

Abstract How do settlers organize their discursive relationship with the lands they settle, in order to claim, conceptually and materially, the position of owner and occupant? What must they do to transform themselves, in their eyes and in the eyes of others, from parasite to host? And in what ways have these practices been contested? This article addresses these questions in the historical context of early American settler colonialism and demonstrates the relational structure that colonial legitimation requires, including how this structure is mediated by subjects not strictly part of that relation. Through readings of John Marshall, Mary Rowlandson, James Printer, and Martin R. Delany, this article brings together the fields of media philosophy and settler colonial studies to theorize the “parasitical trick” as a fundamental and flexible technique of settler colonialism that removes Indigenous people from relationality by, paradoxically, making them central to it.

Keywords settler colonialism, media studies, Indigenous relationality, providence, Mary Rowlandson

In the first of the three early nineteenth-century Supreme Court cases known as the Marshall Trilogy, which dictates the legal status of Indigenous landholding in the United States, Chief Justice John Marshall secures US domestic and international relations through the management of Indigenous sovereignty. Marshall opines that the European power that arrives first to a territory in the Americas claims the right to extinguish Indigenous title “either by purchase or by conquest” (*Johnson v. McIntosh*, 21 U.S. 543 [1823]). Although Indigenous people have a just claim “to use [land] according to their own discretion,” Marshall argues, the first European arrivals have the more considerable power of transferring ownership of land, a power that itself transferred from the English to the Americans. By establishing the earliness of US settler colonialism, Marshall effectively preempts

all others who would expropriate Indigenous land: the private US individuals who might start unsanctioned wars by encroaching on Indigenous territories, the US states that could arrogate the power to extinguish Indigenous title that is instilled in the federal government, or the European nations that might ally with Indigenous groups to gain a foothold on the continent. The Marshall case thus specifies the terms of Indigenous land title, with the ultimate result of strengthening the legal basis for US federal authority during territorial conflicts with other domestic and international powers.¹

I begin with these foundational coordinates for the legal legitimization of Indigenous dispossession in the United States to exemplify what I call the *parasitical trick*. Iteratively adapted to the imperatives of settler colonialism in periods before and after the Marshall Trilogy, the parasitical trick is a technique of settler colonialism that removes Indigenous people from relationality by, paradoxically, making them central to it. The term *parasite*, which I draw from media studies rather than the life sciences, demonstrates the isomorphic structure between communication and dispossession that leads to unexpected contortions in settler relationality, or the types of social relations imposed by the structure of invasion (Wolfe 2016). Developed by French philosopher Michel Serres (2007), the notion of the parasite builds on a tenet of information theory that asserts, as N. Katherine Hayles (1988: 3) glosses, that “whenever a message is transmitted, some noise inevitably intrudes—snow on a television set, static on a radio, blurred type or misprints in a book.” *Le parasite*, a French cognate, includes the usual English definitions of (1) a person who lives at the expense of another, usually through flattery or obsequiousness, and (2) a biological bloodsucker, as well as, exclusive to the French, (3) disruptive noise. In step with this third definition as noise or interference in a communication circuit, the parasite must be eliminated, or at least reduced, for the successful transference of information within that circuit. Though it might seem incongruous to bring together the fields of media studies and settler colonialism, the Marshall Trilogy illustrates the parasite’s significant role in forming settler relations. For Marshall, Indigenous claims to sovereignty are “parasitical” from the perspective of the US settler state, not because they disrupt US claims to sovereignty but because the United States consummates its sovereignty through the management of that disruption. What is “peculiar,” according to Marshall, about the “peculiar and cardinal distinctions” that mark “the relation of the Indians to the United States” (*Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. 1 [1831]) is precisely that the

federal government must manage the disruption that is Indigenous sovereignty in order to speak sideways, as it were, to the private settlers, US states, and European imperial entities that might dispute the scope of US sovereignty.

Although this article begins with the Marshall Trilogy to elucidate the contours of the parasitical trick and its legal enshrinement, its focus is the trick's emergence in the seventeenth-century writings of Mary Rowlandson and James Printer. By excavating the earlier history of the parasitical trick, I argue that the assignment of Indigenous people to the position of the parasite partakes in a colonial genealogy that stretches back to at least King Philip's War in New England (1675–78), but it is not just this temporal continuity that makes connecting nineteenth-century settler relations to those of an earlier early America worthwhile. King Philip's War was the "great watershed" (DeLucia 2018: 1) in the contest over sovereignty between Indigenous and English groups, marking the beginning of the end of Indigenous regional dominance. At a moment in colonial history when the triumph of the English settlers was not yet seen as inevitable, when the familiar discourse of *terra nullius* had not yet become a dominant rationale for settler colonialism, the perceived conspicuousness of Indigenous societies during this initial period of settler contestation leads Rowlandson to ascribe the position of the parasite to indigeneity.² Before its legal triumph in the Marshall Trilogy, in other words, the parasitical trick characterized Rowlandson's justification for settler colonialism despite mounting evidence against the righteousness of English inhabitancy in the Americas. In contrast, James Printer, a Nipmuc Christian and one of the Cambridge printers of Rowlandson's captivity narrative, disrupts the performance of this trick through both outright contestation and dexterous repurposing of its way of mediating relations. By attending to the longer history of the structure of settler relations that the United States adapts from English colonization, this article demonstrates not only how this relational structure is foundational for the articulation of settler colonial sovereignty in a period before the parasitical trick became a legal requisite for realizing dispossession across the continent, but also how these relations were contested through the equally subtle mechanisms of Indigenous defiance.

