RED & WHITE MEN; BLACK, WHITE & GREY HATS

Literary attitudes to the interaction between European and Native Canadians in the first half of the nineteenth century

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In the early decades of the nineteenth century native peoples were a visible presence in the daily lives of many white residents of British North America, and it was as a part of this everyday milieu that they made their way into a number of literary works written by Canadians of European descent. With the passage of time, the original inhabitants disappeared into the remote areas “granted” to them by the newcomers in return for land cessions, and simultaneously they began to fade from literary view. As the frequency of their appearance decreased, the attitudes inherent in the roles they played in early literature also changed. At no time did any one set of attitudes to the interaction between the two races, or to their respective roles in Canadian society, operate to the exclusion of any others, but when the totality of the published literature is examined it is apparent that the dominant ideas change from decade to decade.

Early Canadians received their attitudes to other races from a number of sources: their personal experience, the oral traditions of their communities, their theological beliefs, and, in the case of the whites, since Canadians were by no means the only representatives of Western European culture to have contact with aboriginal peoples, from the international literature they read. The following study is concerned with literature produced in Upper and Lower Canada by those of European descent and with the modifications they made in the literary traditions they absorbed from other countries in the light of their Canadian experience.

Europeans had over three centuries of contact with North American Indians before the nineteenth century. As modern ethnographic and historical research has shown, these contacts were far more complex than earlier scholars had envisioned.
Starting in the seventeenth century, the multiplicity of cultural interactions had sparked a considerable body of written material — scientific and theological as well as imaginative. Whether the native peoples encountered by white travellers and traders were resident in the south seas or the northern woods, the same sets of attitudes inform the descriptive literature. Much of this material was shaped to support one side or the other in the dispute over the inherent nature of aboriginal peoples: were they ordinary human beings who lacked only education and Christian conversion to become fully civilized, or were they survivors of an early stage in human development, incapable of improvement and true belief, and destined to disappear from the earth. Basic to the theses of both sides in this dispute was the assumption that Western European Christian civilization, with its accompanying ideals of progress and improvement, was the highest form of intelligent life. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries these two strands of the deeply felt scientific and theological debate were transformed in imaginative literature into a basic division in the characterization of native peoples as "good" and "bad" Indians, although some writers, conscious that these polarities were simplistic, and aware that interaction between European and native cultures had affected the original inhabitants of many lands, introduced elements of ambivalence into both interpretations.

The aboriginal traits perceived as "good" by Western European society and its writers were: harmony with nature, simplicity, hospitality, wisdom, nobility of character, military alliance, Christian conversion, and, however free and independent their past life may have been, an acceptance of present white domination. The characteristics perceived as "bad" were: violence, cruelty, following instinct rather than reason, active opposition to white control, and rejection of Christianity. Ambivalence was shown towards some groups of Indians who, as objects of pity, made whites feel both guilty and superior at the same time. In literature, this last group were those who formed part of a landless dying race, who lived in poverty, or whose drunkenness was the result of corruption by whites.

Although each social and literary attitude towards aboriginal peoples contained elements of the other, and they were by no means absolute polarities, North American Indians as portrayed in European literature tended to exhibit positive characteristics, while in the literature of the United States they tended to exhibit negative or ambivalent ones. European writers, who rarely had any actual contact with aboriginal peoples, found it easy to use them as a symbol, contrasting what was perceived to be their simple way of life with European decadence. Americans had much closer contact with Indians. As their settlements encroached on Indian territory the two races encountered each other on a personal basis and as opponents in war. The portrayal of Indians in early American literature goes almost in cycles. The aboriginal was a demonic and ferocious enemy in periods when whites were in process of conquering a new territory, and a noble and natural friend in periods
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when there was no warfare. American writers reflected the nature of their own contacts and the circumstances of their day.⁶

As usual, Canadians borrowed from both traditions. Indeed, it is not uncommon to find both in the same literary work. However, before 1840 the European view generally predominated. When portrayed in the distant past, Indians were most often seen as active and independent persons, helpful to whites; passive and dependent when seen in present time. In the 1840s, as actual contacts between whites and Indians in the Canadas decreased, negative and ambivalent American-style attitudes increased. Indians were frequently depicted as violent and "savage" in the "olden days," and either drunk or nostalgic for a long-gone heroic age when described in present time. The American attitudes, more exciting, and more satisfying in a cultural sense, gained ground in the imaginative sphere until the two opposing views were virtually in balance by 1850.

In addition to the ideas received in "literary" works, popular non-fiction also stimulated the imaginations of early Canadian writers. If we could read all the eighteenth and early nineteenth century travel accounts which circulated in Europe and North America we would probably discover sources for most of what was published in the Canadas. The American, Henry Schoolcraft, for example, bears a heavy responsibility for the theme of the Indian maiden who leaps from a cliff into Lake Huron when commanded by her parents to marry an elderly chief rather than the young brave she loves. Schoolcraft is quoted by one of the writers who used this theme as remarking that "Such an instance of sentiment is rarely to be met with among barbarians, and should redeem the name of this noble-minded girl from oblivion."⁷ Evidence of white-valued sentiment produced approval for the "barbarous" native; consequently Schoolcraft's story found its way into many literary works whose authors wished to portray Indians in a positive manner. Many other anecdotes, as well as descriptive passages, originally published in travel accounts, can be found in early Canadian literature. A short story published in French in 1827 and a poem published in English in 1840 share an identical plot-line, which the poet quotes from a writer identified only as "Coleman."⁸ D. M. R. Bentley, in his "Explanatory Notes" to The Huron Chief,⁹ has demonstrated that Adam Kidd, in both text and footnotes, owed a considerable debt to the Rev. John Heckewelder, Cadwallader Colden, G. H. Loskiel, Alexander Henry, and James Buchanan, not to mention Schoolcraft, for much of his material.

