



# PARADIGMS OF OTHERNESS

## The American Savage in British Eighteenth-Century Popular and Scholarly Literature

### INTRODUCING THE “SAVAGE OF AMERICA”

Derived from the Latin *salvaticus* and therefore associated to the wild pagans of the woods, the term savage shifted from its original meaning during the era of European geographical discoveries, coming to denote exotic otherness. One of the earliest examples of such a semantic shift can be found in William Camden’s *Remains concerning Britain* (1605), where the phrase “savage of America” for the first time connects the folkloristic imagery of the beastie forest dwellers<sup>1</sup> to the description of the uncivilized natives of the New World.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, whether portrayed as innocent creatures in edenic paradises or ferocious demons in corrupted lands of sloth, American

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1. The medieval type of the Woodwose, from the Anglo-Saxon “Wudu-wasa” to the German “Holzwib,” is a mythical creature that was believed to be the link between modern humans and their ancestors. Often depicted with a tail and a body covered with thick hair, the Woodwose is generally accompanied by a young captive boy tied to a branch (*Monstrous Bodies* 28).
2. William Camden’s work *Remains Concerning Britain* is perfectly inscribed in the Renaissance tradition of incorporating the discourse about the savage virtue of pre-Roman Britain with the emerging speculations on the indomitable character of the populations of the newly conquered territories. Indeed, the *topos* of the worth of Britons’ ancestors goes back to as far as Tacitus who provides a nostalgic version of the *translation imperii* myth where the refinement and civility brought by the Roman conquest corresponds to the loss of innocence of Britain (Tacitus, *Germania*, chap. 11). Then, across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the scholarly dispute about the effeminizing effects of Latin culture on “the old discipline of England”

natives were commonly represented as an underdeveloped race subsisting beyond the structures and standards of Western civilization. The anecdotes from the first-hand encounters between the early explorers of the Old Continent and the Indians reinforced such a simplistic imagery by providing sketches of the “savages” as mere objects of fascination, wonder, and horror.<sup>3</sup> For example, Christopher Columbus’s initial comments about the Arawak population of the Antille appear as rooted in a patronizing rhetoric of evaluation of the natives both in terms of aesthetic features (their bodily beauty) and commercial value (their aptness to slavery):

They were well-built, with good bodies and handsome features [...] They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are made of cane [...] They would make fine servants [...] With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want. (Morison 43)

Likewise, Ferdinand Magellan’s description of the Brazilian savages of Verzin in 1519 reveals the same discourse of contrastive

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re-emerged as a crucial factor in Stephen Gosson’s *School of Abuse* (1579): “Englishmen could suffer watching and labour, hunger, and thirst, and bear of all storms with head and shoulders. They used slender weapons, went naked, and were good soldiers. They fed upon roots and barks of trees, they would stand up to the chin many days in marshes without victuals [...] the men in valor not yielding to Scythia, the women in courage and wrestling and trying such masteries as either consisted in swiftness of feet, agility of body, strength of arms, or martial discipline” (*The English Renaissance* 286). A few years later, Philip Sidney’s *Defense of Poesy* (1595) associates the savage nobility of the “barbarous and simple Indians” of America to the “true remnant of the ancient Britons” in Wales (Aughterson 55).

3. The term “savage” has been used for centuries by white explorers and settlers to dehumanize Indigenous peoples and normalize the use of violence and abuses against them. On the other hand, the word “Indian” is commonly derived by Christopher Columbus’s first encounter with the native peoples of the Antilles he referred to as *Indios*: persons from the Indus valley. Reflecting the wrong assumption that Columbus had finally reached Asia and the Indian Ocean, such mistaken nomenclature was extended in geographical terms to the Caribbean Islands, still known today as the West Indies. In this article, the intentional use of the words “Indians” and “savages” referring to the native tribes of the American continent is meant to reflect their colonial connotation.

assessment of the locals, further supported by the implication of a certain trait of risible animal plainness of their customs:

The said land of Verzin abounds in all good things, and it is larger than France, Spain, and Italy together. It is one of the countries that the King of Portugal has conquered. Its people are not Christians, and worship nothing, but live according to the custom of nature, more like beasts than otherwise. And some of these people live a hundred years, or six score or seven score years, or more, and they go naked, both men and women. Their habitation is in fairly long houses, which they call Boii, and they sleep in nets of cotton, which they call in their language Amache. Be it noted also that the inhabitants of that country, both men and women, are in the habit of painting themselves with fire [i.e., tattooing] over all the body and face. The men are shaved and wear no beard, for they pluck it out themselves. And their whole clothing is a ring surrounded by the largest parrot feathers, with which they cover the part and backside only. Which is a very ridiculous thing [...] And those people, both men and women, are not quite black, but tend to tan color, and they openly display their shame. (Pigafetta 43)

