

## Anti-Colonial Satire in Roger Williams' A Key into the Language of America

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IT has never been fashionable to deal with the writings of Roger Williams as literature. Instead, his writings, including his first work, *A Key into the Language of America* (London, 1643), have been approached almost exclusively as important and fascinating historical documents which have provided us with a general insight into the Puritan New England mind, once the peculiarities, not to say perversities of the founder of Providence Plantations have been explained or discounted. In the introduction to our 1973 edition of *A Key* we attempted, consequently, to strike out in a new direction in approaching Williams' work, and by emphasizing the literary quality of his shaping imagination as it applied itself to America and the Indian to make Williams more available to the student of Colonial American and Renaissance literature and perhaps along the way to jolt historians of the period into a reassessment of the documents which for three hundred years have seemed to yield the same contents, whether one sided with John Cotton and conservatism or with Roger Williams and radicalism, whether one regarded Williams as a Separatist Don Quixote well banished or as a lonely and persecuted prophet of the Millenium to be realized in the eighteenth-century with the Republic.<sup>1</sup> We felt then, and still do, that whether the historian specializes in political history, church history, or the history and ethnography of the New England Indian, an awareness of the ways in which Roger Williams conveyed his vision through the medium of literary traditions could only help him to avoid the pitfalls of

simplistic readings. Therefore, while admitting that *A Key* is an invaluable document to the student of Colonial American history or of anthropology and the Algonquian language, we drew attention to the theme of the book, its tone and structure, and to its reliance upon the emblem tradition of the Renaissance. We suggested that thematically *A Key* is related to the Genesis story of the fall of man in which Williams sees the introduction of European civilizations among the Narragansetts as a typological recurrence of Satan's seduction of Eve and Adam through the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge; we pointed out that the structure of *A Key* follows from the typology; and we concluded that the tone of the work, moving from celebration to elegy, from the ironic to the tragic, mirrors a state of mind which we believe to be unique among the seventeenth-century Puritan colonists and which we have labelled "tragic primitivism."<sup>2</sup> What we merely touched on then, and would here like to elaborate upon, is the extent to which Williams' comments upon the relationship between the Colonists and the Indians — given his disgust with European manners and his admiration for the sharply contrasting naturalness of the Indian — are satiric in both conception and execution and how much the satiric intention motivates and directs the educative element of *A Key*. It is, after all, a handbook and guide to Indian culture and language as they are being shaped by early contacts with the Christian European.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, however, Williams reminds us in his epistle dedicatory that "A little *Key* may open a *Box*, where lies a *bunch* of *Keyes*" (p. 83).

It is important at the outset to point out that Williams sees and uses the irony inherent in this recurrence of the Genesis story because in America the loss of Eden is occasioned by the conversion of the Indian to the beliefs and practices of the so-called civilized Christian. The controlling irony is the profound sense of reversal thus entailed: to the self-righteous Puritan, America is the

wilderness which he is called to turn into a garden; to Williams, as Faulkner's Ike McCaslin states it three hundred years later, America is the garden spoiled by "the old world's tainted wind which drove the ships" in which the Canaan-seeking colonists arrived.<sup>4</sup> But Williams, it is well to emphasize immediately, is not attacking civilization or Christianity in themselves; he is not a sentimental primitivist or exotic but a Puritan Christian whose righteous zeal overflows at times in *A Key* into the satire of the Old Testament Prophets, a satire tempered by Martial, his favorite Roman author. It is the abuse of the idea and not the idea itself which he is concerned to attack, and his primitivism can be seen as a means to a satiric end.<sup>5</sup> Not Christianity or civilization but the European version of them is his target, and specifically what he considers the faulty premise that because a man has been born into an intellectually and technologically advanced culture and because he has been formally baptized he is by definition a civilized Christian and hence superior to the unchristened savage.<sup>6</sup>

To Williams a truly civilized Christian is superior to the barbaric pagan because that Christian is natural man brought to perfection through spiritual rebirth; consequently the process of colonization should be positive, the Indian should be the better for his contact with the white man. It is not a heretical theology but experience which makes Williams question the value of converting the native. As he has seen it, civilizing the Indian consists in introducing him to "*Europes Coyne*" (p. 210, i.e., knives, guns, and clothes) and christianizing him consists in making the Indian come to church on the Sabbath. Why the structure of *A Key* must move from birth to death, from a pre- to a post-lapsarian world is that the colonists themselves have not been truly converted, for "Gods way is first to turne a soule from it's Idolls, both of heart, worship, and conversation, before it is capable of worship, to the true and living God . . ." (p. 199).

