Benjamin Fletcher.

## Translation:

October 5 1692

Domestic. Since my last [letter] by Beekman, or Jacob van Tilburg<sup>52</sup> nothing further has been undertaken with the witchcraft, both of the Mathers are busy publishing a book of their own about the mather [pun on matter/Mather]. It is said that their opinions differ greatly from each other, yet with both of them, as well as our ministers in general, I can say that too much is attributed to the devil and the 'witch' or sorcery, I will send you a copy of each when they are printed, and anything else that will be published on this, I trust that Mr. English and his wife<sup>53</sup> as well as Captain Alden will be able to explain much of it, we here hope that the greatest heat and fury has stopped, as many things are happening that the magistrates seem to be putting aside somewhat, our side has brought back a rich French prize from the Canadian River, full and sweet with a cargo from France and many letters, from which in the next available by the next you will hear more, herewith god in grace commended and with greetings to your dearest from all of us, I remain your willing friend and servant.

Jacob Melyen with Christian Lowrier

## Letter from Jacob Melyen to Doctor Johannes Kerfbijl

Boston, October 12, 1692

dit sijn de contents:

. . . wij sijn in Reedlicke Rust. de tovery staet gestuijt te worden. Ue brieft opperatiij. veele sijn Ue danckbaar. Mr. Stoten siec, sijn confraters Haw., Milborn gereconsillieert in esteem. en dienst van sijn Exl. de assembly sit de gevangens voor toverij, staen op borgt wtgelaten te worden, en oyer en termer commissie ingetrocken te worden. de mathers versoent haer boecjes in druck. Recomendaty van Capt. Carij en presumtie van Jan Moll verongeluct te sijn op Nantocket

bij lant met Captn Carij overt Rood Islant, Jacob Melijen

52. The letter he refers to is unknown. It may have been written after the last day of executions, September 22. The last letter to Kerfbijl in the letterbook is the one dated August 30 and sent with Joanis Hartman. This letter of October 5 follows immediately after it. There are no letters from the month of September.

53. Philip English, a merchant from Salem, and Mary. Both were accused and imprisoned in Boston, from whence they eventually escaped to New York. English was perhaps the most notable victim of Sheriff George Corwin's plunder campaign during the trials. Corwin seized all of his goods, and it was only with great difficulty, Governor Phips's support notwithstanding, that English eventually received some money from Corwin's estate (Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 199-200, 219-20).

## Translation:

Boston, October 12, 1692

These are the contents:

. . . Things are fairly quiet. The witchcraft is going to be halted. A result of your letter. Many are thankful to you. Mr. Stoughton<sup>54</sup> sick, his colleagues Hathorne,<sup>55</sup> Milborne<sup>56</sup> reconciled in esteem. A service of his Excellency. The assembly is sitting, the prisoners for witchcraft are to be released on bail. And the oyer and terminer comission is to be abolished. The Mathers are reconciled, their pamphlets in press. Recommendation of Captain Cary<sup>57</sup> and presumption that Jan Moll<sup>58</sup> is shipwrecked on Nantucket. By land over Rhode Island with Captain Cary, Jacob Melijen

## Letter from Jacob Melyen to Doctor Johannes Kerfbijl

October 28, 1692

. . . 2 boecxkens van de Mr. Mathers een dijalogue van Mr. Willard, gesonden, wat hij raeden sal per naest wegens vercoop van hujsen, de toverij of de prosscicutij van dien gestopt, vaersjes int Engels door Samuel Melijen gemaect an doctr gesonden. dese mett Capt Jan Moll.

## Translation:

October 28, 1692

. . . Sent 2 booklets by the Mathers and a dialogue by Mr. Willard,<sup>59</sup> by the next [letter] what does he advise regarding sale of houses, the witchcraft or the prosecution of it stopped, verses in English by Samuel Melijen sent to the doctor. This one with Captain Jan Moll.

54. William Stoughton, Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, was the driving force behind the Salem witch trials.

55. John Hathorne, one of the presiding magistrates at the Salem witch trials.

56. William Milborne (see above).

57. Nathaniel Cary, a shipmaster from Charlestown, whose wife (not named) was put on trial in May. Imprisoned in Boston, she eventually escaped via Rhode Island to New York. Nathaniel is here on his way to join her. For his testimony on her trial and escape, see Calef, 'More Wonders of the Invisible World,' 349-52.

58. A Dutch New Yorker and mariner who often worked for Melyen.

59. Cotton Mather's *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, written to defend the witch trials, and Increase Mather's *Cases of Conscience Concerning Witchcraft*, which rejects the use of spectral evidence in witchcraft convictions, but in a postscript comes out to defend the trials and deny that there had been any miscarriage of justice. The dialogue by their fellow minister Samuel Willard is *Some Miscellany Observations On Our Present Debates Respecting Witchcrafts, in a Dialogue between S & B*, published pseudonymously 'By P. E. and J. A' and with the false publication information of 'Philadelphia, Printed by William Bradford, for Hezekiah Usher, 1692.' Willard's authorship has long been assumed, and its publication in Philadelphia disproved by the nature of its type. However, this is the only contemporary attribution of his authorship, as well as the closest confirmation of the time and place of its publication: early October 1692 in Boston, the same time and place as the Mathers' works.

Letter from Jacob Melyen to Doctor Johannes Kerfbijl

December 31, 1692

. . . dat :t prossederen vand toevery wat opgeschort is. Mr. Alden is te huis en de gevangens meest los. dat wilde schrijven op de boeckjes de van dr. Mr. Mathers en de dialoge. . .

*Translation:*

December 31, 1692

. . . that the prosecution of witchcraft has been suspended somewhat. Mr. Alden is home and the prisoners are mostly free. that I wanted to write about the booklets of dr. Mr. Mathers and the dialogue. . .

Letter from Jacob Melyen to Captain Henry Litton  
[in original English]

January 12, 1692[/3]

P.S. We have no news from England long to hear from them. . . We have had some wicked mallissius people who fained themselves bewicht possesst or lunatick, and 8 or 10 such distempered creatures or leagerdemains have accused many good people. The magestrate beleeving them so much, that they have hanged 20: [or so] But now jurijes ar convinst and cleer all this last sessions. My next [letter] wil bee with Mr. Tippits sloop. fairwel etc.

[in original English]

*Coming to Terms with  
the Salem Witch Trials*

JOHN M. MURRIN

FOR SEVERAL YEARS I have been approaching the Salem witch trials from two different directions.<sup>1</sup> Breaking out in 1692, they became the last major upheaval that afflicted the English Atlantic world between the third Anglo-Dutch War of 1672–74 and the 1690s. The Dutch reconquest of New York for fifteen months in 1673–74 reconfigured the politics of that colony and established patterns of partisanship that would prevail until after 1700. In 1675–76, King Philip's War devastated New England, generated massacres on both sides, and led to the enslavement of hundreds of Indians. While all of the New England governments survived the crisis intact and were finally able to win the war, it was only with significant support from the praying Indians, the Mohegans, and the Pequots. New England's victory inflicted civil war upon the Indians within the recognized boundaries of Plymouth, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. By contrast, when an Indian war erupted at almost the same time in

1. I wish to thank the Erasmus Institute at the University of Notre Dame, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the American Antiquarian Society for their financial support in the academic year 2001–2. An earlier version of this essay, entitled 'How Close Are We to Understanding the Salem Witch Trials?' was delivered as a paper at the Columbia University Seminar in Early American History, November 9, 1999. A revised version became a New England Regional Seminar at the American Antiquarian Society on May 7, 2002. I wish to thank the participants at both events for their many thoughtful suggestions.

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Virginia, it tore the colony apart. As the government collapsed, the settlers—not the Indians—descended into civil war.<sup>2</sup>

Less than two years later England experienced its own upheaval, the Popish Plot and Exclusion crisis, which raised issues about Roman Catholics and the royal succession that would not be resolved until the Glorious Revolution of 1688–89. That crisis in turn led to the overthrow of colonial governments in New England, New York, and Maryland. The Salem witch trials erupted just as Massachusetts finally began to resolve the uncertainties created by the overthrow of Governor Sir Edmund Andros in 1689.<sup>3</sup>

During the upheavals these societies attacked different enemies, people who became scapegoats for all of the turmoil. Indians fulfilled that role in Virginia. The government fell apart because Sir William Berkeley and his most dangerous antagonist, Nathaniel Bacon, could not agree on how best to wage war against neighboring Indians. Instead they began to fight each other. England turned against Catholics, hysterically during the Popish Plot crisis, and in a more measured way during the Glorious Revolution. In England's North American colonies, fear of Catholics,

2. On events in New York, see John M. Murrin, 'English Rights as Ethnic Aggression: The English Conquest, the Charter of Liberties of 1683, and Leisler's Rebellion in New York,' in William Pencak and Conrad Edick Wright, eds., *Authority and Resistance in Early New York* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1988), 56–94; Murrin, 'The Menacing Shadow of Louis XIV and the Rage of Jacob Leisler: The Constitutional Ordeal of Seventeenth-Century New York,' in Stephen L. Schechter and Richard B. Bernstein, eds., *New York and the Union* (Albany: New York State Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution, 1990), 29–71; Charles Howard McCormick, *Leisler's Rebellion* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989); and David William Voorhees, "'In Behalf of the True Protestants Religion': The Glorious Revolution in New York' (Ph.D. dissertation: New York University, 1988). Two provocative and imaginative recent studies of King Philip's War are Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998); and James D. Drake, *King Philip's War: Civil War in New England, 1675–1676* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999). On Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia, see Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1975).

