

Empirical Desire

Conversion, Ethnography, and the
New Science of the Praying Indian

SARAH RIVETT

Washington University in St. Louis

A testimony proposed or offered is not effectual unless received.
Samuel Petto, *The Voice of the Spirit* (1654)

In a 1670 letter to Royal Society President Robert Boyle, Puritan missionary John Eliot describes the “rare work of God” that has recently taken place “in Watertown,” where Indians learned a particular “root” that allows them to “read” spiritual phenomena not discernable to the English. Eliot asks for money to recompense those Indians who are able to “bring in a desirable experiment” that would explain the work of God in nature.¹ By the time Eliot made this proposal to Boyle, such experiments were part of the Royal Society’s mission “to study Nature rather than Books, and from the Observations made of the phenomena and effects she presents to compose a history of her.”² Colonial America supplied the Royal Society with material to fulfill

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1. John Eliot to Robert Boyle, September 30, 1670, New England Company Papers, fol. 5, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

2. “Directions for Sea-Men Bound for Far Voyages,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 1, 8 (1666): 140–41.

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this objective, including “accounts of our aboriginal Natives and their customs” and boxes of curiosities that contained “quivers made of an Indian Dogskin” and “arrows headed according to the Indian manner.”³ Eliot’s letter participates in this transatlantic exchange by demonstrating the kinds of experiments that were uniquely possible in the New World context, but it also constructs the Praying Indian as an object of ethnological inquiry with peculiar powers of spiritual discernment.

From *New England’s First Fruits* (1643) to *A Brief Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel* (1671), eleven pamphlets now referred to as the “Eliot tracts” were printed in London as evidence of the “light of grace” among the Pequot, Wampanoag, Mashpee, and Massachusetts Indians of southern New England, Massachusetts, Nantucket, and Martha’s Vineyard. Spanning the formative decades of England’s “scientific revolution,” these tracts inaugurate an effort to catalogue the soul alongside curiosities and natural taxonomies. Through the attempt to translate the evidence of grace produced within the testimonial moment to a scientific text, the tracts record both an inquiry into how grace works upon a non-English soul and the figure of the Praying Indian as a “curiosity” potentially worthy of scientific inquiry.⁴ The extended relationship between Eliot and Boyle, who would become both president of the Royal Society and the New England Company’s mission to the Indians in 1662, was not merely a philanthropic arrangement.⁵ This empirical investigation

3. Cotton Mather, “A Letter from Doctor Mather to Dr. Jurin, Boston New England, August 3, 1723,” and Wait Winthrop, “Mr. Winthrop’s Letter to Mr. Oldenburg About Some Curiosities Sent from New England to the Royal Society, 1671,” *Letter Book* (The Royal Society, London), vols. 3 and 16.

4. Appearing in evangelical as well as scientific writing, the term “curiosity” has several meanings in the seventeenth century. It refers to the human desire to know or learn, the “curiosite to enquire into that which God hath concealed,” as well as to an object that enlists this human desire, specifically an object “valued as curious, rare, or strange.” *OED Online* (2nd) [Web site] (Oxford University Press, 1989 [cited 2004]). As others have observed, the Enlightenment tendency to associate the curiosity with the accumulation of knowledge did not render it unproblematic, for the curiosity always signified licit and illicit knowledge of nature, the extraordinary, and the marvelous. Fontes Da Costa, “The Culture of Curiosity at the Royal Society in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century,” *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 56, 2 (2002); Susan Scott Parrish, “Women’s Nature: Curiosity, Pastoral, and the New Science in British America,” *Early American Literature* 37, 2 (2002): 195–245; and Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

5. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England, more commonly known as the New England Company, formed through an act of Parliament in 1649, but became more centralized through Charles II’s Charter and appointment

into the effects of grace upon an Indian soul marks a historical conjuncture between Puritan religion and natural science. Boyle's notes and essays, Eliot's published tracts, and the correspondence between the two demonstrate an emergent theory of Indian testimony as an object of ethnographic inquiry and a resource for knowledge about the divine as well as the natural world. The testimonies of faith spoken and recorded in Praying Towns mark the implementation of the new science through techniques of observation, witnessing, and record-keeping practiced on Native American worshippers. Through such techniques, Eliot, Thomas Mayhew, Thomas Shepard, Henry Whitfield, and the other authorial collaborators of the tracts transformed Indian testimony into communal knowledge for an audience of theologians and natural philosophers struck by the "curiosity" of the phenomenon of grace among the Indians.

The epistemological and political continuities between the New England Company and the Royal Society have not received much critical attention. Nor has Talal Asad's question, "what kind of epistemic structures emerged from the evangelical encounter?" been fully addressed for colonial America.⁶ Early Americanist scholarship on Native American literature has focused largely on a project of revising an archive that contains only a paltry sampling of Native American voices, filtered through a Eurocentric ear. Myra Jehlen's theory of locating agency in "semidigested, discordant pieces of reporting" as well as the anthropological work of John and Jean Comaroff and Margaret Jolly offer methods for this revisionist project by investigating a spectrum of colonial encounters as potential sites for tracing the subaltern's voice or agency.⁷ Scholars from Stephen Greenblatt to Hillary Wyss identify moments of subversion in colonial texts as records "of the experience and world

of Robert Boyle to oversee Company activities in 1662. New England Company Papers, Box 1, fol. 6, American Antiquarian Society.

6. Talal Asad, "Comments on Conversion," in *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity*, ed. Peter Van Der Veer (New York: Routledge, 1996), 264.

7. The Comaroffs find ethnography to be a useful tool in historical analysis because it provides a method of speaking "about" others rather than "for them" (9). Jolly "insists on the salience of silence, the centrality of not hearing, not talking, and not reading as a way of resisting the power of the word of God" (254). John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992); Myra Jehlen, "History before the Fact; or, Captain John Smith's Unfinished Symphony," *Critical Inquiry* 19, 4 (1993): 689; Margaret Jolly, "Devils, Holy Spirits, and the Swollen God: Translation, Conversion and Colonial Power in the Marist Mission, Vanuatu, 1887-1934," in *Conversion to Modernities*, ed. Peter Van Der Veer (New York: Routledge, 1996).

view of the Native Americans.”⁸ As important as such efforts have been, it is equally important to consider that we, not unlike Eliot and his cohorts, introduce to these texts our own “desire to hear,” albeit one that is quite the opposite from the submission to Christian conquest expected by a seventeenth-century audience.⁹ Instead, we seek evidence of resistance.

Revising this quest for subaltern agency and voice, I offer an account of the epistemological complexity of empirical desire as it mediates transcribed and coauthored texts. The relationship between Boyle and Eliot as well as the institutional overlap between the New England Company and the Royal Society were deeply implicated in Asad’s theory of an “epistemic structure *emerging from the evangelical encounter*” (my emphasis). Witnessed and recorded in New England’s Praying Towns and then published for a London audience, Indian testimony was part of a seventeenth-century “science of the visible,” a program for locating evidence of the divine realm within the lived world.¹⁰ Whereas scholars have described the science of the visible through

8. Quoted from Hilary E. Wyss, *Writing Indians: Literacy, Christianity, and Native Community in Early America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 8. I have in mind Greenblatt’s “Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its’ Subversion,” *Glyph* 8 (1981): 40–60. This method of reading for agency can be traced to a debate between James P. Ronda and Neal Salisbury as to whether the tracts recorded the voices of Christian Indians or simply a colonizing power that stripped the Indians of “all manifestations of power and autonomy.” Salisbury argues for the latter position in “Red Indians: The “Praying Indians” of Massachusetts Bay and John Eliot,” *William and Mary Quarterly* (WMQ) 31, 3 (1974): 27–54 and Ronda for the former in “Generations of Faith: The Christian Indians of Martha’s Vineyard,” *WMQ* 38, 3 (1981): 369–94. Recent scholarship has struck a middle ground between these two positions, acknowledging the Eurocentric filter but nonetheless insisting that “we can hear” Native American voices within the texts: Kristina Bross, *Dry Bones and Indian Sermons: Praying Indians in Colonial America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), 26; Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Karen Kupperman, *Indians & English: Facing Off in Early America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000). All of these scholars have also situated the figure of the Praying Indian within the discursive formation of transatlantic imperialism, or English Puritan identity; my method of analysis differs from theirs through its focus on the complexities of a religio-scientific desire that sought particular forms of “invisible” knowledge from Indian testimonial utterance.

