INITIATION AND QUEST

Early Canadian Journals

Maurice Hodgson

THE EARLIEST of the Canadian captives to write a narrative in English was Pierre-Esprit Radisson who was captured by the Iroquois near Trois Rivières about 1653. Idiosyncratic in style and probably imaginative in detail, Radisson's narrative set the pace for many later Captivity journals written to *épater les bourgeois* and designed to appeal to the popular notion of Indian brutality. Other Captivity journals written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries employed the same narrative traits that Radisson had found amused the ingenuous reader: John Gyles, captive of the Maliseet Indians in New Brunswick; Alexander Henry, captive for a year near Michilimackinac; and John Tanner, thirty years a captive in the vicinity of Lake Winnipeg. But, ultimately, it is not the recording of privation and suffering which impresses the reader, but the author's attempt to integrate into a savage society, which may succeed in lifting the struggle into the realm of the heroic and the tragic. Such is the nature of John Jewitt's narrative of his captivity with the Nootka Indians from 1803 to 1806.

THE COAST INDIANS who in the summer of 1803 massacred the crew of the merchant ship *Boston* had little similarity in custom to the Ojibbeway warriors who had captured John Tanner fourteen years before. The Nootka Indians, unlike the nomadic tribes described in the journals of Alexander Henry and John Tanner, were a settled population on the west coast of North America in a territory that had long had commerce with Spanish, English and American trading ships. The incident which precipitated the destruction of the *Boston* was an insult directed at a single chief, Maquina, whose power extended over fifteen hundred subjects. Few tribes in North America's interior, except perhaps the

Sioux on the plains, could muster such a population, and few leaders commanded such authority except under coalition. The journal of Jewitt, captive survivor of the massacre, thus provides a unique picture of a semi-civilized nation living in relative peace and a certain security, and the text itself escapes the destructive disunity of a journal such as Tanner's which records the day-to-day wanderings of a hunting tribe.

Only Hearne's account of his Indian mentor, Matonabbee, surpasses the portrait which Jewitt creates of Maquina in his journal of three years' captivity with the Nootka Indians; and, like Matonabbee, Maquina demonstrates monarchical foibles only too familiar to European journal writers. Jewitt had little intercourse with the common Indians, except for unpleasant experiences of their teasing him about his menial position in the chief's household. But there is an interdependence between the young English blacksmith who produces for his captor weapons beyond the capability of Indian craftsmen, and the chief who has constantly to guard his captive against the murderous jealousy of lesser chiefs. It was Jewitt's trade as armourer aboard the *Boston* which first caught Maquina's eye, days before he initiated the massacre, and it was his skill as blacksmith which suggested to Maquina that Jewitt would be worth preserving. The extent of his dependence upon Jewitt is manifested a short time after the massacre when Thompson, Jewitt's future fellow-captive, is discovered alive; by professing that Thompson is his father, Jewitt manages to save him. Jewitt's power over Maquina is again tested when Thompson refuses to bow to his captors and twice strikes Maquina's sons in rage, an offence normally punishable by death; only Jewitt's intervention saves his stubborn pseudo-father. As Jewitt settles down to what appears to be a lifetime of captivity, his journal gradually effaces its author, but reveals the Indian chief as an almost tragic figure, beset alternately by the desire to emulate and impress the European and by the need to maintain an image of integrity and strength for his tribe.

Throughout his journal, Jewitt professes a distaste for the savage society and a need to preserve the vestiges of Christianity amongst the heathen. His goal as captive, of course, is not to become like the savage, but to win his freedom and return to a Christian land. This he declares repeatedly in his journal, yet during his three years of captivity he achieves a fair degree of integration with the Indian world. Stubborn Thompson simply doubles his efforts to remain aloof, preferring death to servility; while Jewitt takes his first step towards integration in deciding to "adopt a conciliating conduct towards them . . . I sought to gain their goodwill by always endeavouring to assume a cheerful countenance . . . I resolved to learn

their language". From that point he vacillates: he is unable to prevent his own absorption into the tribe, and the moves he does make to maintain his identity as a civilized individual are nominal and ineffectual. First, he and Thompson try to eat as they are accustomed, but they are often unable to procure anything but Indian food and when they try to cook with salt Maquina arbitrarily forbids it. Secondly, they manage during the first part of their captivity to maintain their European dress at least until Jewitt marries and Maquina insists that they adopt the native life completely.