The parasite as developed in media studies, however, can get us only so far. Though it helps articulate the structure of settler relations, the parasite, as I show here, is not an objective feature of relationality (communicational or otherwise). It is instead historically specific to

the racialized and proprietary relationality at work in settler colonialism. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015: xii) has argued, settler colonies like the United States employ “white possessive logics . . . to circulate sets of meanings about ownership of the nation, as part of commonsense knowledge.” What ultimately turns the “parasite” into the parasitical trick is how the latter operationalizes white possessive logics to transform the settler’s specious mode of possessive belonging into an unexceptional social and legal convention. It should be noted, however, that just because the parasitical trick is a trick does not mean it is a “cynical or duplicitous ploy,” to borrow David Kazanjian’s (2003: 1) description of the abolitionist David Walker’s critique of “the colonizing trick.”³ Rather, the parasitical trick is made real for settlers and for those who take up the settlers’ claims. Indeed, it is the historical enactment of the trick and its fitful metamorphosis into common sense that makes possible Michel Serres’s analysis of relations *as if* the parasite were an objective feature of relationality. Serres, then, helps us find the framework for understanding the historical occurrences that continue to shape perceptions of relationality under settler colonialism.

As part of a broader critical intervention that seeks to put media philosophy and the study of race, colonialism, and social domination into sustained conversation, this article elucidates how early settlers claimed their belonging in British America while simultaneously acknowledging their nonoriginality. In doing so, the article makes a case for the persistence of settler relations that were developed in early America. Given Marshall’s legal dicta on federal landholding, the “earliness” of early American settler colonialism is not a period with dates that range loosely from the mid-1600s to the mid-1800s; rather, it is a phenomenon to be understood as the necessary legal condition of being earlier than the other European powers but later than the Indigenous ones. Marshall was discomfited by this temporal arrangement when nineteenth-century Cherokee land claims, for which Marshall admitted he felt “sympathies” (*Cherokee Nation*, 30 U.S.), served as a persistent reminder that US sovereignty is not original and emerges only through dispossessive social relations with the even earlier inhabitants. He handled these reminders by imagining all Indigenous nations as “gradually sinking beneath our superior policy, our arts and our arms,” fabricating an indefinite future period when Indigenous people will disappear altogether. Marshall thus acknowledges a limited legal basis for Indigenous sovereignty while also engineering a future—perhaps one beyond the stalled temporality of “early America”—in

which such an acknowledgment is a distant memory. Refusing Marshall's wish to periodize early America out of existence, this article asserts that "early America" is an ongoing legal and existential condition that entangles seventeenth-, nineteenth-, and twenty-first-century white possessive logics, including the operations of the parasitical trick. This article therefore articulates the explanatory value of the parasitical trick for addressing key questions about early American settler relationality: How do settlers organize their discursive relationship to the lands they settle in order to assert, conceptually and materially, the position of owner and occupant? Through what practices do settlers exert belonging at the expense of Indigenous people? And in what ways have these practices been contested?



When she was taken captive in February 1676 by King Philip's army during a raid on the English settlement of Lancaster in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Mary Rowlandson (1682a: 7) found her faith uprooted in "*the vast and desolate Wilderness*," a recognizable Puritan trope for the spiritual desolation outside Christian society. Rowlandson, however, turns from a despair that would be a repudiation of God's providence to a reconfirmation of a more profound faith by representing Indigenous people as a disruption that ultimately deepens her relationship with God. In this way, Rowlandson fashions an early theological version of the parasitical trick out of an ardent belief in ordained suffering, a belief popular in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the mid-seventeenth century, when providential interpretations of economic and civil crises were put forth by theologians and merchants alike to rationalize their troubles (Valeri 2010). For example, after the Boston merchant John Hull lost hundreds of pounds in goods to Dutch privateers in the 1660s, he comforted himself that "the Lord" used his losses "to join my soul nearer to himself, and loose it more from creature comforts," but, luckily for him, providence soon recompensed his "loss in outward estate" (92). Looking for an explanation for the precariousness of overseas trade, merchants found their personal misdeeds or the general wantonness of Massachusetts's public institutions reflected in the unfortunate fate of a commercial voyage.

Rowlandson, therefore, is not unique in believing "adversity, death, and loss were integral to God's plan" (Rubin 2013: 24) or even that the captive would understand "God's word through his or her Native American captors" (Wyss 2000: 13). In the first Sabbath of her captivity, for example, Rowlandson (1682a: 19) asks her captors to let her rest from

work, “to which they answered me, they would break my face.” Their refusal prompts her to “take notice of the strange providence of God in preserving the *Heathen*” (19), which she justifies when, on the very day that her captors issue this threat, the English army advances to the Indigenous encampment, only to be stopped by the Baquag river. An English victory would confirm the righteousness of English conquest, but this does not occur, as the natural barrier obstructs their path. The impediment to her rescue serves as a sign that neither Rowlandson nor the English were “ready for so great a mercy as *Victory* and *Deliverance*” (19). Rowlandson even confesses to the sin of spiritual negligence, finding that, although her “conscience did not accuse me of unrighteousness towards one or other,” she “saw how in my walk with God, I had been a careless creature” (40). The unpredictable vicissitudes of war and captivity can thus be processed through the same providential readings that rationalize the vicissitudes of the global commodity market—they share a general mood of actuarial suffering through “the perfect calculation of the kingdom of known cause and effect” (Emerson 1844: 73).

In drawing on these providential accounts of suffering to explain the earthly dominance of King Philip’s army, Rowlandson insists on a unique conjunction of providence with improper eating that incorporates multiple kinds of parasitism. Rowlandson (1682a: 61) explicates this providential parasitism as follows:

How to admiration did the Lord preserve [“the Indians”] for his holy ends, and the destruction of many still amongst the *English*! strangely did the Lord provide for them; that I did not see (all the time I was among them) one Man, Woman, or Child, die with hunger. Though many times they would eat that, that a Hog or a Dog would hardly touch; yet by that God strengthened them to be a scourge to his People.

