# *Introduction: The Indian Atlantic*

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This book is about a transatlantic literary culture that flourished in the context of colonial struggle in North America. Taking as its starting point the Seven Years' (French-Indian) War and its closing date the opening of the Oregon Trail, it explores the complex relationships between Britons, Native Americans[1] and Anglo-Americans in so far as they shaped the literature and culture of the age – a shaping role that has all too often been ignored or misconstrued by historians and literary critics. We offer here a collection of essays on Anglophone transatlantic discourses of our period – some of them traditionally viewed not as transatlantic, but as quintessentially American, British and Native American. These essays principally consider written texts – travel accounts, traders' memoirs, historians' disquisitions, captivity narratives, treaty speeches, autobiographies, newspaper articles, poems, plays and novels. Discussions of the visual arts and of song are also included.

Why 1750 to 1850? It was during this period that Britain's war with France in America (1756–63) produced changes on both sides of the Atlantic, among which was the creation of an intensified and larger-scale relationship with Native Americans, a relationship that became more complex through the War of Independence/Revolutionary War but which fragmented and diminished as a result of the War of 1812 and the increasing dominance of white power in the USA and British Canada until, by the 1840s, most Indian nations east of the Mississippi had been forced into exile or clienthood. By that time, the mutual (though unequal) dependence of colonists and Indians had almost ended and an Indian Atlantic – characterised by an intensive political and diplomatic relationship, a complex realm of circulating discourses, and the material exchange of goods, people and wealth – had become so diminished that it was difficult to recall that it had ever existed. Exist it did, however, and the essays in this volume show how it arose, grew, changed and withered, what it involved and what its effects were.

How did the Indian Atlantic come about? By the mid-eighteenth century, the British empire in America could not have been sustained without Native Americans as willing (though unequal) partners in trade and war. Indians wanted guns, hatchets, kettles, pipes, paint, blankets, alcohol. Britons wanted not only land and fur, but also alliances with Indian military power. And so the colonists, the Crown and the Indians made deals with each other, entering a political and economic relationship that altered society – and the very landscape – on both sides of the ocean. Indian society was, to a greater extent than ever before, reconfigured: subsistence farming, hunting and gathering were supplanted by hunting and trapping of fur for the British felt market. Indians became commercialised; their relationship to the land altered as more and more of the country became a resource to be exploited in exchange for British manufactures; while in Britain industries grew up to supply this demand, changing the British landscape and helping to create an urban working-class.[2] Thus Indigenous people were at one end of a capitalised transatlantic commerce, British peasants at the other. North American landscapes were exploited – whole areas were hunted out – and so were British ones, as the Black Country of iron forges and workshops spread over the English Midlands.

If the Indian Atlantic linked, through the power of capital, people who would never meet each other, it also engendered many close encounters. The Seven Years'/French-Indian War put more whites in close proximity to Native Americans, and vice versa, than ever before – as enemies, allies, captives, negotiators. It turned more Indians than before into agents working alongside colonists in complex and shifting alliances. The result of these interactions was the creation of a new Atlantic world that left both Indian and white societies changed and that took effect not just in America but in Britain too. As Linda Colley has pointed out, the experience of loss and captivity, as well as alliance, in the American wars led Britons to redefine their own individual and national identities.[3] It had a similar effect on many Indians, bringing into power in numerous Indian Nations those who could benefit their fellows by successfully manipulating the colonists. For many Native Americans, engagement with white culture, necessary for diplomatic and political reasons, presented new opportunities; for others it seemed a dangerous path to take, leading only to betrayal and corruption. Thus Indian societies came to exhibit (at least) two political responses to the closer relationship with colonists: on the one hand the appearance of leaders, many of them of mixed Indian/white descent and education, skilled in Anglo as well as Indian practices; on the other the kindling of prophetic

religious movements designed to revitalise Indian life by rejecting much (but not all) white influence.

The closer economic and military/political relationship was paralleled and fuelled by a stronger social, cultural and literary relationship. How did this come about? What course did it follow? Here we distinguish four related discourses that made Aboriginal people figure in British culture in new ways and with a new prominence. First, the French/Indian and subsequently Revolutionary wars put British soldiers into the valleys and forests of Native America on a large scale. Many were captured by Indians: some were killed, many were tortured. Some of those who returned produced narratives detailing their horrific experiences. When published in Britain, these narratives provided a source for a second discourse – newspaper and magazine reports catering to a public anxious for war news. Thus, Indians entered the British readers' minds as cruel, ferocious, torturing savages. In 1758 Edmund Burke portrayed them in parliament as hell-hounds in an effort to shame the government out of its plans to arm the Mohawks and ally itself with them.

