

SAVAGE, DEGENERATE, AND DISPOSSESSED

*Some Sociological, Anthropological, and Legal
Backgrounds to the Depiction of Native Peoples
in Early Long Poems on Canada*

D. M. R. Bentley

AT FIRST GLANCE, the few long poems written in and about Canada during the high Georgian period (1759-1825) appear to contain little, if anything, of interest concerning the country's native peoples. In *Abram's Plains* (1789) by Thomas Cary, there are brief references to the Hurons of Lorette and to the culinary habits of the "Esquimaux," and some encouraging comments about the taming of the "savage mind."¹ In J. Mackay's *Quebec Hill* (1797) and Cornwall Bayley's *Canada* (w. 1805) the Indians are treated at some length and with a similarity that suggests the presence of a stereotype — the "savage" who divides his time almost exclusively between killing animals and people.² In *Talbot Road* (1818) by Adam Hood Burwell, the first native-born white poet, the native peoples are mentioned only in a passing reference to the ability of "commerce" to "tame . . . the hardy savage, rough and rude. . . ."³ In Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village* (1825, 1834) Acadia's "woods and wilds" are inhabited by "wandering savages, and beasts of prey" which, however, soon depart the country and the poem to hunt "beneath some other sky."⁴ With good reason, it may be felt, Terrie Goldie ignores these poems entirely in his recent *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*, as do the contributors to *The Native in Literature*, the proceedings of the conference of the same name at the University of Lethbridge in 1984.⁵ That the treatment of the native peoples in the poems of Cary, Mackay, Bayley, Burwell, and Goldsmith does provide material for fruitful study is nevertheless indicated by Leslie Monkman's *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English-Canadian Literature*, a pioneering survey which mentions each of these poets but, regrettably, discusses their works only as extensively as its comprehensive nature permits. It

will be the aim of the present discussion to consolidate and expand upon Monkman's study by placing *Abram's Plains*, *Quebec Hill*, *Canada*, *Talbot Road*, and *The Rising Village* in the sociological, anthropological, and legal contexts that governed their authors' conceptions of the characteristics, origins, and rights of Canada's native peoples. As will be seen, the legal dimension of *The Rising Village* lends to this poem in particular a contemporary relevance that is usually denied to early poetry on Canada.

SINCE IT DICTATES the sense in which the poets of Georgian Canada described the native peoples as savage(s), the critically important context for understanding their work is the so-called "four stages theory" of social development which, as Ronald L. Meek has shown in *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, was "a very common and a very important ingredient in Enlightenment thought in the field of the social sciences during the whole of the period from 1750 to 1800"⁶ (and, it may be added, continued to be echoed in poetry on Canada and by Canadians until around the turn of the present century).⁷ According to this theory, which Meek traces to two independent progenitors, A. R. J. Turgot in France and Adam Smith in Scotland, all societies develop through four distinct stages, each defined by the mode of subsistence of its constituent members: (1) a savage stage based on hunting; (2) a barbaric (or pastoral) stage based on herding; (3) an agricultural stage based on farming; and (4) a commercial stage based on trading. Of these four stages, the savage was, of course, held to be the most "rough and rude" (Burwell's phrase) and the commercial the most polished or refined. Two subsidiary tenets of the four stages theory are worth mentioning, not merely because of their obvious relevance to the treatment of social development in *Talbot Road* and *The Rising Village*, but also because they colour the depiction of the native peoples in the three other poems under discussion here: (a) the tenet that the great leap forward from rudeness to refinement occurs at the agricultural stage when self-sufficiency begins to give way to the superfluity that creates leisure, trade, and prosperity; and (b) the tenet, absent from Smith's theorizings, but evident in the work of several of his more moralistic successors such as the John Millar of *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* that the commercial stage of a society's development brings with it, not merely such advantages as civility, convenience, patriotism, and the arts, but also a variety of evils, most notably luxury and vice, that can lead to the ruination of individuals within a society (especially women) and, if not checked, to the decadence of an entire society or nation. From the first of these tenets, it should be evident why both Burwell and Goldsmith place great emphasis in their poems on agricultural development (indeed, why the 1825 version of *The Rising Village* contains a note praising Lord Dalhousie and the

Agricultural Societies for their efforts in introducing a better “system of cultivation” [535 n.] to Nova Scotia). From the second, it should be evident why Burwell follows the introduction of “Commerce, the first of friends to human kind, / That . . . forms society for mutual good” with visions of young couples pursuing their sophisticated courting rituals under the guidance of Christian morality and right reason,⁸ and why Goldsmith, enthusiastic as he too is about the arrival of “Commerce” (520) in Nova Scotia, places at the centre of *The Rising Village* the cautionary tale of Flora and Albert. It is no coincidence that the descent into madness of the “refined” and “gentle manner[ed]” Flora begins when a messenger with a “ruder footstep” than she expects delivers a “treacherous” letter from Albert (317, 319, 353, 369). All too easily can a disregard for “mutual good” reintroduce savagery to a society at its commercial stage.

