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## The Literary Debate over "the Indian" in the Nineteenth Century

SHERRY SULLIVAN

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In recent years, substantial critical attention has focused on the vogue of "the Indian" in American literature during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have found this literature interesting, not primarily for its literary merits (outside of Cooper and a few others), nor as a source of information on Native American life and character, but rather for what it reveals about white American culture of the time and the underlying values and ideas which gave rise to and supported white attitudes toward the Indian. Thus, one finds studies with titles like *The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*; *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier*; *Ignoble Savage: American Literary Racism, 1790-1890*; and *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building*. All of these works draw upon literature about the Indian in important ways to help support an analysis of white American culture and national character.<sup>2</sup>

An accurate and convincing analysis depends at least partly upon a complete survey and a balanced interpretation of the literature; one that is sensitive to the literary and cultural contexts in which it was produced. But most current studies of the period, as one might deduce from the titles listed here, lay undue stress on literature hostile to the Indian. They suggest that the small

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and harshly negative body of "Indian hater" fiction is representative of the whole, and that the "metaphysics of Indian hating" which this fiction embodies is an accurate reflection of nineteenth-century white ideas, values, and beliefs. Indian hater fiction, however, is far from representative. It is a minority and extreme genre of literature that arose and flourished in large part to counter the sentimental and Romantic views which prevailed at the time. In fact, a close examination of Indian hater fiction reveals that there was not a broad negative consensus of views about the Indian, as recent scholars have claimed, but rather a wide divergence and a persistent debate.

The contemporary notion of negative consensus derives ultimately from the first and most influential of the above-mentioned studies, Roy Harvey Pearce's *The Savages of America*. Pearce argues that literature about the Indian from approximately the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century—indeed, all writing about the Indian produced during this period—was governed by the single, comprehensive idea which he terms "savagism." Savagism subsumed the "either-or convention of the noble and the ignoble savage" into one "larger, more inclusive convention," holding that the Indian, whether negatively or positively viewed, was all that white Americans were not and should not be. He was historically anterior to civilized society, and consequently morally inferior to it—what America had been in the past, but must eventually grow up and away from. Thus, the idea incorporated both quasi-primitivist and antiprimitivist impulses; sentiments of sympathy and admiration as well as hatred and fear. At the same time, it helped explain and even justify the disturbing fact of the Indian's destruction before the advance of civilization.<sup>3</sup>

On the face of it, Pearce's argument appears sound. Although it stresses an inherently negative perception of the Indian as alien and "other," it does acknowledge the differences between views within the controlling idea of savagism. As a generalization, however, it does not give a very clear sense of what or how extensive these differences were. It regards the literature from without and above, and from the standpoint of the twentieth century. By emphasizing the basic consistency of the nineteenth century's interpretation of the Indian, the underlying agreement between obviously conflicting views, it blurs important distinctions and merges all into an apparent consensus.<sup>4</sup> Moreover,

when Pearce says that the double (noble/ignoble) image of the Indian was resolved into one image, that comprehended by the idea of savagism, he means in fact an image almost indistinguishable from the conventional antiprimitivist one. His analysis fails to give any adequate sense of the number and persistence of works largely sympathetic to the Indian, or of their significance.

What is needed is to supplement Pearce's sweeping and ahistorical analysis with a close examination of this literature, one that moves from the literature towards the theory, rather than the reverse; one that considers the literature in the terms in which it saw itself and was perceived at the time. Indian hater fiction is a particularly suitable choice for this examination because it is often regarded both by contemporary scholars and the general public as representative of all nineteenth-century literature about the Indian. Moreover, it is clearly the embodiment of Pearce's idea of savagism carried to its logical extreme. Pearce implies as much in *Savages of America*, where he stresses the antiprimitivist aspects of the literature in general, and then focuses his discussion of the fiction on the figure of the Indian hater. Later, he makes the point explicit. In the final chapter of the revised edition of his study, he declares that Melville's harshly satirical portrait of author James Hall (the most prolific writer of Indian hater fiction) in *The Confidence Man* may be regarded as "an ideal type, a possible author of all the writings which have been examined in this study." Melville's version of Hall's Indian hater likewise may be regarded "as a composite, perfected version of those writings."<sup>5</sup>

Indian hater fiction is named for its central character, a frontiersman who was once the victim of Indian savagery and has since become an obsessive hater and killer of Indians. It arose in the late 1820s and flourished, in a modest way, alongside other Indian fiction until the 1850s, when it disappeared into the subliterate blood-and-thunder world of dime novels. It was almost invariably antiprimitivist—that is, wholly antagonistic to the Indian, and consequently fundamentally sympathetic to the Indian hater. (A survey of the field reveals eleven novels and slightly more tales that feature Indian hater figures; only three among them can be considered in any way sympathetic to the Indian and thus antagonistic to the Indian hater.)<sup>6</sup> But while Indian hater fiction may well satisfy twentieth-century notions of the nineteenth century's understanding of the Indian, a close "in-

terior" examination leads to a very different interpretation of its importance: not as representative or central but as one side of an ongoing debate, both within and beyond the realm of literature, over the true nature and role of "the Indian" in America.