3. Important recent studies of England's crisis include Mark Knights, *Politics and Opinion in Crisis, 1678–81* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Richard L. Greaves, *Secrets of the Kingdom: British Radicals from the Popish Plot to the Revolution of 1688–89* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); and Jonathan I. Israel, ed., *The Anglo-Dutch Moment: Essays on the Glorious Revolution and Its World Impact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

especially those in New France, galvanized the people of Boston who overthrew Andros in April 1689. It, more than any other factor, fused together Jacob Leisler's coalition that ousted Lt. Governor Francis Nicholson in New York and took over the colony's government. The Maryland rebels of 1689 also justified their actions as a victory of Protestantism over Catholicism.<sup>4</sup>

During the Salem crisis these themes came together in a new way. Accusations of witchcraft fused terrors inspired by Indians and French Catholics with new fears of internal subversion from people—mostly elderly women, many of whom had enjoyed reputations for conspicuous piety—who, the trial court believed, had made explicit compacts with Satan to undermine the people of God in New England.<sup>5</sup>

An effort to explain what society chose which scapegoat has long been one of my major concerns. A second theme has been the relationship between witchcraft and bestiality. For decades after the founding of New England, bestiality was to men what witchcraft was to women, a satanic act constituting an unforgivable sin. Puritans hoped that God could forgive an offender, but humans did not dare even to try without provoking divine wrath. Before 1692 only two men had been executed for witchcraft, both because they were unlucky enough to have wives who were the prime suspects and were also executed. No woman was tried for bestiality. Instead, through the search for animal familiars associated with accused witches, female bestiality became a subcategory of witchcraft. By the last quarter of the seventeenth century, both bestiality and witchcraft were becoming forgivable offenses. For men accused of bestiality, the result was beneficial. No one in colonial New England was executed for this offense after 1674. But for those accused of witchcraft, this shift became catastro-

4. David S. Lovejoy, *The Glorious Revolution in America* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972); Richard R. Johnson, *Adjustment to Empire: The New England Colonies, 1675–1715* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981); and Lois Green Carr and David William Jordan, *Maryland's Revolution of Government, 1689–1692* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974).

5. For a careful, thorough, and brilliant synthesis of these themes, see Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).



phic. At Salem all of those executed insisted on their innocence instead of confessing and asking forgiveness.<sup>6</sup>

The Salem tragedy could not have happened without a dramatic reversal of thirty years of judicial restraint in resolving complaints about witchcraft. This essay explores how and why that transformation occurred.

## I

On October 8, 1692, not long after what turned out to be the last execution for witchcraft in the history of colonial New England, Thomas Brattle, one of the best educated laymen in the region, summarized what the Salem witch trials meant to him: 'What will be the issue of these troubles, God only knows; I am afraid that ages will not wear off that reproach and those stains which these things will leave behind them upon our land. I pray God pity us, Humble us, Forgive us, and appear mercifully for us in this our mount of distress. . . .'<sup>7</sup> As predictions go, Brattle's was superb. Millions of people around the world who know nothing else about colonial British America have heard of the Salem witch trials. Yet, as appalling as they were, they were not even the worst judicial atrocity of the colonial era. That distinction goes to the New York slave conspiracy trials of 1741, in which thirteen slaves were burned at the stake, sixteen slaves and four whites were hanged, and seventy slaves and seven whites were banished, most of them to the West Indies. Yet hardly anyone other than professional historians has heard of those trials.<sup>8</sup>

6. John M. Murrin, "'Things Fearful to Name': Bestiality in Early America,' in Angela N. H. Creager and William Chester Jordan, eds., *The Animal Human Boundary* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 115-56.

7. 'Letter of Thomas Brattle, F.R.S., 1692,' in George Lincoln Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases, 1648-1706* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), 190.

8. The fullest history of these trials is Thomas J. Davis, *A Rumor of Revolt: The 'Great Negro Plot' in Colonial New York* (New York: Free Press, 1985). Davis argues that an interracial arson and larceny ring was operating out of John Hughson's tavern and that, under eighteenth-century law, several of the accused deserved to hang. But then the trials careened out of control. Ferenc M. Szaz attributes all of the convictions to white panic. See his 'The New York Slave Revolt of 1741: A Re-examination,' *New York History* 48 (1967): 215-30. Both accounts rest overwhelmingly on Daniel Horsmanden's *A Journal of the Proceedings in the Detection of the Conspiracy Formed by Some White People, in Conjunction with*

The Salem witch trials have generally confirmed the negative stereotypes about Puritans that remain deeply embedded in American popular culture. As recently as Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, the trials have represented an attempt by bigoted clergymen and magistrates to increase their power at the expense of the ordinary people who became their victims. To most Americans, the trials also reflected the inherently cruel nature of Puritanism itself. When asked what happened at Salem, most people today will respond that a lot of innocent people were burned at the stake. New York and the southern colonies burned quite a few people at the stake, always slaves, but I have encountered only two such incidents in colonial New England: Maria, an African burned alive for arson in 1681; and Phillis, burned at the stake in 1755 for 'petit treason,' that is, poisoning her master.<sup>9</sup> Under their Puritan regimes, the New England colonies sharply limited the number of capital offenses, mostly by insisting upon a biblical mandate for any executions. In practice, juries restricted capital crimes even further by demanding, in effect, that an offense be capital under both biblical and English common law before they would impose the death penalty.<sup>10</sup>

Murder and witchcraft both qualified under this informal rule, but many other offenses did not. For example, after three early executions for adultery, which the Bible defined as capital but common law did not, juries refused to convict anyone for this offense but instead voted the accused guilty of a lesser crime, such

*Negro and Other Slaves, for Burning the City of New-York in America, and Murdering the Inhabitants . . .* (New York: James Parker, 1744). The most recent edition is Daniel Horsmanden, *The New York Conspiracy*, ed. Thomas J. Davis (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

9. Albert Cheney Goodell, Jr., *The Trial and Execution, for Petit Treason, of Mark and Phillis, Slaves of Capt. John Codman, who Murdered their Master at Charlestown, Mass., in 1755; For which the Man was Hanged and Gibbeted, and the Woman was Burned to Death. Including also Some Account of Other Punishments by Burning in Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Mass.: John Wilson and Son, 1883). Although Mark was the leader in this plot, only Phillis was burned because she administered the poison. My thanks to John W. Sweet for this citation.

10. For a fuller discussion, see John M. Murrin, 'Magistrates, Sinners, and a Precarious Liberty: Trial by Jury in Seventeenth-Century New England,' in David D. Hall, John M. Murrin, and Thad Tate, eds., *Saints & Revolutionaries: Essays on Early American History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1984), 152-206.

as lewd and lascivious behavior tending to adultery. In like manner, the Puritan colonies did not include crimes against property on their lists of capital offenses because only the common law, not the Bible, authorized execution for these offenses. The Salem witch panic stands out, in part, because the judicial execution of twenty people within three months became an event of enormous drama in a region that hanged comparatively few offenders and in a colony that had hanged only five people for witchcraft before 1692, and only one of those after 1656. On the world stage, the trials stood out because they came near the end of the early modern European witch hunt that had started around 1550 and continued for a century and a half, although the pace slowed considerably after about 1660.<sup>11</sup>

In a word, even within the history of New England witch trials, the Salem panic became a unique event in the scale of the trials and was almost unique in the way that they developed. To see how and why, we need to look at the regional pattern of witch trials before 1692.

## II

As New England historians have been pointing out for more than a century, the settlers brought their folk beliefs and their religious convictions with them to America. Fear of witchcraft was part of both their folklore and their high theology. This point cannot be contested, and yet although the settlers in other colonies brought similar beliefs with them, nobody was executed for witchcraft outside New England except for one woman in Maryland in 1685 and five people in the tiny island colony of Bermuda. There, between 1651 and 1655, four women and one man were hanged. The court accepted the testimony of black witnesses against white defendants and even hanged a white woman for bewitching a mu-

11. The European witch hunt has generated an enormous literature. An excellent place to begin is with the essays in Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen, eds., *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). For the pattern of witch prosecutions in Massachusetts, see Richard Weisman, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion in 17th-Century Massachusetts* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984).

latto. In 1671 another woman was convicted and sentenced to death, but the governor reprieved her. Altogether twenty-three people were accused in Bermuda between 1651 and 1696.<sup>12</sup> Within New England, executions occurred only in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Haven, not in Plymouth, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, or Maine. The combination of a learned clergy and a learned and pious magistracy probably was almost a necessary precondition for serious witch trials in the mainland colonies. (I do not know enough about Bermuda to evaluate the situation there, although the Puritan element of the population led the fight against witches.) Accusations arose outside New England, but even when a case went to trial involving a Virginia woman, it did not lead to a fatal result. In the Protestant Netherlands, magistrates stopped cooperating in witch accusations after about 1590, and the trials soon ended, just as they were beginning to peak throughout the rest of western Europe.<sup>13</sup>

In most early New England trials, adult men brought accusations against post-menopausal women. In nearly every case within this pattern, the complaint involved *maleficium*, some evil deed that the victim attributed to the accused—a dead cow or pig, a child who suddenly took ill, or something of that kind. In New England, as in western Europe, witchcraft was overwhelmingly a female crime. Women accounted for more than 80 percent of the accused. Even many of the men who fell under suspicion were secondary targets who happened to be closely related to the primary suspect, a woman.<sup>14</sup>

12. See Francis Neal Parker, 'Witchcraft in Maryland,' *Maryland Historical Magazine* 31 (1936): 271-98, esp. 282-84; and J. H. Lefroy, *Memorials of the Discovery and Early Settlement of the Bermudas or Somers Islands, 1511-1687*, 2 vols. (London: Bermuda Government Library, 1879), 2: 601-32, esp. 602, 605. In addition, one woman was stoned to death on the streets of Philadelphia near Independence Hall while the Constitutional Convention sat there in the summer of 1787. But this event was not a judicial procedure, and it occurred after independence. See Edmund S. Morgan, 'The Witch and We, the People,' *American Heritage* 34 (1983): 6-11.

13. See the case of Grace Sherwood in Virginia (1706), in Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 433-42. On the Netherlands, see J. H. Huizinga, *Dutch Civilization in the Seventeenth Century and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 59-60.

14. Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987).