Goldsmith’s view that “wandering savages, and beasts of prey” once held alternating sway in the “woods and wilds” of Acadia probably derives in part at least from Thomas Chandler Haliburton⁹ who, in turn, follows the Scottish historian and proponent of the four-stage theory, William Robertson, in viewing North American Indian civilization as the “rudest” and “least civilized”¹⁰ that could be conceived. In his *General Description of Nova Scotia*, Haliburton does little more than echo Robertson when he describes “savages” as “wandering tribes, who depend upon hunting and fishing for subsistence” and, thus, “nearly resemble . . . animals.”¹¹ Apparently on the assumption that the mentality of nomadic hunters is shaped by their mode of subsistence and way of life, Robertson lists various virtues such as “dignity,” “perseverance,” and a “spirit of independence” among the qualities of North America’s Indians in *The History of America* but dwells at length on their vengeful and cruel disposition, which he sees as characteristic of savage societies: “[T]he most frequent or the most powerful motive of the incessant hostilities among rude nations,” he writes, is “the passion of revenge, which rages with such violence in the breast of savages, that earnestness to gratify it may be considered as the distinguishing characteristic of men in their uncivilized state. . . . The desire for revenge is communicated from breast to breast, and soon kindles into rage,” which, in turn, issues in cruelty.¹² Similar, but less elaborate, views of the Indian character can be found in the work of each of the three writers whose *Travels* lie centrally in the background of the poems on view here: Peter Kalm (a principal source for *Quebec Hill*),¹³ Jonathan Carver (a principal source for *Quebec Hill* and *Abram’s Plains*), and Isaac Weld (a principal source for *Canada, Talbot Road*, and *The Rising Village*). As Carver succinctly puts it: a “diabolical lust for revenge . . . is the predominant passion in the breast of every individual of every tribe. . . .”¹⁴ Or as Weld says, more sympathetically, “a word in the slightest degree insulting will kindle a flame in their breasts, that can only be extinguished by the blood of the offending party; and they will traverse forests for hundreds of miles . . . to gratify their revenge. . . . I fear . . . that in the opinion of many people,

all the good qualities which they possess, would but ill atone for their revengeful disposition, and for the cruelties which . . . they sometimes inflict upon . . . prisoners. . . ."¹⁵ Such, then, are the sources of the stereotype of the revengeful hunter found in Mackay and Bayley:

Here, deep involv'd in woods, the Indians range
 In quest of prey, or panting for revenge;
 With fixt resolve, and nerves inur'd to toil,
 The roe to vanquish, or the foe to foil. . . .
 (*Quebec Hill*, 1, 81-84)

Mark in . . . [you wild Indian's] face what various
 passions low'r
 And rule his bosom with alternate power!
 Revenge, to mercy deaf to reason blind,
 That scorns forgiveness as beneath his mind;
 Exulting Rage, with human tortures fed,
 That rears the Scalp his triumph o'er the dead. . . .
 (*Canada*, 77-82)

In other passages (and for reasons to be discussed in a few moments) Bayley presents a more sympathetic portrait of the Indian than Mackay, but nevertheless does so within the framework of the revengeful hunter stereotype.

To judge from his subsequent description of the destructive effects of alcohol — “Britain’s cherished bane” — on “the Indian” and on “savage nations” (*Quebec Hill*, 1, 236-40), Mackay shared with Goldsmith a recognition of the mixed blessings that could come with the advanced stages of social development. Yet Mackay seems also to have been convinced, as was Cary before him, that advanced (agricultural, commercial) European civilization had a great deal to offer the native peoples in their development from rudeness to refinement. Ignorant of the fact that the Hurons had practised farming for centuries in what is now Ontario, both Mackay and Cary look to Lorette for evidence of the salutary effects of agriculture and contact with European culture on Canada’s native peoples. In a footnote to the following passage, Mackay observes that the Hurons at Lorette “are now so far civilized as to cultivate their lands for their subsistence, yet many of them still retain, not a little, of the indolent roving disposition of their ancestors”:

. . . view the slope of yonder hill . . .
 There, tam'd and staid, the Indian seeks repose,
 Nor still imagines all the world his foes;
 With art and care, he cultivates his lands,
 And gathers in their fruits with willing hands.
 Yet 'mong the few who shun the forest's gloom,
 And Europe's garb and languages assume,
 Still sloth and ignorance our pity claim. . . .
 (*Quebec Hill*, 1, 225-35)