## I

One might, of course, argue that there had always been a debate of sorts over the Indian's true nature and his meaning for white civilized man, at least ever since European explorers recorded their conflicting impressions of the New World and its inhabitants. But Americans had rarely participated in this debate. From the earliest settlements until the final decade of the eighteenth century (even as primitivist sentiment grew in Europe), white Americans generally agreed on how the Indian was to be regarded: as enemy. When he appeared at all in their writings, it was as the embodiment of evil; his life and character were seen as antithetical to the white man's; his relationship with the white man was almost invariably hostile. Symbolically, he was portrayed as a force of death and destruction that white civilization must struggle against in order to survive and prosper. This thoroughly antiprimitivist view passed from Puritan writings into the captivity narratives of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and from there into the belletristic literature of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and beyond. It is to this tradition that Indian hater fiction clearly belongs.<sup>7</sup>

In the early nineteenth century, however, there was a decided shift of opinion under the impetus of Romanticism from abroad and cultural nationalism at home (spurred by a recognition of the imminent defeat and ultimate destruction of the Indian race by white civilization). The Indian became less an object of fear and disgust than a source of both pity and admiration. In literature, this new attitude at first cautiously challenged, then rivaled, and then overwhelmed the conventional antiprimitivist view.

The new attitude is most apparent in the many Indian verse narratives and plays of the period, where American writers simply drew directly from the European primitivist tradition for their Indian characters. Between *Yamodyen* in 1820 and *Hiawatha* in 1855, for example, Pearce finds some thirteen narrative poems that celebrate noble savage Indians, grieve for the wrongs they

have suffered, and mourn their fate; three antiprimitivist examples, he notes, "represent distinctly minority views." Among the flood of Indian plays produced, the immensely popular "Metamora" (first performed in 1829) may be regarded as typical. Its powerful and sentimental portrait of the doomed heroic chief was probably responsible, Pearce says, for some thirty-five similar pieces performed over the next twenty years.<sup>8</sup>

In fiction, sympathy for the Indian also predominated, although Indian fiction was rarely as purely primitivistic as Indian verse narratives or drama. Indeed, it is here that Pearce makes his claim for an inherently antiprimitivistic savagism which "absorbed and reconstituted" the idea of the noble savage. Clear evidence for Pearce's claim is lacking, however. In a survey of eighteen Indian novels published between 1820 and 1830, I find fourteen to be fundamentally sympathetic to the Indian, drawing heavily upon primitivist conventions for their depiction of Indian life and character. Only four are distinctly antiprimitivist. A survey of tales from the same decade, though perhaps less complete, yields similar results: thirteen are primarily sympathetic, two are antiprimitivist (the first Indian hater tales published), and one atypical collection of sketches is not clearly of either camp.<sup>9</sup>

Comments on Indian novels by a major critic of the period further support the impression of a predominantly sympathetic Indian fiction. In his review of *The Red Rover*, written in 1828 for the *North American Review*, Grenville Mellen deplors the low quality of novel writing in America, attributing this to an excessive dependence upon native materials, particularly the Indian. "The Indian chieftain is the first character upon the canvas or the carpet," Mellen sighs; he then goes on to characterize him as he typically appears: "a bronze noble of nature . . . made to talk like Ossian for whole pages." He continues:

After we have painted him in the vivid and prominent colors which seem necessary to represent him amidst his pines and waterfalls—after we have set him before our readers with his gorgeous crown of feathers, his wampum, and his hunting-bow, it would seem that we have done as well as we could for him." [Mellen prefers the ignoble savages of Charles Brockden Brown].<sup>10</sup>

By 1830, then, scores of novels, tales, narrative poems, and dramas featuring attractive and sympathetic Indian characters were pouring from the presses. As a group, such works were not wholly primitivistic, to be sure; they were somewhat ambivalent (antiprimitivist works were adamantly unambivalent about the Indian). Usually these works included both ignoble and noble savages, as well as the darker scenes of frontier conflict; but always they emphasized the sympathetic and admirable Indian characters who were the emotional or thematic centers of the tales, or closely aligned with the white heroes or heroines in important ways. Certainly, they bodied forth an image of the Indian that was diametrically opposed to the antiprimitivist image which had earlier dominated the literature. The description of Burning Arrow, Iroquois warrior in James Athearn Jones's novel *Haverhill* (1831), is typical. Burning Arrow, declares Jones's narrator,

was the noblest specimen I ever saw of these wild men . . . the most perfect in form, and at the same time, the most sinewy, of anything I had ever seen wearing the features of a human being. His forehead was high and broad—the distinguishing characteristic of his race—his skin of the colour of bronze, his teeth white and even, and his eyes filled with an expression unusual to those of his people. I had read much of the perfection of art exhibited at the Apollo Belvedere, and other pieces of ancient statuary, but I believe I saw their equal, if not for beauty, at least for symmetry of limb, in this Iroquois warrior (Vol. 2, p. 16).