Then, with the seventeenth-century capillarization of the European settlements, along with the spread of French Jesuit missions in Acadia and Terre-Neuve, Western understanding of native American societies improved. In particular, thanks to its "scientific" approach to conversion, the Society of Jesus equated every process of evangelization to an intellectual enterprise,<sup>4</sup> thus playing a major role in promoting the scholarly knowledge of indigenous cultures in terms of languages, customs, and religious beliefs. In 1634, for example, Father Julien Perrault provided a written account of the Mi'kmaq tribe, Nova Scotia, reporting how they lived according to a seasonal subsistence round, how they dressed and behaved, and, of course, what they looked like. Similarly, the written reports of Father Claude Dablon about the resident tribes of the Illinois Confederation, upper Mississippi, result as permeated with the same Jesuit spirit of intellectual curiosity almost constantly inspired by the doctrinal urge to disclose a specific type of "savage virtue":<sup>5</sup>

4. Referring to Jesus's words in Matthew's Gospel (Mat 28:18–20), in Jesuit doctrine to evangelize means to observe, learn and act consequently.

5. The Jesuits were inclined to consider savagery in more sympathetic terms as a result of their doctrine. In fact, as a reaction to Calvinist's obsession for men's sinful nature, the theology of the Society of Jesus saw man

is [the chief of the Illinois] countenance, moreover, is as gentle and winning as is possible to see; and, although, he is regarded as a great warrior, he has a mildness of expression that delights all the beholders. The inner nature does not belie the external appearance, for he is of a tender and affectionate disposition [...] And what we say of the chief can be said of all the rest of his nation, in whom we have noted the same disposition, together with a docility which has no savor of barbarian. (Gold Thwaites 213)

For most of the period between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the history of encounters between the wild natives of the New World and the civilized peoples of the Old Continent had been primarily a written one, carried out through the circulation of settlers' memoirs, captivity narratives, or missionary reports. Notwithstanding the massive presence of such forms of literature, it was not until the advent of the eighteenth century that the picturesque inhabitants of the imperial peripheries gained center stage in British public debate. This was mainly due to a variety of factors connected to the unprecedented development of material sites of civic sociability (i.e., the premises of the new coffee houses, literary salons, voluntary societies and associations) and the virtual discursive practices that appeared along with the emerging print culture. Jürgen Habermas defined such a phenomenon as the birth of the public sphere: the community of inter-subjective networks responsible for the processes of opinion formation and the exercise of political power.<sup>6</sup> In Habermas's

*Captive Minds  
Normativities  
and Protests*

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as "less afflicted with much less irreducible evil than the puritanical and that he was therefore comparatively free to seek and to find the good by his own natural efforts" (Healey 1958). This implied a subtle but highly significant shift from the concept of "fallen" to "purely natural" man, meaning that man—no matter how removed from divine presence or favor—always retained as part of his inherent nature those substantial power that made him a creature of dignity, worth, and real potential virtue. It easily followed that even living *extra ecclesia* and therefore being not competent to the attaining of eternal life, the good pagans were not damned or unworthy creatures.

6. Even though Habermas's thesis can be considered as the basis of the scholarly debate about the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere, there is also an extensive number of critical contributions published in the last thirty years which question, or at least problematize, his assumptions. Brian Cowan's essay "Making Publics and Making Novels: Post-Habermasian Perspectives" provides a comprehensive summary of the works that have appeared on this contentious subject (Downie 55–70).

theorization, the concept of the public sphere is intrinsically tangled with the field of cultural production as it was from the very pages of the new-born genres of journalism and realistic fiction that the views and tastes of the British reading public began to be shaped, reflected, and—most importantly—manipulated.

In this perspective, the availability of information about the foreign lands and populations of North America in the press, along with the strategic opacity through which such information was conveyed—"sufficiently imperfect to allow for, or necessitate, a good deal of imaginative interpretation" (Whelan 6) stimulated a substantial growth of public curiosity. However, if at the beginning of the Augustan Age the representations of North American Indians were still embedded in the early modern forms of Eurocentric fetishism, practically interchangeable with all sorts of manifestations of non-European otherness, this changed in the mid-eighteenth century with the outbreak of the Seven Years War (1756–1763). In this period, the mediatic narrative regarding the role of the savage tribes as potential allies or dangerous obstacles to the exercise of British hegemony in the colonies contributed to transforming the stereotypical imagery of the American Indians into a more tangible reality echoing Britain's own socio-economic past as well as present imperial prosperity.

