

The Use of Transference in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts

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Today, as it has been for the past three centuries, the subject of witchcraft in seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay Colony remains a source of curiosity and perplexity for students of American history. Cotton Mather could have easily been writing to the modern reader when he stated in *Memorable Providences*, “It must be the Subject, and not the Manner or the Author of the writing that has made any people desire its publication.”¹ Consequently, it is not surprising to find that the New England Puritans’ engrossment with the Devil, witchcraft, and diabolical possession has been carefully examined by social scientists within an interdisciplinary approach consisting of history, sociology, religion, anthropology, philosophy, and psychology.

In renewing a psychological inquiry into the seventeenth-century Puritan experience with witchcraft and diabolical possession, an endeavor will be made to follow Erik Erikson’s suggestion of using psychoanalysis as a historical tool and not leaving “history to the nonclinical observer.”² The intent of this essay is to use the psychoanalytic concept of transference to enhance our understanding of two instances of “diabolical possession” in late seventeenth-century Massachusetts. This essay will also examine the therapeutic alliances which developed between two female possesses and the two ministers, Samuel Willard and Cotton Mather, who attempted to extricate these possessed individuals.

Psychological concepts and the psychoanalytic perspective have been used previously by several researchers and have provided greater insight into the Puritan mind and Puritan behavior related to the Devil and witchcraft. Hansen’s study of witchcraft in New England illustrated the similarity between the fits and

convulsions suffered by Elizabeth Knapp, the possessee under Samuel Willard's care, and the description of hysteria given two hundred years later by Charcot and Janet. Hansen shows how Willard's description of Knapp's diabolical possession parallels the description of clinical hysteria cited by Breuer and Freud in their *Studies of Hysteria*.³ In their 1982 work, Davidson and Lytle incorporated theories of abnormal psychology in comparing the behavior of the bewitched girls of Salem with the symptoms associated with conversion disorder.⁴ The most comprehensive and original use of psychology and psychoanalysis toward the study of the Puritan experience with witchcraft is John Demos' *Entertaining Satan*.⁵ In his investigation of Elizabeth Knapp's possession, Demos applied several psychological and psychoanalytic concepts and theories such as anorexia nervosa, exhibitionism, hypochondria and conversion disorder, and certain aspects of transference.⁶

This essay will continue the use of the psychoanalytic perspective for the purpose of studying the Puritan experience with diabolical possession in the case of Elizabeth Knapp and Samuel Willard and the case of Martha Goodwin and Cotton Mather. Within both cases, the similarities between minister-possessee relationship and that of the therapist-patient (analyst-analysand) relationship will also be emphasized. The study of these two relationships will clearly show that transference and countertransference developed within these two cases of possession. Through the study of the development and active use of transference in seventeenth-century Massachusetts, the relationship and interaction between ministers and possesseees can be assessed from a modern perspective.

I

Two months after she first became possessed in 1671, Elizabeth Knapp of Groton, Massachusetts, in a low but audible voice, declared to the Reverend Samuel Willard, "Oh, you black rogue, I do not love thee, but you had better love me."⁷ To Willard and his contemporaries, this statement was considered the ravings of a sixteen-year-old adolescent suffering from distemperament due to natural or diabolical causes or possibly it was the Devil speaking from within Elizabeth's body. The modern scientific interpretation of Elizabeth's "black rogue" declaration looks beyond the diabolical roots for her behavior and shifts to a psychological examination of her statement. What conscious or unconscious cognitions would cause her to make this statement and produce the fits and seizures she also exhibited? The shift from diabolical etiology to psychological/psychoanalytic etiology presents the likelihood that transference, the crucial component of psychoanalysis, had developed within the Willard-Knapp relationship.

Although numerous psychoanalytic concepts are applicable to the study of New England witchcraft, it is the concept of transference and to a lesser degree countertransference which enhances our understanding of the minister-possessee relationship. The concept of transference has gone through many reformulations

since first conceptualized by Sigmund Freud. Having changed his views on transference several times, Freud ultimately perceived the activity of transference as the “patient seeing in his analyst the return—reincarnation of some important figure out of his childhood or past, and consequently transfers onto him feelings and reactions that undoubtedly applied to the model.”⁸ Through this process of psychic substitution, feelings and attitudes harbored toward another individual in the past are brought into a relationship with a totally different person, the therapist or an individual who fulfills the role of the therapist such as respected ministers from the community.⁹ Although used by the patient as a major form of resistance, it becomes, once observed by the therapist, of pivotal importance in bringing the patient’s unconscious conflicts to consciousness. The task of analysis is regarded to be extremely arduous if the therapeutic relationship is devoid of transference.¹⁰

Transference has evolved to become the centerpiece of psychoanalytic treatment due mainly to the unique window of opportunity it provides for the patient’s infantile feelings and desires to clearly stand out.¹¹ For transference to be of most service, the therapist or analyst must be able to interpret the transference as an explanation of the patient’s behaviors and feelings and also to infer whether the transference is alluding to similarities between the present circumstances and other life experiences.¹² The task of properly interpreting transference becomes more difficult by the fact that there are several varieties of transference.

Positive transference refers to the patient’s empathetic feelings of love, admiration, and attachment directed toward the therapist or significant other. Idealized transference and mirror transference are two common types of transference which fall under the broad heading of positive transference. In idealized transference, the patient attempts to put the therapist on a pedestal in order to re-establish the childhood wish for the idealized parent. Mirror transference takes place when the therapist is viewed as the patient’s alter ego, reflecting the patient’s desire to be regarded as a respected, wise, and well-liked individual.¹³ Mirroring transference is also expressed when the patient is in need of recognition and acceptance. Finally, negative transference is seen as a blend of hate, disrespect, and aggression targeted toward the therapist fulfilling the role of the parent or significant other. The minister-possessee relationships contain many of the key elements of these variations of transference.