9. The quote is from Eliot, *A Late and Further Manifestation of the Progress of the Gospel among the Indians in New England* (London: M.S., 1655), 3.

10. The term, science of the visible, comes from Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970). I am defining it as a technology for producing evidence of grace as well as natural taxonomies.

natural philosophy's taxonomy of nature, the science of the visible narrated here demonstrates how Francis Bacon's empiricism and Royal Society natural philosophy were also invested in cataloging the invisible world.¹¹ Formative texts in the seventeenth-century tradition of *scientia naturalis*—from Francis Bacon's *New Organon* (1620) to Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646) to Robert Boyle's *Excellency of Theology Compared with Natural Philosophy* (1674)—map an empirical method for identifying divine laws within nature. New England's Praying Indians figured centrally within the long, transatlantic history of this science of the visible, especially as it was implemented in practice and disseminated through information-gathering networks. Colonial missionary writing mobilizes the epistemological possibility encoded within the Praying Indian through taxonomies of Algonquian language, a focus on the scene of witnessing and forms of testifying to the visible evidence of grace.

This connection between the new science and New World discovery is at least as old as the 1662 Charter of the Royal Society, in which Charles II outlines the effort to “extend not only the boundaries of Empire, but also the very arts and sciences,” especially those in philosophical studies, “which by actual experiments attempt either to shape out a new philosophy or to perfect the old.”¹² The Society's experimental objective created a rapport between philosophers from Old and New England who viewed the New World as a laboratory of grace as well as a space in which the laws of natural phenomenon could be more accurately discerned. The Eliot tracts represent the New World as a space in which the divine became visible in a more distilled form and could thus be more accurately described and understood. While many missionary tracts were published prior to the official formation of the Royal Society in 1660, the ministerial authors of the tracts appealed to a growing audience of natural philosophers interested in applying empirical techniques and ethnographic observations to the study of divinity. As such, Eliot's tracts shape the program for New World discovery that the Royal Society and Charles II would officially institute in 1662. For Puritan theologians and natural scientists, the phenomenon of grace among the Praying Indians pro-

11. Mary Louis Pratt locates the onset of the new “knowledge-building project of natural history” in the publication of Linnaeus' *System of Nature* (1735) (*Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* [New York: Routledge, 1992]). Also see Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper and Row, 1980); and Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

12. Quoted in Raymond Phineas Stearns, *Science in the British Colonies of America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 90.

vided visible evidence of the invisible realm, a space that might ultimately be understood empirically through the careful recording and collecting of such testimonies.

Methods of witnessing and recording deployed by Eliot and other evangelical ministers produced an ethnographic technique that was markedly different from the nineteenth-century definition of the discipline as a practice of “writing about customs or cultures based on firsthand observation and participation in fieldwork.”¹³ For seventeenth-century evangelicals, grace rather than human culture and custom was the focus of the empirical quest motivating the observational record. Whereas Anthony Pagden, Margaret Hodgen, and Ronald Meeks read anthropology as originating with a science of man, I am proposing that Puritan evangelical writing and its reception within the discourse of natural history and the new science initially concerns a very different subject.¹⁴ Missionaries attempted to demonstrate empirically, and to witness ethnographically, the forms of revealed knowledge recorded in the testimonial utterances of a population perceived as primitive and in a naturally fallen state. Michel de Certeau’s analysis of Montaigne’s “Of Cannibals” offers a useful elaboration of what I call ethnographic authorization through his definition of the heterological tradition as that “in which the discourse about the other is a means of constructing a discourse authorized by the other.” Specifically, de Certeau explains how the ethnological encounter authorizes the text by naming the “other” through discourse and then framing the utterance in such a way as to suggest the recapturing of something that has been lost through language. In *Tears of Repentance* (1653), the published record of Praying Indian testimony delivered on Martha’s Vineyard in 1652, this technique of framing represents the “sense” of the “heathen’s” divine encounter as a “faithful and verifiable speech” that approximates the primitive origins of Christianity.¹⁵ Jim Egan provides another account of how experiential knowledge came to be central to colonial texts through the concept of an “authorizing experience.” Locating the emphasis on experiential knowledge within an

13. David Levinson and Melvin Ember, ed., *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1996), 2:416.

14. Ronald L. Meeks, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage, Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964); and Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

15. Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 36.

epistemological “movement from Aristotelian thinking to the bare particular,” Egan tracks, as I will, how this knowledge depends on “visible evidence” to gain legitimacy. My analysis complements but also differs from Egan’s in its insistence on the centrality of the witnessing audience within this mode of knowledge production. A witnessing audience of ministerial elites transformed the Native American experience of the divine encounter into a new form of evidence, rendered visible through the testimonial utterance. Such observational capacities institute and work to sustain the social hierarchies that Egan describes as emerging from the colonial encounter.¹⁶ Ethnographic authorization affirms that empirical evidence of divine grace upon a non-English soul has been properly seen, observed, recorded, and ultimately reinscribed within the symbolic order of seventeenth-century natural philosophy and divinity.

A GRAMMAR OF GRACE

Central to Eliot’s ethnography of grace was a practice of recording, observing, and translating divine phenomena as it was expressed among New England’s native population in the Massachusetts language. His concern for Native speech appealed to Boyle who, in a 1664 letter, advised Eliot that “we desire care may be taken that [the Indians] retain their own native Language.”¹⁷ “We” refers here to the Royal Society, for it corresponds to their own theory of language as described in Thomas Sprat’s *History of the Royal Society*: truth needs to be represented “clothed with bodies” in order to meet the scientific goal of bringing “knowledge back again to our very senses.” In an attempt to develop a linguistic method that follows this model, Sprat explains that the members of the Society have returned to the primitive purity of speech, developing “a close, naked, *natural way* of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a *native easiness*: bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can: and preferring the language of the Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that of Wits or Scholars” (my emphasis).¹⁸ Sprat’s method of speaking returns language to the Society’s commitment to “Nullius in verba,” a saying that marks an epistemological turn from reliance on textual language to reliance on a disciplined kind of sensual data discernable through

16. Jim Egan, *Authorizing Experience: Refigurations of the Body Politic in Seventeenth-Century New England Writing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 44.

17. Robert Boyle to John Eliot, March 1, 1664, *Works of Robert Boyle*, ed., Michael Hunter and Edward B. Davis (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999–2000), 2:253.

18. Thomas Sprat, *History of the Royal Society*, ed. Jackson I. Cope and Harold Whitmore Jones (Saint Louis: Washington University Studies, 1667), 112–13.

techniques of performed speech and witnessing.¹⁹ Eliot responds to “Mr. B’s Desire” by agreeing to “write a grammar of the Indian languages.”²⁰ While *Indian Grammar Begun* (1666) appears fifteen years after *Tears of Repentance*, Eliot and Boyle’s discussion reveals the empirical significance assigned to the preservation of an Indian language. Sprat’s notion of bringing linguistic simplicity alive through embodied speech indicates the sensory attentiveness applied to the public performances of grace as Praying Indians spoke of their religious experience in their own native tongue.

