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Résumé

Le chef shawnee Tecumseh est un des rares Amérindiens mentionnés nommément dans les livres d’histoire canadienne. À la suite de la Guerre de 1812, les Haut-Canadiens en firent un héros de guerre et un symbole de la lutte contre les États-Unis. Ils récupérèrent la vie et la mort de ce « noble sauvage » dans leurs efforts pour construire une identité nationale. En analysant deux poèmes concernant Tecumseh publiés dans les années 1820, cet essai étudie les premières manifestations de cette récupération. Son courage et, plus fondamentalement, son caractère sauvage pouvaient inspirer les Haut-Canadiens et leur rappeler leurs sacrifices durant la guerre. Ils servaient aussi à séparer les peuples autochtones des Euro-Canadiens dont la supériorité culturelle légitimait leur possession du territoire et des ressources de la colonie.

Ces œuvres littéraires ont ainsi créé un héros « canadien » qui pouvait servir de symbole national dans une colonie qu'il n'a jamais voulu défendre et qu'il aurait combattu s'il avait survécu.

Tecumseh, the Shawnee warrior, leader, and pan-Indigenous organizer, is one of very few Indigenous people who appear as named figures in the annals of Canadian history. Historians now understand him as an Indigenous patriot whose goal was to defend Indigenous nations and territory, not Upper Canada or British North America. Despite his legendary rapport with Sir Isaac Brock, he was no friend to Britain and had witnessed for himself that country's betrayal of his people.¹ But after his death in the War of 1812, he was claimed by British Canadians, and even some French Canadians,² as a great war hero and symbol of the struggle with the United States, a "Noble Savage" whose life and death provided material for nation-building discourses. Writers in Upper Canada praised Tecumseh as a valiant warrior and portrayed his killing as a prime instance of American wrongdoing and injustice. These early authors found in the Shawnee leader a romantic, exotic figure with a record of military glory and a dramatic, tragic end. They did not explicitly claim Tecumseh as British or Canadian, regarding him as clearly distinct from themselves in both race and nationality. Indeed, they constructed Indianness as inherently incompatible with Britishness, and Tecumseh was not exempted from this primary racial division. Nevertheless, they incorporated elements of his story in their efforts to found a British North American historic and literary tradition.

Using as examples two long poems about Tecumseh published in the 1820s,³ I set out here to examine the early stages of Upper Canada's co-optation of the Shawnee warrior as a component of its national identity. The themes that emerge most prominently in these early poems are Tecumseh's indomitable spirit, his ability to command his fellow warriors, and his fighting prowess. All these traits are shown as being exercised in the cause of avenging the great wrongs his people had suffered at the hands of the expansionist United States. As a tragic hero, he provided the opportunity for Upper Canadian writers to criticize the United States and dramatize the colony's struggle against its recent foe.⁴ In his valiant battle against United States forces, Tecumseh symbolized

Upper Canada's desperate fight against its powerful neighbour. At the same time, his cultural difference offered scope for the expression of a number of other concerns: protest against war itself; discursive constructions of race, Indianness, and whiteness; and perhaps an implicit critique of Britain's policies toward Aboriginal peoples. Despite writing poems ostensibly meant to honour Tecumseh, both poets also depicted him in terms that reflected the era's image of the savage, driven by violence and lacking the education and cultivated emotions of Europeans. This hero could inspire Upper Canadians and remind them of their sacrifices in the War of 1812, but he also served to mark off Indigenous people from the white Canadians whose cultural superiority legitimated their possession of the lands and resources of Upper Canada.

Tecumseh's role in the War of 1812 stemmed directly from his campaign to halt United States expansion and drive settlers off lands already taken from the Shawnee and their neighbours south of the Great Lakes. A chief of growing status in the first years of the nineteenth century, he had also been involved in the nativistic revival movement led by his brother Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee Prophet.⁵ Tenskwatawa's movement initially emphasized a spiritual opposition to the ways of whites, but inched toward military resistance as other options faded. Tecumseh, at first mainly an aide to his brother, used his diplomatic and oratorical skills in the interest of seeking peaceful coexistence with incoming settlers, but concluded by about 1809 that diplomacy could not halt further massive dispossession.⁶ In the three years preceding the War of 1812, he worked tirelessly to persuade tribes living over an extensive territory south of the Great Lakes to join a large, pan-Indigenous military confederacy to defeat the United States. By June of 1812 he was prepared to launch a war — at just the moment when the United States chose to proclaim its own war against Britain.⁷ In that month he travelled to Amherstburg, in Upper Canada, and immediately became the British army's most important Aboriginal ally, rallying other warriors to fight the United States and launching raids that turned the tide of war in Upper Canada's favour.⁸ Throughout the remaining year and a half until his death in October 1813, at the Battle of Moraviantown, Tecumseh remained one of the most important Aboriginal allies of Britain and Upper Canada, playing key roles both in bringing warriors to the cause and in actual warfare.

Tecumseh was a suitable romantic hero in many ways. For one thing, even in life he commanded enormous respect wherever he went, in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous settings.⁹ Sir Isaac Brock famously wrote of him, “a more sagacious or more gallant warrior does not, I believe, exist. He was the admiration of every one who conversed with him.”¹⁰ He was a warrior of great courage and a brilliant strategist, admired by both friend and foe in a war-ravaged era. He was eloquent, persuasive, and intelligent, with striking good looks, a charismatic personality, and a great capacity to inspire his fellows. His role in the War of 1812 was extraordinarily important, especially at the beginning, when the Americans were poised to invade Upper Canada with virtually no opposition.¹¹ He brought many warriors to fight the American “Long Knives,” played a significant role in several key engagements — including breaking the American supply lines and capturing crucial war dispatches — and in so doing helped attract thousands more Indigenous warriors to the cause. His vision of a great, united, Indigenous confederacy was grand and ambitious — and, as historian David Edmunds has remarked, it also “appealed to whites because it was what *they* would have done.”¹² Finally, he had a tragic history in the mistreatment of his people by Americans, and in his death trying to save them and their lands from an implacable enemy.