Any investigation into the use of transference must also address the phenomenon of countertransference and its critical role in the therapist-patient relationship. Countertransference has been described as transference in reverse, with the exception that it is the patient’s transference that acts as the triggering mechanism for the therapist’s countertransference. In countertransference, the therapist’s unconscious conflicts become a source of possible interference when the therapist “invests the patient with certain properties which bear upon his past experiences” rather than constitute objective reactions to the patient’s behavior.¹⁴ Countertransference may be both positive or negative in form, and is likely to be

manifested through acts of irrational kindness or irrational hostility directed toward the patient. Since the record of the two minister-possessee cases to be examined are delayed written accounts by the participating ministers, instances of countertransference may be camouflaged though some aspects of countertransference appear to be present.

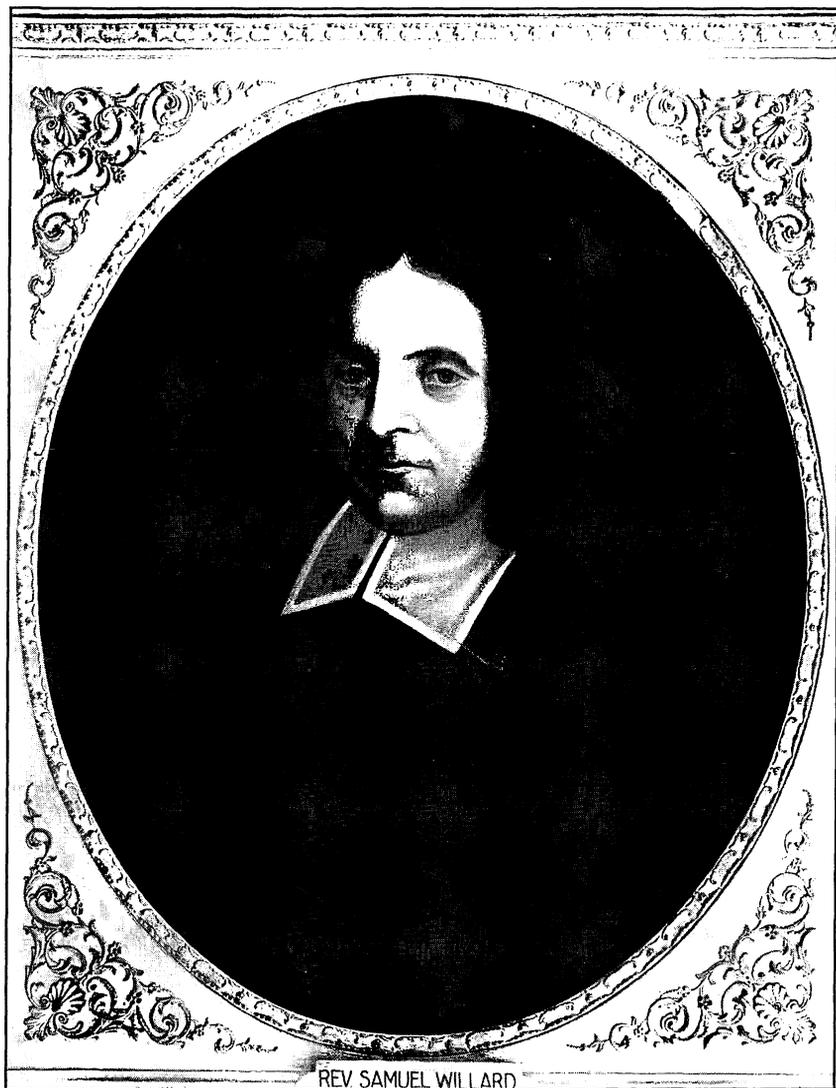
II

Upon his death at the age of seventy-seven, a fellow minister lauded the Reverend Samuel Willard as a “star of the first magnitude” and a person who “should be honored for discovering the cheats and delusions of Satan.”¹⁵ Samuel Willard’s fame and influence in Massachusetts Bay Colony were the result of forty years of dedicated ministering in Groton and at the powerful Third Church of Boston, his service as vice-president and acting-president of Harvard University, his authorship of the highly regarded *A Compleat Body of Divinity*, and his criticism of the Salem trials of 1692.¹⁶ His encounter with the diabolically possessed Elizabeth Knapp in 1671 not only provides meaningful insight into possession and the relationship between minister and possessee, but it is likely to have profoundly influenced many of Willard’s future beliefs on the Devil, witchcraft, God’s wisdom and power, and his ministerial confidence.

Central to Willard’s ideas concerning what made an effective minister was his belief that a minister must be able to “judge between Rational, and either merely Casual or Supernatural Events.”¹⁷ Like most of his fellow clergymen, Willard did not question the existence of Satan, only the manner in which he operated and his possible limitations. Though accepting Satan’s existence, and not one to deny the possibility of witches, Willard perceived much of the world’s evil to be the effects of human agents free of Satanic influence.¹⁸ Willard’s attitude toward the Devil and witchcraft impelled him to become a motivated and careful student of Elizabeth Knapp’s possession.

Elizabeth’s seizures began on the night of October 30, 1671, with a loud cry caused by a severe pain in her legs and breasts. She then placed her hand over her neck and shouted, “Oh, I am strangled.”¹⁹ Off and on for the next three months, she would experience eighteen fits and seizures which might easily be described as somatic experiences of unresolved conflicts. Soon after this initial outburst, Elizabeth Knapp and the Reverend Samuel Willard entered into a three-month relationship that closely resembled a therapeutic relationship. The details of this therapeutic interaction are described in Willard’s “A Brief Account of a Strange and Unusual Providence of God Befallen to Elizabeth Knapp of Groton.”

