

Rereading Captivity: White Anxiety and Indian Assimilation in *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* and *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventure of John Tanner*¹

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ABSTRACT

James E. Seaver's *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* and Edwin James' *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventure of John Tanner* are accounts of white captives among the Native Indians. Unlike other American captivity narratives, the two accounts present the theme of white assimilation into the Indian society along with the portraits of Indians as noble savages. Ethnography which permeates the narratives signifies racial agenda behind the dialectic of exoticism.

บทคัดย่อ

วรรณกรรมเรื่อง *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* ของ เจมส์ อี. เซเวอร์ (James E. Seaver) และ *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventure of John Tanner* ของ เอ็ดวิน เจมส์ (Edwin James) เป็นบันทึกของคนผิวขาวที่ตกเป็นเชลยของชาวพื้นเมืองอินเดียน เรื่องราวของ แมรี เจมิสัน และจอห์น แทนเนอร์แตกต่างกับบันทึกเชลยอเมริกันเรื่องอื่นๆ โดยเสนอแก่นเรื่องที่กล่าวถึงการปรับตัวของเชลยผิวขาวเข้ากับสังคมของคนอเมริกันพื้นเมืองหรืออินเดียน และนำเสนอภาพลักษณ์ของคนอินเดียนในฐานะคนเถื่อนใจธรรม นอกจากนั้นองค์ประกอบทางชาติพันธุ์วรรณนาในท้องเรื่องยังบ่งชี้ นัยยะทางเชื้อชาติผ่านการโต้แย้งของวิชาชีพแห่งคตินิยมเอ็กโซติกด้วยอีกโฉดหนึ่ง

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In 1755, twelve-year-old Mary Jemison of Pennsylvania was carried off by a band of Shawnee before being handed over to the Seneca of western New York. When Dr. James E. Seaver discovered her in 1823, he invited the elderly Jemison for a personal interview and transcribed her words “[w]ithout the aid of fiction” (Seaver, 1992: 51) into the 1824 edition of *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*³. In 1789, nine-year-old John Tanner was abducted by the Shawnee from his remote village in upper Kentucky and was later sold to the Ojibwa in northern Michigan. He would spend the next three decades migrating around the American Great Lakes region under the care of his Indian foster parents (Fierst, 1986: 23-4). Eventually, Tanner decided to return to the whites and make his story known in the 1830 edition of *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventure of John Tanner*⁴ by Dr. Edwin James (Sayre, 1999: 484).

The 1820s saw a new momentum in the American attitude towards the Native Indians. Both *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* and *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner* were biographical accounts of white captives among the Indians, a genre which had already gained traction in the American book market during the antecedent decades. However, the theme of white assimilation placed the two accounts at odds with most American captivity narratives. This essay analyzes the positions of the two accounts in the tradition of American captivity writing in the 1820s context.

American Captivity Writing

It might be possible to mark the sixteenth century as the beginning of American captivity writing. As more European travelers on expedition set foot in the Americas, incidents of conflicts and their captivities among unfriendly natives became recognized in a number of European travelogues. Well into the seventeenth century, Europeans would continue to

³ *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison, who was taken by the Indians, in the year 1775, when only about twelve years of age, and has continued to reside amongst them to the present time, containing an Account of the Murder of her Father and his Family; her sufferings; her marriage to two Indians; her troubles with her Children; barbarities of the Indians in the French and Revolutionary Wars; the life of her last husband, &c; and many Historical Facts never before published* (1824).

⁴ *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner, (U.S. Interpreter at the Sault de Ste. Marie,) during thirty years residence among the Indians in the Interior of North America* (1830).

make records of the Indian captivities, often as minor episodes in longer narratives. The anonymous' *Relaçam Verdadeira* of the *Gentleman of Elvas*, translated into English by Richard Hakluyt as *Virginia Richly Valued* (Voigt, 2009: 306-307), and Captain John Smith's *Generall Historie of Virginia* (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier, 1993: 17) contained various sections on Indian captivities although they were written primarily as travelogues. These earlier accounts were published exclusively in Europe. *Gentlemen of Elvas* was initially printed in the Portuguese city of Elvira in 1557 while Hakluyt's translation and Smith's account were released in 1609 and 1624 in London.