The earliest literary depictions of Tecumseh stem from the first half of the nineteenth century, a period in which the War of 1812 loomed large as a reference point for Upper Canadian self-definition and as a touchstone for politically motivated claims to loyalty and patriotism. As Cecilia Morgan writes, “Loyalty to the British monarch and constitution, and patriotic willingness to defend Upper Canada, figured prominently in political discourses in the colony.”¹³ The war was central to British-Canadian myth-making and personified ongoing themes in the colony’s experience and self-identification, including the United States as a threatening, unjust power and the attachment to Britain as the motherland, seat of righteous empire, and home of British justice. Upper Canadian rhetoric also highlighted the ruthless aggression of the United States against Indigenous nations, contrasting it with Britain’s supposedly more humane approach. Literary works from the period provide a window on the colonists’ understandings of Indigenous military support and its meanings within a settlement context. An analysis of the images they produced of

Tecumseh and his fellow warriors helps to gain insight into the racialized discourses British Canadians fashioned in the postwar half-century, which coincided with the period in which all the Great Lakes nations, Britain's key allies in the War of 1812, were dispossessed of their lands. Tecumseh was a war hero of nearly the stature assigned to Sir Isaac Brock, and he and his fellow warriors were widely acknowledged to have played an indispensable part in defending Upper Canada in the war's first months.¹⁴ Yet their crucial support did nothing to save their lands from the settlers.

The main subjects of analysis in this article are two published British Canadian writings from the first half of the nineteenth century that take Tecumseh as their main subject, both of them long poems (over 100 pages each).¹⁵ The first, published in Montreal in 1824, is George Longmore's poem "Tecumthé. A Poetical Tale in Three Cantos."¹⁶ The second, John Richardson's poem "Tecumseh, or the Warrior of the West," was published in London in 1828, and again in Brockville in 1842.¹⁷ Both authors were English army officers born and raised in British North America. George Longmore was born in Quebec City in 1793 and grew up there before moving to London and joining the British army. He served in the Napoleonic Wars for six years and later spent the years 1819–1824 back in the Canadas supervising canal construction.¹⁸ Thus, although Longmore gained his military experience in Europe, during his later sojourn in the Canadas he would almost certainly have known army officers who had fought in the War of 1812. John Richardson was born in 1796 in Queenston, Upper Canada, on the Niagara frontier, and spent most of his childhood in nearby Amherstburg. At the age of 15, he enlisted as a gentleman volunteer with the British army to fight in the War of 1812. He claimed to have met Tecumseh and shaken his hand before the Battle of Moraviantown, in which Tecumseh was killed, and throughout his writing career made frequent admiring references to him. Richardson continued his military career off and on, but was also a novelist who tried at times to support himself through writing and publishing newspapers in the United States and Upper Canada (he is best known for his novel *Wacousta*).¹⁹

In these writers, then, we have two Upper Canadian men who shared direct experience of warfare and an ongoing connection with the colony of their births. They wrote and published their poems shortly after the events they were commemorating, in a time when many people were

still alive and present in the Canadas who had fought in the War of 1812 and, in some cases, had known Tecumseh. It was an era of strong patriotism — that is, attachment to Britain — and of animosity towards the United States, which had so recently invaded the colony. Tecumseh was a legendary figure and was already becoming a symbol of the War of 1812, a historic role that the poems undoubtedly reinforced. As a poetic subject, he gave Longmore and Richardson scope to discuss a range of themes. Military themes were prominent, including both the horrors of war and wartime heroism and sacrifice. At the same time, the authors gave significant attention to broader colonial issues that were important to British settlers and strongly shaped Tecumseh's life and death: United States expansion and aggression, relations between settlers and Indigenous people, and the virtues of "civilization" compared to Indigenous ways of life. While these two poems glorify Tecumseh in some ways, they are at best ambivalent tributes.²⁰ They make much of the Shawnee leader's military prowess and courage, wisdom and honour, virtues that were widely recognized during his lifetime. At the same time, they portray Tecumseh very much as an Other, exceptional for his intelligence and humanity, but still tainted by the violence and vengefulness that defined the savage in the European mind. Both works have a strong anti-war and anti-American thrust, naming the injustice and slaughter that underpinned the colonization of Indigenous lands, but placing the blame almost solely on the United States. Ultimately, they are literary works designed to use Tecumseh and the natural landscape as vehicles and symbols to promote national identity in Upper Canada. Tecumseh and his fellow warriors appear as necessary but uncomfortable allies in the contest with the United States — dangerous enemies and awkward friends. The portraits these authors paint powerfully reinforce the colonial view of Indigenous peoples as bloodthirsty and uncontrollable, unrestrained by law or reason, and desperately in need of civilization.

It is worth considering for a moment the sources on which these poetic works were based. In Richardson's case, the narrative was based almost entirely upon the author's own experiences of the War of 1812, as well as the stories and rumours gleaned from his fellow soldiers. Richardson produced a series of writings that drew on his war experiences, including several works describing the War of 1812.²¹ As noted, Richardson asserted that he had met Tecumseh shortly before his death.

And it is clear from his writings that he had direct experiences with Indigenous warriors both during combat and outside it. He had obviously been very much frightened by these warriors — by their war paint, their intimidating cries during combat, their fierceness and deadly effectiveness in forest warfare, their harsh treatment of some prisoners of war. Vivid scenes with these features are prominent in both his major works on the War of 1812, *A Canadian Campaign* and *War of 1812*.²² As for Tecumseh himself, he had greatly impressed the young Richardson, who was a youth of 16 when the Shawnee leader was killed. Scholar Leslie Monkman notes that “one of his most treasured memories was of fighting by the side of Tecumseh in the War of 1812.”²³

By contrast, George Longmore had no such direct experience with Aboriginal people. He appears instead to have founded his work largely upon a somewhat mysterious book by an unknown author entitled *The Lucubrations of Humphrey Ravelin*, published in London in 1823. One chapter of this book, which claimed to be written by a retired soldier, was called “Indian Warfare.” Longmore included this whole chapter as the “Argument” to his poem, and it is clear that it strongly shaped his depiction of both Tecumseh and his historical and cultural context.²⁴ Most notably, he took from this chapter his central theme that Tecumseh only needed education, an idea expressed by the author of *Lucubrations* in these terms: “Who, in contemplating the life and death of this untutored savage, can forebear the reflection, that he only wanted a nobler sphere, and the light of education, to have left a name of brilliant renown in the annals of nations?”²⁵