Less admirable because “less civilized” in Mackay’s view than the Hurons at Lorette are “the Indians that live in the woods around Quebec” — hunters who “long . . . the stately deer to foil” and, hence, still fall into the category of “savage” (*Quebec Hill*, 1, 63-72). Although Mackay may have read *Abram’s Plains*, the shared conceptual framework of the four-stages theory is a more likely explanation than a literary debt for the resemblance between his description of Lorette and Cary’s:

Here, of the copper-tribes, an half tam’d race,
As villagers take up their resting place;
Here fix’d, their household gods lay peaceful
down,
To learn the manners of the polish’d town.
(Abram’s Plains, 414-18)

Agriculture is not mentioned in these lines, but earlier in *Abram’s Plains* Cary parallels the physical development of the Canadian terrain with the moral development of its native peoples:

How blest the task, to tame the savage soul,
And, from the waters, bid the woods recoil!
But oh! a task of more exalted kind,
To arts of peace, to tame the savage mind;
The thirst of blood, in human breasts, to shame,
To wrest, from barb’rous vice, fair virtue’s name;
Bid tomahawks to ploughshares yield the sway,
And scalping-knives to pruning hooks give way;
In Circe’s glass bid moderation reign,
And moral virtues humanize the plain!
(Abram’s Plains, 54-63)

Through the simultaneous cultivation of external and internal nature, the “savage” and “barb’rous” will be eliminated from Canada, and in their place will exist an agricultural society amply endowed with the characteristics — “moderation,” “moral virtues,” and the “arts of peace” — that will ensure its stable progress towards the high level of refinement to be expected at the commercial stage of its development and, indeed, already evident in the “polish’d town[s]” of Quebec and Montreal.¹⁶ To see *Abram’s Plains* in the light of the four-stages theory is to recognize that both the “half-tamed” Hurons at Lorette and the launching of a merchant vessel on the St. Lawrence described elsewhere in the poem are part of a progress report on the development of Lower Canada from rudeness to refinement.

LESS UBIQUITOUS than the four-stages theory in shaping the responses of the early poets to Canada’s native peoples were the not unrelated

theories of the origin of the North American Indians. While many such theories were advanced in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (as well as earlier and later), by the high Georgian period one had gained widespread approval because it seemed, in Bayley's words, to be "agreeable" both to "reason" and "the truth of Revelation" (*Canada*, n. 95). This was the theory, traceable to Joseph de Acosta, that the Amerindians were descendants of Noah who had made their way across Asia after the "confusion of tongues" described in Genesis 11 and, from there, had reached the New World by way of an isthmus between present-day Russia and Alaska.¹⁷ Of crucial importance in reconciling "the designs of God" with the four-stages theory was what Bruce G. Trigger in *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* calls "degenerationism" or "the theory of degeneration":¹⁸ the notion that, as Noah's progeny "separate[d] and . . . spread themselves . . . over the whole earth,"¹⁹ they became degenerate in proportion to their distance in space and time from their origin. (The application of the same theory to the other passengers on the Ark led to the idea, prevalent among immigrants to Canada until well into the nineteenth century, that by comparison with their European counterparts, the plants and animals of North America were degenerate — hence, for example, the "songless" birds in Alexander MacLachlan's *The Emigrant*.)²⁰ As the long Note "on the subject of the origin of native Americans" that Bayley appended to *Canada* makes quite clear, the degeneration of peoples far removed from the cradle of civilization in Mesopotamia took place in all spheres, from "manners and customs" to language and religion:

Superstition would naturally creep into their religious ceremonies; the climate and local circumstances of the regions they colonized, would alter not only their manner of living, but even their bodily appearance — The loss of literature and education would corrupt their language — and the want of proper materials and opportunities would occasion that decay of arts and sciences which must finally terminate in barbarity. (*Canada*, p. 19)

As this passage indicates, environment was frequently added to distance and isolation from civilized origins as a factor determining the degenerate and savage (or barbaric) nature of the North American Indians. No wonder Canada's native peoples were in a state of extreme degeneracy: among other things, they had been exposed for centuries to a climate in which, as Frances Brooke has Arabella Fermor observe, "[t]is sufficient employment . . . to contrive how to preserve an existence" and the cold not only "brings on a sort of stupefaction" but also "suspends the very powers of the understanding." "Genius will never mount high," says Arabella, "where the faculties of mind are benumbed half the year."²¹

It should now be evident why Mackay describes Canada's Indians as "yellow" (to indicate their Asian origins) and emphasizes their lack of written history and durable architecture (things not to be expected from such distant and degenerate descendants of Noah):²²

No musty record can the curious trace,
 Engross'd by annals of the savage race:
 Involv'd in darkness their atchievements lay
 Till fam'd Columbus sought a western way.