Throughout her narrative, Rowlandson uses eating as a metaphor for the nourishment of Christian spiritual and bodily life; “the Indians,” however, have access only to bodily nutrition, as they are the instruments of divine chastisement with which God tests and refines the Christian soul. Unable to feed spiritually, the imagined figure of the Indian feeds off the land, consuming the most debased form of physical sustenance or the “provision which they plundered from the *English*” (61). In line with providential interpretations of calamity and disaster, the entwining of the scourge with ingestion reflects what will become long-standing anxieties about God’s rationale for creating indecent

eaters. For Charles Darwin (1909: 41), the parasite is an affront to creation: "It is derogatory that the Creator of countless systems of worlds should have created each of the myriads of creeping parasites." It is this same improper eating that, for Herman Melville's (1971: 127) "Indian-hater," racializes the Indigenous person as the object of universal hatred: "It is terrible; but is it surprising? Surprising, that one should hate a race which he believes to be red from a cause akin to that which makes some tribes of garden insects green?" Whether expressed through predation, scavenger, or parasitism, this blood-thirstiness offends in such a way that must be explained. In the seventeenth-century context, then, Rowlandson provides one such explanation, arguing that God preserves the heathen's body in the just cause of colonial salvation.

It is in this sense that Rowlandson's providential account constitutes part of the puritanical matrix of Euro-American thought from which Serres's concept of the parasite develops some three hundred years later. No doubt the language of eating continues to be a rewarding if well-trodden site of explication for Rowlandson's narrative, but unlike social or biological parasitism, in which the parasite uses the host as a resource—which in a settler colonialist schema would cast the Indigenous American as the parasite who plunders English provisions and is "a scourge to the whole Land" (Rowlandson 1682a: 62)—Rowlandson's providential parasitism imagines the parasite as feeding on the relation between God and Christian.⁴ In the sore trial of the wilderness, away from Christian community, when divine providence is least visible and the commandments least achievable, the worldly dominance of Indigenous societies floods the channel between God and Christian with suffering. To hear God's voice, Rowlandson incorporates this suffering into her theology, turning Indigenous people into afflictive mechanisms for the Christian English people to restore themselves in the divine image. While Rowlandson develops this theology to vindicate the titular sovereignty and goodness of God, it also necessarily articulates a worldview in which the settler is put into relation with God through the mediation of indigeneity. In the providential idiom, Rowlandson casts Indigenous people as a disruptive affliction, as a scourge and instrument of chastisement, who seem at first to interrupt Rowlandson's relation with God by taking her out of the Christian community but in fact bring her closer to God and redemption. Her figuration of Indigenous warfare as a corporal parasitism of plundering and subsistence consumption—which conforms to Puritan assumptions about the lack of systematic agriculture and animal

domestication among Indigenous communities—indicates the Indigenous American's more pivotal task of parasiting the God-Christian relation. Noise, whether as static interference or heathen Indian, boosts the signal, bringing English social identity into an increasingly mediated, structural system of providence.

Yet for this providential parasitism to function, Indigenous people must disrupt the God-Christian relation without ever fashioning a direct relation with God. The absoluteness of this exclusion becomes explicit when Rowlandson unequivocally repudiates the faith of "praying Indians": Indigenous converts to Christianity who adopted English customs and dress, and lived in "praying towns" on the border of Indigenous and English territory. During the early English colonization of North America, influential ministers such as John Eliot and Daniel Gookin, with the financial support of the English Crown, attempted to convert Indigenous people, offering religious salvation, trade access to English markets, and military alliances. Rowlandson, however, unfailingly denies the possibility of Indigenous conversion, depicting Christian and non-Christian Indigenous Americans alike through an anti-black racialization as "those black creatures in the night" or "black as the Devil" (Rowlandson 1682a: 6, 52). In a revealing moment, she sees thirty men on horseback riding toward her encampment: "My heart skipt within me thinking they had been *Englishmen* at the first sight of them, for they were dressed in *English* Apparel, with Hats, white Neckcloths, and Sashes about their wasts, & Ribbons upon their shoulders: but when they came near, there was a vast difference between the lovely faces of Christians, and the foul looks of those Heathens" (44). Though these riders are not identified as "praying Indians," their apparel likely indicates their status as assimilated Christians, yet Rowlandson marks their essential and unconvertable heathenism through a nascent racialization that Lisa Brooks (2018b: 175) describes as spreading through the colonies during the war. Once Indigenous Christians began fighting alongside King Philip's army, the English removed all remaining Indigenous Christians to Deer Island, one of the first "internment camps" in North America, as a strategy of control and surveillance that expanded on the containment of praying Indians to praying towns (DeLucia 2018: 80). To secure a relationality between God and Christian that gives meaning to her suffering, Rowlandson refers to a bodily racial reality that verifies the Indigenous Christian's essential nature as heathen, making any conversion or assimilation a literal travesty. At this point the "lovely faces of Christians" were becoming identifiable only as white faces.

If Indigenous people in Rowlandson's theology serve the function of improving the God-Christian relation, then when Rowlandson encounters Indigenous Christians, she racializes and heathenizes them to secure their position as parasites rather than Christian receivers of grace. In his theory of the parasite, Serres (2007: 67) imagines a channel of information between sender and receiver like a dialogue that "suppose[s] a third man and seek[s] to exclude him." The two interlocutors, rather than being in agonistic contest with each other, collaborate to control the interferences of the "third man" and clear the channel for more precise communication. In Rowlandson, the Indigenous person becomes this "third man" of Christian cosmology even as God might well be the invasive parasite that Rowlandson carries from Europe to the Americas to perform the parasitical trick, which is to say, the removal of Indigenous people from social relationality and into the position of an organizing disruption. It is important to keep in mind that Rowlandson does not simply "flip" the biological host-parasite relation by asking, who is host and who is parasite, who is native and who is foreign, as such questions establish the punitive distinctions that force a dialectical or deconstructive relationality. Put differently, since the colonizers are the ones who have stolen the land, this reversal of the Indigenous from host to parasite would simply indicate the colonizer's resentment, or what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2002: 144), speaking metaphorically, call "the bad conscience of the parasite." Rowlandson's trick is crueler and more efficacious than a bad conscience that affirms a merely inverted relationality. The trickiness of providential parasitism is that it removes Indigenous people from relationality by paradoxically making them foundational to it. Prepositionally, she relates *through* Indigenous people, not *to* them. My claim is not that Rowlandson misrecognizes her actual relations with Indigenous people as an imaginary relation with God; instead, it is that her relations to Indigenous people and God are differentially enacted by the white possessive logic unique to the parasitical trick. For all their presence in Rowlandson's narrative, Indigenous people are only nominally included into relationality to serve the purpose of restoring the neglected relationship between herself and God.