Both Longmore and Richardson clearly intended to contribute to the development of a “Canadian” identity and to celebrate “national aspirations and spirit,”²⁶ both by contrasting the United States with British North America and by romanticizing the landscape of the Canadas.²⁷ Their Tecumseh poems contain long passages about the colony’s geography and scenery, emphasizing its beauty and vast scale, its waterfalls and lakes, its physical grandeur. Longmore opened the prefatory section of his work with these lines: “FAIR Canada, — within whose snowy arms / My infant breath was nurtur’d”²⁸ His poem proper begins thus: “*Land of the foaming cataract, —/ Whose Savage grandeur awes the soul*”²⁹ (emphasis in original) Moreover, he explicitly argued that the Christians’ God had given them this land:

Land of the wild woods ...
 Whose fields, unciviliz'd, — unknown,
 Were buried 'neath oblivion's shroud,
 Until that Godhead from his throne,
 Outstretch'd his arm ...
 And to the zealous Christian, gave
 Beyond the blue Atlantic's wave,
 Another land, to seek, and save!³⁰

In a similar vein, Richardson begins with the tranquil beauty of Lake Erie: “In truth it is as fair and sweet a day / As ever dawn'd on Erie's silvery lake; / And wanton sunbeams on its surface play”³¹ Both poets also reference the dark, “gloomy” woods that covered much of the territory — a classic settler trope that implicitly called for further efforts to clear the land and strip it of its forests. Longmore writes, “Where boundless forests, gloomily, — yet grand, / Wave their high tops to the wild storm upcurl'd, / Still unexplor'd save by some savage band”³² Richardson, in sketching preparations for the Battle of Moraviantown, describes the surroundings three times as “waste,” and repeatedly refers to the well-timbered area as dark and foreboding: “the gloomy road,” “the forest drear,” the “dark glen,” the “wild wood.”³³ The depiction of the Canadas as home, as places of natural beauty, and even as forest wastes awaiting the woodman's axe, coincides with the symbolic assertion of ownership over the territories Britain claimed as part of these colonies, which included lands never ceded by their Indigenous inhabitants. In this sense, these authors were working directly against the central mission of Tecumseh's life: to stop the expansion of colonial settlement.

Beyond contributing to national and imperial pride, the two writers had somewhat different moral objectives in shaping their narratives. Richardson saw Tecumseh as a heroic warrior and stated in his preface that the work was written in order to “rescue the name of a hero from oblivion” and “preserve the memory of one of the noblest and most gallant spirits that ever tenanted the breast of man.”³⁴ He also set out to condemn the Americans for invading Upper Canada, wronging First Nations, and mutilating Tecumseh's dead body. For Longmore, who had never known Tecumseh, the Shawnee warrior was a romantic and noble

figure whose commemoration provided an occasion to express the poet's anti-war views and to offer moral meditations on the respective virtues of European and Aboriginal cultures. He took a partially primitivist perspective, seeking to show that Indigenous societies, as he conceived of them, offered the virtues of simplicity, healthfulness, freedom, and spontaneity. He depicted these societies as fostering skill and daring, a healthy, active outdoor lifestyle, and a physical culture of "native ease and ruder grace."³⁵ As Leslie Monkman has shown, this primitivist approach has a long tradition in which ideas about Indigenous societies are deployed to critique western society: "the primitivist writer finds vital spontaneity, natural religion, and harmony between the red man and the natural landscape."³⁶ Yet Longmore withdrew from a full-scale primitivism, emphasizing the importance of certain European virtues and disparaging some aspects of Indigenous society. He showed Indigenous society as being deeply flawed, producing coarse, uncouth people, credulous and superstitious, easily led astray by the cynical, manipulative Prophet.

As hero of these poems, Tecumseh is depicted much of the time against a background of his fellow Indigenous warriors, who serve as his foil. In contrast to their virtually universal savagery, he is presented as exceptional and admirable. He is shown to be a valiant fighter, honest, upstanding, and fearless, willing to die in battle against the Americans. The image and qualities of the "Noble Savage" underpin these and other positive aspects of his depiction. Richardson describes him in almost superhuman terms, as a man of exceptional physical strength and courage, along with wisdom, valour, and generosity. Longmore, too, portrays the Shawnee leader as handsome, proud, free, and brave. Indeed, the opening passages of his poem depict virtue and strength in the Indigenous lifestyle he envisioned, a simple, healthy life of freedom, physical activity, and clean food and water:

His heart was free, his wants were few,
The twanging bow, — the light canoe,
The wooden spear, — 'twas all he knew
Unknown to Luxury's disease,
Which enervates man's energies³⁷

Longmore first introduces Tecumseh as "a stern, athletic form / In grace tho' rude — in action warm" and shows fellow warriors with-

drawing in awe at his approach. He strikes a taciturn figure, with serious and “sorrow’d” looks, and is also described as being a worthy subject for a sculptor, “[i]n manhood’s strength,” with a “manly brow” and the qualities of pride, freedom, and dignity. Tecumseh is still “the savage of the woods” and an “untutored soul,” but he is graced with reason and the instinct for freedom.³⁸ Alone of all his community, he stands aloof from the superstitious manipulations of his brother the Prophet and is not fooled by the “astrology’s pretence” through which the latter had “Chain’d his wild brethren.”³⁹ Instead, he is alert for danger and has come to warn his fellows that “the white man comes in arms” to “chase us from our land of rest.”⁴⁰ Shortly thereafter, he shows compassion in forgiving the Prophet for distracting the people with an “uncouth” ceremony and thus allowing the enemy to reach their community unrepelled. Longmore credits Tecumseh with having “shewn an intellect endued / With more than common powers of mind” and lauds him as “*Tecumthé*, foremost ’midst the brave / Who scorn the hand which would enslave.”⁴¹ (emphasis in original) Tecumseh is commanding, a “lofty soul” who controls the “Indian warrior-multitude,”⁴² and is depicted reacting angrily to Colonel Henry Proctor’s decision to retreat from Lake Erie to the Thames River, while all eyes turn to him for his response.⁴³ He is shown before the Battle of Moraviantown courageous and eager to fight, speaking encouraging words to the British troops. He looks “the spirit of the storm, / With his stern energetic form,” valorous and defiant, “in all the manliness of grace.”⁴⁴ After a brief account of Tecumseh’s death in this battle, Longmore calls upon history to twine “One laurel more at valour’s shrine,” to pay tribute to “nature’s stern untutor’d child,” and uphold the memory of the place, “Where, ’midst the brave, *Tecumthé* lies, / Who wanted but the polish’d mind / Civilization’s wand supplies, / To make him mighty midst mankind ...”⁴⁵ In short, had Tecumseh’s many impressive “natural” qualities been paired with European education and philosophy, he would have been a nearly ideal man.

