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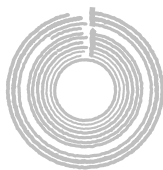


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“THE BOY OF TOCUTT” AND THE DEMONIC COVENANT IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY NEW ENGLAND DEMONOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The New England demonic possession narrative, “A Confession of a Boy at Tocutt,” remains conspicuously absent from the rich scholarship on diabolic affliction in seventeenth-century North America. Appearing in Cotton Mather’s 1689 Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions, this narrative details the torments of one settler, known only as “The Boy of Tocutt,” in Branford Connecticut (ca. 1645–1666). While incomplete, this account is marked by a unique emphasis on the demonic pact and offers a valuable insight into the development of this demonological concept in New England. Through a close reading of “A Confession of a Boy at Tocutt” in the context of Protestant demonic covenant theology, this article establishes the demonological and narrative function of the pact in New England diabolical literature. In doing so, it reconciles this possession narrative with succeeding cases and establishes the versality of the demonic pact in New England demonology.

KEYWORDS

demonic possession, witchcraft, demonic pact, New England, Reformed Protestant demonology, Cotton Mather

The demonic possession of a young settler, known only as “The Boy of Tocutt,” in Branford, Connecticut, is an exceptional entry in New England’s colonial history. Unfolding sometime during the mid-seventeenth century (ca. 1645–1666), this possession account is compelling yet incomplete: “but a fragment of what should have been a fuller story,” according to its influential Puritan author, Cotton Mather.¹ The short narrative, detailing the demoniac’s prolonged struggle against the Devil’s temptations, appears as “A Confession of a Boy at Tocutt” in Mather’s 1689 *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions*. The resolution of the Boy’s possession, however, is not forthcoming, as Mather admits, “I don’t remember that I have heard what became of the Boy concerned”

(63–64).² Furthermore, he explains that the tale is not by his own hand as he found the manuscript amongst his grandfather's papers. As to dating, Mather estimates that "The thing happened many (perhaps thirty) years ago, and was then much discoursed of" (63). If this proves to be correct, then the Boy of Tocutt is one of the earliest recorded (but not published) possession cases in New England and likely shaped succeeding narratives through word of mouth. Above all, "A Confession of a Boy at Tocutt" (henceforth: "A Confession") exhibits a unique emphasis on the demonic pact—also known as a demonic compact, covenant, contract, league, or agreement—furthering our understanding of the development of this demonological concept in New England.

In this regard, the Tocutt possession shares many similarities with the 1671–1672 ordeal of Groton, Connecticut, demoniac Elizabeth Knapp.³ Both possession narratives were distinctly Calvinist in their assertion that children could make pacts with the Devil and be morally responsible for their actions. Brian Levack suggests that the Tocutt possession was modeled on Knapp's demonic torments, yet, based on the dating it may in fact be the reverse (Levack 2013: 183). Mary Beth Norton asserts that the Tocutt and Knapp possessions offer stark differences to later cases as neither led to a witchcraft prosecution, instead being handled entirely by clergymen (Norton 2003: 34). There are few, if any, New England demonic possession narratives that do not involve traces of a witchcraft accusation (Harley 1996: 311). This may also explain why there are no discernible records of this case in the colonial archives. "A Confession" also represents the male demoniac experience in colonial New England, a perspective underrepresented in the extant source material (Karlsen 1998: 135 n. 2). All these aspects testify to the exceptionality of the Tocutt possession and establish the need for further scholarly inquiry.

Despite this, the Tocutt case remains largely absent from the history of demonic phenomena in seventeenth-century New England.⁴ The following discussion offers a preliminary investigation with a focus on the narrative's presentation of the demonic pact. Through a close reading of "A Confession" in the context of early modern Reformed Protestant demonology, this article reconciles the Tocutt case with the broader tradition of Anglo possession narratives and establishes a much fuller picture of diabolic affliction in colonial New England. "A Confession" uses the diabolic covenant to conceptualize the demoniac's struggle against temptation, signifying the consequential act of submitting oneself to the Devil. This struggle is a fundamental element of English possession narratives, yet in this instance it manifests as a literal contractual agreement requiring explicit written confirmation.⁵ In particular, the Tocutt

case indicates that the concept of the demonic pact was not intrinsically tied to witchcraft in Reformed Protestant demonology and could be mapped to other forms of diabolic affliction.

"A Confession" is also noteworthy for its trans-Atlantic dimension. The Boy's conflict with the Devil began in the Dutch Republic and intensified after he emigrated to New England. Curiously, the Dutch provinces did not have an extensive history of demonic possession cases and the few on record were controversial, shaped by confessional tensions. The transition of the Boy's demonic temptations into diabolic occupation is thus significant as it illustrates a clear influence of developing New England demonological traditions, overlaid on the demoniac's earlier experiences. The depiction of the demoniac in "A Confession" may also be shaped by anti-Dutch sentiments during a period of simmering hostilities. Despite their shared Calvinist spirituality, England and the Dutch Republic engaged in three brief wars between 1652 and 1674, with a fierce commercial rivalry persisting during the intervening years. Fighting never actually broke out, though, meaning that while rumors of war heightened colonists' anxieties, there was no active conflict to distract them from descending into internal squabbles (Moyer 2020: 27).⁶ Further complicating this relationship were the swaths of Dutch territory being ceded to English settlers during the mid-sixteenth century. For the inhabitants of Branford, this matter was personal. Fifty men from the town and nearby New Haven Colony had been imprisoned by the Dutch governor in 1651 for attempting to settle upon lands claimed by the latter in the Delaware River region. Despite this, the New England colonies made plans over the next few years to send out further expeditions into the Delaware (Taylor 1979: 78–79). Dutch and English settlers did live in shared communities largely without issue in this period, yet the tension was always simmering beneath the surface, ready to ignite.

Mather intended *Memorable Providences* to highlight the unfolding of God's providence across the North American colonies. The 1688–1689 possession of the Goodwin children in Boston was the centerpiece of this treatise, supported by further examples of witchcraft and diabolic affliction including "A Confession." These examples are further additions "unto the foregoing histories . . . one that the reader, I believe, will count worthy to be related" (63). Mather exclaims that the book follows the "Histories of Witchcrafts & Possessions" published by learned men such as "Mr. Baxter, Mr. Glanvil, Dr. More" and intended to illustrate "that there are devils & witches; & that tho those night-birds least appear where the day-light of the Gospel comes, yet New-Engl. has had exemples [*sic*] of their existence & operation" (sig. A4v). More so, *Memorable Providences* is

directly influenced by *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences* (1684), penned by his father, Increase Mather. *Illustrious Providences* explores the manifestation of phenomena such as earthquakes, tempests, floods, witchcraft, and demonic possession in colonial North America through a Calvinist framework, interpreting these as evidence of God's continual intervention in the earthly realm. The New World offered a plethora of compelling evidence for demonologists on either side of the Atlantic, and the Mathers played a key role in circulating letters, manuscripts, and published tracts on demonic phenomena (Gasser 2017: 102).

