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Noble Savages or Thorough Savages? Encounters with Indians in four 19th Century American Travel Narratives

Indians are often principal characters in 19th century American travel narratives. When travelers and explorers went west, south and north not only did they discover the natural wonders of American fauna and flora, but they also encountered Indians. However, it was not easy to see the Indians or the wilderness they inhabited with completely fresh eyes. As all literary works must be created in a cultural context, 19th century travelers were pre-conditioned in their perceptions of American natives and nature by a prior knowledge of the subject, certain prejudices and judgements present in literature of the time. At the same time, travel narratives, journals and reports often became the primary sources of material for novelists. Thus a circle of mutual influence between fiction and non-fiction was created.

My purpose in this article is to present how the authors of four travel narratives written in the first half of the 19th century responded to the Indians they encountered, and to what extent their subsequent descriptions of the natives were influenced by the set of ideas that later became known as Romantic. I would like to concentrate on four American travel accounts, written between 1791 and 1857. The earliest of these is *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida*, by William Bartam, an eminent botanist. Washington Irving's *A Tour on the Prairies* is a record of a trip across the Oklahoma Territory which he made in 1834. *The Oregon Trail*, by Francis Parkman, contains a vivid picture of life in the Far West, which he visited in 1846. *The Maine Woods*, a less

known work by Henry David Thoreau, is the account of his excursions to the forests of Maine, made between 1846 and 1857.

In the writings of the first half of the 19th century, whether nonfictional or fictional, two basic stereotypes of the Indian are presented: (1) the noble savage and (2) his counterpart, the brute savage. In an essay written at the end of the 19th century Mark Twain summed up these stereotypes as follows:

He is noble. He is true and loyal; not even imminent death can shake his peerless faithfulness. His heart is a well-spring of truth, and of generous impulses, and of knightly magnanimity. With him gratitude is religion; do him a kindness and at the end of a lifetime he has not forgotten it.

He is ignoble - base and treacherous, and hateful in every way. Not even imminent death can startle him into a spasm of virtue. His heart is a cesspool of falsehood, of treachery, and of low and devilish instincts. With him gratitude is an unknown emotion; and when one does him a kindness, it is safest to keep the face toward him, lest the reward be an arrow in the back.¹

The noble savage stereotype appeared as a concept in the mid-eighteenth century in the writings of European philosophers concerned with the state of the civilized society. Jean Jacques Rousseau, in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality among Men* (1775), presented the Indian society as close to the ideal one: they were kind because they did not desire other men's possessions, generous because their every day wants were supplied by Nature and happy because they lived according to the natural laws. Through the example of the American Indian Europeans were to be taught that an alternative to their corrupt way of life did exist, and was within their reach. Rousseau's concept of the noble savage gained popularity in the Romantic epoch and influenced generations of writers and travelers

¹ Quoted from: Louise K. Barnett, *The Ignoble Savage. American Literary Racism 1790-1890* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975), p. 71.

who, unlike Rousseau, came in contact with the native inhabitants of North America.

On the American ground the imported noble savage competed with the brute savage stereotype which dated back to the Puritan times. Puritan narratives presented the American natives as devilish, uncivilized and cruel enemies of the whites. Fighting over the land which white settlers wanted to appropriate contributed to the growth of hatred between the two races. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, Indians were killed off in the Eastern provinces or removed from the areas settled by the whites. By 1845 all the tribes originally living east of the Mississippi had been moved beyond it or reduced to insignificant numbers. Once the Indians ceased to be an immediate threat and obstacle to American expansion in the East,

the mythicization of the Indians could proceed without problems and complexities arising from the realities of Indian-white relations. Indian virtues could be symbolically exaggerated and Indian values accepted as valid for American society [...] Moreover, the Indian's removal cast a tragic aura about his vanishing person that appealed to Romantic sensibilities.²

Indian disappearance from the East brought about a significant change in the sentiments expressed in the books that dealt with them. Earlier, American authors tended to describe the Indians in the context of particular problems they posed to the white society. When these problems ceased to exist, the atmosphere became conducive to more thorough and objective treatments of Indian lives and cultures. In the 19th century the Indians were already generally considered a race doomed to extinction, so much so that some Americans began to express interest in preserving their vanishing tribal customs, lore and languages in writing.

² Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1800* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), p. 357.