In Richardson, he is first described as a “towering warrior” of “god-like form,” and a “monument of strength” with “severe, and war-worn features.”⁴⁶ The poem mentions the Indigenous victory “near the dark Wabash” (where Tecumseh was actually not present)⁴⁷ and credits his “mighty arm” with “achiev[ing] a world’s repose.”⁴⁸ Moreover, he is wise,

“the gen’rous sage,” offering “prudent counsels” that “shed a partial ray of gladness.”⁴⁹ He is a man devoted to halting oppression and guarantees peace for others.⁵⁰ The poem records one of the real Tecumseh’s most renowned acts when, after the siege of Fort Meigs, he rescued American prisoners from attacks by Indigenous warriors.⁵¹ Though the incident is difficult to decipher in Richardson’s laboured verse, it is explained in detail in one of his lengthier footnotes to the poem, and is cited to underscore his subject’s humanity, which makes him morally equal to whites: “he shone the savage but in hue and garb.”⁵² Tecumseh is also shown as ardent, fiery, and brave when he opposes the retreat to the Thames River, upbraiding the “Christian father” (Colonel Henry Proctor) for lack of courage and asking if the British mean to betray his people again.⁵³ Richardson presents him as masterfully in command of all the Indigenous warriors, and calming them when their enthusiasm for his words seemed to threaten the British soldiers present.

Yet, at the same time, these positive constructions are often paired with, and at times thrust aside by, more negative images. Both poets see Tecumseh as a savage, with the classic “savage” traits of vengefulness and ferocity. Both poems frequently liken their Indigenous characters to animals, and sometimes include Tecumseh in such images. In Longmore’s poem, for instance, Tecumseh seizes his weapons and runs to meet attacking Americans “[a]s if it was the wolf that bounded / From its dark den to seize its prey”⁵⁴ Both the Prophet and his followers are compared to “tygers.”⁵⁵ Before the Battle of Moraviantown, Tecumseh is shown as brave and strong, but there is a note of the savage in Longmore’s description, which has him “mingl[ing] in the fray,” “like the lion for its prey,” and calls the Indigenous warriors a “wild multitude” raising “their maniac cry for blood.”⁵⁶ Longmore also has Tecumseh vow of the oncoming United States army, “Their scalps shall bleach on every tree / Torn by our heart’s stern enmity”⁵⁷ Longmore presents Tecumseh as a man lacking in education and cultivation, which he would have required to make him truly admirable. Longmore offers no incidents in which Tecumseh’s “untutor’d” state caused him to act inappropriately or make poor decisions, so that his assertions about the value of “tutoring” and European philosophy remain vague and general. They are further weakened by the fact that the war and violence he decries are driven entirely by Europeans and white Americans, whose leaders, at least, would have had the full benefit of

education. In painting war and its motivating emotions — envy, greed, pride, and ambition — as inherent in human nature, he undermines the credibility of his argument that Tecumseh would have been a better man for some tutoring.

Ironically, the admiring Richardson offers far more negative imagery of Tecumseh than Longmore. In his text, Tecumseh appears repeatedly as a terrifying killer, dedicated to war, driven by blood lust and revenge. Early in the poem, he is described as crossing a river and rising “like a demon of the waters” to “carr[y] death among the lawless band, / The ruthless wasters of his native land.”⁵⁸ In the next stanza, he is portrayed as “rag[ing] through the deep phalanx / Of deadliest enemies soon bath’d in blood, / Whose quivering scalps, half-crimson’d in their gore, / The reeking warrior from the spoilers bore.”⁵⁹ On the eve of his final battle, the poem’s closing scenes, Tecumseh is frightening and demonic, looking “like some dark towering fiend, With death-black eyes,” leaning on his lance, “Fir’d with much spoil, and drunk with human gore.”⁶⁰ It is instructive that Richardson omitted both these sections, and others showing Tecumseh as fiendish savage, from the Canadian edition of his poem published in 1842 — possibly an indication that he recognized how these passages undermined his avowed intent of celebrating his subject.⁶¹ Yet even without these particularly frightening images, Richardson’s Tecumseh is frequently unattractive. Consider this stanza:

’Twas then that, like a mighty avalanche,
His arm gigantic with his wrath kept pace,
And, rear’d on high, like some vast towering branch
Of a tall pine, dealt vengeance for a race
Whose bleeding wounds the warrior swore to stanch
With the deep groans of those he pledg’d to chase
Like the fierce monsters of his native wood,
Till gorg’d with victims and with human blood.⁶²

Though the passage implies that there is some sort of “justice” in this gory vengeance, the overwhelming impression is of relentless, ruthless violence. Indeed, one could multiply examples of this kind almost endlessly from Richardson’s poem. There is an intense focus on the hate the author attributes to Tecumseh, “the vengeful hate, unutterable, vast”;

a “maddening, burning agony of soul,” a “hell which on his quivering being preys, / While the hot fires of hatred seem to roll / In boiling floods throughout each tortur’d vein”⁶³ Tecumseh spends much of the poem in internal conflict and emotional torment, initially over the British loss in the naval battle on Lake Erie and, subsequently, in response to the death of his fictitious son, Uncas, in battle. On the eve of the Battle of Moraviantown, he is shown plunged in grief, rage, and despair — emotions Richardson invented as Tecumseh’s reaction to the death of his fictive son.

