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William Hickling Prescott is one of America's best known romantic historians. Writing in the early nineteenth century, Prescott not only attempted to approach his subjects with the objectivity of a historian relying on major sources of fact, but also with the artistry of a writer who wishes to create interest and genuine concern for his subject. It is the hypothesis of this paper that Prescott approached the characters in his works from a romantic viewpoint which reflected the temper of his times, particularly in his concept of the dark or Indian characters in The Conquest of Mexico and The Conquest of Peru. In order to determine the extent to which the romanticism of the nineteenth century influenced Prescott, one must examine several factors. Among these factors are the nineteenth century view of the Indian, Prescott's sources, and Prescott's concept of the Indian as reflected in his work.

First, it is important to determine the general attitude toward the Indian prevalent in the nineteenth century and the extent to which this attitude is reflected in the drama and literature of the period. Prescott, as a well-educated man, was probably aware of the major literature on the American aborigine at this time. Close examination of these works should indicate the attitude of the public toward the Indian of the nineteenth century.

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Close comparison of his presentation with the original sources which Prescott used should also aid in the evaluation of Prescott's Indian characters. Among sources studied for this paper were those of Bernal Diaz, Garcilasso de la Vega, and Francisco Gomara. This examination should show that while Prescott remained true to his sources, he also added characteristics indicative of the romantic attitude toward the Indian.

All in all, this paper should reveal that while Prescott strove to depict the temper of the times of which he wrote, he also reflected the temper of his own times and that the Indian characters of his books, while drawn primarily from his sources, remain literary creations.

THE INDIAN HEROES OF WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT:
" REFLECTION OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY'S
VIEW OF THE INDIAN

by

Dianne Lee Keck

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APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY VIEW OF THE INDIAN

Before any examination of Prescott's concept of the Indian can be done, it is necessary to explore the background of the North American Indian as a literary theme. The role of the North American Indian in literature has been one of great change, passing from depiction of the noble savage to that of the fated child of destiny. Long before Prescott's works on the conquests of Mexico and Peru, the North American Indian had been the subject of many works of literature, from explorers' journals to poetry and drama. All of those early works of Indian literature produced a definite concept of the Indian. As a prelude to the chapters on Prescott's works, this chapter should provide a summary of the concept of the Indian prevalent at the time Prescott was writing and the background from which this concept was conceived. Such an examination is necessary in order to determine the extent to which Prescott was influenced by popular concepts of his day.

To the man of the nineteenth century, the Indian was more than just an aborigine abiding in the forests of this land. He was, says Albert Keiser, "a native plant springing from the soil, not an exotic product or the result of a

philosophic theory."¹ Yet, Roy Harvey Pearce has said that "the interest is not in the Indian as Indian, but in the Indian as a vehicle for understanding the white man, in the savage defined in terms of the ideas and needs of civilized life."² Did the nineteenth century feel that the Indian, because of his savagery, was merely a reminder of the degree to which the white man had become civilized? Was the Indian in actuality only a measuring stick for society? Pearce, in his book, The Savages of America, has explained that perhaps the Indian was a gauge for pre-1850 society, "For the American before 1850--a new man, as he felt, making a new world--was obsessed to know who and what he was and where he was going, to evaluate the special society in which he lived and to know its past and its future. One means to this end was to compare himself with the Indian who, as a savage, has all past and no future. The final result was an image of the Indian as man out of society and out of history."³

Of course, if this was the attitude of the nineteenth century toward the Indian, it would clearly be reflected in the literature of the day. Yet, in an examination of

¹Albert Keiser, The Indian in American Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 293.

²Roy Harvey Pearce, The Savages of America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), p. 202. Pearce's concept of Savagism does much to explain the nineteenth century's view of the Indian in relation to the major history of the period.

³Pearce, p. 135.

major works and authors of the early nineteenth century, it is first necessary to look backward at the age of literature and history from which they had their beginning. The North American Indian before 1850 was represented by three major concepts, that of the "noble savage," as represented in the works of Rousseau and the French philosophers, sentimentalized Indian of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and that of the romanticized Indian of the works of the early nineteenth century American novelists.⁴ All three of these concepts are part of the background from which Prescott's work sprang.

The concept of the noble savage saw the red man as an idealized answer to the complexities of society. Pearce has pointed out that the major western European intellectual tradition of primitivism--the belief that other incomplex societies possessed happiness greater than that of European societies, compelled searches for such a society and the men who lived in it; in other words, the search for the noble savage. America supplied a profusion of savages according to Pearce but the question was: "How noble were they?"⁵

⁴I am indebted here to Fred Lewis Pattee for the division in concept of the Indian. For a more extended discussion see Fred Lewis Pattee, The First Century of American Literature, 1770-1870 (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1966), p. 346.

⁵Pearce, p. 136.

Crevecoeur's Letters from an American Farmer, written in 1782, left the impression that the noble savage was the epitome of the author's dreams. According to Hoxie Fairchild, the idea of the noble savage is the consolidation of the observations of explorers, sundry classical and medieval conventions, and the conclusions of philosophers and men of letters.⁶ As a man of letters, Crevecoeur led his readers to believe that he had actually lived among the Indians, eating and sleeping in their wigwams, living a life of utter freedom. Pearce accuses Crevecoeur of inventing "the noble savage which he could not find when he wrote."⁷ After reading Letters, one must painfully agree with Pearce that Crevecoeur's Indians are the creation of his mind and not the actual Indian of North America. Analogously, in his Journey into Northern Pennsylvania and the State of New York, written in 1801, Crevecoeur extends this idea of the noble savage. For instance, he describes the Indians as physically unique in comparison to his own race. According to Crevecoeur, the Indians all had "coarse black hair; all the same general appearance: their skin the color of copper, the whites of their eyes tinted with yellow."⁸ In this physical description of the Indians, Crevecoeur extends

⁶Hoxie Neale Fairchild, The Noble Savage (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), p. 2.

⁷Pearce, p. 140.

⁸Michel Guillaume St. Jean de Crevecoeur, Journey into Pennsylvania and the State of New York (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), p. 9.

the tradition of the simple, dark, mysterious race existing in idyllic splendor. Even this early, the tradition of the passing of the redman before the white is recognized by Crèvecoeur: "it would seem that they are destined to disappear before the ascendancy of the white man. In another few years there will be no trace of their existence other than the names given by their ancestors to the rivers, mountains and lakes of their land."⁹ Crèvecoeur thus lays the foundation for the tradition which will influence Prescott, that of the Indian as the measuring stick for white society. Crèvecoeur can never be convinced that the red man does not live in complete harmony with gentleness and tranquility as characteristics of his existence.

Like Crèvecoeur, a number of eighteenth century authors, among them Chateaubriand and William Byrd, dealt with the noble savage. In Chateaubriand's Atala, (1801) one recognizes Indians by their name only and not by their life-style or culture. William Byrd's History of the Dividing Line (although written around 1728, it was not published until 1841), while acknowledging a tribute to Pocahontas, hopes for the further educability of the Indian. By 1793, the noble savage had begun to speak, and a good example of the standard Indian dialogue is found in Henry Mackenzie's Man of Feeling (1793): "May the Great Spirit bear up the weight of your old age, and

⁹Crèvecoeur, p. 10.

blunt the arrow that brings it rest!"¹⁰ The speech of the Indian in Mackenzie's work sounds familiar, for this same tradition today has the Indian speaking, "White man speak with forked tongue" or some such drivel. In spite of the way in which he was characterized by his speech, the North American Indian remained the free and wild creature whose virtues were taken from nature and in whom the civilized man of the eighteenth century could see the dream of a past which had once been his before the coming of civilization, and see also those elements which go into the making of civilization.¹¹ There was, however, one man who could bridge the gap between the idealized savage and the sentimentalized savage of the drama and poetry and novels of the early nineteenth century. That man was Philip Freneau.

Philip Freneau thought the American Indian was a fine example of nobility but a nobility which was dying under the onslaught of civilization. According to Keiser, Freneau, like Rousseau and other authors of the eighteenth century, was captivated by the thought of innocence and rapture of man's natural state.¹² A pioneer in the use of the Indian as a

¹⁰Fairchild, p. 493. Mr. Fairchild quotes several of Mackenzie's more amusing sections of dialogue.

¹¹The best discussion of the idea of the noble savage is in Fairchild's book. Although somewhat dated, the book still affords an excellent study of the concept of the noble savage.

¹²Keiser, p. 22.

subject for poetry, Freneau has a tendency to sentimentalize the Indian as in his poem, "The Indian Student, or Force of Nature" which appeared first in 1788 in Freneau's second volume of poetry. Here, Freneau has his young Indian hero, Shalum, cry out for a return to his old way of life after having attended Harvard College,

And why (he cried) did I forsake
 My native wood for gloomy walls;
 The silver Stream, the limpid lake
 For musty books and college halls.
 Where Nature's ancient forests grow,
 And mingled laurel never fades,
 My heart is fixed; and I must go
 To die among my native shades.¹³

Dying among native shades is also the method by which Freneau sentimentalizes the Indian in his poem "The Dying Indian: Tomo-Chequi," printed first in 1784. The aged chief bemoans the fact that he must die and leave behind the natural world of beauty which has been his home. The world of death can only hold "sickly orchards there" where "apples a consumptive visage shew,/And withered hangs the hurtle-berry blue."¹⁴ Likewise, in his poem, "The Prophecy of King Tammany" written in 1782, Freneau has the Indian hero of the poem deplore the coming of the white man whose intolerance and misunderstanding of the Indian and the natural world which is his home is slowly leading to the disappearance of the race. Tammany

¹³Keiser, pp. 23-24.

