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Indians and Antiquity: Subversive Classicism in Early New England Poetry

JOANNE VAN DER WOUDE

WHEN attempting to make sense of the New World and its Native inhabitants, colonial writers turned, predictably, to scripture, but also to texts from classical antiquity. In the steady stream of translations, reworkings, and appropriations from Spanish, English, and Dutch colonies, America was put forth as an especially productive location for studying and translating the classics, as well as for reflecting on antique themes, plots, and archetypes.¹ Despite this impressive output, many allusions and parallels to the ancient Mediterranean by colonial writers were discordant or far-fetched in the sense that

¹Examples include the *Primera parte del Parnaso Antártico de obras amatorias* (Seville, Spain, 1603) composed in Lima; George Sandys's *First Five Bookes of Ovid's Metamorphosis* (London, 1621) from Virginia; and Franciscus Plante's *Mauritiados Libri XII* (Leiden, Neth., 1647) about Brazil. Scholarship on the classics in the colonies is vast and includes Richard M. Gunmere, *The American Colonial Mind and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963); Wolfgang Haase and Meyer Reinhold, eds., *The Classical Tradition and the Americas* (Berlin, Ger.: W. de Gruyter, 1994); Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500–c. 1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992); John C. Shields, *The American Aeneas: Classical Origins of the American Self* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001); David A. Lupher, *Romans in a New World: Classical Models in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); Sabine MacCormack, *On the Wings of Time: Rome, the Incas, Spain, and Peru* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009); and Ralph Bauer, "The 'Rebellious Muse': Time, Space, and Race in the Revolutionary Epic," in *Creole Subjects in the Colonial Americas: Empires, Texts, Identities*, ed. Bauer and José Antonio Mazzotti (Williamsburg, VA: Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture, 2009), 442–64.

colonial America was (the most imaginative similes notwithstanding) profoundly unlike Greece and Rome, whether climatologically, linguistically, or culturally. Why, then, this prevailing insistence upon a classical frame? What does classicism do for colonial poets, and when does it seem to fail them? In particular: why use the classics to talk about Indians?

This essay considers classicism as an overlooked and radical mode of representation in poetry from Puritan New England, especially when it is used as a vehicle for imagining intercultural contact. By reading Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan* (1637) and Benjamin Tompson's epics on King Philip's War, this essay compares the strategic classicism in these poems, which both center on contact with Native Americans, whether around a maypole or at war.² Poems about contact are rare in colonial New England: aside from Morton and Tompson, only Roger Williams and John Josselyn are known to have written on the subject. Yet Williams's and Josselyn's poems are, respectively, short, biting indictments of Puritan hypocrisy, and "Verses made sometime since upon the Picture of a young and handsome gypsie." They therefore do not primarily address the encounter between settlers and Indians and are arguably unrelated to Native American life. Instead, they stress the cultural and racial differences between both groups, as if comparing different species.³ This poetry presents Indians as

²Thomas Morton, *New English Canaan* (London, 1634), reprinted in Jack Dempsey, ed., *New English Canaan* (Scituate, MA: Digital Scanning, 2000), 1–201. Benjamin Tompson, *New Englands Crisis* (Boston, MA: 1676); *Sad and Deplorable News from New England* (London: 1676); and *New Englands Tears* (London: 1676), reprinted in Peter White, *Benjamin Tompson: Colonial Bard. A Critical Edition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), 82–119. All following references are to these respective editions.

³Roger Williams, *A Key into the Languages of America* (London, 1643), cf. 21, 30, 102. John Josselyn, *New England's Rarities Discovered* (London, 1672), 99–102. In his *Two Voyages to New-England* (1674), Josselyn uses several classical analogies in his description of a Native American moose hunt. See Matthew Binney, "Seventeenth-Century North American Travel Narratives: Nation-ness and Self-Reflectivity," *The Seventeenth Century* 21 (2006): 392. Recent scholarship on Williams's *Key* includes Jonathan Beecher Field, *Errand into the Metropolis: New England Dissidents in Revolutionary London* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2009) and Matt Cohen, *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

instrumental: handy for criticizing Puritans or romanticizing brown folk. In contrast, Morton and Thompson's portrayals are more complex, as they create compelling classical representations of intercultural meetings that run counter to the aims of mainstream colonial chroniclers.

Although Morton and Thompson use classicism to undermine Puritan narratives, classicism and Puritanism are not in principle incompatible. Perry Miller and Samuel Eliot Morison already pointed out the importance of classical learning in colonial educational curricula as well as in the Puritan tradition at large.⁴ Recent scholarly work on, for instance, the commonplace book of poet and clergyman Edward Taylor suggests he based a poetic description of the power of prayer on descriptions of Alexander the Great's siege of Tyre.⁵ Although schoolboys and college students were required to write Greek and Latin, it is surely intriguing that the only surviving work of Native American Harvard students (Caleb Cheeshahteumuck, "Eleazer," and Benjamin Larnell) is in Latin and—in the case of "Eleazar" and Larnell—in verse.⁶ Classicism matters not only because it was a ubiquitous mode of representation in colonial poetry, but mainly—for my purposes—because its tropes of heroism and victory sit uneasily with many realities of early settlement, such as starvation and disease. Despite that tenuous relation to reality, some settler poets and Native converts prefer

⁴Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), chaps. 3 and 4; Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Puritan Pronaos: Studies in the Intellectual Life of New England in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1939).

⁵Amy M. E. Morris, "From Rattlesnake Eggs to Alexander the Great: Edward Taylor's Commonplace Book," *The Yearbook of English Studies: Writing the Americas*, 1480–1826 46 (2016): 90–111.