> Our principal consolation in this gloomy state, was to go on Sundays, whenever the weather would permit, to the borders of a fresh water pond, about a mile from the village, where after bathing, and putting on clean clothes, we would seat ourselves under the shade of a beautiful pine, while I read some chapters in the Bible, and the prayers appointed by our church for the day.

It is not until after Jewitt's marriage that he and Thompson are invited to a native religious celebration, and Jewitt seems to accept without fear of jeopardizing his own religious principles.

By the end of the second year, Jewitt at last identifies himself with the Indians, and though he recognizes their faults, he is prepared to forgive them for the massacre of his shipmates:

> For though they are a thievish race, yet I have no doubt that many of the melancholy disasters have principally arisen from the imprudent conduct of some of the captains and crews employed in this trade, in exasperating them by insulting, plundering, and even killing them on slight grounds.

The importance of Jewitt's sympathy becomes very apparent in the closing pages of the journal, when he pleads with the captain who rescues him to spare the natives' lives.

Jewitt's integration depended upon his good relations with Maquina's family, and it was facilitated by recognizing in Maquina characteristics above those of the common savage, and confusing his natural traits with European sophistication. This rationalization is apparent in his assessment of Maquina's favourable points:

> He was much neater both in person and eating than were the others, as was likewise the queen, owing no doubt to his intercourse with foreigners, which had given him ideas of cleanliness.

His fondness for Maquina and his family he shows particularly through his at-

tention to the young prince, Sat-sas-sak-sis, whom he adopts into his household following his marriage:

> I was also very careful to keep him free of vermin of every kind, washing him and combing his hair. These marks of attention were not only pleasing to the child . . . but was highly gratifying both to Maquina and his queen, who used to express much satisfaction at my care of him.

Considering the almost sacred position of the royal family, it is not likely that Maquina would allow Jewitt to have complete control over the prince unless the king realized the extent to which Jewitt accepted Indian life and thus was not liable to corrupt the child.

Two years of captivity weakened Jewitt's resolve to keep aloof from the native life, and his acceptance of Maquina's suggestion that he marry is an acknowledgment of defeat. It does not represent a sudden change in his attitude but symbolically marks a turning point in his life as a captive. The girl he chooses is a princess, by his own admission very beautiful, and light in complexion. The latter quality must have been the deciding point, as he had to justify his actions if ever he were to return to civilization. The marriage is as satisfactory as could be expected under the circumstances, and for his final winter in captivity he manages to achieve a degree of domesticity which could only be accomplished after the realization that he himself was virtually an Indian. However, a severe illness that spring gives him an excuse to send his wife back to her people, and in allowing this, Maquina starts to lose his hold, and Jewitt starts to release himself from the savage bonds as though his capitulation had only been a momentary weakness. His recollection of his parting with his wife, by the time he wrote his narrative, had become divorced from emotion and she had resumed the guise of a pathetic savage:

> Though I rejoiced at her departure, I was greatly affected with the simple expressions of regard for me, and could not but feel strongly interested in this poor girl . . . after her departure, I requested Maquina, that as I had parted with my wife, he would permit me to resume my European dress.

Maquina does, and it is from this point that he seems to give up hope of retaining Jewitt; only a few months later the brig *Lydia* appears and Jewitt is released.

As in other Captivity journals, there is no attempt on Jewitt's part to systematize scientific and sociological observation; however, of all Canadian Captivity journals his is the one with the greatest literary potentialities. It presents a large

degree of dramatic unity, since he had the advantage of involvement in a settled society; it is the episodic adventures which the other captives undergo while tied to a nomadic people that from the start destroy any natural unity there might be in their journals. However, Jewitt himself seems aware of the necessity of direction, plot and suspense; and one of the few adventures prior to his capture that he recalls, the destruction of the sailor's archetypal symbol of luck, points forebodingly to the future:

> After passing the Cape when the sea had become calm saw great numbers of Albatrosses, a large brown and white bird of the goose kind, one of which Captain Salter shot, whose wings measured from their extremities fifteen feet.