By the 1760s a market for accounts of Indian societies had begun to thrive. It was fed by settlers (often deserted soldiers turned traders) and colonial officials, who published travel narratives and histories of Indians, often on the basis of having lived among them for many years. These narratives, of which James Adair's *History of the American Indians* (1775) and Jonathan Carver's *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America in the Years 1766, 1767, and 1768* (1778) were the most successful, form a third discourse about Indians. Providing a far more nuanced picture of Indian society, beliefs and customs, such narratives included highly influential descriptions of individual Indians that went beyond the merely generic. At the same time, an increasing number of Indians visited Britain as diplomats and political representatives. The impact of these visitors varied: some, speaking no English, were viewed as curiosities and showpieces, generating nevertheless scores of handbills, woodcuts, pictures and newspaper notices. Others, like Mohawk leaders Joseph Brant and John Norton, impressed their aristocratic hosts with their gravity, articulacy and sophistication. Thus they (often self-consciously) subverted stereotypes about Indians as primitives and savages. Circulating in polite journals such as *The Gentleman's Magazine*, reports about these visitors altered common assumptions concerning Native Americans.

The proliferation of discourses purporting to offer new facts about Indians had, we show, effects on several related kinds of text. Would-be Indian speeches were penned by such luminaries as Samuel Johnson and

Thomas Jefferson. Indians became pivotal in the texts of other eminent literary figures too, including such philosophers and theorists of the Scottish Enlightenment as Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, David Hume, William Robertson, Henry Home Lord Kames and James Burnett Lord Monboddo. These writers variously converted what they had read about Indians in captivity and travel narratives into generalised discussions of human progress, natural history, social theory, moral philosophy and ethics. Indians served to prove points in arguments about humanity in general, because the new sources about them were taken to be accurate.

In *The Indian Atlantic* we examine popular and fictional print culture about Indians as well as the socially elite discourse of Enlightenment history and philosophy. This fourth discourse overlapped with the Scots theorists in the area of the song and ballad: Indian songs, supposedly productions of an authentically oral and primitive culture, fascinated both the Edinburgh theorists and the ordinary people who bought them, Englished, in broadside song-garlands hawked in the street. Indian songs became significant causes of the ballad revival and its influential Romantic adaptations. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Shelley, Bowles and Hemans all wrote supposedly Indian songs, some of them based on ethnographic information provided in recent histories of Indians, providing a vital spur to the new genre of Romantic lyric, as Fulford shows in his *Romantic Indians*.[4] At the same time, Indians began to feature in the other burgeoning genre, the novel. We examine this development in *The Indian Atlantic*, showing how fictional Indians travelled, in the pages of Robert Bage and Henry Mackenzie, from Britain to America, later returning in fictions by Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving, which influenced British accounts of Indians still further. An example of this transatlantic process in action is Hemans's 'Indian Woman's Death Song' (1828) which drew on recent American travel narratives and on Cooper's novel *The Prairie* (1827) which, in a chapter naturalising white men's prejudices, depicts an Indian wife's grief that her husband, a chief, prefers a white captive woman. Hemans makes the wife into her poem's narrator, thus producing an Indian figure derived from a white American man's text that was itself influenced, like Hemans herself, by Byron, Scott and various popular travel accounts.[5] Her heroine is thoroughly transatlantic and fictional – stemming from white men's condescension towards Indian women, whom they presume to be racially inferior to white women. And if Hemans's pre-text is Cooper, her poem itself is immediately reminiscent of an earlier poem influenced by the memoirs of Britons in America, in which the speaker is (probably) Indian – Wordsworth's 'Mad Mother' – who

> Proudly, and dauntlessly, and all alone,
> Save that a babe lay sleeping at her breast,
>
> A woman stood: upon her Indian brow
> Sat a strange gladness, and her dark hair waved
> As if triumphantly. (lines 7–11)[6]