Those residents of Upper and Lower Canada who used Indians as part of the imaginative decor in their literary works before the middle of the nineteenth century were predominantly Canadian-born.¹⁰ In general, immigrant authors showed little interest in the country's past, so Indians, perceived by all to be part of the past and present, but not the future, produced relatively little in the way of imaginative response in immigrant writing. Native-born authors, whether French or English, seem to have accepted their land as a separate entity with an historical past and thus
were a great deal more likely to see the original residents of the country as part of its fabric.

In order to understand the attitudes of white writers toward native peoples, we must also consider the manner in which they interpreted their own culture when placing it in conjunction or confrontation with the aboriginal. It should not be surprising to find that the most common role assigned to whites in the literature of the first half of the nineteenth century is that of a civilizing, progressive, and Christian influence, although there is no agreement as to whether this influence was perceived as beneficial or detrimental to indigenous peoples. Few saw it as having any effect whatsoever on whites. Writers in English tended to be negative or ambivalent about the effect of "civilization" on aboriginal life; writers in French tended to regard their national culture more positively — rarely describing their race as usurping, and seeing themselves as friends and protectors of the Indians.

Representatives of European culture play a number of roles in those Canadian literary works in which Indians are present. The most common role is as a soldier, fighting other whites. In only four of twenty cases are they pictured specifically as conquerors of Indians. The next most common role is as an "agent of progress," a rubric which includes missionaries, settlers, and other forces of cultural change. Although traders and explorers generally existed in about the same historical time frame as the soldiers, they do not seem to have stimulated the literary imagination to the same extent. There are only five instances of each role. At least in relation to Indians, there is little mention of the solitary white hero going off into the wilderness on journeys of trade or adventure, as in the American myths. In early nineteenth-century Canada writers found their white heroes among those whose presence is explained by some group activity.

The majority of works published in the period between 1815, when the War of 1812 came to an end, and 1830 are specific about time, place, and tribe mentioned. Indians are portrayed in a positive manner and whites are a mixed lot, depending on whether or not the writer perceived Christian civilization as good or bad for the natives. An incomplete survey of newspapers and periodicals published before 1815 reveals almost no interest in native peoples, imaginative or otherwise, in the small amount of Canadian literature published in those years. Then suddenly, between 1824 and 1830, four of the major nineteenth-century works dealing with Indians — George Longmore’s and John Richardson’s works on Tecumseh, Adam Kidd’s “The Huron Chief,” and “L’Iroquoise,” the first version of a story which was to persist as a theme in French-Canadian literature for many years — were all published. Two factors may, at least in part, explain this occurrence. The first is interest in the specific individual, Tecumseh — along
with General Brock one of the martyrs to the successful defence of Canada in the recent war, and the archetype of the brave, wise, noble savage. The second is a broader interest in the place of Indians in Canadian society generated by discussions about the land settlement treaties of the 1820s. Those who praised Tecumseh as an important ally in the war were, as a subtext, pointing out that Indians had helped European settlers establish themselves in British North America.

Tecumseh’s transformation from Indian ally in the War of 1812 into a literary legend began in 1824 when George Longmore’s “Tecumthé” first appeared in the Montreal periodical, the Canadian Review and Literary and Historical Journal. This long poem subsequently formed part of Longmore’s book Tales of Chivalry and Romance, published in London and Edinburgh in 1826. Longmore’s work has very little to do with Indians as a race, except to describe them as a natural people in a natural setting. He portrays Tecumseh’s brother, The Prophet, as a false leader, but Tecumseh himself, in accordance with the liberal perception of Indian perfectability current in Longmore’s day, is a genius who lacks only education and Christianity to become the ideal man. Tecumseh’s objection to the retreat which preceded the Battle of Moraviantown is treated by Longmore as an example of Tecumseh’s lack of knowledge. When the facts and the strategy were explained to him, he understood the situation and accepted the decision. His genius is, of course, demonstrated by his superiority in white-valued skills and characteristics. Longmore does not portray all whites as examples to be followed. Generals Brock and Proctor are heroes, but some of their troops are cowards, and there is an ironic reference to the “savage will” of the whites.

In John Richardson’s poem, Tecumseh, or, The Warrior of the West, published in London in 1828, the white hero is Captain Barclay, but General Proctor, who is not criticized by name here as he is in Richardson’s 1840 novel about the War of 1812, The Canadian Brothers, is not at all admirable. An interesting aspect of the terminology is that Richardson often uses the word “Christian” as a synonym for “white.” In both the poem and the novel Richardson seems almost to idolize Tecumseh. In the poem, other Indians are not nearly as perfect: an old woman takes horrible revenge on a prisoner, and a group of warriors engage in cannibalism. Richardson’s scornful attitude to General Proctor motivates him to set Tecumseh against Proctor as a contrast in both bravery and strategy, a device also used by Michel Bibaud in the Tecumseh stanzas of his poem “Les Grands Chefs.” While his support is vital to the British cause, and while he is personally described as a great hero, Tecumseh is depicted in all works, in keeping with the historical record, as subordinate to the British commander. He is a leader of his own people, but he is not a leader of whites.