More specifically, in the peculiar context of the Scottish Enlightenment, the indigenous peoples of America began to be perceived as a set of comparable types enabling Europeans to witness "the first footsteps of the human race" (Scots Magazine, August 1777, 434. qtd. in Bickham 199).<sup>7</sup> By analyzing primitive tribes

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7. Just like in the classic age the institutions and laws of the Greek *polis* could be conceptualized and evaluated in contrast with the practices of the non-Greek barbarians or the despotic theocracy of Persia, European Enlightenment utilized the savages of America as a contrastive mirror-glass for the self-referential evaluation of the merits and achievements of Western civilization. Frederick G. Whelan explains the philosophical foundations of such dynamics of cultural comparison in these terms: "Both empirical political theory (social science) and normative theory (moral evaluation in the political field) would seem to require comparison. Meaningful analysis of a phenomenon such as a social practice, a law code, or a form of government involves the identification of what is essential or special about it, which in turn requires a contrast with other, differing instances

at degree zero on the Western thermometer of civilization, Scottish thinkers developed a new category of historiography known as stadial and conjectural history which aimed to produce a rational reconstruction of the common patterns of progress of mankind. Adam Smith, David Hume, Adam Ferguson, John Millar, Lord Kames, and William Robertson, were among the firsts to pursue such a vision of a comprehensive natural history of civilization deploying the discourse of American Indians to categorize the hierarchy of human societies while carrying out an unprecedented inquiry on the origins and evolution of the European cultural identity.

With these premises, in this article I will explore the transformations of the British imagery regarding the savages of America in the context of eighteenth-century print and material culture. The proliferation of Indian-related subjects in the British public sphere will be analyzed in light of the emerging representations of the Empire both as a geopolitical and discursive reality. Then, I will examine the development of the Scottish Enlightenment underlying its role as main ideological framework for the evaluation of the economic and technological superiority of European civilizations against all those peripheral cultures with whom the British Empire interacted.

#### BALLADS AND POPULAR STORIES: THE SAVAGE AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Separated by hundreds of miles of oceanic and continental wilderness, the British reading public encountered the American savage on an impressively regular basis. Even if the rare presence of indigenous visitors to Britain prevented such encounters to occur on a physical or personal level, Britons could virtually access information about the mysterious lands of North American and their exotic inhabitants through specific literary genres and social happenings. Written accounts and reports of the “Savage Nations” circulated among the publishers

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of the same kind of thing. Evaluative judgments of particulars may appeal to an ideal standard (the best regime, the law of nature) that the philosopher delineates in the abstract, but the more practical questions of distinguishing better and worse regimes from the historically feasible set, or of identifying the moral advantages, disadvantages, and trade-offs in the actual alternatives of political experience, similarly require comparison” (2).

and were exchanged by readers either privately or through commercial lending schemes. Similarly, material exhibitions of all sorts of non-European artifacts became sensational events tailored to redirect the public interest towards imperial issues by engaging both men and women in the cultural debate about alien societies and their relationships with Britain. In this paragraph I will give an account of the early literary representations of American Indians into the burgeoning public sphere. In particular, I will focus on the first visit of the Iroquois delegation at Queen Ann's court in 1710 and its resonance in British cultural imagery as written texts and iconographic material. I will then point out how Richard Steele's famous adaptation of the story of Inkle and Yarico, included in the 11th issue of *The Spectator*, contributed to the construction of the early Enlightenment critique towards the new practices of colonial trade based on the growing English hegemony in the Slave Trade.

One of the most renowned cases of direct contact between Britons and native Americans on British national soil is certainly associated to the "Four Iroquois Kings." The episode revolves around the arrival in 1710 of a delegation of Indian leaders—three Mohawk from the Haudenosaunee alliance and one Mohican from the Algonquin nations—supporting Lieutenant Francis Nicholson in his aim to persuade the government to send naval support for an expedition against New France.<sup>8</sup> Misnamed by both degree and kin, the foreign visitors were curiously neither kings nor Iroquois. However, they were granted the same degree of deference reserved to diplomats and fellow members of the elites and engaged in a variety of institutional activities such as reviewing troops, touring across noble estates, visiting London's major sights, and—of course—being presented at court.<sup>9</sup> Queen Ann herself was so impressed by the tall,

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8. The presence of the delegation was intended to emphasize that Nicholson had powerful support from the native populations for his venture which, unfortunately, resulted in a clamorous naval defeat.

9. For a detailed account of the different activities of the Mohawk delegates, see Hinderaker, pp. 487–526.

muscular physique of her guests to commission their portraits to the famous Dutch painter John Verelst.<sup>10</sup>

Even outside the palace walls, the popular response to the Mohawk envoy was quite significant as the four Indian chiefs were quickly turned into celebrities by the metropolitan press. The reading public was meticulously notified of almost every movement of the delegation across the city so that spontaneous crowds of Londoners would gather to catch a glimpse of them everywhere they went. At the same time, a number of ballads, poems, illustrations, and musical compositions, began to proliferate in the entertainment industry to satisfy the public demand for the “kings.” Among these, the homonymous love ballad “The Four Indian Kings” is probably one of the most popular and enduring literary legacies of such an event. Published shortly after the end of the Iroquois visit in 1710, the ballad remained little altered from its first appearances and survived in at least twenty-six printed editions throughout the English, Irish, and North American publishing markets. As Alden T. Vaughan points out in his study *Transatlantic Encounters: American Indians in Britain, 1500–1776*:

Fifteen or more undated broadsides and short pamphlets from various printers throughout England and Ireland, published soon after the Indians’ departure to America, relate in rhymed stanzas a brief and in most versions unhappy romance between one of the Indians (implicitly unmarried) and a beautiful English lady. By repeating and expanding the story for a year or more after the Indians had left England, the pamphlets vicariously extended, embellished and disseminated their story. (128)

The ballad opens with a historical contextualization which emphasizes the reasons of the native prince to come to Britain:

Attend unto a true relation  
Of four Indian kings of late  
Who came to this Christian nation  
To report their sorrows great  
Which by France they had sustained

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10. The series of oil-colors known as *The Four Indian Kings* or *Four Kings of the New World* constitutes one of the first pictorial renderings of aboriginal people where the subjects are not merely captured in their ethnographic peculiarity, but portrayed as authentic English aristocrats posing in front of wild American landscapes in their most ornate apparels.



to the overthrow of trade  
That the seas might be regained  
Who are come to beg our aid. (Stevens 97)

The love story emerges from “a glance of Britain’s glory” in the modern metropolitan setting of St. James’s Park, where the youngest king admires “Troops of handsome ladies fair/Rich and gaudily attir’d/Rubies, jewels, diamond rings” and falls in love with “One fair lady.” The symbolic characterization of the beautiful woman is that of “Britain’s glory” itself—its society, culture and civilization—and serves to establish an immediate sense of alterity with the identity of the Indian king. Notwithstanding the undoubted qualities of the young lover derived from his noble status (“tho’ he is an Indian king”), the lady initially rejects his proposal for he is a pagan :

Tho’ I pity his disaster  
Tho’ I pity his disaster  
Being catch’d in Cupid’s snare  
Tis against all true discretion  
To comply with what I scorn:  
He’s a Heathen by profession,  
I a Christian bred and born. (Stevens 98)

However, only a few lines later, she resolves to accept him if he agrees to “become a Christian”

If he will become a Christian,  
Live up to the truth reveal’d,  
I will make him grant the question,  
Or before will never yield  
Altho’ he was pleased to send to me,  
His fine ring and diamond stone,  
With this answer pray commend  
To your master yet unknown. (Stevens 98)

This is where the early versions of the ballad end. Some copies from the second half of the eighteenth century add a passage in which the Indian king converts to Christianity and marries the lady with Queen Ann’s approval.<sup>11</sup> Envisioning the possibility for a colonized “other” to be redeemed by the love of a civilized

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11. For a reconstruction of the different versions of the Ballad see Bond 57–68.

woman, “The Four Indian Kings” ballad embodies a classic imperial fantasy where the powerful combination of love and Christianity is presented as the only means to ensure the savage outsiders the access to a new order of enlightened fellowship.

Besides the effective literary merits of such a text, “The Four Indian Kings” continued to shape the British popular perception of the indigenous visitors thanks to its iconographic apparatus. Indeed, the stereotypical woodcut illustrations enclosed in the many editions of the ballad depicted the native chiefs as European monarchs, with scepters, crowns, fur-trimmed capes, and—most strikingly—white faces. In addition to that, as each reprinted edition became farther removed in time from the kings’ original visit, a series of more substantial shifts in the collective memory of the event began to occur. In particular, the number of the Indians was progressively reduced to three while any reference to their North American origins was obliterated in the subtle, somehow unconscious, attempt to assimilate them to the best-known biblical correlative of traveling royals: the Magi (Hinderaker 518).

About a year after this exotic encounter, another prominent discussion regarding the colonial world emerged from the new publication of *The Spectator* by Addison and Steele. Published from March 1711 to 1714, the lifespan of *The Spectator* coincides with an important period for Britain’s imperial history. In fact, by the time of its first issue in 1711 the War of Spanish Succession (1710–1714) was clearly resolving to the advantage of Britain’s imperial enterprise. Conversely, the periodical’s final issue coincides with the Peace of Utrecht (1714) which legally established Britain as the main European power in North America and the Caribbean granting it the monopoly of the Slave Trade. In this perspective, it is not much of a surprise that *The Spectator* results both tangentially and directly concerned with the construction of the early eighteenth-century colonial discourse. Among the stories focused on the relationship between Britain and the extra-European world, nothing hooked the popular imagination more than Steele’s rewriting of the romance of Inkle and Yarico in *The Spectator* (11).

Originally reported by Richard Lingon in his *History of the Island of the Barbadoes* in 1657, the bitter-sweet account of the European sailor Inkle and the indigenous maiden Yarico “sold for a slave, who

was as a free born as he" (*The Spectator* 11) soon became the source of dozens of poems, prose continuations, and dramas, the majority of which were written between 1785 and 1795 during the abolitionist campaign.<sup>12</sup> Steele's version includes a frame narrative following Mr. Spectator's encounter with Arietta, an older woman many people visit to converse with. When Mr. Spectator enters her drawing room, she is discussing matters of "constancy in love" with another man who is using the tale of *The Ephesian Matron* to support his point. Arietta responds to the gentleman's tale with her story of *Inkle and Yarico* where she presents Thomas Inkle as a twenty-year-old Englishman educated by his father in the "love of gain." On its way to the Barbados Islands, his ship comes under some distress and is "put into a Creek on the Main in America, in search of provisions." When a group of Indians ambushes and kills many of Inkle's shipmates, he escapes and hides in a cave where he meets Yarico. The attraction towards the Indian maiden is immediate:

They appeared mutually agreeable to each other. If the European was highly charmed with the Limbs, Features, and wild Graces of the Naked American; the American was no less taken with the Dress, Complexion, and Shape of an European, covered from Head to Foot. The Indian grew immediately enamoured of him, and consequently solicitous for his Preservation (*The Spectator* 11).