We do not know much about these early trials, but between 1647 and 1656, ten women and one man were executed. Why were there no executions for twenty-seven years after the founding of Plymouth, or seventeen years after the founding of Boston? Plymouth never showed much interest in witchcraft. Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Haven probably had few women past childbearing years prior to the mid-1640s. The hunt pursued by Matthew Hopkins, England's 'Witch Finder General,' that began in 1645 may well have triggered anxieties about witches on the other side of the Atlantic. Altogether about sixty people were accused in New England between 1647 and 1663. Of the first twelve to be tried, eight were executed, most of them in Connecticut, which remained the center of New England witch trials into the 1660s.<sup>15</sup>

Massachusetts hanged four women for witchcraft in the early years, but doubts soon arose about all of these trials, partly because none of the accused confessed. In 1648 Margaret Jones, a healer and cunning woman, became the first to die. So far as the record shows, she was only vaguely accused of *maleficium*. She may have been executed for practicing white magic. Apparently the court was influenced by Matthew Hopkins's methods of interrogation, for it borrowed some of them. At least one contemporary strongly objected to the execution. Then Elizabeth Kendall was condemned and executed for bewitching a child who died, even though the parents never accused or blamed her. The child's nurse accused her to deflect criticism from herself for leaving the child out in the cold too long. After the execution, the nurse was jailed for her neglect but died in prison before coming to trial. Both magistrates and ministers began to grow suspicious of *maleficium* as an adequate basis for convicting anyone of witchcraft. They wrote the laws, and early New England statutes defined

15. For Matthew Hopkins, see Jim Sharpe, 'The Devil in East Anglia: The Matthew Hopkins Trials Reconsidered,' in Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts, eds., *Witchcraft in Early Modern History: Studies in Culture and Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 237-54.

witchcraft in terms of compact, not *maleficium*. A witch was a person who 'hath or consulteth with a familiar spirit.'<sup>16</sup>

The conviction rate began to fall sharply. In the next forty-five trials after the first twelve, only seven people were executed. The turning point in Massachusetts was the trial of Mistress Anne Hibbins of Boston in 1655-56. The widow of a magistrate, she was convicted by a jury in the Court of Assistants on the basis of *maleficium*. The magistrates, or judges, rejected that verdict, which brought the case before the General Court sitting as a unicameral body. There the deputies outvoted the magistrates, convicted Hibbins, and condemned her to hang. The magistrates and ministers were convinced that an injustice had occurred and thereafter, for more than three decades, they acted as a powerful brake upon witch accusations. Between the Hibbins trial and the Salem outbreak, Massachusetts convicted only two people (the verdict against Elizabeth Morse in 1679 was overturned) and hanged only one for witchcraft—Mary Glover, an Irish Catholic, who confessed to the offense in 1688.<sup>17</sup>

### III

In Connecticut and New Haven, the judicial system found a more lethal path to the same result by 1663. Between 1647 and 1654, seven people were tried for witchcraft (four women and one man in Connecticut, two women in New Haven), and all were convicted and hanged. Then the two colonies began competing for the residency and the political and medical services of John Winthrop, Jr. Between 1655 and 1661, four more persons were prosecuted in the two colonies, and all were acquitted. In a subtle

16. The quotation is from the Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641), which was widely copied throughout the region. All of these statutes are assembled in David D. Hall, ed., *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History, 1638-1692* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 315-16. For the Jones and Kendall cases, see 21-23, 24-25. See also the Alice Lake case in Hall, 28.

17. See the comprehensive list of witch accusations, trials, and results in John Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 401-09. For Anne Hibbins and Mary Glover, see Hall, ed., *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 89-91, 265-79.

and persuasive piece of historical analysis, Walter W. Woodward concludes that Winthrop played a major role in the acquittal of at least two of them, and probably all four.<sup>18</sup>

Then Winthrop departed for England where he negotiated a royal charter for Connecticut that, among other things, united the two colonies under Hartford's jurisdiction. In his absence Connecticut launched a major witch hunt, the worst in English America before Salem. The Hartford and Salem trials were similar in other important respects as well. The primary accusers in Hartford were a girl and a young woman, not the adult males who brought most witchcraft accusations before 1692. And spectral evidence played a major role in the Hartford trials.<sup>19</sup>

Eight-year-old Elizabeth Kelly accused Goodwife Ayres's specter of tormenting her. The charge acquired weight when Kelly died soon after crying out against Ayres. Then Ann Cole, a young married woman in the throes of a conversion experience, became 'possessed' and cried out against several people. At least thirteen individuals were accused, some of whom fled the colony. The trials alarmed several observers because some of the accused did not at all resemble the accepted stereotype of a witch. One of them was Judith Varlet, sister-in-law of Pieter Stuyvesant, director general of New Netherland. In the trials, six women were convicted, four of whom were hanged. Then Winthrop returned from England to find Hannah Hackleton and Elizabeth Seager still in prison awaiting execution, Seager for adultery as well as witchcraft. Although he took months to reach a final decision, Winthrop refused to sanction either execution and by 1670 persuaded the colony to remove adultery from its list of capital crimes. (Because Puritans considered adultery a legitimate cause for divorce, the repeal had the unexpected consequence of turning

18. Walter W. Woodward, 'The Magus as Mediator: Witchcraft, Alchemical Healing, and Authority in the Connecticut Witch Hunt of the 1660s' (unpublished essay, 1999, revised 2001). Woodward has recently completed a dissertation on Winthrop at the University of Connecticut.

19. The documentary record of these trials is collected in Hall, ed., *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 147-63.

Connecticut into what was almost certainly the divorce capital of Christendom by the eighteenth century. The colony terminated several thousand marriages, most often on petition of the wife.<sup>20</sup>)

Winthrop, as Woodward shows, fought witch trials, not with modern science, but with occult weapons. Although probably no Antinomian himself, he developed a close relationship with one in London before coming to America.<sup>21</sup> He certainly was immersed in alchemy, astrology, and high-toned magic. As a physician, he may well have visited half the households in the two colonies by the early 1660s. In short, when Winthrop denied that some particular person was a witch, his opinion carried great weight because of his vast knowledge of the occult.

By 1663 Massachusetts and Connecticut had reached a common ground on witchcraft. In both colonies people had been accused or even executed whom educated men considered innocent. Magistrates and ministers in Massachusetts, and at least the magistrates in Connecticut, turned against *maleficium* as adequate evidence for conviction of witchcraft. The rash of executions stopped, although by 1663 Connecticut (including New Haven) had already hanged eleven people, and Massachusetts four.<sup>22</sup>

## IV

For nearly thirty years after the Hartford panic subsided, New England seemed to be reacting to witchcraft in much the same way as most of Western Europe at that time. With magistrates re-

20. Sheldon S. Cohen, "'To Parts of the World Unknown': The Circumstances of Divorce in Connecticut, 1750-1797," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 11 (1980): 275-93. By contrast, the number of divorces in Massachusetts remained in the hundreds. See Nancy Cott, 'Divorce and the Changing Status of Women in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts,' *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d ser., 33 (1976): 586-614.

21. See David Como, 'Puritans and Heretics: The Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Early Stuart England' (Ph.D. dissertation: Princeton University, 1998). Como demonstrates that London experienced a major Antinomian crisis between 1628 and 1631, just as the exodus to Massachusetts Bay was being organized. The younger Winthrop kept up a steady correspondence with one of the leading Antinomians, with whom he also shared occult interests.

22. On the question of *maleficium* versus a compact with Satan as a basis for witch trials, see especially Weisman, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion in 17th-Century Massachusetts*.

luctant to credit accusations of *maleficium*, conviction for this offense became extremely difficult. Executions for witchcraft became quite rare—only one between 1663 and 1692. Accusations continued, of course. Fifty-eight survive for these years, or about 1.8 per year, down from about four per year between 1647 and 1663 in a region that now had a much larger population and no shortage of post-menopausal women. Pressure for more trials came from below, mostly from men who believed that some woman had used occult means to harm them. Restraint was imposed from above.

In 1652, for instance, the town of Rowley accused John Bradstreet of familiarity with the devil, who appeared to him and asked if he could do Bradstreet a favor. '[G]o make a bridge of sand over the sea. Go make a ladder of sand up to Heaven and go to God and come no more,' Bradstreet replied. The court merely fined him twenty shillings for lying. Even when Elizabeth Morse, a cunning woman of Newbury, was convicted and sentenced to hang in 1680, the magistrates rejected the jury's verdict and released her into the custody of her husband. The most revealing example of ministerial restraint occurred in 1672 in the Groton parsonage of the Reverend Samuel Willard. Elizabeth Knapp, a servant girl, began having fits, then could not pray and started to bellow horrible blasphemies. In her agony she insisted that several local people, or their specters, were tormenting her. Satan's direct assault on Willard's family had to be embarrassing for a minister, and the temptation to blame everything on local witches must have been great. But Willard did the courageous thing. He proclaimed Knapp possessed, not bewitched, and refused to accept any of her accusations. Satan, after all, is a liar. Spectral evidence, to Willard, could not be a legitimate basis for convicting anyone. Instead he prayed with Knapp for an extended period until her fits went away. In his written account of her ordeal, he refused even to name the people whom she had accused.<sup>23</sup>

23. See Hall, ed., *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 87–88, 197–212, 320–59.

Witch trials in New England had not yet run their course. But before they could revive, the restraint shown by magistrates and ministers after 1663 would somehow have to disintegrate.