Shortly after a few initiatory observations, Willard made two important decisions relating to Elizabeth’s predicament. First, he concluded that she was not bewitched but rather in a state of possession due to the fact that the Devil had entered her body.²⁰ This assessment was also validated by the courts and community of Groton. On two separate occasions, Elizabeth pointed an accusing finger at two Groton women, but neither woman was ever brought to trial for



Samuel Willard. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

being a witch.²¹ Willard's second decision early in their relationship was his willingness to dedicate himself to improving Elizabeth's condition and thus become the object of her transference. On this point he wrote, "I tendered her all the help I could, if she would make use of me and now privately relate any weighty and serious conscience to me."²²

For transference action to be understood within the Knapp-Willard therapeutic interaction, it is imperative to first assess the dynamics of the Knapp family and

specifically Elizabeth's relationship with her father, James Knapp. Since it appears that Willard becomes the idealized object, acting as a substitute for James Knapp, the real object of Elizabeth's feelings, comprehending the father-daughter dyad is crucial to understanding the minister-possessee relationship. Elizabeth was the first born of the Knapp family, and for all intensive purposes she was raised as an only child. Elizabeth's only sibling, a brother, died in infancy and no other children were born into the Knapp family.²³ A Puritan family having only one child was very unusual for this era, and it is highly likely that Elizabeth felt the authoritarian aspects and regimentation of Puritan child-rearing to a greater degree than most of her cohorts. It was common for Puritan parents to avoid excessive intimacy with their children, believing them to be sinful and naturally depraved. This practice of "remote distance" predictably led to negative psychological problems for the young child.²⁴ In addition, many Puritan children were weaned around the age of two, and so Elizabeth was forced to psychologically adjust to parental attachment separation as well as the death of her younger brother.²⁵

Compounding Elizabeth's psychological conflicts during her infancy were the numerous legal and moral problems surrounding her father's behavior. From 1656 to 1658, James Knapp was accused of adultery, fathering an illegitimate child, and drunkenness.²⁶ Although James Knapp was never convicted of any of these accusations, and afterwards became a respected member of the Groton community, the suspicions and psychological stigma never fully disappeared.²⁷ The death of the son and the father's questionable behavior must have placed the Knapp family into a state of psychic disarray during Elizabeth's formative years. Furthermore, it has even been speculated that Elizabeth's mother was suffering from severe mental health problems of her own.²⁸ Viewed through psychoanalytic filters, Elizabeth's diabolical possession and the behavior she manifested during her possession are likely the product of unresolved childhood conflicts caused by a dysfunctional family environment which created an atmosphere of psychological alienation rather than one of psychological attachment.

To complete the mosaic of Elizabeth's childhood and adolescence, one additional experience must be considered for purposes of evaluating her psychological well-being. At the time of her first seizure, Elizabeth had already been living with Samuel Willard and his family for several weeks as a maidservant. It was common for Puritan parents to "place out" their children with other families in order to gain apprenticeship training as well as housekeeping skills. It has been suggested that some Puritan parents placed their children in another household simply because they did not trust themselves to be strict enough and were afraid that they might show too much affection and thus spoil the degenerate child.²⁹ Occasionally, the minister or the courts might take a child away from unfit parents, but this does not appear to be the case with the Knapp family. The placement of Elizabeth in the Willard household is further evidence that by the time of her possession, she was already physically and psychologically disen-

gaged from her family for several weeks, and it is probable that she was unconsciously relating to the respected minister as a replacement father-figure prior to her first seizure.³⁰

Willard, the parent-image for this troubled adolescent, was the recipient of Elizabeth's positive transference throughout the three-month ordeal. Elizabeth's need for attention and recognition was expressed through her use of mirror transference. At one point, Willard stated, "Whenever I came in her presence, she fell into these fits."³¹ It was extremely rare for Elizabeth to have seizures in the absence of Willard. It appears that the attention given to her by Willard was filling the attention void created by her parents. It is quite possible that the entire episode of diabolical possession was the Puritan equivalent of a cry for help and recognition which many adolescent Puritan females were desperately seeking. Willard seemed to be aware of the positive feelings being directed toward him, and his acceptance of being the transference object was necessary in establishing the proper environment for psychological improvement.³²

One of the keys of transference action is that the patient makes conscious what had been previously unconscious, and through this process the negative emotions and feelings directed to the actual person or persons become dissolved.³³ Willard recorded that the Devil "urged upon her constant temptation to murder her parents, her neighbors, our children, especially the youngest—tempting her to throw it into the fire, or the hearth, into the oven; and that once he put a bill-hook into her hand to murder myself."³⁴ Within the context of a psychoanalytic therapeutic alliance, this statement is of great significance. Elizabeth is bringing to consciousness the unresolved infantile conflicts associated with her feelings and need for intimacy and other psychosexual and psychosocial impediments. Verbal aggression was also directed toward the neighbors she once accused of witchcraft and Willard's youngest child who likely became the object of Elizabeth's displaced hostility unconsciously intended for her infant brother who had deserted her. Elizabeth's threat against Willard sheds light on the more intense negative transference to be aimed at the minister briefly before their relationship was concluded.

By December, an apparent transference shift had developed in which Willard, the idealized transference object, the venerated father-figure, soon became the target of Elizabeth's unresolved hatred for her real father. It is during this phase of their relationship that Elizabeth starts to describe Willard as the "black rogue" and one who has been telling lies and deceiving her real father and others in attendance. "You tell the people a company of lies" was her hollow reply to one of Willard's many inquiries. And when Willard knelt down to pray for her she cried out, "Hold your tongue, hold your tongue; get you gone, you black rogue, what are you going to do; have you nothing to do with me." Soon after, she threatened to "knock thee on the head when I please."³⁵ Why this sudden attack against Willard after two months of positive transference action? It does not appear that Willard was becoming disinterested in Elizabeth, nor is there any

evidence that he was becoming preoccupied with matters of church or family. From a psychoanalytic perspective, these verbal outbursts are simply the negative transference actions that typically occur during the later stages of therapy when the patient is working through an unconscious conflict.³⁶ Through her negative transference feelings, Elizabeth was reliving and revealing her original infantile Oedipal neurosis in a manner that might lead to eventual and practical resolution.