While it comes as no surprise that even the settler's spiritual well-being depends on the removal of Indigenous people, the parasitical trick's facility for simultaneously acknowledging and nullifying Indigenous presence entails a distinctive white possessive logic that comes into focus by way of Cheryl Harris's (1993) path-breaking legal analysis "Whiteness as Property." A direct influence for Moreton-Robinson's

account of property, Harris argues that whiteness has been enshrined in law as property, rather than as an identity among identities, through “the parallel systems of domination of Black and Native American peoples” (1714). If, as Harris suggests, the object of property is “possessed” through the selective inclusion and exclusion of other subjects from the use of that property, then whiteness, with all its legal and social entitlements, becomes the property of European settlers through the exclusion of others. Harris’s insight, however, is not that possession entails exclusion but that these legal and historical exclusions are themselves subsequently obscured, thereby lifting whiteness out of social relationality and making it identical with the body of the European settler. The omission of these historical exclusions is the condition for the affective experience of white racial security when whiteness comes to be seen as an inalienable property that is self-identical to the possessor. In other words, the modern racial category of whiteness is predicated on a racialized economy of exclusion that denies its origination in this economy. Forgetfulness thus becomes a cunning solution for a commercial culture that subordinates the variety of social relations to the governing relation of property, subjecting even the most cherished and seemingly self-evident notions of a white settler class, including its self-identity as white, to the social contingencies of property, with its intrinsic vulnerability to alienation, theft, and loss.

Like Moreton-Robinson, I take Harris’s argument as having an expansive explanatory power beyond an analysis of whiteness: it can also disclose other social relationalities that have been “forgotten” or “disappeared” to naturalize property, in the expanded sense, as inalienable and seemingly secure. In Rowlandson’s case, her property includes her spiritual belonging that must be preserved through the exclusion of Indigenous people. Unlike others who simply disavow or “forget” that exclusion is the condition for possession—whether the possession of whiteness, religious salvation, or settler sovereignty—Rowlandson insists on the centrality of Indigenous people for mediating spiritual relations. Unable to be forgotten or disappeared, indigeneity is what Rowlandson is always thinking, but in a distinctive way that removes Indigenous people from relationality through their very presence.

Nonetheless, Rowlandson’s theology is flexible enough that it does not require Indigenous people to be actively remembered for them to secure her redemption, ultimately confirming Harris’s insight into amnesiac property relations. Once the English gain control over the region—and once God, who “had not so many wayes before to preserve [“the Indians”], but now he hath as many to destroy them”

(Rowlandson 1682a: 63), determines the time is right for the destruction of Indigenous societies—Rowlandson secures Christian both spiritual alignment and worldly dominance by absorbing affliction into herself. When the war ends and she returns home to Christian society, she remembers the days before captivity when she could “*sleep quietly without workings in my thoughts*” (71). But now her mind cannot rest as she considers “the wonderfull power of God that mine eyes have seen” so that “when others are sleeping mine eyes are weeping” (71–72). Her tears consecrate a mix of emotions: they are an expression of the suffering she has endured, the grief over her daughter Sarah who died during captivity, the gratitude for God’s salvation, and the knowledge that the world is transitory. She has returned to shelter among the English, but her restored material comforts do not heal the traumas that continue to afflict her. In the passage that ends the narrative, Rowlandson offers an extended meditation on life after captivity:

When I lived in prosperity; having the comforts of the World about me, my relations by me, my Heart chearfull: and taking little care for any thing; and yet seeing many, whom I preferred before my self, under many tryals and afflictions, in sickness, weakness, poverty, losses, crosses, and cares of the World, I should be sometimes jealous least I should have my portion in this life; and that Scripture would come to my mind, *Heb. 12.6. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every Son whom he receiveth*. But now I see the Lord had his time to scourge and chasten me. . . . If trouble from smaller matters begin to arise in me, I have something at hand to check my self with, and say, why am I troubled? It was but the other day that if I had had the world, I would have given it for my freedom, or to have been a Servant to a Christian. I have learned to look beyond present and smaller troubles, and to be quieted under them. (72–73)

Affliction, by the end of the narrative, becomes the sweetness of her life—the vindication of God’s love and the sign of her election. And yet this affliction has changed. It has lost its source in the figure of the Indian, whom Rowlandson no longer mentions. Vanquished by the English army, Indigenous people reappear only as the unnamed and disappeared ground of Christian suffering and salvation. This internalized affliction not only becomes the guarantee of her righteousness but also maps out the self-protective feelings of whiteness. David L. Eng (2016: 14), writing about a similar phenomenon in Melanie Klein’s object relations, describes how “the European colonizer monopolizes

both sides of the psychic equation: he is both the *perpetrator* of violence and the traumatized *victim* deserving of repair.” Rowlandson, too, internalizes the position of the afflicter, the vanished Indian, as well as the afflicted, the suffering Christian, so that she can feel, psychically, like a victim but live, materially, like a victor. The dual destruction and introjection of the parasite is thus the necessary foundation for Rowlandson’s physical home in the postwar arrogation of Indigenous land and her salvation in the arrogation of Indigenous affliction.

What begins as a theological heuristic for making her suffering meaningful as a means of enduring captivity becomes so integrated into her psyche, by the end of Rowlandson’s narrative, that her trauma becomes the very source of her virtue. Her land, her suffering, and her salvation become hers through the double exclusion of Indigenous people: once from Christian community and again from memory. Unable to remember, let alone repair, the suffering of Indigenous dispossession, Rowlandson encounters difference only to plunge out of herself into herself. Her suffering is genuine, which is what makes her claims to belonging compelling, but these afflictions are also the moral justification for the settler’s relation to home. The parasitical trick is complete: the settler returns to bed, righteous in her moral calculus, with tears in her eyes and a parasite within.