¹⁴Philip Freneau, Poems on Various Subjects (London: John Russell Smith, 1861), p. 310.

denounces Christian principles and declares that the white man's race will also come to no good end, being replaced by a race whose sordid virtues will be worse than those of the present white settlers. After predicting the downfall of the white race, Tammany dies in a funeral pyre which is the only answer to or escape from the white man.¹⁵

However, not all of Freneau's Indians are quite so noble in life and death. His later Indian poems depict an Indian who is a scandalous rascal, particularly in "The Indian Convert," which appeared in 1787. Here Freneau depicts not a noble savage, but an Indian who has been persuaded to try the Christian way of life even though he felt that his life of fishing and hunting was far better than Christianity. Finally, the Indian, in a discussion with the parson, turns away from his new-found faith because, as he tells the parson,

. . . I'm none of your mess;
On victuals, so airy, I faintish should feel,
I cannot consent to be lodged in a place
Where there's nothing to eat and but little to steal.¹⁶

This is hardly the noble savage. Instead, Freneau has taken a sarcastic jab at the very idea which he had employed in his early poetry.

Freneau was not the only one to change the image of the Indian at the end of the eighteenth century. In 1792, Hugh Henry Brackenridge, living on the Pittsburgh border, wrote

¹⁵Freneau, p. 273.

¹⁶Keiser, p. 24.

in the magazine Echo, "I consider men who are unacquainted with the savages like young women who have read romances, and have as improper an idea of the Indian character in the one case, as the female mind has of real life in the other."¹⁷ To Brackenridge, the Indian was little more than a beast roaming the American frontier: "And those brown tribes, who snuff the desert air, / Are aunts and cousins to the skunk and bear."¹⁸ Such opinion of the Indian was born of the myriad tales of savage slaughter and inhumane cruelty conducted during the Indian wars of early colonial times. Men such as Brackenridge and Charles Brockden Brown grew up on these tales, which were prevalent in most colonial families. Albert Keiser has noted that Brown's conception of the Indian was like that of many colonists, one of a murderous savage who must be closely observed in order to prevent tragedy.¹⁹ Brown, who was the first novelist to use the Indian as subject matter for prose fiction, is noted for his Indian work, Edgar Huntly or Memoirs of a Sleepwalker (1799).

Yet, if a close examination is made of Edgar Huntly, Brown's concept of the Indian is one of a cigar-store type of Indian who is powerless to show any compassion or good qualities at all. The best character in the novel is the

¹⁷Pattee, p. 350.

¹⁸Pattee, p. 350.

¹⁹Keiser, p. 37.

old Indian witch, Old Deb, but she remains undeveloped.²⁰ Prescott not only read Brown but reviewed Edgar Huntly for Jared Spark's American Biography in 1834. Prescott was hardly complimentary in his review of Edgar Huntly, for he compared Brown to Cooper and reached the conclusion that "the light in which the character of the North American Indian has been exhibited by the two writers has little resemblance. Brown's sketches, it is true, are few and faint. As far as they go, however, they are confined to such views as are most conformable to the popular conceptions, bringing into full relief the rude and uncouth lineaments of the Indian character, its cunning, cruelty, and unmitigated ferocity, with no intimations of a more generous nature."²¹ Such was Prescott's opinion of Brown's Indians.

Brown's conception of the Indian was shared also by Mrs. Susanna Rowson, in her Reuben and Rachel; or, Tales of the Old Times, written in 1798. For her there is no noble savage, only villainous redskins who slaughter and maim. In speaking of her use of the Indians as villains, Mrs. Rowson recounted that the purpose of such a literary theme was "to impart in their [the young people's] minds a love

²⁰Charles Brockden Brown. Edgar Huntly or Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker (New York: Macmillan Co., 1928).

²¹William Hickling Prescott. Biographical and Critical Miscellanies (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1905), pp. 30-31.

for piety and virtue."²² Fred Pattee has also pointed out that Mrs. Rowson knew little if anything about the real Indians of the early nineteenth century. According to Pattee, Mrs. Rowson used Indians merely as the villains in her story; these villains seize children and mercilessly murder women and babies.²³ Even the Indian girl Eumea, is treated with maudlin sentimentality; she kills herself when she finds that her white hero is blissfully wed to the white heroine of the novel.²⁴ Although such a move by an Indian maiden was to become a popular theme in American literature, suicide over a white man was hardly standard procedure for broken Indian hearts.

Although this sentimentality over the Indian existed well into the nineteenth century, it is evident by the end of the eighteenth century that the Indian presented quite a paradox for the writer as well as for the colonists of earlier times. He was a savage to be pitied because he lacked education yet admired because he supposedly drew from nature virtues which made him innocent and pure. He was the last of a dying race embittered by the onslaught of

²²Pattee, p. 351. The brackets here are my own. I have included them in an effort to clarify Mrs. Rowson's comment. Anytime brackets occur in the text of this paper, they are mine.

²³Pattee, p. 351.

²⁴Pattee, p. 351. I am indebted to Mr. Pattee for his excellent summary of Mrs. Rowson's work which I could not find in any other source.

white civilization, yet a being who enjoyed the freedom of a simple life to be envied by the white settler. If the noble savage did exist, it was not in America, but only in the minds of men such as Crèvecoeur. In the defeat of the Indian, the white man was able to measure his progress in acquiring lands and building towns. He was able to measure his ability to push forward into a promising future while building upon the anachronism of the Indian who has long ago outgrown his usefulness to society. Thus, by the end of the eighteenth century, the Indian was a creature of dual nature. He was the actual Indian who fought hard to save his people against the unending flood of white settlers who constantly pushed him off his lands, lands that had belonged to his tribe for a hundred years or more. He was also the ephemeral Indian of the dream of the noble savage, an Indian whose innocence and virtue were lost to the white man who had relinquished such virtue the day that he had banded together with his fellow settlers in what had come to be known as a civilized world. The Indian was what all men had once been and could never be again. In celebrating the idea of the noble savage, the white man was offering tribute to what he himself had once been.

This sentimentality for man's past was carried over into the early nineteenth century. Pearce has appropriately pointed out that "as doomed noble savage the Indian could be pitied; and American literary men, sensitive to the feeling

of their readers, cultivated such pity."²⁵ This pity prompted that recording of the past, of the forgotten, which has come to be a romantic element in literature. America had no real past except the Indian; thus, the romantic concept of the Indian was prevalent in both drama and fiction of the time. The enigma of the Indian linked the strange with the familiar, a quality necessary for romance. Keiser has written that the Indian drama rose to popularity during the first three decades of the nineteenth century. The drama reached its peak about 1830 through the acting of Edwin Forrest, America's great tragedian and retained its popularity until the early 1850's.²⁶ As early as 1808, Indian drama had begun to appear on the stage in John Barker's play entitled Indian Princess. But the Indian play did not become really popular until 1827 when George Washington Parke Custis wrote The Indian Prophecy based on an incident in the private life of Washington.

Outshining The Indian Prophecy in popularity, Pocahantas, or the Settlers of Virginia, Custis's third play, was performed in 1830. Based on the legends of Pocahantas and John Smith, the play lacks the chronology of the history on which it is based. For dramatic purposes, the salvation of Smith by Pocahantas occurs in the last act of the play when

²⁵Pearce, pp. 169-170.

²⁶Keiser, p. 65.

historically it occurred much sooner. The two main Indian characters in the play are Pocahantas and Matacoran, her Indian sweetheart. Pocahantas is a gentle, sweet, and very romanticized young lady. At one point in the play she is explaining why she refuses to marry the brave Matacoran and in good Indian tradition she says, "but sooner shall the sun cease to shine, and the waters to flow, than Pocahantas be the wife of Matacoran . . . Matacoran is brave, yet he lacks the best attribute of courage--mercy. Since the light of the Christian doctrine has shone on my before benighted soul, I have learned that mercy is one of the attributes of the divinity I now adore."²⁷ In the closing scenes of the play when she throws herself under the upraised clubs of the executioners in order to save Smith's life, Pocahantas severs her ties with her father because the God of the Universe sustains her and "it is his divine spirit that breathes in my soul, and prompts Pocahantas to a deed which future ages will admire."²⁸ Here is a girl who recognizes the value of her actions.

Matacoran is also an active young man, his activity being used against the white man instead of for him. An avowed enemy of the white man, Matacoran captures Smith and demands his death. Spurned by Pocahantas and deprived of his

²⁷Arthur Hobson Quinn, Representative American Plays 1767-1923 (New York: Century Co., 1925), p. 191. Quinn, here gives an excellent script of Custis' Pocahantas.

²⁸Quinn, p. 207.

victory by her actions, Matacoran, in his last speech of the play, espouses the romantic sentiment prevalent in the early nineteenth century:

Hear me, chief. Know that Matacoran scorns thy friendship, and hates all thy kind. The fortune of war is on thy side; thy gods are as much greater than the gods of the Indian, as thine arms are greater than his. But altho' thy gods and thine arms have prevailed, say did not Matacoran fight bravely in the last of his country's battles? and when his comrades fled, singly did he face the thunders of his foe. Now that he can no longer combat the invaders he will retire before them, even to where tradition says, there rolls a western wave. There on the utmost verge of the land which the Manitou gave to his fathers, when grown old by time, and his strength decay'd, Matacoran will erect his tumulus, crawl into it and die. But when in a long distant day, posterity shall ask where rests that brave, who disdaining alliance with the usurpers of his country, nobly dar'd to be wild and free, the finger of renown will point to the grave of Matacoran.²⁹

The play however, ends on a note of reconciliation with Pocahantas being given in marriage by her father, Powhatan. In toasting the bride, Powhatan calls for a reconciliation of the white man and the red man in future generations. Keiser has aptly summed up Custis' work when he explains that "on the whole, Custis has rather skillfully utilized the historic material and in his Indian portrayals puts only a fair strain upon credulity except that in some instances the native ideas are too much colored by white civilization."³⁰ The idea of

²⁹Quinn, p. 208.