To what degree the act of countertransference played in the resolution of Elizabeth's unconscious conflicts is difficult to ascertain, but since countertransference is viewed as an inevitable component of the therapeutic process, it is presumably present and meaningful to their interaction.³⁷ The therapist's unconscious and conscious subjective feelings and emotions directed toward the patient are referred to as countertransference. It is believed that these feelings are expressed by the therapist through acts of omission during therapy, extreme friendliness and overprotection for the patient, or extreme hostility or annoyance with the patient with an overall effect of distorting the therapeutic process.³⁸ Although Willard's account of their interaction gives no evidence of overprotection or irrational concern for Elizabeth, nor do any glaring omissions of ministerial action appear; nevertheless, specific acts of countertransference do appear present.

At several times in their relationship, Willard ceased behaving in the role of the concerned minister and became the hostile witness to Elizabeth's abreaction. His subjective hostility is revealed to future readers when he declares, "She had used preposterous courses and therefore it was no marvel that she had been led into contradictions." Subsequently, his challenge to the Devil to finally make a visual appearance seems to be associated with his personal frustration in not being able to comprehend the purposes or behavior of the Devil.³⁹ Willard might have become aware of his feelings of countertransference, leading him to conclude that his relationship with Elizabeth should be terminated even though she was not yet depossessed.

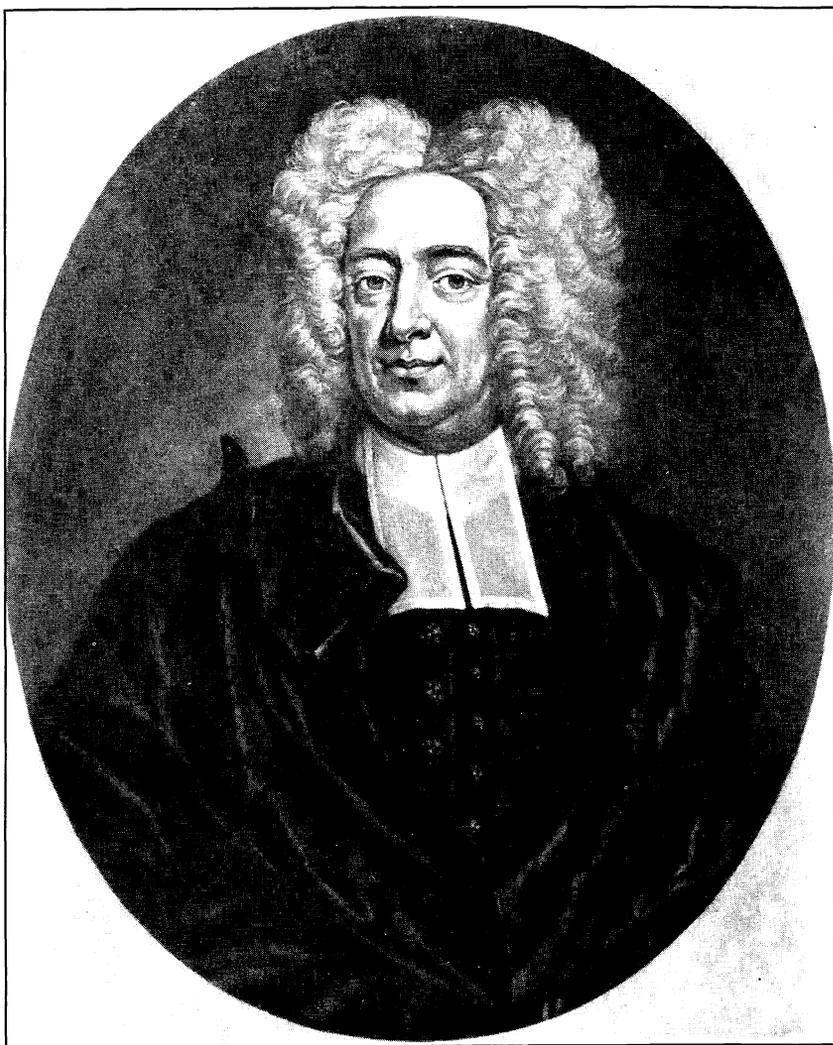
After three months of fervent interaction, he stopped seeing Elizabeth, and it is likely that she went home to live with her parents. Willard's disappointment at not being able to alleviate her disorder and his developed sympathetic concern for Elizabeth is evident in his closing remarks: "She is an object of pity, I desire that all that hear of her would compassionate her forlorn. She is (I question not) a subject of hope, and therefore all means ought to be used for her recovery. She is a monument of divine severity; and the Lord grant that all that see or hear may fear and tremble."⁴⁰ It is recorded that shortly afterwards Elizabeth Knapp stopped having fits and seizures, married and had a family, and lived a normal New England existence. The acts of transference and countertransference that arose within the Willard-Knapp therapeutic alliance need to be regarded as significant interpersonal communication which facilitated Elizabeth's resolution of her unconscious infantile conflicts and led to her eventual depossession.

III

“He was precocious both in learning and piety, he was from boyhood—if he ever had a boyhood—the rising hope of Massachusetts orthodoxy.”⁴¹ The son of the famous Increase Mather, Cotton Mather was destined to be the spokesperson for the Puritan world view, which by the end of the seventeenth century was showing signs of becoming more Yankee than Puritan. Mather is considered one of the most influential “nonconformist ministers in the Anglo-American world of the time” and one of the most prolific writers of his generation.⁴² Of his many works, the epic history of New England, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, is perceived to be his most prestigious publication, while much of his reputation is based on his *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, in which Mather becomes the apologist for the Salem executions.⁴³ For Mather, who viewed the latter years of the seventeenth century as a time of religious crisis, perhaps no work was more momentous than the 1689 publication entitled *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcraft and Possession*. *Memorable Providences* is Mather’s descriptive account of his interaction and observations of Martha Goodwin, a diabolically possessed adolescent. Written by Mather in hopes that a clear case of witchcraft might prove to be a decisive weapon in the war against philosophical materialism, as well as showing that the afflictions of New England were increasing due to its sinful behavior,⁴⁴ this work provides the modern reader with a window in which to view transference interplay within the minister-possessee relationship.