The Indian in these works was shown to be attractive and fundamentally like the civilized white man—even superior in some respects—in character as well as in appearance. He was gentle natured and loving in private life, stern and stoic in public, and bold and fearless in war—all admirable traits in civilized and savage alike. Differences were attributed to education and environment; negative traits were objectively examined and carefully explained from the point of view of Indian culture (usually as the natural response to white mistreatment). The Indian's relationship with the white man was shown to be beneficent as well as hostile—often beneficent before it was hostile, as in the famous case of Chief Logan, prototype in the literature of the Noble

Savage betrayed. He was friend and ally, protector and benefactor to the white man, just as he had been to the first settlers. Symbolically, he played a very positive role indeed, for while the antiprimitivist notion of him as a force of death and destruction was retained (through the presence of ignoble savage enemies), it was emotionally outweighed in the end by his significance as the embodiment of primitive virtues—the virtues of the Romantic ideal of natural man. These include the physical strength and skills demanded by wilderness life, the sense of pride and the free, independent spirit such a life developed, and, most important, honesty, fidelity, and a certain moral innocence and purity of heart. In other words, the Indian for these writers was not an enemy to conquer but a friend and ally to embrace and an ideal with which to identify their sense of a distinctive national identity.<sup>11</sup>

Both those writers who presented this image and those Romantic critics who supported it were well aware of coming up against the traditional—one might say indigenous—view of the Indian, especially in the early years—and they often argued explicitly against its influence. In "Traits of Indian Character," Irving declared that "writers have been too prone to indulge in vulgar prejudice and passionate exaggeration instead of the candid temper of true philosophy." Cooper's *Leatherstocking*, who spends an inordinate amount of time explaining and defending Indian character and habits to displaced representatives of civilized society in the wilderness, serves the same rhetorical purpose.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, there was hardly the consensus of attitude toward the Indian in literature which the theory of an underlying adherence to savagism might suggest. Writers emphasized either a sympathetic or an antiprimitivist point of view (very few wrote works in which one or the other is not clearly favored). Furthermore, by the late 1820s antiprimitivism had become a minority view everywhere but in the West, its negative image called into question by the great outpouring of sympathetic literature and the whole Romantic movement which lay behind it.

Against this historical background, the rather sudden and aggressive appearance of Indian hater fiction around 1830 takes on a different meaning from that usually offered. It was not the embodiment of all writing about the Indian, but a kind of literary backlash, a reaction against the Romantic vogue of the Indian



which then prevailed. By focusing on the Indian hater as a victim of Indian savagery, authors of Indian hater fiction countered the sentimental excesses of Romanticism and argued for what they considered to be a more objective, realistic appraisal of the Indian—as seen from the frontier. In narrative content and point of view, in theme and often in structure, they argued for a return to the traditional, antiprimitivist view of “the Indian.”

## II

The narrative content of all Indian hater stories follows the same general outline and presents many of the same dramatic details. It concerns the terrible experience of a frontiersman who has witnessed the brutal slaying of his wife and children and the destruction of his home by Indians. In some works, such as James Kirke Paulding's *The Dutchman's Fireside* and Timothy Flint's “The Indian Fighter,” he is the only survivor of the massacre of an entire frontier community. Overwhelmed by grief and rage, he has sworn eternal vengeance on the race and has since spent his life obsessively killing every Indian he comes across or can track down. A deranged and solitary figure, his insane mission has cut him off from his own race and paradoxically forced him to become like the enemy he hunts—in appearance, deed, and ultimate fate. Yet, he is made to seem tragic in the literature by virtue of the enormous burden of suffering he bears (which even killing Indians cannot ease) and by the moral purgatory to which his actions doom him.

Indeed, both explicit sympathy for the Indian hater and implicit tolerance of his activities are important characteristics of the genre that serve to strengthen the antiprimitivist view it promotes. Although the Indian hater may be criticized for his abandonment of civilized, Christian values in his chosen life, he is still invariably regarded with pity and understanding. He may even be praised for his wilderness skills, his courage and endurance, his single-minded devotion to his task, which (in some works) help to make the borders safe for white settlers. And while his bloody deeds are rarely condoned, they are shown to be the natural and sometimes even justifiable response to the far greater crime he has suffered at the hands of his enemies.