Adam Kidd’s long poem, “The Huron Chief,” published in 1830, has remained current in modern literary studies at least in part because, as the most anti-white and anti-Christian of all the early nineteenth-century works, it appeals to the guilt
feelings of twentieth-century readers. Kidd's narrator, disappointed by white civilization, "Europe's crimes, and Europe's errors," travels west by canoe where he encounters "a gentle sage" Skenandow. He participates in a highly romanticized version of native life —

Oh! what a beauteous, charming scene,
On that pure downy, tufted green,
To see the children of the grove,
    With hearts that felt no touch but pleasure,
Thus linked in social, tender love,
    Where flowing joys seemed without measure,
Beneath a verdant maple shade,
Which Nature's God alone had made

— and is present when the Indians repel a sneak attack by whites. Through the intervention of Tecumseh three white prisoners taken in the raid are released, only to return with reinforcements to kill Skenandow. Even greater than the threat posed to Indian life by white usurpers of their land has been the threat posed by Christian missionaries:

The Missionary evils brought,
By those who first Religion taught —
Forgive the phrase — had more of hell —
And all the crimes with it connected. . . .

In contrast to the corrupt European Christians, the Indians' religion keeps them in harmony with nature. All the Indian tribes help each other, as well as the white man, but Europeans fight everybody. Despite his footnoted references to various travel and exploration books, Kidd's intention seems more to be the portrayal of a corrupt European civilization than an accurate and positive picture of native culture. He wants to show the beauty and harmony of Indian life so that readers will realize that their own is cruel and unnatural. He also specifically criticizes American treatment of Indians, contrasting it with the fatherly care which was part of British policy. It must be noted that Kidd, so romantically attached to European ideas of "noble savages," all-wise chiefs, and unspoiled children of nature, was the only one of those who wrote about Indians up to 1830 who can be identified as not Canadian-born.

The fourth of the major works dealing with Indians published in the period up to 1830, "L'Iroquoise," is in a number of respects an exception to the general statements made about the literature of that era — although in portraying the Iroquois tribe as cruel, treacherous and warlike it is definitely part of the mainstream. Even though the Iroquois were long-time allies of the British, they are consistently presented, in both languages, as villains. The name of the original author of the story "L'Iroquoise" is unknown. Michel Bibaud, who published it in La Bibliothèque Canadienne in 1827, noted that it was "librement traduit du Truth Teller," a New
York publication. Bibaud was almost certainly the translator. A long line of French-language literary works are based on “L’Iroquoise,” which is set in 1700. There are few whites in the story. The principal one is the priest whose “efforts gagnèrent quelques sauvages au christianisme et aux habitudes de la vie civilisée.” The other is Eugène Brunon, a young Frenchman who marries the Christian Indian heroine. Eugène is the first of many brave, handsome young heroes in the literature of both languages who marries an Indian woman, although “L’Iroquoise,” which ends with the death of both lovers, is the exception to the happy-ever-after rule. The marriage of a white male with a native female, an obvious metaphor for the assimilation of a weak culture by a stronger one, typically met with the approval of the heroine’s father, a chief, and the jealousy and opposition of the young men of her tribe. All the authors who used this device as a positive image were male, and all set the circumstances far enough in the past that they could not be interpreted as recommending integration of Indians into Canadian life through assimilation via the dominant white male culture.

Michel Bibaud demonstrated his ongoing interest in Canada’s native peoples by the quantity of didactic prose material about Indians which he published in his four periodicals. The lengthy poem “Les Grands Chefs,” which appeared in the 1830 volume of his collected verse, Épitres, satires, chansons, épigrammes et autres pièces de vers, lists seven chiefs whose principal virtue seems to be that they were helpful to whites: these are, in his spellings, Garakonthié, Ouréhouharé, Téganissorens, Ganihégaton, Kondiaronk, Ponthiac, and Técumsé. Bibaud’s tone is laudatory, both in his general opening stanzas and with regard to each chief, leaders of “ces peoples par nous mal appelés [sic] sauvages”:

Je vois, chez eux, briller des vertus, des talents,
Des hommes éloquents,
Des négociateurs, des héros et des sages.

IN THE NEXT DECADE, between 1831 and 1840, about two-thirds of the published material is vague about tribal names, but most is specific about time and location. In many of the works there is no direct white presence: Indians are interacting with other Indians or are observed by an omniscient narrator. Three are descriptions of bloodthirsty wars between tribes; the remainder purport to describe the thoughts and feelings of Indian males young and old, whose responses to beautiful young women and approaching death — smitten and stoic, respectively — are stereotypical. In a further three works there are whites who are clearly superior to the Indians around them: Constance Montresor dominates “The Pride of Lorette” by her wise, Protestant Christianity; Sir Alexander MacKenzie is “friend and father” to his native companions; and Captain Clifford
masters the Indians in James Russell's 1833 novel *Matilda; or the Indian's Captive*, by his scarlet uniform and the force of his will.