Participation in the formalities of religion does not make one a Christian:

As also, that the two first Principles and Foundations of true Religion or worship of the true God in Christ, are Repentance from dead workes, and Faith towards God, before the Doctrine of Baptisme or washing and the laying on of hands, which containe the Ordinances and Practises of worship; the want of which, I conceive, is the bane of million of soules in England, and all other Nations professing to be Christian Nations, who are brought by publike authority to Baptisme and fellowship with God in Ordinances of worship, before the saving worke of Repentance, and a true turning to God. . . . (p. 199)

Until the European himself has been converted, he can only subvert the Indian, or as Williams writes in the companion-piece to *A Key*: "Wo be to me, if I call that conversion to God, which is indeed the subversion of the souls of millions in Christendom, from one false worship to another."<sup>7</sup> It is not the truly Christian gentleman, then, but the Pharisee who is the object of Williams' satire.

In the first section of *A Key* Williams' technique is to describe characteristic features of Indian life and then to contrast the natives' habits with those of the European. In "Of *Eating* and *Entertainment*," for example, he observes, "If any stranger come in, they presently give him to eate of what they have; many a time, and at all times of the night (as I have fallen in travell upon their houses) when nothing hath been ready, have themselves and their wives, risen to prepare me some refreshing" (p. 104). Immediately after this description of the natural charity and generosity of the Indian he notes the contrast which European hospitality presents: "It is a strange *truth*, that a man shall generally finde more free entertainment and refreshing amongst these *Barbarians*, then amongst thousands that call themselves *Christians*" (p. 104). It is a strange truth on two counts: first, because the savage is supposed to be lacking in humanity; second, because the Christian is supposed to be the example of the good Samaritan. Williams of course

remembered that for the New Testament Jews the Samaritans were barbarians. And by labelling the colonists self-styled Christians Williams emphasizes the ideal while he castigates the abuse.

Another "strange *truth*" which Williams as pragmatic observer directs towards his learned compatriots (those of the epistle dedicatory) is that "For the temper of the braine in quick apprehensions and accurate judgments (to say no more) the most high and sovereign God and Creator, hath not made them inferiour to *Europeans*" (p. 130). Contrary to the popular — and convenient — notion that the Indian is dull-witted, Williams finds him to be as intelligent as the colonist. If this is so, upon what can the European base his sense of superiority?

*Boast not proud English, of thy birth & blood,  
Thy brother Indian is by birth as Good.  
Of one blood God made Him, and Thee & All,  
As wise, as faire, as strong, as personall.*

*By nature wrath's his portion, thine no more  
Till Grace his soule and thine in Christ restore,  
Make sure thy second birth, else thou shalt see,  
Heaven ope to Indians wild, but shut to thee.* (p. 133)

Not only is the Indian not inferior with respect to natural qualities but also with respect to his chances for salvation. Indeed, possessing none of the false assumptions of the colonist, he is potentially a better candidate for redemption. What the European has — titles and traditions — is not essential; what the Indian has — the natural virtues — is prerequisite.

The most suggestive example of the satiric direction of the first section of *A Key*, however, is to be found in the opening chapter itself. "Of *Salutation*" begins with the observation that "The Natives are of two sorts, (as the English are.) Some more Rude and Clownish, who are not so apt to Salute, but upon *Salutation* resalute lovingly. Others, and the generall, are *sober* and *grave*, and yet chearfull in a meane, and as ready to begin a *Salutation* as to *Resalute*, which yet the English generally

begin, out of desire to Civilize them" (p. 93). Immediately Williams begins to establish comparison and contrast as his central technique for exposing misconceptions about the Indian which form the basis for the colonists' sense of superiority.<sup>8</sup> For if it is true that some of the natives are fools, the type is not unique to the Indian race, and further, contrary to the stereotype, fools are in the minority among the natives. Secondly, while the Indian does have good manners, the colonist fails to recognize them as such; to him only those who have learned to speak English are civilized, whereas by virtue of the vocabulary sections of *A Key* Williams makes it clear that the difference between the two languages is in the form and not the meaning. The Indian does not need to be taught politeness; rather, the colonist needs to be taught the Indian tongue, shorthand throughout *A Key* for Indian customs in general. So that instead of being a favorable comment upon the desire of the colonists to civilize the natives, the passage reveals itself to be an ironic and satiric commentary upon the colonists' narrow-mindedness and excessive concern with the formalities rather than with the spirit of culture, and thus prepares the way for the explicit attack in the concluding poem of the chapter:

*The Courteous Pagan shall condemne  
Uncourteous Englishmen,  
Who live like Foxes, Beares and Wolves,  
Or Lyon in his Den.*