Falling in love with one another's diversity, especially clothing and physical appearances, Yarico spends the next several months hiding Inkle from her people while providing him with food and fresh water so that "In this manner did the Lovers pass away their Time, till they had learn'd a Language of their own." Eventually, another ship heading for the Barbadoes passed, and Inkle and Yarico used this opportunity to leave the island. However, after reaching the English colony, Inkle considers selling Yarico as a slave even after being informed she is pregnant with his child:

To be short, Mr. Thomas Inkle, now coming into English territories, began seriously to reflect upon his loss of Time, and to weigh with himself how

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12. According to Frank Felsenstein, over the course of the eighteenth century at least sixty versions of the story were published. It was translated into a variety of languages, made into an opera, a play, and rendered in the form of a poem (2).

many Days Interest of his Money he had lost during his stay with Yarico. This Thought made the Young Man very pensive, and careful what Account he should be able to give his Friends of his Voyage. Upon which Considerations, the prudent and frugal young Man sold Yarico to a Barbadian merchant; notwithstanding that the poor Girl, to incline him to commiserate her Condition, told him that she was with Child be him: But he only made use of that Information, to rise in his Demands upon the Purchaser (*The Spectator* 11).

Steele's version ends with a return to the frame narrative wherein Arietta closes her tale highlighting how Inkle exploited Yarico's condition to bargain for a higher price when selling her, leaving Mr. Spectator visibly moved.

Despite the purely fictional nature of this peculiar story of love and slavery, the popular clamor around Inkle and Yarico reveals a lot about the British perception of the dynamics of hierarchy, gender, and property, implied in the practice of colonial trade.<sup>13</sup> In particular, Mr Spectator's emotional reaction to Arietta's tale can be read as a symptom of the uneasiness regarding the exploitation of indigenous people and the arbitrariness of the boundary between the status of free and enslaved human beings during the earliest decades of English settlements. In addition to that, the *Spectator's* version of Inkle and Yarico discloses the profound intersections between gender and colonial discourses exposing the unspeakable reality of an enslaved woman whose value relies as much in her ability to do the work of any male slave as in the ability of her body to reproduce the next generation of slaves.

The analysis of the cultural phenomena of "The Four Indian Kings" ballad and Steele's rewriting of Inkle and Yarico presented above illustrate how British interest in North American Indians at the beginning of the eighteenth century still responds

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13. "Steele's Inkle and Yarico story was published on 13 March 1711, several months before details of the *asiento* treaty would become public. But there is no doubt that Steele had already sensed the implications of victory over Spain for British colonial policy. In this context, it is significant that the Inkle and Yarico story, rather than displaying enthusiasm for New World slavery, in fact articulates an anxiety over the dangers posed by colonial trade, as opposed to the fair, honest, British trade that was celebrated by Whigs at home. Indeed, imperial trading appeared to involve a suspension of the established social order and a disregard for the social and linguistic codes that bound traders together" (Newman 135).

to a logic of erratic enthusiasm rather than of genuine public engagement for imperial matters. It was only after the Seven Years War (1756–1763) that the indigenous gained centre stage in the British public debate as specific ethnic groups capable of influencing the prosperity or demise of the British Empire. As a result, major British intellectuals—many of which belonged to the Scottish Enlightenment—began to make a more comprehensive and systematic effort to understand and appraise the cultures and political institutions of the non-Western world and use their findings to sustain their research concerning the origin and fate of commercial societies. In the following paragraph I will explore the development of the Scottish philosophical school as the main theoretical framework for the British interactions with its colonies.

SCHOLARLY RELOCATIONS:  
THE SAVAGE AND THE SCOTTISH ENLIGHTENMENT

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The relationship between the Scottish Enlightenment and American Indians is worth revisiting in the context of the eighteenth-century pseudo-scientific reasoning about racial hierarchies on a national and imperial level. As the previous section has just shown, despite a limited number of sensational cameos in the British literary scene, it was not until the second half of the century that savages were used by Scottish philosophers to categorize other cultures into what Edmund Burke described as “the great map of mankind.”<sup>14</sup>

What mostly triggered such a new attitude was the series of highly publicized, large-scale conflicts raging across the North American frontier from 1754 to 1783, namely the Seven Years War and the American War of Independence.<sup>15</sup> In those years, the British

14. In 1777 Edmund Burke wrote a letter to the Scottish historian William Robertson stating: “Now the Great Map of Mankind is unrolled at once; and there is no state or Gradation of barbarism, and no mode of refinement which we have not at the same instant under our View. The very different Civility of Europe and of China; the barbarism of Persia and of Abyssinia. The erratick manners of Tartary, and of Arabia. The Savage State of North America, and of New Zealand” (qtd. in Marshall 93).