It was only later in the seventeenth century that the inhabitants of American New England began to produce their own captivity narratives. From the seventeenth century onward, stories of Indian captivities became central in a number of American biographical and autobiographical accounts which were written, printed and read on American soil. Very popularly acclaimed were Mary Rowlandson's *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* and Cotton Mather's *Humiliations Follow'd with Deliverance* (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier, 1993: 219). Hundreds of other captivity narratives continued to supply the American book market well into the late nineteenth century.

White Anxiety

From the late seventeenth towards the close of the nineteenth century, the majority of American captivity narratives were published in pamphlets as a-shilling-worth penny dreadfuls, the cheap sensational fiction of their day. They provided channels for the Americans to feed on stories of "tortures, gore, and bloodshed" under the strict prohibition of any explicit pornographic materials (Drinnon, 1973: 14). Through the excess of descriptive details, these narratives brought readers to the world of Indian brutality and perversion. Mary Rowlandson, for example, drew on such images to the Indian victory celebration which comprised of "... the roaring, and singing and dancing, and yelling of those black creatures in the night, which made the place a lively resemblance of hell". John Gyles similarly remarked in his 1763 account of how "[the Indians] are encouraged by the devil, for they go to him for success in hunting" (VanDerBeets, 1984: 2). Indian cannibalism was also popularly depicted in a number of American captivity narratives. Jonathan Carver in his 1778 diary related how "many of these savages drank the blood of their victims, as it flowed warm from the fatal wound" (VanDerBeets, 1984: 40-41). Father Bressani,

according to the 1858 edition of his account, saw the dismembered body of a captive and “[b]efore my eyes, [the Indians] skinned and ate the feet and hands”. Hundreds of captivity pamphlets with these gory descriptions were circulated among the seventeenth and eighteenth century American readership and would continue to dominate the tradition of American captivity writing well towards the end of the nineteenth century.

As penny dreadfuls and shilling horrors, the mainstream American captivity narratives represented a collective anxiety of the white Americans towards the savage Indians. While travel writings attempted to bury the fears of savagery under the macho language of exploration, captivity narratives unearthed the anxieties and brought them to the forefront. Anna McClintock studies this white anxiety that lurks behind the textuality of early modern arts and literature. By applying Victor Turner’s concept of the liminal condition, McClintock sees the anxieties as the crisis of white identity in face of the marginal influences. As European travelers arrived at an unknown shore outside of their familiar limits, they also trespassed the psychological threshold which marked the civilized subjectivity from the dark, savage zone: “There on the margins between known and unknown, the male conquistadors, explorers and sailors became creatures of transition and threshold. As such, they were dangerous, for, as Douglas writes: ‘Danger lies in transitional states ... The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others’.” (McClintock, 1995: 24-25)

Liminal condition applied when the civilized white subject was brought before the mysterious realm of savageness. There, the civilized subjectivity would develop the fear of marginal engulfment and recession into the savagery. The anxiety found expressions in the cannibal trope presented in a number of early modern arts and writings where the white conquerors were depicted as eaten or mutilated by the savages of primitive lands (McClintock, 1995: 27). Regarding the Indians as threats, white settlers in the colonies—later to become citizens of the American Republic—would also begin to demarcate a stiff line between civilization and Indian savagery in an attempt to shield the status of the white subject. The accounts of fear and humiliation, the savage treatments that the captives underwent, the affirmation of Christian faith and white civility—all signified the writers’ anxiety as well as the struggles to resolve and maintain the civilized subjectivity.

These were reasons why the mainstream American captivity narratives contained the popular themes of Indian brutality and moral decadence along with the authors' assertions of Christian and white superiority in face of the Indians. The "barbarous Indians" who possessed "horrible addictedness to lying, and that there is not one of them that makes the least conscience of speaking of truth" in contrast to "a vast difference between the lovely faces of Christians, and foul looks of those heathens" (Rowlandson, 2004: 17-18) were discursive prototypes of these mainstream American captivity narratives.