Frontier journals, Indian biographies, grammars and vocabularies had a vital role in rescuing the native cultures from sinking into oblivion. Between 1830 and 1850 several biographies and histories appeared, which reassessed the historical conflicts between the Indians and the whites. Although he clearly placed himself on the side of progress and settlement, historian B. B. Thatcher in his *Indian Biography* (1834) sympathized with Indians' love for their land and admired their courage in defending it. Missionaries - John Heckewelder and Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, went to live and work with the Indians and left accounts describing the aboriginal life, including the abundance of Indian customs and mythology. George Catlin painted more than four hundred pictures presenting the variety of American tribesmen in their everyday lives, and in 1837 exhibited his "Indian Gallery" in New York and later in Washington, Philadelphia and Boston.

Thus, by the mid-nineteenth century "a thin line divided the writing of history from that of belles-lettres," as Lee Clark Mitchell observes in *Witnesses to a Vanishing America*.³ Indian themes were present not only in travel reports and missionary accounts but also in contemporary poems, novels and plays. These works presented Indians as either noble children of nature or brute savages. James Fenimore Cooper stood out among 19th century writers as one of the few authors who tried to present a more balanced view of Iroquois or Delaware. Cooper saw the Indians as both savage and noble, even if he could not imagine those two qualities combined in a single individual.

Sympathy for the vanishing tribes, evident in *The Leatherstocking Tales*, is not characteristic of Cooper only. William Gilmore Simms in *The Yemassee* (1835), presented the Yemassee as proud and fearsome people, moved to violence only by the threat of displacement. It has to

³ Lee Clark Mitchell, *Witnesses to a Vanishing America. The Nineteenth Century Response* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p.173.

be remembered, however, that in spite of Romantic ideology, which encouraged idealization of the primitive, bluntly racist attitudes continued to be expressed by many writers of frontier romances, who were the apologists of the "white" civilization and its victory over the "red" savagery.

Clearly, then, in the 19th century fiction we can distinguish two different modes of presentation of the Indians: as the noble and as the brute savages. American readers seemed to accept both of them, perhaps because contradictory stereotypes appealed to different audiences. In Louise K. Barnett's opinion:

American whites found their Indian stereotypes comfortable and comforting: as noble savages, Indians could be remembered with a vague regret; as good Indians, they could helpfully initiate whites into the wilderness before falling victim to their inherent inferiority; and as bad Indians, they deserved the harsh fate actively meted out to them by the conquering race.⁴

As I have already mentioned, there existed an interaction between travel narratives and novels in creating and popularizing the images of the Indians. The first text which was important in this process of crossfertilization of fiction and non-fiction was William Bartram's book, written at the end of the 18th century. In *Travels* Bartram responded to budding pre-romantic sentiments and his book in turn influenced European romantics. William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge were fascinated by Bartram's account, and for the latter it became a source of the exotic images he used in "The Ancient Mariner", "Kubla Khan" or "Ruth." Similarly Rene Chateaubriand drew on *Travels* while writing his romances *Atala* and *Rene*, which he set in the American wilderness.⁵

⁴ Louise K. Barnett, *The Ignoble ...*, p. 96.

⁵ Hans Huth, *Nature and the American. Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1957), p. 21.

The fourth part of Bartram's *Travels*, entitled *An Account of the Persons, Manners, Customs and Government of Muscogulges or Creeks, Cherokees, Chactaws etc., Aborigines of the Continent of North America*, is devoted to the description of the so-called "five civilized tribes" of the Southeast.

The first encounter with an Indian warrior that Bartram describes took place when he was riding alone and unarmed through open land. Having no time to escape and no means to protect himself, the frightened traveler put on an air of confidence, hailed the Indian "brother" and offered him his hand. Then, looking into the painted face, Bartram imagined himself to be able to read the Indian's thoughts, which he reported as the following:

White man, thou art my enemy, and though thou and thy brethren may have killed mine; yet it may not be so, and thou are alone, and in my power. Live; the Great Spirit forbids me to touch thy life; go to thy brethren, tell them thou sawest an Indian in the forests, who knew how to be humane and compassionate.⁶

Bartram, clearly, has no doubt that he can understand and explain the Indian behaviour. Such comments reveal the arrogance and "the occasional silliness," as one critic calls it, of the white naturalist.⁷

The tribes that Bartram visited lived in small villages, cultivating the land and hunting. The community was ruled by a council of elderly chiefs, "respectable for wisdom, valor and virtue," headed by a king - called *mico*. (388) During his stay in the villages Bartram studied the social and economic organization, laws, customs and character of the Indians and in the process became full of regard for the wisdom, justice and simplicity evident in all spheres of Indian life.