15. “British awareness of Indians changed remarkably in the three decades that followed. Indians were simultaneously represented as the causes of defeat, keys to victory, and banes of British rule in America. In an effort

debate about the peoples of the New World saw a progressive overriding of the picturesque representations of Indians typical of the early century with images of brutal savages living in primordial, kin based, hunter-gatherer communities. For Scottish Enlightenment, the state of primitive simplicity characterizing the variety of American cultures was not just an ethnographic oddity but a living window on Europe's past. In particular, Scottish philosophers believed that the origins of all human societies could be traced and observed in the social organization of their contemporary colonial tribes and therefore the study of their manners and customs could be used to substantiate theories about the development of a stadial history of mankind as well as a theory of human emotions.<sup>16</sup> In this paragraph, I will provide an overview of the role of American Indians within the most relevant works of the Scottish Enlightenment in their attempt to merge the moral and natural philosophical approaches to the study of conjectural historiography.

In his study about the Scottish Enlightenment, Hopfl defines conjectural history as the term first employed to describe the methodology used in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) by Adam Smith to illustrate his vision of a stadial scheme of human progress, presenting societies as evolving through stages characterized by different formulations of the division of labor and concepts of property (20). After Smith, also Adam Ferguson, John Millar, William Robertson, and, to a lesser extent, Lord James and David Hume, were among the intellectuals who mostly contributed to the construction of such a field. These men knew each other

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to educate their readers about these essential allies and formidable foes, editors packed their newspapers and magazines with information about American Indians. Sources included accounts from American colonists, reprinted histories and travel accounts, letters from British soldiers serving in America, speeches from various diplomatic encounters with Indians, and the reactions of readers at home. The result of the press's information bombardment was that at least a crude awareness of American Indian warfare, geography, and culture was hard to avoid" (Bickham 67).

16. According to William Robertson (*Annual Register* [1777]), "[Philosophers] discovered that the contemplation of the Americans in their original state, tended to complete our knowledge of the human species, [and] might enable us to fill up a considerable chasm in the history of its progress" (qtd. in Bickham 207).

thanks to Edinburgh's intricate network of social hubs where they met as colleagues, mentors, but especially as friends. Indeed, in a time span of twenty years, beginning with Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), they all published on the same topic with similar titles such as *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) by Adam Ferguson, *History of America* (1777) by William Robertson, and *Origin and Distinction of Ranks in Society* (1778) by John Millar, all of which I will examine below .

Adam Smith was the core of the group as he was Millar's professor who arranged for him to live with Lord Kames during his apprenticeship in law. On the other hand, Kames was the person who firstly introduced Millar to Hume and the wider Edinburgh circle, while William Robertson, another of Smith's students, became the principal of Edinburgh University so that he would have been familiar with the whole group. Even if they diverged on academic and political interests, they all appeared to share the same methodologies and philosophical premises for what concerned their scholarly engagement with American Indians. In particular, an analysis of their works reveals two major common traits: their use of French sources of information about the indigenous tribes of North America, and their common a priori assumptions about man and society.

As regards their typology of sources, Scottish philosophers mostly relied on French Jesuits' accounts such as Lafitau's *Moeurs des Sauvages Amériquains, Comparées aux Moeurs des Premiers Temps* (1724), and Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix's *Histoire et Description Général de la Nouvelle France* (1744). With the parochial exception of the Cadwallader Colden's *History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada* (1744) and James Adair's *History of the American Indians* (1775), the preference of French literature over the British one can be explained in light of a generalized perception of superiority of Jesuits' reports in terms of details and analytical depth. For instance, Ferguson's *History of America* relied almost exclusively on Lafitau's and Charlevoix's works and early modern travel writing, while Millar further justified the recourse to the French sources because of their "degree of authority, upon which we may depend with security,

and to which the narration of any single person, how respectable soever, can have no pretension” (Bickham 176).

On the other hand, for what concerns their a priori assumptions, the Scottish philosophers structured their conjectural histories on the common premises that the commercial society, acme of modern experience, was but an outcome of a recursive evolutionary process that had substantially altered European government and manners. The driving force of such a process was the progressive change in the means by which a society obtained its subsistence, marked by four stages: hunting, shepherding, farming, and commerce. The relationship between these evolutionary stages and the course of human interactions was at the core of the conjectures about the role of private property considered as the ultimate frontier of human moral and economic advancement.