Establishing the proper experimental methods of translation and transcription, the tracts offer London’s scientific community the Massachusetts speeches of New England’s natives “clothed with bodies” as empirical evidence of grace. *A Late and Further Manifestation of the Progress of the Gospel Among the Indians* (1655) testifies to the authenticity of the recorded account:

the Elders saw good to call upon the Interpreters to give a public testimony to the truth of Mr. Eliot’s Interpretations of the Indians answers, which Mr. Mayhew and the two interpreters by him did . . . the Interpretations which Mr. Eliot gave of their answers was for their substance the same which the Indians answered, many times the very words which they spake and always the sense.²¹

The disciplined discernment of sensual data within this scene authenticates the Indian experience of Christianity in its aural and visual expressive form, according to what Boyle would later establish as the proper criteria for witnessing religious testimony. In *Christian Virtuoso* (1690), Boyle writes that “the outward senses are but the instruments of the soul, which Hears by the intervention of the Ear and the eye . . . the sense does but perceive objects, not judge them.” Applying the same sensual techniques to Indian testimony,

19. For recent work on this epistemological turn and its cultural and social implications, see Joyce Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the New England Frontier, 1500–1676* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983); and Peter Dear, *Discipline & Experience: The Mathematical Way in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

20. “List of Letters from Eliot to Boyle,” Boyle Papers, vol. 35, fol. 157, the Royal Society. Thanks to Christina Malcolmson for this reference and transcription.

21. Eliot, *A Late and Further Manifestation of the Progress of the Gospel among the Indians*, 20.

a group of Native and English interpreters hear and remember the spoken Algonquian, while Eliot records the oral account with, presumably, help on the translation. The witnessing audience visually verifies the proper transmission of aural evidence to “examine whether the testimony be indeed divine, and whether the divine testimony ought to be believed.”²² The authors of the tracts then frame the evidence through the technique of ethnographic authorization that assures European readers that they are encountering the *sense*, if not the exact *words*, of a “heathen’s” first experience of grace. This idea of capturing the “sense” as initially expressed through the “primitive simplicity” of the Massachusetts language displays a central tenet of the Royal Society and New England Company’s empirical objective. Indian testimony presented a new use of language as a medium of communication between the natural world and the mysteries of the invisible realm. As extensions of the natural landscape—“poor souls” who are still in their natural state—Indians, speaking in their Native language, reflected a wealth of empirical possibility.

Ministers involved in the evangelical project and their scientific reading community derived this conceptualization of language from the prominent teachings of such seventeenth-century linguists as Jan Comenius, Christopher Cooper, Cave Beck, and Samuel Hartlib.²³ These linguists sought to establish a homology between language and nature. Comenius taught that the key to understanding the world was through the development of a linguistic system, or a “universal language,” that followed the one-to-one correspondence between language and nature. Popular tracts such as Woodward’s *Light to Grammar* (1641) promote Comenius’s theory of linguistic isomorphism, suggesting that revelation was the result of the proper usage of language. Language was the key to the natural world, while the natural world unlocked the mysteries of the divine. Woodward’s tract explains the empirical possibilities of natural language through an exploration of “grammar” as a medium for

22. Robert Boyle, *The Christian Virtuoso: Showing That by Being Addicted to Experimental Philosophy, a Man Is Rather Assisted Than Indisposed, to Be a Good Christian* (London: Printed by Edward Jones for John Taylor at the Ship in Saint Paul’s Church Yard, 1690), 115, 118.

23. For an overview of seventeenth-century linguistics, see: Murray Cohen, *Sensible Words: Linguistic Practice in England 1640–1785* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). In 1641, John Winthrop Jr. invited Comenius to New England to oversee the education of Indian converts. While Comenius ultimately decided not to pursue this possibility, his correspondence reveals that Hartlib, Winthrop, and others involved in London’s scientific community imagined that scientific research might be associated within missionary work in New England. Robert Young, *Comenius and the Indians of New England* (University of London, 1929).

understanding divine truth, the most “high and excellent Science.” Through grammar, man “spiritualizes the senses” and learns to approximate the universal language that links the natural world with the divine. Natural phenomenon, “*water, rivers, floods, brooks of honey and butter*” function as visible marks of the “Being of God,” accessible through the medium of language. As “the mind of man traces the footsteps of natural things” through their “logical resolution” in language, the world becomes the soul’s “evidence” of God’s existence.²⁴ This concept of “spiritualizing the senses” through a grammar that will engender a linguistic link between natural taxonomy and divine mystery condenses the empirical goals of seventeenth-century theologians and natural philosophers into an experiential process. In *Dawnings of Light* (1644), one of the earliest physicotheological tracts of the seventeenth century, John Saltmarsh describes a striving to move beyond “lower and more natural interests” in order to begin to see the divine, “that which is more hidden and secret.” Language is the vehicle through which Saltmarsh imagines accomplishing this spiritual hermeneutic. Universal language embodies the potential to dispel such mysteries and unfold the “secrets” of the invisible within the visible domain. Saltmarsh takes on a millennial fervor, anticipating a future moment of divine revelation through language and recognizing that “God’s laborers” have already implemented this hermeneutic in “Geneva, New England, Germany and the Netherlands,” a statement that sites the primary communities engaging in the practice of religious testimony.²⁵

Implementing a Comenian theory of language in practice, Eliot began to study Algonquian languages in 1643. His tutor was a Long Island Indian captive from the Pequot War (1636–38) and servant of a colonist in Dorchester. In 1644, the General Court ordered Indians in several counties to be “instructed in the knowledge and worship of God,” and in 1646 Eliot went to Nonantum where he preached his first Algonquian sermon in Waban’s wigwam.²⁶ In 1649, Parliament praised Eliot’s practice of preaching in Algonquian rather than instructing Native Americans in English.²⁷ This investment in Algonquian as the spoken language of Native American pious practice reflected a belief in the missionaries’ power to actualize Comenian

24. Hezekiah Woodward, *A Light to Grammar, and All other Arts and Sciences* (London: John Bartlet, 1641), 31, 34, 38.

25. John Saltmarsh, *Dawnings of Light* (London: R.W., 1644), 17–18.

26. New England Company Papers, fol. 1, American Antiquarian Society.

27. Upon forming the New England Company in 1649, Parliament praised “the pious care and pains of some godly English of this Nation, who preach the gospel to them in their own Indian Language . . .,” Rawlinson Manuscripts, Rawlinson Collection, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

potential: the possibility of a universal language that would make divine phenomena visible in their pure, spontaneous, and unadulterated forms. In his preface to Thomas Thorowgood's *Jews in America* (a text that identifies the North American natives as one of the lost tribes of Israel), Eliot summarizes the potential usefulness of Algonquian in realizing this universal language: "It seemeth to me, by the little insight I have, that the grammatical frame of our Indian language cometh nearer to the Hebrew, than the Latin or Greek do."²⁸ Employing a conventional recognition of the limitations of his own perceptive capacities, Eliot nonetheless suggests that Algonquian may in fact be the ur-language of Christian primitivism.