White Anxiety in Jemison and Tanner

A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison and *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventure of John Tanner* shared a common anxiety found in the majority of American captivity writings. Although the two accounts appear to be Jemison's and Tanner's own autobiographies, the authorships can be more identified with the editors, James Seaver and Edwin James. Dr. James Seaver, who claimed to have contributed Jemison's story "without the aid of fiction", in fact played a major part in the narrative's direction, causing, as June Namias observes, the "inherent problem of extricating Jemison from Seaver" (Sayre, 1999: 484). Tanner's account was similarly written by Edwin James, "a doctor and scientific explorer with a long resume of frontier experience with Indians" (Sayre, 1999: 484). Since Tanner had difficulty communicating in English, Dr. James, who "spoke the Indian language of his collaborating subject", asked Tanner to dictate the narrative in Ojibwa (Sayre, 1999: 485). Although *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventure of John Tanner* was more credible than Jemison's narrative, there was the same underlying white agenda within the account. Through these white editors, the narratives of Jemison and Tanner were the arenas on which the white anxieties manifest and struggle.

The beginning chapters of *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* contain the lurid accounts of massacres by the Shawnees: "My suspicious as to the fate of my parents proved to be true; for soon after I left them they were killed and scalped, together with Robert, Matthew, Betsey, and the woman and her two children, and mangled in the most shocking manner" (Seaver, 1990: 13). Dreadful practices of the Indians are also vividly

presented on the beginning pages of the narrative: *"On our way we passed a Shawanee town, where I saw a number of heads, arms, legs, and other fragments of the bodies of some white people who had just been burnt"* (Seaver, 1990: 19).

The beginning of Tanner's narrative also paints a similar image on the Indians. The *"object of terror"* (Tanner, 1994: 5), young Tanner would be regularly beaten and tomahawked for his minor lapses although he manages to survive and learns to cope with the harsh Indian discipline (Tanner, 1994: 5). The first pages of Tanner's account continue to relate a similar brutality that Jemison has earlier encountered: *"As I did not know how to [spear fish] well, they commonly turned upon me, beat me, and often knocked me down with the pole of the spear. By one or the other of them I was beaten almost every day"* (Tanner, 1994: 11).

It is also obvious that the beginning sections of the two accounts attempt to assert the ideal of white superiority. Young Jemison remembers the last words of her parents: *"Be careful and not forget your English tongue ... Don't forget, my little daughter, the prayers that I have learned you – say them often"* (Seaver 1990, 15). As certain time lapses, young Jemison still maintains a hope of returning to the whites: *"the sight of white people who could speak English inspired me with an unspeakable anxiety to go home with them, and share in the blessings of civilization"* (Seaver 1990, 27).

At the beginning chapters, young Tanner also expresses a similar desire of returning to the white community: *"I therefore chose, for the present, to remain with them, but always intended, at some future time, to return and live among the whites"* (Tanner, 1994: 26). As he is proposed a marriage, Tanner hesitates, having *"yet thought little of marriage among the Indians, still thinking I should return before I became old, to marry to the whites"* (Tanner, 1994: 85). The account still constitutes Tanner with heroic personality which implies the superiority of white men over the Indians. Tanner grows up to become the best hunter among the Ojibwa, returning from a hunt with more animal prizes than other members of the band. Tanner *"promoted the fantasy that a white man could out-Indian the Indian, as in his frequent boasts that he was the best hunter around"* (Sayre, 1999: 495). Like earlier captivity narratives, both the accounts of Jemison and Tanner also attempt to demarcate a line between the white civilization and Indian savagery.

Assimilation Theme

Notwithstanding, the accounts of Jemison and Tanner are unlike other American captivity narratives in presenting the theme of “white men turning Indians”. Mary Jemison would remain with the Senecas for the rest of her life while historical records revealed how Tanner found difficulty readjusting himself to the white community after his return. Tanner was last seen by the whites in 1846 and rumors went that he had decided to rejoin the Ojibwa band (Fierst, 1986: 36). Within the textuality of both narratives, the anxiety which develops at the beginning chapters gradually melts away as the captives welcome assimilation into the Indian society.