⁶Colonial poems in ancient languages, such as the works of Cheeshahteumuck, "Eleazer," and Larnell, but also William Morrell's "Nova Anglia" (1624) in *Latin hexameters* (London, 1625) deserve more scholarly attention than they have received. On Cheeshahteumuck and Eleazer, see Wolfgang Hockbruck and Beatrix Dudensing-Reichel, "'Honoratissimi benefactores': Native American Students and Two Seventeenth-Century Texts in the University Tradition," in *Early Native American Writing*, ed. Helen Jakoski (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–15; on Benjamin Larnell, see Stuart McManus and Thomas Keeline, "Benjamin Larnell: The Last Latin Poet at Harvard Indian College," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 108 (2015): 621–42.

classicism as a representational frame over and against the more common typological paradigm in Puritan writing. Classicism is thus an important mode in the colonial Americas—one which counteracts, contradicts, or satirizes biblical ways of seeing the world, and one which has often been overlooked in genealogies of New World literature based on Puritan texts.

In this article, classicism refers not to a single period of time or a tightly circumscribed literary movement, but rather to the general use of antique plots, types, and tropes. When that usage is central to a work's form and content—more important than a decorative sprinkling of muses and nymphs throughout an otherwise Christian universe—that work is considered classicist. Finally, while my considerations of the classical dimensions of colonial poetry focus on New England, they emphatically gesture toward and invoke a richer hemispheric and multilingual tradition of early American verse, in which Puritanism is neither exceptional nor paradigmatic.⁷ In addition, classicist texts are not just vital to colonial literatures; they also do more cultural work than previously assumed. This article posits classicism as a narrative and poetic technique more suited to intercultural contact (both to establishing it and to rendering it) than the biblical references used by Puritan authors. Through multivalent classical references, colonial authors posit nuanced perspectives on land ownership, disease, fertility, and war that diverge from the more monolithic interpretations of those issues favored by the imperial regime.

Alongside an interest in representing scenes of contact, Morton and Thompson also share a preference for pastoral: a classical literary genre (famously practiced by Theocritus and Virgil) commenting on contemporary behavior by depicting innocent shepherds or divine machinery (nymphs, cherubs) in an idealized landscape. Pastoral is a traditional vehicle for societal critique and, accordingly, Morton and Thompson use it to create descriptions and plots in the New World that seem opposed to

⁷Sabine Klein provides a productive reading of Morton in a multilingual context in her "Shires and Sachems: Languages of Political Theory in Dutch and English Narratives of Contact," *Early American Literature* 43 (2008): 535–55.

more common teleological or Scriptural interpretations.⁸ With that in mind, my readings focus on instances when Morton and Tompson's classical references represent contact in unexpected ways. At times, their classicism gestures towards a discourse that allows for enough plurality of meaning to accommodate both Indian and English versions of history. This strategy is particularly pronounced in Thomas Morton's intercultural performance in which, as we will see, classical allusions bridge the gap of understanding between settlers and Indians. In addition, both works employ classicism for purposes of mockery, stressing the incongruous comparisons between ancient Greeks, Romans, and early modern Native Americans. Taken together, these texts showcase not just literary strategies, but also the variety of experiences and interpretations of intercultural encounter in the seventeenth century. Antique references prove surprisingly good at rendering intercultural contact and conflict in funny, vicious, and realistic ways. Classicism thus depicts intercultural encounter in ways that allow us to read for native influence and agency in a diverse corpus of early American histories and literatures.⁹

Morton's Maypole (Re)peoples America

Thomas Morton was born in the 1570s around Devonshire into a family of the middling gentry, which implies some experience with land ownership, something Morton seemed eager to attain in America. Trained as a lawyer at Clifford's

⁸On pastoral, see Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); and Karen O'Brien, "Imperial Georgic, 1660–1789," *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550–1850*, ed. Gerald MacLean et al. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 160–79. On its role in travel literature and ethnology, see Joshua Crandall, "The Great Measur'd by the Less': The Ethnological Turn in Eighteenth-Century Pastoral," *English Literary History* 81 (2014): 955–82. It is worth noting that pastoral would become an important and enduring technique for political persiflage in early New England. Cameron C. Nickels, "Federalist Mock Pastorals: The Ideology of Early New England Humor," *Early Am. Lit.* 17 (1982): 139–51.

⁹Thomas Morton's fanciful text has actually been found to render intercultural encounter more accurately than his Puritan peers. Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Thomas Morton, Historian," *New England Quarterly* 50 (1977): 660–64.

Inn at the same time as Ben Jonson, he probably witnessed the masques—elaborate multi-generic performances—staged for Elizabeth I, on which he seems to have based his American fêtes.¹⁰ By the time he sailed for the New World, in 1625, Morton liked to be in charge: with the captain of the early Massachusetts settlement off for Virginia, he deposed the acting lieutenant and assumed control, renaming it Mare-Mount. Perhaps in imitation of vernal festivals in West England, Morton erected an 80-foot tall Maypole in 1627 around which he reveled with his crew and Native American trading partners. He quickly provoked the Pilgrims' pique, both at his heathenish merry-making and at his quick success with Indian fur traders. He was arrested and deported by Plymouth authorities in 1628, officially on account of selling guns to the natives.¹¹

During one of his exiles from New England, Morton wrote *New English Canaan* to support his petition to the royal Privy Council to revoke the patent for the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The title is a play on the favorite Puritan literary habit of typology, which asserts an analogy between the religious dissenters coming to America and the Jews inhabiting their promised land.¹² Morton extends this figure of speech and introduces the Native Americans into the Old Testamental world in order to “recall the Biblical story of the dispossession of a tree-worshipping people, the Canaanites, by the Ancient Israelites.”¹³ He thus, as it were, sees the Puritans' trick and

¹⁰William Heath, “Thomas Morton: From Merry Old England to New England,” *Journal of American Studies* 41 (2007): 135–68; Roger D. Abrahams, “Antick Dispositions and the Perilous Politics of Culture: Costume and Culture in Jacobean England and America,” *Journal of American Folklore* 111 (1998): 115–32.