*Let none sing blessings to their soules,  
For that they Courteous are:  
The wild Barbarians with no more  
Then Nature, goe so farre. (p. 99)*

The purpose of the first (or pre-lapsarian) section of *A Key*, then, is to contrast the so-thought inferior Indian with the so-called civilized Christian, and it is the European colonists' belief in his superiority which makes for satire. Technically speaking, the European is the *alazon*, a deceiving and self-deceiving figure, and it is his use of the Indian which make Williams' comments satiric rather

than purely critical and which makes portions of *A Key* satire rather than invective. In addition to this, the use of contrast is of great value to Williams in his portrayal of the Indian. For what emerges from the first section of *A Key* is the portrait of the native as pre-lapsarian man, a necessary gambit if Williams is to utilize the Edenic myth to the full and present the Indian after contact with the colonists as fallen man. To present the native as Adamic man, however, would carry the suggestion that natural man could be saved without Revelation, and to Williams this "*cultus naturalis*" is nothing less than "*Splendidum Peccatum*" (VII, 242). But the contrast of seventeenth-century types saves the day: the Indian, natural man, is superior to the European; consequently he is relatively a type of unfallen man.

The Indian of the last section of *A Key*, we realize, has lost many of the natural virtues described earlier and with them his innocence. But even thus fallen he is shown to be superior to the colonist. If words for lying, stealing, and quarrelsomeness must now be included in their vocabulary, yet Williams "could never discern that excesse of scandalous sins amongst them, which *Europe* aboundeth with" (p. 203). If warfare can no longer be mentioned only incidentally, as in the first section, but now must be dealt with as a subject worthy of an entire chapter, still

Their Warres are farre lesse bloody and devouring then the cruell Warres of *Europe*; and seldome twenty slaine in a pitch field: partly because when they fight in a wood every Tree is a Bucklar.

When they fight in a plaine, they fight with leaping and dancing, that seldome an Arrow hits, and when a man is wounded, unless he that shot followes upon the wounded, they soone retire and save the wounded: and yet having no Swords, nor Guns, all that are slaine are commonly slain with great Valour and Courage: for the Conquerour ventures into the thickest, and brings away the Head of his Enemy. (p. 237)

Thus one who had looked only at the latter part of *A Key* could perhaps conclude that "The recurrent theme is that

the faults of the savage Indians are all the more egregious when manifested by supposedly civilized 'Christian' Englishmen,"<sup>9</sup> but when one has considered the work as an organic whole it becomes obvious that it is not the "faults" of the Indian but his original natural virtue that acts as a foil to the vices of the colonist; the recurrent theme of the work is that the Indian is being corrupted by those who pretended to convert him.

As one might expect, given the Edenic motif of *A Key*, Williams' major metaphor in his continuing satiric attack upon the colonists is that of clothes, since they are the biblical symbol of lost innocence and since nakedness is the stereotypic characteristic of the savage. Prior to the central chapter of the work which is entirely concerned with the symbolic significance "Of *their nakednesse and clothing*," there are only three explicit references to clothes, each associated with the European, while the nakedness of the Indian is of course a *donnée*.

Putting aside Williams' pun on "suite" in his distinguishing himself from those who have not made their deeds fit their pretences with regard to the Indian (p. 87), the first reference to clothes appears when he informs the reader that the Indians have "no *Clothes, Bookes, nor Letters*, and conceive their *Fathers* never had; and therefore they are easily perswaded that the *God* that made *English* men is a greater *God*, because Hee hath so richly endowed the *English* above *themselves*: But when they heare that about sixteen hundred yeeres agoe, *England* and the *Inhabitants* thereof were like unto *themselves*, and since have received from *God, Clothes, Bookes, &c.* they are greatly affected with a secret hope concerning themselves" (p. 85). As is the case in all of Williams' comments in the epistle dedicatory, the irony of such a passage is not evident at the first reading. At the second reading or in retrospect, however, one feels justified in conjecturing that "easily perswaded" transforms the passage from an apparent comment upon the natives'



recognition of the true benefits of civilization into a satiric criticism of the colonist's use of and belief in the externals of culture as signs of his superiority. The comparison between the Indian now and the Englishman of "sixteen hundred yeeres agoe" would further this thrust by implying, first, that the difference between the civilized Christian and the barbarian is historical and material rather than spiritual, and second, by implying that the so-called civilized Englishman is the representative of a nation "greatly affected with a secret hope concerning themselves." In the year 3243, the Indian will be just as "advanced" as the Englishman of 1643. But by then, Williams asks by implication, where will the Indian, where will the Englishman be?