The Antiquarian here may search in vain
 For walls erected in Severus' reign;
 Or lofty tow'rs that their declension show,
 Or cities built some thousand years ago:
 For arts and antiquities visit Eastern ground. . . .

(*Quebec Hill*, I, 131, 37-45)

In his long Note to *Canada*, Bayley also alludes to the Indians' lack of "accounts or memoirs of themselves"²³ and, in the body of the poem, notices the absence in Canada of "marble busts," "gothic tow'rs," and "pillars glowing with Corinthian flowers" (*Canada*, 454-55). Since the Indians have no written literature or history, no "classic wreaths . . . / To swell the annals of an ancient state" (*Canada*, 35-36), their past is a *tabula rasa* on which Bayley proceeds to inscribe his own version of events, a characteristically syncretic combination of science and Christianity. In the beginning, a "long and dreary . . . night" of "Chaos" enveloped the St. Lawrence; then came nature — trees and animals (including the "Mammoth, hugest in the brutal train" and resembling the Behemoth of the Bible)—without man, but manifesting increasingly the signs of the Fall; and, finally, into a distinctly post-lapsarain world of suicidal snakes, "murd'rous" wolves, and "pilfering . . . Squirrels" come the distant ancestors of the Indians:

. . . mankind, the forest's ancient Lords,
 Pitch'd their light tents, and told their savage hordes;
 Of sex regardless — rushing from afar,
 With brethren clans to wage eternal war!

(*Canada*, 37-68)

That these people are nomadic and uncivilized is shown by their "light tents" and disregard of sexual differences;²⁴ that they are from Asia is indicated by the word "hordes," which refers specifically to "clans" of "roving Tartars";²⁵ that they are fallen, indeed, diabolical, is suggested by Bayley's allusion to Satan's resolve to wage "eternal War" in *Paradise Lost*, I, 121.²⁶ Until the arrival of the Jesuit missionaries who began the process of making the "darted tomahawk" yield its "tribute to agriculture's throne" (*Canada*, 135-36), Canada was nothing more than a battleground for vicious animals and Satanic savages.

When Bayley turns his attention to the generic Indian of his own day, he sees a savage hunter-warrior who, while driven by such typical passions as "Rage" and a desire for "Revenge," nevertheless displays certain physical, mental, and spiritual qualities that suggest the residual presence of his original, Mesopotamian culture:

Mark you wild Indian, leaning on his bow,
 Fatigue and labour streaming from his brow;
 Ev'n in his wild and undomestic state,
 In form superior and in reason great!
 Mark how the hand of Fashion or of Pride
 In barbarous custom decorates his side;
 Mark the snow-sandals that support his tread,
 The crown of Feathers waving o'er his head. . . .
 (*Canada*, 69-76)

Since Bayley agreed with Pierre de Charlevoix, Edward Stillingfleet, and others that the "superstitions" and "notions of religion" among the Indians were, like their "arts and sciences," the degenerate vestiges of their original, biblical culture²⁷ — "the phantoms of a purer creed / That worships Heav'n in *spirit* as in deed . . ." (*Canada*, 110-11) — it may also be that in describing his generic Indian's snowshoes as "snow-sandals" and his headdress as a "crown" of Feathers, he intended these things, and perhaps also the Indian's "bow," to be recognized as the distant descendants of items developed in the cradle of civilization and referred to in the Bible. Be this as it may, and despite his "wild" and "undomestic" state, Bayley's present-day Indian still exhibits physical and mental attributes ("form superior and reason great") that characterize him as the not unworthy descendant of Noah and, beyond him, Adam. Indeed, when viewed sympathetically (as Bayley clearly intends) the Indian can be seen to possess certain innate ("self-born") and patriotic "virtues" — "Contempt of danger, and contempt of pain" — that bear the "stamp" of something "nobler" and immortal:

Yes here are form'd the mouldings of a soul,
 Too great for ease, too lofty for controul;
 A soul, which ripen'd by refinement's hand,
 Had scatter'd wisdom thro' its native land;
 A soul, which Education might have given
 To earth an honor — and an heir to Heaven!
 (*Canada*, 86-94)

Bayley's Indian is "nobler" than he first appears, but he is not a noble savage whose claim to admiration resides in his natural condition, his freedom from the taint of civilization. On the contrary, his admirable qualities are the residue of his original civilization and would have been strengthened, not corrupted, by "refinement" and "Education."