⁶ William Bartram, *Travels*, ed. by Mark van Doren (New York: Dover Publications, INC, 1955), p. 46. All subsequent references are noted in text parenthetically.

⁷ Patrick O'Brian, "Discovering the New World", *The New York Review of Books*, Vol XLIII, No 16, 1996, p. 6.

They are just, honest, liberal and hospitable to strangers; considerate, loving and affectionate to their wives and children; industrious, frugal, temperate and persevering; charitable and forbearing.(385)

However, Bartram realised that he was likely to be accused by his less open minded readers of a pro-Indian bias. He writes in *Travels*: "I doubt not that some of my countrymen who may read these accounts of the Indians, which I have endeavoured to relate according to truth, at least as they appeared to me, will charge me with partiality in their favour"(183) Therefore, he presents also their "vices, immoralities and imperfections"(183) The most serious are: their fondness of wars with neighbouring tribes, treatment of captives, the practice of scalping enemies and sexual promiscuity. Nevertheless, Bartram also points out that Indian behaviour during wars does not generally differ from that observed among civilized nations. In fact, while they scalp slain enemies, they do not kill women or children nor do they torture the captives. It is noteworthy that the author of *Travels* devotes only one page in his book to Indian vices, while the rest of his account concentrates on their numerous virtues. The conclusion that he reaches is radical: the Indians "as moral men stand in no need of European civilization."(385)

In fact, the greatest threat to their almost perfect society is posed by the demoralized whites, who tempt the Indians with the least admirable products of the white civilization: alcohol and trinkets. However, Bartram optimistically believes in the strength of the Indian character. In a meaningful scene he describes a young warrior observing with a disdainful smile the excesses of drunken white men in a trading post. Bartram imagines the Indian thinking these words:

O thou Great and Good Spirit! we are indeed sensible of thy benignity and favour to us red men, in denying us the understanding of white men. We did not know before they came among us that mankind could become so base, and fall so below the dignity of their nature. Defend us from their manners, laws and power.(386)

Patrick O'Brian points out that "one seems to hear echoes of Rousseau" in such fragments.⁸

Bartram is usually perceived as a writer who began the tradition of pastoralism in American literature. The world described in *Travels* resembles closely that of a pastoral romance - it is a world of pristine nature, as yet untouched by civilization and corruption, where conflicts and revolutions have no place. There are no references to political events in his text and exact locations of the places he writes about are rarely given, so that the background usually remains unspecified. "Bartram's world appears to exist beyond history, beyond time, even beyond place."⁹ The cult of the noble savage is one of the components of pastoralism and therefore has its important function in the book. Bartram uses the noble savage to criticize the vices and sins of civilized people and to show the beneficial influence of nature on human character.

Forty years after Bartram's trip, Washington Irving set out on a tour across the prairies to see "those great Indian tribes which are now about to disappear as independent nations, or to be amalgamated under some new form of government."¹⁰ Such an expedition was a perfect occasion to confront the literary portraits of the Indians, with which Irving was already familiar, with the reality.

During the trip across Oklahoma, Irving encountered two tribes: the Osages and the Pawnees. The Osage warriors he met in Fort Gibson impressed him with their independence, and their dignified and handsome looks:

⁸ Patrick O'Brian, "Discovering ...", p. 6.

⁹ *The Cambridge History of American Literature. Vol. 1 1590-1820*, Cambridge 1994, p. 131.

¹⁰ Lee Clark Mitchell, *Witnesses to a Vanishing America. The Nineteenth-Century Response* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 26.

They had fine Roman countenances, and broad deep chests, and as they generally wore their blankets wrapped round their loins, so as to leave the bust and arms bare, they looked like so many noble bronze figures.¹¹

A few days later Irving described a young warrior riding through the prairie. The Indian seemed to him a perfect embodiment of personal freedom.