It is Captain Salter himself who is the direct cause of the massacre when he later insults Maquina at Nootka. Jewitt is a conscious and capable artist working with material which provides him with the necessary dramatic unity.

In spirit Jewitt is in touch with the prevailing Romantic movement, and his descriptions of the New World are not unlike those of Chateaubriand who was writing at the same time. It is the early romanticism of Rousseau, Chateaubriand and Goldsmith: a charming eighteenth-century Nature created by God for a simple, appreciative human race. There is nothing in the other Captivity journals to compare with Jewitt's description of his religious retreat by the inland pond, or of the Indians' winter bivouac on the coast north of Nootka:

> Tashees is pleasantly situated and in a most secure position from the winter storms; in a small vale or hollow on the south shore, at the foot of a mountain. The spot on which it stands is level, and the soil very fine, the country and its vicinity abounding with the most romantic views, charmingly diversified, and fine streams of water falling in beautiful cascades from the mountains.

The concept of a provident and benevolent Nature, essential to the Romantic, was very much a part of Jewitt's literary philosophy, no matter how embryonic that might be. His desire to *épater les bourgeois* is obviously not meant to do so through horrific description, but rather as Chateaubriand did, with concepts novel to the reader, but pacific in nature. It is the tradition of Defoe as well. Like Defoe, Jewitt chooses to pose as the practical man, aware of providential Nature and the hand behind that nature; but the puritan Defoe speaks also for self-sufficiency, and as Crusoe survives through ingenuity so Jewitt emulates him. One of the

first tasks that Crusoe sets himself is to strip the wrecked ship of all usable items, and Jewitt follows suit. When Crusoe's ship is finally destroyed by the sea he is left to survive by his practical sense; and after a native Nootkan inadvertently burns the *Boston*, Jewitt, too, is dependent on his own devices. Thus, weeks after their capture, the illiterate Thompson insists that Jewitt keep a journal and that he, Thompson, will supply his blood for ink if necessary; Crusoe-like, Jewitt experiments and finds a solution:

> On the first of June I accordingly commenced a regular diary . . . and after making a number of trials I at length succeeded in obtaining a very tolerable ink by boiling the juice of the blackberry with the mixture of finally powdered charcoal . . . as for quills I found no difficulty in procuring them . . . while a large clam furnished me with an ink stand.

Each writer of a Captivity journal certainly has the material to create a work of some drama, though most of them do not have the native ability to develop the material satisfyingly. Jewitt exhibits, with his education and his apparent sympathy with the contemporary spirit, the highest literary potentialities. Dramatically the capture and release of the captive would seem to supply the most likely material; Tanner has not the literary ability to exploit them, while Jewitt, though he creates a mediocre capture sequence, concludes with a masterful description of his final deception of the natives. The deception involves Maquina, and through Jewitt's handling of the narrative to that point, Maquina evolves as a sympathetic character. The deception, therefore, appears gross, as Maquina must run the risk of forfeiting his life in order to preserve Jewitt. The reaction of the tribe, despondent and powerless to aid its leader in the hands of the white men, is not unlike a Sophoclean chorus watching inert as the inevitable tragedy draws to a close. As Maquina is held on board the brig as a hostage, Jewitt returns to the shore to collect the *Boston*'s gear, and though greeted by spears, he is certain that with their chief in the captain's hand the Indians will not harm him.

In his three years of captivity, he has become accustomed to the Indian customs and the Indian psyche, and fortunately for him, unlike captives with more volatile captors, he is not harmed. As he boards the canoe to return to the ship he is intercepted by the prince, and later he records the expression of the child's divided loyalty:

> As I was going into the canoe, little Sat-sas-sak-sis, who could not bear to part with me, asked me, with an affectionate simplicity, since I was going away to leave him, if the white men would not let his father come on shore, and not kill him. I told him not to be concerned, for that no one should injure his father.