The second use of the clothes metaphor in the early section of *A Key* also identifies the white man in terms of external appurtenances. In the chapter concerned with Indian physiognomy Williams observes the natives' tendency to characterize a race in terms of its appearance, a viable practice where men are naked and thus open to inspection. The Narragansett name for the European is in strict keeping with this practice — and with Williams' satiric purposes. Immediately after noting that the Narragansett word for "*A cole blacke man*" is "Suckáutacone," Williams announces, "For, *Sucki* is black, and *Waútacone*, one that weares clothes, whence *English*, *Dutch*, *French*, *Scotch*, they call *Wautaconâuog*, or *Coatmen*." (p. 133). By suggesting that to the naked eye Europe's national distinctions are not apparent but rather that clothes are the distinguishing characteristic of all *white* men, Williams prepares for his concluding observation that "Nature knowes no difference between *Europe* and *Americans* in blood, birth, bodies, &c." (p. 133). The European is merely a clothed natural, not a better man; further, his clothes conceal his basic nature and thus are symbolic of deception of self and others and of his false sense of superiority.

In the next chapter, the last reference to clothes in the early section appears. The point of the chapter, suitably entitled "Of *Discourse* and *Newes*," is formulated in the general observation, "The whole race of *mankind* is generally infected with an *itching desire* of hearing *Newes*," and is given focus in the concluding lines of the poem, "*The Gospel, or Glad tidings onely can, / Make glad the English, and the Indian*" (p. 140). Ideally, the bringer of the good news to the native should be the civilized white man; yet if words are meaningful, the colonist appears in a very different light:

Awaunaguss, suck.	<i>English-man, men.</i>
This they call us, as much as to say, These strangers.	
Wautacone -nuaog.	<i>Englishman, men.</i>
That is, Coat-men, or clothed.	
Chauquaock.	<i>English-men, properly sword-men. (p. 137)</i>

Unless one argues that Williams is presenting the Narragansett tongue as redundant, the purpose of the repetition seems to be to link "sword-men" to "Coat-men" and thus to define further the way in which the European will civilize the Indian. Not "Glad tidings" but the badge of sin and the implement of war mark the entrance of the colonists; there is, after all, "not a sorry *Howe, Hatchet, Knife*, nor a rag of cloth in all *America*, but what comes over the dreadful Atlantick Ocean from Europe . . ." (p. 220).

In Chapter XX Williams first makes reference to the clothing of the native. Significantly, however, the subject is presented in terms "Of *their nakednesse* and *clothing*," that is in terms of a transition from one to the other. Furthermore, the chapter progresses in three stages. First, the nakedness of the Indian is described in clearly Edenic terms: "(except their secret parts, covered with a little Apron, after the patterne of their and our first Parents) I say all else open and naked" (p. 185). The observation which follows ends by emphasizing the Edenic innocence which such attire symbolizes: "Custome hath used their minds and bodies to it, and in such a freedom

from any wantonnesse, that I have never seen that wantonnesse amongst them, as, (with griefe) I have heard of in *Europe*" (p. 185). Whereas Adam and Eve provide Williams with a suitable comparison, the European provides him with material for ironic contrast.

The second stage of native attire might be called the primitive, since it involves the Indians' use of "natural" materials to clothe themselves. While a "fall" from the paradisaical condition, the motive and mode of costuming is still presented as idyllic: "Within their skin or coat they creepe contentedly, by day or night, in house, or in the woods, and sleep soundly counting it a felicitie, (as indeed an earthly one it is) *Intra pelliculam quemque tenere suam*, That every man be content with his skin" (p. 186).<sup>10</sup> The pun is, of course, intentional and it points to the animality of the savage; but the appropriateness of the costume presents a state in which man is still in harmony with his environment.

By way of describing the Indian custom of painting their beasts' skins, finally, Williams moves to the third stage of the "civilizing" process, the adoption of English garments. "Our English clothes are so strange unto them, and their bodies inured so to indure the weather, that when (upon gift &c.) some of them have had English cloathes, yet in a showre of raine, I have seen them rather expose their skins to the wet then their cloaths, and therefore pull them off, and keep them drie" (p. 187). The description humorously suggests the "true value" of the white man's gift, and further seems to characterize the giver who gives the forms of civilization without fully explaining the practical benefits to be derived from the gift. For, "While they are amongst the *English*, they keep on the *English* apparell, but pull of all, as soone as they come againe into their owne Houses, and Company" (p. 187). Perhaps the implication is that the Indian has learned one lesson well after all: when in the presence of the colonist it is wise to cover oneself.

