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What are the origins of the American novel? Does it begin with the imagination, when Europeans first began dreaming of life in the New World?[1] Does it begin with Daniel Defoe's adventurers, Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders, and their literary progeny? Or does the novel need a material presence in the soil of the New World? Does it begin in 1789, with William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*?—which Isaiah Thomas, with shrewd prescience, marketed as the "first American novel." Or does it begin even earlier, in 1742, with Benjamin Franklin's first American edition of Samuel Richardson's sentimental novel *Pamela*, published at his shop in Philadelphia? These are all arguable inception points for American fiction, grounded in particular kinds of historicist practices. But what if what we think we know about the material history of the novel in British America is wrong—or at least more complicated? What if we were able to push back by five decades the date of the first novel published in the American colonies and locate that first novel publication not in relatively liberal Pennsylvania, but at the height, and in the heart, of conservative Puritan Massachusetts? If the first novel published in the colonies was not a sentimental story about middling kinds of white people, as were *Pamela* and *The Power of Sympathy*, but rather a story about race, sex, violence, slavery, and colonialism, how would those facts change the stories we tell about the novel and early America?

We want to posit that origin stories matter: beginnings beget endings. They provide us with a frame of reference. They make certain kinds of texts and narratives legible, while suppressing other kinds of texts. By beginning with *Pamela* and *The Power of Sympathy*, we privilege the stories of middling white women, stories the majority of the academy has learned to feel comfortable with—and value—over the past thirty years. *Pamela* and *The Power of Sympathy* set us on a sentimental path, and everywhere we look, we see more of the same: *Charlotte Temple*, *The Coquette*, *Kelroy*,

Dorval, *Emily Hamilton*, and *The Female Quixote*, all fixated on the marriage dilemmas of middling white men and women, a trope that emphasizes choice and the importance of consent. Marriage, as Jay Fliegelman, Jan Lewis, Nancy Cott, and others have noted, functioned as a convenient metaphor for voluntary association to symbolize the consent necessary for the functioning of a democratic republic.[2] While this kind of volunteerism is one strand of the literary history of early America, its dominance has occluded other equally resonant narratives.

If, instead of consent, we began our literary history of the novel in early America with a tale of coercion and violence, what other stories might become legible? That there is another intriguing contender for the first American novel is not a newly discovered fact so much as a newly *recovered* fact. Literary history is a continual process of forgetting and recovering. One such repeatedly recovered and forgotten text has been English politician Henry Neville's (1620–94) *The Isle of Pines*, first published in London in 1668 and, it seems, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in that same year by Marmaduke Johnson. Although *The Isle of Pines* was well known to old-school bibliographers and continues to be of interest today to scholars of utopias and Robinsonades,[3] it is not nearly so well known among early Americanists, especially those whose work focuses on the history of the novel. It does not figure at all in Lillie Deming Loshe's *The Early American Novel* (1907), Carl Van Doren's *The American Novel* (1921), Herbert Ross Brown's *The Sentimental Novel in America* (1940), Henri Petter's *The Early American Novel* (1971), Patricia Parker's *Early American Fiction: A Reference Guide* (1984), Cathy Davidson's *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (1986), Emory Elliott and Cathy Davidson's *The Columbia History of the American Novel* (1991), Shirley Samuels's *Romances of the Republic: Women, the Family, and Violence in the Literature of the Early American Nation* (1996), or even William Spengemann's *A New World of Words: Redefining Early American Literature* (1994).[4] Although this is by no means an exhaustive list, influential studies such as these have framed the terms of our scholarly conversation and have made it clear that the early American novel is, above all, sentimental in its origins, with all of them gesturing to *The Power of Sympathy*, *Pamela*, or other sentimental British imports as inception sites for the American novel.

Bibliography, the painstaking, time-consuming, meticulous kind, was an art in the early twentieth century, nowhere more so than in Boston.

There was nothing those early bibliographers loved so much as a mystery, and one of their favorite mysteries was that of Marmaduke Johnson's unauthorized 1668 printing in Cambridge of Neville's *The Isle of Pines*. This novel (more properly a novella) became a particular interest of Worthington Chauncey Ford, one of the most dedicated bibliographers and prolific editors of the twentieth century. Ford provides us with the most comprehensive account of *The Isle of Pines* in British America.