¹¹For the Pilgrims' dislike and persecution of Morton, Daniel B. Shea, “‘Our professed old adversary’: Thomas Morton and the Naming of New England,” *Early Am. Lit.* 23 (1988): 52–69.

¹²On typology, see Naoki Onishi, “Puritan Historians and Historiography,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early American Literature*, ed. Kevin J. Hayes (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 93–115. For the imperial usage of typology, see David A. Boruchoff, “New Spain, New England, and the New Jerusalem: The ‘Translation’ of Empire, Faith, and Learning (translatio imperii, fidei ac scientiae) in the Colonial Missionary Project,” *Early Am. Lit.* 43 (2008), 5–34 and Eric Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan*, expanded ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

¹³Robert D. Arner, “Wit, Humor, and Satire in Seventeenth-century American Poetry,” *Puritan Poets and Poetics: Seventeenth-century American Poetry in Theory and*

raises them one by creating a biblical landscape that is already inhabited and not easily or unproblematically empty for settlement by God's people. Here, Morton uses the Puritans' favorite frame of reference for American events—the Old Testament—but turns their self-serving, navel-gazing interpretation on its head in order to supplant it with his own literary universe in which the Jews (or Puritans) displace the rightful owners of the land: the Indians. He thus integrates and anchors his later classicism in a biblical frame that he knew would be intelligible and objectionable to his enemies.

Indeed, these enemies did not fail to object. Authorities seem to have recognized that while Morton's text, like his Maypole, purported to be a series of celebrations of New England's riches, it possessed far more threatening political purposes.¹⁴ Morton's adversaries, both the Pilgrims and later the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay, won the conflict in every way that counted, booting him from the territory and jailing him repeatedly until shortly before his death around 1647. *New English Canaan* was not reprinted until more than 200 years after its first publication in Amsterdam in 1637 and does not seem to have been widely read. But its poetry may have had a much larger audience than its single print run suggests. The central "Poem," for example, was affixed to the Maypole to be read by Morton's fellow English revelers, Native American traders, and annoyed Pilgrims (Morton, 135). Because Morton taught some Natives how to read, they may have even understood his written series of riddles better than the stupefied soldiers that

Practice, ed. Peter White (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 274.

¹⁴Its reach was certainly limited by the fact that "by year's end," notes Jack Dempsey, "the government confiscates most copies, possibly mistaking them for foreign-printed 'outlaw' tracts. No evidence of their recovery" (Morton, xx). Scholars disagree as to whether copies of *New English Canaan* were printed in Amsterdam or London. Paul R. Sternberg, "The Publication of Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan* Reconsidered," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 80 (1986): 369–74. Although his text may not have been widely-read, the story of Morton's Maypole did achieve lasting fame and has inspired American authors for centuries. For an overview of its literary legacy, John P. McWilliams, *New England's Crises and Cultural Memory: Literature, Politics, History, Religion 1620–1860* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 44–74.

Winthrop sent to burn down the plantation. Additionally, Matt Cohen has recently suggested that the Maypole itself may have functioned within Indian systems of signification. By endowing the pole with totemic symbols (such as buck horns) of divine power or Manitou, Cohen writes: "Morton's ceremony, . . . may have borne enough similarities to eastern Native social rituals to present itself as [a] kind of liminal or connecting ritual space."¹⁵ This culturally-knowledgeable communication tactic shows Morton's success in commanding a large and diverse audience for his text. He appeals to that audience by simultaneously evoking multiple registers of meaning through classical references, totemic symbols, and by accommodating Native American ways of writing.

One of the key parts of Morton's performance was lasciviousness, or, more specifically, sex with Native women. Morton initially casts it as an activity undertaken only while waiting for English wives—"This harmless mirth, made by young men that lived in hope to have wives brought over to them" (139)—but goes on to serenade the Indian women:

Give to the Nymph that's free from scorn
No Irish stuff nor Scotch o'erworn:
Lasses in beaver coats come away,
Ye shall be welcome to us night and day. (Morton, 138)

These relationships with nymphs and lasses seem transactional: the women are offered used European cloth ("Irish stuff nor Scotch o'erworn") and associated with their prime commodity, "beaver coats." This song called "Drink and be merry, merry, merry boys" was written for the occasion of Morton's party and salutes Hymen: the pagan goddess of the wedding feast and the marriage bed. Morton even assigned parts to different speakers and devised a dance, creating a spectacle that resembled an Elizabethan masque: "a merry Song . . . was sung with a Chorus, every man bearing his part; which they performed in a dance, hand in hand about the Maypole, whiles one of the Company sung, and filled out the good liquor like Gammedes

¹⁵Matt Cohen, *The Networked Wilderness*, 46.

and Jupiter" (137). This last reference to Ganymede, the beautiful youth chosen as cupbearer of the Greek Zeus or Roman Jupiter, is taken to refer to Morton's indentured servants waiting on him, in addition to his sexual interest in boys as well as lasses.¹⁶ Classical references are thus central to Morton's triumphant celebration of behavior that would have been deemed deviant and illegal by colonial authorities. Consistently associating Native Americans with mythological creatures such as nymphs and Ganymede, he gleefully notes how the spectacle "was much distasted of the precise Separatists" (139). All these jokes and depictions center on classicism, which offers Morton more freedom to express both his complex, multi-layered identity and those of his Native guests than biblical metaphors could have.