Bayley's subsequent speculations on the origins and present condition of Canada's Indians are a versified version of the theory of degeneration through diffusion:

Perchance there was a time (ere first
 On Europe's plains the dawn of science burst)
 When the forefathers of these vagrant hordes

Knew every charm that civil life affords;
 Now may they rove, expell'd by wayward fate,
 By mutual warfare or tyrannic hate;
 The offspring *once*, of nations far renown'd,
 Whom Genius cherish'd or whom Glory crown'd. . . .
 (*Canada*, 95-102)

In Bayley's final analysis, the Indians are the benighted victims of "fate," "time," and "*nature*":

Perchance at last — when their meridian blaze
 Had beam'd around on man's astonish'd gaze;
 In *nature's course*, and time's declining date,
 Perfection yielded to the hand of fate,
 Their Sun of Science set beneath the clouds,
 And bade the night rise, that still their glory
 shrouds!

(*Canada*, 111-16)

Thanks to the presence of the French and the British, however, a new dawn has begun to break for the Indians of Canada, and, thus, "willing Hope perceives returning beams / Bursting from nature's long-bewildered dreams . . . And looks beyond to life's maturer blaze!" (121-24). In fact, the "darted tomahawk" has already yielded its "tribute . . . to agriculture's throne" and the "war whoop's echoes and the slave's sad throes" been "hush'd in music, pleasure, and repose!" (133-36). What diffusion darkened, refinement will cause to shine again. As well as being "agreeable" to "reason" and "Revelation," such a view demonstrated the compatibility of the degeneration and four stages theories, not merely with each other, but also with the imperial ethos. Provided that Christianity came with it, exposure to Britain's agricultural and commercial civilization could only improve the benighted and degenerate savages of Canada and other countries remote from the sources and centres of civilization. To ensure this exposure was the burden of the white man; to accept it with gratitude and grace was the lot of the native. That the St. Lawrence, the Hudson, and the "GANGES flow[ed] by EUROPEAN lands"²⁸ was surely to the benefit of all concerned. Thus ran the logic of British imperialism until well into the present century, but it was plagued by one especially nagging doubt: who really owned those "EUROPEAN lands" in Asia, Africa, America, and Australia?

IN *A General Description of Nova Scotia*, Haliburton furnishes several examples of the "great outrages" visited upon "the solitary and peaceable settlers" in the Maritimes by the "savage" and "ferocious" Micmacs and Richi-

buctos. In the vicinity of Halifax particularly, he observes, “[t]hese savages . . . defended with obstinacy a territory they held from nature, and it was not until after very great losses, that the English drove them out of their former hunting grounds.”²⁹ “[H]ideous yells announce the murderous band, / Whose bloody footsteps desolate the land,” run the equivalent lines in *The Rising Village*, “And now, behold! [the settler’s] bold aggressors fly, / To seek their prey beneath some other sky; / Resign the haunts they can maintain no more . . .” (85-86, 107-09). Goldsmith was, of course, much less learned in the law than the future Judge Haliburton, but he had enough legal knowledge to appreciate the force of the phrase “territory . . . held from nature” in his compatriot’s account of the Indian resistance to white settlement in Nova Scotia. One of the legal texts that Goldsmith read during his brief stint as a clerk in a “Lawyer’s Office” in Halifax during his teens was Sir William Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England*,³⁰ a work which, in addition to being grounded in the four-stages theory (and in this regard also, an important influence on *The Rising Village*), contains a discussion of property rights that may well have been seminal for both Haliburton and Goldsmith.

The relevant portion of the *Commentaries* is the section entitled “Of Property, in General” in the second volume, where Blackstone draws a distinction between the primeval “natural right” of “wandering” peoples to the lands that they use or need for subsistence and the “idea of a more permanent property in the soil” which, he says, was “introduced and established” through the “regular connexion and consequence” that came with “the art of agriculture.” Blackstone draws an explicit contrast between the natural law under which “American [Indian] nations” and “the first Europeans” held “transient” rights to property and the post-agricultural notion of “permanent property,” and he expresses deep misgivings about the practice of “sending colonies” into “countries already peopled, and driving out or massacring the innocent and defenceless natives. . . .” “How far such a conduct was consonant to nature, to reason, or to christianity,” he writes, “deserved well to be considered by those, who have rendered their names immortal by thus civilizing mankind.”³¹ As Haliburton’s concessive reference to “territories . . . held from nature” by the Micmacs indicates, the question of the right of settlers to land in Canada was still being “considered” in Nova Scotia in the early 1820s. So, too, was it in the United States, as witness the landmark case of *Johnson v. M’Intosh*, which was decided in the same year (1823) as the publication of Haliburton’s *General Description* and the writing of *The Rising Village*.³² In a decision that was controversial in its day, and which it still cited in American and, occasionally, Canadian land disputes involving native peoples, Chief Justice John Marshall held that, while “exclusive title” to a given area in North America had passed under the “fundamental principle” of “discovery” from its “original inhabitants” to the particular European nation that discovered it, the Indians remained “the rightful

occupants of the soil, with a legal as well as just claim to retain possession of it, and to use it according to their own discretion. . . .”³³ As Chief Justice Dickson writes in the seminal Supreme Court of Canada case of *Guerin v. The Queen* (which acknowledges the Indian’s right to land), Marshall “was . . . of the opinion that the rights of Indians in the lands they traditionally occupied prior to European colonization both predated and survived the claims to sovereignty made by various European nations in the territories of the North American continent.”³⁴