In two of the longer works of the 1830s both races have a mixed role. In Richardson's *The Canadian Brothers* (1840) at the end of the decade, whites, without regard to nationality, are a very mixed lot: perfect heroes, despicable villains, brave soldiers, cads, cheats, and honest men. Those who treat their Indian allies well are perceived as good men. A speech justifying the taking of Indian land, obviously deprecated by the author, is put in the mouth of an American officer. The Indians are an equally mixed lot who appear principally in sections having to do with the actual war. While they are brave and loyal and their leader, Tecumseh, is a hero, they are also cruel and vengeful in battle.

The 1830s saw the addition of a new theme to the genre: the treatment of aborigines as a dying race.

> Thrust from his grounds, and backward forced, to seek<br>Subsistence hard, in regions cold and bleak.<br>Far from his once-loved haunts; with many a sigh<br>He wanders forth, with broken heart, to die!''

This motif was not initially very common, but in the 1840s, mixed with nostalgic views of long-gone idyllic forest life, it was to become one of the dominant ideas in the literary presentation of native people.

Perhaps the most interesting work of this decade is W. F. Hawley's *The Unknown, or Lays of the Forest*, a novella interspersed with long poems on non-Canadian themes, published in Montreal in 1831. The novella is set in Three Rivers and on the Shawinigan River in 1622. The newly arrived whites, who have settled on Indian land, are portrayed as unable to cope in their new environment without Indian assistance. The hero, a reclusive young Frenchman, fails in his attempt to persuade Piscaret, the friendly Algonkin chief, to adopt European civilization because, as Piscaret, recognizing the fundamental separation of the two cultures, says, "the swan can never teach the eagle to forsake his path among the clouds for her own shadowy fountains!" When the settlement is attacked by marauding Indians of an unspecified tribe and the teen-aged daughter of the central family in the story is carried away, the Algonkins find out where she is, assist in returning her to her parents, and defeat the marauders. The girl is not harmed by her captors, but is treated as a daughter and sister by the chief's family. This conduct is an example of another theme in early Canadian literature. Before 1850 no white woman, abducted by Indians, is ever physically mistreated in any way. This may say more about the supposed absence of sexuality in early nineteenth-century female literary characters, and about certain persisting characteristics of eighteenth-century "captivity" literature as a genre, than it does about Indians in the white imagination, but nonetheless the horror tales associating Indian males with sexual violence were a later development in fiction.
In the literature of the 1830s, the two examples of the portrayal of Indians as totally bad are both set in a context of wars between Indians. The period of these wars is not specifically mentioned, but it appears to pre-date white settlement in the Canadas. In the case of Charles Durand's sketch "An Indian Legend," the combatants are the Hurons and Chippewas, and their battle is waged at the junction of the Sable River and Lake Huron. The author refers to "the native wildness of the savage eye, and muttering and silent resentment of his heart" and says they "looked like so many darksome, infernal fiends." The other work, "L'Iroquoise, Hymne de guerre," a poem purporting to be an Iroquois war song, published in Le Canadien in 1831, describes the treatment which will be meted out to Indian enemies.

Balancing off the "bad" Indians are the "good" ones who accompany explorers, who are peaceful, and who have been converted — conforming most closely to the roles and goals established for them by white society in the 1830s. Another group of "good" Indians are those who, because of their "nobility" and "chivalry," independent of religious sanction but conforming to romantic perceptions, are described in a positive manner. J. H. Willis's three prose sketches, published in the Montreal Museum and the Montreal Gazette in 1833, are typical of this latter genre.

As in the earlier period, it is in longer works that a variety of authorial attitudes to native peoples can be found in the same pages. In the novel Matilda, or the Indian's Captive, the heroine is indeed kidnapped, but the Indians who took her found the four-year-old girl wandering alone on the banks of the St. Lawrence, her parents having left her unattended for a short period of time. When confronted by a white man who insists on buying her from them, they drive a hard bargain, but make no attempt to spirit her away. Many years later the Indians' son, for whom she had been intended as a bride, turns up to claim her, but is foiled in the attempt. Ultimately, the Indian family surrenders the picture book with her name in it, which they had taken at the time of the kidnapping, thus becoming the instruments by which the heroine is enabled to find her real father. While these Indians perform "bad" acts, the acts are described matter-of-factly and mitigating circumstances are always presented, so that they are depicted as ignorant of white culture, but not as inherently "bad" people.

In the 1840s, an expanding population produced a greater quantity of literature in the Canadas, but proportionately less about Indians. Literary works in this decade were usually specific about location, but two-thirds of the sites mentioned were outside the Canadas so that the native peoples described could not be perceived as competing with immigrants for space. Overall, there is a return to the time-specificity of the 1820s. One work is dated in the sixteenth cen-
tury, three in the seventeenth, four in the eighteenth, and ten in the nineteenth. One
surveys all periods, and seven are not specific. The number of works contrasting
present Indian life with a happier past has increased. Just over half mention no
tribe. This increasing vagueness about tribal identification is an indication of the
distancing process in white attitudes. Native people were no longer described as
individuals, or even as Mohawks or Algonquins; they were lumped together as a
single group called "Indians" or "red men." Instead of an active, independent life
in past time, they are increasingly depicted as being either passive and dependent
inhabitants of present time or cruel and violent creatures in the past.