This youth, with his rifle, his blanket, and his horse, was ready at a moment's warning to rove the world; he carried all his worldly effects with him, and in the absence of artificial wants, possessed the great secret of personal freedom. We of society are slaves, not so much to others as to ourselves. (34)

It is clear that although Irving wanted to confront fiction with reality, he nevertheless saw the Indians through the prism of sentimental literature and was, to a large extent, unable to depict people or places as they actually were. The author of *A Tour* has been frequently criticized for the use of stock literary comparisons and historical allusions while describing the West.

However, Wayne R. Kime disagrees with the majority of the critics and claims that literary allusions serve as points of reference for the readers as well as represent the author's Eastern sensibility at the beginning of the trip, which he later abandons to arrive at a deeper and more personal interpretation of his frontier experience. After the descriptions of the Osages Irving goes on to summarize frontiersmen's tales about this tribe describing their funeral customs, legends and myths. These passages, as Kime points out, "progress thematically from second-hand data to experiential or first-hand information about

¹¹ Washington Irving, *A Tour on the Prairies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), p. 22. All subsequent references are noted in text parenthetically.

the Osages."¹² Indeed, Irving's observations question some of the stereotyped notions about the Indians. The Osages, according to the writer, "are by no means the stoics that they are represented, taciturn, unbending, without a tear or smile." (44) They behave in a reserved way only in the company of white people whose goodwill they distrust. On the other hand, at tribal gatherings they talk over their adventures in war and hunting, gossip merrily, play games, and frequently make fun of the whites.

In fact, Irving has more understanding and more curiosity for the Indians than his traveling companions - the pompous Commissioner, sent on a peace mission to the West, or the young and ignorant troop of rangers who accompany him. Irving observes the Commissioner's endeavours to communicate with the Indians and comments on them with irony. In an Osage village where all young men were absent on a hunting expedition, the Commissioner made a speech from horseback,

informing his hearers of the purport of his mission to promote a general peace among the tribes of the West, and urging them to lay aside all warlike and bloodthirsty notions. Multitude (...) promised faithfully that as far as in them lay, the peace would not be disturbed.

As Irving mockingly remarks: "their age and sex gave some reason to hope that they would keep their world." (67)

Indian logic is also presented in the story of an Osage war party on their way to carry off some Pawnee scalps and horses. Again the Commissioner delivered a speech informing the Indians of a plan of their Father in Washington to establish peace between all tribes. The warriors listened to him in silence, exchanged a few words and rode away. As it turned out later, their leader had observed that "as their

¹² Wayne R. Kime, "The Completeness of Washington Irving's *A Tour on the Prairies*," *Western American Literature* VIII 1973, p. 61.

great father intended so soon to put an end to all warfare, it behoved them to make the most of the little time that was left them." (154)

The generally peaceful Osages were contrasted with the Pawnees, the "bad Indians" of the account, whom the travelers fortunately never met. In spite of their luck, Irving and his companions did not feel safe crossing their lands. However, as Irving remarked with a considerable dose of common sense "there was always some wild untamed tribe of Indians, who form, for a time, the terror of a frontier, and about whom all kind of fearful stories were told." (75)

Summing up his observations on the Indians Irving declared: "As far as I can judge, the Indian of poetical fiction is like the shepherd of pastoral romance, a mere personification of imaginary attributes." (45) Paradoxically, in spite of the author's rejection of the concept of the noble savage as fantasy, he, more or less consciously, put some elements of that stereotype into the portraits of the Indians in his narrative.

In Henry David Thoreau's philosophy and writings the Indians occupied a special place. Materials collected by Thoreau in his "Indian Notebooks" testify that he was planning to write a book about the native inhabitants of America. Edwin Fussell argues that it is possible to infer from other writings how Thoreau perceived the Indians and what his book would have been like if he had written it.¹³ The Indians for Thoreau symbolized the past of the New World, and therefore, if he attempted to write the natural and human history of the New World, he had to learn about their history and languages. They also epitomized the American wilderness: "they seem[ed] like a race who ha[d] exhausted the secrets of nature, tanned with age ... Their memory [was] in harmony with the russet hue of the fall of the year."¹⁴ The Indian was also for Thoreau an embodiment of humanity,

¹³ See Edwin Fussell, *Frontier. American Literature and the American West* (Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 327-350.