It is difficult to reconcile these images either with contemporary descriptions of Tecumseh’s character or with Richardson’s avowed admiration for the Shawnee warrior. Most commentators of his time spoke of Tecumseh in extremely positive terms, emphasizing his physical attractiveness, his humane treatment of others, including war prisoners, and his expressive and animated manner in negotiations.⁶⁴ Descriptions depicted him as cheerful, humorous, magnetic, and persuasive, a man known for his energetic, lively manner. For instance, a well-known contemporary description by Sir Isaac Brock’s aide, Captain John Glegg, described his “bright hazle [*sic*] eyes, beaming with cheerfulness, energy, and decision.”⁶⁵ By inventing characters like Tecumseh’s fictitious son, Richardson undoubtedly sought to amplify the drama of his tale; but the result seems a distortion of historical reality, making Tecumseh appear a hateful, brooding, tormented soul, in contrast to the documentary sources. It is possible that these characterizations were intended to suggest a justified anger and hatred stemming from the injustices the Shawnee had experienced at the hands of both the United States and Britain. Nevertheless, they certainly understate the charisma contemporaries attributed to Tecumseh and make him appear much more the “savage” of colonial rhetoric.

In both poems, hatred and vengeance are repeatedly attributed to the Indigenous characters, including Tecumseh, and though these sentiments are implicitly understandable reactions to American cruelty, they remain classic traits of the savage as imagined by Europeans. His fellow warriors are depicted almost uniformly as uncivilized beings of inferior intellect, reason, and self-control, with a lust for war. Richardson first introduces the Indigenous combatants as “a thousand native warriors [who] wildly spring” on shore, watching the Battle of Lake Erie, and

react with rage to the British defeat: “Then shriek’d, as from the inmost depths of hell, / The savage war-cry and the deafening yell.”⁶⁶ Later, the warriors are shown as vicious and macabre, returning from a battle with “poles, thick strung with scalps ... all loathsome in their gore ...”⁶⁷ In the poem’s closing passages, they appear again as figures of horror: “All deck’d in terror for the battle hour; / Half white, half black, their swarthy forms they stain, / And look like wild fiends, raging to devour.”⁶⁸ Richardson also included in his poem several incidents in which Indigenous people brutalized and killed prisoners of war — their most severe violation of European codes of military honour, and a part of the War of 1812 that he had perhaps witnessed personally, as he claimed in the poem’s footnotes and elsewhere.⁶⁹ For his part, Longmore depicted his Indigenous characters as coarse, uncouth, animalistic, and superstitious, blindly following the Prophet and enacting the uncivilized practices of an un-Christian, “untutor’d” people.

Richardson’s text has more nuance to offer in its depiction of Indigenous warriors, which is clearly the result of his personal experience of fighting alongside them in the war. His poem reveals the fear they awakened in him, and at times exploits the image of the savage for melodramatic effect. But at the same time, he also displays his understanding of the divisions and distinctions among Indigenous nations, devoting six stanzas to an enumeration of the different nations represented. His list reflects more or less accurately the nations that did fight with Britain. Not only does he list most of their tribal names, but he portrays them as differing greatly from each other, designating some as being “mild” and unthreatening, while others receive the most negative characterizations of colonial discourse. The text distinguishes the “mild Huron who forsakes his plough [to fight]” from the “Winnebago fierce,” the “artful Chippewa,” the “Sawkie of the noble brow,” and the “wild Minoumini of flaming eyes” (the latter accused by Richardson of cannibalism). Richardson also devotes 18 stanzas to a speech uttered by an “aged chief,” in which the initially unnamed speaker charges whites with cruelty and war-mongering:

The white man terms them cruel, while his blade
Alone leaps thirsting for some victim’s blood;
He hunts the peaceful Indian from his glade,
To seek for shelter in the pathless wood;

Then talks of direst treason, when, dismay'd,
 He hears the war-cry where their homes once stood,
 Nor fails the wily hunter to abhor,
 Who differs from him but in forms of war!⁷⁰

The lengthy speech attributed to the “aged chief” offers an idyllic, romantic image of Indigenous life before colonization, with peaceful scenes of canoeing, night fishing, and graceful dancing and courting among the youth of the community. In this brief interlude, Richardson blames American greed and aggression for Indigenous war-making and temporarily softens his damning picture of the warriors, shifting the focus to Upper Canada’s bellicose southern neighbour.

One of the most surprising aspects of the two poems is their treatment of Indigenous people’s reasons for fighting with the British. One might have expected Longmore and Richardson to speak about Tecumseh and his fellows in terms of alliance with the British, yet neither uses the terms “ally” or “alliance” at all. There is no sense in either poem of the substantial history of military alliance and strategic collaboration between the British and Indigenous nations against the Americans, nor is there any reference to their common effort in the war of the American Revolution. It is interesting, then, to examine the motivations the poets attribute to Tecumseh and the other warriors in fighting alongside British forces. For the most part, they are depicted as being animated by revenge and hatred against the Americans, who are portrayed in both poems as ruthlessly slaughtering Indigenous people and driving them from their lands. As a secondary motivation, their attachment to Britain by diplomacy and gift-giving is mentioned. Tecumseh himself is portrayed as desirous of avenging his many slain relatives, a goal that is insinuated to be typical of his culture. To a lesser extent, the poets recognize his objective of halting United States expansion and protecting remaining Indigenous lands. In Richardson’s text, the aim of revenge stands out as the prime factor, and there is almost no allusion to alliance with Britain. Longmore’s poem states that Indigenous warriors have been won over to the British cause through “bribes” and British policies. Underlying all these depictions, once again, is the construction of the United States as a brutal invader, disdainful of law and justice, whose aggression and rapine cause suffering to both Indigenous nations and British North Americans.