Goldsmith’s response to the vexed and vexing issue of Indian rights in land seems aimed at reassuring his European readers. To justify the colonists’ claims to the land, he begins by implying that the area of Nova Scotia which was colonized by the Loyalists some “fifty Summers” earlier was at that time uninhabited. When the first “lonely settler built his home” “amid a wilderness of trees . . . / . . . not a voice upon his ear intrude[d]; / . . . [and] solemn silence all the waste pervade[d] . . .” (*The Rising Village*, 499, 59-63). In similar attempts to obviate the perception of a conflict between “aboriginal rights” and “white conceptions of ownership and possession of . . . land,”³⁵ Burwell and, later, Isabella Valancy Crawford also send their settlers into areas where, to quote *Malcolm’s Katie*, the animals have not seen “the plume or bow / Of the red hunter. . . .”³⁶ It is as if all three poets were writing with an eye on Blackstone’s argument that only the colonization and cultivation of “uninhabited countries” was in keeping with the “law of nature” (i.e., the law of God) and gave settlers to such areas the right of “first taker”³⁷ in the lands that they occupied. In *The Rising Village*, the violators of the law of nature and God, the newcomers to what Blackstone calls “countries already peopled” are therefore the “wandering savages” whose “sentence” of “death” to the European settlers thus amounts to a grotesque perversion of justice:

Behold the savage tribes in wildest strain,
Approach with death and terror in their train;
No longer silence o’er the forest reigns,
No longer still now her power retains;
 But hideous yells *announce* the murderous band,
 Whose bloody footsteps desolate the land;
 He hears them oft in sternest mood maintain,
Their right to rule the mountain and the plain
 He hears them doom the *white man’s* instant death,
 Shrinks from the sentence, while he gasps for breath
 Then, rousing with one effort all his might,
 Darts from his hut, and saves himself in flight.
 (*The Rising Village*, 81-92)

(The italics of amazement on “*white man’s*” in this passage are Goldsmith’s own; the other emphases have been added to highlight his placement in key positions of phrases which concern the arrival and claims of the Indians.) Nor are the Indians wrong merely in asserting a sovereignty — “[t]heir right to rule” — that in any case

had passed under the principle of discovery to the European discoverers and settlers of Nova Scotia. They are wrong also, and in a very specific way, for forcing the settler out of his hut and off his farm. The reason lies in Goldsmith's other major means of justifying the settler's rights in the land.

According to Locke's analysis in *Two Treatises on Government* (the key passage is quoted but disputed in a note in Blackstone's *Commentaries*), the ownership of a thing such as land devolves to the man who "hath mixed his labour with [it], . . . joined to it something that is his own," and, hence, "remove[d] [it] out of the state that nature hath provided it and left it in. . . ." ³⁸ "By patient firmness and industrious toil, / . . . [the settler] still retains possession of the soil . . ." observes Goldsmith in *The Rising Village*, adding in a note that "[t]he process of clearing land, though simple, is attended with a great deal of labour" (103-04, 72 n.). By labouring mightily to clear, cultivate, and build on the land, the European settlers in Nova Scotia have established their rights to "possession of the soil." In contrast, the nomadic or, to use Goldsmith's significantly repeated adjective, "wandering" (45, 99) Indians have merely passed over the land without investing labour or accruing rights in it. Where the white settlers in *The Rising Village* are thus justified in their ownership of land by their investment of labour, by the right of "first taker," and, more remotely, by the principle of discovery, the Indians are relegated to the status of animal-like "transients" whose hunting grounds are "haunts" which they defend aggressively but, ultimately, "[r]esign" to seek "prey" and "safety" in "far distant wilds" (107-10). It is no small irony that the Indians exiled from their traditional hunting grounds by the agricultural and commercial ambitions of the white colonists of Nova Scotia are in a parallel position to those same colonists, whose exile "beyond the Western main" (*The Rising Village*, 50) as described in *The Deserted Village* provided Goldsmith with the inspiration for his chronicle of settler heroism. The difference, of course, is that while the plight of his white compatriots who were "forced . . . to quit their native plains," ³⁹ excited Goldsmith's sympathy, the plight of the native peoples in similar circumstances did not. From the perspective shared more or less by all the poets discussed here, whites were the only finders and keepers, losers and weepers, who really mattered.