Crowning the dense web of allusions that is spun around the Maypole is the central poem, "Rise Oedipus." In order to make sense of the poem—a series of inscrutable riddles—it helps to look at Morton's earlier characterizations of America. His Prologue already focuses on sex and procreation, picturing America as a woman willingly ravished in the course of her conquest: "Like a fair virgin, longing to be sped [satisfied]/ And meet her lover in a Nuptial bed" (Morton, 7, lines 9–10). Even in the 1630s, the image of America as a virgin "willingly ravished" by European colonists was time worn and tired.¹⁷ But Morton invokes the cliché only to invert it: virginity and chastity are no longer signs of surefire fertility. Instead, if New England is not properly "decked" or "enjoyed" (lines 11, 13), death and decay will inevitably follow. So, the colony will only succeed in

. . . , being most fortunate [profitable]
 When most enjoyed. So would our Canaan be,
 If well-employed by art and industry,
 Whose offspring now shows that her fruitful womb
 Not being enjoyed, is like a glorious tomb,

¹⁶For queer readings of Morton, see Dempsey's biography in Morton, 2:16: 2.199.

¹⁷Thomas Cartelli, "Transplanting Disorder: The Construction of Misrule in Morton's *New English Canaan* and Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*," *English Literary Renaissance* 27 (1997): 258.

Admired things producing which there die,
And lie fast bound in dark obscurity— (Morton, 7)

The flipside of the hyperbolically fertile landscape is a world that, without intervention or insemination by the colonizer (“art and industry”), produces things that cannot live or move (“die / and lie fast bound”). Because the stern Pilgrims and Puritans do not properly “enjoy” America, they will not succeed in making her bear fruit. Although Morton’s suggestion of labor (“industry”) seems to contradict the leisure that is characteristic of pastoral, his repeated emphasis on “enjoyment” makes clear what work he has in mind. Colonization, then, becomes a competition of sexual productivity when Morton introduces carnality and sexuality into what is, at heart, a political and economic polemic.¹⁸ That polemic is made here, in part, by his use of pastoral, in the sense that Morton simultaneously idealizes the landscape and the Indians, while critiquing the treatment they have received from his dissenting opponents.¹⁹ If the Pilgrims retain their patent, Morton implies, there will be death and stasis instead of teeming reproduction in the fecund and flourishing garden.

Morton’s tongue-in-cheek predictions of death resonate in uncomfortable ways with the reality of epidemic disease in early New England, which had largely stripped the coastal regions of their original inhabitants. Because the few survivors were not able to bury the dead, both the Pilgrims and Morton arrived in an American landscape littered by corpses. Upon first seeing it, Morton famously described New England as “a new-found Golgotha,” or place of the skull. He continues this sudden switch to biblical metaphors and providential readings when he explains the epidemics as “the hand of God [falling] heavily upon them [the Natives]” (19–20). Reading

¹⁸On how Morton’s models of trade and agriculture differed from the Puritans, see Michelle Burnham, “Land, Labor, and Colonial Economics in Thomas Morton’s *New English Canaan*,” and Daniel Walden, “‘The very hydra of the time’: Morton’s *New English Canaan* and Atlantic Trade,” in *Early Am. Lit.* 41 (2006): 405–28 and 48 (2013): 315–36 respectively.

¹⁹See also Robert D. Arner, “Pastoral Celebration and Satire in Thomas Morton’s *New English Canaan*,” *Criticism* 16 (1974): 217–31.

Indian deaths as the result of divine providence seems strangely inconsistent after chalking it up to not enough sex and infertility (as when Morton flippantly rhymes “tomb” with “womb” just above). Similarly, the suggestion that amidst all those “things . . . which there die,” plenty of “fair virgins” are eagerly awaiting their deflowering shows either a painful poetic incapacity to stay on-message, or a deliberate effort to make light and classical fun of actual historical events and their customary Puritan interpretations.

Morton repeatedly metaphorically feminizes and fertilizes the American landscape. The allegorical title of chapter 9, “Of a Barren Doe of Virginia, Grown Fruitful in New Canaan,” is explained as follows:

This country of New Canaan in seven years’ time could show more children living that have been born there, than in 27 years could be shown in Virginia. Yet here are but a handful of women landed to that of Virginia. (120)

Morton claims New Canaan has already brought forth more children than Virginia in only a quarter of the time—a tally of which historians have cried foul and which curiously contradicts the ideas of Golgotha and infertile Puritans.²⁰ In Morton’s fantasy, the country is “a Barren Doe” for whom only the phallic fountain of Marymount ensures progeny. In this universe, colonialism is clearly doing America and her inhabitants a big favor. In the paragraphs leading up to the revels, Morton thus teaches his reader how to read American events. During the feast, the (consistently feminized) New World plays her part in a riotous gathering whose couplings show no regard for race, gender, culture, or species.²¹ Morton’s disparaging depictions of the Separatists contribute to the “the realm of mock epic

²⁰See Charles Francis Adams Jr.’s 1882 edition of *New English Canaan*, who simply writes “preposterous” (121) in Dempsey, ed., *New English Canaan*, 390.

²¹Richard Slotkin notes: “‘Mare-mount’ evoked the image of sodomy, or buggery, a crime that troubled New England not a little (by Bradford’s account); but like ‘Marymount,’ the name was also evocative of primitive legend and ritual, and in the ‘Revells’ of Merrymount such rituals were mimed by men and women dressed as beasts for the occasion.” *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 61.

and comic allegory,” which David Read claims the poem has now entered.²² Although Morton’s antique comparisons may be far-fetched, he has convincingly dismissed Puritan typology as a similarly ridiculous set of suggestions.