³⁰Keiser, p. 74.

material colored by native thought proves to be a point of contention in Prescott's works which are examined later in this paper.

Greater in popularity than either of Custis's plays was John Augustus Stone's Metamora, or the Last of the Wampanoags. Presented first in 1830 with Edwin Forrest in the lead role, Metamora ran almost twelve years consecutively and made a millionaire of its leading actor. The character of Metamora is, says Arthur Hobson Quinn, "a type, not a real Indian, and every admirable characteristic is intensified, and every moment is a tense one."³¹ Yet, Albert Keiser points out, "Forrest's contemporary and biographer, Alger, asserts that "it was the genuine Indian who was brought upon the stage, merely idealized a little in some of his moral features, with the single and very proper exception of this partially heightened moral refinement, the counterfeit was so cunningly copied that it might have deceived nature itself."³²

Whether or not the character of Metamora would have deceived nature itself can be determined only by a look at the play.³³ Metamora is always seen in an affected pose, as in

³¹Arthur Hobson Quinn, A History of the American Drama From the Beginning to the Civil War (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1943), p. 271. All subsequent footnotes from this book will be denoted here as Quinn, History, etc.

³²Keiser, p. 76.

³³I am indebted to Keiser for the rudiments of the summary which follows.

the beginning of the play when he appears on a high precipice looking off into the sunset, his feathers in place and his bow in hand. His theatrics include pantomime answers to Oceana and an off-stage struggle with a wild beast. As the play progresses, Stone adds colonial history clearly in opposition to the domestic attitudes of the Indian, which are displayed by scenes occurring within the tents of the Indian. In comparison to the sentiments of the Indian, the white settler seems cruel, powerful, and unflinching in his confiscation of Indian land and in his destruction of the Indian way of life. All those scenes which portray the white man indulging in such inhumane treatment of the Indian only serve to generate affection for the Indian in the heart of the audience. Keiser quotes a passage from the play which clearly was written to evoke sympathy for the Indian and his vanishing way of life: "The pale-faces are around me thicker than the leaves of summer. I chase the hart in the hunting grounds; he leads me to the white man's village. I drive my canoe into the rivers; they are full of the white man's ships. I visit the graves of my fathers; they are lost in the white man's cornfields. They come like the waves of the ocean forever rolling upon the shores. Surge after surge, they dash upon the beach, and every foam-drop is a white man. They swarm over the lands like the doves in winter, and the red men are dropping like withered leaves."³⁴

³⁴Keiser, p. 78.

In scenes of Metamora's homelife, Stone depicts a compassion and love encompassed by the wilderness that only adds to the sympathy evoked for this red man. These scenes also lay the groundwork for the later scenes in the play where the young son of Metamora is slaughtered by the whites. Arriving at the white encampment to rescue his beloved wife and son, Metamora in a pathetic scene hears of the death of his only son. Resolving to deny the white settlers any victory over him, Metamora murders his wife. When white men come to take him prisoner, Metamora defies them and is subsequently killed by musket fire. Before he dies, Metamora displays pride in the fact that he will never be the prisoner of the white soldiers and with his last breath he curses both the settlers and their progeny:

My curses on ye, white men! May the Great Spirit curse ye when he speaks in his war-voice from the clouds! May his words be like the forked lightnings, to blast and desolate! May the loud winds and the fierce red flames be loosed in vengeance upon ye, tigers! May the angry Spirit of the Waters in his wrath sweep over your dwellings! May your graves and the graves of your children be in the path where the red man shall tread, and may the wolf and the panther howl over your fleshless bones! I go. My fathers beckon from the green lakes and the broad hills. The Great Spirit calls me. I go,--but the curses of Metamora stay with white men!³⁵

Then, crawling to the side of his dead wife and son, Metamora, in a line reminiscent of Othello gasps, "I die--my wife, my

³⁵Keiser, p. 81.

Queen--my Nahmeokee!"³⁶

As a play Metamora survived and was popular for almost fourteen years until the death of Forrest. Forrest seemed to be the only man for the role, for after his death the play simply stopped being produced and quickly was forgotten by the public. The Indian play as a vogue was not forgotten, however; as Quinn points out, about fifty Indian plays were performed between 1825 and 1860.³⁷ Joseph Patrick Roppolo in "American Themes, Heroes, and History on the New Orleans Stage, 1806-1865," has said that only a few of the plays picture the Indian participating in historic events while others exhibit a small degree of American awareness of the Indian and some aspects of his tragedy.³⁸ Quinn has said that the vogue declined because of sameness of plot, exaggeration of motive, and lack of reality in the treatment of the Indian. Unlike other plays, the Indian drama failed because it dealt with a vanishing race rather than a coming race.³⁹

Yet, in spite of the fact that the drama of the period developed a duplication of plot elements, the greatest example

³⁶Keiser, p. 81.

³⁷Quinn, History, p. 275. Quinn gives an excellent listing of all these plays.

³⁸Joseph Patrick Roppolo, "American Themes, Heroes, and History on the New Orleans Stage, 1806-1865," Tulane Studies in English, 5 (1955), 157.

³⁹Quinn, History, p. 275.

of treatment of the Indian in the nineteenth century was in the popular fiction. W. C. Brownell has pointed out that "the introduction into literature of the North American Indian, considered merely as a romantic element, was an important event in the history of fiction."⁴⁰ Perhaps the best way in which to gather a comprehensive view of the Indian in fiction is to examine the concept of the Indian in the works of two of the most popular writers of the nineteenth century, William Gilmore Simms and James Fenimore Cooper. No other two writers so influenced or better expressed the dual concept of the Indian as savage and noble man.

According to J. V. Ridgely in his biography of Simms, Simms' Indians were neglected because they had no place in civilized society. Although the white man could learn certain skills from the Indian, Simms did not believe that the Indian could be turned into a slave because his basic nature was too brutal to allow him to be a part of society.⁴¹ Simms, himself best expressed his views of the Indian in his book, Views and Reviews in American Literature, History and Fiction (1848) when he wrote:

Our imperfect knowledge of the Indian,--the
terror that he inspired,--the constant warfare
between his race and our own--have embittered

⁴⁰W. C. Brownell, American Prose Masters (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 21.

⁴¹J. V. Ridgely, William Gilmore Simms (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1962), p. 54.

our prejudices, and made us unwilling to see any thing redeeming either in his character or intellect. We are apt to think him no more than a surly savage, capable of showing nothing better than his teeth. The very mention of his name, recalls no more grateful images than scalping knife and tomahawk; and shuddering at the revolting associations, we shut our eyes, and close our ears, against all the proofs which declare his better characteristics. We are unwilling to read his past as we are unable to control his future;--refuse to recognize his sensibilities, and reject with scorn the evidence of any more genial attributes, in his possession, which might persuade us to hope for him in after days--for his natural genius and his real virtues--when, shut in by the comparatively narrow empire which we have allotted him--barred from expansion by the nations which are destined to crowd upon him on every hand, . . . he will be forced to throw aside the license of the hunter, and place himself, by a happy necessity, within the traces of civilization.⁴²

Later, in the same review, Simms wrote of the American Indian, "He has virtues, but they are not those which belong to, or spring from society. He is proud, and this protects him from meanness; generous, and capable of the most magnanimous actions; hospitable,--you shall share his bread and his salt to his own privation;--loves liberty with a passion that absorbs almost all others--and brave--rushing into battle with the phrenzy of one who loves it--he prolongs the conflict, unhappily, long after mercy entreats to spare.

Such is the North American Indian."⁴³

⁴²William Gilmore Simms, Views and Reviews in American Literature, History and Fiction (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 139. (1848).

⁴³Simms, p. 135.

While Simms writes so glowingly of the Indian in his essays, an even better example of his opinion of the Indian lies in his romance work, The Yemassee printed in 1835. First of all, Simms sees the Indian as a link with the past. In the Indian, Simms found the glory which Scott found in the European past. Sanutee, the "well-beloved" of the Yemassee, is that link with the past. He is the last of the great chiefs of the Yemassee, and although slowed by age, can still wield a tomahawk. Simms was to write that "The elements of all uncultivated people are the same. The early Greeks, in their stern endurance of torment, in their sports and exercises, were exceedingly like the North American savages."⁴⁴ Simms also compared the Indian to the Lacedaemonians and the Jews as well as the Danes and Saxons.⁴⁵

Although Simms uses Sanutee as a link with the past, he uses the son of Sanutee, Oconestoga, as the symbol of the degraded future of the American Indian. Oconestoga has been ruined by the white man's liquor and finally becomes a traitor to the Yemassee. In his death, Oconestoga represents the downfall of the Yemassee who have only a degraded hope for future in the white man's world and no pathway for retreat to the glorious past of their forefathers. In death, Oconestoga

⁴⁴William Gilmore Simms, The Yemassee (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1911), p. 284. All subsequent footnotes will be marked Simms, Yemassee, page number. (1835)

⁴⁵Simms, Yemassee, p. 284.

is saved from further ruin by the tomahawk which his mother wields. Rather than allowing her son to die dishonorably deprived of his tribe's totem, Matiwan delivers the death blow. In murdering her son, Matiwan saves him from dishonor at the hands of his own people. Just before she ends his life, Occonestoga cries out, "'It is good, Matiwan, it is good--thou hast saved me--the death is in my heart.'" And back he sank as he spoke, while a shriek of mingled joy and horror from the lips of the mother announced the success of her effort to defeat the doom, the most dreadful in the imagination of the Yemassee."⁴⁶ Matiwan's murder of her son restores to him part of the lost nobility which had once been his.