IN TREATING THE INDIANS stereotypically and collectively as savages, degenerates, and transient hunters, the poets of Georgian Canada denied them status as individual people and as a multiplicity of peoples. With the honourable exception perhaps of Bayley (who at least argued with one of the stereotypes), these poets exiled the Indians from the reality of here and now into the "far distant wilds" of abstraction and silence. Only when they seemed to be assimilating themselves to European culture in the "colony at Lorette" (*Quebec Hill*, I, 229 n.) did

they warrant anything like full approbation, and even then they were not called by their names, either personal or tribal. The explanation for these denials of status and identity lies, no doubt, in the ethos of imperialism: it is psychologically difficult to colonize and settle lands inhabited by equals, by people with names, by cultures that have their own integrity. It is not fortuitous that Adam Kidd, one of the first poets to view the Indians as equals (indeed, betters), to accord them their personal and tribal names, and to depict their culture as rich in history, tradition, and value, was also vehemently opposed to the colonial enterprise in its various religious and secular manifestations, particularly in the United States. But *The Huron Chief* also embraces with post-Romantic fervour the stereotype of the noble savage and thus in its own way, patronizes and simplifies its Indian subjects. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose?* In our own day, several poets and critics have attempted to penetrate the stereotypes and abstractions that have occluded the indigenes in Canada, but have any of them done more (this essay certainly has not) than assemble archives of misrepresentation? With all their emphasis on deconstructing meta-physical assumptions, have the practitioners of post-modernism and post-structuralism helped to reify the native peoples of Britain's ex-colonies, or have they once more denied them a real presence in the world that matters — the world, now, of words, and words, moreover, in the great imperial languages of the modern age? How much better is it to be described as an indigene rather than as a savage? The question will be real if it reaches its intended audience.

NOTES

I am grateful to three colleagues at the University of Western Ontario, Eileen Gillese, Barry Hoffmaster, and Geoffrey Rans, for information and discussions that have been very useful in the development of this essay.

¹ *Abram's Plains: A Poem*, ed. D. M. R. Bentley (London, Ont.: Canadian Poetry Press, 1986), pp. 4-5, 8, and 14. After a preliminary reference like this, poems in the Canadian Poetry Press Series of Early Canadian Poems are cited by title and line number in the body of the essay.

² See *Quebec Hill; or, Canadian Scenery. A Poem In Two Parts*, ed. D. M. R. Bentley (London, Ont.: Canadian Poetry Press, 1988), p. 10, and *Canada. A Descriptive Poem, Written at Quebec, 1805 With Satires — Imitations — and Sonnets* ([Quebec:] John Neilson, n.d.), p. 7. Hereafter Bayley's poem is cited in the body of the text with line numbers altered to reflect the repetition of the couplet at lines 131-32. An edition of Bayley's poem is forthcoming in the Canadian Poetry Press series.

³ "Talbot Road: A Poem by Adam Hood Burwell," ed. Michael Williams (M.A. thesis, Univ. of Western Ontario, 1988), p. 79.

⁴ *The Rising Village*, ed. Gerald Lynch (London, Ont.: Canadian Poetry Press, 1989), pp. 8-13. Unless otherwise indicated, subsequent quotations are from the 1834 version of Goldsmith's poem.

