

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

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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.¹ 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 1692.²

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.³

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 1736.⁴

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.⁵

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.'⁶ 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.'⁷

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.⁸

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.⁹

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.¹⁰

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.¹¹

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.'¹²

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).¹³

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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵

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 Delliuss 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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸

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.¹⁹

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.²⁰

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.²¹

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.²²

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.'²³ 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.'²⁴

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.²⁵

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.²⁶

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.²⁷

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.'²⁸ 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.²⁹ On October 11, 1692, Peter Peirot, Godfrey Dellius, and Rudolph Varick all endorsed Selijns' letter on witchcraft.³⁰ Peirot was a Huguenot minister. The rest were Dutch Reformed. All of them had actively opposed Leisler's regime.³¹ Indeed, on October 12 Selijns, Varick, and Dellius wrote a letter to the Classis of Amsterdam complaining about the continuing legacy of Leislerian troubles.³²

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 Haelve 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.³³ 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.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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.³⁶

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.'³⁷

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.³⁸ 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.'³⁹ 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.⁴⁰

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.⁴¹

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.'⁴² 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.'⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ At

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

Salem he believed 'distempered creatures or leagerdemains' and 'wicked and mallissius people who fained themselves bewicht 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 sieckens, 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 onsinige 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 [gelovigheid] van de Magestraet, dat wat de getormenteerde oft beseetene tegens iemant in brengt met andere bueselachtijge sijrcomstantijen, behoort als waeragtijge en geloofwaardige 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 duijvelen en der duivelsche Coustinaeren [kunstenaeren], 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 genoemd wort, de helche vijant can comissioneren en sijn ketting verlongen om naer haer geliefsten andre onoselue [onnozele] volwassen en onmondige menschen, creatures 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 vertrowen, 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 vriend,

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. Willard⁴⁵ was also named by these ridiculous people; Captain Alden⁴⁶ and many decent people have been sitting in prison for 2 months already. One has been hung.⁴⁷ 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. Mather⁴⁸ 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 Dudley⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰

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.⁵¹ 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 Matteredij 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, alse 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 brieven, waervan per naest aperent per naest verder sult hoeren, 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 Tilburg⁵² 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 wife⁵³ 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 opperattij. 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 comissie 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).

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]

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