Cotton Mather was twenty-six years old, husband and father, and minister of the North Church of Boston at the time he first encountered Martha Goodwin. He, like most of his clerical peers, had the intense desire to become more cognizant of the Devil’s spiritual or invisible world. The more Mather could learn of the Devil’s power and purposes, the easier it would be for him to “countermine the whole plot of the Devil, against New England.”⁴⁵ For the seventeenth-century Puritan mind, belief in Satan was not only plausible but rational. To deny the existence of Devils was to deny the existence of Angels and perhaps God Himself.⁴⁶ Mather’s motivation for offering to assist the Goodwin girl was based on his desire not only to free her from the state of possession but also to study and learn the Devil’s powers and ways. In the introduction to *Memorable Providences*, Mather writes, “This will afford him that shall read with Observation a further clear confirmation that there is a God, and a Devil, and witchcraft.”⁴⁷ Upon accepting Martha Goodwin’s father’s invitation to assist his daughter, Cotton Mather began to assume the roles of caring minister, inquisitive scientist, and helping therapist.

A necessary feature in the understanding of transference is the personal case history of the patient, including the family constellation. Regrettably, less is known of Martha Goodwin’s pre-possession life than was known in the Knapp case. At the time of her possession, Martha Goodwin was thirteen years old and the second oldest of the six Goodwin children. She was the oldest daughter and the oldest of the four Goodwin children who became possessed in 1688. Mather’s



Cotton Mather. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

notation of “six (now living) children” indicates that at least one other Goodwin child died prior to 1688, which was the norm for New England families.⁴⁸

Because the patient’s (in this case, the possessee’s) unresolved infantile feelings are conveyed in coded form toward the therapist usually substituting for a parental figure, Martha’s feelings and emotions concerning her parents are indispensable to this study.⁴⁹ The Goodwin parents, as was true with the Knapp parents and most other Puritan heads of families, were taught that children were born in sin due to Adam’s fall and that children “were obligated by their nature

to do evil.”⁵⁰ John Robinson, an English Puritan minister, in a childrearing manual published in 1628 which was influential in New England, urged parents to keep children from the knowledge that they had a will of their own.⁵¹ Child-rearing practices based on Puritan theology created a parent-child relationship which laid the seeds for childhood neurosis, and this may be especially true for the oldest daughter in the family. It is also known that Martha’s parents kept all the children in “continual employment, which did more than deliver them from the Temptation of Idleness,” which for young Martha probably meant housekeeping chores.⁵² And although, at the time of her possession, Martha had not yet been “placed out,” it is possible that she was already suffering from minor pre-separation anxiety, knowing that she would soon be asked to live with another family.

Unlike Elizabeth Knapp’s father, there is no evidence that Martha’s father had any legal troubles in Boston. John Goodwin appears to have been a hardworking mason and was described as a “pious and sober man.”⁵³ A chronicle of John Goodwin’s personal feelings relating to his children’s afflictions was included by Mather in *Memorable Providences*, under the title “Godly Father of these Haunted Children.” In these pages, he confesses his personal guilt and accepts all responsibility for his children’s condition. “Now I thought I had greatly neglected my duties to my children in not admonishing and instructing them, and that God was calling my sins in mind to slay my children.”⁵⁴ Until historical evidence is found to support John Goodwin’s statement of parental neglect, this self-indictment should be interpreted as a Puritan father’s cathartic reaction to a seemingly helpless situation.

Whether one perceives the afflictions suffered by the Goodwin children as diabolical or psychological in nature, there is little historical doubt concerning the outward or visible causation of their disorder. The fits and seizures the four Goodwin children displayed in 1688 started to appear immediately after an Irish Catholic woman, Goody Glover, placed a curse on Martha for accusing Glover’s daughter of stealing. Never denying that she was a witch and even confessing to attending meetings with “her Prince,” Goody Glover was convicted of witchcraft and executed in Boston.⁵⁵ Her prophetic last statement was that death would not release the Goodwin children from possession because “others were also guilty.”⁵⁶ After her death, the seizures and fits became even more intense.

In November of 1688, Cotton Mather, out of a sense of duty, pity, and his desire to gain evidence against the sadducism of his era, took Martha Goodwin into the house he had recently bought for his new wife and himself.⁵⁷ For the next six months, Mather and Martha Goodwin engaged in a therapeutic process which would eventually lead to Martha becoming depossessed. It appears from the beginning of their relationship that Martha saw the Mather household as a safe haven, not unlike the behavior of many patients in a new therapeutic environment. Mather noted that for the first several days in his house, Martha did not suffer from her usual fits which had been afflicting her for several months. This ephemeral inactivity ended with Martha’s loud cry, “Ah, They have found me out! I thought it would be so!” and immediately her fits returned.⁵⁸

Within the next few weeks, Martha began to suffer from new and unusual tortures and attacks, as if to demonstrate to Mather that she was not the typical possessee. Her desire to be attended to and appreciated by the young minister tends to establish the initial usage of mirror transference in their relationship. Among the most common of her antics and gestures was her imitation of a barking dog, her complaints of being struck by invisible blows which would later cause red streaks to appear on her body, and the numerous times she would become deaf and dumb.⁵⁹ The transference process becomes more evident when she claimed there was an invisible chain around her neck that was holding her down, but Mather had the power to knock it off and free her.⁶⁰ Martha's comments and the sequence of events surrounding the invisible chain episode suggests that, in bestowing Mather with god-like power to counter the influence of Satan, Mather had become the idealized father-protector for Martha. During the process of idealized transference, the patient's unconscious distortion of reality imparts to the therapist prodigious powers and considerable nurturing capabilities. As Freud remarked, "The patient is not satisfied with regarding the analyst in the light of reality as a helper and advisor." On the contrary, the patient sees the therapist as an important and influential figure out of his childhood.⁶¹ In Martha's case, her inclination to experience Mather as an idealized father provided her with the opportunity to work through her unresolved infantile feelings.