The assimilation theme is in fact dominant in the accounts of both Jemison and Tanner. Jemison at once embraces her new Indian identity after the initiation rite is performed: *“I was, however, happily disappointed, when at the close of the ceremony the company retired, and my [Indian] sisters went about employing every means for my consolation and comfort”* (Seaver, 1990: 78). Although Jemison initially finds the ceremony repulsive, the revulsion finally dissipates into the sense of welcome. A similar sensation arises as Jemison is compelled to marry an Indian man. In her reluctance, Jemison believes the marriage will prevent a chance of returning to the civilization, that *“[t]he idea of spending my days with [the Indian husband], at first seemed perfectly irreconcilable to my feelings”*. However, the anxiety resolves as Jemison comes to embrace the Indian conjugal life: *“Sheninjee [Jemison’s first husband] was a noble man ... his good nature, generosity, tenderness, and friendship towards me, soon gained my affection; and, strange as it may seem, I loved him!”* (Seaver, 1990: 81-82).

The process of Tanner’s assimilation is somewhat similar to Jemison’s experience. As he is *“rising in the estimation of the Indians, and becoming as one of them”* (Tanner, 1994: 46), Tanner tries in vain to restrain his love and passion for the Indian life. Although he rejects the first marriage offer, Tanner soon relents after several more offers are given (Tanner, 1994: 84). With a wife and property, Tanner soon develops a permanent tie with the Indian community. He prospers among the Ojibwas until being entrusted and honored with warriorship. He speaks of *“ceremonies of what may be called the initiation of warriors, this being the first time I had been on a war party”* (Tanner, 1994: 108).

Apart from the assimilation theme, the narratives also idealize the Indians as noble savages while maintaining an undercurrent tone of criticism towards the whites. The image of Indians as noble savages rarely echoed in the American captivity writing until the beginning of the nineteenth century. For Jemison, *"Indians love their friends and kindred, and treat them with kindness"* (Seaver, 1990: 73) while *"[t]he warmth of their feelings, the kind reception which I met with, and the continued favors that I received at their hands, riveted my affection for them so strongly"* (Seaver, 1990: 80). For Tanner, the Indians "are commonly ready to divide what provisions they have, with any who come to them in need" (Tanner, 1994: 66). Indian society, although less civilized, has its own system of justice which is somewhat better than the complicated legal system of the whites. While Tanner relates stories of Indian revenge and murder, he also reflects how the acts are more just and effective in settling Indian conflicts. And while Indian life has many hardships, the roughness and industry still constitute the Indians as ideal masculine individuals. To Tanner, the Indians enlighten him with the true meaning of masculinity and personhood: *"Since I have been a man, I have been placed in difficult situations; but my anxiety for success was never greater than in this, my first essay as a hunter"* (Tanner, 1994: 17). Friendly rivalries with the brave Indians complete Tanner's heroism: *"One of the young men, the son of Wah-ka-zhe, was accounted the best hunter among the Indians of this band, and there was, between us, while we resided at Be-gwi-o-nush-ko, a friendly rivalry in hunting"* (Tanner, 1994: 163).

Jemison and Tanner also reproach white society in light of lessons learned from the Indians. Tanner criticizes the indolent French workmen who are *"... lazy and insolent, and refused to go for meat, to carry packs, or render me any assistance whatever"* (Tanner, 1994: 263). The Anglo-American traders are also censured for their cunning scheme of exchanging cheap liquors for their costly products. Whereas white society finds fault in the Indian drinking habit, Tanner condemns the whites as causers of such evil. To Tanner, the whites are initiators of vices that quickly erode and despoil the virtuous society of the Indians: *"... I had been so long among the Indians that many of them were personally my friends, and having seen the extent of the mischiefs occasioned by the introduction of intoxicating liquors, I had become desirous of preventing it ..."* (Tanner, 1994: 264). Although Tanner at times relates incidents of the Indian vices, they become rather minimal compared to the evils of white

men. Whereas Indian vices—jealousy, aggression, pride, and the “unconquerable appetite for spirits”—are instinctual, the white traders, driven by the greed for material possession, are even more destructive under the civilized masks.