Thus, the Tocutt demoniac was accommodated into the Anglo tradition of demonic possession cases with his name following the naming convention of preceding demoniacs: the "Boy of Burton," the "Boy of Northwich," and the "Boy of Bilson." Mather also expressively sets out in *Memorable Providences* to address uncertainty toward the demonic pact. "It has also been made a doubt by some," he writes, "whether there are any such things as witches, i.e. such as by contract or explicit covenant with the Devil, improve, or rather are improved by him to the doing of things strange in themselves, and besides their natural course" (sig. A2r). "A Confession" is unique for being predicated on a literal expression of the demonic pact, perpetuating a demonological interpretation of this concept adapted specifically to demonic possession. None of the other possession episodes in *Memorable Providences* features the demonic pact in this exact role—a further testament to its exceptionality.⁷ The many examples of demonic phenomena in *Memorable Providences* thereby provide direct evidence of the diabolic pact, in all its many forms.

"BUT WHAT I NOW PUBLISH, I FIND AMONG THE PAPERS OF MY GRAND-FATHER"

During the early period of New England's colonization, few cases of diabolic affliction appeared in personal correspondence or court records. This shifted during the mid-seventeenth century as the North American colonies began to experience a heightened sense of anxiety. According to John Demos, outbreaks of diabolic phenomena were not inherently mapped to episodes of conflict (wars or religious controversies); instead, they waxed and waned. It is in the aftermath of such conflicts, especially ones that fractured communities, that accusations of witchcraft often emerged (Demos 2004: 368–71). Witchcraft was the prevailing diabolic phenomenon that settlers experienced, and the number

of possession episodes were far lower by comparison. Relatedly, the possession cases on record were largely instigated by witchcraft, as demonic possession and witchcraft were intertwined in the early modern Anglo context, demonstrating a “near affinity” in the words of Mather (63). The diagnosis of possession in seventeenth-century New England, as David Harley explains, was often conflated with witchcraft in modern scholarship precisely because of this affinity. There is a clear demarcation between these two diabolic afflictions in the Tocutt case, though, and Mather expects his readers to recognize this (Harley 1996: 308–10). “A Confession” explicitly defines the demoniac’s affliction as an ongoing conflict with demonic temptation that transitions to a “corporal possession” (68). Straightforward cases of possession were rare as the enactment of the possession script was almost always accompanied by the naming of a human agent as the cause. In New England, only the Tocutt possession lacked an inciting witch or any hint of a witchcraft accusation, thereby offering a singular focus on its depiction of the demonic pact (Gasser 2017: 102).

New England experienced a surge of witch trials during the mid-seventeenth century as authorities there initiated legal action against fifty-seven suspected witches between 1638 and 1670 (Moyer 2020: 11). Connecticut took the most aggressive stance against witchcraft and may have been the first colony to execute an individual for this crime: Alse Young in 1647. From this date to 1663, the colony secured the highest conviction rate for witchcraft cases in colonial North America, resulting in approximately nine executions (Karlsen 1998: 20). During the 1650s, witch hunting was rife in the Connecticut Valley following the sensationalist trial of the Springfield, Massachusetts, witches. Notably, one of the accused—Hugh Parsons—was acquitted of bewitching his own children to death as there was no evidence that he had formed a diabolic covenant (Gaskill 2021: 194–96). Connecticut was also the site of the first large-scale witch hunts on the continent. The settlement of Hartford was at the center of this, yet there were a handful of cases in nearby Wethersfield whence the founders of Branford hailed. Evidently, the Boy of Tocutt’s possession unfolded during a period of sustained diabolic interest in New England. Compounding this was the emergence of heated political and religious divisions across many colonies as the population underwent rapid growth. This, in turn, made these colonies increasingly vulnerable to attack from displaced Native Americans or foreign enemies. Conditions such as these proved ideal for the manifestation of demonic possession.

Branford’s early period of settlement and proximity to other colonies is also significant. It went through several name changes during the mid-seventeenth

century, from Tocutt (anglicized from the indigenous name Totoket), to Brentford and, finally, Branford during the 1660s. The Totoket region was part of the land purchased from the Mattabesech Indians in 1638 by the early English settlers of New Haven Colony. In 1644, settlers from Wethersfield, displeased with the spiritual governance of Reverend Henry Smith, founded a village in the area (Taylor 1979: 113). The following year Reverend Abraham Pierson and a group of colonists arrived here from the settlement of Southhampton, Long Island.⁸ Pierson was Branford's first permanent minister, and he is closely tied to the early history of the town; governance of Branford was subject to the laws of New Haven Colony, and the leadership of the two settlements grew close in this period.⁹ However, Pierson led an exodus from Branford in 1665 or 1666 in protest to the absorption of New Haven Colony into Connecticut that would allow non-church members to vote in Parish matters (Moyer 2020: 32). The group moved west to found Newark (New Jersey). It would take two decades for the town to stabilize its population, and it is unknown whether the Boy remained there, joined the others in Newark, or left the settlement earlier.

When considering the matter of authorship for "A Confession," it is difficult to determine the input of the three primary figures: Cotton Mather, Mather's grandfather, and the Boy. Mather's grandfather in this scenario is either John Cotton (1585–1652) or Richard Mather (1596–1669), both prominent clergymen in this period. The text is framed as the demoniac's confession, yet it is not clear how the text was relayed. Written in the third person and drawing on learned demonological concepts, the work is clearly not of the demoniac's making. As often with such works, this account is constructed, shaping the experiences of the demoniac into a coherent narrative. Recording the tribulations of demoniacs for didactic purposes was a typical move in any case, particularly in Puritan circles. However, the individual responsible for penning this demonic narrative remains unknown. Mather does not clarify whether his grandfather authored the original manuscript or had produced a written copy from another source. In his preface to "A Confession," Mather states that he is merely transcribing the story without embellishment:

[B]ut what I now publish, I find among the papers of my grand-father, of whom the world has had such a character, that they cannot but judge, no romance or folly, nothing but what should be seririous [*sic*] and weighty could be worthy of his hands; and it is in his own hand that I have the manuscript, from whence I have caused it to be transcribed. (64)

Mather here does not doubt the authenticity of the demoniac's confession and believes it to be his Christian duty to share the story with others.

The demoniac likely related his experiences to a figure of authority who first committed it to the page. This author may be Abraham Pierson (1611–1678), the clergyman who provided spiritual guidance to the Boy. Pierson is one of the few individuals named in the text, thus indicating a time frame of ca. 1645–1666, when he was minister of Branford. George Lincoln Burr, the celebrated religious scholar, makes this contrary assertion: “The contents suggest a suspicion that the original author was nearer the boy than either [John Cotton or Richard Mather]—perhaps the Rev. John Davenport, of New Haven” (Burr 1914: 137 n. 1). Davenport (1597–1670) was an influential clergyman and spiritual leader of New Haven Colony during this period. The only other figure named in “A Confession” is “Mr. Eaton,” described as the Boy’s “uncle” (70). There are many Eatons in the colonial records, but the family with the closest connections to Branford and the New Haven Colony is that of Theophilus (ca. 1590–1658), Samuel (ca. 1596–1665), and Nathaniel Eaton (1609–1674). The Eaton brothers were a notable presence in early New England history, settling alongside Davenport in 1637. Theophilus was the first governor of New Haven Colony, while Nathaniel served as the inaugural headmaster of Harvard College. The Boy was probably part of the extended Eaton family or their intimate social network (“uncle” could be used as a term of endearment).¹⁰ This raises the possibility that the Boy hailed from a family of English Dissenters living in Rotterdam who relocated to New England. There is no mention of this in the text though, and the early section covers a span of four years in the Dutch Republic with Rotterdam inferred to be the demoniac’s home. With no specific contextual markers present in the source material and few hints available in the extant colonial records, the identity of the Boy can only be conjecture.