## v

Massachusetts endured a severe crisis of legitimacy throughout the 1680s and into the 1690s. In 1680 the Crown took over New Hampshire, which Massachusetts had been governing, and in 1683 appointed Edward Cranfield as royal governor. He promptly established what historians who have studied his regime regard as the most ruthlessly mercenary government that ever ruled a mainland English colony. Cranfield and his lieutenant governor, Walter Barefoot, set about plundering the settlers in every way that they could think of. As Mary Rann put it in 1684, they came into New Hampshire 'like a parcel of pitiful beggarly curs . . . ; come to undo us both body and soul; they could not be contented to take our estates from us, but they have taken away the gospel also, which the devil would have them for it.' But the devil, it seems, had more urgent business in Massachusetts.<sup>24</sup>

The magistrates and ministers of Massachusetts had to wonder whether Cranfield's administration was a foretaste of what the Bay colony could expect, especially after 1684 when the English Court of Chancery vacated the Massachusetts Charter of 1629. After James II became king in 1685, he united Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Plymouth, Rhode Island, and Connecticut into the Dominion of New England, dispatched Sir Edmund Andros as governor in 1686, and then ordered Andros to add New York and the Jerseys to the Dominion. Andros was a far more principled man than Cranfield, but he did establish an auto-

24. For two excellent studies, see Theodore B. Lewis, 'Royal Government in New Hampshire and the Revocation of the Charter of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, 1679–1683,' *Historical New Hampshire* 25, n. 4 (1970): 3–45; and Richard R. Johnson, 'Robert Mason and the Coming of Royal Government to New England,' *Historical New Hampshire* 35 (1980): 361–90. Mary Rann's deposition, Nov. 7, 1684, is in Nathaniel Boutton, ed., *Documents and Records Relating to the Province of New Hampshire* (Concord: George E. Jenks, State Printer, 1867–1943), 1: 508–9.



cratic regime that legislated and taxed without an elective assembly. He also compelled the Puritans to tolerate public worship in Boston according to the Anglican Book of Common Prayer.<sup>25</sup>

This intrusion of royal authority alarmed the clergy, especially Increase Mather and his precocious son Cotton. Was a godly society still possible in New England? Did the magistrates and ministers still have the power to achieve it? To demonstrate God's special relationship with the people of the region, Increase Mather mobilized many other clerics to provide him detailed accounts of God's special favors to New England, and Mather published this material as *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences* in 1684.<sup>26</sup> Cotton Mather followed with his *Memorable Providences* five years later, an account and a defense of the trial and execution of Goody Glover for witchcraft in 1688, a case that involved *maleficium*, spectral evidence, and tormented children, in this instance boys. Both Mathers emphasized the importance of witchcraft. Both suggested that New England must be special to the Lord if Satan devoted so much energy to trying to destroy it. Both, in other words, expected Satan to do the work of God, a dangerous assumption under anyone's theology.<sup>27</sup>

The Dominion of New England also became a crisis for the magistrates. Would they serve the Andros regime? Of those later involved in the Salem trials, Bartholomew Gedney and Nathaniel Saltonstall both served on the Dominion Council. Of judges from Boston who served on the Salem court, William Stoughton, Wait Winthrop, and John Richards had also served on the Dominion Council. Far from being dominated by old-line Puritans, about half of the magistrates in the witch trials were prominent men

25. Outstanding accounts of the Dominion of New England and the Glorious Revolution in Boston include Johnson, *Adjustment to Empire*, and Richard S. Dunn, *Puritans and Yankees: The Winthrop Dynasty of New England, 1630-1717* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), ch. 9-11.

26. Increase Mather, *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences* (1684), facsimile reproduction with an introduction by James A. Levermer (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1977), esp. ch. 5-7.

27. Cotton Mather, *Memorable Providences, relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions* (Boston, 1689), reprinted in Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 89-143.

who had deviated too far and too publicly from the New England Way. All of them supported the overthrow of Andros when the Glorious Revolution came to Boston in April 1689, but some of them clearly hoped for a more moderate version of royal government, which they received with the Charter of 1691. As a group they could not afford to appear soft on witches. Wait Winthrop showed no sign of continuing the role that his father had played in stopping Connecticut's witch panic. Stoughton had been badly compromised by his service on the Superior Court of the Dominion and on a special Court of Oyer and Terminer that crushed a tax strike in Essex County and jailed and severely fined the Reverend John Wise, among others. Stoughton became the fiercest witch hunter of them all. Any court presided over by him would not pursue the moderating policy that the Court of Assistants had followed for more than thirty years.<sup>28</sup>

## VI

The Salem witch panic has become one of the most carefully studied episodes of the early modern Atlantic world. Salem Village has become one of the best known communities of that era. To specialists in American colonial history, an awkwardly high percentage of the village's families have become familiar companions: the Putnams and the Porters; the Reverend Samuel Parris, his daughter Betty, his niece Abigail Williams, and his Indian slaves Tituba<sup>29</sup> and John Indian; the three Towne sisters (Rebecca

28. See Viola F. Barnes, *The Dominion of New England: A Study in British Colonial Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), 87-90, 115-18.

29. Peter Charles Hoffer's *The Devil's Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 8-16, revives the old nineteenth-century contention that Tituba was of African descent. He uses the plausible argument that there were no surviving Carib Indians in the West Indies by the late seventeenth century. Elaine G. Breslaw successfully addresses this issue in *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem: Devilish Indians and Puritan Fantasies* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), ch. 1 and, more briefly, in 'Tituba's Confession: The Multicultural Dimensions of the 1692 Salem Witch-Hunt,' *Ethnohistory* 44 (1997): 535-56. She traces Tituba's origins to the South American mainland and has even located the region where her name was common. All contemporary sources identify her as Carib or Indian, none as African. I assume that New Englanders were capable of telling the difference.

Nurse, Mary Easty, and Sarah Cloyse); Elizabeth and especially John Proctor, made famous by Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, who was fatally accused by his servant Mary Warren; and the village's former ministers, Deodat Lawson, a chronicler of the outbreak, and George Burroughs, a victim of the trials. In the 1970s and 1980s, an important scholarly contribution to the subject appeared every three or four years.<sup>30</sup> In the 1990s they virtually became annual events, and interest still shows no sign of abating.<sup>31</sup>

These studies have taught us an enormous amount and have brought us very close to understanding this tragedy in most of its dimensions. The strong scholarship on witchcraft accusations prior to the Salem outbreak has provided an indispensable con-

30. Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem* (New York: George Brazillier, 1969); Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem-Village Witchcraft: A Documentary Record of Local Conflict in Colonial New England* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1972, reissued by Northeastern University Press, 1993); Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974); Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, 3 vols. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1977); Demos, *Entertaining Satan* (1982); Weisman, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion in 17th-Century Massachusetts* (1984); Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (1987).

31. Larry Gragg, *Quest for Security: The Life of Samuel Parris, 1653-1720* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990); Hall, ed., *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England* (1991); Enders A. Robinson, *The Devil Discovered: Salem Witchcraft 1692* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1991); Gragg, *The Salem Witch Crisis* (New York: Praeger, 1992); Richard B. Trask, ed., *The Devil hath been raised: A Documentary History of the Salem Village Witchcraft Outbreak of March 1692* (Danvers: Danvers Historical Society, 1992; reissued in Danvers by the Yeoman Press, 1997); Richard Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); James F. Cooper, Jr., and Kenneth P. Minkema, eds., *The Sermon Notebook of Samuel Parris, 1689-1694* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia for the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1993); Frances Hill, *A Delusion of Satan: The Full Story of the Salem Witch Trials* (New York: Doubleday, 1995); Breslaw, *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem* (1996); Hoffer, *The Devil's Disciples* (1996); Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: A Legal History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997); Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Emerson W. Baker and John G. Reid, *The New England Knight: Sir William Phips, 1651-1695* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Bryan F. Le Beau, *The Story of the Salem Witch Trials* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998); Laurie Winn Carlson, *A Fever in Salem: A New Interpretation of the New England Witch Trials* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999); and most recently Norton, *In the Devil's Snare* (2002). Rosenthal and Trask are putting together a complete and more accurate edition of Salem witchcraft documents that will be organized chronologically rather than case by case.

text for the trials. For thirty years before the Salem crisis, the demand for action against witches had welled up from below. The magistrates and most ministers had been showing restraint. Salem reversed that momentum and eventually even that alignment. That pattern seems clear enough, but comprehending what propelled this reversal has left more than a few puzzles.

The clergy played an ambiguous and often an unheroic role in the accusations and the Salem trials. In Boston, Samuel Willard, who had contained Groton's potential witch hunt twenty years earlier, opposed the trials. Cotton Mather became an advocate and an apologist, even after arguing against the conviction of any accused person solely on the basis of spectral evidence. Increase Mather, who did not return from England until the middle of May 1692 and then found the panic well under way, had deeper reservations than his son but also decided to defend the results of the trials. In Essex County, the senior minister was John Higginson, pastor of the Salem Church. He almost certainly opposed the trials but not openly. By contrast his junior colleague Nicholas Noyes joined with Samuel Parris of Salem Village and John Hale of Beverly in actively pursuing the accused and supporting the trials.<sup>32</sup>

One way of approaching the panic is to assume a series of roughly concentric circles, beginning with the Parris household, then extending out into Salem Village, from there into Salem Town (where the trials took place) and the rest of Essex County, and finally into Boston and the province of Massachusetts Bay as a whole. Why did the magistrates of Salem Town believe the accusations arising in the village? Why did the judges from Boston, after receiving cautious advice from their own ministers, turn into active witch hunters themselves? Restraint could have been imposed at each of these levels. It was not. It returned only after nineteen people had been hanged, one had been pressed to death, and at least four others had died in prison.

32. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, is excellent on the clergy's support for or resistance to the trials.

## VII

Conventional wisdom on the outbreak of the panic starts with the Samuel Parris household. In the winter 1691-92 Tituba, a Carib Indian slave, supposedly met frequently with nine-year-old Betty Parris, Betty's eleven-year-old cousin Abigail Williams, twelve-year-old Ann Putnam, Jr., and several teen-aged girls of the village, mostly to tell fortunes. Then Betty began to experience ominous fits, and so did the others as the seizures moved up the age hierarchy of the participants. For nearly two months, the Reverend Samuel Parris tried to follow Samuel Willard's Groton precedent. He treated the outbreak as a manifestation of diabolical possession, not witchcraft. He prayed with and for the girls. Sometimes neighboring ministers participated in the ritual, and first the village congregation and then the entire province held a solemn fast to beseech the mercy of the Lord upon the community. Then Mary Sibley, a full member of the village church, persuaded John Indian, who was Tituba's husband and a slave to Parris, to make a witch's cake out of rye meal and the children's urine and feed it to a dog who was, no doubt, suspected of being the familiar of someone who had bewitched the girls. Parris discovered this attempt at 'white' witchcraft. These 'Diabolical means' enraged him but also convinced him that the children were indeed bewitched. Evidently this occult activity worked, for at the end of February, he and his supporters began looking in earnest for the witches, starting with his own household.<sup>33</sup>

The first part of this story—the fortune-telling—rests upon an extremely thin documentary base. No source contemporary with the accusations and the trials mentions Tituba telling fortunes or instructing the girls in these activities. Five years after the trials, Cotton Mather and the Reverend John Hale provided the only

33. David Hartley, 'Explaining Salem: Calvinist Psychology and the Diagnosis of Possession,' *American Historical Review* 101 (1996): 307-30. For Parris's version of the witch's cake, as recorded in the village church records, see Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Village Witchcraft*, 278-79.

written evidence that we have. Both traced the origins of the crisis to fortune-telling, but neither placed these events in the Parris household or named Tituba as a participant.