In four of the items published in the 1840s, whites are not physically present
in the action, although the white author obviously shapes the view of the native
presented to the reader. In six works, whites are unequivocally depicted as physi-
cally, morally, and intellectually superior. The five short stories, and a sixth story
told in verse, are an exception to the tendency of the literature of their day because
they are all told in terms of interpersonal, rather than inter-group, relations. Al-
though each is different, the unnamed white hero of "Tula — or, The Ojibwa's
Leap" can perhaps stand for all. He outdoes his Indian rival in both stamina and
strategy. Although the young Ojibwas "were expert with the gun and spear . . .
none of them were at all a match for the white man in the use of either." Tula, the
Ojibwa who leaps to his death from a cliff, is not an unhappy maiden, but the
unsuccessful Indian suitor. The hero of "De Soulis, The Runner of the Woods," a
story by the same author set in the sixteenth century, is not as admirable, nor physi-
cally as dominant, but he still wins the girl and saves her tribe from Indian enemies,
in spite of the jealousy and treachery of its young males, through force of intelli-
gence. In two other stories the white man stands outside the events — in one case
as a morally-superior eavesdropper, in the other as someone who happens along
to rescue the Indian hero from a hostile tribe and restore him to his father. In one
of the remaining two works, heroic whites survive an Indian attack, and in the
other, a treacherous Indian kills the noble hero because he had defended an enemy
prisoner's life.

There are four literary efforts of the 1840s in which whites are mixed between
perfect and pernicious. All are extended works in which the author has time and
space to develop individual characters. In Le jeune Latour (1844), the one play
of Antoine Gérin-Lajoie, roles are most stereotypical. The young hero, faithful to
his sovereign the King of France, is supported, in the only instance of their positive
portrayal in early Canadian literature, by his Iroquois friends. His father, who has
traitorously gone over to the English side, is backed up by a group of equally
traitorous Indians of an unnamed tribe. Maximilien Bibaud’s book, Biographie des
Sagamos Illustres (1848), documenting a variety of Indian experience, also docu-
ments a variety of relations with whites. The good whites recognize their need of
the Indians, the bad ones usurp their lands. Since the book is in French, the French
tend to be the "good" whites and the usurpers tend to be British. In the novel *The Last of the Eries*, written in English, the racial designations are generally reversed, although the hero is French. An Iroquois chief is the villain, but the Indian heroine comes from a tribe friendly to whites and is half-white herself. Joseph Doutre’s 1844 novel, *Les fiancées de 1812*, contains one-dimensional, bad British and good French-Canadian, characters. The latter manifest a friendly, paternal, attitude in their relationship with Indians.

The conversion of native peoples to Christianity, and their acceptance of Western European culture, provides the basis for interaction between whites and Indians in a number of works in the 1840s. Generally, this conversion is seen as beneficial to the converts, and natives are positively or negatively portrayed according as they do, or do not, accept Christianity. In two works, written by missionary Anglican priests, this concentration on religious conversion is to be expected. *The Snow Drop*, the first Canadian children’s periodical, published a series of stories, based on Canadian history, in which cultural transformation of aboriginals is an important factor. The author, almost certainly a Unitarian, is less concerned with religious conversion, describing whites as bringers of progress and education. The conclusion of one instalment addresses its young readers in these terms:

> How very grateful we ought all to feel for the blessings of civilization, which teaches us to cultivate thoughts and feelings of a nobler and gentler nature than those that find their way to the breast of the poor untutored savage.28

In another example, “A Poem, most particularly dedicated to our much esteemed Brother, the Rev. William Case, a British Wesleyan Preacher,” a layman, “Sir” John Smyth, praises the missionary efforts of the Wesleyan Methodists. In this poem, white civilization is the standard to which Indians should aspire:

> Great is their change since they embrac’d Christianity,  
> And took upon them the Christian’s holy name,  
> No more to live and act like men of insanity,  
> And ever to be liable to censure and blame.29

Denominationalism was never far from the surface where Christian conversion was concerned. The story “Françoise Brunon,” derived from “L’Iroquoise,” describes in very positive terms the civilizing and missionary task of the French from a Catholic point of view, while “Jacques Cartier and the Little Indian Girl,” written by a Protestant, portrays Catholic missionary activity negatively by adopting the point of view of one of the unhappy Indians taken to France by Cartier. Rivalry between religious denominations has played an important role in many aspects of Canadian society, not just in the unseemly contests to convert native peoples to one Christian communion at the expense of another. As these examples suggest, nineteenth-century religious politics should always be taken into account when analyzing the presentation of missionary activity as either a positive or a negative influence in the life of North American Indians.
In most works written in the 1840s there is a shift in the manner in which Indians are described from one based on their fundamental humanity to one based on the theological and sociological theories which relegated them to the sub-human. In this literature, the original inhabitants are characterized as having been cruel and vicious, so that in consequence it was necessary that they give way to a superior culture. This position was ameliorated in several ways: some natives were acceptable because they had been, or were about to be, saved by Christian conversion; others, while not Christian, were acceptable because they were of assistance to whites. Both these aspects of white approval involve ascribing highly valued white behavioural norms to non-whites. Those who observe and interact with Indians are traders, soldiers, and missionaries, rather than settlers. In the one case involving settlers, an initial footnote describes their difficult relations with the natives:

On sait que dans les premiers temps de l'établissement du pays, nos ancêtres étaient obligés de cultiver leurs champs les armes à la main; les sauvages faisaient souvent des irrusions et l'histoire nous raconte les massacres qu'ils ont commis, surtout dans le district de Montréal.30

The cruelty of Indians is as often depicted as being turned against other Indians as it is against whites. Cruelty thus becomes a cultural characteristic, rather than a response to white incursions, so whites (it is implied) need not feel guilty about it. In “Françoise Brunon” war between Iroquois and Ottawas is as much a part of the plot as is Iroquois hatred of French Christians. In “The Chief’s Last Prisoner,” the Iroquois and the Hurons are the warring tribes to which the “Romeo and Juliet” Indian hero and heroine belong. Neither tribe is admirable. The two young lovers — she is half white to begin with — are described as having emotional responses generally found in the romances of the day. Powantah, the hero, “Indian as he was, and subject to the like passions and excitements of his fellow warriors, . . . possessed a heart devoid of cruelty.”31 While the forest is lovingly described, life in it is not idyllic. Both the Hurons and the Iroquois are cruelly vengeful. The young lovers, although the children of chiefs, are specifically described as being outside their own cultures, thus separating their romantic nobility from the inhuman ferocity of their tribes.

All but one of the seven works in which Indians are described as a dying race are narrated by Indian personae. Most are set in present time, with the narrator’s nostalgia for a glorious past, for free movement over the land, and for a life integrated with the natural world directed back to the pre-settlement period. In several, inter-tribal warfare is mentioned as the cause of a decline which made the Indians more vulnerable to white incursions.

The works written in the 1840s which show Indians as helpful to whites are all in French. Maximilien Bibaud’s Biographie des Sagamos Illustres extends and develops the positive views of Indians which his father, Michel, had expressed a
generation earlier in the poem “Les Grands Chefs.” “Essai sur la littérature en Canada,” an 1845 discussion of the future of French-Canadian literature by L.-A. Olivier, published in *La Revue Canadienne*, suggests that description of Indians is the only way to make Canadian literature exciting to outsiders. The author, obviously conscious that there were options available when undertaking such a description, suggests three ways of portraying Indians: as fierce warriors; as brave and hospitable smokers of the peace pipe; and as the female with “ses yeux noirs, si doux, si limpides” and “le cri naïf de sa joie, lorsqu’elle aperçut pour la première fois l’Européen.” The Indian girl Ithona in *Les Fiancées de 1812* exactly meets these last specifications. She goes on to be convent-educated, and then to marry the young white man who had rescued her from the anger of her own tribe. In the play, *Le jeune Latour*, the Iroquois back up young Latour, notwithstanding his father’s urging to desert the French cause. The French attitude is paternalistic and remains closer to the European model throughout the first half of the century. We know from the number of articles and references to Fenimore Cooper’s books which appeared in French-language newspapers and periodicals that French Canadians read his works, but it is not likely that they would have had much contact with American stories of treacherous, inhuman savages, burning with hatred for white men, which began to be borrowed by English-Canadian newspapers from American sources.

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**LOWLY, THE ENGLISH CANADIANS** seem to adopt the American stereotypes. Where there had been almost no maleficent Indians in the literature of the Canadas in the 1820s, by the 1840s almost half of the literary Indians were fierce and warlike — although they were as likely to be fighting among themselves as against whites, and they never reached the inhuman depths of the worst American material. The “drunken Indian” also begins to appear in a literary context. The tone of English-language poetry began to change as well. The laments for a vanished past focused less on the idea of a bygone heroic civilization and more on the idea of an inevitable surrender of space to a superior civilization — another common American theme. The land cessions of the 1820s and 1830s meant that fewer and fewer Canadians had ever seen an Indian, let alone a tribe leading a free life. Those whites who remembered “the old days” were dying out. Native people were physically relegated to remote areas and psychologically consigned to the shadows. As this literary distancing progressed, the American myths began to exert greater influence. With little to contradict them, it was easy for English-Canadian imaginations to be stimulated by them. Nonetheless, considerable ambivalence, particularly in works written by the Canadian-born, still showed in white writing about Indians. The variety of response depicted shows that no single
interpretation had yet been accepted, even though a shift in emphasis toward the American responses is evident.

In neither French nor English was there any attempt at an imaginative leap into a Canada which existed before the arrival of Europeans. Except for the vague, unspecific nostalgia for an aboriginal "golden age" which indicates that white writers knew the Indians had been here first and had a valid culture, it is as if native peoples had no existence until they became part of the European consciousness at the moment of first contact. Attitudes to Indians were bound up with attitudes to the colony's past and future as a white society. Immigrants found the past irrelevant, thus there was no need to incorporate a people who had been a part of that past into their writing, which most often focused on the present and future. While they may have absorbed the European myths before emigrating, the American myths, which satisfied their need to justify control of the new environment, were socially and economically more persuasive. The native-born of both language groups did attempt to integrate wars, Indians, the fur trade, and other people and events of history into their view of their homeland. Generally, they were both positive and realistic in their treatment of these elements.