Like other Indians of the nineteenth century literature, the Yemassee tribe becomes, for Simms, a gauge against which man could measure the progress of his civilization. Early in the first chapter of the book, Simms writes, "A feeble colony of adventurers from a distant world had taken up its abode along side of them (the Indians). The weaknesses of the intruder were, at first, his only but sufficient protection with the unsophisticated savage. The white man had his lands assigned him, and he trenched his furrows to receive the grain on the banks of Indian waters. Meanwhile, the adventurers grew daily more numerous, for their friends and relatives

⁴⁶Simms, Yemassee, p. 211.

soon followed them across the ocean. Until, at length, we behold the log-house of the white man, rising up amid the thinned clump of woodland foliage, within hailing distance of the squat, clay hovel of the savage."⁴⁷ The Yemassee prove to be no match for the white man's progress. Sanutee, greatest of the Yemassee chiefs, is no match for either the pirate, Chorley, or the governor of South Carolina. After the story is told, the main theme of the book is the relationship of the Indians to the growing white civilization. The relationship becomes a mathematical one, for in the end as the white man increases, the red man decreases.⁴⁸

In his demise, the red man in Simms' novel, like the other red men of the time, dies nobly and in combat against the white man. As the book ends with the death of Sanutee and the defeat of the Yemassee, Sanutee gasps, "It is good, Matiwan. The well-beloved has no people. The Yemassee has bones in the thick woods, and there are no young braves to sing the song of his glory. The Coosah-moray-te is on the bosom of the Yemassee, with the foot of the great bear of Apalachia. He makes his bed in the old home of Pocotaligo, like a fox that burrows in the hill-side. We may not drive him away. It is good for Sanutee to die with his people.

⁴⁷Simms, Yemassee, p. 3.

⁴⁸D. H. Lawrence in Studies in Classic American Literature (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1951) has said that Benjamin Franklin has a neat little formula for the extinction of the Indian: Rum + Indian = 0.

Let the song of his dying be sung."⁴⁹

While the song of his dying is sung, Sanutee's death is reinforced by the scenes of domestic life which Simms had included in the earlier part of the novel. Like Custis's Metamora, The Yemassee is filled with scenes of apparent affection between Sanutee and Matiwan. In the first chapter of the novel, Simms has Sanutee praise Matiwan for her loyalty as a wife: "Matiwan is the woman who has lain in the bosom of Sanutee; she has dressed the venison for Sanutee when the great chiefs of the Cherokee sat at his board. Sanutee hides it not under his tongue. The Yemassee speak for Matiwan--she is the wife of Sanutee."⁵⁰ Later, in the final night before the assault with the white man, Sanutee "caught the approach of a light footstep behind him. He turned, and his eye rested upon Matiwan. She crept humbly towards him, and lay at his feet."⁵¹ As Sanutee lies dying, Matiwan places her hand over his wound in a last effort to save the precious life-blood flowing from his side, and in doing so, hopefully to save her well-beloved Sanutee. The picture of the Indian couple is as pathetic as any drawn in the literature of the nineteenth century.

Another means of heightening the fall of the Yemassee

⁴⁹Simms, Yemassee, p. 440.

⁵⁰Simms, Yemassee, p. 11.

⁵¹Simms, Yemassee, p. 433.

chieftain is Simms's method of describing Sanutee. When the reader first sees Sanutee, he is dressed in buckskin leggings and hunting-shirt and moccasins of deerhide. The costume is completely without ornament, but the person of Sanutee needs no ornament:

His symmetrical person--majestic port--keen, falcon eye--calm, stern, deliberate expression, and elevated head--would have been enfeebled, rather than improved by the addition of beads and gauds,--the tinsel and glitter so common to the savage now. His form was large and justly proportioned. Stirring event and trying exercise had given it a confident, free, and manly carriage, which the air of decision about his eye and mouth admirably tallied with and supported. He might have been about fifty years of age; certainly he could not have been less; though we arrive at this conclusion rather from the strong, acute, and sagacious expression of his features than from any mark of feebleness or age. Unlike the Yemassee generally, who seems to have been of an elastic and frank temper, the chief--for he is such--whom we describe, seemed one, like Cassius, who had learned to despise all the light employes of life, and now only lived in the constant meditation of deep scheme and subtle adventure. He moved and looked as one with a mind filled to overflowing with restless thought, whose spirit, crowded with impetuous feelings, kept up constant warfare with the more deliberate and controlling reason.⁵²

Truly, one so noble does indeed have a long way to fall and like Cassius, his fall is tragic yet necessary for the good of the society, in this case, the white society. Thus, Sanutee and all of Simms's Indians are like those of drama and poetry of the nineteenth century.

⁵²Simms, Yemassee, p. 9.

While Simms's concept of the Indian is much like that in the drama discussed earlier in this paper, there was one whose idea of the Indian set the precedent for Simms and for the nineteenth century view of the Indian, James Fenimore Cooper. Author of eleven Indian novels, Cooper probably influenced the concept of the Indian more than any other author of his time. But Cooper's portrayal of the Indian has also inspired a great controversy. Lucy Hazard has said in her review of Cooper's works that to Cooper "the 'good' Indian was one who did not trouble the Americans."⁵³ D. H. Lawrence in speaking of the Leatherstocking Tales retorts, "As if ever any Indian was like Apollo, The Indians, with their curious female quality, their archaic figures, with high shoulders and deep, archaic waists, like a sort of woman! And their natural devilishness, their natural insidiousness."⁵⁴ Brownell has pointed out that "successful or not, his Indians, like his other characters, belong to the realm of attempted portraiture of racial types, and are, in intention, at all events, in no wise purely romantic creations."⁵⁵ Brownell has also remarked in his evaluations of Cooper's Indians that "with the naturally greater simplicity of the savage they are, nevertheless, not represented without the complexities that

⁵³Lucy Hazard, The Frontier in American Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 100.

⁵⁴Lawrence, p. 58.

⁵⁵Brownell, p. 24.

constitute and characterize the individual."⁵⁶ Cooper's idea of the Indian was aptly expressed in the introduction to The Last of the Mohicans (1826) when Cooper wrote, "Few men exhibit greater diversity, or if we may so express it, greater antithesis of character, than the native warrior of North America. In war, he is daring, boastful, cunning, ruthless, self-denying, and self-devoted; in peace, just, generous, hospitable, revengefull, superstitious, modest, and commonly chaste. These are qualities, it is true, which do not distinguish all alike; but they are so far the predominating traits of these remarkable people as to be characteristic."⁵⁷

Antithesis of character is exactly the method Cooper uses in portraying his Indians. In the Leatherstocking Tales, Cooper uses his Indians in opposition to one another. In The Last of the Mohicans, Chingachgook and Uncas are in opposition to Magua; in The Deerslayer (1841), Chingachgook as a young warrior stands in opposition to Rivenoak, the embodiment of malaise in the Indian. Cooper seems to match one bad Indian with one good Indian. Yet, it is only in looking at the individual Indian that one can determine Cooper's working attitude toward the Indian.

⁵⁶Brownell, p. 24.

⁵⁷James Fenimore Cooper, Last of the Mohicans (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), p. iii. All subsequent footnotes will be marked Cooper, LM, page number.

To Cooper, each Indian has a noble bearing which may or may not have been corrupted by the white man. In describing young Indians, Cooper always depicts them as powerful and god-like. For instance, in his description of Uncas in The Last of the Mohicans, Cooper writes, "At a little distance in advance stood Uncas, his whole person thrown powerfully into view. The travellers anxiously regarded the upright, flexible figure of the young Mohican, graceful and unrestrained in the attitudes and movements of nature. Though his person was more than usually screened by a green and fringed hunting-shirt, like that of the white man, there was no concealment to his dark, glancing, fearless eye, alike terrible and calm; the bold outline of his high, haughty features, pure in their native red, or to the dignified elevation of his receding forehead, together with all the finest proportions of a noble head, bared to the generous scalping tuft."⁵⁸ In The Pathfinder (1840), Cooper describes Arrowhead as "one of those noble-looking warriors that were oftener met with among the aborigines of this continent a century since, than today; and, while he had mingled sufficiently with the colonists to be familiar with their habits, and even with their language, he had lost little, if any, of the wild grandeur and simple dignity of a chief."⁵⁹ Chingachgook of The Deerslayer is the

⁵⁸Cooper, LM, p. 54.

⁵⁹James Fenimore Cooper, The Pathfinder (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), p. 5. All subsequent footnotes will be marked, Cooper, Path, and page number.

untouched young native warrior who stands in purity, unspoiled by the white man. Cooper's Indians are the embodiment of the ideal of the Indian as conceived by the white man. He is that epitome of grace and handsome dark features which causes him to stand out in apparent dark ignorance to the enlightened civilization of the nineteenth century America.