Let us examine these statements in some detail. According to Mather's 1697 biography of Governor Sir William Phips (the first royal governor under the new charter) Phips arrived in the colony at a moment<sup>34</sup>

when Scores of poor People had newly fallen under a prodigious *Possession of Devils*, which it was then generally thought had been by *Witchcrafts* introduced. It is to be confessed and bewailed, that many Inhabitants of *New-England*, and Young People especially, had been led away with little *Sorceries*, wherein they *did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God*; they would often cure Hurts with *Spells*, and practice detestable Conjurations with *Sieves*, and *Keys*, and *Pease*, and *Nails*, and *Horseshoes*, and other Implements, to learn the things for which they had a forbidden and impious Curiosity. Wretched Books had stoln [*sic*] into the Land, wherein Fools were instructed how to become able Fortune-Tellers: . . . And by these Books, the Minds of many had been so poisoned, that they studied this *Finer Witchcraft*, until, 'tis well, if some of them were not betray'd into what is Grosser, and more Sensible and Capital. Although these *Diabolical Divinations* are more ordinarily committed perhaps all over the *whole World*, than they are in the Country of *New-England*, yet, that being a Country Devoted unto the Worship and Service of the Lord *Jesus Christ* above the *rest of the World*, He signalized his Vengeance against these Wickednesses, with such extraordinary Dispensations as have not often been seen in other places.

Hale recorded his fear that<sup>35</sup>

some young persons . . . have tampered with the Devil's tools so far that hereby one door was opened to Satan to play these pranks, *Anno* 1692. I knew one of the afflicted persons who (as I was credibly informed) did try with an egg and a glass to find her future husband's

34. Cotton Mather, *The Life of Sir William Phips*, ed. Mark Van Doren (New York: Stratford Press, 1929), 130-31.

35. Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem*, 30, quoting John Hale, *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft, and How Persons Guilty of that Crime may be Convicted . . .* (Boston: B. Green and J. Allen, 1702), 132-33. This treatise was written in 1697. Norton believes that Susannah Sheldon, who died unmarried by 1697, was the young woman mentioned by Hale who became mentally unbalanced through fortune-telling. *In the Devil's Snare*, 311.

calling, till there came up a coffin, that is, a specter in likeness of a coffin. And she was afterwards followed with diabolical molestation to her death, and so died a single person—a just warning to others to take heed of handling the Devil's weapons lest they get a wound thereby.

Another, I was called to pray with, being under sore fits and vexations of Satan. And upon examination I found that she had tried the same charm, and after her confession of it and manifestation of repentance for it, and our prayers to God for her, she was speedily released from those bonds of Satan.

Bernard Rosenthal, whose book on Salem is one of the most careful accounts of the tragedy yet written, accepts Parris's claim that John Indian, not Tituba, prepared the witch's cake. Rosenthal doubts that Tituba had much of anything to do with the preliminaries to the formal witchcraft hearings. And yet she, not John Indian, was arrested and accused of witchcraft.

The key to this puzzle may lie with the dog. When a witch's familiar was subjected to this occult treatment, the witch was supposed to rush to the scene to restore her control. If Parris accurately reported (in the village church records, no less) that John Indian had supplied the witch's cake, we need only assume that Tituba, no doubt busy with her housekeeping chores, was the next person to come through the door. Her arrival probably triggered the first accusation. The combination of the witch's cake and her testimony and confession then launched the panic. Although the formal charges were brought by several adult males of the village, the girls must have accused Tituba of something to trigger these proceedings.

When the grand jury took up her case in May, it rejected the formal indictment, which accused her only of covenanting with Satan by signing his book, not of tormenting the girls. Tituba was never brought to trial and was eventually sold outside the colony, apparently to cover her jail costs. To the grand jurors, the witch's cake was not an issue probably because it was meant to help the girls, not harm them. Maybe there really was some fortune-telling in the village, but it probably had nothing to do with the

initial cry against Tituba. Because Cotton Mather and John Hale both linked fortune-telling to the onset of the crisis, we should be associating it with the older girls who began making accusations in March and especially with Susannah Sheldon whose afflictions and accusations began in the last week of April, not with Betty Parris and Abigail Williams in the Parris household in January or February. But we do have evidence that Parris probably whipped Tituba to force her to confess and that her several confessions, for all of their esoteric content, were carefully measured performances. She refused to accuse anyone except the other two women who had been denounced with her, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne. We do not know whether she or one of the girls was the first to name them.<sup>36</sup>

Carol Karlsen's analysis of the afflicted girls makes a narrower fortune-telling hypothesis plausible, but only for accusers outside the Parris household. Other than Betty Parris, Abigail Williams, and Ann Putnam, Jr., most of them were orphans, victims of the Indian wars. They had been taken into households that were probably more intensely pious than the northern frontier families into which they had been born, but they were not at all certain who, if anyone, now had a responsibility for finding husbands for them. That fortune-telling would appeal to these teen-aged girls makes a lot of sense, and Hale clearly believed it happened. When one of them conjured up a coffin instead of a potential husband, she became unhinged and turned accuser.<sup>37</sup>

By March 1 Parris had finally abandoned his assumption that the afflicted were possessed, not bewitched. Once he began encouraging accusations of witchcraft, the crisis escalated ominously. The first three to be denounced represented, I suspect, the sort of women the afflicted girls feared they might become—disreputable,

36. Compare Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 21–29, with Breslaw, *Tituba*, 93–101. Rosenthal quotes the indictment and assumes it was approved, but the reverse side of the document is marked 'Ignoramus' and signed by the foreman of the grand jury, which means that the jurors refused to indict her. Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, III: 755. For Susannah Sheldon, see Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 140–44, 311.

37. See Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, ch. 7.

impoverished, powerless, or all three. Sarah Good and Tituba matched these requirements, and so perhaps did Sarah Osborne, who had fallen on hard times. Yet Sarah Good was still in her child-bearing years, and Sarah Osborne had two living sons by a previous marriage, although she was engaged in legal action to try to disinherit them. The Salem accusations undermine Karlsen's argument that most witch accusations, especially those that led to executions, were about property. Prime suspects, she claims, were women who stood to inherit property and had no male heirs. They were blocking the orderly transmission of property from one generation of males to the next. Whatever the crisis was really about, this issue explains little, if anything, about the Salem trials.<sup>38</sup>

Instead the accusations reflected the factional struggles of Parris's congregation and of village politics. As Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum have shown, the accusers' families were strong supporters of Parris's ministry; the accused had resisted his appointment, and many of them worshipped in neighboring churches. The accusers lived on the remote west side of the village; the accused resided on the east side, closer to commercial Salem Town and the Ipswich Road. As this pattern took hold, the 'afflicted' also accused some respectable people. The girls were, I suspect, beginning to denounce the kind of women they feared they never could become, such as the three Towne sisters, all of whom were full church members, respectable matrons, and mothers with no lack of male heirs. Rebecca Nurse had eight children, Mary Easty seven, Sarah Cloyse eight by her two marriages. Among other victims who were condemned, Susannah Martin had seven adult children, Sarah Averill Wildes had an adult son who was a constable of Topsfield, and John and Elizabeth Proctor had two sons.<sup>39</sup>

38. See Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, ch. 3.

39. Robinson, *The Devil Discovered*, ch. 15 contains very useful biographical information, including family connections, for the first seventy-five people to be accused. Rebecca Nurse and Mary Easty were both hanged. Sarah Cloyse was never brought to trial because the grand jury twice refused to indict her, in June and in September. We do not know why. See Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, I: 221-23.

Whatever was tormenting the afflicted, a lack of male heirs among the accused was not the trigger for the judicial proceedings. When women became the primary accusers, other factors took hold. One may have been child and spousal abuse, especially among the men who were brought to trial. The Reverend George Burroughs, the only minister to be executed in seventeenth-century New England, certainly fits that pattern. John Proctor whipped his servant, Mary Warren, when she began accusing other people, only to have her turn on him instead. Ann Putnam, Jr., accused John Willard's specter of whipping her infant sister to death. Rosenthal plausibly interprets this charge as a projection of guilt by young Ann away from her own mother and onto Willard, who was hanged.<sup>40</sup>

The Salem panic resembled, though on a more terrible scale, what had happened thirty years before at Hartford. Into mid-April, Salem seemed almost a reprise of the Hartford outbreak. The primary accusers were young women. Even more than at Hartford, when John Winthrop, Jr., had arrived just in time to stop the trials, the result was a massacre. New England had learned how to contain accusations of *maleficium* levelled by men against a particular woman. It did not know how to respond when women turned against other women—and against some men. In both Hartford and Salem the accusers were among the least privileged and least powerful people in New England, and they hurled their accusations successfully at some powerful and well-connected people. I suspect that their very lack of power and standing, when combined with their visible and obvious torments, gave them credibility in the all-male theater of high theology and formal courtroom proceedings. With New England again at war with the northern Indians, the ability of many of the 'afflicted' to survive earlier attacks may have seemed a providential endorsement of their accusations against almost anyone.

40. Hoffer's *The Devil's Disciples* emphasizes the connection between child abuse and the males who were accused. For Ann Putnam, Jr.'s accusation against Willard, see Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 40.