Printing was highly regulated in Puritan Massachusetts. Marmaduke Johnson had been sent from England by the Corporation for Promoting the Gospel of Jesus Christ in New England to help Samuel Green publish John Eliot's *Indian Bible* (1663). Hugh Amory describes Johnson, a well-trained printer, as "a constant thorn in the side of the commissioners who supervised the progress of the Bible" (89), and certainly his personal and professional relationships in Massachusetts seem to have been equally fraught.[5] Despite numerous brushes with the General Court, Johnson later established a separate printing establishment in Cambridge. During this time, he once again ran afoul of the General Court by printing *The Isle of Pines* in 1668 without a license; all copies were reportedly destroyed as part of his punishment, incurring significant financial losses for him.[6] Johnson died not long afterward, in 1674. As far as we know, Johnson's edition of *The Isle of the Pines* never circulated. Ford was unable to locate a copy, even after meticulous comparison of extant copies of *The Isle of Pines*.[7]

Given these facts, and that Henry Neville was an Englishman with no personal ties to the American colonies and hence no claim to being an "American" novelist, why might a ghost edition of *The Isle of the Pines* matter to American literary history? If we focus purely on circulation, his edition becomes merely a historical and bibliographical curiosity. However, as Meredith McGill has argued recently, "it is not the act of creation but multiple acts of reiteration that enable literature to hold its value." In this view, the reprinting of *The Isle of Pines* reminds us that it is through "repeated acts of articulation by which literary culture and audiences are constituted" (3). Reprints, then, are not negligible; they, too, can be instantiating events. And yet the Cambridge edition of *The Isle of Pines* likely never found its intended audience; instead, it haunts the American literary archive with its might-have-beens.

The Isle of Pines takes place on an island in the Indian Ocean,[8] and its story is told in a three-layered narrative. Its outermost frame is a letter in

the form of a ship's log by the Dutchman Henry Cornelius Van Sloetten to a friend in London. The letter begins by describing a prolonged storm that finally casts the ship, bound for the East Indies on a commercial voyage, ashore on a remote island whose inhabitants turn out to speak English. At this point, the voice of William Pine, the island's ruler, takes over the narrative by introducing the story of his grandfather, George Pine, whose written account of his own experience occupies the center of the text. George, we learn, was serving as a bookkeeper on an East Indies–bound English ship when it wrecked in 1589, landing him and four women—including the fourteen-year-old daughter of his master, two maidservants, and one black slave—on this desolate island populated only by a variety of bird species. After several months spent building a shelter and securing food resources, Pine develops "a desire for enjoying the women" (197) and soon impregnates all four of them. The remainder of his narrative is dominated by a reproductive enumeration, as the one-time bookkeeper records that he sired with these four women 47 children, who in turn had 560 offspring among themselves, leaving a total island population, he carefully counts, of "one thousand seven hundred eighty and nine" (200).

When William Pine's narration resumes, he recounts the "disorders" and "mischiefs" (201) that followed George's death—including incest (as "brother and sister lay openly together") and rape (as "those who would not yield to their lewd embraces, were by force ravished"). William's father decides to punish these violators and, before establishing laws and plans for their enforcement, executes one of them: his mixed-race half-brother John Phill, the "second son of the Negro-woman that came with my grandfather into this island," who was found "guilty of divers ravishings and tyrannies" (202). When the narrative returns to Van Sloetten, we learn that the Dutchmen built a palace for William before deciding to "use violence" to help him quell an insurrection that erupts on the heels of yet another rape. That uprising leads to another execution—this time of Henry Phill, who "armed his fellows with clubs and stones" (208) during the rebellion—in a racialized family-colonial history that routinely ascribes disorder to (and inflicts punishment on) Pine's black offspring. The Dutchman's letter ends with the trading ship's arrival in Calicut, India, and its voyage home through the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. A final postscript remarks on the natural abundance of the Isle of Pines, and the utopic innocence and antimaterialism of its inhabitants before concluding that it might reach a greater potential "if it were manured by agriculture and gardening" (212).

We will never know, of course, what might have happened if Johnson's edition of this fascinating account had managed to circulate and find readers in Puritan New England in 1668. But since beginnings beget endings, we can ask where this alternative, phantom starting point might land us, and what kind of story about American identity and culture it might lead us to tell. Read as an early American novel, *The Isle of Pines* feels immediately disorienting in a number of ways. It's temporally and geographically disorienting because the literary history of the novel in America has always begun in the eighteenth century and always been situated in the Atlantic world. It's also thematically and stylistically disorienting because we're used to thinking of early American novels as seduction stories whose sympathy-inducing heroines and plots have been read by generations of scholars in the historical and political context of the American colonies' revolution against Britain. Neville's book places us instead halfway around the world in the middle of the Indian Ocean, among the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century voyages to the East (rather than the West) Indies, and in a plot about colony- (rather than nation-) building marked by multiple and unapologetic forms of violence.