Such a sympathetic rendering of the Indian hater's life argues effectively enough against a too-Romantic view of the Indian and Indian-white relations. But the argument is made still stronger by the addition of other characteristic details. The Indian hater is almost without exception the innocent victim of Indian savagery; in no way did he provoke the attack which destroyed his home and family, except by being a representative of the settler community. In many works, he had been particularly friendly with the Indians—sometimes the same Indians who later attacked. In Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Woods*, for instance, the Quaker-turned-Indian-hater Nathan Slaughter had innocently offered his rifle as a gesture of trust and peace to Indians who later used it to murder all the members of his family.

Also reinforcing the notion of the Indian hater's innocence is the common device of presenting the attack itself against a background of pastoral peace and domestic harmony, and describing it as a scene of appalling carnage and brutality. An extremely vivid, yet typical, example appears in a tale by James Hall entitled "The Pioneer." Here a reformed Indian hater narrator recounts the scene he witnessed as a child, when his family and other members of a frontier community emigrating further west were trapped in an Indian ambush. His father had been killed and his sister taken into captivity in an earlier Indian attack; now from a safe distance he sees his mother and uncle cut down by "a hellish band of savage warriors." The description must be quoted in full:

We came near enough to see the bodies of our friends stretched lifeless on the ground, or struggling in the agonies of death—surrounded by the monsters, who were still beating them with clubs, and gratifying their demonic thirst for blood in gashing with their knives the already mutilated corpses. Never did I behold a scene of such horror: language has no power to describe it, nor the mind capacity to obliterate its impressions. Men, women, and children, were alike the victims of an indiscriminating carnage. The hell hounds were literally tearing them in pieces—exulting, shouting, smearing themselves with blood, and trampling on the remains of their wretched victims.<sup>13</sup>

One may note that these details were part of the conventional image of the ignoble savage and had appeared regularly in the captivity narratives of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when writers could assume popular concurrence with their anti-primitivist interpretation of the Indian. Similar descriptions also appeared in sympathetic literature of the nineteenth century (e.g., the Ft. Henry massacre in *The Last of the Mohicans*), though to a lesser degree, and always outweighed by the emotional appeal of a contrasting sympathetic image. In nineteenth-century Indian hater fiction, however, they have taken on a new, aggressive note of defiance; it seems clear that they are being used defensively and rhetorically to prove a point in the face of growing popular sympathy for the Indian. This aim is most apparent in *Nick of the Woods*, where Bird follows a particularly gruesome description of Indian savagery with the strident declaration:

Such is the red-man of America, whom courage—an attribute of all lovers of blood, whether man or animal, misfortune—the destiny, in every quarter of the globe, of every barbarous race, which contact with a civilized one cannot civilize; and the dreams of poets and sentimentalists have invested with a character wholly incompatible with his condition.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps the best example of the use of rhetorical devices to convert the sympathetic reader to an antiprimitivist understanding of the Indian is in Hall's "The Indian Hater," which demonstrates a skillful manipulation of point of view. The process bears close examination. Hall tells his tale from the perspective of a genteel white narrator, a traveler from the East who encounters an Indian hater on his tour of the western country. The narrator is highly critical of the Indian hater, one Samuel Monson, when he sees him in a frontier village store and learns from others that he kills Indians. He is even more shocked to find that Monson's bloody activities are tolerated by the local populace: "But the wickedness of such unprovoked murder—" he cries, "the shame—the breach of law, the violation of hospitality!"<sup>15</sup> Shortly thereafter, when a "kind and worthy" Indian guide he employs (whose civilized traits "raised him above the ordinary savage") is shot and killed before his eyes by this same Indian hater, the narrator is outraged. And when Monson comes boldly forward to claim the deed, "his hand imbrued in blood, his soul freshly

steeped in murder," the narrator threatens to have him arrested and punished for his crime (pp. 148-149).

Then, as Monson begins to reveal the story of his life and how he became a hater and killer of Indians, by way of justifying what he has done, the narrator's sympathies are aroused and his attitude completely changes. He notes for his readers the choked voice, sudden pauses, and flowing tears of the bereaved husband and father recounting the cruel murder of his family. (At one point he describes Monson as "the man of sorrows" who "paused in his tragical narrative, overcome by the tender and terrible recollection that it called forth" [pp. 150-151].) Soon all criticism is suspended, the Indian guide is quite forgotten, and the narrator stands silent and awed before the enormity of the Indian hater's suffering and grief, still freshly felt. The last words of the story are appropriately left entirely to Monson, and they reiterate its theme: "When all that you cherish is torn from you in one moment, by hellish ruffians," he says to the narrator, "condemn me if you can: but not till then" (p. 151).