Jemison similarly criticizes the whites through the idealized portrait of the Indians. As Jemison becomes better acquainted with the Seneca, she perceives a noble beauty within their primitive livelihood: “*Notwithstanding all that has been said against the Indians ... it is a fact that they are naturally kind, tender and peaceable towards their friends, and strictly honest*” (Seaver, 1990: 33). Jemison believes the influx of white artifacts may bring downfall of the Indian communities: “*Indians must and will be Indians, in spite of all the means that can be used for their cultivation in the sciences and arts*” (Seaver, 1990: 32). Whiskey and other liquors introduced to the Indians have also brought decays to their idealized community: “*The use of ardent spirits amongst the Indians, and the attempts which have been made to civilize and Christianize them by white people, has constantly made them worse and worse; increased their vices, and robbed them of many of their virtues; and will ultimately produce their extermination*” (Seaver, 1990: 32).

Never before had the Indians been glorified in the American captivity literature; never did American captivity writers condemn the whites in favor of the Indians—not until the early nineteenth century when the Indian noble image began to emerge in the American captivity writing.

Reception of the Accounts

During the 1820s, the assimilation theme in American captivity narratives did not always receive a friendly reception. Captivity narratives before and during the nineteenth century often refused to convey any positive terms of the Indians who were seen as the degradation of human personality (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier, 1993: 63). In 1823, John Dunn Hunter, a white captive who spent his childhood among the Indians, published his *Manners and Customs of Several Indian Tribes Located West of Mississippi*. The account was among the earliest writings that reversed the bad Indians into victims of the white invasions. Hunter's critique of the white society was almost intolerable to most patriotic Americans who could not stand the portrayal of the Indians as if they were better than the rational whites (Drinnon, 1973: 21).

While Hunter was blunt in his critique of white society, the editor of Jemison's account prudently appropriated the narrative as though he had anticipated a similar consequence. In the author's introduction to the first edition of the narrative, Seaver urged the readers to pay more attention to the historical value of the account instead of the "Frankness" which *"characterized [Jemison's] conduct"*. Seaver insisted that his intention was initially *"to preserve some historical facts which they supposed to be intimately connected with her life ..."* (Seaver, 1992: 54). Years later, the publisher's note to the 1856 edition still warned the readers that Jemison's account presented *"the reverse of the order of nature"*. The same publisher continued to pick on Jemison, saying that she was already punished for *"this unnatural alliance"* with the Indians which caused the *"tow of her sons"* to *"meet with a violent death at the hands of their brother, and afterward, to complete the tragedy, the fratricide himself dies by the hands of violence"* (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier, 1993: 75). Edwin James' introduction to the first edition of Tanner's account also voiced a similar conception: *"Some particulars in Mr. Tanner's narrative will doubtless excite a degree of incredulity, among such as have never attended particularly to the history and conditions of the Indian tribe ... He will appear to some weakly credulous—to others, stupidly dishonest"* (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier, 1993: 76).

Apart from the resistances against the reading of Indian assimilation, the accounts of Jemison and Tanner, and even that of John Hunter, received a popular reception in the American book market, especially in the metropolitan sphere of the Eastern Seaboard. The popularity even extended across the Atlantic to the readers of England and several other European countries. After the first edition of Jemison's account had rapidly grown in popularity around the upper New York region, it was quickly reprinted and issued in Batavia, Auburn, Westfield, Rochester, and Buffalo before making way to New York City and across the Atlantic to London (Namias, 1992: 4). By the end of 1824, the book had sold over a hundred thousand copies. The popularity of the book would continue throughout the century, with 14 editions coming between 1824 and 1877 (Namias, 1992: 34). The reception of John Tanner's narrative was less acclaimed, but it nevertheless received a certain degree of popularity both in the US and Europe. The narrative was published for the first time in New York City before being reprinted that same year in London. French and German translations were also made available in 1835 and 1840 (Sayre, 1999: 469).

The theme of white assimilation among the natives in American captivity writing was initiated in the early nineteenth century. Their portrayals of Indians as noble fit *“the emerging ideology that a once romantic and noble Indian life was becoming extinct”* (Namias, 1992: 34), but it carried beyond ideology into action in many cases. Incidents of whites going native had not been uncommon. Scholars such as Emma Coleman, Daniel Richter and Alden Vaughan placed the number of New English captives and *“native converts”* between the span of the seventeenth and eighteenth century at more than a thousand, while *“thousands more, whose names are lost, may either have died along the way or been adopted by the Indians”* (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier, 1993: 2). In these instances, a 1747 record by Cadwallader Colden, a New York lieutenant governor, showed how a number of white captives refused to leave the Indians at redemptions:

No Arguments, no Intreaties, nor Tears of their Friends and Relations, could persuade many of them to leave their own Indian Friends and Acquaintance[s]; several of them that were by the Caressings of their Relations persuaded to come Home, in a little Time grew tired of our Manner of living, and run away again to the Indians, and ended their Days with them. (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier, 1993: 5)

At least 200 more captives who were redeemed through a 1764 treaty of Colonel Henry Bouquet resisted leaving their Indian homes. These incidents were noticed and recorded in various official reports throughout the span of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Jean de Crevecoeur, an eighteenth-century French-American writer, wondered why it was that *“thousands of Europeans are Indians, and we have no example of even one of those aborigines having from choice become European?”* That could there really be *“something superior in Indian society?”* (Drinnon, 1973: 15).

Most captivity accounts before the 1820s were silent about these stories of assimilation. In 1783, John Slover, a white captive who spent twelve years with the Indians from the age of eight, wrote *Narratives of a Late Expedition against the Indians; with an Account of the Barbarous Execution of Col. Crawford*. Yet, Slover's pamphlet was more of a penny dreadful, presenting the same popular juxtaposition between Indian savagery and white superiority. The 1820s truly marked the earliest presence of the good and victimized Indians in the American captivity narrative (Drinnon, 1973: 16).

Nostalgia for Primitivism

Conditions in the early nineteenth century paved the way for the American sentiment towards the Indians. Shortly before the 1820s, there was already a conception that the Indians might be assimilable to white society. While serving his presidential term between 1801 and 1809, Thomas Jefferson made a powerful statement regarding the needs to assimilate the Native people into white society: “... *our settlements and theirs to meet and blend together, to intermix, and become one people*” (Takaki, 2000: 59). In fact, Jefferson contended that once the Indians were pacified by the assimilation policy, it might be easier for the whites to take over Indian territories. Jefferson’s policy encountered opposition nevertheless. For instance, President Andrew Jackson, who came into office in 1829, took an aggressive stance towards the Indians. He demanded a complete ostracism of the Indians from any fertile territories so that they might be replaced by white settlers (Takaki, 2000: 106). Amidst the political bubblings of Indian assimilation into white society, white assimilation into the Indian society was happening, and positive accounts of Indians and Indian culture, such as the accounts of Jemison and Tanner, were also emerging.

The 1820s provided conditions that allowed the counter-image of good Indians to seep into the American literary tradition. During the earlier decades when the young Republic’s stability was not yet firmly established, compassion for the Indians became a barrier for the Republic’s territorial expansion and civil development. Amidst the impulse to civilize the young nation, the demarcation of civility from native savagery became a significant concern of many white Americans. Although incidents of white assimilation among the Indians were not left unnoticed, any attempts to idealize or romanticize them were hardly acceptable to the American public before the nineteenth century.

In the early nineteenth century, the rise of metropolitan sphere contributed to the white American sentiment towards the Indians. The demographic record reveals a great transition of the fragile American settlements in the early eighteenth century into the well-established metropolises by the 1820s. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, New York City contained some 5,000 inhabitants while Boston, the largest American settlement, stood at around 7,000. In the 1820s, New York alone flourished into a city of 118,000 people while

Philadelphia had over 130,000 inhabitants (Mohl, 1997: 15). Unlike the early settlements, which had been constantly exposed to Indian threats, news of Indian attacks in nineteenth-century metropolises were viewed as goings-on in the far-off frontiers. Traces of affluent city life also began to emerge shortly before the 1820s. The new industrial society which began to prosper reflected the culture of consumption and production. In the 1820s, America would become engaged in its first phase of the Industrial Revolution.

The consumption of books which *"fit the emerging ideology that a once romantic and noble Indian life was becoming extinct"* would reflect the readers' nostalgic sentiment amidst the growing urban industrial society. Many Americans disapproved of the vices that seemed to go along with urban growth and prosperity and began to seek a nostalgic refuge in the primitive and simple livelihood of the Natives. From an 1823 issue of the *Monthly Review* : *"In civilized countries, the most luxurious and the most miserable of the human race are to be found; but, among the Indians of North America, those extremes are unknown which poverty and affluence exhibit in every city and town of Europe"* ("Memoirs of a Captivity", 1823: 369). While some metropolitan residents began to perceive the beauty of Indian culture, they also became increasingly aware about the news of Indian extermination that arrived constantly from the frontiers. For many, America could not continue to exterminate the Indians under the banner of patriotism. The same author from the *Monthly Review* remarked, *"Civilization has opened to man destructive views, and given him the means of indulging them ... The Whites civilize the Indians as settlers clear a forest – by felling all before them!"* ("Memoirs of a Captivity", 1823: 370; see Drinnon, 1973: 21).