Through her development of the parasitical trick as a religious explanation for English military vulnerability, Mary Rowlandson prepares the relational system that Chief Justice John Marshall will adapt into law two centuries later. The parasitical trick, however, has not gone uncontested, even in Rowlandson’s lifetime. The seventeenth-century scholar Wawaus, a Nipmuc Christian also known as James Printer, not only improvises techniques for challenging the parasitical trick that Rowlandson exemplifies but also probes the trick’s limitations and self-disabling contradictions. Before King Philip’s War, Printer worked as a typesetter for the printing press in the town of Cambridge, translating portions of John Eliot’s Indian Bible and even training the Cambridge printer Samuel Green (Lopenzina 2012: 109). When the war broke out, he and ten other Indigenous Christians were accused by colonial authorities of participating in a raid on the English town of Lancaster and were thrown into a Cambridge jail for three weeks. They eventually procured a trial and proved that, at the time of the raid, they were observing the Sabbath in prayer (Brooks 2018b: 199). With the accusations found to be baseless, Printer returned to the

town of Hassanamesit, but his wartime troubles did not end there, as King Philip's army invaded his town and took him captive. As a captive, Printer participated in raids against colonial villages—perhaps unwillingly, perhaps not. After returning to Cambridge at the conclusion of the war, he likely set at least one of the two Cambridge editions of Rowlandson's narrative. It was during his captivity with King Philip's army and afterward, in his capacity as typesetter for Rowlandson's manuscript, that Printer's writings and textual presence appear and gesture toward a futurity beyond the parasitical trick and its readiness to task Indigenous Americans with organizing North American settler relations through their exclusion.

Printer posted his first surviving piece of writing at the foot of a burning bridge after the raid on the English town of Medfield on February 21, 1676. While the original note has not survived, there are two extant transcriptions in the colonial archive. These transcriptions differ from each other, with scholars often citing one without acknowledging the existence of the other, even as their differences reveal nearly as much as the notes themselves. The first transcription comes from Reverend Noah Newman's first-hand account of the raid. In a letter dated March 14, 1676, Newman (1676: 139) transcribes Printer's note as follows: "Thou English man hath provoked us to anger & wrath & we care not though we have war with thee this 21 years for there are many of us 300 of which hath fought with thee at this time, we have nothing but our lives to loose but thou hast many faire houses cattell & much good things."

The second transcription comes from Daniel Gookin's *Historical Account of the Doings and Sufferings of the Christian Indians in N. England*, written in the fall of 1677. Gookin (1836: 494) claimed to have received the original note from Captain Benjamin Gibbs: "Know by this paper, that the Indians that thou hast provoked to wrath and anger, will war this twenty one years if you will; there are many Indians yet, we come three hundred at this time. You must consider the Indians lost nothing but their life; you must lose your fair houses and cattle." While the content of these notes is effectively the same, their rhetorical features portray very different critiques of the colonialists' justifications for war. Rather than discern which is the more faithful transcription, or even whether the note was in fact written by Printer, I draw out their similarities and differences to illustrate the notes' attempts to renegotiate the terms of relationality with settler colonialism. Printer, then, appears in this account not only as a historical figure but also as a strange attractor, mediated by the political allegiances of the transcribers, for concepts and provocations around relationality.

One of the most noticeable differences concerns the level of literary fluency. The Newman letter's grammatical slipups and repeated use of the conjunction "and" to string together the sentence suggest a lack of writerly sophistication. The Gookin letter, in contrast, divides the language into clear grammatical units and offers a more intricate opening by placing "the Indians" as the object of English provocation before transforming them into subjects of the verb phrase "will war." These changes might simply attest to Gookin's literary style and Newman's grammatical coarseness, but the effect of the change is that Newman's letter "indianizes" Printer. As Kristina Bross (2004: 170) identifies, linguistic representations of "broken English" before King Philip's War usually infantilized Indigenous people as sympathetic innocents, but after the war the same tactic is used "to alienate readers from the Indian characters." This linguistic distinction plays itself out in the use of pronouns. Newman has Printer refer to himself exclusively with the first-person plural of *us* and *we* in a self-identification with King Philip's military aspirations. The Printer of Gookin's letter, however, is more aloof, referring to the "Indians" as the aggrieved party and slipping only once into the *we* of "we come three hundred" before changing to the *their* of "the Indians lost nothing but their life." While Newman's letter "indianizes" Printer through low literacy and unselfconscious self-identification, Gookin's letter places him at a farther distance from an English caricature of Indigenous American life—literary, social, or otherwise.

The implications for these ambivalent attachments are elaborated in the notes' distinct engagements with the discourses of just war. Already in *A Brief History of the Warr with the Indians in New-England*, by Increase Mather (1676: 1), the justness of the war is assumed: "It is known to every one, that the *Warr* began not amongst us in *Mattachusetts* Colony; nor do the Indians (so far as I am informed) pretend that we have done them wrong." In a letter to Mather, Josiah Winslow, governor of Plymouth Colony, is equally uninformed: "I think I can clearly say, that before these present troubles broke out, *the English did not possess one foot of Land in this Colony, but what was fairly obtained by honest purchase of the Indian Proprietors*" (2–3). Rather than denying that Indigenous people have lawful property, Mather and Winslow both suggest that their government can acquire Indigenous lands through the two means of commerce and just conquest. Printer, in both letters, reverses these positions, accusing the English of provoking Indigenous peoples to just and righteous anger, but in the Newman letter Printer disavows these reasons for war by suggesting that, although the English began

the war, “we care not.” While Gookin’s note has Printer simply reverse the relations—putting the question of colonization into a legal framework of just war—the Newman version shows Printer acknowledging the English rationalization of conquest, only to reject these rationalizations as matters of concern.