At the beginning of this crucial chapter Williams introduces his subject by stating that the Indians "have a two-fold nakednesse" (p. 185). His immediate reference is to his observation that the Indians are naked beneath their beast's skin or mantle and their tendency to throw off these garments when in their own homes or abroad. The concluding observation of the chapter, however, suggests another dimension to "two-fold": "How deep are the purposes and Councells, of God? what should bee the reason of this mighty difference of One mans children that all the Sonnes of men on this side the way (in *Europe, Asia and Africa*) should have such plenteous clothing for Body, for Soule! and the rest of *Adams* sonnes and Daughters on the other side, or *America* (some thinke as big as the other three,) should neither have nor desire clothing for their naked Soules, or Bodies" (p. 187). If clothing is truly the mark of the civilized man and symbolic of his regenerate spiritual condition, then the nakedness of the Indian has to be a cause for sadness since, conversely, first it must be symbolic of his fallen condition, and second, his preference for nakedness must reveal his stubborn unregeneracy. If nakedness symbolizes openness and honesty, however, then the European's superabundance of clothing becomes a matter for suspicion and condemnation. The problem which Williams ironically refers to the inscrutable wisdom of God, in short, is that while clothes should be symbolic of fall and regeneration, they seem on the contrary to have become instruments of moral deception and, this being the case, should the colonists "clothe" the native?

*Israell was naked, wearing cloathes!*  
*The best clad English-man,*  
*Not cloth'd with Christ, more naked is:*  
*Then naked Indian. (p. 188)*

English "clothes" appear to hinder rather than to advance the cause of Christianity and civilization in America.

After this "fall" chapter, the clothes metaphor continues to be employed extensively. Williams' characteristic

emphasis now, however, is not upon the Indian having learned also how to cover himself, but upon his having been "perswaded" that the "Coat-men" are indeed morally as well as materially superior to him. Thus Williams' satiric method in the postlapsarian section is to use the Indian as *ieron* or straight-man naively asking the questions which expose the alazonic colonist. Appropriately, "*Of Religion, the soule, &c.*" is the first chapter after the "fall," and in it Williams ironically observes: "They apprehending a vast difference of Knowledge betweene the *English* and themselves, are very observant of the *English* lives: I have heard them say to an Englishman (who being hindred, broke a promise to them) You know God, Will you lie Englishman?" (p. 197). Along the same lines, but more directly this time, in the concluding stanza of the poem in the next chapter, "*Of their Government and Justice,*" Williams has the polytheistic savage reply to the supposedly superior monotheistic coatman, after hearing of the "*horrid filths*" of the European:

*We weare no Cloaths, have many Gods,  
And yet our sinnes are lesse:  
You are Barbarians, Pagans wild,  
Your Land's the Wildernesse.* (p. 204)

Similarly, in the next chapter, the Indian after hearing of the "*thousand Whoredomes*" of the Papists, asks "*if such doe goe in Cloaths, / And whether God they know?*" since while such immorality would be understandable in the stereotype unregenerate heathen, it is unthinkable in a civilized Christian. But "*when they heare they're richly clad, / Know God, yet practice so*":

*No sure they're Beasts not men (say they,)  
Mens shame and foule disgrace,  
Or men have mixt with Beasts and so,  
Brought forth that monstrous Race.* (p. 209)

Williams' technique here has a double value. First, by allowing the Indian to speak *in propria persona* he is able to employ the most bestial of images; second, by allowing the Indian to be the indignant critic, Williams is able

to demonstrate the normal superiority of the native and to suggest that he is potentially if not actually morally better than the vast bulk of Europeans, with Papists as the extreme example. For if the Indian, unregenerate as he is, is already shocked by such proceedings, how much greater will his reaction be when his natural sense of morality is supplemented by divine grace.

Thus far Williams' emphasis has been upon the negative aspects of his clothes metaphor. But in "*Of their paintings,*" the third-last chapter, he gives positive attention to the other side of the picture — nakedness. In this chapter he comes to the general observation that "It hath been the foolish Custome of all barbarous Nations to paint and figure their Faces and Bodies (as it hath been to our shame and griefe, wee may remember it of some of our Fore-Fathers in this Nation.)" (p. 241). This comment one might notice as an inverse reflection of his observation in the epistle where his point was that sixteen hundred years ago Druid England had no books or clothes. Metaphorically, then, the progress of civilization and Christianity should be a movement from painting the body to clothing it. And in this respect, "How much then are we bound to our most holy Maker for so much knowledge of himselfe revealed in so much Civility and Piety? and how should we also long and endeavour that *America* may partake of our mercy" (p. 241).