One of the first Scottish thinkers to make explicit use of the “savages of North America” as empirical evidences for the primordial stage of human societies is Adam Smith in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*<sup>17</sup> where he states that moral sentiments can only develop in more advanced social stages in which the presence of a hierarchy of social ranks and leisure time offers sufficient opportunities for individuals to grow reciprocal sympathetic interest. On the contrary, the daily experiences of the native tribes prevented their members from expressing a variety of emotions as “all savages are too much occupied with their own wants and necessities, to give such attention to those of another person” (Smith 1987, 129). To further illustrate his points, he turned to the “savages of North America, [who] we are told, assume upon all occasions the greatest indifference, and would think themselves degraded if they should ever appear in any respect to be overcome, either by love or grief, or resentment” (Smith 1987, 129).

After the success of Smith’s *Theory*, in 1767 Ferguson’s *Essay on the History of Civil Society* contributed to enrich the paradigm for Scots philosophers’ use of Indians in conjectural histories. Accord-

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17. Smith will make further reference to the indigenous people of North America in his famous book *Wealth of Nations* where he will equate them to Britain’s Celtic ancestors: “At the invasion of Julius Caesar [...] its inhabitants were nearly the same state with the savages of North America” (419).



ing to the author, the contemporary zones of the “rude nations” were enormous, stretching “from one to the other extremity of America; from Kamschatka westward to the river Oby, and from the Northern sea, over that length of country, to the confines of China, of India, and Persia; from the Caspian to the Red sea, with little exception and from thence over the inland continent and the western shores of Africa” (Ferguson 148). The presumed universality and interchangeability of such civilizations offered “polished” nations the opportunity to peer into their own past: “It is in their present condition, that we are to behold, as in a mirror, the features of our own progenitors, and from thence we are to draw our conclusions with respect to the influence and situations, in which, we have reason to believe, our fathers were placed” (Ferguson 147).

In addition to that, Ferguson’s *Essay on the History of Civil Society* reinforced the thesis that British ancestors also lived in a social state similar to the American Indians: “the inhabitants of Britain, at the time of the first Roman invasions, resembled, in many things, the present natives of North America” (137). This parallelism allowed the scholar to stress some rare but admirable traits of the indigenous peoples such as their inherent sense of freedom. Ensuring that no man had to endure “any imposition, or unequal treatment,” he stated that what actually determined Indians’ wartime goals was the preservation of people, rather than the pursuit of glory and material greed: “The American rates his defeat from the numbers of men he has lost, or he estimates his victory from the prisoners he has made; not from his having remained the master of a field [...] A man with whom he can associate in all his pursuits, whom he finds an object to his affections, and an aid in his struggles, is to him the most precious accession of fortune” (250). This specific assumption allowed Ferguson to connect the imagery about Indian warriors to the emerging type-character of the romantic hero:

The hero of Greek poetry proceeds on the maxims of animosity and hostile passion. His maxims in war are like those which prevail in the woods of America. They require him to be brave, but they allow him to practice against his enemy every sort of deception. The hero of modern romance professes a contempt of stratagem, as well as of danger, and unites in the same person, characters and dispositions seemingly opposite;

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ferocity with gentleness, and the love of blood with sentiments of tenderness and pity. (362)

Like Ferguson's *History of Civil Society*, also Millar's *Origins of the Distinction of Ranks* (1778) maintained his colleagues' perception of the American natives as the living examples of the pre-history of the civilized nations of Europe. In particular, Millar explored how human progress had an impact on family organizations, showing how the place and treatment of women within a society could be seen as an index of the socio-economic development achieved by a given community. In addition, Millard's research focuses with remarkable originality on the relationship between cultural advancement and sexual desire. Rejecting the arguments of the naturalist Buffon about the possible connection between the low population-density of the American continent and the supposed inferiority of its inhabitants' reproductive organs, the Scottish scholar asserted that the demographic scarcity among the Indians was mainly due to the limited male interest in copulation rather than a genital defect. Such lack of enthusiasm on the part of indigenous males for "cultivating a correspondence with the other sex" was ascribed to their easy access to sexual intercourses where the male savage "arrives at the end of his wishes, before they have sufficiently occupied his thoughts, or engaged him in those delightful anticipations of happiness which the imagination is apt to display in the most flattering colours" (qtd. in Bickham 190).<sup>18</sup>

One of the last exponents of Scottish Enlightenment to extensively include the American Indians in his inquiry on the "infancy of social life" was William Robertson. Unlike Smith or Ferguson, Robertson was not a social theoretician but he nonetheless applied the same evaluative methodology employed by Machiavelli's *Discourses* and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* to examine the Spanish Empire in the New World. Heavily relying on Hume's skeptical theory of knowledge—in which conceptions of time, space, substance, and causation are seen to be rooted in custom and education—Robertson's *History of America* (1790) described the American Indians as creatures of appetite

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18. For a deeper analysis of eighteenth-century Scottish studies on women and sexual relationships among the American tribes see Moloney.

without the use of reason. Incapable of forming an idea of futurity, Robertson's savages were depicted as genuinely limited and simplistically dismissed as "small, independent, hostile tribes, struggling for subsistence amidst the wood and marshes" (qtd. in Bickham 196).