Throughout Tecumseh's childhood and adulthood, Americans had driven the Shawnees from place to place, killing many who defended their homelands, including Tecumseh's father. Both Longmore and Richardson mention this history of resistance, dispossession, and death, which accorded with an incipient literary tradition portraying the colonial destruction of Indigenous nations as high tragedy. As Longmore writes in his poem, "For many a year, untam'd — unknown, / The Shawanee, call'd this his own / Unconquer'd land"; and, more powerfully: "Onward her sons, *Columbia* sent / To drive the savage from his lair, — / Where he had lived in calm content, — / The wild, yet unmolested there."⁷¹ (emphasis in original) Longmore also describes Tecumseh himself in these words:

Driven from the shore, which was his home
Where Rapine with voracious hand
Had darted down, and made him roam
Far from his own, his native strand.⁷²

This critique of United States imperialism anticipated even stronger language from Richardson, who stresses not only the military attacks and land theft the Shawnee had suffered, but goes further, painting the Americans as lawless and rapacious. His poem speaks of "Deep vengeance for the sufferings of a land / Long doom'd the partage of a numerous horde, / Whom lawless rapine o'er its vallies pour'd."⁷³ Richardson also highlights the Shawnee's near-complete loss of their ancestral territories, stating that they "have scarce a land to weep — / Scarce room where now their mighty dead may sleep."⁷⁴

In Longmore's poem, Britain is said to have attracted Indigenous allies through gifts and deeds, overcoming hostile sentiments whose origins are not addressed:

To check the foe, (*Columbia* sway'd
To empire, —) sent there to invade.
To Britain's cause, — by act and bribe,
From hostile feelings overwon, —
Full many a daring savage tribe
Have made that warring feud, their own⁷⁵

Later, before the Battle of Moraviantown, Longmore depicts Tecumseh eager for battle, hastening to "the Briton, who had sway'd / His heart to

combat for their cause.”⁷⁶ But the work ultimately prevaricates on the question of Tecumseh’s motivations. In its version of Tecumseh’s famous 1813 speech to Colonel Proctor, arguing against retreat, the poem gives two different reasons for his willingness to fight with the British. On the one hand, Tecumseh mentions several times that he and his fellow warriors had answered a call from the British to support them in the fight. On the other hand, he is also portrayed claiming ownership of the territory as land given to his people by the Creator:

“Twas the great Spirit who bequeath’d
 “These shores unto our valiant sires;
 “And whilst the gasp of life is breath’d, —
 “And Nature’s faintest spark inspires,
 “Our arrows shall maintain the soil
 “From Treason’s cheat, or Rapine’s spoil,
 “Till, ’midst the dank wild grass, our own
 “Worn limbs, shall whiten bone, by bone.”⁷⁷

Interestingly, Longmore acknowledges the treachery Indigenous nations had experienced from the British and offers a moment in which readers might recognize British injustice toward them. In the speech, Tecumseh condemns Britain’s betrayal of its Indigenous allies when it made peace with their mutual enemy and ceded Indigenous lands to the United States in the peace treaty:

“Contemn’d by Treachery’s foul hand
 “Which rais’d its death-blow o’er our land
 “Sold by oppression to appease
 “As rank, and restless a disease.
 “And shall the heartless White-man then,
 “Betray us to the foe again?”⁷⁸

For his part, Richardson emphasizes Tecumseh’s hatred of Americans and his goal of taking revenge for his slaughtered countrymen and women, who are constructed as innocent, hospitable folk victimized by their own guests. The killing of Americans is framed as an offering to “Indian shades,” i.e. the souls of the murdered:

All rose in dark array before his view,
 And cried for vengeance in that silent hour, —

The shades of those whom treacherous white men slew,
Whose lives pass'd harmless in the chase or bower;
Whose doors in welcome ever open flew,
And hail'd the stranger from the night-blast's power,
Reckless of harm, nor conscious of the guile
Which lurk'd unpitying in the guest's dark smile.⁷⁹

The poem portrays American settlements in the Ohio valley as being built literally on the bones and massacred remains of the valley's Indigenous inhabitants.

Where spread their cabins o'er Ohio's flood,
And the dark Wabash' banks their hunters bore,
His slaughter'd kindred sleep within the wood,
All gash'd with wounds, and sullied with their gore,
The foeman's fortress rises o'er their blood:
Their bones lie crumbling at his very door;
And nought of Indian life or growth remains
Along the vastness of those conquer'd plains.⁸⁰

Having painted this picture of American atrocities, Richardson attributes to Tecumseh untold numbers of American deaths in vengeance, continuing in the same florid language and imagery:

Well had his arm aveng'd his fallen race, —
Thick were the streams which crimson'd the dark soil;
The scalps scarce left within his tent a space,
Vast were the heaps from the warrior's spoil:
Still his soul slept not, and his wrath kept pace
With hate that scoff'd at suff'ring or at toil ...⁸¹

Richardson pays some attention, too, to the related but distinct goal of protecting Indigenous lives and lands from attack and dispossession at the hands of Americans. He portrays Tecumseh as fighting, "To free his groaning country, and to save / The faithful remnants of his weakened bands / From the dire fury of the foeman's hands."⁸² Quantitatively, though, the motives of vengeance and hate vastly predominate, appearing repeatedly in Richardson's poem. The lasting and irresistible impression of Tecumseh is that of a vengeful destroyer, rather than an

organizer and strategist who used diplomacy as well as military means to try to protect his people's lives and land.

These two poems are long, and each has complex motives and concerns. They both present war as horrific; both critique white encroachment on Indigenous lands, as well as white treachery in violating treaties, attacking without justification, and committing massacres. Most of this wrongdoing is laid at the door of the Americans, whose negative depiction is central to both poems — in keeping with the anti-American sentiment that pervaded Upper Canadian society in the period. Both poems acknowledge Tecumseh's motivations as related to protecting and avenging his own people and retaining ancestral territories, fighting off American invaders who had already driven so many Indigenous people off their lands. Neither claims at any point that Tecumseh is a friend to Britain or attached to it in any way. Moreover, both offer passages that suggest criticism of British policy toward Aboriginal peoples. Yet neither devotes much space to Tecumseh's goal of halting United States expansion, and both authors overlook his massive efforts to create a united confederacy of Indigenous nations to fight the United States to a standstill and end land cessions through treaties. Instead, he is individualized as a lone avenger, portrayed in solitude for much of the two works and separated from his fellow warriors by the uniquely noble character that sets him apart from all other Indigenous people.