We have already seen, however, that there is a great difference between material progress — clothes — and spiritual advancement — what clothes should symbolize. Now we also learn that "painting" is not a thing of England's forgotten pagan past but a contemporary fashion. For if the Indians' cosmetics are symptomatic of his barbarousness, "*More foule such Haire, such Face in Israel. / England so calls her selfe . . .*" (p. 241). In this way Williams' rhetorical question how should we endeavour that "*America* may partake of our mercy"

becomes very ironic, and in the concluding poem of the chapter he redefines the symbolic significance of the Indian's nakedness:

*Truth is a Native, naked Beauty; but  
Lying Inventions are but Indian Paints;  
Dissembling hearts their Beautie's but a Lye.  
Truth is the proper Beauty of Gods Saints. (p. 241)*

In only two other instances in *A Key* is nakedness employed: in the poem from the religion chapter and in the concluding poem of the book. An echo of the former, the latter reads:

*Two Worlds of men shall rise and stand  
'Fore Christs most dreadfull barre;  
Indians, and English naked too,  
That now most gallant are. (p. 249)*

Here, however, nakedness is used only to suggest the deceptiveness of clothing in general, whereas to say that "*Truth is a Native, naked Beauty*" is explicitly to complete the satiric attack upon assumed values for which the metaphor is designed.

In addition to what might be called the universal dimensions of Williams' satire, *A Key* also includes a number of choice allusions to the political climate of the time. Applicable to either Stuart erastianism or the Bay theocracy, for example, are Williams' observations upon the separation of church and state in Indian affairs. Not the Bay but the Narragansetts follow the "exact forme" of government which "the Lord *Jesus* ordained": "their Kings or Governours called *Sachimaïiog*, Kings, and *Atauskowaïog*, Rulers, doe govern: Their Priests, performe and manage their Worship" (p. 192). Also in contrast to the tyranny of European rulers, "The *Sachims*, although they have an absolute Monarchie over the people; yet they will not conclude of ought that concernes all, either Lawes, or Subsidies, or warres, unto which the people are averse, and by gentle perswasion cannot be brought" (p. 202). In religious matters particularly the Indian is an implied example for the so-called civilized

nations, since "They have a modest Religious perswasion not to disturb any man, either themselves *English, Dutch,* or any in their Conscience, and worship . . ." (p. 193).

More specifically, Charles and his Court provide a telling contrast to his new subjects in America. Perhaps in order to emphasize the pun on wane, Williams twice translates "*Mosk* or *Paukúnawaw* the great Beare, or *Charles Waine*" (pp. 156 and 86). (In similar manner Fulke Greville writes "Natures waine" in *Caelica*, LXXX). And while one may smile at the description of the Indians as Roundheads, the reason for it is clearly not Williams' faulty perception: "Yet some cut their haire round, and some as low and as short as the sober *English*; yet I never saw any so to forget nature it selfe in such excessive length and monstrous fashion, as to the shame of the *English Nation*, I now (with grieffe) see my Countrey-men in *England* are degenerated unto" (p. 130). Finally, in the poem we have already examined from "*Of their paintings*," Williams employs typology to direct his satiric attack against the Crown Prince and the Queen when he observes that if "*Fowle are the Indians Haire and painted Faces. . . . / yet there's / Absoloms foule Haire and Face of Jesabell*" to be found in England (p. 241). In the manners of the Stuart Court as compared and contrasted to those of the Indian is graphically figured-forth the wane of Charles I.

Another thing which the English and Indians seem to have in common as well is "*Munnotaúbana, or Hangings,* which amongst them make as faire a show as Hangings with us" (pp 117-18). The difference of course is that the Indians' hangings are embroidered mats while the English version may very well take the form of public executions, particularly of dissenters. In the chapter "*Of Discourse and Newes*" Williams again considers this most central of political issues, this time in his attempt to answer an Indian's question, "Why come the *Englishmen* hither?" Because the Indian practice is to move to a



new location when the old one is no longer capable of providing firewood, they assume first that the English are in America because they "want *firing*." In view of the great coal and wood shortage in England at the time as a result of the occupation of Newcastle by anti-Parliamentary forces, the Indians might seem to have hit upon the right reason for the migration. In the conversation that follows, however, a more serious reason why the English have come is suggested with macabre irony. "*Have you no trees?*" asks the Indian; to which the Englishman answers, "*Great store.*" But, he goes on to explain, "*They are too full of people. They have not room one by another*" (p. 138). Perhaps an innocent enough attempt to explain English overpopulation to the simple savage. The reader who has seen Jacques Callot's engraving "*La pendasion*" in *Les Grandes Misères de la guerre* (1633), however, may be better equipped to appreciate the grimness of Williams' pun; for in Callot's representation of seventeenth-century execution by hanging, the trees are literally so full of hung dissenters that there is not room for another.<sup>11</sup>