The tragedy averted, Maquina greets Jewitt as he boards the ship. Then, after the chief is given presents by the captain and prepares to return to his people, he acknowledges Jewitt's deception, but also his own cunning when he declares

> that he should never take a letter of recommendation from anyone, or even trust himself on board a vessel unless I [Jewitt] was there. Then grasping both my hands, with much emotion, while the tears trickled down his cheeks, he bade me farewell, and stepped into the canoe, which immediately paddled him on shore.

To the last, Maquina acts in the style of the eighteenth-century concept of the "noble savage" and he remains to the end more European than Indian, just as the young princess is pictured with his archly civilized "affectionate simplicity". Doubtless the feeling that lingered with Jewitt as he sailed from Nootka was that of a touching parting with his foster family, but the sense of identification did not pass beyond this admirable "European" family to the natives *in toto* or to the savage way of life.

THE CAPTIVITY JOURNAL obviously comes near the genre of the novel and consequently this type of narrative — at least the better examples of it — can be examined in terms of prose fiction. However, the narratives of quest — the Exploration journals such as those of Alexander Mackenzie, David Thompson and Samuel Hearne — have a purpose in which the literary value can only be considered as secondary to the description of the quest. But, as each is a unique attempt to reach a goal, the universality of theme which this suggests — adventure, quest, initiation, suffering, privation — attests to the immediacy of these journals as much to the author's contemporaries as to the twentieth-century reader. Few Exploration journals have enjoyed so continuous and so deserved a popularity as Samuel Hearne's journal which was first published in 1795.

After the French were defeated in the Seven Years War the English once again showed some interest in expanding trade, and this took the novel form of scientific and commercial speculation over copper ore brought to the Prince of Wales Fort by some Chipewyan Indians. After two abortive attempts, Samuel Hearne reached the mouth of the Coppermine River in 1771, and Hearne's journals and maps proved him not only able to expand the trade, but also competent as a surveyor, cartographer, anthropologist and an exceptional narrative writer.

> Mr. Norton was an Indian; he was born at Prince of Wales' fort, but had been in England nine years, and considering the small sum that had been expended

> on his education, he had made some progress in literature. At his return to Hudson's Bay he entered into all the abominable vices of his countrymen. He kept for his own use five or six of the finest Indian girls . . . took every means in his power to prevent any European from having intercourse with the women of the country . . . and showed more respect to one of their dogs, than he ever did to his first officer.

Hearne's years as a sailor aboard the frigate *Bideford* during the Seven Years War had inured him to privation, which stood him in good stead during his trip to the Coppermine river; but it could not prepare him to endure the profligate half-breed Moses Norton, governor of Prince of Wales fort. Son of a former governor and a Southern Indian woman, of a tribe that Hearne rated as "the most debauched wretches under the sun", Norton was a certain antidote to Hearne's remaining at the fort. Although Hearne was posted at the fort specifically to undertake an expedition to the area that had yielded some interesting samples of copper, he was probably not expected to show much initiative. However, faced with a lieutenancy under Norton, Hearne chose the uncertainty of the wilderness in preference to the certain hell of working under so notorious a superior. Without this explanation, it would be difficult to account for the alacrity of Hearne's repeated attempts to reach the Coppermine river.

Hearne's first voyage carried him only a few hundred miles west of Hudson's Bay; with the desertion of his guide he had to return to the fort with his two unhappy European comrades barely a month after his departure. Then, undaunted, or not wishing to remain with Norton, he struck out again within two months of his previous failure. The second expedition was hardly more auspicious, though he had learnt from the first and took no encumbering Europeans. Thus he had taken his first step toward integration and towards psychological captivity to the Indians. Though free of Europeans, he was not yet free of European inexperience and inappropriate equipment:

> . . . what considerably increased the handicap was . . . the coarseness of our lodging . . . the tent we had with us was not only too large and unfit for barren ground service, where no poles were to be got, but we were obliged to cut it up for shoes.

On his final successful trip with the guide Matonabbee, he would learn to prepare his tent poles before entering the Barren Ground, and also to concur with Matonabbee's dictum that they be attended by many women who "were made for labour; one of them can carry, or haul as much as two men can do. They also pitch our tents, make and mend our clothing, keep us warm at night. . . ."