“A Confession” does not contain the full narrative. Mather explains that “more very observable passages could not be written for want of time, which will after appear.” He adds, “Of what did after appear, I have no account; but what did then appear, is so undoubtted and so wonderful, that it will sufficiently atone for my publication of it” (71). Another manuscript covering the conclusion to the Boy’s possession was likely produced at some point, although there is no indication of it in the extant colonial records. To this effect, Mather states that he was content to leave this account unfinished, “but I cannot without some trouble or delay inconsistent with my present designs put my self in a way to perfect it” (63). This suggests that he did not have the time to search for any

follow-up records and decided to publish it as is. Questions of authorship aside, "A Confession" provides an incomplete and overlooked account of demonic possession that offers a profound insight into the development of demonic covenant theology in seventeenth-century New England.

"MORE THAN ORDINARY"

The text describes the Boy of Tocutt as an especially sinful child, engaging in conjuring tricks and theft until his father sent him to New England for a fresh start. Unlike Catholic demoniacs, possessed individuals in Calvinist territories were usually held morally culpable for their condition along with the heinous actions they committed whilst under the Devil's influence (Levack 2013: 206). The Boy was thus responsible for inviting in Satan through his sinful ways. "A Confession" establishes that he was predisposed to wickedness from birth and easily waylaid by other reprobates on the streets of Rotterdam. "The Boy was for his natural parts, more than ordinary at seven years old" and was set on his path of sin after witnessing "a conjurer play tricks in Holland. There it was strongly suggested to him. He should be as good an artist as he" (65). Over the next few years "he used the trade of inventing lyes, and stealing mony, running away from his father, spending of it at dice, and with the vilest company and this trade he used in that space (he confessed) above forty times at least, and many strange instances he gives to it." His father, being a clergyman, offered guidance, but the Boy's heart was "sett in a way of malice against the word of God" (64–65). The Boy mocked his father's teachings and allowed others to lead him down a dark path. Youth, according to theologians, were particularly vulnerable to demonic temptation. Samuel Willard, the minister involved in the Knapp possession, warns of these dangers in a 1673 treatise: "either God or the Devil will have your young time . . . the Devil stands waiting, yea endeavouring for you, and if Gods yoke please you not, he will easily perswade you to take his; and though that may seem delightful for the present, yet know it, it will be bitterness in the latter end" (Willard 1673: 37). The Boy of Tocutt case neatly encapsulates this sentiment, highlighting the tactics that the Devil was believed to employ in pursuit of this objective.

At eleven the Boy ran away from Rotterdam to nearby Delft and there was directly confronted by the Devil, the first of many times over his young life:

[T]he Devil appeared to him there in the shape of a Boy, counselling him not to hearken to the Word of God, nor unto any of his Fathers Instructions, and propounding to him, to Enter into a Covenant with him. Being somewhat fearful at first, desired that he would not appear to him in a shape, but by a voice, and though his heart did inwardly consent, to what the Devil said. (65)

This marks the beginning of what can be termed a “spiritual possession” or “demonic obsession”: the presence of the Devil in the demoniac’s conscience rather than a corporeal occupation. This condition usually proceeded a possession, as was also the case with Knapp. In his 1616 treatise, *The Triall of Witch-craft*, Puritan clergyman and physician John Cotta defines obsessed individuals as

in whose bodies outwardly appearing no extraordinarie signes or tokens of the Divels corporall presidence, or residence in them (as was in the possessed manifest) yet are their mindes, understanding, wils, and reason palpably observed to bee besieged, captived and enchanted, by an extraordinary and more then naturall, or rather an infernall invasion of the Divels illusions. (Cotta 1616: 55)

This is an important distinction as the narrative later denotes the exact moment in which Satan takes corporeal possession of the Boy. At this young age the Boy was only just falling under the Devil’s charm and the trap was yet to be sprung.

Satan tormented the Boy with the explicit objective of sealing a demonic pact and obtaining his soul. The Boy did not agree to a full covenant with the Devil at this stage but only *inwardly consented* to further discourse. The account conveys that the demoniac was remarkably protected from Satan’s advances: “yet he was withheld, that he could not then enter into a covenant with him” (65). God’s grace preserved the Boy, undeserving as he was, throughout this ordeal. This act of divine intervention reveals the primary function of demonic possession in the Anglo sphere: providence. As the title of Mather’s *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions* infers, demonic possession was fashioned as an emblematic experience, vividly describing the horrors that befell the wicked and the faith required to overcome this affliction. Providential theology was prevalent in colonial North America and a central concept in

possession cases. Puritans in New England saw themselves as God's chosen people, thus making the Devil's wrath all the more evident here. Willard, for example, exclaims that the possession of Knapp was an example of "the hand of God upon this Land" so "that you may be prepared for shaking times, and the nearer they approach the more need have we to be hastened and roused from our loitering" (Willard 1673: sig. A2r). Any weakness or sinful desire would be exploited as, according to Mather, even the "clearest gospel-light shining in a place, will not keep some from entering hellish contracts with infernal spirits" (sig. A3r). "A Confession" precisely illustrates the Devil's implementation of the demonic covenant and his ability to lead the vulnerable into sin through temptation. Cases like this synthesized complex demonological concepts into easily comprehensible didactic examples for the layperson. The Boy's dalliance with Satan at such a young age testified to his wicked nature. This was the foundation of a demonic relationship as it allowed the Devil to gain a foothold in the Boy's body and henceforth assail his mind in pursuit of a demonic agreement.

DEMONIC COVENANT THEOLOGY

Demonic covenant theology originated in the early fourteenth century and was largely developed by Dominican inquisitors—men like Nicolau Eymeric and Nicolas Jacquier—concerned with rooting out heresy in remote regions. The demonic pact was predicated on an individual submitting to the Devil in exchange for material gain or power. Satan offered all manner of temptations to entice individuals into signing an agreement or, if this failed, used trickery or violence. The pact was largely associated with witchcraft, and many conceptions flourished from this: the witches' Sabbath, where witches congregated to worship the devil and have sex with him, and the night-time flight which helped get them there (Machielsen 2020: 4). The pact could be merely oral or take written form, usually signed and sealed in blood. An individual might commit to the Devil for life, a fixed term of years, or even with their eternal soul (Unsworth 2001: 8). The demonological authority Jean Bodin argues in his *De la Démonomanie des sorciers* (1580) that both parties needed to directly agree to a demonic pact, therefore requiring a high standard of evidence to prosecute individuals for witchcraft. One of the best indicators of a demonic covenant was the so-called witch's mark, a bodily abnormality where the Devil had branded them. Such marks were supposedly insensitive to pain and did not bleed when pricked (Levack 2013: 201). The discovery of a witch's mark on the body of the

accused was compelling evidence in court, partly because confessions of face-to-face meetings with the Devil were viewed with skepticism unless substantiated by physical proof. The witch's mark could also be interpreted as the lesion where a familiar spirit sucked blood from the host. Familiars were a central concept in English demonology, constructed as a manifestation of abstractions like personal temptation (Millar 2017: 38). The demonic pact was thus a surprisingly flexible and accommodating explanatory agent that played a significant role in early modern diabolic narratives (Machielsen 2020: 5).