Where Indians are concerned, beginning with Tecumseh, early Canadian writers seem to have been fascinated by chiefs and to focus on them more often than on the tribe as a specific cultural group. Aboriginal characters in past time, regardless of whether they were positively or negatively portrayed, were nonetheless active and independent; in present time they were melancholy, passive and dependent, although they were by no means all dead by the time the reader arrived at the last paragraph or stanza. Indians had no role at all in any literary vision of the future. The literary images which transmit the assumption that native peoples would either fade away or assimilate in future time seems, with hindsight, to be based on naïve and wishful thinking, but these images had many parallels in the political rhetoric of the period. It was not until after Confederation that Indians became a "problem" for which "solutions" had to be devised.

A number of themes run through all the literature written about native peoples. There is the idea that, under the direction of their wise chiefs, they assisted white settlers and acted as wartime allies; there is the idea of a vague, idyllic time before white settlement, with its reverse image of inevitable displacement; there is the young white hero who marries, and integrates into his culture, the beautiful Indian maiden; and there are the evil Iroquois, as well as the more general image of the Indian as a fierce warrior — both against whites and against rival tribes. Each one of these themes is rooted in some aspect of white European philosophy, self-image, and perception of North American reality. With the exception of the concept of an idyllic life before white settlement, they seem to have been specific to the literature of the early nineteenth century. They did not persist in post-Confederation literature and are not thought of today as being "typical" ideas of the past.
Consequently, the works which transmit these attitudes are not included in anthologies, and the complex and varied responses they contain are lost to our national consciousness.

**CHRONOLOGICAL CHECKLIST**

*Canadian literary works about, or referring to, Indians: 1817-1850*

"Indian Song," Quebec *Mercury*, August 14, 1821. Poem by "V."

"Song. For an American Indian," *Upper Canada Gazette*, May 29, 1823. Poem by "P."

Untitled. *Niagara Gleaner*, July 26, 1823. Poem by "Linus."

"Tecumthé," *Canadian Review and Literary and Historical Journal*, December 1824, 391-432. [Different copies have different page numeration.] Long poem by George Longmore. See also *La Bibliothèque Canadienne*, Tome III, num. 4, mars 1829 for a translation of the prose "argument."

"The Indian's Lament," *Canadian Magazine and Literary Journal*, 4, no. 21, March 1825, 262. Poetry by "M."


"Indian War Song," *Canadian Courant*, April 28, 1830. Poem by "H.M.C."


"An Indian Legend," *Canadian Casket*, April 7, 1832. Prose by Charles Durand.


"Lines Written on Observing some Indian Women Praying before they Retired to Rest," Cobourg Star, December 24, 1834. Poem by "H.A."


"La Mort d'une jeune fille," L'Aurore, 6 septembre 1839. Prose.


Hamilton and other Poems. Toronto: Rogers and Thompson, 1840. Long poem by W. A. Stephens, contains several lengthy descriptions of Indians.


"St. Lawrence," Literary Garland, November 1840. Poem by "G.J."

"The Chief's Last Prisoner," *Bathurst Courier*, seven instalments between December 1840 and March 1841. Fiction by "H.K.F."


"Le Huron et son chant de mort," *L'Aurore*, 8 février 1842. Poem by "Un Canadien."


"The Indian. On Revisiting an Old Encampment," *Maple Leaf for 1848."

"A Picture of Indian Times," *Bathurst Courier*, July 18, 1848. Poem by Holmes Mair. 

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"The Last of the Mohecans," *Bathurst Courier*, August 18, 1848. Poem by Holmes Mair.


"Conversations on History," "Early History of Canada," and "Stories from the History of Canada," *The Snow Drop*, 1848-1850. Ongoing series still incomplete when the periodical ceased publication. The former, dealing principally with British history, embodies a number of interesting comments about aboriginal peoples in various countries.

**NOTES**

1 The eighty-four items in the appended Checklist — long and short poems, short stories, novels and one play — were first published in the newspapers, periodicals and books printed in French and English in Upper and Lower Canada between 1790 and 1850. A whole thesis could be written on the presence of native peoples in periodicals sponsored by religious denominations. Because this study is concerned with imaginative literature of less specific inspiration and intention, religious periodicals have been omitted, as has the extensive newspaper and periodical material printed in Canada but "borrowed," in the early nineteenth-century manner, from American, British, and French sources. *Wacousta*, which was written for a British audience and not published in Canada until late in the century, has also been omitted. Since bibliographic information appears in the Checklist, notes to the body of the text will be in brief form.

2 Literature written by Indians has been studied elsewhere. See Donald Smith, "The Life of George Copway or Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh (1819-1869) — and a review of his writings," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 23 (Fall 1988), 5-38; and *Sacred Feathers* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1987).


4 The idea of "le bon sauvage" had a long history in French literature, beginning in 1590 with Montaigne's *Essais*. Voltaire, Diderot, and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre were its principal exponents in the eighteenth century. Chateaubriand's *Attala* of 1801, whose Indian hero Chactas is the epitome of the type, influenced generations of French readers and was also well known in English translation.