¹⁴ *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis Allen (Boston, 1906), I, p. 444.

which was more conspicuous in primitive man, whose basic nature had not been overlaid with civilization. In Philip F. Gura's opinion Thoreau went to the Maine woods:

in the hope that he might uncover a man who, in Emerson's words, would become a "Iens" through which he could read his own mind more accurately and who could help him adjust the angle of his vision more clearly on an American axis.¹⁵

The first two trips were disappointing in this respect. The Penobscot hunters whom Thoreau saw during a walk on Indian Island struck him as "short, shabby, washerwoman-looking."¹⁶ The Indian houses had "a very shabby, forlorn and cheerless look." (294) Two Indians, employed as guides for the first trip, quickly got drunk and left the party. Thoreau remarked grimly: "we thought Indians had some honour before," but after the trip they appeared to him no better than "fellows whom you meet picking up string and paper in the streets of a city." (286) Of course, Thoreau's disappointment was partly his own fault. He refused to go to the Far West, where, if anywhere in America, the uncorrupted Indians were still to be found. As E. Fussell points out: "in going to Maine he was [...] putting himself on the trail of the wrong Indian."¹⁷ Moreover, in these first encounters Thoreau did not behave as a researcher interested in gathering all possible data about the people he came to study. His judgements were based exclusively on what he saw; he saw the first Penobscots and their village, and immediately felt disillusioned. "I even thought that a row of wigwams, with a dance of powwows, and a prisoner tortured at the stake, would be more respectable than

¹⁵ Philip F. Gura, "Thoreau's *Maine Woods* Indians: More Representative Men," *American Literature* Nov 1977, vol. 49, nr 3, pp. 368-9.

¹⁶ Henry David Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, ed. by Dudley C. Lunt (New Haven: College and University Press, 1965), p. 293. All subsequent references are noted in text parenthetically.

¹⁷ Edwin Fussell, *Frontier...*, p. 347.

this." (294) Such comments show how Thoreau escapes from the unpleasant reality into the past, as the Indians of the past correspond better to his great expectations.

During the second trip, Thoreau and his friends hired an Indian Joe Aitteon as a guide for a moose hunt. Although more reliable than the previous guides, he also failed to impress Thoreau as a model man of the woods. When Thoreau wanted to learn Indian woodcraft it turned out that Joe was not able to explain how he found his way in the woods, give the details of the boat's construction, or assess correctly the weight of a moose.

However, the moose hunt had also its brighter and more satisfying moments for the author. One of them was a night spent in the Indian hunter's camp, where the Penobscots were curing moose hides and smoking meat. Listening to the Indians talking in their language, Thoreau realised that these sounds had been spoken in America before Columbus was born. He felt that he "stood or rather lay, as near to the primitive man of America, that night, as any of the discoverers ever did" (108). The Indian camp was sufficiently primitive to win Thoreau's romantic approval, but even there he retained his critical judgement, commenting: "for fear of dirt, we spread our blankets over their hides, so as not to touch them anywhere" (109)

The third and last trip to Maine again brought both favourable and unfavourable impressions. Thoreau was constantly wavering between the desire to admire the Indian, or at least some elements of his nature, and the urge to reject the disappointing reality. His mixed feelings reveal themselves in his attitude to Joe Polis - his guide on the last trip. Joe Polis, like Joe Aitteon, showed some deficiencies as a woodsman. After he tracked a moose, he was too excited to shoot it. On another occasion, however, Joe impressed Thoreau greatly by calling a musquash, which he wanted to catch: "I thought that I had at last got into the wilderness, and that he was a wild man indeed, to be talking to a musquash!" (125) It was also Joe who explained to Thoreau the meanings of the Indian names of rivers and lakes, so that

he could admire the accurate identification of a word with a thing. While listening to Joe singing in his language a religious song Thoreau realised that they both felt the same spiritual presence in nature. Definitely, Thoreau felt closer to Polis than to the previous Indian guides.

The Maine Woods is a record of the confrontation between Thoreau's idea of the Indian and the reality of one. He did not find the Penobscots morally superior to the whites. They had somewhat different manners and possessed some skills, unknown to the more civilized race, but they had their faults and weaknesses, as did the whites. They were careless, untrustworthy and moody. What is worse, they made "coarse and imperfect use of Nature"(87). But what disappointed Thoreau most was the Indian inability to "function successfully as the priests of the mysteries of wilderness."¹⁸ The Maine Indians failed Thoreau's expectations.