Thirteen people were accused at Hartford. Fourteen were accused in Salem Village through April 18. Then on April 13 Ann Putnam, Jr., who was quickly seconded by others of the afflicted, accused Abigail Hobbs of Topsfield of tormenting her. Soon Bridget Bishop of Salem Town was also accused. When Hobbs, who was only fourteen years old, was interrogated on April 19, she provided a spectacular confession of her meetings with Satan in order to do his work in New England. A survivor of the Indian attack at Casco Bay in 1689, Hobbs connected the witch accusations in Salem with the Indian crisis in Maine. Within days Ann Putnam, Jr., cried out against the Reverend George Burroughs, who had spent most of the 1680s as a preacher in Maine.<sup>41</sup>

The Salem witch crisis was no longer a local event. As it reached the Maine frontier, it evoked the danger of destruction from external enemies, supplied by Catholic New France and less-than-loyal New England traders, such as Philip English and John Alden, and supported from within by untold numbers of witches eager to carry out the satanic plot. Some of the confessions, probably doing their best to say what their interrogators wanted to hear, were quite explicit. William Barker, Sr., of Andover, claimed that Satan maintained 307 witches in New England, and his explanation sent a chill through the court:<sup>42</sup> 'Satans design was to set up his own worship, abolish all the churches in the land, to fall next upon Salem and soe goe through the countrey, He sayeth the devil promised that all his people should live bravely that all persones should be equall; that there should be no day of resurection or Judgement, and neither punishmentt nor shame for sin . . . .' In Boston, Cotton Mather shivered when he realized that 'at prodigious witch-meetings the wretches have proceeded so far as to Concert and Consult the Methods of Rooting out the Christian Religion from this Country.' Satan also had a political objective: 'it may be feared that, in the horrible Tempest which is now upon ourselves, the design of the Devil is to

41. See especially Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 78-81, 118-19.

42. Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, I: 66.

sink that happy Settlement of Government wherewith Almighty God has graciously enclined Their Majesties to favour us.' Satan was determined to destroy the royal charter negotiated mostly by Increase Mather, the father of Cotton.<sup>43</sup>

## VIII

One of the more baffling features of the Salem crisis, and the least studied aspect of the trials, is the response of the magistrates in Salem Town. They were deeply involved in the settlement of the Maine frontier and had badly mismanaged the northern Indian war that had broken out in late 1688. Very likely, as Norton argues, they were quite prepared to blame the devil and his witches for their own failures. Most other explanations of their witch-hunting zeal make little sense. Young women, closely tied to a church faction that considered Salem Town a corrupting influence on community life in Salem Village, somehow convinced John Hathorne, Jonathan Corwin, and Bartholomew Gedney to credit their accusations against a growing group of people with strong connections in Salem Town. For Hathorne the problem seems particularly acute. His sisters, Ann and Elizabeth, had married Joseph and Israel Porter, respectively. In the village Joseph Porter was the arch rival of the Putnam clan, which was already emerging as the source of most of the local allegations. Perhaps Hathorne resented his sisters. His father had used all of the family's lands in the village as marriage portions for the two women, but then John's wealth was in trade. Still, his familial connections tied him directly to the anti-Parris faction in village and church politics, not to the Parris and Putnam households that were generating the accusations. He did have familial reasons for resenting the Reverend George Burroughs, but those motives do not explain his prosecutorial zeal during the seven weeks before anyone accused Burroughs.<sup>44</sup>

43. Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 211, n. 1.

44. On Hathorne, see Robinson, *The Devil Discovered*, 32-35, and Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 104-5, 125, and passim. Burrough's second wife, who died in 1688, had been the widow of John Hathorne's deceased younger brother. Burroughs had apparently treated her with 'unkindness.' On the Putnam-Porter rivalry, see Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, ch. 5-6.

By March 1 one of Corwin's sons was among the afflicted, the first child outside the village to be so affected, but since the only mention of this fact is an offhand remark in Tituba's first examination, the incident probably did not amount to much.<sup>45</sup> None of the Salem magistrates had attended college. They probably shared none of the learned reservations about witchcraft that were already circulating among Samuel Willard, the Brattle brothers, and Robert Calef in polite Boston society.<sup>46</sup> Corwin and Gedney had compromised their Puritan credentials through willing service on the Council of the Dominion of New England. Hathorne had also been implicated, but only as an Essex County justice. In the early hearings he set a tone of wrathful righteousness, and the others seem to have followed his lead. Apparently he never asked himself whether diabolical possession, rather than malefic witchcraft, might better explain the torments of the afflicted. In the critical preliminary hearings in March and April, he asked only how and why, not whether, the accused tormented the afflicted girls and John Indian, who had quickly become one of the accusers.<sup>47</sup>

Not even evidence of fraud in the accusations dampened the zeal of the magistrates. As Rosenthal points out, someone was sticking pins in the afflicted girls, and presumably it was not anybody's specter. Somebody must have tied the hands of one of them so tightly that the ropes had to be cut, a problem not easily explained by hysteria. Some of the afflicted were lying at least some of the time, although I doubt that fraud can explain the bulk of the accusations. Yet the magistrates, and later the Court of

45. Trask, ed., *The Devil hath been raised*, 11.

46. Samuel Willard's principal critique of the trials pitted Salem against Boston. See his 'Some Miscellany Observations on our Present Debate respecting Witchcrafts, in a Dialogue between S. & B. By P. E. and J. A.' (1692), reprinted in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 122 (1986): 218-36. Historians have never been sure who 'P. E.' and 'J. A.' were supposed to be, but most assume that 'S.' was Salem and 'B.' Boston. Similarly, I assume that when Thomas Brattle described the Salem magistrates as 'Salem Gentlemen,' he was being bitterly sarcastic. Burr, ed. *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 170. New Englanders seldom used the term before the eighteenth century.

47. The pattern was obvious on the first day of the hearings. See Trask, *The Devil hath been raised*, 4-16.

Oyer and Terminer, never took the elementary precaution of separating the afflicted and examining them one by one to compare their stories. As the accusations spread into outlying towns, the magistrates even sanctioned torture (tying suspects' neck and heels for hours) to elicit several confessions.<sup>48</sup>

Soon the jails in Essex County and Boston were full of people denounced as witches, including a large contingent of grandmothers, many of whom were church members. Yet the inter-charter government did not bring them to trial. Aging Governor Simon Bradstreet, the widower of poet Anne Bradstreet, may have been the one important public official who still stood for the tradition of restraint. Once the accusations and arrests spread beyond the village, his son, Dudley Bradstreet, became the first magistrate to compel an accuser to post bond before prosecuting, a small gesture but probably an indication of the family's position.<sup>49</sup>

This restraint at the province level crumbled when two saviors arrived to resolve the impasse and launch the trials. On Saturday, May 14, 1692, a vessel bringing Governor Sir William Phips and the Reverend Increase Mather arrived from England. According to an account that reached Maryland, Phips gathered the inhabitants of Boston together and addressed them:<sup>50</sup>

Part of the speech was that God had sent him there to serve his country and that he would not abridge them of their ancient laws and customs, but that all the laws, liberties and privileges that were practicable should be as before and should be maintained and upheld by him. Then he read his commission and letters patent, but when they were about half read he ordered it to cease as the Sabbath was begun, and he would not infringe the Lord's day; and he ordered all firing of guns and acclamations to be put off till Monday morning. On Monday

48. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, ch. 2-3 makes a powerful case for some conspicuous fraud among the accusers. For the use of torture, see 61-62. Mary Easty, in her moving petition to the court after her conviction, urged the judges to separate the accusers and question them individually. Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, I: 303-04.

49. On the Bradstreets, see Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, 30, 53.

50. Joshua Brodbent to Lt. Governor Francis Nicholson of Maryland, June 21, 1692, in J. W. Fortescue, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies, 1689-1692, Preserved in the Public Record Office* (London: F.L.M. Stationery Office, 1901), 653, n. 2283. This document is a detailed abstract, not a literal text.

morning the Council waited on him in the Council Chamber, and there was a debate of six hours whether the reading should begin where it was left off or be read *de novo*. The latter course was taken, because a good thing could not be too often read over.

The witch frenzy terrified Governor Phips. His first decision about the accused, according to Robert Calef, was to order 'that Irons should be put upon those in Prison,' although we know that some of them had been in chains since March. On May 27 Phips created a special Court of Oyer and Terminer to sit in Salem and try the accused witches. That court was an illegal body. Under the Massachusetts Charter of 1691, only the legislature (the General Court) could create a law court. This provision, which differentiated Massachusetts from other royal colonies, was one of the valuable concessions that Increase Mather had obtained from the Crown during the long and tedious negotiations that had accompanied the drafting of the charter. Phips and Mather both understood that clause, and Phips had read it, perhaps twice, to the people of Boston on May 14 and 16. Much of the business undertaken by the new General Court elected in late May 1692 involved the legislative reconstitution of the province's court system. Yet the governor, no doubt with Mather's approval, created the Salem court by prerogative action rather than wait for the results of the legislative process.