In its primitive, natural, and simple state, the Algonquian language might more closely follow an isomorphic relationship to the natural world and could, as theories such as Thorowgood's *Jews in America* (1660) suggest, stem directly from the ten lost tribes of Israel. Roger Williams's *Key to the Indian Language* (1643), Eliot's *Indian Grammar Begun* (1666), and John Cotton Jr.'s *Diary and Indian Vocabulary* (1666–78) provide a framework for an Algonquian grammar of grace. Such texts reflect an effort to systematize an oral language according to written rules that vary in taxonomic complexity, beginning with Roger Williams's ethnographic "observations" of Natives juxtaposed to topically organized common phrases. In a 1663 letter to Robert Boyle that describes his ethnolinguistic project, Eliot declares the ultimate "reducibility" of the "Indian language" to grammatical rules despite its complex anomalies.²⁹ Reduction refers to both a civilizing technique and the empirical goal of establishing a universal language through ethnological observations.³⁰ Eliot and Cotton endeavor to show how Native language might be understood through the grammatical structure of the English language, with the ultimate hope of then tracing this structure to its etymological foundation in Greek and Latin roots.³¹

28. Thomas Thorowgood, *Jews in America, or Probabilities That Those Indians Are Judaical, Made More Probable by Some Additionals to the Former Conjectures* (London: Printed for Henry Brome at the Gun in Ivie-lane, 1660), 19.

29. Robert Boyle, "Letters of Mr. Boyle to Several Persons and Letters of Several Persons to Mr. Boyle," in *The Works*, ed. Thomas Birch (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966), 510.

30. James Holston explains that reduction is literally a historical "leading back": "an attempt to trace the Algonquian language back to its Hebrew roots" (*A Rational Millennium: Puritan Utopias of Seventeenth-Century England and America* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1987], 138).

31. Laura Murray's research locates such texts within an entire genre of linguistic ethnology that persists through the nineteenth century in journals and letters. Laura J. Murray, "Vocabularies of Native American Languages: A Literary and Historical

Dedicating his *Indian Grammar* to Boyle, Eliot states that because Boyle was “pleased” with the “testimonies” of “the effectual Progress of this great Work of the Lord Jesus among the Inhabitants of these Ends of the Earth,” he would also like to supply “a Grammar of this Language for the help of others.” Eliot and Boyle intended the *Indian Grammar* for “public use,” whereby it could contribute to the research of natural linguistics investigating the potential for a new, universal language to call forth the secrets of the divine.³² Soon after the publication of *Indian Grammar*, the *Philosophical Tracts of the Royal Society* proposed that this “universal language” would “contain an Enumeration of all such Single Sounds or Letters as are used in any Language.” Like the Puritan missionary effort to discover the language of Christianity’s primitive past, this project attempted to locate the origins of the English language in Chinese and Arabic characters, explaining that such research would allow for a language that demonstrated a one-to-one correspondence between “the sign,” the “oral sound of the sign,” and the body’s physiology in relation to speech.³³ The universal language of the Royal Society exemplifies David Murray’s explanation that an anthropological fascination with North American Indian speech is rooted in an Enlightenment “search for the common structures of mind revealed in a common grammar.”³⁴

While the *Indian Grammar* provided an occasion to study a “primitive language,” the testimonies contained the promise that such language would be the key to the “things” that in the mysterious “depths” of the divine mystery “lie concealed from other men’s sight and reach.”³⁵ The depths to which Boyle refers in this passage consist of “things above reason” and invisible to

Approach to an Elusive Genre,” *American Quarterly* 53, 4 (2001): 590–623. At least one early eighteenth-century Royal Society meeting introduced a letter from a Caribbean missionary that contained an Indian vocabulary list. Those present tried to decide how to extend this list to their theory of a universal language. “Minutes of the Royal Society Meeting, January 14, 1719,” in *Journal Book of the Royal Society* (London: Royal Society, 1720).

32. George Parker Winship, ed., *The New England Company of 1649 and John Eliot, The Publications of the Prince Society* (Boston: Plimpton Press, 1920).

33. “The Philological and Miscellaneous Papers,” in *The Philosophical Transactions and Collections To the End of the Year 1700, Abridged and Disposed under General Heads* (London: Printed for R. Knaplock at the Bishop’s Head; R. Wilkin, at the King’s Head; and H. Clements, at the Half-Moon, in St. Paul’s Church-Yard, 1716), 3: 373.

34. David Murray, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing and Representation in North American Indian Texts* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 36.

35. Boyle, *Christian Virtuouso*, 50.

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| Mancheemok | goe |
| Nunmancheemyen | you goe, wee goe |
| Commancheem | He goe |
| Manchee)ayg | they goe |
| Mancheesh | Imperat. |
| Nunmancheepah | I did goe |
| Kunmancheepah | you did goe |
| Mancheepah | He did goe |
| Nunmancheemyenunpa | wee did goe |
| Mancheepemnick | They did goe |
| Nashpooramoonk | A witness |
| Nunashpooramoonk | My witness |
| Kunashpooramoonk | Your witness |
| Nunashpooramoonkanun | It's witness |
| Lunashpooramoonkanun | our witness |
| | Their witness |
| Aketammoonk | read |
| Nuttaakketam)pa | I read, did read |
| Kuttakketam)pa | you read, did read |
| Aketam)pa | He reads, did read |
| Nuttakketamnummen)unpa | wee read, did read |
| Kuttakketam)unpa | They read, did read |
| Ekketash | read Imperat. |
| Nussokhuamoonk | To write |
| Nussokhuam)pa | write, did write |
| Nussokhuam)unpa | He writes, did write |
| Nussokhuam)unpa | wee write, did write |
| Nussokhuam)unpa | They write, did write |
| Nussokhuam)unpa | A write Imperat. |
| Nussokhuam)unpa | A write letter |

Figure 2. John Cotton, Jr., Diary and Indian Vocabulary 1666–1678. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

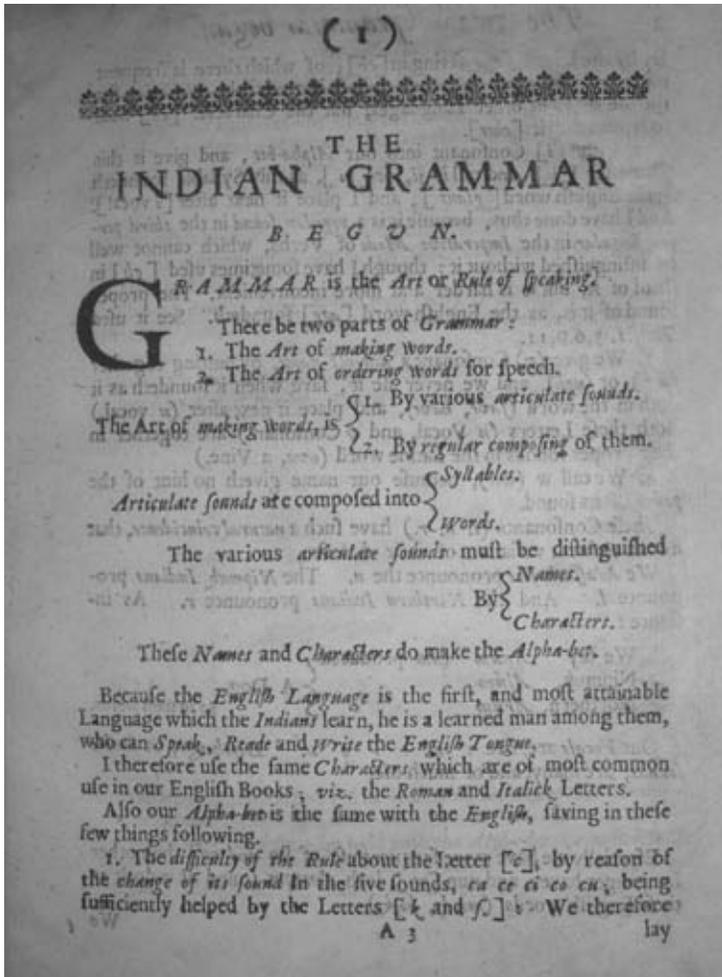


Figure 3. John Elliot, *Indian Grammar Begun* (1666). Collections of the Rosenbach Museum and Library.