Some critics, however, disagree with the above interpretation of Thoreau's Maine experience. In Philip F. Gura's opinion, the first two trips, though disappointing, played also a positive role as they allowed Thoreau to understand precisely what kind of knowledge he had been so long seeking to gain from the Indians. Thoreau claimed that it was man's awareness and willingness to confront reality that made the lives of some men more meaningful than those of others. The essence of Thoreau's discovery was that many of the Indians he encountered, and especially Joe Polis:

despite their obvious failings and corruptions attributable to their exposure to white society, met this test more squarely than his Concord acquaintances and that in his profoundly simple life the Indian's own

¹⁸ Richard Bridgman, *Dark Thoreau* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), p.91.

consciousness and all outside it (Emerson's Me and Not-Me) were somehow imaginatively linked.¹⁹

Francis Parkman went West, as he wrote in *The Oregon Trail*, "with a view of observing the Indian character."²⁰ He planned to write a history of the French - English struggle for the colonial America, and he needed to know the character of the Indians, who played an important part in that conflict.

Parkman spent a few months in a Sioux village, taking part in the everyday life of its inhabitants. In spite of this close contact he did not learn much about the Indians. Convinced of his superiority, limited by his Puritan and patrician heritage, Parkman was not able to recognise the common humanity between himself and the people he came to study. He describes the Sioux as "thorough savages. Neither their manners nor their ideas were in the slightest degree modified by contact with civilization."⁽⁹⁴⁾

Those "living representatives of the stone age"(149) appeared to Parkman disruptive individualists, braggarts, and sluggards. Their intelligence, measured by the ability to reason abstractly, was deficient. Indian customs, although occasionally fascinating to watch, were to Parkman mere manifestations of ignorance and savagery. Similarly, he ridiculed the practices used by the Sioux medicine men in curing diseases. In fact, the young traveler could fully appreciate the Indians only when they were at war, displaying the civilized virtues of energy, purpose, discipline and bravery. "[War] awakens their most eager aspirations, and calls forth their greatest energies. It is chiefly this that saves them from lethargy and utter abasement."⁽¹¹⁶⁾

¹⁹ Philip F. Gura, "Thoreau's *Maine Woods* Indians: More Representative Men," *American Literature* Nov 1977, vol. 49, nr 3, pp. 377. See also Edwin Fussell, *Frontier...*, p. 347.

²⁰ Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail* (New York: New American Library, INC., 1950), p. 94. All subsequent references are noted in text parenthetically.

Parkman was treated with great hospitality by his hosts - each family considered it a point of honour to invite the white guest for a meal and the young traveler truly appreciated this custom, but he also realised that Indian - white relationships were complex and full of paradoxes:

So bounteous an entertainment looks like an outgushing of good-will, but doubtless, half at least of our kind hosts, had they met us alone and unarmed on the prairie, would have robbed us of our horses, and perhaps have bestowed an arrow upon us besides. (117)

Parkman had neither enough insight nor enough good-will to comprehend the Indian culture in terms of the survival value of their behaviour. Nor was he able to bridge the gap between the races, or learn from the Indians as he refused in advance to accept that the aristocratic gentleman and the Sioux share common humanity.

For the most part a civilized white man can discover very few points of sympathy between his own nature and that of an Indian. With every disposition to do justice to their good qualities, he must be conscious that an impassable gulf lies between him and his red brethren. Nay, so alien to himself do they appear, that, after breathing the air of the prairie for a few months or weeks, he begins to look upon them as a troublesome and dangerous species of wild beasts. (206)

Obviously, there are several important factors that influenced the presentation of the Indians in the accounts discussed above. Their chronology seems to be crucial, as the texts were written at various points of time during the Romantic epoch. Another factor is the variety of tribes described - ranging from the agricultural Southeastern tribes and the nomadic Plains Indians to the acculturated Penobscots. It should also be assumed that all four of the travelers came to the wilderness with certain stereotypes of Indians in mind, stereotypes popularised by contemporary literature. As I have already mentioned, the concept of the noble savage, taken over from Rousseau by the

European Romantics, was particularly influential in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

For Bartram, writing at the time of budding Romantic sensibilities, the noble savage was a new, fascinating idea and he sought confirmation of it in reality. The Southeastern Indians from his *Travels* resemble Rousseau's noble savages in almost every aspect. They live in harmony with nature, according to simple laws and customs. Their virtues are numerous and they have fewer vices than the civilized whites. While in the 18th-century Europe such treatment of the two races was typical, in the 18th-century America it was quite unusual.²¹ Therefore, Bartram may be considered one of the first to introduce the concept of the noble savage to American literature.