The Gookin note more often than not sees Printer aligning with Englishness, whereas the Newman note maintains the collective identity of the “we”—unnamed as *Indian* but definitely not English—through strategies of refusal. Property, however, muddles these dynamics. Printer’s suggestion that Indigenous people have nothing to lose but their lives, compared to English loss of property, intervenes not into Winslow’s theory of “honest purchase” but into conceptions of *vacuum domicilium*, as expressed most famously among Puritans by John Winthrop, who might have even invented the term (Corcoran 2018: 238). According to Winthrop’s (1629: 112) assessment of the American continent as “wast[e] without inhabitant,” Indigenous people have no property under English law and thus have nothing material to lose in war. The notes, then, adopt this line of thinking to invent an Indigenous army that can obliterate English houses and ransack English goods without loss to their own supposedly non-existent property, a thought that would surely menace the Puritans.

However, the adoption of Winthrop’s *vacuum domicilium* paradoxically aligns Printer with Christianity. When Newman (1676: 139) introduces his account of the raid, he criticizes the English for their timidity: “I doubt [suspect] their was too much Confidence in an arm of flesh[.] If there was the Lord hath let them see what a poore thing flesh is.” In contrast to the fearful Englishmen, the Indigenous fighters care nothing for their lives, which in a Christian military context becomes a virtue. The Newman note’s opening of “thou English man,” as a direct address that indicates a bitter familiarity, defines and homogenizes Printer’s target: an English collectivity that cares too much about their worldly possessions, whether that be the flesh of cattle or of Christian. As a literate Indigenous Christian with a keen sense for Puritan discourse, Printer strikes at “the ambivalence of colonial identity” (Rex 2011: 83), suggesting that his negation of life might paradoxically make him a better Christian, one who does not care for the things of this world. In this sense, though it might seem absurd for an Indigenous Christian to measure Indigenous life against English goods, this comparison turns Printer’s critique of commerce into something like an ironic Calvinist jeremiad: to “admit” to Indigenous life’s negligible value compared to English property incites the English public to meditate on the contradictions between Christianity and commerce.

Whether Printer insinuates himself in these discourses to reverse them—to frame Indigenous fighters as good Christians defending themselves according to the principles of just war—or to acknowledge them only to refuse their terms, the two letters show Printer negotiating a forced relationality with the English that is marked through assent or refusal. The notes alternately show Printer manipulating or rejecting Puritan jurisprudence and theology, remaining ambivalent about the prospect of relationality, even one based in opposing relationality. In this way, Printer does not so much take the parasitical trick as his target of critique as he seeks a direct relation with settler colonialism grounded either in strategic assimilative assent or in strategic oppositional refusal. In either case, Printer implicitly demands that Indigenous people be put into relation.

Printer's demand, read in this way, is consistent with a tendency in contemporary Marxism and critical Indigenous studies to acknowledge the historical exclusion of Indigenous people from traditional accounts of capitalism. According to Iyko Day (2016: 141), Indigenous populations are made superfluous to the labor process, becoming "latent and then stagnant members of the industrial reserve army," which pulls them out of the traditional dialectical relation between the property-owning class and those who own nothing but their labor. Shona N. Jackson (2012), too, has argued that the descendants of slaves and contract laborers in Guyana represent themselves through the transformative agency of labor to indigenize their claims to the modern nation at the expense of the supposedly nonproductive Indigenous Guyanese. Similarly, Glen Sean Coulthard (2014) argues that, because the settler requires Indigenous people's land more than their labor, the dispossessed become identifiable with revolutionary struggles only through a proletarianization that does not necessarily occur. All sympathetic to Marxist methods, these critiques amend the exclusion of Indigenous political issues in traditional Marxist analyses that foreground the centrality of labor by presenting new dialectical couplings—of enslavement with dispossession, for example—for understanding racial and settler capitalism.

I agree with these accounts that it is necessary to read the critical traditions of Marxism and Indigenous studies together, but the attention to updating Marxist critiques of political economy through new dialectical relations differs from this article's attention to how socially legible relations come into existence through the parasitical trick. While Printer's notes express a similar demand to be in relation, his editorial practices after the war indicate that it is not necessary to

adopt an ever-widening relational structure to recognize the significance of historical actors excluded from that structure or their power to disrupt it. Indeed, at the war's end, when Printer successfully petitions to return to Cambridge and secures his old position at the printing press, he realizes a mode of relation in the typesetting of Rowlandson's narrative that is alternative to what a letter addressed to the English, even a letter that seeks to sever bonds, makes possible.

As with Printer's notes, this different relationality is identifiable only through textual comparison. The complete first edition of Rowlandson's text, printed in Boston in 1682 and likely set from her manuscript, is not extant, but it was most probably the basis for the second and third American editions that were printed in Cambridge, also in 1682, where Printer was likely responsible for typesetting at least one of the editions (Derounian 1988; Lepore 1999; Rex 2011). When reading over her narrative, Printer must have felt some surprise when he saw himself in print: "My Master went out of the *wigwam*," reads the text of the Cambridge editions, "and by and by sent in an *Indian* called *James the Printer*, who told Mr. *Hoar*, that my Master would let me go home tomorrow" (Rowlandson 1682a: 57). At the moment of Printer's appearance in Rowlandson's narrative, the significance of the multiple editions becomes critical. In the Cambridge editions, Printer's name appears like any other, but in the London edition (Rowlandson 1682b: 26), printed in the same year and set also from the original Boston one, Printer's last name appears as "*PRINTER*," the only occurrence of this stylistic anomaly. The London version, then, stages a self-announcement of the printer of the text even as Printer himself had no immediate involvement in the printing of that edition.

The divergence between the Cambridge and London editions lays bare several questions: Did Printer's Cambridge editions decapitalize his name from the previous Boston one? Or were his editions a faithful typesetting of the Boston edition that had his name already decapitalized? If they were faithful, then was the capitalization in the London edition a winking trans-Atlantic recognition of one printer from another? When read against the "*PRINTER*" of the London edition, his unremarkable appearance in the Cambridge editions is evidence of a nonintervention or, even more frustrating, of nonevidence: there is no sign of Printer, as a printer, at the very moment that he appears as a character in the narrative. Capitalization by another typesetter in London makes the infrastructural role of the printer visible and fits normative expectations about what claiming identity from within colonial archives looks like. Yet, Printer's Cambridge editions "care not"

about recognition and instead standardize his name along with the others, eschewing the historicist desire to ascribe authorship. Printer's role in the mechanical reproduction of print would have afforded him a unique view into the social, material, and technological forces that necessarily mediate the relation between author and audience. Rather than make visible those forces of production by bringing them into relation with the reader—by capitalizing his name and claiming coauthorship, for example—Printer's nonintervention indicates an awareness of all that goes on behind reading that would be lost once the act of printing is put into perceptible relation. To capitalize his name and call attention to textual mediation would in effect remove him from the position of the mediator.