This simple sentiment is the theme of all of Hall's Indian hater writings, and indeed the theme—at least implicitly—of all Indian hater fiction: that it is much too easy amidst the comforts and securities of civilized society to idealize the primitive Indian we know nothing of, to bemoan his passing, and to condemn the white frontiersman as the agent of his destruction; that to get a more accurate understanding of the Indian, of his true nature and role, we must put ourselves in the place of the victim of Indian savagery and see the Indian from his point of view.

The antiprimitivist point of view in Indian hater fiction is frequently promoted through narrative structure, as well. Again, "The Indian Hater" serves as the best example, where structure assumes the form of a kind of dialectic drama. The first half of the story presents the narrator's original sympathetic attitude. His early criticism of the Indian hater's fanaticism, his moral disgust at frontier white society's tolerance of it, his praise of the "civilized" Indian who guides him into the wilderness, all culminate in his shock and outrage at Monson's killing of the Indian. The second half of the story presents Monson's defense of the act. The initial tragedy which gave rise to Monson's hatred, his vow of revenge, the obsessive killing which after many years still brings no relief from the grief of his loss, all culminate in his dramatic closing plea for sympathy without judgment. Hall's aim

is to force the reader, who is (like the narrator) predisposed to sympathize with the Indian guide and criticize the Indian-hating frontiersman, to shift with him from the first to the second perspective. At the very least, Hall's device obliges the reader to see the inadequacy of a too-sentimental attachment to the idea of the noble savage and a too-hasty condemnation of his white frontiersman enemy. It obliges him to face the ugly facts of frontier reality as the antiprimitivist perceives them.

Other Indian hater stories also use the technique of dialectic argument for the same rhetorical purpose, though the conflict of views may not be between two characters (the Indian hater and someone who represents the sympathetic reader's view, as in Hall's tale) but within a single character, the Indian hater to-be. These may be termed "the making of an Indian hater" tales.<sup>16</sup> Typically, the character begins by expressing a tolerant, even benevolent attitude toward the Indians, assuming that his own feelings of good will shall be returned in kind. The inevitable massacre of his family by savages who had no reason to harm them shows him (and the reader) the utter folly of his presumptions—"As if brotherly love or charity had anything to do with red heathen, or the New Testament with a North American savage," interjects the author of one such tale.<sup>17</sup> The once sympathetic frontiersman is instantly transformed into an Indian hater, espousing the true Indian hater's creed of ceaseless revenge. As Bird's hero Roland Forrester expresses it to Nathan Slaughter in *Nick of the Woods*, had he endured the horror Nathan experienced at the hands of Indians, he too would have "[d]eclared war on them and their accursed race! . . . I would have sworn undying vengeance, and I would have sought it—ay, sought it without ceasing . . . I would have pursued the wretches, and pursued them to the death."<sup>18</sup>

### III

In each of these ways, then, writers of Indian hater fiction worked to convert their readers from the prevalent Romantic sentiment to a more "realistic" conception of the Indian and Indian-white relations on the frontier. *This* was the true nature of the Indian, they argued—not the proud and virtuous noble savage of sympathetic literature, but the cold, merciless, demonic killer

of women and children. And *this* had been his role in American history—not the friend, ally, and benefactor of the white man, but a violent and vengeful enemy, wholly devoted to his destruction. The dark reality of the frontier experience, reenacted over and again as white civilization moved westward, was the brutal encounter of two irreconcilable foes with nothing whatever in common except the desire for the land they struggled over. The real Indian had to be conquered and pushed still farther west, or destroyed, if American civilization was to advance and prosper and assume its rightful heritage.

In several important respects, certainly, the sympathetic view of the Indian and the antiprimitivist view represented by Indian hater fiction were one and the same, as Pearce argues. The points of agreement between them are important to acknowledge. Both interpreted "the Indian" in terms of white civilization and ignored the actual, historical Indians before them. Both also agreed that white civilization was morally superior to "primitive" Indian culture, as they understood it (though they disagreed as to whether it was a relative or an absolute superiority). Hence both, in the end, accepted the destruction of Indian culture by white civilization in the course of its westward advance as necessary, inevitable, and somehow right (though again with different degrees of satisfaction or regret).

Is it surprising that, having started from the same premises which their culture gave them (that is, the grand ideas of civilization, progress, and manifest destiny), both views should have come to the same conclusion? It would have been difficult for any white American of the period to do otherwise. Even Thoreau, with his intellectual independence, his sympathy for the Indians' plight, and at least some exposure to American Indians and their life, was hardly free of savagist prejudices and preconceptions, as Robert Sayre has observed. In an important passage toward the end of *Thoreau and the Indians*, Sayre comments on how extremely distorted and oversimplified the idea of savagism was.