"There was," writes Mather, "another most unaccountable circumstance which now attended her; and until she came to our house, I think, she never had experience of it."⁶² The invisible horse did not appear to Martha until the middle of her stay in the Mather house. When the invisible horse was present, she would assume a riding position and proceed to trot and gallop around the house. Though she was often tossed off in a violent fashion, she would remount and continue her equestrian pantomime. In one instance, when Mather was about to leave the house, she commented to an unseen friend, "Mr. M. is gone abroad, my horse won't come back till he come home, and then I believe I shall tell them all."⁶³ Martha's reaction to Mather's anticipated absence is commonly found within the transference interaction. Since happiness and power reside in the idealized object, the patient becomes dependent on the therapist, and a continuous union is desired.⁶⁴ Soon after Mather's return, Martha began to show gradual improvement, which culminated in her freedom from possession.

During the last few days of their relationship, Mather's record of events suggests an abrupt transition from a positive transference interaction to a negative transference process. This transition should not be viewed as anti-therapeutic. Contemporary psychoanalysts look upon negative transference as an essential component of therapy because it enables the patient to bring out his/her unconscious aggressive tendencies, often in the form of verbal attacks.⁶⁵ Mather describes that, while he was preparing a sermon, Martha became extremely agitated due to this lack of attention. She then tried different means to disturb his sermon writing and even began to throw objects at him. Martha also told Mather

that, if he publishes an account of their relationship, he would come to disgrace by its history.⁶⁶ The wounded Mather was quick to observe this sudden change in attitude. He noted that “in the worst of her extravagances formerly, she was more dutiful to myself than I had reason to expect, but now her whole carriage to me was sauciness, that I had not been used to be treated with.”⁶⁷ Martha’s childish behavior is quite similar to modern examples of negative transference which describe young patients annoying their analysts by calling on the telephone countless times an hour and leaving fictitious names.⁶⁸ Although Mather might have been able to make greater therapeutic use of Martha’s negative transference actions,⁶⁹ he remained relatively unemotional and objective, thus allowing his possessee to freely express her feelings in a therapeutically helpful manner. Within a week of this encounter, Martha left the Mather’s house and returned to her family.

From the psychoanalytic standpoint, Mather’s humanness and his own unresolved infantile conflicts are two factors which ensured the appearance of countertransference in this relationship. Mather was never a truly objective party in this interaction. His intentions to use this case study as a means of proving the Devil’s existence in Massachusetts and then publish an account of their relationship was explicit from the beginning. Several times, Mather showed greater interest in scientifically studying the Devil’s abilities than in giving full emotional assistance to Martha. On one such occasion, Mather tested Martha’s ability to read various religious works. Though he stopped this line of experimentation after awhile, he stated, “A few further Tryals, I confess, I did make, but what the event of ‘em was, I shall not relate, because I would not offend.”⁷⁰ Martha probably became a countertransference object to Mather, not only because she reminded him of past struggles with the invisible world, but also in his despair that all his preconceived goals associated with this endeavor may never be fulfilled. It is impossible to assess all the dynamics of countertransference within the Mather-Goodwin relationship. It is likely that countertransference interfered with the progress of therapy at times, while on other occasions it became a valuable form of communication between minister and possessee.

In the summer of 1689, Martha Goodwin, no longer possessed, said goodbye to Cotton Mather and returned to an ordinary life. Though little is known of Martha after her involvement with Mather, it is suspected that Thomas Hutchinson knew her several years later and described her as “a very sober virtuous woman, and never made any acknowledgment of fraud” concerning her diabolical possession.⁷¹ Mather’s *Memorable Providences* was published in 1689 and had a wide circulation and an immense impact throughout the Puritan world. For Cotton Mather and those that either read or heard of his work, Martha Goodwin’s diabolical possession became the ultimate proof of the existence of the invisible world.

IV

The parallelism found in the Willard-Knapp case and the Mather-Goodwin case is not accidental or circumstantial. Two rational and caring ministers entered into a therapeutic covenant with two adolescent females suffering from neurotic disorders which were contemporaneously diagnosed as diabolical possession. Children of the American wilderness and Puritan theology, both Samuel Willard and Cotton Mather understood the dual potential of their minister-possessee relationship. On a humanitarian level, both ministers perceived their possesseees to be innocent children who required their services in order to escape the tenacious embrace of the invisible world. On a theological level, both ministers viewed their possessee relationship as an excellent opportunity to observe and comprehend the techniques and power of the Devil. The publication of these two accounts of possession should be evaluated as each minister's theological propaganda concerning the Devil, witchcraft, and the religious declension affecting Massachusetts in the late seventeenth century. The finding of no witchcraft in the Knapp case and the execution of Goody Glover in the Goodwin case is consistent with both ministers' personal belief in witches and witchcraft that became a source of debate and contention between these two Puritan spokespersons.⁷²

To propose that the relationship between minister and possessee is identical to the relationship between therapist and client is to overlook some obvious differences. Nevertheless, a careful examination of these two interactive relationships does unearth some salient underlying similarities. In both relationships, the patient/possessee has entered into the relationship with an anticipation that he/she will profit from the interaction in the form of psychological or physiological gain. In both relationships, the therapist/minister brings to the interaction a sense of his/her own well-being, a desire to alleviate the patient's/possessee's problem, and an inner confidence that through careful observations, questioning, and rational communication, the mental health of the patient/possessee will be improved. The description of a therapeutic relationship as a "balance of attachment and detachment" appears equally depictive of the minister-possessee relationship.⁷³ It should not be overlooked that New England ministers were used to shouldering many roles within their communities. The Puritan minister has been described as more than just an intellectual, political, and ecclesiastical influence but also the moral leader and loving father.⁷⁴ If, as most psychoanalytic theorists believe, transference takes place both within the therapeutic environment as well as outside the therapeutic alliance, it is not surprising that some form of transference developed within the minister-possessee interplay. More importantly, if the minister-possessee relationship is comparable to the therapist-patient relationship, then the degree of emerging transference should also be comparable. In the pre-psychoanalytic world of seventeenth-century New England, both Willard and Mather assumed the role of therapists and engaged in therapeutic alliances that profited from the use of transference and countertransference.