the human “eye.” Through a subtle violation of St. Paul’s warning of the *speculum obscurum*, Boyle proposes that a “Supra-Intellectual” divine light supplements the natural philosopher’s human vision.³⁶ “An experimental philosopher may be compared to a skillful diver” diving beneath the “surface” of nature, says Boyle. Supplied with the “supernatural testimonies” that have

36. Martin Jay and Lucien LeFebvre argue that the “unleashing” of vision in seventeenth-century science inaugurated a new rationalized visual order in which

been collected by “eye-witnesses,” “ministers,” and other “travelers to America,” the experimental philosopher begins to discern “attributes of God” and “knowledge of what is infinite.”³⁷ This 1739 portrait of Boyle, positioned as the title page to the New England Company’s London manuscript record book, both embodies these ideals and suggests the centrality of the New England mission to Boyle’s Christian philosophy. The rays of sun breaking through the dark clouds to illuminate Boyle’s face conventionally represent Enlightenment knowledge while also echoing descriptions of light in missionary tracts such as Thomas Shepard’s *Clear Sun-Shine of the Gospel Breaking Forth Upon the Indians* (1649). The divine light connects Boyle to a form of knowledge not completely supplied by the books, crumbled papers, and early scientific tools scattered beneath him, just as he imagines in *Christian Virtuoso* (1690) that “an ordinary seaman who traveled along the coast [of America] could learn things that could never be learned in Aristotle’s philosophy or Ptolemy’s *Geography*.” What “could never be learned” in Aristotle or Ptolemy is revealed in the “supernatural testimonies” of America’s “Heathen” as they convert to Christianity.³⁸

Through their conversion, Indians were represented with the unique ability to conjoin Algonquian with an Augustinian understanding of language as a potential vehicle of truth and divine communication.³⁹ Compounded with Comenian linguistic theory, conversion testimonies would express a “natural” form of religious primitivism, one that had been lost to “civilized” “wits and scholars,” even in their moment of conversion. While Eliot’s efforts to translate Algonquian from an oral to a written language marked an attempt to make this “primitive form” a usable tool for English Christians, the translation of testimonies into English presented an idealized vision of a universal language to his London audience. Alongside this universal language, the ministers anticipated a racialized testimonial utterance: through the public performance of Praying Indians, theologians and scientists sought to discern the “attributes of God” as a “Heathen” people, “deeply engaged in poly-

knowledge was built upon methods of intersubjective witnessing. Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century, the Religion of Rabelais*, trans. Beatrice Gottlieb (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

37. Boyle, *Christian Virtuoso*, 50, 76.

38. Boyle, *Christian Virtuoso*, 76.

39. Augustine experiences a new relationship to a universal language that corresponds to the invisible realm in Book IX of the *Confessions* when words rise above their fallen status to form the visible signs of the invisible realm.



Figure 4. Portrait of Robert Boyle. Collection of Original Correspondence, Papers of the New England Company, Guildhall Library, London.

theism, idolatry, magical rites and superstitions,” became “worshippers of Christ.”⁴⁰

“ACCORDING TO THE MANNER OF
CHURCHES IN PRIMITIVE TIMES”

Three pamphlets published in the early 1650s collectively establish Indian testimony as both a return to this universal language and a tool for bringing forth the secrets of the divine. *Light Appearing* (1651) and *Strength out of Weakness* (1652) set the stage for *Tears of Repentance* (1653), the most ambitious attempt to record evidence of grace through individual accounts of conversion. In *Light Appearing*, Henry Whitfield goes with Eliot to Watertown, where he records the questions that follow Eliot’s sermon to the Indians. “I have set down some of their questions, whereby you may perceive how these dry bones began to gather flesh and sinews,” Whitfield writes, evoking Ezekiel 37 to create a material image through which the reader can bear witness to the visibility of grace.⁴¹ Flesh and sinews signal, quite literally, the corporeal presence of grace within the Praying Town. On a more symbolic level, this metaphor foreshadows the records of visible testimony that will make the presence of grace perceptible to the witnessing audience reading the tracts. The numinous, ethereal quality of grace becomes visible to the discerning eye through the oral relation as experience takes on an embodied presence. In the same tract, Eliot refers to the soul as an “eye of faith,” expanding upon the theological and scientific theory that the ocular sense, transformed through faith, makes the divine manifest within the natural world. The soul is both the place in which the individual discovers his or her spiritual status and the text that others read to discern the work of grace.⁴²

40. Boyle, *Christian Virtuoso*, 94.

41. Whitfield, *Light Appearing*, 18. Ezekiel 37 was often preached to American Indians and, as many scholars have pointed out, was highly effective in soliciting conversion, quite possibly because the healing powers of Christianity described in the passage spoke directly to the needs of an American Indian community suffering from illness. For examples of scholarship, see Joyce Chaplin; Kristina Bross; Richard Cogley, *John Eliot’s Mission to the Indians before King Philip’s War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); and Jean M. O’Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees: Indian Land and Identity in Natick, Massachusetts, 1650–1790* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

42. Eliot’s description of the soul in these terms comes from Hebrews 11.1: “Faith is the ground of things, which are hoped for, and the evidence of things unseen.” Mid-seventeenth-century theologians and scientists, from Francis Bacon to Richard Baxter to Boyle subtly transform this scriptural sense through a new use of faith to tap the elect’s willed observational capacities. Baxter rephrases the passage as “*faith is a kind of sight; it is the eye of the soul: the evidence of things not seen*” (*Call to the*

In *Strength out of Weakness*, Whitfield and Eliot describe the preparatory stages of conversion approaching completion. The Indians have “formed themselves into a Government of God” and are now ready for the “Church-estate.” Anticipating this estate, Eliot instructs his Native congregants “that the Visible Church of Christ is builded upon a lively confession of Christ” and “exhorts them to try their hearts by the Word of God, to find out what change the Lord hath wrought in their hearts.” He then explains to his readership, “this is the present work we have in hand.”⁴³ The telling pronominal shift from “them,” the Indians, to “we,” the readers of the tracts, locates authority in the discerning judges who are witnessing ethnographically the work of grace upon the Praying Indians. Praying Indians’ self-examination is preparation for the testimony that will narrate the results of this introspection to a discerning audience of reliable witnesses. Eliot conveys to the Indians the work they must do in anticipation of forming the Visible Church without telling them what he expects to hear in the oral relation.⁴⁴ The reader understands that the Indians haven’t been coached in what counts as evidence of grace but in how to find it. Although the Praying Town will mirror an English congregation, the authority to judge the evidence produced in the testimonial account does not belong to the congregants within the enclosed sphere of the ecclesiastical community. The evidence instead becomes the “present work” of theologians and scientists investigating Nonantum, Natick, Martha’s Vineyard, Mashpee, and other Praying Towns as laboratories of grace wherein the complexities of divine mystery might be further understood.

Even though *Strength* prepares natives for a science of self-scrutiny, the pronominal shift from “them” to “we” signals that the Praying Indians can not be entirely trusted to this introspective science and that the translators and transcribers ultimately take responsibility for tracking evidences of the soul. Through this transference of discerning authority, the authors of the tracts anticipate what the experience of grace will look like by attributing to the Native American worshippers a peculiar and explicitly non-English

Unconverted [London: R.W. and N. Simmons Bookseller, 1663] my emphasis, 48). Eliot employs this ocular transformation here as he presents the soul as a text whose evidence others can discern.