Williams' satiric thrusts against his fellow colonists are directed, as we have already seen from examining the opening lines of *A Key*, toward their materialistic mentality disguised by a hypocritical morality. In this respect, the best example is to be found in the chapter under discussion. In his observations Williams records a supposed dialogue between himself and the great Sachem of the Narragansetts, Canounicus, in which the Indian begins by asserting that he never bore any ill-will toward the English and that *if* the colonists are true to their announced good will toward his people he will die happy with the thought of English and Indian living together in peace and love. To this, Williams as straight-man "replied, that he had no cause (as I hoped) to question *Englishmans, Wunnaumwaúonck*, that is, faithfulness, he having had long experience of their friendliness and

trustinesse." By way of reply to this qualified assertion of the Englishmen's Christian principles, the old chief improvises a brief drama upon his experiences with the bringers of the Gospel: "He tooke a sticke, and broke it into ten pieces, and related ten instances (laying downe a sticke to every instance) which gave him cause thus to feare and say" (pp. 136-37). And to this demonstration of the nature of the white man's "ten commandments" Williams can only answer, "I satisfied him in some presently, and presented the rest to the Governours of the *English*, who, I hope, will be far from giving just cause to have *Barbarians* to question their *Wunnaum-wâuonck*, or faithfulness" (p. 137).<sup>12</sup>

A second issue upon which Williams ran headlong against his countrymen in New England was the question of ownership of the land. In the again appropriately titled chapter, "*Of the Earth, and the Fruits thereof, &c.*," he begins by refuting the general argument by noticing that contrary to the convenient opinion that the Indian is by nature a vagrant, "The *Natives* are very exact and punctuall in the bounds of their Lands, belonging to this or that Prince or People, (even to a River, Brooke &c.)" Next he directly refers to the "sinfull opinion amongst many that Christians have right to *Heathens* Lands: but of the delusion of that phrase, I have spoke in a discourse concerning the *Indians* Conversion" (p. 167). In the discourse referred to, *Christenings make not Christians*, his basic argument is that the term "Christian" can be applied only to individuals, never to a group of people let alone a country; so that even had God (which he did not) given Christians the right to the land of the pagan, it was not in the power of the king to grant charters. Only through lawful purchase from the native inhabitant, the American, could a colonist claim right to American soil. Williams himself did this and more — as he reflected in a dialogue from "*Of buying and selling*": "I would buy land of you," says the Englishman; "How much?" asks the "punctuall"

Indian; "*For a Towne, or, Plantation,*" says the would-be buyer; "*I have no mind to sell. The Indians are not willing. They want roome themselves,*" states the cautious owner; "*We are friends,*" asserts the colonist; then, "I will give you land," replies the Indian (pp. 219-20).

Williams was his own touchstone, for in his case the land transaction was indeed accomplished through friendship. One recalls his famous conclusion when asked to describe the purchase and founding of Providence: "It was not price nor money that could have purchased Rhode Island. Rhode Island was purchased by love" (VI, 305-06). That his case was well nigh unique history has demonstrated in further making prophetic the Indians' fears in the poetic conclusion to the chapter:

*Oft have I heard these Indians say  
These English will deceive us.  
Of all that's ours, our lands our lives,  
In th' end they will bereave us. (p. 220)*

A final aspect of Williams' satire still deserves mention — his use of words specifically to contrast the two "languages." In the trading chapter, for example, the dialogue ends in one instance with the word "Audtà," which Williams translates as "*A paire of small breeches or Apron.*" Employing his typical device of repetition — the word was already used in "*Of their nakednesse and clothing*" — Williams goes on in the following observation to make use of the moral implications earlier established: "*Cuppáimish* I will pay you, which is a word newly made from the *English* word pay" (p. 216). In "*Concerning their Coyne*" a similar linguistic explanation is to be noted: "*The Indians* are ignorant of *Europes* Coyne; yet they have given a name to ours, and call it *Monéash* from the *English* Money" (p. 210). The implication in both cases seems to be that before the European arrived the Indian lacked the word because he lacked the concept, and thus the "loan word" explicitly symbolizes the gift itself and emphasizes the metaphorical nature of Williams' linguistic concern. Another word which the English have

given to the Indian is "Shóttash. *Shot*; A made word from us, though their Gunnes they have from the *French* . . ." (p. 235). Ironically, and conversely, early in *A Key* Williams had observed: "From this the Natives conceiving a consimilitude between our Guns and Thunder, they call a Gunne *Péskunck*, and to discharge *Peskhómmín* that is to thunder" (p. 158).