Cooper's Indians are powerful not only in their physical attributes but also in their demise as the owners of the vast wilderness of the nineteenth century. For every powerful figure in Cooper's works, there is one who is less powerful and on the edge of ruin from the stain of the white civilization. Where Uncas is noble in his youth, Magua is ruined by the white man's liquor in his middle age; where Chingachgook represents the finest hope of the Mohicans in The Deerslayer, Indian John represents that hope come to disaster in The Pioneers (1823). Never in Cooper's fiction does the reader see the Indian in any light except as out of place and "out of time" with the world around him. The greatest of the warriors in Cooper's novels is Tamenund, who is introduced to the reader as a withered but noble old man, no longer able to participate in the warpath glory which had once been his. The Indians in Cooper's works never progress beyond what they are. While they are interesting as separate characters, they remain at their particular point of reference throughout the work of which they are a part. For instance, Uncas is young when the reader first meets him, and young

when he dies in combat with Magua.⁶⁰ Magua is already ruined and is never redeemed. Tamenund is old and gets older. Chingachgook of The Last of the Mohicans becomes Indian John of The Pioneers, a rapid and downhill transition for one of the finest warriors of Cooper's novels. Arrowhead and Magua are cruel and heartless and they die without any remorse or hope for change. Rivenoak is captured and shows no signs of remorse or despair. Thus, Cooper sees the Indian in bas-relief, lacking many of the complexities which make the white characters more interesting.

While the Indian is almost a one dimensional character in Cooper, he does become again a way to measure progress. In all of the works of the Leatherstocking Tales as well as the other six works by Cooper which involve Indians, the Indian is pushed farther and farther away from the world which had once been his. Hurry Harry and Tom Hutter of The Deerslayer claim the Glimmerglass as their property while it had once belonged to the Indian. In The Pioneers, Indian John dies in a fire which purges the frontier of the last reminder of the barrier which had once stood between the white man and the town which he desired. In Wyandotte (1843), the Indian loses his favorite hunting ground so that the white settlers

⁶⁰Donald Darnell, "Uncas as Hero: The Ubi Sunt Formula in the Last of the Mohicans," American Literature, 37 (Nov. 1965), 259-66. Here Darnell discusses the movement of Uncas from an insignificant Indian warrior to the position of hero. However, Uncas really does not experience a growth in character at all. Cooper merely reveals character which is already there.

can develop a farm on the property. The cycle of progress is repeated in The Prairie (1827) even though Leatherstocking is an ancient man and his adversaries are not the Hurons but the Sioux of the Great Plains. The movement for the Indian in Cooper's works is always westward, with the white man following close behind.

Although Cooper supports the westward movement of civilization, he also bewails through his Indian characters the fate of the red man. The most fitting tribute which Cooper pays to the passing of the red man is The Last of the Mohicans, the second book of the Leatherstocking Tales. The very title itself implies the demise of the Indian race. At one point in the novel, Chingachgook laments the fortunes of his race, "My tribe is the grandfather of nations, but I am an unmixed man. The blood of chiefs is in my veins, where it must stay forever. Where are the blossoms of those summers! --fallen, one by one: so all of my family departed, each in his turn to the land of spirits. I am on the hill-top, and must go down into the valley; and when Uncas follows in my footsteps, there will no longer be any of the blood of the sagamores, for my boy is the last of the Mohicans."⁶¹ The last speech of the book belongs to the last of the wise men of the Lenni Lenape, Tamenund, "It is enough. Go, children of the Lenape, the anger of the Manitou is not done. Why

⁶¹Cooper, LM, p. 39.

should Tamenund stay? The pale-faces are masters of the earth, and the time of the redmen has not yet come again. My day has been too long. In the morning I saw the sons of Unamis happy and strong; and yet, before the night has come, have I lived to see the last warrior of the wise race of the Mohicans."⁶² Tamenund's speech could well be the requiem for all the major Indian characters of the nineteenth century who pass into time and history.

Like most of the literary Indians of the nineteenth century, the Indians of Cooper pass into history nobly. Uncas faces the gauntlet with aplomb and finally dies struggling to save the girl he loves. Indian John dies stoically, refusing aid or rescue from the flames of the forest fire which rage around him and finally take his life. In The Pathfinder, Arrowhead is described as listening "gravely" and submitting with the "calm and reserved dignity with which the American aborigines are known to yield to fate."⁶³ In Cooper as in the drama of the period, the Indian is known for his ability to die well and with great reserve and dignity as is befitting an anachronism of any age.

No doubt, the Indian of the Cooper novels is one whose very being deeply influences the concept of the Indian in other works. All of the Leatherstocking Tales had appeared

⁶²Cooper, LM, p. 386.

⁶³Cooper, Path, p. 235.

by the time Prescott's The Conquest of Mexico appeared in 1843. The earliest of the Cooper novels dealing with Indians appeared in 1823, three years before Custis's famous Indian play and twelve years before Simms's novel, The Yemassee. The idea of the Indian in the nineteenth century literature was influenced by the popular works of Cooper, and his Leatherstocking Tales provided the world with a slightly idealized and sympathetic version of the Indian endowed with the virtues that philosophers such as Rousseau had sought in the world of nature. However, the degree to which Cooper's idea of the Indian, as representing the nineteenth century's view of the Indian, influenced the work of Prescott remains to be seen.

After such examination of the works of Cooper, Custis, and other major figures of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the concept of the Indian emerges with several key characteristics. First of all, the Indian must be physically unique if he is to be a major character of the work. In poetry, drama, and fiction of the time, the Indian is always a god-like figure in physical appearance if he is young, and if he is older, he must have a noble bearing or air about him. Secondly, the Indian must be in conflict with the white man or with European civilization. He must be caught in a struggle for the existence of his race. Third, as a result of that struggle, the Indian must die well. His death must be as noble as the past from which his reputation

springs. Death must result from the conflict of the two societies or from the conflict involving good and evil. Fourth, the passing of the Indian civilization must indicate the growth of the European civilization or white civilization in America. This growth of the European way of life should result from the ignorance of the savage way of life and the light of the Christian settler. The Indian must in this case remain pagan and true to his gods and his way of life. The Indian who partakes of the white man's way of life is shown to be a traitor to his race and of little value to the white race. These four characteristics are the basis for the nineteenth century's view of the North American aborigine. To what extent these four characteristics can be applied to the South American and Central American aborigine may be seen in Prescott's work. To what extent these characteristics affected Prescott's work can be determined only by examining the major characters of Prescott's works in comparison to his major sources and then examining those elements which constitute Prescott's poetic license with his subject.

CHAPTER II

DIAZ, GOMARA, PRESCOTT, AND THE CONQUEST OF MEXICO

The best way to determine the effect of the nineteenth century's view of the Indian upon Prescott is to look directly at Prescott's two major works which deal with Indians, The Conquest of Mexico and The Conquest of Peru. The Conquest of Mexico, with which this chapter deals, appeared in 1843. Immediately hailed as an important work of history, The Conquest of Mexico was also noted for its fine artistic work. William Gilmore Simms praised Prescott and his work extravagantly: "The work of Mr. Prescott possesses higher claims to our regard as an original narrative. It is an elegant and eloquent production, rich and copious in expressions, yet distinguished by a grace and simplicity worthy of any English historian. It is in the clearness and beauty of his style, and his conscientious and careful analysis of authorities, that Mr. Prescott's chief excellencies lie. We may travel with him confidingly, and yield our faith without hesitation, whenever his conclusions are declared. We have reason to be proud of his production."¹ While Simms was laudatory in his praise, he unwittingly exposes part of the problem in dealing

¹William Gilmore Simms, Views and Reviews in American Literature (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 188.

with Prescott's work. He assumes that Prescott's material came only from his documents and forgets that Prescott was like any author dealing with a subject and that his own attitudes toward his subjects influenced his presentation of the downfall of Mexico. Particularly in his methods of characterization did Prescott's attitude toward his subject become evident. A close examination of Prescott's The Conquest of Mexico in comparison to the two major sources for the book, the chronicles of Bernal Diaz del Castillo and the manuscripts of Francisco Lopez de Gomara, should reveal how much Prescott relied on popular romantic ideas for his concept of his characters, particularly those Indian characters of Montezuma and Guatemozin.²

As early as 1838, Prescott had recorded in his literary memoranda that "the overturning of their old empires by a

²Bernal Diaz was one of the conquistadors present during the entire Mexican campaign. However, he did not write his chronicles until he was an old man and he wrote them then in reaction to the manuscripts of Gomara. Diaz felt that he had received little recompense for his part in the conquest and he hoped that by reporting the true events, or all those that he could remember, he would be able to receive more wealth and fame. However, this was not true and only after his death did he become noted as one of the major authorities on the conquest of Mexico.

Francisco Gomara was Cortes's secretary for six years until the death of Cortes in 1547. He claims to have received all his information from Cortes personally. Yet, in the chronicles of Gomara, Cortes can do no wrong. One recognizes that Gomara was in awe of his employer and prejudiced his story in favor of Cortes.

For more background material on these writers, see Herbert Cerwin, Bernal Diaz, Historian of the Conquest (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963); and Lesley Byrd Simpson's translation of Gomara's Cortes (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964).

handful of warriors is a brilliant subject, full of important results, and connected with our own history. It will hit the popular taste here much more than disquisitions on French plays and comedies. . . ."3 Obviously, Prescott was well-pleased with his choice of subject matter. Yet, it is in three later documents that his real attitude becomes apparent. On July 14, 1839, Prescott entered in his literary memoranda that his subject was "an epic in prose, a romance of chivalry; as romantic and as chivalrous as any which Boiardo or Ariosto ever fabled,--and almost as marvellous; and which, while it combines all the picturesque features of the romantic school is born onward on a tide of destiny, like that which broods over the fictions of the Grecian epic or tragic fable, in which the resistless march of destiny is more discernible than in the sad fortunes of the dynasty of Montezuma."<4 In a letter to Richard Bentley written December 31, 1842, Prescott wrote, "The story is so full of marvels, perilous adventures, curious manners, scenery, etc. that it is more like a romance than a history, and yet every page is substantiated by abundance of original testimony."<5 Again, on April 1, 1843,

3C. Harvey Gardiner, The Literary Memoranda of William Hickling Prescott (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), I, 229.