43. Whitfield, *Strength out of Weakness* (London: M. Simmons for John Blague and Samuel Howes, 1652), 10.

44. The Visible Church marks the Puritans’ attempt, following Augustine, to create a visible approximation of Christ’s invisible church on earth. Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1963).

physicality in their public performances. Generalized descriptions of the scene of witnessing native conversion in the tracts leading up to *Tears* describe this racialized spectacle of religious affect:

it did truly give to us who were present a great occasion of praising the Lord, to see those poor naked sons of *Adam*, and slaves to the Devil from their birth, to come toward the Lord as they did, with their joints shaking, and their bowels trembling, their spirits troubled, and their voices with much fervency, uttering words of sore displeasure against sin and Satan, which they had embraced from their Childhood with so much delight, accounting it also now their sin that they had not the knowledge of God.⁴⁵

Through such descriptions of religious affect, the tracts construct a racialized difference between English and Native testimonies. In *Strength* Mayhew describes an embodied, performative, and emotive experiential testimony. “Shaking,” “trembling,” and “fervency,” depict a mode of religious utterance that was neither practiced nor permitted in English congregations. Ministers labeled this very form of religious expression enthusiastic and in fact urged their English congregants to practice restraint and follow decorum in their own relations of faith. The description, “poor naked sons of Adam, and slaves to the Devil from their birth,” situates the Praying Indian within a biblical typology, structured according to bifurcated understandings of human difference as Christian or Heathen.

In contrast to English converts, these sons of Adam are not only fallen but also long-forgotten remnants of the Old Testament. The moment of conversion reinstantiates Praying Indians within the covenant, but only as relics from an ancient past. The ministers hoped that in addition to speaking in an Algonquian tongue, believed to be one of the lost languages, Praying Indians would complement this language by performing a mode of primitive affect. This primitive form of conversion fits neatly within the Puritan narrative of the New World as a site of typological fulfillment: in an unfolding, providential design, the conversion of Old Testament Native Americans mirrored New Testament fulfillment through the conversion of English congregants. Collectively, the reinscription of the “Jews in America” and the English in America within God’s covenant would signal the imminence of Christ’s return to earth, the reform of New England, and the subsequent reform of the

45. Whitfield, *Strength*, 29. Boyle’s letters provide the strongest “empirical” evidence that he read the Eliot tracts. A 1662 letter quotes the line, “poor, naked sons of Adam” verbatim. Eliot, “Notes from Company Records.”

world.⁴⁶ Encased in Christian primitivism, the figure of the Praying Indian also fit the burgeoning empiricism of Royal Society natural philosophy. As if to anticipate the Royal Society's desire for a primitive speech "clothed in bodies," Mayhew's description promises atavistic forms of Native worship to accompany Algonquian testimonial utterance. Here, a version of "Nullius in verba" involves a return to a primitive and pure form of language that would demonstrate a one-to-one correspondence between "the sign," the "oral sound of the sign," and the body's physiology in relation to speech.⁴⁷

In the letter to the New England Company that begins *Tears of Repentance*, Thomas Mayhew foregrounds Bacon's method of the "observed particular" as a technique for identifying manifest forms of grace upon non-English souls when he establishes that the text will convey "more particulars" and evidence of the "tokens of more Grace to be bestowed on Indian souls."⁴⁸ Providing material for the ethnographic imaginary of Boyle's *Christian Virtuoso*, Mayhew describes encountering the Native Americans on Martha's Vineyard as a group of "heathens" who had gone beyond moral and ethical degeneracy into a state of spiritual captivity. The description of a Powwow's failing attempt to terminate his "devilish craft" rhetorically underscores the extent of this captivity: "after he had been brought by the word of God to hate the Devil, and to renounce his Imps (which he did publicly) . . . his Imps remained still in him for some months tormenting of his flesh, and troubling

46. As a corrective to Max Weber, Dwight Bozeman explains the primitivist dimension of Puritan typology in which "moving forward also meant retrogression to the primitive origins of Christianity," represented through sermonic "plain style," the institution of the Augustinian church, and the invocation of a "mythic time" of the ancient past (17). I am adding to Bozeman's account an explanation of the racialized dimensions of Puritan primitivism. Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

47. "The Philological and Miscellaneous Papers," in *The Philosophical Transactions and Collections To the End of the Year 1700, Abridged and Disposed under General Heads*, vol. III, In Two Parts (London: Printed for R. Knaplock at the Bishop's Head; R. Wilkin, at the King's Head; and H. Clements, at the Half-Moon, in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1716), 373.

48. Defined in *New Organon* as a new "method, order and process of connecting and advancing experience" through the written record of "particulars." Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne, ed., *The New Organon, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 81, 83. This method becomes central to the Royal Society's experiential objective. In *Christian Virtuoso* Boyle writes that the American traveler might become acquainted with "diverse particulars" that confirm what was previously known, but also might discover things that would rectify erroneous assumptions (76).

of his mind, that he could never be at rest either sleeping or waking.” Yet, God’s “mercy,” Mayhew attests, allowed eight Powwows to convert to Christianity and “brought two hundred and eighty three Indians (not counting young children in the number) to renounce their false Gods, Devils, and Powwows” and “publicly” to defy “their tyrannical Destroyer the Devil . . . in set meetings, before many witnesses.” Here we have the description of witnessing Indian “supernatural testimony” that Boyle places at the center of Christian philosophy: Mayhew describes a scene of witnessing that highlights the contrast between heathen darkness and divine light, dramatizing the ideology of the savage to appeal to religio-scientific desires for evidence of divinity through a form of Christian primitivism. Mayhew’s letter promises that the testimonies recorded in *Tears of Repentance* will offer evidence of grace as an ontological phenomenon occurring within the natural world.⁴⁹

Through this framework of savage ideology, the tracts construct the Indian as the proper hermeneutic site through which to witness the spread of the gospel. In contrast to “learned Nations,” still “loth to yield to Christ,”

poore Indians have no principles of their own, nor yet wisdom of their own (I mean as other Nations have) . . . and therefore do most readily yield to any direction from the Lord, so that there will be no such opposition against the rising Kingdom of Jesus Christ among them.⁵⁰

While this paternalistic statement clearly presents the Indian in a state of primitive simplicity, Eliot’s remark is not simply a disparaging ethnographic one in the self-critical terms of our modern sense of ethnography. His racial observation, rather, is an attempt to establish the Indian subject as an appropriate text upon which to witness the workings of God in a distilled form.⁵¹ Because the Indians have no history, politics, or “human wisdom,” their religious experience offers purer evidence of grace. Eliot’s account of Native depravity as a particularly conducive site for witnessing manifestations of grace reminds the reader of criticisms of English temporal concerns in English

49. Thomas Mayhew, “To the Much Honored Corporation in London” in Eliot, *Tears of Repentance, Or A Narrative of the Further Progress of the Gospel Among the Indians in New England*.

50. Henry Whitfield, *The Light Appearing more and more toward the perfect day. Or a Farther Discovery of the present state of the Indians in New England* (London: T.R. and E.M. for John Bartlet, 1651), 28.