Sixteenth-century continental demonology and legal theory established that witches were those who voluntarily entered into a pact with the Devil, while the possessed were those who were subjected to his external and internal assaults (Midelfort 2019: 236). This distinction, however, was not always recognized in popular narratives. Demonic possession did not necessitate the signing of a covenant, particularly when witchcraft was involved, but such narratives sometimes were configured to include such a pact. There was a perception that the demoniac was forced into signing the pact and had not benefited from this agreement. While this consideration did not totally absolve the possessed individual of their moral culpability, it did provide some justification. This was the case in 1586 when Jeanne Féry, a Soeurs Noires nun at Mons-en-Hainaut in the Spanish Low Countries, confessed to forming an agreement with the Devil at a young age after an altercation with her drunken father. At that moment the Devil gained power over her, sealing a pact with her two years later when she naively agreed to take him as a father. This infantile act of apparently free will resulted in diabolic bondage that was only undone by an exorcism and the intercession of Mary Magdalene (Ferber 2004: 105–6). Even in situations wherein the demoniacs played a more active role in securing a pact they could still retain victimhood status. The demoniac's status largely depended on the spiritual anguish they experienced and whether they had committed *maleficia* (Levack 2013: 201–2). In 1677, the infamous Bavarian painter Christoph Haizmann revealed that he had made two pacts with the Devil: one in ink and another in blood. Despite this, others perceived him as a demoniac rather than a witch. A pilgrimage to the shrine of the Blessed Virgin at Zell in Austria and repeated exorcisms subsequently liberated him from the Devil (Midelfort 2019: 237). Haizmann had indeed benefited from this agreement—offering up his soul for nine years of artistic brilliance—but was driven to this decision through poverty and despair over his father's death. The strict binaries set down by demonologists and jurists were evidently not always upheld in demonic possession cases, allowing for unique contextual readings of the demonic pact.

Furthermore, demonological theory established that one of the conditions Satan could impose on individuals who submitted to his demonic overtures was to become a witch. This was a persistent fear in Protestant possession cases, yet there is little precedent until the Salem witch trials (Levack 2013: 208). In England, only William Sommers and his sister-in-law Mary Cowper were openly suspected of being witches during their possession ordeal (1597–1598), but no charges were ever brought against them. Continental possession episodes provide more examples, such as the case with Madeleine Demadols, an Ursuline nun in Aix-en-Provence, who in 1610 was labeled by her fellow demoniac Louise Capeau as a witch (Ferber 2004: 62–78). The women had initially accused Father Louis Gaufridy of possessing them, and in their testimony they made sensationalist allegations. Facing the threat of prosecution for *maleficia*, Demadols claimed that Gaufridy had inducted her into a coven after possessing her, and she confessed that under Gaufridy's demonic thrall she was forced to participate in the witches' Sabbath and sign blood pacts with the Devil (Clark 1999: 424–25). Gaufridy even gave Demadols his own mark, branding her repeatedly with a hot iron. Based on this evidence, along with the identification of marks on Gaufridy's body, he was executed as a witch. The court exempted Demadols from prosecution at this time due to these mitigating circumstances, but she was eventually convicted of witchcraft in 1653. Her sentence, imprisonment for life in a religious institution, was unusually lenient, indicating that legal authorities had taken her earlier diabolic affliction into account (Ferber 2004: 73–74).

The demonic covenant was first explicitly defined by English theologians during the early seventeenth century (Moyer 2020: 47–48). William Perkins, a leading Puritan theologian, exemplifies the Calvinist position on demonic covenant theology. His posthumous 1610 treatise, *The Damned Art of Witchcraft*, argued that the demonic pact, rather than the practice of harmful magic, was the essence of witchcraft. "The ground of all the practises of witchcraft," Perkins writes, "is a league or covenant made betweene the witch and the Devill: wherein they doe mutually bind themselves each to other" (Perkins 1610: 41–42). Contrary to other demonological writers, Perkins thought of witchcraft less as a distinct category of crime and more as a moral condition that flowed naturally from humanity's depraved condition. He thus subscribed to the existence of an implicit or unconscious demonic covenant that encompassed idolatrous thoughts and popular folk practices such as so-called white magic. This was an outlook that emphasized the need for constant self-reflection and vigilance against superstitious beliefs (Dixon 2020: 245, 247–48). Perkins's

demonic covenant theology addressed several legal issues relating to the pact and forwarded the possibility of illegal contracts, the sufficiency of consensus between the parties, and the effect of deceit upon the contractual relationship (Unsworth 2001: 9). More so, he brought English witchcraft legal theory more into line with continental notions and stripped back the lurid details surrounding the witch's Sabbath, demonic copulation, and night flight, focusing more on the insidious nature of the Devil's attempts to bind the sinful (Dixon 2020: 239). The demonic pact was at the center of Perkins's demonology, and he effectively synthesized the disparate opinions of continental demonological writers for Protestant audiences.

Successive English theologians built on this reasoning. Richard Bernard, in his influential 1627 witchcraft manual *A Guide To Grand-Jury Men*, writes that Satan entices individuals to enter into a "compact" with him to "increase the sinne of the witches, to make them desperately wicked without hope of mercy, when they shall remember how they have renounced God, and given themselves to the divell, and thereby have provoked the just wrath of God to their utter damnation, which is that which Satan herein labours for" (Bernard 1627: 116–17). Because Bernard could not cite English examples of direct pacts with the Devil, he based his discussion on the witch-familiar relationship (Moyer 2020: 189–90). To this effect he aligned earlier English witchcraft narratives with demonic covenant theology and explained that agreements could be concluded in many different ways: "& of others some (as of their ordinary witches) hee desireth to sucke blood: for hee will have his covenant sealed with blood one way or other" (Bernard 1627: 110–11). Bernard also subscribed to Perkins's notion of an implicit pact and provided further explanation: "there is a double league, the one open and expressly made with the Divell visibly appearing . . . the other is close, secret, and implicate, in a mutuall consent, but without any expresse termes from either the one or the other, as in the former" (Bernard 1627: 121–24). Perkins and Bernard thereby laid the foundation of the demonological and legal aspects of witchcraft trials in the Anglophone world, significantly influencing New England theologians.

The appearance of a written demonic pact was a rarity in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English diabolic narratives, as the harboring of a familiar spirit remained the primary indication of a demonic relationship (Millar 2017: 57–58). English law reflected this concern: the 1604 Witchcraft Act imposed the death penalty for anyone who "shall consult covenant with enter-taine employ feede or rewarde any evill and wicked spirit to or for any intent or pu[r]pose" ("An Act against Conjurat[i]on" 1604). Blood pacts enacted through

familiar spirits were a consistent element of the pamphlet literature, yet written contracts and direct agreements did not gain traction until the English Civil War period (1642–1652). One of its first appearances was in a 1645 anonymous witchcraft tract in which one of the accused, Joan Williford, confessed that “she gave some of her blood to the Divell, who wrote the covenant betwixt them. She further saith that the Divell promised to be her servant about twenty yeeres” (*The Examination* 1645: 1). Charlotte-Rose Millar suggests that this emphasis on oaths during the Civil War period inspired accused witches and pamphleteers to use terms such as “covenant,” “contract,” or “league” when describing demonic pacts (2017: 60). Moreover, English diabolic pamphlets did not always describe the first meeting between witch and Devil or the agreement that they came to. Controlling a familiar spirit was already evidence of a demonic relationship and sufficient grounds to acquire a conviction. The acceptance of demonic covenant theology in popular literature during the mid-seventeenth century further imbued this relationship with symbolic meaning.