The idealization of Indian society and a critical conception towards the whites pervaded the accounts of Mary Jemison and John Tanner under these socio-economic conditions. The rise of the American metropolis would nurture a novel taste in the consumption of captivity writings. It would also spark the awareness among some white Americans who began to rethink the maltreatment that they had earlier imposed upon the noble Indians at the civilization's frontier.

Ethnography

While both accounts of Jemison and Tanner could be read for literary pleasure, their semi-documentary elements carry some weight as ethnographies. The narratives contain the ethnography of Indian livelihood and practices, including the detailed descriptions of Indian farming and hunting methods and expound on the primitive structure of Indian society and governing. Politically speaking, ethnography is the apparatus which compresses the vastness of knowledge and global terrain to create a clearer picture so that the dominant power can dominate more effectively (Loomba, 2005: 53). In the context of American captivity writing, the ethnographic elements reflected the white Americans' attempt to reshape and restructure the knowledge about the savage people, who were perceived as threats to Anglo-American civilization. By aligning the savage terrain into a structure of facts, the heinous realm of the savages was made familiar, enabling the whites to pervade and conquer the subjects of their anxieties.

Ethnography, which permeates the accounts of Jemison and Tanner, is a reflection of how the assimilation theme in fact continues to uphold the demarcation between whiteness and noble savageness. Ethnography is a product of the dialectic of exoticism, which plays a significant role in conciliating the savage image of the Indians, turning the atrocious Indians (in the whites' imagination) into strange but harmless beings that rather deserve a curious speculation as exotics.

The dialectic of exoticism, which finds expressions in ethnographic elements, works as a "systematic assimilation of cultural difference" that provides a "*familiar meanings and association*" at the same time that it keeps the object of representation "*at arm's length rather than taken as one's own*" (Huggan, 2001: 14). In the dialectic, the conceptions of familiarity (the known) and otherness (the unknown) swing back and forth before resolving in the exotic representation of the object, which incorporates both the elements of facts and fabrications. This enables the white subjects to associate themselves with the objects outside of their familiar limits although their partial ignorance perpetuates a distance from that particular exotic object.

Ethnography in the narratives of Jemison and Tanner is also a terrain on which the dialectic of exoticism performs its work. The white authorships (Seaver and James) inscribe the narratives with the ethnographic elements in their attempts to “know” about the savage people. As white persons, the authorships are denied immanent access to the Indian community, forcing them to fall short at the ethnographic level where the Indians remain only as objects of representations, prancing about through the narratives for the white readers to speculate from “arm’s length”. By aligning the details of Indian livelihood in the ethnographic manner, the dialectic begins the work of including the Indians into the knowledge map of the empire although it perpetuates a distance by keeping the noble Indians as curious objects for speculation.

Conclusion

Within the two accounts, ethnography and exoticism reveal the agenda behind the assimilation theme. While American attitude towards the Indians began to diverge at around the turn of the eighteenth century, the savage Indians in the earlier writings found its counterpart in the emerging portrait of Indians as noble savages in later writings. The earlier anxieties of the whites resolved into a curious appetite for the Indians’ noble yet exotic livelihood.

The authorships (Seaver and James), as ethnographers, on the one hand attempted to infuse the Indians into the structure of white knowledge. On the other hand, the civilized, white subjectivity of the authorships still denied them immanent access to the object of their speculations. As a result, the authorships would designate a position for the Indians as exotics at the margins. The assimilation theme in American captivity writing therefore suggests how, in the nineteenth century, the whites might have possibly included the Indians into the State’s legal and social block; yet, the dialectic of exoticism, through the politics of ethnography, would only assign the Indians a place at the bottom of the State’s multi-layered hierarchy.

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