51. This reading draws from James Axtell’s theory of cultural erasure in *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America, The Cultural Origins of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

Revolutionary tracts such as Samuel Hartlib's *Faithful and Seasonable Advice* (1643). Hartlib attributes the delay in the millennial realization of the National Covenant to the "Absolute Temporal Monarchy," which claims dominion over men's "[spiritual] estates and bodies."⁵² As "unprincipled, poor souls," the Indians embody a promising space upon which to witness, in Old England and New, evidence of the progress of the Protestant cause.⁵³

Tears attempts to translate, record, and circulate such evidence for scientific and religious communities engaged in a shared desire to collect proof of what Richard Baxter and Boyle call "things unseen." Situated between Bacon's concept of the "natural theologian" and Boyle's theory of the "Supra-Intellectual" that can know "things above reason," *Tears* participates in a burgeoning scientific method that seeks to discover "divine mystery."⁵⁴ The task of presenting evidence of grace in the recorded testimonies was not only crucial to the integrity of the Visible Church at Natick and the legitimacy of the evangelical mission but also to the establishment of Natick and other Praying Towns as laboratories of grace for natural philosophers.

Ray Charleton, a natural philosopher known for reviving theories of physicotheology during the English Civil War, explains this empirical quest in *Darkness of Atheism Dispelled By the Light of Nature* (1652), which argues that proof of God's existence and of man's soul can be attained through "natural theology." While both God and the soul are invisible entities, wholly distinct from corporeal matter, God "imprints an indelible mark upon the soul" as a "mark or signature" of his existence. According to Charleton, philosophers are more equipped than divines to discern this indelible mark. While the Puritan clergy would disagree with Charleton over who had such discerning authority, Charleton describes the science of visible signs operative within the testimonial genre in Praying Towns. The existence of God can be established "by conversion . . . since faith is the gift of God, he that gives grace sufficient for the stable apprehension of other things contained therein, can also give

52. Samuel Hartlib, *A Faithful and Seasonable Advice or, The Necessity of a Correspondency for the Advancement of the Protestant Cause* (London: John Hammond, 1643), 4. The very notion in the title of a "necessary correpondency" indicates a political and religious climate in England that would have welcomed the evidence of grace and the advancement of the Protestant cause presented in the tracts.

53. My reading of Eliot as highlighting a religious critique of English politics during the Civil War draws upon Kristina Bross's insistence that we consider the relationship between the Civil War and the Eliot tracts as pivotal to the formation of English national identity. See her *Dry Bones*, especially 3–21.

54. Boyle, *A Discourse of Things Above Reason: Inquiring Whether a Philosopher Should Admit There Are Any Such* (London: St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1681).

grace sufficient to the administration of his existence.” In other words, the evidence found upon the human soul can serve as a text through which natural philosophers can trace the “fountain” or “archetype” from which the evidence flows.⁵⁵ The epistle dedicatory to “The Christian Reader” that begins *A Further Account of the Gospel* (1659), similarly states that the “legal impressions [of grace] in the natural conscience” can be used to investigate the “Doctrine of the Gospel.”⁵⁶

While promising an empirical account of primitive impressions of grace, *Tears* ultimately reflects a profound contradiction between the observed particular and the desire to hear and present certain forms of grace to London’s natural philosophers through the record of testimonial relations. This contradiction stems from the authors’ attempt to ensure that the “fruits” of grace witnessed ethnographically matched the spectacle of religious affect that they claimed to be witnessing among the Indians. But in place of the “shaking,” “trembling,” and “fervency,” promised in *Strength*, the testimonies offer a version of the ambivalent assurance that would count as adequate proof of grace in English congregations. Monequassun “thanks Christ for all these good gifts which he hath given me.” Totherswamp declares, “This is the love of God to me . . . I trust my soul with him for he is my Redeemer.” Ponampam testifies, “my heart is broken and melteth in me.” Owuffumag unequivocally states, “my heart turned to praying unto God, and I did pray . . . then I purposed to pray as long as I live.”⁵⁷ Each of the above statements *could* have been spoken by an English congregant and this was precisely the problem. The ministers were not simply interested in knowing that the Indians believed themselves to be saved, they also wanted to understand the peculiar way in which grace affects a “heathen” soul. The Indians, in other words, failed to produce the “curiosity” that Mayhew and others claimed to be observing among the Native population. In order to become a laboratory of grace for the scientific community and a space for securing the purity of English religious identity, the Praying Towns had to demonstrate what grace looked like among a population represented as history-less and in a depravedly fallen state.

55. Physicotheology was a mid-seventeenth-century term for natural theology, the study of God in nature. Ray Charleton, *The Darknes of Atheism Dispelled by the Light of Nature* (London: Printed by J.F. for William Lee, 1652), 20.

56. Edward Reynolds, “The Christian Reader,” in Eliot, *A Further Account of the Progress of the Gospel Amongst the Indians in New England* (London: M. Simmons, 1659).

57. Eliot, *Tears of Repentance*, 15, 7, 24, 44.

In response to the failure to witness and record new forms of religious experience, the ministers employed a surgical method of extracting desired evidence. Whereas the English congregants delivered a unified, cohesive account of saving grace once to a community of elect-witnesses, the Indians were often requested to give their account twice or even three times in the hopes that they would approximate the account that the ministers wanted to hear.⁵⁸ In response to the ministers' prompting for a second confession, Waban states, "I do not know what grace is in my heart." This clearly frustrated the ministers witnessing and recording the event who refused the proposed testimony by deeming it "not so satisfactory as was desired." Waban's belief in Christianity was not their concern, for he repeatedly attests to his faith in God. The ministers desired "to see and hear" evidence of his soul rather than a statement of his belief.⁵⁹ In place of the evidence that Waban could not (or would not) deliver orally, Eliot attests to the "exemplary" nature of Waban's conversion, explaining to the reader as well as to the witnessing ministers that "his gift is not so much in expressing himself this way, but in other respects useful and eminent." Waban is not alone in his inability to know the contents of his heart, despite repeated prompting. Eliot makes a similar intercession for Nishohkou: "When he made this Confession, he was much abashed, for he is a bashful man; many things he spoke that I missed, for want of thorough understanding some words and sentences." Blaming the first narrative's failure on a combination of Nishohkou's timidity toward public speech and the difficulties of transcription, Eliot offers a privately related testimony in its stead. Bashfulness, timidity, and an inability to "know" directly contrast the anticipated embodied performance with an insecurity as to the testifier's worthiness for election. While doctrinal insecurity was part of a Calvinistic understanding of grace, the Praying Indian further supplemented theological ambivalence with social forms of hesitance and reluctance to perform before a witnessing audience. This hesitancy delayed the establishment of Natick as an autonomous Praying Church until 1663, eleven years after this first winter gathering.⁶⁰

Robin Speen's confessions, offered in three sequential versions, reveal the minister's attempt to extract tangible proof of grace from the relation and

58. For examples of this testimonial practice in New England congregations see Michael McGiffert, ed., *God's Plot: Puritan Spirituality in Thomas Shepard's Cambridge* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972).

59. Eliot, *A Late and Further Manifestation of the Progress of the Gospel among the Indians*, 20.

60. Eliot, *Tears of Repentance*, 8.

Speen's inability or unwillingness to produce it. In the middle of his second confession, Speen stops and asks Eliot, "What is Redemption?" This question signals Speen's struggle to match his narrative with the witnessing audience's idea of what an experiential testimony should sound like. By this point in his instruction, Speen was undoubtedly familiar with several definitions of the term from Eliot's sermons and translation of the catechism into Massachusetts. Speen stops in the middle of his own narrative of religious experience in order to verify that it matches the forms of evidence he is expected to produce. Eliot's answer does not help Speen out, for it merely reiterates that redemption is "the price which Christ paid for us and how it is to be applied to every particular person." Speen continues repeating his desire for redemption and his knowledge of sin, without delivering the "particular application" that Eliot requested. The final version of his testimony offers a version of the ambivalent assurance that counts as membership qualification in the Visible Church: "I give myself unto Christ that he may save me." Although Speen does not meet Eliot's specific narrative demand, he ultimately gives adequate testimony to his experience of grace.