The central theme of this symbolism was temptation. Reformed Protestantism framed temptation as the single most important aspect of demonic activity, and this emphasis profoundly shaped depictions of the demonic pact in English devotional literature (Johnstone 2006: 95–96). Demonic possession is the most visceral form of temptation, manifesting the internal conflict against diabolic advances as a grievous physical affliction. Indeed, the demoniac’s resistance to temptation may even be the impetus for their possession as it drove Satan to more drastic action. The clearest indication of this was the case of the demoniac Robert Briggs in 1573–1574: he was grievously tempted by the Devil with riches in return for his soul.¹¹ In one notable 1596 possession episode, Satan offered Thomas Darling—the “Boy of Burton”—a “kingdom,” a “crowne,” a “faire woman,” and “a bag full of gold and silver” if he would worship him (Bee et al. 1597: 11, 19, 40). These demoniacs were tempted to yield to Satan in a fashion analogous to the demonic pact, yet there was no suggestion that the consequence of their submission was to become a witch. This process has parallels with German Lutheran communities where possessions sometimes began with temptation and then transitioned into demonic occupation (Midelfort 2019: 236–37). Signing a covenant was one of the conditions the Devil could impose on an individual that succumbed to demonic temptation, but it was seldom framed as such in English possession cases. These earlier possession narratives conveyed the struggle against temptation primarily through the demoniac’s torments rather than through the conceptual framework of a covenant. The appearance of a written covenant in later New England diabolic cases can consequently be understood as an alternative model for conceptualizing this

struggle. While this depiction of the demonic pact can be simply understood as a variation of existing narrative and theological themes, its functionality is unique to New England spirituality.

The demonic pact was firmly established in colonial New England's fledgling legal system, and many settlers interpreted diabolic phenomena through this lens. New England statutes defined the crime of witchcraft exclusively in terms of the demonic pact while maintaining emphasis on familiar spirits (Moyer 2020: 49–50). Citing Mosaic law “(Ex. 22. 18. Lev. 20. 27. Dut. 18. 10.),” the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony declared in 1641: “If any man or woeman be a witch, (that is hath or consulteth with a familiar spirit,) They shall be put to death” (“94. Capitall Laws. 2” 1641: 273). The following year, the Colony of Connecticut adopted this framing in its *Capital Laws of Connecticut*, 1642 and later codified it in 1650. Rebecca Greensmith, one of the accused in the 1662–1663 Hartford Witch Trials, was convicted on this basis. Increase Mather details this conviction and the demonic torments suffered by Ann Cole in *Illustrious Providences* (Mather 1684: 135–39). Curiously, anti-Dutch sentiment likely shaped this case as one of the witches was a Dutch woman named Judith Varlett (Moyer 2020: 149–50). More so, Ann's demonic “Discourse passed into a Dutch-tone,” a development seemingly “impossible for one not familiarly acquainted with the Dutch” (Mather 1684: 136–37). Another of the accused was Cole's neighbor Greensmith. While giving testimony to magistrates, Greensmith was adamant that she had never made “an express covenant” with the Devil yet admitted that he “had frequently the carnal knowledge of her body” and that she “promised to go with him when he called, which accordingly she had sundry times done.” Later she testified that Satan intended to make her fully submit, telling her “that at Christmass they would have a merry meeting, and then the covenant between them should be subscribed” (Mather 1684: 137–38). Based on Greensmith's familiarity with the Devil and stated intention to seal a demonic pact, the court passed a sentence of execution. As Greensmith's conviction illustrates, the demonic pact was prevalent in New England demonology and constituted compelling evidence of diabolic crime.

“NOW HE MUST ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT”

New England's emphasis on the demonic pact is a defining aspect of “A Confession” and functions as the central framing device. The Boy, at this early stage of the narrative, had not yet committed to any explicit agreement with Satan. Following his experience in Delft, the Boy returned to the care of

his father who “procured many Christians to join with him in a day of humiliation; confessed and bewailed his sins, prayed for him.” Hoping that a change of scenery would wake him from his life of sin, the Father “sent him to New-E. and so committed him to God” (65). He thus emigrated to North America, likely joining other members of his family, and soon ended up in the bustling settlement of New Haven. Here, Satan continually tempted him with offerings of material wealth:

From that time to this being now about Sixteen years old, the Devil hath constantly come to him by a voice; and he held a constant Discourse with him; and all about Entering into a Covenant with him: and still perswaded to have it written and sealed, making many promises to allure him, and telling him many Stories of Dr. Faustus and other Witches how bravely they have lived, and how he should live deliciously, and have Ease, Comfort, and Money; and sometimes threatning to tear him in pieces if he would not. (65)

The mention of Faust—the most well-known example of a demonic pact to early modern audiences—clearly indicates this account’s objective. Like the Faust legend, “A Confession” demonstrates how the Devil entices individuals to his side and conveys the dramatic stakes of signing a demonic pact. In contrast to Faust, though, the Boy was “strangely kept, by an hand of God, from making a covenant.” Even though “his heart was strangely enclined to write and seal an agreement, yet such dreadful horror did seiz upon him, at the very time, from the word of God and such fears of his eternal perishing, that he could not do it then” (66).

This scenario also reflects Perkins’s understanding of the demonic pact. The normative view was that the pact represented an apostasy from which none could return, yet Perkins argues that the Lord could reclaim the wicked (Dixon 2020: 243–44). Mather echoes this exact sentiment in his own demonological writing: “From the Hell of witchcraft our merciful Jesus can fetch a guilty creature to the glory of heaven. Our LORD hath sometimes recovered those who have in the most horrid manner given themselves away to the Destroyer of their souls” (61). The Tocutt possession narrative continually highlights the demoniac’s depraved nature, so it seems that his preservation is shaped as a display of God’s grace rather than any reflection of the child’s innate faith. Accordingly, his conflict with the Devil is primarily designed for others to heed and reflect upon as an assurance of God’s power.

"A Confession" focuses on the act of formally sealing a written demonic covenant. The demoniac's resistance eventually forced Satan to manifest before him again; this time "at New-haven, in the shape of a Boy." Sometime later at nearby Branford, whilst living with his older brother, Satan visited the Boy in the shape of a fox,

at which time, at first, they had loving discourse, as formerly; but at last the Devil was urgent upon him, and told him he had baffled with him so long, now he must enter into an agreement, or he would tear him in pieces: he saying, How should I do it? would you have me write upon my hands? No, (saith the Devil) Look here, and with that, set Paper, and Pen, and Ink like Blood before him. (66)

Satan's relentless pursuit of the demoniac was intended to wear down his spiritual defenses. In this case the influence of Perkins and Bernard is apparent, as the text stipulates that individuals must formally consent to signing an explicit agreement under their own power. The demoniac had already formed an implicit pact of sorts, allowing evil into his heart through impure thoughts, but a formal declaration was required for Satan to claim his soul. In this case the Devil gave the Boy an ultimatum and summoned the necessary contractual materials to finalize their agreement. Satan's resort to physical threats also exposed his desperation along with the limited agency that he wields. While the Devil can inflict terrible violence on individuals, the extent of this violence is proportional to their faith (Johnstone 2006: 85). Divine protection is available to all who submit themselves without reservation, and the Boy's torments are ultimately the result of his inability to fully embrace God.