5 It is hard to come by examples of this genre today because it has not been considered suitable for modern reproduction. Some examples can be found in Canadian newspapers of the period. See, for example, *Chatham Gleaner*, November 16, 1847, and August 22, 1848; *Kingston Argus*, June 12, 1846; or *Upper Canada Herald* (Kingston), December 21, 1840. When a source is given for these borrowings it is generally...
a newspaper published in the Ohio/Illinois area. Note that the dates are all in the
1840s. Even Fenimore Cooper, whom we think of today in terms of Natty Bumppo's
friendship with Chingachgook and Uncas, shows us Bumppo fighting for his life
against Hurons and Sioux. In the "Leatherstocking Tales" most of Cooper's villains
are Indian.


"L'Abenaquis, ou la tendresse paternelle," *La Bibliothèque Canadienne*, December
I have been unable to identify "Coleman."


Of those who can be identified, twenty-three were born here, two were American,
eleven were born in Great Britain. The birthplaces of the remainder are un-
known. This predominance of native-born is in marked contrast to the overall figures
for this period in which, of 109 identified writers, 46 were Canadian-born and 63
others foreign-born. In other words, 42 percent of the possible authors account for
almost two-thirds of those who wrote about Indians. This two-to-one distribution
varies only slightly for each of the decades studied. In addition, seven of the native-
born — John Richardson, Charles Durand, W. B. Wells, Holmes Mair, J. H. Willis,
F. X. Garneau, and Michel Bibaud — were responsible for more than one work,
while none of the immigrants wrote more than once on the subject. Statistical informa-
tion derived from M. L. MacDonald, "Literature and Society in the Canadas,


See R. J. Surtees, "Indian Land Cessions in Ontario, 1763-1862: The Evolution of

Canto III, line 530, in *Tales of Chivalry and Romance*.

P. 38, line 1078, in the Canadian Poetry Press edition.

P. 10, line 189.

P. 17, line 429 *et seq.*

P. 48, line 1371 *et seq.*

John Hare suggests in his introduction to the story in *Contes et Nouvelles du Canada
français, tome 1* (Ottawa: Univ. of Ottawa, 1971) that Bibaud was the author.
Maurice Lemire has argued in the first volume of *Dictionnaire des oeuvres littéraires
de Québec* (396-97) that the author must have been Canadian, rather than Ameri-
can, because of his or her knowledge of Quebec history. While the author may have
been American, it should be noted that many English-Canadian writers were publishing
in American periodicals in the 1820s, so it is entirely possible that the original
author was an English resident of Quebec.

In the version published in *Le Répertoire National, Tome 1*, 161.

La *Bibliothèque Canadienne* (1825-30), *L'Observateur* (1830-31), *Le Magasin du
Bas-Canada* (1832), and *L'Encyclopédie Canadienne* (1842-43). It is also evident
in the newspapers he edited, most notably *L'Aurore*. 

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21 *Epîtres, satires, etc.*, 115.
22 Both in the *Literary Garland*. The first, a story, July 1840, and the latter, a poem, November 1839. See Checklist.
23 “Canada” by John Breakenridge. The poem was the prize poem at Upper Canada College in 1836 and was printed in a number of newspapers at the time. The quotation here is taken from the version printed in Breakenridge’s book, *The Crusades and Other Poems* (Kingston: John Rowlands, 1846), 137.
24 *The Unknown*, 225.
25 *Canadian Casket*, April 7, 1832, 82.
27 The Rev. Joseph Abbott’s *Philip Musgrave* and Bishop G. J. Mountain’s *Songs of the Wilderness*. Both works were published in Great Britain, the source of funding for missionary activities, but had wide circulation in the Canadas. Mountain is much more sympathetic to the Indians he encounters than Abbott.
28 *The Snow Drop*, New Series, Vol. 1 (1850), 194. Most of the “original” material in this periodical has been attributed to its proprietors, the sisters Harriet Cheney and Elizabeth Cushing, and their cousin, Elizabeth Hedge — all three, daughters of Unitarian clergymen and active members of the Montreal Unitarian community.
29 *Select Poems*, 23.
31 H. K. F., “The Chief’s Last Prisoner,” *Bathurst Courier*, January 22, 1841. The story was printed in seven instalments between December 1840 and March 1841.
32 *La Revue Canadienne*, January 1845, 29.
33 The Indian women who marry white men in early Canadian literature are not described as sultry temptresses. They are, rather, a young male writer’s fantasy of the perfect woman: close to nature, eager to marry him and live subordinate to his wishes — potential Galateas adopting the alien culture rather than seducing the man from his own.
34 See, for example, “M. Fenimore Cooper,” *Album Littéraire*, August 1847, 215-19.
35 Chipman Hall in “A Survey of the Indians’ Role in English Canadian Literature to 1900” (M.A. thesis, Dalhousie Univ., 1969), and Leslie Monkman in *A Native Heritage* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1981), 65, make this assertion. Monkman’s thesis, while useful for the study of contemporary Canadian fiction, is not easily applied to the early nineteenth century. Among other things, he does not accept the “Indian as ally” theme which determined so much of the tone of Longmore’s and Richardson’s works on Tecumseh, ascribing less noble motives to the authors.