The main Maypole poem—a series of inscrutable riddles—is both a repetition and culmination of the text’s main concerns: intercultural sex and fertility in an early modern waste land.²³

Rise Oedipus, and if thou canst, unfold
 What means Caribdis underneath the mould,
 When Scilla, solitary on the ground
 (Sitting in forme of Niobe) was found; (Morton, 135)

Oedipus is summoned because he is known as the solver of riddles, which is how he defeated the Sphinx. His upward movement counteracts the submerged, downward positions of Scilla and Caribdis. There are four reasons to believe that Caribdis is Morton’s way of representing the exterminated Indian population: he is dead and thus “underneath the Mould;” he was, traditionally, a danger to European seafarers, and Morton had earlier narrated [unproven] stories about Indians kidnapping explorers; the name Caribdis includes “Carib,” the standard designation for the original inhabitants of the West Indies; and he is a good husband to Scilla, just like the Indians were to their land. Scilla is therefore the New World, widowed and weeping, like Niobe, over her loss of all her children. In Ovid, Scilla is transformed into a great rock by the sea, which is another similarity to Niobe, who turns into a weeping stone. The main point here is that Morton again imagines America as a young woman (Scilla) who, though she has suffered grievous losses (Niobe), is now at liberty to choose a new suitor. Morton thus compares New World experience to classical precedent, though he never clearly states that America is the tenor and Caribdis, Scilla, and

²²David Read, *New World, Known World: Shaping Knowledge in Early Anglo-American Writing* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 87.

²³The following readings rely on Edith Murphy, “‘A Rich Widow, Now to be Tane Up or Laid Downe’: Solving the Riddle of Thomas Morton’s ‘Rise Oedipus,’” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 53 (1996): 755–68 and Jack Dempsey, “Reading the Revels: The Riddle of May Day in *New English Canaan*,” *Early Am. Lit.* 34 (1999): 283–312.

Niobe are the vehicles. What is most remarkable here is that Morton does not place himself at the center of his metaphorical universe—as the Puritan squarely did in their typological analogues.²⁴ Instead, he seeks to portray the last decades—with their death, destruction, and weeping—from the perspective of the Indians of New England. He imaginatively renders Native experience through classical analogies.²⁵

In the rest of the poem, Scilla asks Neptune to send her a new lover. He obliges in a sudden shift to biblical imagery:

. . . the bold shore
Presented Scilla a new paramour,
So strong as Samson and so patient
As Job himself—directed thus by Fate
To comfort Scilla so unfortunate. (Morton, 136)

The unrhymed description of Scilla's new male companion ("patient") sticks out among the poem's otherwise regular heroic couplets, but there is a larger purpose to its ill-fittingness. Morton consistently refers to the dissenters as Old Testamental people and so this "new paramour," who resembles Samson and Job, presumably refers to the Pilgrim (and later, Puritan) settlement of New England. Samson's strength was, of course, annulled by his weakness for Philistine and Canaanite women, while Job was widely read as a figure of despair and impatience.²⁶ As the lack of rhyme also indicates, this lover does not suffice. Scilla, still unsettled and unfulfilled, complains that "no sign / can there be found of virtue masculine" (Morton, 136). Morton refers to the Pilgrims as "effeminate" on five different occasions in *New English Canaan*, which lends strength to the interpretation that the dissenters are unable to meet the sexual needs of the colony and are therefore not worthy of the territory. He also, through another series of complex allusions,

²⁴See note 14 above.

²⁵This, writes Jack Dempsey, "represents an unsurpassed inclusion of Native history and experience in four lines of early English-American poetry," *New English Canaan*, 291.

²⁶For this reading of Job, Barbara K. Lewalski, *Milton's Brief Epic: The Genre, Meaning and Art of Paradise Regained* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1966), 189.

positions himself as a more fitting mate in the figure of Aesculapius, son of Apollo, who traditionally restores the dead to life. His arrival heralds new life for Scilla who, with him, finally attains sexual satisfaction.

Thus, throughout *New English Canaan*, Morton presents countless classical allusions intelligible only to those who participated in his original party (which probably performed the poem) and to careful readers attuned to his particular conflation of imperialism, sexuality, and New World experience. Morton imagines reviving (female-coded) Native American culture through his classical figures of fertility, as opposed to the sterility of the Pilgrims and their patriarchal typology. He not only pokes fun at the Puritans' lack of virility, but also at their representational paradigms. Morton's wild, unchecked, proliferating classicism counters Puritan settlement, ideology, and means of representation. His performance and means of communication probably allowed Native Americans to understand and participate in his classicist partying and imperialism—which they seem to have done enthusiastically and (probably) self-interestedly. By creating a maze of classical references Morton depicts intercultural encounter as dizzying, confusing, and obscure. And because nobody knows their way around without an interpreter, Morton is firmly at the center of his own literary New World.

Tompson's Ambivalent Crisis and Tears

Unlike Morton, Tompson operated firmly within the Puritan establishment but wrote poetry that was no less radical and subversive. Poetry played an auspicious part in his early life when his father, William Tompson, learned of the death of his wife, Abigail, from John Wilson's mourning verses.²⁷ Those verses scramble the letters of her name in an anagram—a

²⁷The poem in question is printed in Kenneth Murdock, ed., *Handkerchiefs from Paul* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 7–9. Peter White reconstructs the event in *Benjamin Tompson*, 17.

favorite source of inspiration for Puritan poets.²⁸ Benjamin did not enter the ministry, but he became a schoolteacher who wrote poetry aspiring to European fame (Tompson, 25), which he did not attain. His gravestone, nevertheless, lauds him as “the renowned poet of New England,” a reputation he most likely earned for his elegies, another particularly Puritan genre (41). *New Englands Crisis* (Boston and London, 1676) to which he later added *New-Englands Tears* (London, 1676) is his only surviving long poem, consisting of more than 850 lines. In it, he displays a wickedly satiric sense of humor—a striking choice for a poem on the terrifying events of King Philip’s War (1676–78). Like *New English Canaan*, *New Englands Crisis* mediates multiple voices—the speaker and Oedipus (Morton) or King Philip (Tompson)—and frames of reference (both biblical and classical) inside a single work. In both Morton’s and Tompson’s texts, intercultural contact thus creates colonial poetry that is double- (or even triple-) voiced and strongly satirical or irreverent.