Hemans was able to draw upon a transatlantic Romantic vocabulary – of subjects, genres and topoi – in which Indians played a formative part. She was also able to perpetuate it, for if she had cited Cooper in 1828, in 1841 he returned the compliment, including in *The Deerslayer* this epigraph from her 'Edith': 'Thou'rt passing from the lake's green side,/And the hunter's hearth away;/For the time of flowers, for the summer's pride,/Daughter! thou canst not stay'.[7] Indians were now cycled and recycled as text from New York to London and back by white writers looking to romanticise their seeming disappearance. They thus blossomed as literary figures even as they were uprooted from their homelands. On this occasion, Cooper's epigraph from Hemans legitimises his narrative drive to occlude the mendacity, exploitation and violence involved in dispossessing Indians of their land. It assists Cooper in suggesting that white frontiersmen are *the* authentic Americans because they have acquired Native Americans' knowledge of the country without acquiring Native American savagery – and have acquired it from a people who were ostensibly always already destined for destruction.

Cooper's tribute to Hemans was echoed by Washington Irving's assertion that British poets 'exercised a powerful influence' over American 'opinion and affections'.[8] Both responses are noteworthy, for later generations of American authors and commentators often attempted to 'forget' their British and Indian literary origins. This historical amnesia is partly a product of America's political history; for in order to assert their independence and autonomy from the parent country, nations born of revolution often deliberately attempt to forget or repress their pre-revolutionary historical origins.[9] Such deliberate 'forgetting' is particularly evident in post-independence American culture and letters. In the literary realm, for example, it is exemplified in Henry David Thoreau's discussion of the Atlantic Ocean as a site of crossing from one mode of being to another: 'the Atlantic is a Lethean stream, in our passage over which we have the opportunity to forget the Old World and its institutions.' Thus establishing a rigid east/west dichotomy marked both geographically and figuratively by the wide Atlantic, Thoreau writes that 'we go eastward to realize history and study the works of art and literature, retracing the steps of the race; we

go westward as into the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure'.[10] Like his fellow American Transcendentalists and Romantics, Thoreau celebrates and privileges the westward direction, rejecting the Old World as excessively urban and corrupt and praising the New World as a blank slate awaiting a more natural and virtuous inscription. Undoubtedly, this literary 'act of Westering'[11] helped to encourage the development of a distinctively American literary tradition; but, in the process, it also denied many of the transatlantic influences that helped in crucial ways to shape and characterise colonial New World culture – and it left little room in which to examine the ways that North American cultures continued to influence the Old World. Perhaps most significantly, it also failed adequately to account for the embattled but dynamic contemporary Native American cultural presence in North America.

Even when Anglo writers acknowledged each other's renditions of Indians – as in the case of Cooper and Hemans – they celebrated a white transatlanticism, in which Britons and Anglo-Americans forged joint terms for representing Indians but inflected them differently as colonies became more established in Canada and independent in the US. But what of the Indians themselves? Although they were all too often exploited and oppressed, they were not voiceless or passive victims in the colonial process. Missionary education in America led a number of Native Americans to operate as cultural brokers, proselytising fellow Indians and, in some cases, developing a biting critique of colonialist hypocrisy. Christian Indian writers like William Apess, Samson Occom, Hendrick Apaumut, and Joseph Johnson innovatively combined in their work generic traditions associated with European Christian literacy and Indian orality. Some of them, too, appropriated for their own purposes the romanticisation of nature and of Native Americans made by Wordsworth, Southey and Byron, instances of a transatlantic process of import/export creating a literary culture in which whites and Indians alike (though from different situations and degrees of power) could forge new forms of expression for themselves and their (white) readers. Some Indians, it turns out, were Wordsworthian Romantics too – at least when it suited their rhetorical and political needs.

Although Indians who published in English were exceptional, Indians who appropriated other aspects of white culture were not. Many nations allowed whites into their societies, seeking political and economic advantage in doing so, or choosing to adopt white asylum seekers, or assimilating captives to replace their own relatives lost in warfare. The resultant hybrid culture was the fruit of an exchange rather than simply an effect of colonial subjugation. It stemmed from colonial encounters predicated not on the

enslavement of mass labour but on military alliance and politico-economic advantage. It was an exchange that flourished on a shrinking 'middle ground' (to use Richard White's phrase) in which neither whites nor Indians dominated each other, but in which neither could ignore the other.[12] By improvising on their knowledge of each side's traditions, those who could represent each side to the other exerted a (precarious) power. They can be seen as cultural brokers, people who used their rare expertise in both cultures to negotiate, for themselves and for the people they led, strategic and material advantage, but who also knew enough to achieve effective compromise and working partnerships.[13] To attain this delicate diplomatic balance, they had to be able to don masks and costumes like the tricksters whose cultural power, in many Aboriginal nations, stemmed from their ability to transform themselves into animals, spirits, or feared enemies. By playing roles, such brokers might, for instance, impersonate (and so interpret) the people of the other side to their own people.