This observation finally enables one to place in its proper context the entire concept of language itself upon which an understanding of the ironic and satiric nature of large parts of *A Key* ultimately rests. Language, to Roger Williams, is more a mode of communication; it is an index to the cultural and moral nature of a race. Thus the structure of each chapter of *A Key*, for example, consists of a dialogue-vocabulary section followed by observations on the specific cultural phenomenon related to the conversation, which in turn are followed by general observations on the moral significance of the custom. The vocabulary, however, as we have suggested, is not simply a list of Indian words but a list of English as well; the observations are not only upon the habits of the natives, but through comparison and contrast they become comments upon the English as well. Consequently *A Key* explores not one but two languages as indexes to cultural and moral concerns; the language and observations upon the Indian both literally and figuratively form the basis of the book, the comparisons and contrasts to the English give the work its theme and tone.

Understanding these things, one also understands what Williams means when in his epistle to the reader he states that he has touched upon the essential features of Indian life, "from their *Birth* to their *Burialls*, and have endeavoured (as the nature of the work would give way) to bring some short *Observations* and *Applications* home to *Europe* from *America*" (p. 87). *A Key* may be invaluable as a document of the life of the American Indian just after his first contact with the European, but that

is not its only and probably not its primary value. While, ironically, it may have turned out that way, the beneficiaries of his book Williams had in mind were not the natives of America but his "*Deare and Welbeloved Friends and Countrey-men, in old and new England*" (p. 83). For he knew too well "How unsearchable are the depth of the Wisedome and Power of God in separating from *Europe, Asia and Africa* such a mightie vast continent as *America* is" (p. 179), and he had long pondered upon "the infinite wisedome of the most holy wise *God*, who hath so advanced *Europe*, above *America*" (p. 220). Not without reason, he had recognized, did the Indians call the English colonists "Cháuquacock," "properly sword-men." "for want of this," he says of *A Key* in the epistle, "I know what grosse *mis-stakes* my selfe and others have run into" (p. 84). Roger Williams knew as well as anyone that the mistakes made by the colonists were not always in translation.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>All references to *A Key* will be to Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, John J. Teunissen and Evelyn J. Hinz eds. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973). The reader is referred specifically to the Introduction, pp. 27-69, and to the bibliography.
- <sup>2</sup>See our "Roger Williams, St. Paul, and American Primitivism," *Canadian Review of American Studies* IV (Fall, 1973), 121-36.
- <sup>3</sup>Henry Chupack, *Roger Williams* (New York: Twayne, 1969), echoes Perry Miller, *Roger Williams: His Contribution to the American Tradition* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), and the tradition generally when he writes that "the *Key* may be considered a definitive sociological text of early New England Indian life and mores" (p. 63). For the persistence of the tradition see Donald M. Hines, "Odd Customs and Strange Ways, The American Indian C. 1640," *Western Review* VII (1970), 20-29.
- <sup>4</sup>Roger Williams was not quite alone in his criticism. Thomas Morton in his *New English Canaan* (Amsterdam, 1637) had of course preceded him, and Nathaniel Ward was not far behind with his *The Simple Cobler of Aggawamm in America* (London, 1647).
- <sup>5</sup>For a detailed analysis of the links here between Thomas More's *Utopia* and *A Key* see our "Roger Williams, Thomas More, and the Narragansett Utopia," forthcoming in *Early American Literature*.

<sup>6</sup>See Roger Williams' *Christenings make not Christians, or a Briefe Discourse concerning that name Heathen, commonly given to the Indians* (London, 1645), reprinted in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams* (New York, 1963; 7 vols.) Vol. VII. Future references to other of Williams' works will be made to this edition, a reprint of the six volume Narragansett Club edition (Providence, 1866-74). The seventh volume contains previously unpublished material and an "Essay in Interpretation" by Perry Miller.

<sup>7</sup>*Christenings*, p. 37.

<sup>8</sup>As good a contemporary source as any for this view of the Indian is William Wood in his *New England's Prospect* (London, 1634).

<sup>9</sup>Harrison T. Meserole, *Seventeenth-Century American Poetry* (New York, 1968), p. 177.

<sup>10</sup>It is important to note that this quotation, from memory, is from Martial, *Epig.* 3. 16.

<sup>11</sup>*La Pendasion* is reproduced as p. 139 of our edition of *A Key*.

<sup>12</sup>Williams obviously shaped the events to his artistic purpose. See our Commentary on *A Key*, pp. 292-93.