Although Tompson’s epic was not reprinted after 1676, it shaped public opinion of King Philip’s War (especially in England) in important ways. Like Morton’s book, it was never forgotten by scholars or historians and contributed to the tradition of New World writings that demonized Native Americans to advance millennial frameworks of imperialism.²⁹ Yet its opening is unexceptional: Tompson starts off admonishing present generations, nostalgically referring back to the

²⁸See Ivy Schweitzer, *The Work of Self-Representation: Lyric Poetry in Colonial New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 51; and Michael Clark, “The Honeyed Knot of Puritan Aesthetics,” *Puritan Poets and Poetics*, 67–84.

²⁹Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Vintage, 1999); Jenny Pulsipher, *Subjects unto the Same King: Indians, English, and the Contest for Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); and Billy J. Stratton, *Buried in Shades of Night: Contested Voices, Indian Captivity, and the Legacy of King Philip’s War* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013). Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra points out how Tompson’s combination of classicism and typology demonized the Indians. *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550–1700* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 9.

communal ethos of their Puritan forebears. Such castigations are common in Puritan literature, particularly in the sermons known as jeremiads.³⁰ Tompson charts generational decay within a classical frame that stresses the abundance of food, referring to “*Ceres* [sic] bounty,” (84, line 11)—which has no clear correlation with New England’s settlement history that actually included famine.³¹ Like Morton’s “beaver coats,” Tompson also deliberately includes, in attention-grabbing italics, New World products and terms such as Jonakin—a cake made of cornmeal (100).

In the most famous scene from the poem, the warlike Indians gather around Philip, their leader, in a destroyed countryside filled with “rotten stump” and “rugged stone” (86, line 106). Philip makes a speech not unlike Satan’s in *Paradise Lost* with respect to aggression, false promises, and general irrationality.³² Initially, Philip eloquently articulates the Natives’ grievances:

My friends, our Fathers were not half so wise
As we ourselves who see with younger eyes.
They sel [*sic*] our land to english man [*sic*] who teach
Our nation all so fast to pray and preach:
Of all our country they enjoy the best,
And quickly they intend to have the rest. (86, lines 111–16)

Inverting the customary Puritan hierarchy, Philip claims superiority to his ancestors’ naiveté. Combined with Tompson’s earlier accusations—he claims the “golden times (too fortunate to hold) / Were quickly sin’d away for love of gold” (lines 13–14)—*New England’s Crisis* squarely blames the colonists for the end to peaceful settlement.

³⁰See the forum on the jeremiad in *Common-Place: The Interactive Journal of Early American Life* 14 (2014).

³¹Tompson’s relationship to pastoral has been thoroughly discussed by Joyce Green MacDonald, “Race, Imitation, and Forgetting in Benjamin Tompson’s New England Pastorals,” and Neil T. Eckstein, “The Pastoral and the Primitive in Benjamin Tompson’s ‘Address to Lord Bellamont,’” in *Early Am. Lit.* 46 (2011): 207–32 and 8 (1973): 111–16 respectively. On famine, see Katherine A. Grandjean, “New World Tempests: Environment, Scarcity, and the Coming of the Pequot War,” *WMQ* 68 (2011): 75–100.

³²John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004) Book 1, lines 84–123, 157–91.

Yet the epic abruptly changes direction when Philip switches into an odd, undignified pidgin. He lisps: "We drink so we big whipt, but English they / go sneep, no more, or else a little pay" (l. 121–22). Displaying the typical accent of an Algonquin Native speaking English, he mispronounces the "l" in sleep as an "n." This little inside joke may have amused Tompson's colonial readers and escaped the rest.³³ While again (or still) castigating the English, Philip seems petulant and childish. His ideas of victory have little to do with land ownership anymore, as he promises his troops: "Now if you'le [sic] fight Ile [sic] get you English coats, / And wine to drink out of their Captains throats" (l. 125–26). The image of drinking wine out of someone's throat conjures an image of cannibalism of which New World Natives (especially in Latin America) were regularly accused.³⁴ Tompson does not spell out that possibility, but quickly moves on to another favorite of white settlers: "Wee'l [the Narragansetts] have their [the Puritans'] silken wives take they our Squaws" (87, l. 129). The threat of Indian rape loomed large in the Puritan imagination, though (as in the case of American cannibalism) no historical evidence exists of its occurrence.

Over the next 200 lines, Tompson systematically dehumanizes the Indians, calling them wolves (l. 229), monsters (l. 319), and, again, cannibals (l. 344). New England, figured female (in a rare instance of typology) as Rachel, is beset by those who repeatedly rape (l. 160), devour (l. 230), and howl (l. 341). The violation of the white community and endangerment of its survival cannot be greater than in the scenes of pregnant women cut open:

And Mothers bodies ript [*sic*] for lack of aid.
The secret Cabinets which nature meant
To hide her master piece is open rent,
The half formd [*sic*] Infant there receives a death
Before it sees the light or draws its breath (l. 248–52)

³³White points this out in *Benjamin Thompson*, 101n8. Wayne Franklin has a different interpretation in "The Harangue of King Philip in *New-Englands Crisis* (1676)," *American Literature* 51 (1980): 536–40.