The presentation of the pact in this narrative is also noteworthy. "A Confession" does not stipulate what appears on the paper set before the demoniac; Protestant demonologists were not overly concerned with the specific contractual format. Perkins merely explains that "for the ratifying hereof" the individual "gives to the devil for the present, either his owne hand-writing, or some part of his blood, as a pledge & earnest pennie to bind the bargain" (1610: 48). Bernard explains that "This league is uttered either by word of mouth, of such as cannot write; or in writing by others, and that by their owne blood" (1627: 110). In the Tocutt narrative the "league" takes the form of either a blank piece of paper or a contract that the Devil encouraged the Boy to sign. The ink is described as "like blood," but beyond this there is little description of the contractual materials, probably because the signing of the pact was Satan's ultimate

goal, concluding the entire ordeal, rather than the impetus for the individual to gain power and wreak havoc as was the case in witchcraft narratives. The Boy's sealing of an agreement with Satan represented a submission to temptation and the forfeit of his soul, with this being the central concern of "A Confession."

In contrast, other New England diabolic cases provide more specific examples of the forms that the pact could take. One prevalent variation was the *Devil's book*, which displayed the name of those who had committed their selves to evil. In his 1693 *Wonders of The Invisible World*, Mather writes, "A large part of the persons tortured by these diabolical spectres, are horribly tempted by them, sometimes with fair promises, and sometimes with hard threatenings, but alwayes with felt miseries, to sign the Devils laws, in a spectral book laid before them" (1693: 50). During Knapp's possession, the Devil's book performed a central role. Willard provides details of this book and Knapp's confession of satanic dalliances in a 1672 manuscript.¹² As with the Boy, Satan tempted Knapp for many years with the "treaty of a covenant, & offering largely to her: viz. such things as suited her youthful fancye." The Devil's visitations eventually grew more frequent; he presented her with a "booke written with blood of covenants made by others with him" and "urged upon her constant temptations to murder" her parents, children, neighbors, and even herself (Willard [1672] 1883: 8–9). After being worn down, she consented to signing a covenant for a "terme of time . . . for 7 yeers; one yeere shee was to be faithful in his service, & then the other six hee would serve her, & and make her a witch." Willard explains the process of fulfilling the contractual agreement in detail:

[Satan] with a knife cut her finger, hee caught the blood in his hand, & then told her she must write her name in his booke, shee answered, shee could not write, but hee told her he would direct her hand, &. then took a sharpened sticke, & dipt in the blood, & put it into her hand, & guided it, & and shee wrote her name with his helpe. ([1672] 1883: 14)

This confession raised the possibility that Knapp had become a witch, and this consideration became Willard's primary concern (Levack 2013: 212). The clergyman pressed Knapp on her relationship with Satan and subsequently assisted her in resisting his temptations.

Contradictions marked Knapp's confessions. She claimed that the individuals responsible for her afflictions were named in the Devil's book and that apparitions in their "likenesse & habit" had assaulted her (Willard [1672] 1883: 8). She later withdrew this claim when the witchcraft accusations failed to

gain traction. The dismissal of witchcraft left two alternatives: Knapp was the innocent victim of terrible pressures brought by the Devil alone, or there was a prior agreement between the two of them of which her afflictions were a manifestation. Willard appears to have found the fault with Knapp as he continually beseeched her to confess: the Devil was always implicated as an ultimate source of evil, yet there still must be somebody whose guilt could be more immediately discovered (Demos 2004: 116). Eventually Knapp denied ever committing to a pact as her hand had been stayed “by the providence of God.” She declared that Satan “had deceived her concerning those p[er]sons impeached by here, that hee had in their likenesse or resemblance tormented her” (Willard [1672] 1883: 12, 15). This explanation actually anticipated the critique of spectral evidence that emerged during the Salem witch trials (Levack 2013: 212). Willard accepted Knapp’s assertion that she had not actually formed a demonic league and proceeded to treat her as a victim (Demos 2004: 107–8). Despite all this buildup, the narrative does not reveal whether Knapp succumbed to Satan or was able to conquer his temptations. It does, nevertheless, reveal the narrative function of the demonic pact in possession cases that involved witchcraft, thereby offering a contrasting demonological model to the Tocutt possession.

Demonic covenant theology underwent further developments in the late seventeenth century. During the Salem witch trials, for example, the enslaved woman Tituba gave testimony that she had signed the Devil’s book and in its pages witnessed other marks made by women in the community. These marks served as evidence in subsequent witchcraft accusations at Salem. While relating their experiences to magistrates, the demoniacs, termed the “afflicted girls,” claimed that witches in the form of specters descended upon them with the offer of a demonic league. Torture followed these offers. The afflicted were adamant that they refused to sign the book and qualified that they had not even touched it. Especially interesting in this case is the role of George Burroughs, the Salem clergyman who was later executed on charges of witchcraft. Like Louis Gaufridy, Burroughs was fashioned as an agent of the Devil with the demoniacs testifying that he offered them power and riches: “He would give them all to her, if she would write in his book” (Mather 1693: 96). He was hence elevated into a demonic figure far above the common witch, playing the part of tempter like his master Satan. This portrayal of Burroughs made the witch’s Sabbath legible in a New England context, replacing sensationalist European depictions with a gathering involving a devilish Lord’s Supper where the assembled dined on blood-red bread (Gasser 2017: 109).

The Salem witch trials offer an interesting parallel to continental diabolic narratives in that they illustrate a distinctly Calvinist interpretation of many prevalent demonological concepts.

By comparison, there was no expressed concern in the Tocutt case that the demoniac would become a witch. The depiction of the pact in this instance is far more straightforward. The absence of an inciting witch removed the narrative requirement for the demoniac to provide names and placed the spotlight solely on his conflict with temptation. Reformed Protestant demonology had previously established that the demonic covenant could take the form of a familiar spirit, appear as a written document, or manifest within the individual's conscience. The exact form of the diabolic pact was therefore highly contextual, uniquely configured to fulfill different narrative requirements. Conversely, demonologists argued that the Devil presented the pact in whatever capacity he thought would be most enticing. Citing scripture, Bernard speaks to this exact point: "That Satan hath his wyles, Ephes. 11. his devices. 2. Cor. 2. 11. his depth and policies, Reu. 2.24. his snares to catch people at unawares" (1627: 119). This demonological reading exemplifies the Protestant conception of the Devil, providing yet another example of the insidious threat he posed to humanity.