These disorientations result from the introduction of an unexpected text into a literary history whose shape and tenor has taken on stable and recognizable, if not precisely fixed, forms. We want to invite the unfamiliar coordinates in which *The Isle of Pines* places us to serve instead as reorientations, to allow the text to query and press at the assumptions that hold the contours of American literary and cultural history in place. In what ways might *The Isle of Pines* have resonated for Marmaduke Johnson and other colonial New Englanders, a time and place that most scholars today believe was not receptive to fiction? How does the colonial Massachusetts ghost edition of Henry Neville's fiction change the way we read more familiar texts and episodes in early American literature, and encourage us to notice less familiar ones? In 1589, for example, when the fictional Englishman George Pine landed on and began populating his Indian Ocean island, the historical Englishman John White was attempting to reach the Atlantic Ocean island of Roanoke and its colonists. A year later, he discovered that its entire English population of ninety men, seventeen women, and eleven children had disappeared—a stark contrast to the fantasy of Pine's multiplying colonists.[9] But *The Isle of Pines* is also a story about what happens when a colony's growth leads to dispersal and incoherence in subsequent generations, and in this respect it recalls nothing so much as William Brad-

ford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*. Bradford's narrative of the New England colony famously slides at the end into a mood of despair as it recounts the departure of so many residents from Plymouth to other towns, only to be abruptly concluded with a nostalgic list of the first colonists who arrived on the *Mayflower*. That last entry was made about fifteen years before Johnson printed *The Isle of Pines* in Cambridge, one of the locations where so many of Plymouth's residents chose to relocate. *Of Plymouth Plantation* has long served as a privileged origin point for narratives of American literary and cultural history, despite the fact that Bradford's book circulated only in manuscript and then became lost, until it was finally rediscovered and printed at last in 1856.

What if we were to read *The Isle of Pines* against another Puritan-era text that circulated widely on both sides of the Atlantic: Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God. . . .* (1682), a text that provides a whitewashed, selective "truth" of colonialism, as opposed to the avowed fictions of the novel? Weetamoo hovers malignantly on the fringes of Rowlandson's narrative, nominally her "mistress," but reduced from her political importance as sachem to a "severe and proud dame" (96) whose baby dies, leaving, as Rowlandson dispassionately reports, "more room" in the crowded wigwam (91). The brutal truths of what happens to Weetamoo afterward—her drowning while trying to escape the English, the mutilation of her body, and the display by the English of her head on a pike in Taunton, Massachusetts—are ignored by Rowlandson's narrative, with her insistence on privileging the victimization of white settlers. Weetamoo has no text of her own and hence little voice in our literary histories. Might *Isle of the Pines*, with its emphasis on the locust-like growth of its English colonists, failure to respect the sovereignty of women, and brutal treatment of nonwhites, provide a different lens through which to view the conflict between white settlers and New England natives?

Works like Bradford's and Rowlandson's dominate our sense of Puritan New England print culture, helping to shape a context in which a book like *The Isle of Pines* appears entirely anomalous. Positioned within a geographically and linguistically broader history and culture of print, however, the Cambridge edition of Neville's narrative begins to look nearly inevitable—just one of a multitude of editions and translations that appeared immediately after the book's initial publication in London. *The Isle of Pines* was so popular that it was reprinted twice in London within a month of its

appearance and was immediately translated into a number of languages. In 1668 alone, it appeared in at least three editions in both Dutch and German, at least two editions in both French and Italian, and in at least one Swedish edition. Danish and Portuguese translations followed.[10] This more global and translingual print context positions Marmaduke Johnson's edition and his Cambridge press within a world of (re)print in a way that makes colonial New England both less isolated and less exceptional than it often seems.

Johnson's phantom American edition of *Isle of Pines* makes us want to ask what other forgotten acts of textual recovery might be hiding in our literary-historical closets and dustbins. The kind of bibliographic work pursued by Ford has been out of favor for so long that, as Jordan Alexander Stein notes, the practice of literary studies in the United States "has for more than three generations maintained a studied ignorance of bibliography in favor of the kind of abstract interpretations otherwise afforded by literary theory and criticism" (160). Stein goes on to argue, however, that there has in fact always been a "pragmatic combination of interpretation and bibliography" (161)—especially in African American literary studies, but also in American literary studies more broadly—and he calls for a more overt recognition and embrace of the "methodological pluralism" that results from bringing together "the materialist concerns of critical bibliography with the interpretive possibilities afforded by literary theory" (172).