By 1832, when Washington Irving traveled across the Indian territory in Oklahoma, the noble savage had become a stock figure in American sentimental literature. During his trip Irving discovered that the Osages and Pawnees were not the embodiments of virtues but simply human beings with their weaknesses and imperfections. "Although still highly general Irving's Indians are credited with a full range of emotions and behaviours," points out Bruce Greenfield in his analysis of *A Tour*.²²

For Henry David Thoreau the Indian was to be a spiritual guide, leading him into a better, fuller life and helping him to discover the mysteries of nature. In *The Maine Woods* the divergence between Thoreau's expectations and the reality is evident. Ordinary, simple, and down to earth Penobscot hunters failed to provide the writer with the inspiration he sought. Paradoxically, for him they were at the same time too primitive, and not primitive enough to be perfect woodsmen and children of nature.

²¹ *The Cambridge History of American Literature. Vol. 1 1590 - 1820*, ed. by Sacvan Bercovitch, (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 136.

²² Bruce Greenfield, *Narrating Discovery. The Romantic Explorer in American Literature 1790-1855* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p.141.

During his relatively brief stay in a Sioux village Parkman assessed the Indian character and behaviour exclusively by the measures of his own patrician and Puritan culture. His superior position prevented him from gaining insight into the Indian nature. As L. Hugh Moore observes: "No culture shock occurred on his journey; he never questioned the assumptions and values of his own society, as Melville did in *Typee*. He remains secure and certain."²³ The "thorough savages" are, in Parkman's view, doomed to fall before the march of progress. As David Levin notices:

Parkman understands the direction of history but not the nature of Indian life. For him that exists only as danger and charm, as experience and image but not as value. In this regrettable limitation [...] Parkman represents American literary culture in his time.²⁴

Even those artists and travelers who, unlike Parkman, were able to appreciate the value of the native cultures and idealized the Indians as noble savages in their writings, saw them as vanishing nations. That minority, influenced by the Romantic ideology, admired "noble savages" and sympathized with their tragic fate. For the majority of Americans, however, the "living representatives of the stone age," to put it in Parkman's words, were an obstacle to progress and as such had to be eliminated.

²³ L. Hugh Moore, "Francis Parkman on the Oregon Trail: A Study in Cultural Prejudice," *Western American Literature* XII, 1977, p. 188.

²⁴ David Levin, "Francis Parkman: *The Oregon Trail*," *Landmarks of American Writing*, Voice of America Forum Lectures, 1974, p. 90.

LUBELSKIE MATERIALY NEOFILOLOGICZNE NR 21, 1997

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Skizze einer Evolution des Präsuppositionsbegriffes in den linguistischen Theorien

Der vorliegende Artikel betrifft folgende Aufgabenbereiche:

1. Die allgemeine Darstellung einer Evolutionslinie des Präsuppositionsbegriffes in linguistischen Theorien wie: der Sprachphilosophie und Logik, der traditionellen Semantik (Strukturalismus und der generativen Transformationsgrammatik), der Pragmalinguistik sowie der kognitiven Linguistik.
2. Die Definierung des Präsuppositionsbegriffes im Rahmen der oben genannten linguistischen Disziplinen im Sinne einer komparativen Konfrontierung wie auch eines Evolutionskontinuums divergenter Präsuppositionskonzeptionen auf dem linguistischen Gebiet. Die Frage der indirekt mitgeteilten Informationen ist in der linguistischen Literatur wegen ihrer Relevanz für die Modellierung des Kommunikationsprozesses zu einem weit diskutierten Thema geworden. Im Rahmen des vorliegenden Beitrags kann jedoch kein komplexes Bild der Präsuppositionstypologie gegeben werden. Ohne auf die Einzelheiten einzugehen, präsentiere ich lediglich jene allgemeinen Präsuppositionstypen, die in jeder der obigen Disziplinen präsent sind. Die Präsupposition, die als eine Art der implizit gebildeten, indirekt mitgeteilten Kommunikationsinformation fungiert, ist permanent in der Alltagskommunikation anwesend. Natürliche Kommunikationsformen mit der profilierten Wahrnehmungsperspektive, ethische Gründe, kommunikationsstrategische Motive (Ursachen, kulturell –