Despite the Boy's receptivity to the Devil's advances, God's protection persisted. This protection is critical as Protestants were far less likely than Catholics to believe that the individual could break a demonic covenant (Levack 2013: 132). It was therefore crucial to prevent its signing in the first place. In response to the Boy's resistance, Satan grew desperate and applied further pressure: the Devil "had baffled with him, he set a year and half time for consideration. The last quarter of a year is yet to come. The Devil told him, if he let him alone so long, he would baffle with him still." To this the demoniac again attempted to stall, answering "if he did not yeild then, he would give him leave to torment him whilst he lived" (67). Thus, the Boy provoked further torments and was only able to find relief through invoking God's mercy. In the midst of one particularly fierce assault at the hands of the satanic fox, the demoniac finally summoned his courage and cried out "Lord, Jesus, rebuke the devil!" to which "the fox, pen, ink and paper vanished." Despite this intervention, the demoniac's "Will was bent to write & seal the agreement, having his discourse yet with Satan by voice" (67). The Devil's temptations did not cease, though, and because the Boy was unable to abandon his wickedness, the torments soon returned.

“THE DEVIL TOOK A CORPORAL POSSESSION OF HIM”

The Boy's demonic affliction intensified when he began to ridicule his own brother, who was suffering with some form of convulsions (natural or otherwise). The Boy “laughed and mocked at him, and acted the convulsion fits. A while after God sent convulsion fits on himself; in which time, his former terrors, the Wrath of God, Death, Hell, Judgment, and Eternity were presented to him” (67). Convulsions were a typical marker of demonic possession, but in this instance described as originating from God's hand. The Boy continued to transgress and defy God's grace, refusing to atone: “He would fain then have confessed his sins, but when he was about to do it, the Devil still held his mouth, that he could not. He entreated God, to release him, promising to confess & forsake his sins, and the Lord did so; but he being well, grew as bad, or worse than ever” (67). “A Confession” highlights God's preservation of the demoniac while also establishing the fraught nature of this situation.

The Boy's depraved nature prevented his full deliverance and allowed the demonic torments to carry on: “About six weeks-since, his convulsion fits came again three times most dreadfully, with some Intermissions, and his former horrors & fears” (67). The convulsions returned repeatedly until he offered a sincere confession. Like the exposure of a witch, a confession was thought to force Satan to give up his side of the bargain, breaking the soul's bondage and casting the individual back on the mercy of heaven (Gaskill 2021: 148–49). The Devil thereby did everything in his power to prevent knowledge of their deal coming to light. This included sealing the mouth of the demoniac. Thus, when the Boy did attempt a genuine confession, Satan prevented him from uttering the words of atonement: “He would have confessed his Sins but could not” (67). During this time the demoniac began to attract the attention of the wider community, and many flocked to his bedside to witness God's providence being enacted.

After months of torment, the Boy finally offered a confession. He had come to the realization that it was his own depravity that had entangled him in the Devil's snares (Godbeer 1992: 113). The demoniac consequently admitted to one individual at his bedside that he had “familiarity with the Devil” and then requested the presence of Branford's minister Reverend Pierson. When the minister arrived, the Boy “confessed all, how it had been with him,” to which “the convulsion fits left him” (67–68). On that night the Devil descended upon him with fresh anger and threatened, “Had he blabbed out such things? He would teach him to blabb! and if he would not then write and seal the agreement, he

would tear him in pieces.” The Boy again refused and Satan, bereft of all other options, “took a corporal possession of him, and hath not ceased to torment him extremely ever since.” Now the Boy exhibited clear demonic behavior: “If any thing be spoken to him, the Devil answereth (and many times he barks like a fox, and hisseth like a serpent) sometimes with horrible blasphemies against the name of Christ” (68).

The text’s author notes that the demoniac related the Devil’s words to the individuals assembled at his bedside during lucid moments. Satan’s primary objective remained the same, “urging him to seal the covenant still, and that he will bring paper, pen and ink in the night, when none shall see, pleading that God hath oust him off, that Christ cannot save him” (68). The Devil’s insistence that the Boy sign the pact became all-consuming and he grappled with these demonic advances every night. Conversely, this desperate struggle against Satan also elevated the demoniac closer to God. In some instances, “he is ready to yeild to all in a desperate way. Sometimes he breaks out into confession of his former sins, as they come into his mind; exceedingly judging himself, and justifying GOD in His for ever leaving of him in the hands of Satan” (68). The Boy thus moved others around him to tears with his pious rhetoric, illustrating the extent of God’s mercy and his love for humanity.

Once he was heard to Pray in such a manner so sutable to his Condition, so Aggravating his Sin, and pleading with God for mercy, and in such a strange, high, enlarged manner, as judicious godly persons then present, affirm they never heard the like in their lives, that it drew abundance of tears from the eyes of all present, being about twenty persons. (68–69)

These moments of ecstatic faith were only fleeting. At other times the word of God or prayers only elicited unbearable agony. The Devil’s full power over the demoniac had yet to develop, and the apex of the Boy’s suffering was still to come.

“HE HATH KEPT HIS BODY IN CONTINUAL MOTION”

Now with a captive audience, the Boy related his terrifying experiences with the Devil. These relations also form part of his confession, as it is made clear that he was culpable for the torments heaped upon him. First, the demoniac confessed that he once invoked the powers of Satan to harm an innocent animal in an

act of malicious cruelty. If the Devil could perform this act, then the demoniac would continue in his sinful ways. This discourse establishes that the Boy was an all-too-willing participant in this episode as he proposed his own terms to Satan, seemingly on a whim and without any consideration of the cost to his salvation. He revealed to the assembled crowd that once,

in Discourse he told the Devil, that if he would make his Spittle to scald a dog, he would then go on in a way of Lying and Dissembling, and believe that he should, do it, which he said, he did with all his heart, and so spit on the dog, and with that a deal of Scalding Water did poure on the Dog. In pursuance of his Promise, he went on in a way of Lying and Dissembling: That when he was urged about it, that he had done some mischief to the dog, then he fell down into a Swound as if had been dead. (69)

This confession produced an immediate effect. “As soon as he had confessed this, the Devil went out of him with an astonishing noise, to the terrour of those then, present: and so he continued one day” (69). But this relief was only temporary as the Boy remained in the thrall of Satan. Stoking his faith, the demoniac attempted to hold out against further assaults. The following day, “being much troubled in himself for one special passage in his Discourse with the Devil, when he appeared to him as a fox; saith he to the Devil, I have formerly sought to God, and He hath been near unto me” (69). This is yet another striking example of the demoniac’s fickle nature, oscillating between modes of wickedness and exemplary piety.

The Boy’s invocation of God’s grace only provoked Satan to violent threats: “With that the Devil enraged, said unto him then, What, are you got hither and fell to threatning of him. He said to him again, But I find no such thoughts now, but do & will believe you now more than the word of God which saith in Isa. 55, Seek the Lord &c. and said further, What comfort you shall afford me, I shall rely upon you for it” (69–70). Isaiah 55 centers on God’s path for moving individuals from their earthly desires to fulfillment, peace, and joy. Notably, this passage emphasizes the need to abandon worldly matters in pursuit of forming a covenant with God. This is the exact sentiment that Satan was attempting to subvert. Yet again, divine protection is offered to the Boy and, yet again, he is unable to fully receive it.

Remembring this Passage the Devil appeared to him, ready to enter into him again. Thereby much astonished, having the Bible in his hand, he

opened it, &, as it were of it self, at that place of Isai. 55: his Eye was fixed upon it, and his Conscience accusing him for abusing the Word a year ago, his heart failing him, and the Devil entred into him again a Second time, railing upon him, & calling him, Blab tongue, and Rogue! he had promis'd to keep things secret, he would teach him to blabb, he would tear him in pieces. (70)

The demoniac's faltering at this moment is far more consequential than any time previously. Satan's assault was fierce, and the Boy's inability to accept God's grace resulted in repossession.