4Gardiner, II, 31.

5Roger Wolcott, The Correspondence of William Hickling Prescott, 1833-1844 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1925), p. 328.

Prescott wrote Colonel Thomas Aspinwall that the conquest was "altogether as brilliant a subject, with adventures as daring and wonderful as ever occupied the pen of a historian, and one that if not executed in a very bungling way must have all the interest of romance."⁶ Clearly, the key word is romance. Prescott approached his subject as more than history. For him, the conquest was the epic comparable to, if not greater than, the epics of the ancients. Out of his own mouth Prescott admits his romantic viewpoint and thus discloses the first hint necessary for an examination of his major Indian characters, Montezuma, Guatemozin, and Xicotencotl.⁷

Modern critics have more or less substantiated Prescott's view of his own work.⁸ Stanley Williams has said that "the Conquest of Mexico was never, as captious critics later said, merely the tale of the extermination by the Spaniards of a

⁶Wolcott, p. 345.

⁷Xicotencotl is necessary for two of the major characteristics of the nineteenth century view of the Indian. He is however, a minor character in the overall view of the conquest. Although he is barely mentioned in either of Prescott's original sources, Prescott emphasizes his part in the rebellion and his subsequent death.

⁸David Levin in History as Romantic Art (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959) examines thoroughly the idea of Prescott's infatuation with the romance of history. For further study see George Ticknor, Life of William Hickling Prescott (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864); Stanley T. Williams, The Spanish Backgrounds of American Literature (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955); Samuel Eliot Morison, "Prescott: The American Thucydides," Atlantic Monthly, 200 (1957) pp. 165-172; and L. M. Angus-Butterworth, "William Hickling Prescott," South Atlantic Quarterly, 44 (1945) pp. 217-227.

gentle, helpless race. Rather it was, as Prescott asserted, an 'epic', a high story of gods and men, a narrative of soldier, priest, and king, a record of fantastic riches and insatiable cruelty, of sorrow and terrifying triumph. Civilizations and religions clashed and fell, and as the magician wrote, he saw unfold the past of noble and unhappy people."⁹ David Levin has written that "a large part of its success depends on Prescott's skillful use of romantic conventions" and that Prescott saw that "the crucial differences between the two cultures . . . are differences in character, leadership, and religion. . . ." ¹⁰

Paradox of character is used by Prescott to create the character of Montezuma. Prescott had written on June 8, 1829, concerning his earlier work, Ferdinand and Isabella, that "the human character is the most interesting subject of contemplation to every reader . . . A leading object of my history should be the exhibition of character whether of the times or of individuals."¹¹ On April 1, 1841, Prescott wrote in his literary memoranda, "Above all, keep character. . . . Omit no act or word . . . that can illustrate it.

⁹Stanley T. Williams, Spanish Backgrounds of American Literature (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), II, 106.

¹⁰David Levin, History as Romantic Art (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), p. 57.

¹¹Gardiner, I, 117.

Interest is created out of character."¹² Prescott realized the paradox of Montezuma's nature when he wrote on July 14, 1839, "The unfortunate Montezuma, the victim of destiny, whose fate seemed to be announced before the arrival of the white man, and who yielded to it with an unresisting weakness that forms an affecting contrast with his naturally bold and somewhat cruel character."¹³ The first view Prescott affords his reader of Montezuma is one of a cruel despot ruling Mexico with an iron hand. Diaz related that the Lord of Cempoalla was "apprehensive of his (Montezuma's) dissatisfaction at our being entertained in that place, without his licence."¹⁴ Gomara relates that struggle only produced tyranny, that "the more they struggled, the greater were the evils they experienced."¹⁵ Prescott combines both Gomara and Diaz to say that the people became "disgusted with the arrogance of the sovereign; the provinces and distant cities outraged by fiscal exactions; . . . Still the kingdom was strong in its internal resources, in the will of its monarch,

¹²Gardiner, II, 70.

¹³Gardiner, II, 32.

¹⁴Bernal Diaz, The True History of the Conquest of Mexico (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co., 1927), p. 118. This is a modern translation by Maurice Keatinge of the 1568 manuscript of Diaz.

¹⁵Francisco Lopez de Gomara, Cortes, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), p. 73. This edition is a modern translation of the 1552 manuscript.

in the long habitual deference to his authority,--in short, in the terror of his name. . . ."16

Not only is Montezuma's power impressive, but so is his physical appearance. Prescott describes Montezuma as a person who "was tall and thin, but not ill-made. His hair, which was black and straight, was not very long; to wear it short was considered unbecoming persons of rank. His beard was thin; his complexion somewhat paler than is often found in his dusky, or rather copper-colored race. His features, though serious in their expression, did not wear the look of melancholy, indeed, of dejection, which characterizes his portrait, and which may well have settled on them at a later period. He moved with dignity, and his whole demeanor, tempered by an expression of benignity not to have been anticipated from the reports circulated of his character, was worthy of a great prince.--Such is the portrait left to us of the celebrated Indian emperor, in this his first interview with the white men."17 This description is taken almost word for word from Diaz. Diaz does elaborate and disclose that Montezuma's eyes were a pleasant blend of "gravity and good humour."18 Gomara neglects a personal

¹⁶References and quotations from Prescott's histories are from the Montezuma edition, ed. Wilfred Harold Munro, 22 vols. (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott & Co., 1904). All subsequent footnotes will be denoted by Prescott, CM, volume number and page number. This quotation is from volume II, pages 8-9.

¹⁷Prescott, CM, II, 252.

¹⁸Diaz, p. 170.

description of Montezuma. Yet, it is in this physical description that a part of the romantic tradition begins. By emphasizing the duskiess or pale copper color of Montezuma's skin, Prescott places him in direct contrast to Cortes, the very fair-skinned conqueror. This emphasis allows Prescott to enhance the inevitable conflict of these two civilizations and to make the triumph of the Spaniards not only desirable but necessary. This darkness of the skin, emphasized by Prescott, implies the idea of primitive man, ignorant of the enlightenment of European civilization. Unaware of the refinements of European civilization, Montezuma and, by consequence, the Aztec nation, must be considered as pagans living in the darkness of ignorance. Donald Ringe has aptly pointed out that Prescott reflected the typical nineteenth century attitude that the conflict "between Spaniard and Aztec" is like "the conflict between Christian and pagan."¹⁹ Such perspective if true, would bring to mind a play such as Pocahantas by Custis where Christianity triumphs over paganism and the dark Indian girl marries the white man.

In considering Montezuma's physical appearance, one is reminded of the description of Tamenund in The Last of the Mohicans. Like Tamenund, Montezuma is supposed to be the greatest of the kings of the Aztecs. And, like Tamenund Montezuma is bedecked to match his station. Cooper's

¹⁹Donald A. Ringe, "The Artistry of Prescott's The Conquest of Mexico", New England Quarterly, 26 (1953), 454.

description of Tamenund reads in part,

This robe was of the finest skins, which had been deprived of their fur, in order to admit of a hieroglyphical representation of various deeds in arms, done in former ages. His bosom was loaded with medals, some in massive silver and one or two even in gold, the gifts of various Christian potentates during the long period of his life. He also wore arm-lets, and cinctures above the ankles of the latter precious metal. His head, on the whole of which the hair had been permitted to grow, the pursuits of war having so long been abandoned, was encircled by a sort of plated diadem, which, in its turn, bore lesser and more glittering ornaments, that sparkles amid the glossy hues of three drooping ostrich feathers, dyed a deep black, in touching contrast to the color of his snow-white locks.²⁰

Later, Cooper describes the attitude of the young men as one of contentment caused by "touching his robe. . . ." ²¹

In Montezuma's first meeting with Cortes, Prescott describes him as wearing "the girdle and ample square cloak, tilmatli, of his nation. It was made of the finest cottons, with the embroidered ends gathered in a knot around his neck. His feet were defended by sandals having soles of gold, and the leathern thongs which bound them to his ankles were embossed with the same metal. Both the cloak and sandals were sprinkled with pearls and precious stones, among which the emerald and the chalchivitl--a green stone of higher estimation than any other among the Aztecs--were conspicuous.

²⁰James Fenimore Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), pp. 352-353.

²¹Cooper, p. 353.

On his head he wore no other ornament than a panache of plumes of the royal green which floated down his back, the badge of military, rather than a regal, rank."²² Both men wear cloaks representative of past military greatness; both are wearing jewels or precious metals; both wear feather headdresses. Montezuma, however, is not quite as respected as Tamenund because of his extreme cruelty to his people. The cast down eyes of his servants are due to terror and not respect as in the case of Tamenund. While Tamenund seems to be of another realm or world, Montezuma is clearly a part of the world of Mexico. It is in these descriptions of the person of Montezuma that Prescott first embellishes his sources with his romantic point of view. Although the words used in the description are from Diaz basically, it is amazing how much the description matches that of the typical Cooper Indian.