For dealing with a difficult political, economic, and military situation [such as the Sioux Indians' in Minnesota with whom he came into contact in 1861], it was utterly inadequate. *Yet no other structure of ideas then existed.* For Thoreau, or any artist, to enter such a situation and suddenly invent the new forms of truth

necessary to portray all the elements and characters in it would have been impossible. (*italics mine*)

Writers saw American Indians from the outside and at a distance in the conventional mode of traveler-observer and in the conventional terms of savagism, Sayre explains. Only gradually and much later in the century (after the Civil War) did the scientific point of view emerge, examining Native American tribal structures from above and all around and finally from within and on their own terms.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, it is all the more important to focus on the ongoing debate between the two views within the narrow and controlling context of savagism, and determine its significance. One must appreciate that it was taken very seriously at the time. If this is not clear from Hall's cautious and self-consciously evenhanded manner in "The Indian Hater" and other pieces, then it should be from Bird's more strident and belligerent manner in *Nick of the Woods*. One may also point to the remarkably hostile reception many critics gave Cooper's sympathetic portrayal of Indians in the Leatherstocking novels, and to his own need to respond to them in the preface to the 1850 edition of the series.<sup>20</sup>

Why was so much interest and emotion aroused by each interpretation of "the Indian"? Surely the answer lies in the conflict of values and ideas which lay behind these two interpretations. The debate over the Indian was a vehicle for debate over different views of white American society and national identity. In order to determine more precisely the values and ideas involved, however, and the extent of the conflict between them, we need to know more about the writers: What, for example, was their gender, age, and class? What were their political, social, and regional affiliations, and their experience of Native Americans? There may be much more involved here than regional rivalry between the literary, conservative East and the raw and uncouth, future-oriented West—the explanation usually offered. (One thinks of such authors as Paulding and Bird, both strong antiprimitivists and both from the East.)

In the meantime, a close examination of Indian hater fiction points to other explanations. Perhaps the most obvious is that, in the aggressive nationalism of the early nineteenth century, anti-primitivist writers were motivated by a fear of the subversive implications inherent in the Romantic interpretation of the Indian. The sympathetic view contained the paradox that

although it arose and flourished as part of a nationalistic impulse, it carried a profound criticism of white American society (one that many of its adherents seemed unaware of). Indeed, this paradox lay at the heart of an emerging national self-image: that the country was both the inheritor of an ideal of civilization soon to be realized and the preserver of an Edenic past threatened by the growth of this civilization. The antiprimitivist response of a purely negative interpretation of the Indian attempted adamantly to refute the criticism and allow an uncompromised celebration of the glories of American civilization to come.

Less apparent is the possibility of ambivalence and criticism inherent even in the antiprimitivist view, which Indian hater fiction also suggests. Although its harsh portrayal of the Indian clearly affirms the values of progress, civilization, and manifest destiny, its intensely sympathetic portrayal of the Indian hater also reveals doubts. At the very least, it reveals concern about the consequences of progress and the effects on white American society of westward expansion. In the tragic condition of the Indian hater, with which the reader is asked to sympathize (the destruction of his home and family, his wandering exile, his solitude and misery), is a powerful sense, too, of the loss of an Edenic state. His sudden, dramatic conversion from civilized and Christian to wholly savage values of hatred and revenge, with which the reader is then asked to identify, dramatizes the potential for moral degeneration in all civilized whites under the brutal conditions of frontier life.

Roy Harvey Pearce sees in the figure of the Indian hater and the metaphysics of Indian hating which he embodies "a deep commitment to the mission of western, Christian, humanistic civilization."<sup>21</sup> But one can also see that the Indian hater also represents an awareness, at some level, of the darker side of westward expansion and the negative potential of the white American character. It is, of course, precisely this awareness that sympathetic Indian fiction articulates more consciously and directly. What these two conflicting views of "the Indian" in literature ultimately give us is a great deal more insight into the complexity and the ambivalence of the nineteenth century's response to "progress" and change. Within the very terms and images of the debate is revealed another kind of consensus: a shared cluster of fears and doubts about the effects of the civilizing process, even as its idealized end is all the more eagerly sought.



## NOTES

1. I use the term "Indian" or "the Indian" in this paper rather than "American Indians" or "Native Americans" because the paper is about a literary figure and what that figure meant to nineteenth-century white Americans. "The Indian" is how writers of this period referred to Native Americans; that is, as a representative type who possessed specific character traits, either noble or ignoble or a mixture of both. Cooper, for example, defends his portrayal of "the red man" against his critics in his preface to *The Leatherstocking Tales* of 1850, just as he had earlier defined "the native warrior of North America" and then presented Uncas as its prototypical ideal in *The Last of the Mohicans*. To use contemporary labels in this analysis of historical views would be anachronistic, a projection of twentieth-century ethnic consciousness onto the past. The same explanation also holds true for my frequent use of the term "civilization," "white civilization," or "American civilization." Nineteenth century Anglo-Americans saw their civilization as the culmination of all civilizations, a paradigmatic ideal toward which all others had progressed.

2. Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Savages of America* (rev. ed. 1953); (reprint, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965); Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1975); Richard Drinnon, *Facing West* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1980). One may add as well, Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Knopf, 1978).

3. This thesis is developed throughout *The Savages of America*, but see especially chapters vi and vii and the forward to the 1965 revised edition. (The quotations are from pp. 196, 232, and 200 respectively.) Pearce's own summary appears elsewhere in his writings, in "The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating," *Ethnohistory* 4, 1957, pp. 27-40, later expanded as "The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating: Leatherstocking Unmasked" in Pearce, ed., *Historicism Once More: Problems and Occasions for the American Scholar* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 118, 119; and in "From the History of Ideas to Ethnohistory," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 2, 1979, pp. 39-90. For a particularly incisive examination of the idea of savagism that draws heavily from Pearce, see Robert Sayre, *Thoreau and the American Indians* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 3-18.

4. Pearce argues at length in *Historicism* that the difference between Cooper's sympathetic view of the Indian and James Hall's antagonistic view is less of substance than of degree (pp. 129-130); Sayre observes that Thoreau's position being closer to Irving's than to Melville's Indian hater (a parody of Hall's) "does not make as much difference as we might think" (p. 18).

5. *The Savages of America*, p. 245. See also "The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating," *Ethnohistory*, p. 32, where Pearce states that an analysis of the nineteenth-century American's understanding of American Indians must perforce consider the role of the Indian hater and the meaning of the metaphysics of Indian hating. "As a matter of fact," he writes, "many of the hundreds of documents which I worked through in searching out the idea of savagism, consider the two subjects as one. And I think that they are one, and that anyone who would write the history of the situation of the white man and Indian *vis-a-vis* one another must consider the two as one and handle his documents and develop his insights accordingly."

6. The novels are: James McHenry, *The Spectre of the Forest* (1823); N. M. Hentz, *Tadeuskund* (1825); James Kirke Paulding, *The Dutchman's Fireside* (1831); James Hall, *The Harpe's Head* (1833), rptd. in *Legends of the West* (1853 and in subsequent editions); Robert Montgomery Bird, *Nick of the Woods* (1837); Anna L. Snelling, *Kaboasa* (1842); Samuel Young, *Tom Hanson, the Avenger* (1847); Osgood Bradbury, *Pierpold the Avenger* (1848); James Wilmer Dallam, *The Deaf Spy* (1848); Emerson Bennett, *The Forest Rose* (1850); and James Quinlan, *Tom Quick, the Indian Slayer* (1851). The tales are: Hall, "The Indian Hater," *Western Souvenir* (1829), rptd. in *Legends of the West* (1832) and *The Wilderness and the War Path* (1846); Timothy Flint, "The Indian Fighter," *The Token* 3 (1830); William Snelling, "The Devoted," *Tales of the Northwest* (1830); John Neal, "David Whicher," *The Token* 5 (1832); Hall, "The Pioneer," *Tales of the Border* (1835); Charles Fenno Hoffman, "The Bald Eagle," *A Winter in the Far West* (1835); Chandler Robbins Gilman, "The Hunter's Vow," *Legends of a Log Cabin* (1835); Hoffman, "The Dead Clearing," *Wild Scenes in the Forest and Prairie* (1943); Bennett, "A Desperate Encounter," "The Daring Scouts," and "Rocky Mountain Perils," *Wild Scenes on the Frontiers* (1859). Despite McHenry's and Hentz's earlier publications, Hall is more properly seen as the initiator of the genre of Indian hater fiction. With the publication of "The Indian Hater" in 1829, he was the first to recognize and exploit the value of this frontier character type in the debate over the Indian's nature and role. He was also the genre's most prolific and celebrated writer and a self-proclaimed authority on the subject of Indian hating.

7. For a typical expression of this perception of the Indian, see Ann Eliza Bleecker's early fiction, *The History of Maria Kittle* (1797). For discussion of the antiprimitivist convention and its origins, see Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, pp. 23-31 and 80-85; Slotkin, *Regeneration*, ch. iii-iv; Howard Mumford Jones, *O Strange New World* (1952), (reprint, New York: Viking, 1964), ch. ii; Charles M. Segal and David C. Stineback, *Puritans, Indians, and Manifest Destiny*. (New York: Putnam's, 1977); and Gary B. Nash, "The Image of the Indian in the Southern Colonial Mind," *William and Mary Quarterly* 29, (1972), pp. 197-230.