Caught within a settler relationality that encloses socially mediated existence through the impoverished terms of property ownership, Printer's nonintervention, his provocative "carelessness," suggests how the parasite, as another form of mediation, can make possible nondispossession relations. This possibility is easier to recognize through a brief jump forward in time to another scene of parasitism in Martin R. Delany's *Blake; or, The Huts of America* (1859, 1861–62). In the antebellum novel, Blake travels to plantations across the Mississippi Valley and Cuba, organizing the enslaved and colonized into a transnational military force. Blake might seem like the prototypical intervener, which makes him more akin to the Printers of the threatening Medfield notes than the Printers of the decapitalized Cambridge editions, but Blake's interventions are complicated by his crossing over into "Indian Nation" (Delany 2017: 86). To increase the ranks of his secret army, Blake holds all his conspiratorial meetings with the enslaved except for one instance when he convenes with the master, a Choctaw leader named Mr. Culver. During their meeting, Mr. Culver at first justifies the ownership of slaves on his plantation because, unlike with white slaveholding, Black and Indigenous people "work side by side" (87). Culver takes a convenient view of the economic nonparasitism of Choctaw slaveholding: because he works with the slave, the master is not a parasite who lives off the exploitation of others. Clearly, the bare conjunctive relation of *side by side* in this instance relies on the idea of a generic relationality that suggests that the problem of slavery is the distribution of work rather than the owning itself.

Unconvinced, Blake gets to the point and asks his question directly: "What I now most wish to learn is, whether in case that the blacks should rise, they may have hope or fear from the Indian?" (Delany

2017: 88). Abandoning the justification of cooperative labor, Mr. Culver answers Blake's question by describing the social intimacies that already exist between Black and Seminole people in Florida: "You see the vine that winds around and holds us together. Don't cut it, but let it grow till bimeby, it git so stout and strong, with many, very many little branches attached, that you can't separate them" (88). Unlike the side-by-side of labor, Mr. Culver pivots to the bimeby of nonlabor: he tells Blake *not* to work, not to prune or trim the vine as an agriculturalist would. For the planter, as for Nathaniel Hawthorne (1846: 20), vines can appear like "ambitious parasites" that "unite two trees of alien race in an inextricable twine," but for Mr. Culver the structural support of the vine embraces a deindividuating entwining.⁵

The vine is not narratively held in check by this scene. The swaying spiral of the vine's circumnutation—a term developed by Darwin to describe the irregular ellipses of plant movement—maps onto the shape of Blake's travels. When Blake's movements are mapped two-dimensionally, as Jerome McGann does (see Delany 2017: 46), we see Blake recursively departing from and returning to Natchez, Mississippi. In the twining movement of the narrative, we might imagine pressed into the pages of the book the loose coils of a vine. Blake's peregrinations, which might also trace a "star atlas" (Madera 2015: 83), given Delany's preference for astronomy over botany, also recall the movement of Indigenous historiography. "The project of indigenous modernity," Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012: 96) writes, "can emerge from the present in a spiral whose movement is a continuous feedback from the past to the future," or as Lisa Brooks's (2018a: 263) method of *pildowi ôjmowôgan* reveals, "The cyclical, spiraling process through which we (inclusive or exclusive) collectively participate in recovering and narrating 'a new history.'" The vine that, in spiraling, returns to its origin in a displaced fashion is valued through a recursive dedifferentiation that realizes difference at every turn.

By following this nonlinear, recursive movement, we might speculate that Printer reappears in Rowlandson's text—this time unnamed, and prior to his encounter with Rowlandson at the end of the narrative—in a similar adherence to parasituality. After the Medfield raid, Rowlandson describes an Indigenous person approaching her with a bible that she thinks he has plundered. Admittedly, there is no definite evidence to determine this person's identity. Even though we know that Printer was at Medfield, it is quite possible that other Indigenous fighters would recognize the value of a bible for Rowlandson. However, the possibility of this figure being Printer is worth considering,

especially given Printer's tendency to appear at moments of nonappearance. Once she receives the gift, she asks "whether he thought the *Indians* would let me read? he answered, yes" (Rowlandson 1682a: 14). From one perspective, we might say this brusque *yes* lightly mocks her. By giving her the holy book, he implicitly acknowledges her right to read: *yes, you can read it; why else would I give it to you?* But, if he is Printer, then we might speculate that the *yes* holds much more. Whether a reluctant captive or an enthusiastic soldier, he might have missed the scholarship of translation and printing as well as the prayers and rituals of his faith; in giving Rowlandson this gift, he does not necessarily act out of pure generosity but potentially with the desire to establish a channel of communication with one of few literate Christians in the area.

However, as a constitutive feature of Rowlandson's text, any possibility of "directional parity," "two-way traffic" (Dimock 2015: 105–6), or sociality more generally with Indigenous people must be dispelled. In this case, Rowlandson's response to the gift is to ask if the Indians will let her read, not realizing that the very Indian who gave her the book might be a Christian and a scholar, translator, and printer of the Bible. She is incapable of recognizing an Indigenous person's relationship with scripture as other than that of allowing or disallowing the proper audience—English Christians—from worship. Otherwise, this invitation to sociality would open Rowlandson to the thought of the colonial project becoming parasitical: Indigenous people, legitimate receivers of grace, have all along suffered the affliction of the settler. Rowlandson accepts the Bible but rejects his ordinary, maybe even half-earnest invitation because if she were to truly receive his gift and recognize the Christianity of Indigenous Christians, then she might suddenly see herself as a parasite—not only in the communication between God and Indigenous Christians but also on the land. Printer contests his parasitism by opening a channel with the English and with God, only to have Rowlandson exclude him from that channel. The understated smallness of his *yes* might very well encapsulate the incalculable feeling of refusal in becoming parasite.