The evidence provided by the ministers' accounts of their relationships with Elizabeth and Martha shows transference action and to a lesser degree countertransference. For transference to have its greatest therapeutic effect, the patient must become aware of the congruence between his/her reaction to the therapist and to his/her significant others in childhood. Likewise, the more the therapist is consciously aware of the transference action, the more likely the therapist will be able to make the proper responses to provide insight and explore the patient's unconscious feelings.⁷⁵ Neither of these cases of diabolical possession present any substantial evidence that Elizabeth or Martha were conscious of her transference. This does not negate the possibility that both possessees were consciously sensitive to their transference actions, and perhaps neither minister was observant enough to notice, or chose not to discuss, these episodes of awareness. Without psychoanalytic training, it is extremely unlikely for Willard and Mather to be truly attentive to transference and countertransference, though it is evident that both ministers perceived the transition from positive transference to negative transference. Both learned ministers seemed to have realized that the hostility directed toward them had its source elsewhere and that they were only the surrogate targets for the negative transference.

An essay on the uses of transference and countertransference within a therapeutic relationship, especially ones composed of therapists and patients of different sexes, would be remiss if it did not comment on the sexual nature of transference. Freud and many other psychoanalysts have theorized that transference is in many ways rooted in erotic sources. The significant others a patient admires in his/her real life may still be sexual objects since that is all the individual was initially aware of during childhood.⁷⁶ Libidinal transference originating in the authentic Oedipal desires was presumably present in the minister-possessee dyad. The likelihood that libidinal transference and libidinal countertransference developed in these relationships is greater due to the fairly young ages of the ministers and the maturing adolescence of Elizabeth and Martha. During the periods in which the ministers and possessees interacted, there were several instances of bodily contact that may also be representative of underlying libidinal desires. In one example, Mather was carrying Martha upstairs to his study where her fits subsided, when he suddenly lost control. "She was thrust back upon me, that I had almost fallen backwards, and her breast was sore afterwards."⁷⁷ This illustration of bodily contact and other similar instances were possibly not simple accidents but were manifestations of unconscious libidinal feelings. Movements which are often described as accidental often act to mask sexual pursuits, especially when one or both parties believe such activities to be improper.⁷⁸ Speculation into the erotic elements of these minister-possessee relationships is worthy of further consideration from a Freudian and neo-Freudian perspective, though such inquiry may also give rise to what one historian has labeled "the precarious practice of psychohistorical theorizing."⁷⁹

Cotton Mather in *The Wonders of the Invisible World* wrote, "We are travelers in the world which is well the Devil's Field; a world in which every nook

where of, the Devil is encamped with Bands of Robbers to pester all that have faces looking Zionward.”⁸⁰ Cotton Mather’s and Samuel Willard’s entire lives were given to the study of the visible and invisible worlds in hopes of discovering the Devil and better understanding God and the human condition. That which was unknown, that which was evil and dangerous to self and community, and the causes of unnatural behavior were all attributed to the invisible world. Some two hundred years after the publications of Mather’s and Willard’s accounts of diabolical possession, Sigmund Freud developed his theory of the unconscious. Freud viewed the unconscious as the determiner of behavior of which the individual is unaware. For Freud and other psychoanalysts, the unconscious became the great underworld of vital, unseen forces which exercised control over the individual. The invisible world of Samuel Willard and Cotton Mather and Sigmund Freud’s unconscious mind were the audacious attempts by three different individuals to explain the unknown and thus make behavior and existence more comprehensible.

Notes

1. Cotton Mather, “Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions,” reprinted in Charles Lincoln Burr, ed., *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases* (New York, 1968), 96.
2. Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study of Psychoanalysis and History* (New York, 1958), 20.
3. Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem* (New York, 1969), 15-18.
4. James W. Davidson and Mark H. Lytle, *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (New York, 1982), 41-44.
5. John P. Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (New York, 1982), 97-210.
6. Heinz Kohut’s theories on object relations and narcissistic personality disorders appear to be the foundation of Demos’ discussion and interpretation of transference in the Willard-Knapp case. Kohut’s narcissistic transference is a patient-centered form of transference which also incorporates idealized and mirror transference. Libidinal transference, though mentioned, is de-emphasized within his discussion of transference and its role in this case. Demos does not discuss the issue of countertransference in this case, thus limiting the psychoanalytic analysis of the Willard-Knapp relationship.
7. Samuel Willard, “A Brief Account of a Strange and Unusual Providence of God Befallen to Elizabeth Knapp of Groton,” repr. in John P. Demos, ed., *Remarkable Providences 1600-1700* (New York, 1972), 368.
8. Sigmund Freud, “An Outline of Psychoanalysis,” in J. Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. 23 (London, 1968), 174.
9. Erwin Singer, *Key Concepts in Psychotherapy*, 2nd. ed. (New York, 1970), 250.
10. Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* (New York, 1971), 261.
11. James W. Jones, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Religion, Transference and Transcendence* (New York, 1991), 10.
12. William E. Piper, Anthony S. Joyce, Mary McCallum, and Hassan F.A. Azim, “Concentration and Correspondence of Transference Interpretation in Short-Term Psychotherapy,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 6 (1993), 586-595.
13. Mirror transference and other forms of positive transference are viewed differently by various contemporary theorists. The definitions used here are a blending of the theories developed by Heinz Kohut, W.R.D. Fairbairn, and Melanie Klein, as well as Sigmund Freud’s original theories on transference.
14. Singer, *Concepts in Psychotherapy*, 293.
15. Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 115; Ebenezer Pemberton, “A Funeral Sermon on the Death of the Learned and Excellent Divine, The Reverend Samuel Willard” (Boston, 1701), 63.

16. Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *The Puritan Oligarchy: The Founding of American Civilization* (New York, 1947), 278.
17. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1939), 67.
18. Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 116.
19. Demos, ed., *Remarkable Providences*, 368.
20. *Ibid.*, 357.
21. Marion Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts* (New York, 1969), 167.
22. Demos, ed., *Remarkable Providences*, 364.
23. Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 124.
24. David Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change* (New York, 1977), 60. Though non-psychoanalytic in its perspective, the work of Patricia and Salvator Minuchin would provide further insight into the Puritan family through the use of the family systems approach. See S. Minuchin, *Families and Family Therapy* (Cambridge, 1974) and P. Minuchin, "Families and Individual Development: Provocations from the Field of Family Therapy," *Child Development* 56 (1985), 289-302.
25. John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York, 1970), 133.
26. Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 112; Nathaniel Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of Massachusetts Bay, in New England III* (Boston, 1853-1854), 403-404.
27. Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 116.
28. Darrett Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston: A Portrait of a Puritan Town, 1630-1649* (New York, 1965), 8.
29. Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Essays on Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England*, 2nd ed., (Boston, 1956), 37. Though not based on specific evidence, Morgan's explanation seems highly credible from the perspective of the Puritan mindset.
30. Jones, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 18.
31. Demos, ed., *Remarkable Providences*, 361.
32. Kohut, *Analysis of Self*, 262.
33. Jones, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 16.
34. Demos, ed., *Remarkable Providences*, 360.
35. *Ibid.*, 368-369.
36. Kohut, *Analysis of Self*, 268.
37. Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 3rd ed. (California, 1986), 33.
38. Michael Nietzal, Douglas A. Bennoten, and Richard Milich, *Introduction to Clinical Psychology*, 3rd ed. (New Jersey, 1991), 260.
39. Demos, ed., *Remarkable Providences*, 367.
40. *Ibid.*, 371.
41. Burr, ed., *Narratives*, 91.
42. Michael Winship, "Prodigies, Puritanism and the Perils of National Philosophy," *The William and Mary Quarterly* LI (January, 1994), 92-105.
43. Perry Miller, *New England Mind: From Colony in Province* (Cambridge, 1953), 201.
44. *Ibid.*, 189.
45. Vernon L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: Volume One, 1620-1800 The Colonial Mind* rpt. (New York, 1954), 116. Parrington describes Mather as neurotic, oversexed, and a prime candidate for psychoanalysis.
46. David Levin, *Cotton Mather: The Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer, 1663-1703* (Cambridge, 1978), 152.
47. Burr, ed., *Narratives*, 96.
48. *Ibid.*, 99.
49. Alice Miller, *Banished Knowledge: Facing Childhood Injuries* trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York, 1990), 160.
50. Levin, *The Young Life*, 151.
51. John Robinson, "Of Children and Their Education" reprinted in Phillip Greven, Jr. (ed.), *Child-rearing Concepts, 1628-1681* (Itasca, Ill., 1973), 9, 13-17; Bruce Daniels, "Did the Puritans Have Fun? Leisure, Recreation and the Concept of Pleasure in Early New England," *Journal of American Studies* (25), 19-20. Robinson was the original Pilgrim pastor and although he was a Separatist who never journeyed to New England, he was in contact with many of the members of the Nonseparating school of Congregationalism. See Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (New York, 1964), 21 n14.
52. Burr, ed., *Narratives*, 100.
53. *Ibid.*, 99.
54. *Ibid.*, 130.
55. Kenneth Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* (New York, 1985), 84-87.
56. Burr, ed., *Narratives*, 96.

57. Silverman, *Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, 85.
58. Burr, ed., *Narratives*, 110.
59. *Ibid.*, 111-113.
60. *Ibid.*, 111.
61. Strachey, ed., *Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, 174-175.
62. Burr, ed., *Narratives*, 114.
63. *Ibid.*, 115.
64. Kohut, *Analysis of Self*, 37.
65. Judith Hughes, *Reshaping the Psychoanalytic Domain* (Berkeley, 1989), 84.
66. Burr, ed., *Narratives*, 119.
67. *Ibid.*, 119.
68. Nietzal, et al., *Clinical Psychology*, 261.
69. For a brief overview of therapeutic strategy and intentions after transference has surfaced, see Charles Gelso, Clara E. Hill, and Dennis M. Kivlighan, Jr., "Transference, Insight, and the Counselor's Intentions During a Counseling Hour," *Journal of Counseling and Development* 69 (1991), 428-433.
70. Burr, ed., *Narratives*, 113.
71. Hansen, *Witchcraft in Salem*, 26; Thomas Hutchinson, *The History of the Province of Massachusetts-Bay*, Vol. II (Boston, 1750), 16.
72. M. Wynn Thomas, "Cotton Mather's Wonders of the Invisible World: Some Metamorphoses of Salem Witchcraft," in Sydney Angelo, ed., *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft* (Boston, 1979), 205; Samuel Willard, "Some Miscellany Observations on our Present Debates Respecting Witchcraft (Philadelphia, 1692), 8.
73. Nietzal, et al., *Clinical Psychology*, 208.
74. Wertenbaker, *Puritan Oligarchy*, 62.
75. Gelso, et al., "Transference and Counselor's Intentions," 429.
76. Sigmund Freud, "The Dynamics of Transference," in J. Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. 12 (London, 1968), 101.
77. Burr, ed., *Narratives*, 117.
78. Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, trans. Alan Tyson, rpt. (New York, 1960), 175-176. It was even suggested by Robert Calef, a contemporary and critic of Cotton Mather, that Mather was obtaining vicarious sexual pleasures during his encounters with adolescent girls believed to be possessed. See Robert Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (Boston, 1700), 35.
79. Daniel B. Smith, "The Study of Family in Early America: Trends, Problems, and Prospects," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (1982), 11.
80. Cotton Mather, "The Wonders of the Invisible World," (Boston, 1693), rpt. in Burr, ed., *Narratives*, 24.