Having resumed corporeal possession of the Boy, the Devil unleashed his full wrath. The Boy consequently began to exhibit the typical markers of possession: ventriloquism, blasphemy, bodily contortions, falling senseless, clairvoyance, and levitation. From this day onward, Satan "hath kept his body in continual motion, speaking in him, and by him, with a formidable voice: sometimes singing of verses wicked and witty, that formerly he had made against his father's ministry, and the word of God &c" (70). The Boy also displayed precognitive abilities, forewarning of a letter sent by his uncle Mr. Eaton before it even arrived and anticipating exactly when certain people would show up at his bedside. These incidents only intensified over time. Satan's objective of forcing a league with the Boy seemed to have been overtaken by his rage as he proceeded to deliver endless torments on the demoniac. Most disturbing was the Devil's continual abduction of him, levitating his body and casting it across the room with terrible power. The Goodwin demoniacs were also subjected to a similar experience: "carried with an incredible swiftness thro the air, having, but just their toes now and then upon the ground" (14). Such phenomena were perceived as clear demonstrations of demonic agency. Satan was subject to the laws of nature like any other being, but he could push these boundaries to their limits as the Boy experienced firsthand (Clark 1999: 163–64). On three occasions "two being with him, their backs turned, the Devil carried him away, they knew not how, & after search they found him in a cellar, as dead, but after a little space he came to life again." Later, Satan "threw him up into a chamber, stopped him up into a hole," where others found him. Finally, the Devil "carried [him] about a bow-shot and threw him into a hog-stye amongst swine, which ran away with a terrible noise" (71). Each incident vividly conveys the torments that the wicked bring upon themselves, demonstrating the dire consequences of straying from the righteous path.

The narrative suddenly concludes at this point. This abrupt ending suggests that the author was recording these demonic experiences *in situ* with a follow-up account forthcoming. However, the latter half of the narrative was presumably not completed in time to fall into the hands of Mather's grandfather, so the conclusion is not known. Reflecting on the providential meaning of the Boy's affliction, "A Confession" simply ends this way:

Here is as much to be seen of the Venome of Sin, the Wrath of God against Sin, the Malice of the Devil, and yet his limited Power, and the Reasonings of Satan in an ocular Demonstration, as hath fallen out in any Age. Also the strange & High Expressions of a distressed Soul, in a way of Judging himself and pleading for Mercy, such as may be wondered at by all that hear of it. (71)

This demoniac is thereby presented as an exemplar of suffering, depicting the effects of sin and temptation upon the soul. God's mercy is enacted through the Boy—a lifelong sinner who is continually preserved by divine intervention—for all to witness. There is no indication that an exorcism was enacted, and it is unlikely that one was even intended. The text places emphasis on the demoniac's confession and indicates that relief came once he began to atone. This suggests that God would free him from his torments when he had offered full repentance. Exorcism, or dispossession, was no longer the only recourse to demoniac assault in the Anglo tradition and deliverance could be procured through other means.¹³ Once the Boy had outright rejected the Devil's offer of a covenant and endured his rage, he would be restored to full health with renewed piety.

CONCLUSION

The mid-seventeenth-century surge in demonological interest to which the Tocutt possession contributed was followed by a period of relative calm. From 1664 to 1688 only three individuals were convicted of witchcraft in the New England colonies, and none of these cases resulted in execution (Karlsen 1998: 28–29). Relatedly, possession episodes were scarce during this period. This is why "A Confession" stands as a unique possession case, limited as it is. Demonic covenant theology was not a prominent element in prior Anglo demonic possession cases, and its centrality in this narrative is a testament to its versatility.

Here the narrative offers a distinctive conceptual model for demonic possession by presenting the pact as a manifestation of the demoniac's struggle with temptation. "A Confession" illustrates Satan's tactics in persuading individuals to submit to a demonic covenant yet does not elaborate on the form that such a covenant takes precisely because the completion of this objective would be the endpoint in this particular scenario. In contrast with contemporaneous New England diabolic cases, there was therefore no further demonological and narrative function for the pact to fulfill in this demonic possession narrative.

The function of the pact in the Tocutt possession consequently reveals an ongoing development of diabolic covenant theology throughout the latter half of the seventeenth century, culminating in a far more intricate depiction of such theology in the Salem witch trials. Thus, the Boy of Tocutt case stands as a fascinating entry in New England's colonial records, one that highlights a unique characteristic of New England demonology. While the identity of the demoniac remains a mystery, his harrowing ordeal illustrates the centrality of temptation in this context. Ultimately, "A Confession of a Boy at Tocutt" is an evocative didactic tale that exemplifies humanity's perpetual battle against temptation and the harsh consequences that may befall anyone who fails in this endeavor.

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NOTES

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1. The usage of the term *Puritan* remains a contentious scholarly issue as it was originally employed as a slur against individuals deemed to be overzealous in their religious convictions. These individuals called themselves the *Godly*. This article frames Puritan and Godly in the Collinson mold as the "hotter sort of Protestants," further elaborating on this definition with the descriptive markers provided by Michael P. Winship. Puritans are thereby defined here as the most determined seekers of salvation, the most concerned with God's providence, and the most committed activists for moral and spiritual reform (Collinson 1967; Winship 2018: 1–2).

2. All subsequent quotations from Mather's *Memorable Providences* are cited parenthetically.
3. John Demos has carried out the most extensive study on the Knapp possession (2004: 97–131).
4. References to the Tocutt case are scattered throughout the scholarly literature and the only scholars to engage with this case in any meaningful capacity are Norton (2003: 34–35) and Godbeer (1992: 112–14). George Lincoln Burr reprints this case in his classic 1914 study of New England witchcraft (1914: 136–41).
5. The central role of temptation in English demonism is expertly outlined in Johnstone 2006.
6. The most prominent of these rumors was a Native American–Dutch plot to cut off settlers between the Hudson and Connecticut Valley. Fears of this plot were so great that in 1653 the New Haven and Connecticut colonies united in an appeal to Oliver Cromwell for assistance (see Henneken 2016).
7. The Goodwin possession account made little reference to demonic pacts, mentioning only that the offending witch, Mary Glover, had made a “Covenant with Hell” but giving no indication that the Devil had attempted to force a pact with the demoniacs during their possessions (Mather 1689: 11).
8. There are no modern scholarly histories of Totoket or Branford. The most extensive study remains Rockey 1892.
9. For a modern overview of New Haven's colonial history and court system, see Blue 2015.
10. Only one of the Eaton brothers, Nathaniel, was known to have spent any time in the Dutch Republic, but he did not have any children at that time. John Davenport was also in Holland for a few years during this period and his son, John Jr., was born at The Hague in 1635. Davenport and his son left for New England just two years later.
11. For a detailed study on the Briggs possession, see Sands 2002.
12. This article uses an 1883 reproduction of the original manuscript, edited by Samuel A. Green and appearing as *Groton in the Witchcraft Times*.
13. For a survey of resistance practices in seventeenth-century Reformed Protestant demonic possession cases, see Tan 2017: 135–53.

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