And yet, in handing Rowlandson a bible, Printer does not simply seek interpersonal reciprocity but instead mediates Rowlandson's relation with God in a way that disrupts the parasitical trick. Through the giving of the Bible—in a reversal of the trope of the evangelization of the Indian—Printer again takes on the role of channel by opening the space between God and Christian, but this time through charity rather than affliction. The literary scholar Andrew Newman (2019: 20) has argued that the introduction of the Bible into Rowlandson's text

marks the appearance of “the vehicle for an interpretation of Rowlandson’s captivity that has precedence over all others.” Newman suggests that through “the medium of scripture” Rowlandson establishes “a two-way channel of communication” with God (32–33), which is undoubtedly true, but this channel must also be read alongside how the Bible turns Indigenous American wartime practices into amplifiers for God’s voice. Once the Bible is introduced into the narrative, it supplies the textual conditions for Rowlandson to find theological support for her exclusion of Indigenous people from that very channel of communication.

Bestowing the Bible therefore not only makes Printer unavailable as a resource for providential suffering—he is, in fact, being kind rather than afflictive—but also affixes his generosity to the narrative’s internal condition for her providential parasitism. Printer’s gift challenges the literary cliché of the Indigenous person who, as Dallas Hunt (2018) tracks, gives a “totem” to the settler that symbolizes the rightful transfer of land ownership. Printer does not give Rowlandson a totem of authentic indigeneity, whatever that might be, but rather a Bible, the implication of which is that the constitutive assignment of indigeneity to productive affliction—and the justification of settler colonialism that comes with it—has been disturbed. Given Rowlandson’s theology, the only thing more painful than suffering is generosity. Printer removes himself from the position of the afflicter while nonetheless inhabiting what we might call, after Kevin Bruyneel (2007), the third space of relationality that is grounded neither in sending nor in receiving but in clearing the way for a relation. With this strategic assent to mediation, Printer forces Rowlandson to encounter a generosity that afflicts and a gift that negates any possibility of symbolic transfer. In this sense, Printer retains a hold over the position of the parasite because this act of generosity is more disruptive for her parasitical providentialism than any suffering she could experience and thereby turn to her advantage in improving her relationship with God.⁶ Perhaps only for the instance of the Bible exchange, then, Printer accepts the position of parasite through an afflictive generosity, only to refuse the dispossessive logics of the parasitical trick. Read alongside Printer’s larger repertoire of anticolonial tactics that includes intimidation, ironic pedagogy, and outright war, Printer’s momentary assumption of the parasite’s position ultimately circumvents a coercive relationality with settler colonialism.

Jodi Byrd (2011: 17) writes that, once the flow of Euro-American thought “approaches, touches, or encounters Indianness, it also confronts the colonialist project that has made that flow possible.” It is as

this point of contact that the system of thought, “not being prepared to disrupt the logics of settler colonialism . . . either freezes or reboots” (17). Because of Printer’s gift, the settler relational system reboots as Rowlandson begins rifling through Printer’s Bible in a refusal to consider the possibility of the Indigenous person as either receiver or messenger of grace. Through the Bible, she will turn Indigenous people into instruments of affliction—but the foundations of this theology rest on the gift itself. Taken rather than received, Printer’s gift remains necessarily unreceivable, the missed recursive point of a new history, until what the settler takes in the name of the parasitical trick is restored.

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Notes

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- 1 For interpretations of Marshall’s legalization of dispossession that have influenced my account, see Bens 2020, Purdy 2007, Wald 1992, and Williams 2015.
- 2 In portraying this conspicuousness, Rowlandson (1682a: 20–21) uses the phrase “as thick as the trees” to describe Indigenous people, in contrast to “deserted *English* Fields.”
- 3 For Kazanjian, the “trickiness” of the colonizing trick, which entwines an Enlightenment concept of equality with the deportation and resettlement of Black Americans, is not that it fails to deliver on the promise of equality but that this failure is constituent of the US nationalist enterprise. Framed similarly in my analysis, the legal and cultural project of including Indigenous persons in the settler structure of relationality operates precisely through the gradual erosion of Indigenous sovereignty.
- 4 Despite the imagery of biological parasitism in her writing, Rowlandson would not have thought of the “parasite” this way. The parasite’s biological definition surfaced only in the eighteenth century, but it is derivative of its earlier meaning as a social sponger, which appears in the English language during the sixteenth-century Tudor period. However, as Serres indicates, the two meanings share an emphasis on eating at the expense of another, whether directly from the organic body or from another person’s larder. By the seventeenth century, the flattering parasite had become a

recognizable stage villain and object of vitriol for its way of eating. “Most smiling, smooth, detested parasites,” jeers Timon of Athens (Shakespeare 1997: 1510) at his “courteous destroyers, affable wolves, meek bears, / You fools of fortune, trencher-friends, time’s flies, / Cap and knee slaves, vapours, and minute-jacks!” That Rowlandson might consider the Indigenous American a “courteous destroyer,” razing English villages and pilfering goods in service of benevolent ends, is a cunning inversion of the court parasite: the helper who harms becomes the harmer who helps.

- 5 Judith Madera (2015: 99) rightly qualifies these entanglements given that Mr. Culver emphasizes marriage and childbirth as a reflection of Delany’s own colonialist thinking about “original priority,” but, as Madera also points out, the “genealogical rewiring” of reproductive labor—regarded here by Delany as nonlabor—that reproduces the possibility of labor need not be the only way to understand the sociality implied in the *bimeby*.
- 6 If this unnamed figure is not Printer, then this generosity shows that instances of discomposing the parasitical trick are not unique to Printer but instead are matters of everyday interaction.

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