Nonetheless determined to make the experiment work, the ministers attempted to extract empirical evidence of grace from the experiential authority of the Indian's narrative through a complex interplay between testimonial voice and witnessing audience. Whereas Charles Cohen has argued that the testimonies recorded in *Tears* failed to provide adequate evidence to legitimate the formation of the Visible Church at Natick, I am suggesting here that the testimonies *did* provide adequate evidence for the Praying Church, but not for the natural taxonomy of grace that the authors of the tracts hoped to develop.⁶¹ Although Indians narrate the transition from Indian religious practice to Puritanism as an allegorical movement from darkness to light, their method of testifying itself mimics the decorum modeled for them by their English proselytizers, occasionally supplemented with an exaggerated social insecurity. Ministers presented the towns as spaces for witnessing the forms of divine intervention required to "change the heart" of such "barbaric natives," yet the Indians would not narrate their experience in terms that were adequately different from the English.

In response to the failure of *Tears*, *A Late and Further Manifestation* (1655) attempts to ameliorate the inadequacy of the evidence produced through the

61. Charles Cohen, "Conversion among Puritans and Amerindians: A Theological and Cultural Perspective," in *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith*, ed. Francis Bremer (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993).

Indian testimonies through a more direct method of extracting evidence of grace. Reflecting on *Tears*, Eliot expresses a subtle sense of disappointment in the first tract of recorded testimonies, noting that “he did much to desire to hear what acceptance the Lord gave unto them, in the hearts of his people there.” Eliot’s “desire” seems not to have been fulfilled, for the 1655 tract pursues the quest of extracting evidence of grace through a persistent set of questions that demand an account of the particular nature of experiential religion: “What doth he put into your heart, that causeth your heart to break?” “What work of the Spirit find you in your heart?” “What change hath God wrought in you of late, which was not in you in former times?” Varying the language and sequence of each question for each confessor, Eliot puts forth such questions as a method of soliciting the exact nature of the divine encounter experienced by each of the six Indians offering testimonies of faith. The questions extract the very evidence that the testimonies failed to produce, while the answers replicate the patterns of misrecognition. The Indians provide answers that describe a conventional pattern of conversion—“I find my heart turned” . . . “the Spirit turned us from our sins”—without the specificity requested by the ministers.⁶²

In the self-authorizing framework of Christian evangelism, the ministers and natural philosophers would only “receive a testimony” that placed the Praying Indian more firmly within an ancient religious form of primitive simplicity.⁶³ In his manuscript collection of “loose notes theological,” Boyle locates missionary ethnographies that make the “mysteries of religion” discernable within a narrative of natural history. For Boyle, the study of “the supernatural assistance of special grace” within the natural world depends on collecting and studying “external Testimonies that favor the Christian Religion,” “the propagation of the gospel,” and increasing “knowledge of human nature.”⁶⁴ Boyle’s notion that “external testimonies” serve as the most reliable evidence of the presence of “special grace” within the natural world upholds a central tenet of the Royal Society—that experimental philosophy must involve exploration in order to examine the phenomenon of nature in its original state.

This religioscientific inquiry into the invisible world through the testimonies of Praying Indians existed in a dialectical relationship with evidence of

62. Eliot, *A Late and Further Manifestation*, 3.

63. I am returning to the essay’s epigraph. Samuel Petto, *The Voice of the Spirit* (London: Printed for Livewell Chapman at the Crowne in Popes-head alley, 1654), 8.

64. *Boyle Papers*, “Background notes on Christian Virtuoso,” 79.

natural “oddities” recorded in Mather’s “*Curiosa Americana*” (1712–24) and other ethnographic records of Indians in nature. On the title page of John Josselyn’s *New-England’s Rarities*, the Indian Squaw is framed as an “addition” to a catalogue of medicinal plants, garden herbs, and edible roots that constitute Maine’s coastal ecosystem. In the text, Indian women receive the same form of descriptive rendering as the plants: “even short teeth; hair black, thick and long; broad breasted; handsome straight bodies; limbs cleanly straight, and of a convenient stature, generally, as plump as Partridges.” This ethnological understanding of North American natives as part of a natural taxonomy reflects a starker example of the imperialist underpinnings of empirical practices. However, the ministerial authors of the Eliot tracts also enfolded an imperial desire for religious knowledge within the witnessing scene of the evangelical encounter. This desire persists beyond Eliot’s mission as an instance of what Asad would call an epistemic structure emerging from the evangelical encounter. Cotton Mather’s early eighteenth-century letters to the Royal Society continue to present the Indians as heathens existing in a state of primitive simplicity, with “no family government among them” and an “intolerably lazy quality.”⁶⁵ In 1710, Mather uses this framework of racial subordination to describe the activity of the Praying Towns in an appendix to his *Bonifacius*. His description suggests that the figure of the Praying Indian as a site of epistemological and empirical plenitude had far from vanished from missionary discourse. The “testimony” of an English minister preaching “among them” summarizes the primitivist and affective modes that the Praying Indian had come to embody as a result of its encounter with the new science method and epistemology:

Their method, respecting those that are admitted into communion, is more according to the manner of Churches in the primitive times, than is now practiced among the churches in most parts. The Person to be admitted . . . makes a confession of sin; which they do (as I have seen) with *Tears* and *Trembling*, like him in the Sixteenth Chapter of the Acts. And then he gives an account of the experiences he has had, of convictions, awakenings, and comforts; in which they are large and particular.

Mather’s Praying Indian testifies—through the witnessing power of the English minister—to the visible presence of divine power. As a performer of primitive, religious affect, the confessor contributes particular knowledge to

65. Cotton Mather, “*Curiosa Americana Continued in a Decade of Letters to Dr. John Woodward and Dr. James Jurin from the Reverend Cotton Mather,*” in *Letter Book* (London: The Royal Society, 1724).

New-Englands
RARITIES
Discovered:
IN
Birds, Beasts, Fishes, Serpents,
and *Plants* of that Country.

Together with
The *Physical* and *Chyrurgical* REMEDIES
wherewith the *Natives* constantly use to
Cure their DISTEMPERS, WOUNDS,
and SORES.

ALSO
A perfect *Description* of an *Indian SQUA*,
in all her Bravery; with a *POEM* not
improperly conferr'd upon her.

LASTLY
A *CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE*
of the most remarkable Passages in that
Country amongst the *ENGLISH*.

Illustrated with CUTS.

By *JOHN JOSSELYN, Gent.*

London, Printed for *G. Widdowes* at the
Green Dragon in *St. Pauls Church-yard*, 1672.

Figure 5. John Josselyn, *New England Rarities Discovered* (1672). Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

the mysteries of Christianity by providing the testimonies upon which Boyle's theory of natural religion depends. Employing the racial logic structuring this notion of a heightened primitivism Mather remarks that the Indian confessor goes beyond "the English in their meetings."⁶⁶ The quoted testimony concludes with the statement that such scenes occur daily as more and more Praying Indians are admitted into the church. This promise of the continued presence of divinity concludes Mather's lament for the lost era of Puritan missionary work in traditional jeremiadic fashion, while also indicating the persistence of spiritual subjectivity as a racialized "curiosity" within later missionary efforts.

66. Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius. An Essay Upon the Good* (Boston: Printed by B. Green, for Samuel Gerrish at his shop in Corn Hill, 1710), 197–98.