- ⁵ Goldic's study was published by McGill-Queen's University Press in 1989 and *The Native in Literature*, which is edited by Thomas King, Cheryl Carver, and Helen Hoy, by ECW Press in 1987.
- ⁶ *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), p. 230. My understanding of the four-stages theory is deeply indebted to Meek.
- ⁷ See, for example, Bliss Carman, *The Poetry of Life* (Toronto: Copp, Clark, 1905), p. 16.
- ⁸ See *Talbot Road*, 583-642 in Williams's thesis, pp. 19-81.
- ⁹ The debt of *The Rising Village* to *A General Description* was first suggested by Desmond Pacey; see *Creative Writing in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1961), p. 12.
- ¹⁰ See *The History of America*, 9th ed. (London: A. Strahan, 1800), II, 30 and II, 30-214 (Book IV), *passim* and *A General Description of Nova Scotia*, 2nd ed. (Halifax, N.S.: Royal Acadian School, 1825), p. 8 for Haliburton's inclusion of Robertson's *History* among the works upon which he has heavily relied.
- ¹¹ *A General Description*, pp. 46 and 52.
- ¹² *The History of America*, II, 233 and II, 147-75.
- ¹³ See Peter Kalm, *Travels into North America . . .*, trans. John Reinhold Foster, 2nd ed. (London: T. Lowndes, 1772), I, 139-40 and II, 187-89.
- ¹⁴ *Travels through the Interior Parts of North America . . .*, 3rd ed. (1781; rpt. Minneapolis, Minn.: Ross and Haines, 1956), II, 328-42.
- ¹⁵ Isaac Weld, *Travels through the States of North America, and the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada*, 4th ed. (London: John Stockdale, 1807), II, 264-65 and 276-79.
- ¹⁶ See also Bayley, *Canada*, 421-23: "British sons . . . / 'Midst savage tribes . . . fix a polish'd home; / And grace with Europe's charms a dreary scene. . . ."
- ¹⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 19 ("Note Referred to in the Poem on Canada"). Bayley refers to the "confusion of tongues" and the likelihood that the two Continents of Asia and North America were "once united." I am indebted in this section of the essay to Lee Eldridge Huddleston, *Origins of the American Indians: European Concepts, 1492-1729*, Latin American Monographs, No. 11, Institute of Latin American Studies (Austin: Univ. of Texas, 1967).
- ¹⁸ *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* (1985; rpt. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press; Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 51 and 406.
- ¹⁹ P[ierre] de Charlevoix, *Journal of a Voyage to North America . . .* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1761), I, 47. Bayley refers to Charlevoix in *Canada*, 142 n.
- ²⁰ See *The Poetical Works of Alexander McLachlan*, Literature of Canada: Poetry and Prose in Reprint, intro. E. Margaret Fulton (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 225 and, as another example, Catharine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada* (London: Charles Knight, 1836), p. 91.
- ²¹ *The History of Emily Montague*, ed. Mary Jane Edwards (Ottawa: Carleton Univ. Press, 1985), p. 103 (Letter 49).
- ²² As pointed out in the Explanatory Notes to these passages in *Quebec Hill*, pp. 39-40, Mackay is here indebted to Kalm, *Travels*, II, 276-77.

- ²³ As his authority for this observation, Bayley cites Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae; or A Rational Account on the Grounds of Christian Faith . . .* (London: Henry Mortlock, 1662), the relevant passage (from which the phrase quoted above is a quotation) being on pp. 577-78.
- ²⁴ The phrase "[o]f sex regardless" may, however, refer to the lack of sexual ardour attributed to the Indians by the French naturalist Buffon, who is quoted to this effect in a work that lies centrally in the background of *Canada*: Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*. See the *Notes*, ed. William Peden (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1955), pp. 58-59 and, for Jefferson's use of the fact that Indian "women very frequently attend . . . the men in their parties of war and hunting" to refute Buffon's argument, p. 60. See also Robertson, *The History of America*, II, 65 f. Bayley's Mammoth is Jeffersonian.
- ²⁵ Bayley, *Canada*, p. 19, and see the definition of "horde" in the *OED*.
- ²⁶ John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey, 1957), p. 214.
- ²⁷ See Charlevoix, *Journal*, I, 58 and Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae*, pp. 578-79. Bayley illustrates Indian "superstition" by citing their "dread" of thunder and their "notions of religion" by deferring to their conception of "the Elysium beyond" as a place reached by way of a "plank impending o'er the gulf beneath . . ." (*Canada*, 105-08 and 107 n.). His probable sources for these ideas are, respectively, Weld, *Travels*, II, 285-86 and Charlevoix, *Journal*, II, 153-55.
- ²⁸ Henry James Pye, *The Progress of Refinement. A Poem. In Three Parts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1783), II, 706. Pye's poem appears to have exerted an influence on both Burwell and Goldsmith.
- ²⁹ *A General Description*, p. 47.
- ³⁰ See the *Autobiography of Oliver Goldsmith: a Chapter in Canada's Literary History*, ed. Wilfrid Myatt, 2nd ed. (Hantsport, N.S.: Lancelot, 1985), p. 34: "I was directed to read and study three works, Blackstone's Commentaries, Coke upon Littleton, and Tidd's practice."
- ³¹ *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 15th ed. (London: A. Strahan, 1809), II, 7.
- ³² See Goldsmith's *Autobiography*, pp. 42-43.
- ³³ Quoted in *Guerin v. The Queen*, [1984] 2 S.C.R. 335, at 378.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, at 377-78.
- ³⁵ Leslie Monkman, *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English-Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 133.
- ³⁶ *Malcolm's Katie: A Love Story*, ed. D. M. R. Bentley (London, Ont.: Canadian Poetry Press, 1987), p. 9 (II, 86-87). For the area north of Lake Erie as a "desert" see *Talbot Road*, 18.
- ³⁷ *Commentaries*, II, 7 and 9.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 8 n.
- ³⁹ Goldsmith, *Autobiography*, p. 42.