In 1975, when Michael Davitt Bell reprinted a 1770 novel coauthored by Hugh Henry Brackenridge and Philip Freneau, titled *Father Bombo's Pilgrimage to Mecca*, his introduction began with a sentence that again disorients our current sense of the American novel's early history: "The honor of 'first American novel' is usually given either to Thomas Atwood Digges' *Adventures of Alonso . . . By a Native of Maryland* (1775) or to Francis Hopkinson's *A Pretty Story* (1774)" (ix). In a footnote, Bell admits that Joseph Morgan's 1715 *The History of the Kingdom of Basaruah* might also have claim to this status. This list of titles is, we suspect, largely unrecognizable to most early American literary scholars today whose syllabi and scholarly work regularly feature such titles as *The Power of Sympathy*, *Charlotte Temple*, *The Coquette*, and *Wieland*. Why are these two lists so alien to each other, and how might our sense of early America's place in the Atlantic world and beyond change if we adopted a more globally and generically flexible literary history of the novel?[11]

The Isle of Pines begins with an attempt to establish an English factory in the East Indies in order to profit commercially from its resources; when that plan goes horribly awry, a new world gets populated instead. George Pine's almost magically multiplying numbers compete for our attention with the acts of coercive violence that made such growth possible. Most often classified as a utopia (although one really wants to ask: utopia for whom?), Neville's book in fact shifts uncomfortably between the registers of the idyllic and the repulsive. Has our focus on the sentimental prevented us from seeing how a much more ambivalent affect might animate a history of the American novel, as well as a history of America? We are not suggesting that *The Isle of Pines* ought now to be considered the first American novel, but we are insisting on the need to recognize a wider multiplicity of potential origin points for the genre's literary history, and to explore the alternative stories about America and its literature these other beginnings allow us to tell.

NOTES

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1. Both Spengemann and Dillon argue that Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, first published in London in 1688, presents a strong case for the first American novel, although for different reasons. Spengemann identifies *Oroonoko* as an American text on both a geographical and linguistic basis, specifically because of its generic relationship to the travelogue. Dillon, on the other hand, recognizes *Oroonoko* as an American novel because of its contractual, rather than romantic, logic. Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines* was published in 1668, twenty years before *Oroonoko*. We are interested in *The Isle of Pines* not for any putatively "American" identity the book or its author might have, but rather for its status in the material and print history of the novel in America.
2. See Fliegelman 123–31; Lewis 709; and Cott 3.
3. Although *The Isle of Pines* is frequently described as a Robinsonade, it preceded *Robinson Crusoe* by thirty-one years. For a longer, and more global, history of this genre, see Avaramudan.
4. *The Isle of Pines* does appear briefly in such stalwarts of British literary history as McKeon; and Armstrong and Tennenhouse.
5. Johnson was accused by Samuel Green of pursuing a relationship with Green's daughter without his permission and of threatening her other suitors. Johnson was married at the time, but his wife had run away with another man in England and

later died. As a consequence of this illicit courtship, Johnson was fined and initially ordered to leave the colony, but his usefulness as a trained printer apparently outweighed his moral deficiencies, which also included unrelated charges for fraud.

6. See Littlefield 232. Bumgardner notes, "During the first thirty years of printing in Massachusetts, the output was controlled by the General Court, which delegated its power of censorship to the officials of Harvard College in 1662. The General Court strengthened its domination of the printing press in 1664 by forbidding the establishing of a press elsewhere in the colony" (119).
7. See Ford for a detailed account of his exhaustive search for the lost Marmaduke Johnson imprint.
8. The location given in the text identifies the island as situated somewhere in the Indian Ocean, though the work's subtitle indicates that it is located in "Terra Australis, Incognito"—a reference to a great southern continent then believed to exist somewhere in the southern reaches of the Pacific. Contemporary readers would therefore have imagined the island in a rather amorphous transoceanic geography.
9. For more on Roanoke, see Kupperman.
10. See Scheckter for a comprehensive survey of the book's publishing history.
11. For selected recent work that engages with the possibilities of a more global literary history, see Moretti, *Forms* and *History*; Dimock; Casanova; Apter; and Giles.

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