For the time being he was still at the mercy of Norton's ineffectual guides, for he did not meet the fabled Matonabbee until September of 1770, as he was returning to the fort after breaking his quadrant. Then, mysteriously appearing from the uninhabited west at a point when once again Hearne was being deserted by his guides, the "stranger" Matonabbee proceeded to enliven Hearne's travels by his company and his encouragement. So much so that Hearne's initial impression, "the courteous behaviour of the stranger struck me very sensibly", contains an epithet that Europeans would hardly associate with a savage. Subtly the Indian life, and specifically this Indian chief, was absorbing Hearne.

Matonabbee, always free with his advice, diagnosed the reason for Hearne's repeated failure in terms that Hearne could appreciate and second, the desertion of his guides and, principally, the lack of women. The latter was antithetical to the views of governor Norton, but by this time Hearne was prepared for his third venture, and Matonabbee and his ideas had gained ascendancy. Scarcely two weeks after returning to the fort from an arduous seven-month journey, Hearne commenced his third and final expedition. The trip took eighteen months, and during that time Hearne had no intercourse with a European.

From the time of departure, Hearne anticipates the dictates of a later Arctic explorer, Steffanson, by allowing himself to be directed by the natives and their experience with the country. Soon he appears to have no authority; at least he does not assert himself.

> On the nineteenth, we pursued our coarse in the North West quarter; and, after leaving the above-mentioned creek, with empty bellies, till the twenty-seventh . . . it was the twenty-seventh before the meat was brought to the tents. Here the Indians proposed to continue one day, under the pretence of repairing their sledges and snow shoes; but from the little attention they paid to those repairs, I was led to think that the want of food was the chief thing that detained them, as they never ceased eating the whole day.

Thus with some humour Hearne describes his capitulation; soon afterwards he shows his complete dependence upon Matonabbee's judgment when the party spends a week impounding deer before attempting the traverse over the barren ground.

The release from his responsibilities as leader allows Hearne's sensitive powers of observation to roam not only over the natural life that he encounters, but also over the Indians themselves. The Northern Indians strike him as the finest he knows, and his sympathies lie with the neglected women; he sees them in general with humour:

> Ask a Northern Indian, what is beauty? he will answer, a broad flat face, small eyes, high cheek-bones, three or four broad black lines a-cross each cheek, a low forehead, a large broad chin, a clumsy hook-nose, a tawny hide, and breasts hanging down to the belt.

But individually he portrays them with much feeling:

> The instant, however, the poor woman was delivered, which was not until she had suffered all the pains usually felt on those occasions for nearly fifty-two hours, the signal was made for moving when the poor creature took her infant on her back and set out with the rest of the company; and although another person had the humanity to haul the sledge for her, (for one day only) she was obliged to carry a considerable load beside her little charge, and was frequently obliged to wade knee-deep in water and wet snow.

His deepest sympathy remains with Matonabbee, whose nobility and sensitivity make him an easy mark, despite his exalted tribal position, for warriors stronger or less responsible than himself. Throughout the trip Matonabbee is dogged by problems involving his eight wives: the youngest and most comely elopes, and another is forcibly taken from him. The Indian chief is disconsolate and, strangely foretelling his final fatal action years later, Hearne notes that "he [Matonabbee] took this affront so much to heart, especially as it was offered in my presence, that he almost determined not to proceed further." Matonabbee's concern over Hearne's reactions is only outweighed by the latter's dependence upon his guide, and in a curiously European manner he appeals to Matonabbee's honour to continue the voyage. Hearne's integration into Indian life has a parallel in the Indian's adoption of European custom; he agrees to continue.

Hearne, the consummate story-teller, not only builds his narrative towards the goal of his explorations, but also parallels his quest with the aim of the Indians — the destruction of the Eskimo encampment at the mouth of the Coppermine river. As the party approaches the river its numbers increase, as does the certainty of executing its design. Hearne's reaction initially is to condemn the Indians' design, but by that point the success of his venture is so tied to the Indians that when his hesitancy to attack the Eskimos is interpreted as cowardice, his own design is jeopardized. Dramatically he acquiesces, again realizing the unique and dangerous position he holds:

> I never afterwards ventured to interfere with any of their warplans. Indeed, when I came to consider seriously, I saw evidently it was the highest folly for an individual like me, and in my situation, to attempt to turn the current of a national prejudice . . .