8. *The Savages of America*, pp. 188 and 176 respectively. On the abundance of Indian verse narratives and their origins, see also G. Harrison Orians, "The Rise of Romanticism, 1805-1855," *Transitions in American Literary History*, ed. Harry Hayden Clark (1953); (reprint, New York: Octagon, 1967), pp. 212-217. On Indian drama, see Marilyn J. Anderson, "The Image of the Indian in American Drama During the Jacksonian Era, 1829-1845," *Journal of American Culture* 1, (Winter 1978), 800-810.

9. There is no bibliography of nineteenth century fiction about Indians, nor any very extensive list that distinguishes between sympathetic and anti-primitivist works. Roger O. Rock's recent bibliography, *The Native American in Literature* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1985), covers only Native American literature and critical works about American Indians in literature; while Peter F. Biedler and Marion F. Egge's bibliography, *The American Indian in Short Fiction* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1979), is limited to works published after 1890. The best source for titles, therefore, remains Lyle Henry Wright's *American Fiction 1774-1850* (1957) and individual volumes of *The Token* and *The Atlantic Souvenir*. In my survey of the 1820s, I included everything I could find, but doubtless some works were overlooked, particularly of short fiction.

10. *North American Review* XXVII, (July 1828), pp. 140-141. John Neal, an author of several sympathetic Indian novels and tales, made similar comments on the phenomenon that same year: "you can hardly pick up a story on either side of the water now, without finding a red-man stowed away in it," he wrote in the preface to *Rachel Dyer*: "and what kind of red-man? Why, one that uniformly talks the best English the author is capable of—more than half the time perhaps out-Ossianing Ossian" (p. xv).

11. Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, which Pearce makes his prime example of the literature of savagism, in fact provides many illustrations of this new, Romantic image of the Indian. In *The Last of the Mohicans*, each facet of the image noted above is particularly well portrayed: note the physical description of Uncas in ch. vi, for example (similar to Jones's description of Burning Arrow); the intimate father-son scene between Chingachgook and Uncas in ch. ix (directly paralleling a similar scene of the Munro family in ch. xvi); Indian courage and Uncas's heroism in the final battle scenes; Hawkeye's frequent explanations of white and Indian differences (the cultural relativism of "gifts") and the thoughtful, if not entirely sympathetic, analysis by Cooper even of Magua's villainy in ch. xi; the close and affectionate relationship between Hawkeye and his Indian companions, and the protective and benevolent relationship between them and all the representatives of white civilization in the wilderness; and finally, the clear symbolic association throughout the novel of Uncas, Chingachgook, and the Indianized Hawkeye with a romantic ideal of natural man in appearance, character, life, and deed.

12. "Traits of Indian Character" was originally published in the *Analectic Magazine* in 1814, and later appeared with another Indian tale, "Philip of Pokanoket," in *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon* (1819-1820). The passage is quoted from *The Sketchbook* (New York: Putnam's, 1860-1861); and vol. 2 of the revised standard edition of *The Works of Washington Irving*, p. 345.

13. *Tales of the Border* (Philadelphia: Harrison Hall, 1835), pp. 69-70.

14. *Nick of the Woods* (1837), (reprint, New York: American Book, 1939), pp. 219-220. In the preface to the 1853 edition of the novel, Bird further attacks these Romantic portrayals of the Indian, like Cooper's and Chateaubriand's, as "beautiful unrealities and fictions merely," "imaginary and contrary to nature"; while his own work, he argues, depicts "real Indians" as they existed and still exist in nature—"ignorant, violent, debased, brutal" (pp. 7-8).

15. *The Wilderness and the War Path* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), p. 147. Subsequent references from this edition will be inserted in the text.

16. They include most notably *Nick of the Woods*, "David Whicher," and *The Forest Rose*. Barrie S. Hayne of the University of Toronto has pointed out to me that this is also a rhetorical convention in pro-slavery fiction of the Civil War era.

17. John Neal in "David Whicher," *The Token* 5, (1832), p. 358.

18. The excited Nathan then expands on the creed: "by night and by day, in summer and in winter, in the wood and in the wigwam, thee would seek for their blood, and thee would shed it—thee would think of thee wife and thee little babes, and thee heart would be as stone and fire within thee—thee would kill, friend, thee would kill, thee would kill!" (p. 264).

19. Sayre, pp. 210-211. Other scholars have noted the powerful influence of the idea on those with much richer and more complete experience of Ameri-

can Indians than Thoreau's (see, for example, Pearce in *Historicism*, pp. 119-121). But their aim has been to support thereby a single interpretation of savagist, basically antiprimitivist views, rather than to consider the divergence of views which the idea encompassed.

20. For a full discussion of the critical reception of Cooper's Indians, see Isaac Sequeira, "The Frontier Attack on Cooper, 1850-1900," *Journal of American Indian Studies* 8, (Jan. 1978), pp. 25-35.

21. "The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating," *Ethnohistory*, p. 38; see also "The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating," *Historicism*, pp. 117-118; *The Savages of America*, p. 246.