In conclusion, it is clear that Scottish Enlightenment philosophers did not paint a flattering portrait of the American populations. Rather, their perception of the natives continued being deeply affected by the existing popular views about the savages,<sup>19</sup> whether by presenting them as irredeemable or emphasizing the negative connotations of their physical characteristics. On the other hand, in terms of positive qualities, Scots intellectuals commonly acknowledged Indians with a considerable degree of personal freedom, superior oratorical skills, and an enviable immunity to the hardships associated with greed and vanity. Even if most of the theoretical principles of conjectural history were shared by all the four authors presented here, their emphasis differed according to the single intellectual and political concerns. Smith and Millar, for example, appear more focused on the contrast between primitive and modern societies in terms of property, social rank, and manners while Ferguson's civic engagements led him to contemplate the vigor and virtues of the "rude nations" in contrast to the potential corruptibility of the "polished" ones. On the other hand, Robertson's comprehensive but unaccomplished narrative of European empires presupposed the patronizing stereotype of the American natives as savages in need of civilization.

In this way, by using them either as mirrors on Europe's own barbaric past,<sup>20</sup> or as empirical evidences of the earliest stages of human civilization, the Scottish Enlightenment exploited

19. "Descriptions of Indians were abundant throughout the British press, which provided easy and inexpensive access to detailed accounts of Indian warfare, culture, and society. These were available in the Scots Magazine, a favourite of the Scottish literati, as well as in a host of other Scottish and English newspapers and magazines that would have been available by subscription in the coffee-houses in which the Scots philosophers met and socialized" (Bickham 181).

20. "Indians such as the Iroquois became contemporary equivalents of ancient Britons, Gauls, and Scots. Their pagan societies reminded the Church

the imagery related to the savages of America as the theoretical and ideological basis for the legitimation of the natives' political subjection within the new imperial order.

#### CONCLUSIONS: PARADIGMS OF OTHERNESS

In the attempt to investigate the British popular representations of the savages during the long eighteenth-century, this article has revealed the two major diachronical turning points in the construction of the European's ethnographic paradigm of otherness. Indeed, for most of the years from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, the symbolic opposition between wild and civilized peoples was articulated on a stereotypical imagery of American Indians seen as the inferior aliens upon which the rising culture of Empire shored its dominance. However, due to their paradoxical status of outsiders born *within* the extended boundaries of the British commonwealth, American savages represented a new model of imperial otherness deprived of the threatening and hostile qualities generally associated to common outsiders. Indeed, Indians had quite a different appeal to the British audience who viewed them as exotic and mysterious allies endowed with an essentially benign set of features. As shown in the second section, the early eighteenth-century apparitions of savages in the British sphere of literary production seem to match with this prototype. The popular success and the artistic longevity of the ballad of *The Four Indian Kings*, or the famous story of *Inkle and Yarico* can be seen as examples of the public appetite for the type of sensational exoticism embodied by the Indians. Then, as shown in the third section, during the second half of the century, more precisely in the years between the end of the Seven Years War and Britain's defeat in the American War of Independence (1754–83), such a characterization of American natives experienced a radical change. The consistent representation of the indigenous as ruthless, indiscriminate, but extremely capable warriors, demonstrates how the British were unwilling to see Indians in idealized, noble-savage terms any longer. In particular, key philosophers

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of England clergy of the European gentiles at the time of Paul the Apostle's entreaties for the expansion of the Christian Church" (Bickham 2).

of Scottish Enlightenment deployed the principle of aesthetic primitivism observed within the social organization of American tribes to fuel British interest in their own ancestral origins, while providing an empirically sustained theory for the vast socio-economic discrepancies between the world's cultures and nations. Scottish Enlightenment's relation to imperialism and the colonial discourse is certainly influenced by the British political context in the aftermath of the 1707 Act of Union. Being finally integrated into the political entity of Great Britain, Scotland rapidly changed its status from one of an oppressed colony to one of a northern periphery of a growing global empire. However, notwithstanding the fact that the economic and administrative centers of Glasgow and Edinburgh massively benefited from the fruits of English colonial trade, some of the most celebrated authors of the Scottish Enlightenment showed quite a critical attitude toward the imperial enterprise. Both Hume and Smith, for example, condemned the colonial wars for their ruinous impact on the British public debt which they saw as a major factor of degeneration and corruption of commercial societies. Likewise, Robertson's patronizing conception of imperialism as well as Ferguson's vitalist critique of colonial expansion seem to suggest a certain degree of sensibility towards the inclusion of non-Europeans within the ordinary standards of political and human reciprocity. In this perspective, the Scottish Enlightenment can be regarded as the cultural framework in which "the barbarian ceased being an 'other' and became an origin of the self" (Pocock 363) thus transforming the American natives from the generic turban-wearing Orientals of the first eighteenth-century into the earliest characters of Europe's quest for its own narrative of civilization.

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