When the middle ground lasted long enough and was sufficiently widespread, there were enough such cultural brokers, and their important work helped to promote the development of a hybrid culture. Their diplomatic negotiating skills enabled some chiefs to achieve a degree of influence over British policy. For example, Sir William Johnson sought to increase Mohawk power and wealth over that of other nations among the Iroquois and beyond, because the Mohawks offered him a means of achieving some of his aims for Britain (the gaining of a reliable ally, peace, and land grants). As a result, there was an increase of authority for individual Mohawks who exploited their ability to negotiate with Johnson in a process that altered the traditional social structure within the nation. There was also an accession of power for the nation as a whole. But this successful 'middle ground' was not achieved without cost: the Mohawks aroused the envy and resentment of other Indian nations, especially when in 1768 they granted land to the British that the Shawnees, who were not consulted, regarded as their own. And moreover, after the US victory over the British in the War of Independence, the management of relations with whites became, for many eastern nations, a matter of humiliating concessions of land for which they received less and less in exchange. As White remarks, it was when the independent US grew strong that the middle ground was gradually obliterated, as Indians were reduced to colonised, exiled clients of a victorious white nation.[14] The turn given to the literary figure of the Indian by American writers including Cooper, Irving and Freneau assisted in this process of obliteration, even as it lamented it, by portraying the Indian's disappearance in the face of white culture (rather than his interaction with

it) to be an inevitable and indeed natural process.[15] But to write thus was to ignore the achievements of such men as the Mohawk chief Joseph Brant (Thayendanegea) and his successor John Norton (Teyoninhokarawen). Norton's upbringing in Scotland made him fully conversant with English literature; when he returned to Britain in 1804 in the capacity of emissary he was able to manipulate to the Mohawks' advantage the popular stereotypes about Indians and to demonstrate his mastery of the social and literary codes by which Britain's governing classes operated. He won many allies among MPs and aristocrats and their leverage won the Mohawks a hearing from powerful ministers. Norton renewed the campaign later, from Canada, by means of a journal, composed in Johnsonian English, of his travels into the Cherokee country. This literary work, sent to the Duke of Northumberland, gauged the state of Indian nations immediately after their alliance with the British in the War of 1812–14 (in which Norton had played a distinguished part). It prospected the ground for a pan-Indian alliance to resist the pressure of US settlers on their lands; it spoke of and from a middle ground on which Indians and Britons had long had dealings and on which some, such as Norton himself, had grown up as hybrids of white and Indian cultures. But Norton's travelogue also recorded the incipient destruction of that middle ground by US power. No 'dying Indian', Norton set an example of a committed, if conflicted, defence of Indian nations and revealed the ability of the Indians to master white cultural codes to promote their own cause. Although ultimately unsuccessful in getting title to the Mohawks' lands in Canada, Norton showed many in the corridors of power that Indians were influential not just as the Romantic figures of novels and poems, but as political negotiators and literary authors in their own right. He showed, too, that many 'Indians' were by now part-British by blood, and no more 'savage' than well-educated gentlemen.

But Norton found his political aims harder and harder to realise after 1814. The end of the war in that year was a watershed, for it secured the US and Canada from further hostilities. The Indians whom the British had encouraged to attack the US were sacrificed in the peace treaty that the white powers signed: their military aid was no longer needed. Soon the tribes of the Old NorthWest were being pushed off their lands onto the Indiana Territory; in the south General (later President) Jackson forced the Creeks' and Cherokees' removal by a mixture of deceit and violence, ignoring what the Supreme Court had newly decreed to be the law when he chose to do so. The forced removal of the Cherokees was bitterly ironic, since they had flourished on the middle ground, disproving all the self-serving white arguments that Indians were irredeemably primitive by

succeeding at white-style agriculture and trade. They were not 'inevitably' disappearing before the advance of white 'civilisation': in fact, they were better organised and more prosperous than most of the white settlers who coveted the gold discovered on their lands. Nevertheless, they were no longer numerous enough to resist colonial expansion, nor, without British interest in disrupting the US, could they hold a balance of power. The Cherokees were removed to Oklahoma; Indians, in the increasingly populous US, had officially become 'domestic dependent nations' – legal anomalies and internal 'problems' rather than independent powers with whom, like it or not, whites had to interact. So too in Canada: as Britain's mercantile colony became a country of poor white emigrants, Indians, no longer required to defend the US frontier, their fur-harvest of less economic importance, were displaced onto reserves and seen as an internal concern of the Indian department.