Both poems show a distinct ambivalence about Indigenous people, and even to some extent about Tecumseh himself, as savages and "untutor'd souls." While at times the behaviour of his fellows seems a foil for Tecumseh's nobler and wiser character, at other moments he is more difficult to distinguish from the frightening, animalistic warriors who populate both poems. Indigenous people lend exoticism to both texts and are portrayed as "children of the forest," uneducated, un-Christian, and unrestrained in their passions. As warriors they are terrifying, not only to Americans but also to the British. Richardson refers to them before the final battle as "screaming Indians" and represents them as fierce, wild, and inhuman in their black and white war paint, ready to "devour" their enemies. Longmore repeatedly renders them as animalistic, comparing them to "wild tygers" and "wolves at scent of blood." Their "war-whoops" inspire dread and horror, their practice of scalping is frequently mentioned, and they are represented as eager for battle. Richardson

emphasizes the torture and killing of war captives, presenting several sensationally horrific scenes of this nature that his footnotes claim he witnessed personally. For the most part, then, Indigenous warriors are portrayed as savages who demonstrate the virtues of bravery, hospitality, and forest skills, but also cruelty and indiscriminate slaughter. Both texts claim they are motivated largely by revenge, a motive that effectively serves a dual function: on the one hand, it is another negative feature of savagery; on the other hand, the notion of vengeance underlines the commission of previous wrongs, reminding the reader that their people have been victimized by the aggressive, treacherous, invading Americans.

While a hero in these texts, important to the British military effort and worthy of emulation as a symbol of indomitable courage, Tecumseh is also an Other. For Longmore, his “natural” virtues could have made him the perfect man had they been united with Christianity and western education — but without these, he lacked the necessary cultivation, reason, and moral compass. In Richardson’s text, a fundamental ambivalence seems to be revealed in his admiration for Tecumseh, through the demonic images that crept into his poem and dominated its closing passages. For the Canadian edition, 14 years after the London edition, many of these passages were edited or omitted. But the inability of even sympathetic observers to achieve an entirely positive construction of the Shawnee leader is telling. Indigenous people were inconvenient allies in many ways — uncontrollable, undisciplined, pursuing their own goals and agendas. Following their egalitarian social structure, each man determined his own actions, which included looting enemy forts and towns and, in some cases, killing enemy prisoners — who, as they observed, would otherwise return to attack again.⁸³ The Americans persistently used their presence alongside British troops defending Upper Canada as a propaganda tool to defame the British and justify their own invasion of the colony. Indeed, Longmore’s and Richardson’s poems are part of a continuing propaganda war between the Americans and the British on both sides of the Atlantic over culpability in the War of 1812. Though Tecumseh conspicuously shunned the activities that he knew antagonized his allies, he too had his own agenda, which centred on ending the dispossession of Indigenous peoples.

Despite their reservations about their subject, Longmore and Richardson made use of Tecumseh as a “Canadian” hero, a figure who

symbolized Upper Canada's struggle for survival and contest against the United States. He was incorporated as a national symbol of a settlement colony he never set out to defend, and had not even visited more than a few times before the War of 1812 broke out. Although he died on soil claimed by Upper Canada, his heart belonged to lands further south, along the Wabash River and in other parts of the Ohio valley where he had lived most of his life. It was these lands, not Upper Canada, that Tecumseh died defending. His nationality was Shawnee, his identity fiercely Indigenous and independent of European colonies and empires. A Tecumseh who had lived would have fought with equal tenacity against the expansion of British settlement that occurred with a vengeance in the decades after his death. Safely in his grave, however, he could be appropriated for purposes that were never his own.

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Endnotes:

- 1 John Sugden, *Tecumseh: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), 90, 310, 328. In 1794, Tecumseh was among the retreating warriors who were denied entrance to Britain's Fort Miami after their defeat by United States forces in the Battle of Fallen Timbers. He was also aware of Britain's failure to protect

Indigenous interests after the American Revolution, despite their many promises during the conflict.

- 2 For example, see Maximilien Bibaud, *Biographie des sagamos illustres de l'Amérique Septentrionale* (Montréal: Lovell & Gibson, 1848), chap. 6.
- 3 The poems are George Longmore, "Tecumthé. A Poetical Tale in Three Cantos," published in the Montreal periodical *Canadian Review and Literary and Historical Journal* (December 1824); and John Richardson, *Tecumseh, or the Warrior of the West. A poem in four cantos* (London: R. Glynn, 1828).
- 4 According to Gordon Sayre, United States culture demonstrates a pattern of adopting as "tragic heroes" the Aboriginal leaders who resisted the European invasion. As tragic heroes, these leaders' stories served a series of cultural and affective functions, including evoking a sentimental response to Aboriginal suffering that served to alleviate a sense of responsibility for it; providing catharsis for feelings of pity and fear; and turning sympathy for the victims into an aesthetic, rather than a moral, sensation. Sayre also notes in passing Canada's use of Tecumseh for postcolonial nationalism. Gordon M. Sayre, *The Indian Chief As Tragic Hero. Native Resistance and the Literatures of America, from Moctezuma to Tecumseh* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), especially, 1-8, 32, 289.
- 5 R. David Edmunds, "Tecumseh, The Shawnee Prophet, and American History: A Reassessment," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (July 1983).
- 6 Sugden, 8-9; R. Edmunds, 274.
- 7 Sugden, 271-5.
- 8 Ibid., 279-93.
- 9 Ibid., 5-6 and *passim*.
- 10 Ibid., 311.
- 11 For example, see *ibid.*, 281-309.
- 12 Edmunds, 275.
- 13 Cecilia Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women. The Gendered languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 23.
- 14 See Colin Coates and Cecilia Morgan, *Heroines and History: Representation of Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 270.
- 15 I would like to thank Mary Lu MacDonald for her generosity in sharing with me, some years ago, her bibliography of Tecumseh and an unpublished paper about him, which were very helpful in beginning my research.
- 16 Longmore. In using the spelling "Tecumthé," Longmore sought to approximate more closely the Shawnee pronunciation of the name. Since the name has become standardized in English as "Tecumseh," I have used that spelling throughout this paper.
- 17 Richardson. For an explanation of the work's publication history, as well as a