³⁴Kelly L. Watson, *Insatiable Appetites: Imperial Encounters with Cannibals in the North Atlantic World* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

Comparing women to closed furniture (“cabinets”), their violated bodies expose “her master piece”: the “half formd” fetus. The cruelty of butchering embryos seems not only random, but also terrifying. Yet such descriptions are common in texts about intercultural warfare, including Mary Rowlandson’s memorable description of the raid on Lancaster during King Philip’s War, and also occur in a Dutch poem on the Wiltwijck massacre.³⁵ Although it is safe to assume that such attacks actually and repeatedly happened, it is also worth identifying the goals their (re-)telling and versifying accomplish. For while the events dehumanize women who become gruesome tokens or trophies of war, Tompson’s poetry places the Indian outside the bounds of humanity. This positioning matters because it implies total war is the settlers’ only option. For how can one see Indians as fellow beings worthy of compassion or trust, when they confirm their savagery so whole-heartedly?³⁶ Here, Tompson first sets aside classicism to make a joke intelligible only to those in-the-know, only to then invoke the incessant bloodshed and slaughter of, say, the *Iliad* in a specifically American way. Classicism seems to be a discourse that is as easily suspended as employed in Tompson’s ambivalent colonial poetics.

Tompson’s descriptions of blood and gore continue in a classical vein. Yet, when classical references appear, their contrast to the gruesome subject matter makes them, somehow, inappropriate. For instance, Tompson alludes to the primitive state of Indian architecture by writing: “*Rome* took more time to grow than twice six hours, / But half that time will serve for indian [sic] bowers” (91, l. 308–9). Rome cannot therefore be compared to Native New England; Philip and his men’s construction speed shows they are savage and backwards. The English are not much better, however: “Hundreds they [the English] hack in pieces in pursuit. / *Sed haud impuné*, English sides do

³⁵Mary Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* ed. Neal Salisbury (Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin’s, 1997), 68–71; Henricus Selyns’ “Bridal Torch for Rev. Ægidius Luyck,” (1663), trans. in *Early American Writings*, ed. Carla Mulford (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 717–18.

³⁶For the prevalence and point of public torture and murder during King Philip’s War, see Lepore, *Name of War*, chapter 3.

feel / as well as tawny skins the lead and steel" (90, l. 277–80). Hacking their way through feeling "swarms" (l. 276) seems hardly courageous, and the English's own peril (in a throw-away Latin phrase which means "but not unpunished") makes them suffer symmetrically alongside their adversaries. Tompson's ideas about a "golden age" have here been replaced by tongue-in-cheek classicism that points out the incommensurability of colonial warfare with Greek and Roman precedent. Although the incommensurability may strike some as funny, it also exposes a deeper ambivalence inherent in Tompson's text: namely the suggestion that neither Biblical nor classical paradigms apply to King Philip's War. The carnage and pointlessness of the conflict reduce all literary allusions and even the idea of classical heroism to farce.

Although comparing colonial America to classical antiquity may seem like a strange and misguided enterprise, it was actually very common. In a 1664 poem about an Indian raid in upstate New York, the preacher Henricus Selyns spins an elaborate yarn about a distraught Cupid, crying in the Catskills, because the Indians have stolen his arrows.³⁷ Before he became the last Director-General of New York, Petrus Stuyvesant exchanged verses with a friend on Curaçao, straining to populate the island with antique gods and heroes.³⁸ In the sixteenth century, three Spanish historians—Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Augustín de Zárate, and Pedro Cieza de León—already found that the history of Rome explained that of Peru.³⁹ And Alonso de Ercilla, in one of the most famous and well-received poems from the Spanish Golden Age, modeled his description of the War with the Mapuche Indians of Chile on Virgil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *Pharsalia*.⁴⁰ Writing on the heels of all of this output, Tompson is hardly pioneering the classical approach, yet he appears to be questioning it (anew). By invoking analogies only

³⁷"Bridal Torch."

³⁸*Een Pant van ware Vrientschap: Trantveersjes and Enkele Andere Gedichten van Johan Farret en Petrus Stuyvesant*, ed. Jaap Jacobs (Leiden, Neth.: Kopwit, 2004).

³⁹MacCormack, *On the Wings of Time*, chap. 3; Lupher, *Romans in a New World*.

⁴⁰Alonso de Ercilla, *La Araucana* (Madrid, 1569–89). See also Peter Quint, *Epic and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), chap. 4.

to reject them—between Rome and Indians bowers—Tompson seems to suggest that he finds classical parallels inapplicable to colonial America, despite their resounding international popularity.

In another incongruity, the epic's elevated genre seems to work against its peripheral subject matter, as the exploits of Puritans and Indians are trivialized in comparison to heroic classical combat. The speaker's jokey attitude to death becomes increasingly hypothetical or even bathetic:

Here might be heard an hideous indian [sic] cry
Of wounded ones who in the Wigwams fry.
Had we been *Canibals* here might we feast
On brave *Westphalia* gammons ready drest.
The tawny hue is Ethiopick made
Of such on whome [sic] *Vulcan* his clutches laid. . . .
But tedious travel had so cramped our toes
It was too hard a task to chase the foes. (l. 341–50)

Contemplating the cannibalistic impulses of the English this time (“Had we been *Canibals* here might we feast”), whose appetite for fancy Westphalian hams might have gotten the better of them, Tompson attempts to sort out the Indians’ origins (from Ethiopia?), a question which was a matter of intellectual dispute throughout the colonial period.⁴¹ Although his tone is disparaging and racist (“the tawny hue” is clearly inferior to whiteness), the speaker offends both Indians and English in equal measure by suggesting the English soldiers contemplate eating the fried Indians. This curiously counteracts his earlier dehumanization of the Indians who cut open pregnant women. Tompson seems to lose himself in the confusion of combat and far-fetched parallels (Westphalian hams, anyone?). The concluding joke about “tedious travel” and “cramped toes” does not seem remotely funny, right after allusion to Indians

⁴¹See Sarah Rivett, *The Science of the Soul in Colonial New England* (Chapel Hill, NC: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2011), 20, 165, and Joyce Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500–1676* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), chap. 4.

burning alive. If anybody is dehumanized here, it is the English observer or soldier who asks attention for his sore feet after setting people on fire.