Not only is Montezuma unique physically, but so is the young king Guatemozin. Guatemozin, according to Prescott, is a young man of "not more than twenty-five years old, and elegant in that his person for an Indian . . . valiant and so terrible, that his followers trembled in his presence. His head was large, his limbs well proportioned, his complexion fairer than those of his bronze-colored nation, and his whole deportment singularly mild and engaging."²³ Again,

²²Prescott, CM, II, 252.

²³Prescott, CM, IV, 102-103.

Gomara gives no physical description in his work but Diaz describes Guatemozin as being "of a noble appearance both in person and countenance; his features were rather large, and cheerful, with lively eyes. His age was about twenty-three or four years, and his complexion very fair for an Indian. . . . He was a young man about the age of twenty-five years, of elegant appearance, very brave, and so terrible to his own subjects that they all trembled at the sight of him."²⁴ Like Montezuma, Guatemozin is unique among his race because of his fair colored skin. Although Diaz disagrees with Prescott as to Guatemozin's age, he depicts Guatemozin as young and reinforces the idea of a young man as the hope of his nation. From Prescott's adaptation of Diaz's description, one is reminded of the young Uncas who stands exposed in the firelight of the Heyward party, of a young Matacoran of Custis's play. Thus, Prescott fulfills the first criterion of the nineteenth century's view of the Indian. Unique in their physical appearances, Prescott's Indians are very much in the tradition of the Indian as seen in the early literature of the nineteenth century.

In examining the second characteristic, the struggle for existence of the race, one must consider that history itself fulfilled this criterion. The fact that there was a conquest of Mexico is a subject which aptly lends itself to

²⁴Diaz, p. 290.

fulfilling this characteristic. Yet, if the Indian must be caught in a struggle for the existence of his race, one must consider the Indian's reaction to the apparent conquest. It is the reaction to the conquest that often romanticizes Prescott's Indian characters. Montezuma is, in Prescott's opinion, a vacillating person. At one point in the second book of the conquest, Prescott judges Montezuma's actions: "But Montezuma, taking counsel of his own ill-defined apprehensions, preferred a half-way course,--as usual, the most impolitic."²⁵ David Levin has said of Prescott's characterization of Montezuma in reaction to the conquest that "Montezuma's perception of his destiny, unlike that of Bancroft's and Parkman's chiefs, is not the recognition of natural law. . . . He is not a brave man standing against the forces of destiny, but a decadent despot whose lofty and naturally courageous spirit has been subdued by the influence of superstition. Courage is an absolute virtue, the highest virtue of the Indian; when Montezuma is measured against this standard, one can see that his Oriental institutions have subverted the strength of his Indian character."²⁶ Harry Thurston Peck has said that Montezuma is reminiscent of the tragic Greek hero who is doomed to destruction and vainly struggling against those fates which condemn

²⁵Prescott, CM, II, 8-9.

²⁶Levin, pp. 152-153.

him.²⁷ What are the opinions of Diaz and Gomara, Prescott's sources?

Diaz merely relates the events of the conquest as they occur. While he may often endeavor to justify Cortes's actions, he rarely if ever passes an opinion on the actions of Montezuma. Throughout his work, however, Diaz often calls Montezuma "the great and good Montezuma" or "the good Montezuma." One can only suppose that Diaz is so kind to Montezuma because the Spaniards encountered little resistance from him. Diaz clearly states that he became very fond of Montezuma while Montezuma was in captivity and for this reason he never criticizes Montezuma's actions but relates them as truly as possible.

Gomara does much the same. Like Diaz, Gomara tells the story from the Spanish point of view and thus does not berate Montezuma for his indecisiveness, for it played into the hands of the conquistadors. After recounting Montezuma's death, though, Gomara states that "in my opinion he was either very wise in disregarding the things that he had to put up with, or very foolish, in not resenting them. He was as warlike as he was religious, and took part in many wars in person."²⁸ Perhaps his one and only criticism is that Montezuma offered little resistance to his own capture:

²⁷Harry Thurston Peck, William Hickling Prescott (New York: Macmillan Co., 1926), p. 143.

²⁸Gomara, pp. 213-214.

"Montezuma must have been a weak man of little courage, to let himself be seized and then, while a prisoner, never to attempt flight, even when Cortes offered him his freedom and his own men begged him to take it."²⁹ Otherwise, Gomara gives no opinion of the actions of Montezuma.

Prescott, however, shows Montezuma caught in the struggle for his race. By using the first book of the conquest to portray a highly scientifically advanced civilization, Prescott sets the romantic air for his work. Montezuma is supposed to be the most powerful ruler of the Aztec monarchs and as such, he should be the one to lead the resistance against the Spaniards. However, Montezuma is a man of weak character and Prescott plays upon his tragic flaw. Prescott depicts Montezuma as a motionless man. He is shown either in a sitting, reclining, or standing position. He is carried everywhere as though he were too weak to stand upon his own two feet. Prescott capitalizes on this fact and insinuates that Montezuma morally cannot stand on his own. For instance, Prescott says after describing Montezuma's private life, "It is characteristic of such a people, to find a puerile pleasure in a dazzling and ostentatious pageantry; to make show for substance; vain pomp for power; to hedge round the throne itself with a barren and burdensome ceremonial, the counterfeit of real majesty."³⁰ Because of this

²⁹Gomara, p. 179.

³⁰Prescott, CM, II, 308.

degradation of his own life, Montezuma is unable to make forceful decisions and thus opens the way for the tragic fall of his own people. Montezuma is caught in the struggle for his own people and powerless to do anything to save them. It is this fact which romanticizes Montezuma in the eyes of Prescott and makes him stand in tragic dimensions against the destiny which is engulfing his race. To Prescott Montezuma is tragic because of his past and because his present actions are not in the character of his past glory. Montezuma submits willingly to fate and by the time he dies, the reader is persuaded to be sympathetic toward him because Prescott is. In a final tribute to Montezuma, Prescott wrote on July 11, 1842, that "it did not cost me much to kill Montezuma . . . tho' I rather love the barbarian."³¹ In summing up Montezuma's character, Prescott gives way to the romantic idea of the monarch against the ideas of fate, "It is not easy to contemplate the fate of destiny,--a destiny as dark and irresistible in its march, as that which broods over the mythic legends of Antiquity!"³² In this sympathetic outburst, which is not recorded in either of his major sources, Prescott obviously takes the current idea of the Indian as the hopeless victim of destiny, the man belonging to the past and not to the future.

³¹Gardiner, II, 90.

³²Prescott, CM, II, 154.

More significantly resistant than Montezuma is Guatemozin. Physically, Guatemozin is caught more in the struggle for his race than is Montezuma. Guatemozin leads the Aztecs in the last important battle of the conquest. Guatemozin is young and fiery and in complete dissension with Montezuma. To Prescott, Guatemozin is the embodiment of the nineteenth century view of the Indian caught in the struggle for the survival of his race. Prescott was to write on August 20, 1842, "The feeble Montezuma replaced by the heroic Guatemozin. Will not the sympathy of the reader gather round the 'brave man struggling w. the storms of fate?'"³³ Where Montezuma is always portrayed motionless, Guatemozin is always portrayed as active. He organizes the resistance against the Spaniards and is described by Prescott as a young man possessed of the "true spirit of a patriot prince to uphold her falling fortunes, or bravely perish with them."³⁴ Later, as the city falls in ruins around Guatemozin, Prescott says, "In the midst of these awful scenes, the young emperor of the Aztecs remained, according to all accounts, calm and courageous. With his fair capital laid in ruins before his eyes, his nobles and faithful subjects dying around him, his territory rent away, foot by foot, till scarce enough remained for him to stand on, he

³³Gardiner, II, 92.

³⁴Prescott, CM, III, 250.

rejected every invitation to capitulate and showed the same indomitable spirit, as at the commencement of the siege."³⁵

This admiration is expressed by neither Diaz nor Gomara. Both of them again simply state the facts of history and do not elaborate on the character of Guatemozin except in the preparations for the siege. For instance, Diaz says at one point that Guatemozin "expressed his determination to fight to the last man and gave orders to spare the provision as much as possible, to sink wells in various places, and to endeavour to obtain supplies by night."³⁶ Gomara simply says that "Cuauhtemoc was, as history tells us, a valiant man, and in every adversity proved his royal heart and courage, in favor of peace at the beginning of the war, and in perserverance during the siege. . . ." ³⁷ Otherwise, these two men make no lasting comment as to the true spirit of the "patriot prince" as does Prescott.

By elaborate comment Prescott reveals the effect of the nineteenth century's view of the Indian. In summing up Guatemozin's life, Prescott gives his personal opinion of Guatemozin, ". . . there are few entitled to a higher place

³⁵Prescott, CM, IV, 89.

³⁶Diaz, p. 347.

³⁷Gomara, p. 356. Notice here that Gomara uses a different spelling for Guatemozin's name. Such discrepancies between the original sources and Prescott's spelling of the names is frequent. For instance, Gomara spells Montezuma as Moctezuma; Guatemozin is Cuauhtemoc. These discrepancies occur only in Gomara's work.

on the roll of fame than of Guatemozin. . . . No one can refuse his admiration to the intrepid spirit which could prolong a defence of his city, while one stone was left upon another; and our sympathies, for the time, are inevitably thrown more into the scale of the rude chieftain, thus battling for his country's freedom, than into that of his civilized and successful antagonist."³⁸ This is entirely opinion, for neither Diaz nor Gomara express such sentiment in their works. Such opinion smacks of the sentiment of *Metamora*, of the Indian in conflict in the major literature of the period.