Old Governor Bradstreet had been reluctant to proceed hastily to a trial of the witches. Phips and Mather were afraid not to. Phips appointed Thomas Newton as attorney general for the trials. A year earlier, Newton had led the public prosecution of Jacob Leisler and Jacob Milborne in New York. Both had been convicted of treason and executed after the court refused to allow them to appeal to England. In Massachusetts, the panic that had started in the Parris household, spread to Salem Village, and then engulfed Salem Town, had finally reached the most powerful people in Boston. As of May 14, the date that Phips arrived, forty-three people had been accused of witchcraft. By June 6, the number had

reached sixty-eight, an escalation that no doubt contributed to the governor's alarm.<sup>51</sup>

Before the court convened, Judge John Richards requested Cotton Mather's advice about procedure. Mather cautioned against overreliance on spectral evidence. 'It is very certain,' he explained, 'that the devils have sometimes represented the shapes of persons not only innocent, but also very virtuous.' The best evidence would be an open confession, but sometimes even a confession should not be believed. Mather warned against the use of torture, cautiously approved using the ability to recite the Lord's Prayer as a test of innocence, urged the court to search for puppets, presumably with pins in them, and sanctioned the use of what might be called reverse spectral evidence. That is, if someone should wound a specter, and the suspected witch should then possess the same wound, that evidence would be valid. Finally, Mather recommended that even some confessing witches—'lesser Criminals' only, he explained—should be forgiven and not executed, provided they would make 'some solemn, open, Public & Explicit renunciation of the Devil.' He was suggesting that even witchcraft might be a forgivable offense, a claim that

51. Robert Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (1700), in Burr, *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 349; and for the escalating number of accusations, Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 120, chart 2. On the illegality of the court, see Thomas Hutchinson, *History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts-Bay*, 3 vols., ed. Lawrence Shaw Mayo (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 2: 37. Hutchinson was chief justice of the Superior Court of Judicature when he wrote that part of his history. For the relevant clause in the 1691 charter, see Abner Cheney Goodell et al., eds., *The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay: To Which are Prefixed the Charters of the Province*, 21 vols. (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1869-1922), 1: 14-15. The General Court met on June 8 and a week later passed a statute continuing the laws then in force into November. Clearly it could also have created a court of oyer and terminer had the governor asked it to do so, but he was not willing to wait even two weeks for it to act. Another law passed on June 28 provided for the holding of county courts until the legislature made other arrangements. Goodell, ed., *Acts and Resolves*, 1: 27, 37. Thomas Newton's activities have not left many traces, but see Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, III: 867-69. For his career in New York, see Paul M. Hamlin and Charles E. Baker, eds., *Supreme Court of Judicature of the Province of New York, 1691-1704*, 3 vols., New-York Historical Society, *Collections*, vols. 78-80 (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1959), 1: 112. Peter Charles Hoffer argues that creation of the trial court was a legitimate exercise of the governor's prerogative. See *The Devil's Disciples*, 135.

I have never encountered in any other witch trial of the early modern era.<sup>52</sup>

In this ominous environment, the trials finally began.

## IX

Cotton Mather's advice probably explains why Bridget Bishop became the court's first victim. She had been formally accused of witchcraft in 1680. After that her specter acquired the nasty habit of invading the bedchambers of adult men and hopping around the room or sitting on their chests. One witness even claimed, years earlier, to have found puppets in the wall of a house she had recently occupied. Although she insisted on her innocence—a claim that had worked in her favor twelve years earlier—the jury condemned her. The evidence seemed to meet Mather's insistence on something more than the spectral torment of the girls, although as the indictments made clear, she was brought to trial because her specter afflicted her accusers at the preliminary hearing. A resident of Salem Town, she insisted that she had never been in Salem Village before and did not know any of the afflicted accusers. But her reputation had preceded her, and it doomed her to the gallows. She died on June 10.<sup>53</sup>

Tituba, who had confessed to signing the devil's book, was not even indicted. Now Bishop, who insisted on her innocence, was hanged. A deadly pattern was beginning to emerge. At Salem no one who confessed was ever executed. Everyone who was executed insisted that she or he was no witch, even after it was becoming obvious that a confession might save the person's life. No other witch trials that I have heard of developed such a pattern. The Salem court hanged the most courageous people it encountered and rewarded those too cowardly to stick by the truth, that they were indeed innocent. As Esther Forbes has sug-

52. Cotton Mather to John Richards, May 31, 1692, in Kenneth Silverman, ed., *Selected Letters of Cotton Mather* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 35–40.

53. Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, 1: 83–109.

gested, the people executed at Salem deserve to be honored as 'the most distinguished group of Christian martyrs this country has produced.' They died because they would not 'belay their souls.'<sup>54</sup>

After the Bishop trial, the court took a recess to consult with the ministers, more formally this time. 'The Return of Several Ministers Consulted,' which was dated June 15 and was probably written by Cotton Mather, repeated his reservations about spectral evidence without telling the court what evidence might be acceptable.<sup>55</sup> With more than one hundred people already accused, including one minister, the Reverend George Burroughs, the court began to attract public criticism. William Milborne, a Baptist minister in Boston and the brother of Jacob Milborne who had been hanged for treason in New York the previous year, collected signatures for a petition to the General Court which pointed out that the jails were filling with people accused of 'witchcraft only upon bare specter testimonie many whereof we cannot but in Charity Judge to be Innocent' and warned of 'A woeful chain of consequences [that] will undoubtedly follow besides the uncertaintie of ye exemption of any person from ye like accusation in ye said province.' Milborne doubtless knew that Attorney General Thomas Newton had hounded his brother to death and was about to prosecute George Burroughs, a fellow Baptist whom Milborne had probably met when they both ministered to nearby Maine congregations at Casco (Burroughs) and Saco (Milborne) in the 1680s. One of the first questions that Burroughs had been asked in his preliminary hearing in May was whether he had baptized all of his children. He had not. An accusation of witchcraft could make telling scapegoats of the Baptists. But the upper house (all the Salem trial judges were members) sent the sheriff to bring Milborne before it and compelled him to post £200 with two sureties to appear before the next Superior Court 'to answer for . . . writing and publishing the said seditious

54. Esther Forbes Papers, box 6, folder 5, 'Confession,' American Antiquarian Society.

55. Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem-Village Witchcraft*, 117–18.

and scandalous papers.<sup>56</sup> Questioning the court's procedures, even in a petition for redress, had become a crime.<sup>56</sup>

By then the trials had resumed, and the court established two new landmarks. In late June it condemned five women to death, three of whom were full church members (Susannah Martin, Rebecca Nurse, and Sarah Wildes). When the jury initially acquitted Nurse, who had a strong reputation for piety, the afflicted accusers raised such a tumult in the court that Stoughton sent the jury out to deliberate again, and this time he got a verdict of guilty. All five were hanged on July 19.<sup>57</sup>

Most historians have concluded that by late June the judges had decided to ignore the advice of the ministers altogether and were willing to convict on the basis of spectral evidence alone. Wendel D. Craker has strongly challenged this view. He insists that when the court could not find collateral evidence, it did not bring an accused person to trial. But the question remains whether he has established anything more substantial than a highly technical point. In effect, the Bishop case became the governing precedent. Spectral evidence, as the wording of the indictments makes clear, defined the actual crime. But then the court accepted any other testimony involving *maleficium* that it could find and used it to comply, at least nominally, with the guidelines established by the clergy. The technique worked in that it enabled both Mathers to defend the results of the trials despite the court's overwhelming dependance on spectral evidence. But the conventional wisdom about Salem remains valid. Without spectral evidence there would have been no executions and probably no trials. Spectral evidence prompted the court to validate precisely the kind of tes-

56. The Milborne documents are printed in George H. Moore, 'Notes on the History of Witchcraft in Massachusetts; with Illustrative Documents,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 2 (1882): 171, n. 1. Burroughs' Baptist beliefs were elicited in Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, 1: 153. See also David William Voorhees, "'Fanatiks and Fifth Monarchists': The Milborne Family in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic World,' *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 129 (April and July 1998): 67-75, 174-82.

57. For an outstanding account, see Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, ch. 5.

timony about *maleficium* that judges and ministers had been rejecting for more than thirty years.<sup>58</sup>

x

By July the afflicted had become a pack of young terminators against whom no defense was possible. Anyone who pleaded not guilty was doomed. Those who confessed were saved, at least for the present. As the court grew suspicious of those who confessed, it began to demand proof of sincerity by insisting that the confessor name others who had participated with her or him in a witches' sabbath. Soon it often insisted that the names include people who had not yet been brought to trial, much less executed. The momentum of the trials threatened, if unchecked, to consume most of the grandmothers of Essex County.

By then the cohort of accusers, and the circle of the accused, were both expanding wildly. When some afflicted girls went to Andover to challenge Satan, their accusations may have seemed almost random because their families had not been linked to many of the Andover people, but the cycle of denunciations for witchcraft quickly got out of control. Boys began to have fits and join the accusers. And relatives of an accused person began to urge her to forswear herself in the presence of the living God, at least until the madness passed, and thus save her life.<sup>59</sup>

On August 19 the court hanged five more persons. Four of them were men, including George Burroughs and John Proctor. This shocking challenge to the accepted stereotype of a witch drew Cotton Mather, Thomas Brattle, and Robert Calef to the scene. The spectacle confirmed Mather's support for the trials but probably turned Brattle and Calef into grim and determined opponents. Something seemed amiss in each of the five convictions. John Willard was a constable who made many arrests in the

58. Wendel D. Craker, 'Spectral Evidence, Non-Spectral Acts of Witchcraft, and Confession at Salem in 1692,' *The Historical Journal* 40 (1997): 331-58.

59. For the fullest analysis, see Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, esp. 233-36, 254-65.



early phase of the panic but then began to sympathize with the accused, to the point where he even suggested that the afflicted and the judges were the real servants of Satan. George Jacobs, an elderly cripple who needed two canes to walk, was hanged even though two of his accusers, including his sixteen-year-old granddaughter, recanted their testimony. John Proctor had suggested in the opening weeks of the crisis that someone ought to whip the afflicted and bring them to their senses, as he did with his servant, Mary Warren. She soon accused him, then recanted her accusation, but finally managed to rejoin the afflicted accusers. George Burroughs recited the Lord's Prayer without flaw at the gallows, but while a failed attempt had helped convict others, his success did not save him. As he was turned off the scaffold, the enormous crowd surged forward, perhaps to rescue him, but Cotton Mather, mounted on his horse, 'addressed . . . the People . . . to possess [convince] the People of his guilt; saying That the Devil has often been transformed into an Angel of Light,' according to Robert Calef, an eye witness; 'and this did somewhat appease the People, and the Executions went on. . . .'<sup>60</sup> Martha Carrier had been convicted after her own children confessed and testified against her, but they had been tortured.<sup>61</sup>

The prosecutions continued. Sixty-year-old Giles Corey showed his contempt for the court by refusing to accept trial by the court or 'by God and the Country'—that is, by jury. Under an old common-law rule never invoked before or again in colonial New England, he was pressed to death on September 16. Six days later six more women and one man were hanged, the last people to be executed for witchcraft in colonial America.<sup>62</sup>

60. Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 360–61.

61. For these cases see Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, 1: 151–78 (Burroughs), 183–96 (Carrier); 2: 473–86 (Jacobs), 677–90 (Proctor); 3: 819–52 (Willard).

62. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, ch. 8. Nearly all accounts of Giles Corey, drawing upon an entry in the church records of Salem Town, give his age as eighty. But Esther Forbes found a record of 1644 describing him as a 'boy,' which usually meant someone under 14 years of age. If so he would have been no more than 62 in 1692. Forbes did not give her source. See her 'Giles Corey,' Esther Forbes Papers, box 6, folder 5, American Antiquarian Society.

By then mounting lay resistance had finally found a way to reach the government. The accusers cried out against the Reverend Samuel Willard of Boston, a vocal critic of the trials, and then against Lady Mary Phips, the governor's wife who had, in his absence, signed a release for one of the accused known personally to her. The governor had spent part of the summer in Maine fighting Indians, but not nearly as much time as he later implied in letters to his superiors in England.<sup>63</sup> After the last executions, he stopped the trials, to the great rage of Judge Stoughton. Perhaps at this time William Milborne, though already castigated by the court, petitioned the legislature to intervene and stop the trials.<sup>64</sup> When the General Court met again in October, resistance to the court took the form of a contest over the wording of a public call for a day of fast. Opponents of the trials won in the House of Representatives by a margin of thirty-three to twenty-nine.<sup>65</sup> Thomas Brattle's powerful critique of the trials was circulating in manuscript by some point in October, and the Dutch Reformed clergy of New York contributed their own criticism of spectral evidence. So did Increase Mather, speaking for most of the clergy of Massachusetts, in his *Cases of Conscience*.<sup>66</sup>

Once the General Court set up a complete court system, the trials resumed briefly in January, but under the governor's orders the Superior Court no longer entertained spectral evidence, and all new trials ended in acquittals. Several who had been condemned but not hanged in September and three who had already

63. Marion L. Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Enquiry into the Salem Witch Trials* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1949), ch. 18–19. The most careful study of Phips's role in the crisis is Baker and Reid, *The New England Knight*, ch. 7.

64. For the text of this undated petition, see Moore, 'Notes on the Bibliography of Witchcraft,' 246–47.

65. M. Halsey Thomas, ed., *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674–1729*, 2 vols. (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1973), 1: 299.

66. For Brattle, see Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 165–90; for the Latin text and an English translation of the Dutch Reformed critique, edited by Albert C. Goodell, see *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 2d ser., 1 (1884–85): 348–58; Increase Mather, *Cases of Conscience concerning Evil Spirits Personating Men, Witchcrafts, Infallible Proofs of Guilt in Such as are Accused with that Crime . . .* (Boston: Benjamin Harris, 1693). Despite the date on the title page, *Cases of Conscience* was circulating by October 1692.

confessed but had not yet stood trial were condemned to hang. Stoughton did his best to rush them to the gallows, but Phips released them all. The trials finally ended.<sup>67</sup>

## XI

The Salem tragedy emerged from a lethal combination of excessive Puritan zeal and the anxieties aroused by defection from Puritan standards. Cotton Mather, most of the clergy in or near Salem Village, Magistrate John Hathorne, and Increase Mather in his willingness to defend the trials after rejecting spectral evidence, provided the unrelenting zeal. But the afflicted girls, the other Salem magistrates, and most of the judges from Boston were people who had deviated too far, too conspicuously in the opposite direction.

Satan tormented the girls by urging them to sign his book, a phenomenon that seldom occurred in witch outbreaks elsewhere in the Atlantic world or in earlier New England trials. Tituba introduced this aspect of Satan's malice on March 2, the second day of her interrogation, and thereafter it reverberated through the entire crisis.<sup>68</sup> It represented the obverse of the conversion experience that ministers had been demanding from young people for half a century. It reflected the girls' terror that they stood on the very precipice of damnation. They projected this anxiety and guilt first onto disreputable adult women in or near Salem Village and then upon others who had led godly lives but whose families opposed Samuel Parris. The girls' torments, which they blamed on specters, gave these claims credibility. So did the special status of the orphans. As frontier survivors of Satan's malice inflicted through the northern Indians, they may well have seemed providential messengers of God's special regard for New England, despite the region's erring ways.

67. For the 1693 trials, see Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, III: 903-44.

68. See Trask, ed., *The Devil hath been raised*, 23-25. In an undated but later deposition, Ann Putnam, Jr., testified that Sarah Good had urged her to sign the book as early as February 27, but I am suspicious of that claim. Nobody mentioned the devil's book in the extensive interrogations of March 1. Compare Trask, 18, with 3-16.

Most of the judges, by contrast, had cooperated much too willingly with the Dominion of New England, a royal regime that truly did threaten to undermine the godly commonwealth of the seventeenth century. Stoughton in particular had offended the people of Essex County by imposing severe punishments on the men who dared protest against taxation without representation. A life-long bachelor in a society that considered marriage a duty, he was also, I suspect, a misogynist. These judges needed forgiveness, and they projected this need upon the people accused of witchcraft. When Mary Lacey, Jr., confessed in open court that she had actually worshipped Satan, a magistrate—was it Stoughton, the chief justice?—reassured her 'you may yet be delivered if god give you repentance.' 'I hope he will,' she replied. She survived. At first the judges may have spared confessors to pry information from them. They could be hanged later. But by September any such strategy would have turned a judicial massacre into a holocaust.<sup>69</sup>

For the first time in the great witch hunt of the early modern era, open confession to the crime became a way to escape punishment, not guarantee it. By August and September this perversion of traditional justice had become so manifest and so grotesque that most people in the colony recognized it for the moral monstrosity it had become. Even the trial jurors later admitted that 'for want of Knowledge in ourselves, and better Information from others,' they had believed evidence that 'we justly fear was insufficient for the touching the Lives of *any*' [my emphasis] and had brought 'upon our selves, and this People of the Lord, the Guilt of Innocent Blood, which Sin the Lord saith in Scripture, he would not pardon, 2 Kings 24.4, that is we suppose in regard of his temporal Judgments.'<sup>70</sup> When Phips stopped the trials, hardly anyone but Stoughton protested.

People still believed in witches after 1692, but the Salem trials

69. Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, II: 520.

70. Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World*, in Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 387-88. This statement was made in December 1696. We do not know how soon after the trials the jurors concluded that they had been horribly mistaken. Nor do we know how many juries were involved in the trials.

had left them with no credible way to identify who was or was not a witch. The early trials had turned the magistrates and ministers against ordinary *maleficium*. Salem discredited the validity of a compact with Satan as evidence for witchcraft, especially if the only proof was spectral. Robert Calef took the argument one step farther. He challenged Cotton Mather to produce any scriptural passage that supported the very notion that such a compact was even possible. Mather could not defeat Calef on those terms. His reply conceded nothing, certainly not its own feebleness, although the weakness of his position seemed obvious to Calef.<sup>71</sup>

The trials had other long-term consequences. Ministers began to shy away from using Satan in their sermons. By the 1730s they would discover that hellfire could be just as terrifying to a congregation weeping for its sins but did not carry the same risks. The preaching style of Jonathan Edwards probably was an indirect offshoot of the trials.<sup>72</sup>

Controversy aroused by the trials split the elite into what might loosely be described as political versus cultural anglicizers. Both Mathers defended the trials, despite the overwhelming reliance on spectral evidence, and both of them seemed to think that Satan's onslaught was an attempt to destroy the Charter of 1691, which had been mostly the handiwork of Increase Mather. Robert Calef and Thomas and William Brattle, along with John Leverett, embraced the early English enlightenment, and the Brattles founded the Brattle Street Church in 1699. Calef and Thomas Brattle were eloquent in their condemnation of the witch trials. By 1707 the Brattles and Leverett had outmaneuvered Increase Mather to gain control of Harvard College. England's enlightenment had found a new base in the bastion of Puritan orthodoxy.<sup>73</sup>

71. Worthington C. Ford, ed., 'Mather-Calef Paper on Witchcraft,' *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 47 (1913-14): 240-68.

72. See Reis, *Damned Women*, ch. 5.

73. See 'Letter of Thomas Brattle,' and Calef's *More Wonders of the Invisible World*, both in Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 165-90, 289-393. See also Samuel Eliot Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), II: ch. 23-24; and Norman Fiering, 'The First American Enlightenment: Tillotson, Leverett, and Philosophical Anglicanism,' *New England Quarterly* 54 (1981): 307-44.

Popular culture also responded to the trials. At Salem, women had taken over the public sphere for a whole summer, with catastrophic results. The judicial system had learned how to handle a witchcraft accusation aimed at a woman by a man. But when women accused other women, the result was a massacre. At first the men of Essex County reacted defensively. For several years after the Salem trials, every woman who requested a criminal jury in the Essex Court of Sessions got acquitted. But around 1700, not only in Essex but in all of New England, the double standard of sexual behavior, which had been in some peril under the Puritan regime, revived with amazing vigor. Men refused to plead guilty to any sexual offense except making love to their wives before their wedding day. Some men even denied that charge, usually by invoking the biblical two-witness rule, and nearly always won an acquittal. Juries acquitted men of nearly every sexual offense except incest. Increasingly women appeared in court only to be humiliated. The law became—almost, but not quite—an arena for men only.<sup>74</sup>

Popular culture Europeanized in one other, quite dramatic respect. People still believed in witches, but the courts would no longer protect any victim of this crime. The result, I suspect, was a huge resurgence of folk magic. The best evidence comes from a century later, pulled together in recent studies of the early life of Joseph Smith. Magic became a major folk weapon in a society presided over by enlightened judges and lawyers.<sup>75</sup>

In North America, probably more than elsewhere, the Enlightenment had strange, unexpected results.

74. See especially Cornelia N. Dayton, *Women Before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). Dayton's study rests primarily upon New Haven Colony and County. My own reading of the published or manuscript court of sessions records for York, Essex, Middlesex, Suffolk, Plymouth, Bristol, New London, New Haven, and Hartford counties persuades me that the resurgence of the double standard occurred throughout New England. For several years after 1692, juries in the Essex County court of sessions routinely acquitted women. When I read these records, they were in the Essex County Courthouse in Salem. They have since been moved to the Massachusetts Archives at Columbia Point in Boston.

75. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World* (Salt Lake City, 1987); John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).