Perhaps Tompson intends to leaven the—admittedly hard to digest—events of King Philip’s War with his humor. But much of his sense of comedy derives from the patently unheroic conduct of colonials. In an extended ekphrasis (of an imagined painting of the war) which befits Tompson’s epic ambitions, he suggests that an invented painter of the scene portray the Narragansett “besmeared with Christian blood and oild / with fat out of white humane bodyes [sic] boild” (lines 433–34). Here, it seems he tries to lift the violence to a level appropriate for epic (namely ekphrasis) only to be stymied by the gross realities of war. Thinking about Achilles’s and Aeneas’s shields—the most important instances of ekphrasis in their respective epics—Tompson’s mind runs to Vulcan, their maker: “Draw them [the Narragansetts] with clubs like maules and full of stains / Like *Vulcans* anvilling [sic] *New-Englands* brains” (l. 435–36). Here, the very stuff of war—blood, fat, and brains—take the place of heroic history, which is depicted on the shields in *the Iliad* and *the Aeneid*.⁴² This fits with the common English negation of Native American history or culture, while it also denies the Indians access to precious resources such as gold and steel. Instead, the only source materials of the Natives are English body parts, which, though boiled, chopped, and beaten, are but poor replacements of the lost territory and independence.

The final explicit epic gesture occurs towards the end of the poem, when the women of Boston start to build a bulwark of dirt to repel the enemy. With an explicit nod to Virgil—“*Dux Foemina Facti*”—Tompson instantly pokes fun at the “Amazonian Dames,” whom he suggests should stick to housewifely pursuits.⁴³ The amateurish fortifications remind him of

⁴²Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Richard Lattimore (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 18.478–608, and Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage, 1990), 8.626–728.

⁴³White points out that this is a reference to *The Aeneid*, book 1, l. 364. Benjamin Thompson, 102n29.

"Christmas pyes / [whose] pastry by degrees on high doth rise" (l. 595). As on previous occasions, Tompson's Virgilian references here underscore the difference between the dirty, domestic, and dumb proceedings of King Philip's War and heroic battles of the past.⁴⁴ Thus, throughout his short epic, Tompson does not consistently sustain a single interpretive paradigm (like classicism or typology), because the gruesome realities of war disrupt such ways of seeing the world. Although he keeps reintroducing epic, the terrors and horrors of colonial New England's largest armed conflict (terrors and horrors which are listed in ways resembling epic catalogues) never coalesce into heroic deeds, but rather seem random and desperate. The incompatibility of the depicted acts with the elevation of epic creates humor through incommensurability: because the fighting with Indians is so unlike Greek or Roman battles, the invocation of those forebears is funny. This device simultaneously highlights colonial warfare and disparages it. The speaker seems, like Janus, not to know whether to laugh or cry at the spectacles of disemboweled pregnancy, burned Indians, and useless female labor.

Tompson's half-baked, mocking classicism might be plausibly attributed to his limited poetic capacities. Yet rather than an inferior craftsman, I see a colonial poet struggling to make sense of fledging imperialism and a ghastly war. As Joyce G. Macdonald has recently argued: "the processes of colonization mounted unprecedented challenges to the cultural authority of Tompson's inherited genres. New relations between colonists and their English administrators, between colonists and Indians, and between New England and the rest of an emerging British Atlantic empire were beyond the comprehension of his classical resources."⁴⁵ I believe Tompson deliberately invites us to contemplate the insufficiency of both his scriptural and classical resources. The very insufficiency underlies his humor.

⁴⁴See also Jane Donahue Eberwein's conclusions: "However entertaining, Tompson's burlesque falls flat as the conclusion to what began as a narrative of a tragic, appallingly destructive war." "'Harvardine Quil': Benjamin Tompson's Poem on King Philip's War," *Early Am. Lit.* 28 (1993): 16.

⁴⁵"Race, Imitation, and Forgetting," 209.

Even Tompson acknowledges that European ways of seeing the world do not apply to early New England, yet he is unable, like Thomas Morton, to imagine a universe with a new symbolic language. Instead, the colonial contact zone, Tompson suggests, is a space of ambition, violence, and chaos.

In summary, the classicist poetics of intercultural contact from Puritan New England foster a perspective running counter to common Puritan depictions of the Algonquins. In Thomas Morton's multi-generic celebration, myriad interlinked allusions form an insider's code that includes Indians while it pokes fun at Pilgrim spoil sports. This insider's code is simultaneously artful and highly realistic, rendering both Morton's and Native American perspectives on early colonization with more nuance and sophistication than Puritan typology could have accommodated. At the same time, his endless puns on fertility and reproduction render his classicism less fixed and coherent than typology: instead, it seems contradictory, excessive, and proliferating, like the landscape itself. It is a riddle that generates more riddles. Benjamin Tompson, on the other hand, writes a mock epic that contrasts New World imperialism to traditional heroism, emphasizing the primitivism and savagery of war in North America, which both transcends and appears to invalidate classical precedent. Ultimately, the antique parallels of both authors seem to search for a new kind of culturally flexible, satirical mode. Yet classicism proves a double-edged sword: it deflates the powers-that-be but also cuts or pokes whoever wields it, making poems seem inscrutable or silly. Perhaps, then, the real accomplishment of both poems is that their code-switching conveys the difficulty of cross-cultural communication. By failing to satisfactorily signify in either Christian or classicist ways, colonial verse appears to enact the impossibility, at this time, of monolithic understandings of intercultural contact and conflict.

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