- valuable introduction to Richardson's life and work, see Douglas Daymond and Leslie Monkman's introduction on the "Canadian Poetry" website at http://canadianpoetry.org/longPoems/Richardson_John/Tecumseh/introduction.html, <viewed May 23, 2012 >.
- 18 See Mary Lu MacDonald's carefully researched introduction to George Longmore's poetry on the "Canadian Poetry" website at <http://www.canadianpoetry.ca/longpoems/Tecumthe/introduction.htm>, <viewed May 23, 2012 >.
 - 19 Daymond and Monkman, http://canadianpoetry.org/longPoems/Richardson_John/Tecumseh/introduction.html, <viewed May 23, 2012>.
 - 20 See also Coates and Morgan, 143, 270.
 - 21 Richardson's publications on the War of 1812 include: *A Canadian Campaign*, published serially in the *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* (London: Colburn, 1826–1827; reprint Simcoe, Ont.: Davus Publishing, 2011, ed. David Beasley); and *War of 1812, first series; containing a full and detailed narrative of the operations of the right division, of the Canadian army* ([Brockville], 1842). He also wrote the novels *Wacousta*, *Hardscrabble*, and *Wau-nan-gee*, all with significant content relating to Indigenous warfare.
 - 22 Coates and Morgan, 143, 270.
 - 23 Leslie Monkman, "Richardson's Indians," *Canadian Literature* 81 (Summer 1979): 86.
 - 24 MacDonald. MacDonald also notes, "One of the other chapters of *The Lucubrations* appeared in the *Canadian Magazine* in August 1824, which is an indication that the author was probably resident in Canada at that time. While Longmore is probably not the author of the book, since he does not seem to have acknowledged it at a later date as he did *The Charivari* and *Tales of Chivalry and Romance*, the author was certainly a person known to him—probably a fellow Staff Corps officer with whose permission he versified the chapter "Indian Warfare," and with whom he had discussed its specific contents."
 - 25 *The Lucubrations of Humphrey Ravelin* (London: G. & W.B. Whittaker, 1823), 358–9.
 - 26 Daymond and Monkman. They demonstrate the influence on Richardson of Walter Scott's popular forging of historical myth. They also quote Richardson himself writing that, in offering for sale his works *The Canadian Brothers* and *Wacousta* in 1842, he hoped to "to infuse a spirit of National Literature into his native land."
 - 27 In this period, of course, "Canada" meant Upper and Lower Canada, not the much larger nation state founded in 1867.
 - 28 Longmore, lines 1–2.
 - 29 *Ibid.*, Canto I, lines 1–2.
 - 30 *Ibid.*, lines 5, 17–20, and 25–7.
 - 31 Richardson, lines 1–3.
 - 32 Longmore, stanza III, lines 5–7.
 - 33 Richardson, Canto IV, stanzas XXX, XXXVIII, XXXIX, XLIII, XLIV, XLVI.

- 34 Ibid., Preface, v.
- 35 Longmore, Canto I, line 85.
- 36 Leslie Monkman, *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English-Canadian Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 5.
- 37 Longmore, Canto I, lines 48–9, 91–2.
- 38 Ibid., lines 145–98.
- 39 Ibid., lines 125, 127.
- 40 Ibid., lines 221–4.
- 41 Ibid., Canto III, lines 147–8, 161.
- 42 Ibid., lines 328–30.
- 43 This event actually occurred and is mentioned in Richardson's poem as well (see below). Colonel Henry Proctor, the British commander, decided in October 1813 to withdraw from the shore of Lake Erie after a devastating naval defeat at the hands of the United States, which left the British unprotected by naval power and vulnerable to the severing of their supply lines. When he publicly announced his intention to retreat, Tecumseh delivered a withering speech in which he accused Proctor of cowardice and promised to remain and fight to the death. Subsequently, however, Tecumseh was persuaded to accept a strategic move to a supposedly better location for the impending battle, which took place near Moraviantown and led to Tecumseh's death.
- 44 Longmore, Canto III, lines 657–8, 663.
- 45 Ibid., Canto III, lines 709–22.
- 46 Richardson, Canto I, stanza XXVII.
- 47 Sugden, 63. Richardson is presumably referring to the Indigenous victory over Arthur St. Clair's army in November, 1791. According to Sugden's careful research, Tecumseh was not present for this battle.
- 48 Richardson, Canto I, stanza XXIX.
- 49 Ibid., Canto I, XXXII.
- 50 Ibid., XXXIII.
- 51 See Sugden, 334–8.
- 52 Richardson, Canto II, XLVII.
- 53 Richardson consistently presented Proctor's decision as an act of cowardice and a fatal mistake, an evaluation that many shared at the time.
- 54 Longmore, Canto I, lines 156–7.
- 55 Ibid., lines 294; Canto II, line 228.
- 56 Ibid., Canto III, lines 651–4.
- 57 Ibid., Canto I, lines 251–2.
- 58 Richardson, Canto I, stanza XXIX.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Ibid., Canto 4, stanza XLVIII.
- 61 See Daymond and Monkman. The work is unpaginated, but this information appears under Section IV.

- 62 Richardson, Canto I, stanza XXXVI.
- 63 Ibid., stanza XL.
- 64 See Sugden, 5–6.
- 65 Cited in G. Auchinleck, *A History of the War between Great Britain and the United States of America during the Years 1812, 1813 & 1814* (Toronto: Maclear & Co., 1855; reprint Arms and Armour Press, 1972), 57.
- 66 Richardson, Canto I, stanza XXIII.
- 67 Ibid., Canto II, stanza XXVI.
- 68 Ibid., Canto IV, stanza XXXI.
- 69 For instance, Richardson describes several brutal incidents in his *A Canadian Campaign*, 12–13, 16–18, 24, 36–9.
- 70 Richardson, Canto II, stanza XXII.
- 71 Longmore, Canto I, lines 36–8, 163–6.
- 72 Ibid., Canto III, lines 149–52.
- 73 Richardson, Canto I, stanza XXXI.
- 74 Ibid., Canto 2, stanza XX.
- 75 Longmore, lines 123–8 on page 45.
- 76 Ibid., Canto III, lines 621–2.
- 77 Ibid., Canto III, 447–54. The quotation marks are in the original, showing that Tecumseh is speaking.
- 78 Ibid., lines 433–4, 437–40.
- 79 Richardson, Canto 4, XXI.
- 80 Ibid., stanza XXII.
- 81 Ibid., stanza XXIII.
- 82 Ibid., Canto 4, stanza XXVII.
- 83 See Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812. American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 167–8, 171–2.