It was during this early nineteenth-century period of diminishing power that some Indians began to reject the middle ground and the hybridisation of their own cultures. In several Indian nations, young men rejected the authority of sachems who had sought to manage relations with whites by accommodating Anglo demands for land in return for annuities of trade goods. Some of these chiefs had enriched themselves in the process, as well as boosting their power within the nation by ensuring that they remained the source of the European goods that most Indians needed in order to feed and clothe themselves. Now these chiefs found themselves unable to control the young: among the Creeks there was a breakaway by warriors determined to fight the US and its land-hungry settlers rather than heed their sachems' counsels. The Redstick movement split the nation, regarding accommodation of the Anglos as weak and corrupt, and preferring war. But it was among the Shawnees that the most remarkable development occurred. In 1805 a poorly regarded drunken young man, Lalawethika, emerged from a coma so deep his family thought him dead, to reveal his vision. The Master of Life (the Great Spirit) had shown him that Indians must forego white lifeways, give up alcohol, beads, paint and ironware, as well as their traditional medicine bags. If they did so, the whites would be driven from their land and they would be rewarded after death. If not they would be punished. Renaming himself Tenskwatawa ('the open door'), this prophet gathered a growing following among the Shawnees, Kickapoos, Potawatomis and Ottawas, establishing in Greenville Ohio a Prophetstown that cut across traditional tribal divisions and hierarchies. His followers rejected dependence on Anglo-introduced practices, while also abandoning some Indian traditions. They emphasised the separate divine creation

of Indians and whites. They killed other Indians whom they regarded as witches – many of them Indians who had been in close contact with Anglo-Americans. Historian James Merrell comments: 'For participants in these movements, history was understood not from the perspective of passive victims confronting a monolithic and inevitable invasion. Rather, they affirmed that their situation was partly their responsibility by asserting that their situation resulted from the action of *traitors within*, traitors who had neglected tradition or, even worse, had actively advanced colonialist forces'.[16]

Meanwhile, Tenskwatawa's brother, the inspiring leader Tecumseh, negotiated among the nations to build a pan-Indian alliance against the US. Together the brothers were constructing a radical departure from the politics of the middle ground and from tribal tradition. Tecumseh, political and military leader, and Tenskwatawa, millenarian prophet, jointly restructured Indian society with the aim of reviving confidence and power so as to free Native Americans from dependence upon, and submission to, victorious white America.

Under pressure from the US authorities and from accommodationist Indian chiefs, Tecumseh, Tenskwatawa and their followers moved to Indiana in 1811. There, in Tecumseh's absence, the Prophet's followers encountered the US army at the Battle of Tippecanoe. Their failure to destroy the Americans signalled the decline of Tenskwatawa's influence; nevertheless Tecumseh, in a marriage of convenience with the British, led his followers to several victories over the US in the War of 1812, before he died in battle.

The Prophetic movement did not end there: Tenskwatawa's example inspired other prophets to arise, along similar lines, in Indian nations similarly under pressure from Anglo encroachment. Among the Ottawa a prophet named Le Maigouis (The Trout) preached against involvement with corrupting whites, especially Americans, who were 'the spawn of the Great Serpent'.[17] The Trout told the Ottawa people that the scarcity of game was the result of Indians adopting whites' wasteful exploitation of the animal world; he taught them a dance which would empower them 'to destroy every white man in America'. His converts declared it 'a crime punishable by Death for any Indian to put his name on Paper for the purpose of parting with any of their lands'.[18]

Converts spread the word, the visions, the new rituals, beliefs and dances. Among the Ojibwa a witness to this process was John Tanner, an Anglo-American captured in childhood and raised as an Indian. After a visit from Tenskwatawa's followers, Tanner saw his Ojibwa companions and