Virtually a captive of the Indians by this time, Hearne is forced not only to condone the inevitable massacre of the Eskimos, but, like other captives, he takes an active part, if largely a defensive one, in the attack.

> ... I determined to accompany them, telling them at the same time, that I would not have any hand in the murder they were about to commit, unless I found it necessary for my own safety. The Indians were not displeased at this proposal; one of them immediately fixed me a spear, and another lent me a broad bayonet...

Hearne minutely describes the preparations for the attack, both the physical and superstitious, as well as his own trepidation. The actual battle, as expected, is a tragic farce. The sleeping Eskimos are quickly massacred as they flee their tents, and, though other captives and explorers recount more numerically impressive massacres, Hearne's involvement is so personal and the effect of his description so real that his writing transcends the involvement he so assiduously rejected earlier. The climax of the battle, the murder of the young Eskimo girl who seeks his protection, is a powerful symbol of Hearne's guilt over his approbation of the massacre:

> ... when the first spear was struck into her side she fell down at my feet, and twisted around my legs, so that it was with difficulty that I could disengage myself from her dying grasps... even at this hour I cannot reflect on the transactions of that horrid day without shedding tears.

Hearne's epilogue to this tale of the Indians' cruelty is perhaps less severe, but so pathetic and final as to maintain the level of the narrative of the earlier butchery. An old and blind Eskimo woman, oblivious to what had passed a few hundred yards away, was fishing by a waterfall; turning to greet her supposed relative, she was instead "transfixed to the ground in a few seconds, and butchered in a most savage manner."

It is doubtful if Hearne could have achieved the degree of integration that he did without the catalytic effect of Matonabbee's presence. So great was the communion between these two men that when La Pérouse captured Prince of Wales fort in 1782 and Hearne, then governor, surrendered to the French commander and was carried off a prisoner, Matonabbee quietly hanged himself. Whether this final act of an Indian still in the prime of his life was through sorrow or shame, Hearne notes that "he is the only Northern Indian who, that I have ever heard, put an end to his own existence". Probably no Canadian explorer depended so much upon one Indian for the success of his venture, and probably also no Indian exists in early Canadian journals with so dichotomic a nature: so split between the ideals of the Indian and the white man, and yet so dedicated to the execu-

tion of the wishes of both races. It is impossible to understand the success of Hearne's last expedition without appreciating the degree to which Hearne allowed himself to be physically and psychologically captured by the Indians, and more specifically by his attachment to, and affection for, Matonabbee. Hearne's journal, as a consequence, is the product of a strong sense of purpose and an inquisitive spirit; of a unique degree of integration into a voyage and with the only people who were a real part of the territory he covered.

As EXCEPTIONAL JOURNAL WRITERS, Jewitt and Hearne exemplify the best characteristics in the genre of travel literature; equally they demonstrate how all travel journals, whether of Initiation or Exploration, are dichotomic in their intrinsic nature — at once purposeful, direct and immediate, yet moving into realms of the archetype: the quest, self-preservation, alienation, and search for identification. Each Explorer's journal, then, starts with either a scientific, geographic, or commercial purpose, just as each Captivity journal commences with the single theme of preservation; but both, depending upon the nature of the individual, develop to some degree toward universality, toward themes essential to the human situation. Thus, every journal reflects the spirit of altercation, between immediacy and universality, between its scientific or commercial form and its artistic form. The more readable journals, those which transcend their immediate and contemporary purpose, like Jewitt's and Hearne's, unconsciously approach the genre of the novel, and thus can be judged both in their actual and their archetypal categories.

Overt heroism may be accepted, even applauded, in the literature of heroic ages, but in more sober and rationalistic periods the reader distrusts such an approach and his criticism is liable to be cynical and damning. Few Canadian journal writers could be accused of this type of self-sufficient heroism; if anything, they are only too aware of their own physical and psychological weaknesses. Their heroism, then is of the kind with which identification is possible; the essentially weak or very ordinary man forced by circumstances to endure and to exceed his own expectations. Heroism, in such conditions, becomes admirable, personal and, ultimately, real.

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