Even more lucid in reflecting the nineteenth century's view of the Indian is Prescott's view of Xicotencotl, the young Tlascalan chieftain. Prescott, with only mere mention of Xicotencotl's physical appearance, employs him to represent effective resistance against the Spaniards. In his first view of Xicotencotl Prescott shows him engaged in open rebellion against Cortes on the Tlascalan plains. In the ensuing battle, Xicotencotl loses the support of part of his army and with his forces thus divided by half, is compelled to relinquish victory to the Spaniards. In commenting on the actions of Xicotencotl, Prescott is at his nineteenth century best:

The conduct of Xicotencotl is condemned by Castilian writers, as that of a ferocious and sanguinary barbarian. It is natural they should so regard it. But those, who have no

³⁸Prescott, CM, 648.

national prejudice to warp their judgments, may come to a different conclusion. They may find much to admire in that high, unconquerable spirit, like some proud column, standing alone in its majesty amidst the fragments and ruins around it. They may see evidences of a clear-sighted sagacity, which, piercing the thin vein of insidious friendship proffered by the Spaniards, and penetrating the future, discerned the coming miseries of his country; the noble patriotism of one who would rescue that country at any cost, and amidst the gathering darkness, would infuse his own intrepid spirit into the hearts of his nation, to animate them to a last struggle for independence.³⁹

Here, Prescott vividly reflects the nineteenth century view of the Indian, a view which has no basis in either Diaz or Gomara. As Prescott states, both Diaz and Gomara see Xicotencotl's resistance as nothing more than the revolt of a savage moved by brute emotion. Neither Spaniard credits Xicotencotl with the astute perception that Prescott attributes to him. Yet, Prescott sentimentalizes the revolt so that he is able to depict again the Indian in a struggle for the salvation of his race. Added to those portraits of Montezuma and Guatemozin as Indians in the struggle to save their own race, the portrait of Xicotencotl only reinforces the assertion that Prescott saw the Indians involved in the conquest through the eyes of a nineteenth century man.

If Prescott has fulfilled the first two characteristics of the prevalent attitude toward the Indian, he also reflects the third, that the Indian must die well and his death must

³⁹Prescott, CM, II, 146.

result from the conflict of the two societies. History again has laid the groundwork for Prescott's work. Diaz and Gomara both describe the deaths of Montezuma and Guatemozin. Diaz also recounts the death of Xicotencotl which Gomara never mentions. Yet, the extent to which Prescott adds to their report indicates that he shared the popular opinion of the Indian at this time.

Historically, Montezuma dies first. In relating the events of his life, Diaz and Gomara are rather factual, offering no personal opinion on his conduct as emperor. Diaz reports that Montezuma, upon being asked by Cortes to address his people, refuses and shows the first signs of rebellion that he had shown since his voluntary imprisonment. Montezuma, according to Diaz, replied to Cortes with "what does he want of me now? I neither desire to hear him, nor to live any longer, since my unhappy fate has reduced me to this situation on his account."⁴⁰ Montezuma then speaks to his people and is wounded in the arm, leg, and head by three stones and an arrow. Diaz then simply says, "The King, when thus wounded refused all assistance, and we were unexpectedly informed of his death."⁴¹ Diaz ends by saying that "it was said that he had reigned seventeen years, and that he was the best King Mexico had ever been governed by."⁴²

⁴⁰Diaz, p. 252.

⁴¹Diaz, p. 253.

⁴²Diaz, p. 253.

Still, Diaz gives no opinion as to the nobility or impact of Montezuma's death as the last of his nation. When Diaz writes "it was said" the implication seems to be that Diaz himself may be of another opinion.

Gomara relates the events of Montezuma's death basically the same way Diaz does with the exception that in Gomara's account, Montezuma lingers on for three days and then dies. Gomara mentions nothing which would indicate that Montezuma's death in any way reflected opposition to the Spanish rule or that his death was as noble as his life was supposed to have been.⁴³

Again, Prescott goes a step further than either Diaz or Gomara in that he attributes Montezuma's death to wounds aggravated by neglect of medical attention, starvation, and despair. Prescott writes, "The Indian monarch had rapidly declined, since he had received his injury, sinking, however, quite as much under the anguish of a wounded spirit, as under disease. He continued in the same moody state of insensibility as that already described; holding little communication with those around him, deaf to consolation, obstinately rejecting all medical remedies as well as nourishment."⁴⁴ The key word here is "obstinately," which does not appear in either of the original sources. Although broken of spirit,

⁴³Gomara, pp. 212-213.

⁴⁴Prescott, CM, III, 147.

Montezuma, Prescott implies, shows a final surge of rebellion in his refusal to speak or to eat. Likewise, Montezuma, at the point of death, refuses to abandon the religion of his people when he says to Father Olmedo, "I have but a few moments to live; and will not at this hour desert the faith of my fathers."⁴⁵ Prescott here chooses to repeat what Diaz credits as a rumor or legend concerning the behavior of Montezuma. At any rate, he is able to contrive a picture of the final moments of simple rebellion by a dying monarch. After reading Prescott's account of the death of Montezuma, one realizes that his act of rebellion was, in its own way, as noble as the rest of his life had once been. At no point in the story does Montezuma really strike out in fierce rebellion against the Spaniards and his death, as his life had been, is only passive opposition to the conquest. Yet, the fact that Prescott chooses to present a legend proves that he placed value on the idea of an Indian dying well and Montezuma does die well.

Guatemozin, however, dies well in the fighting tradition of the Indian. Gomara and Diaz again give accounts of Guatemozin's death. Diaz recounts that at the time of his capture, Guatemozin had called out for death: "Malintzin! I have done that which was my duty in the defence of my kingdom and people; my efforts have failed, and being now

⁴⁵Prescott, CM, III, 148.

brought by force a prisoner in your hands, draw that poinard from your side, and stab me to the heart."⁴⁶ Cortes refuses to do this and takes Guatemozin prisoner. Later, on an expedition to Honduras, Guatemozin is sentenced by Cortes to die and in his last moments cries out, "Malintzin! now I find in what your false words and promises have ended;--in my death.--Better that I had fallen by my own hands than trust myself in your power in my city of Mexico.--Why do you thus unjustly take my life? May God demand of you this innocent blood!"⁴⁷ Diaz then points out that for an Indian, Guatemozin dies "most piously" and that "they suffered their deaths most undeservingly, and so it appeared to us all . . . that it was a most unjust and cruel sentence."⁴⁸ According to Diaz, Guatemozin hardly dies as a weakling fearing death; instead, he dies crying out against the tyranny of his own death much as Metamora does in Stone's play.

Gomara also testifies that Guatemozin died in a noble fashion. Although Gomara does not relate the last words of Guatemozin, he does say that "Cuauhtemoc was, as history tells us, a valiant man, . . . of royal heart and courage . . . when he was hanged."⁴⁹ Gomara attempts to justify Cortes's decision

⁴⁶Diaz, p. 354.

⁴⁷Diaz, p. 450.

⁴⁸Diaz, p. 450.

⁴⁹Gomara, p. 356.

to execute Guatemozin. He quietly chides Cortes for the decision but never claims that the deaths were undeserved or unjustified. Because of this basic difference in the telling of the stories, the attitude which Prescott assumes toward the event should reflect whether or not he was influenced by current opinion of the Indian when he was writing.

In describing Guatemozin's death Prescott relates that "when brought to the final tree, Guatemozin displayed the intrepid spirit worthy of his better days."⁵⁰ Prescott thus links Guatemozin's death with the more valiant acts of his past. By using the term, "worthy of his better days," Prescott implies that Guatemozin's death is worthy of his life and is a fitting demise for the young chieftain. Prescott credits Guatemozin with being a "formidable captive," and excuses any thought of rebellion as a natural act resulting from brooding over the wrongs and sufferings of the Aztec people themselves.⁵¹ If Guatemozin ever considered rebellion, he must surely have considered death as a consequence of failure. It was a price he was willing to pay from the time that he assumed the throne. Prescott relates that Guatemozin is ready to "bravely perish" for his people. In effect, he does; and by his death maintains literarily the tradition of the Indian who dies well. The nineteenth

⁵⁰Prescott, CM, IV, 185.

⁵¹Prescott, CM, IV, 186.

century could not abide cowardice in the death of the red man and Guatemozin as a literary character lives up to the standard.

However, the death of Xicotencotl goes beyond the standard of the nineteenth century. Diaz, in his chronicles, states only that Xicotencotl was arrested and hanged. Gomara never says anything about the death of Xicotencotl; he simply drops Xicotencotl from his narrative, thus allowing Xicotencotl to pass out of history without any notice. Prescott, on the other hand, goes beyond both Diaz and Gomara in recounting the death of Xicotencotl. According to Prescott, Xicotencotl died "in the flower of his age,--as dauntless a warrior as ever led an Indian army to battle. He was the first chief who successfully resisted the arms of the invaders; and, had the natives of Anahuac, generally, been animated with a spirit like his, Cortes would probably never have set foot in the capital of Montezuma. He was gifted with a clearer insight into the future than his countrymen; for he saw that the European was an enemy far more to be dreaded than the Aztec . . . For he was a powerful chief, heir to one of the four signories of the republic. His chivalrous qualities made him popular, especially with the younger part of his countrymen."⁵² Such tribute is solely representative of the nineteenth century attitude toward

⁵²Prescott, CM, III, 372.

the Indian. Although Prescott does not recount any last speech or any great dignity in connection with the death of Xicotencotl, the fact that he pays such tribute to the Indian indicates that he realized more significance in Xicotencotl's death than did his original sources. Death brings a tribute from Prescott that Diaz refused to offer.

In dying, Montezuma and Guatemozin represent the advance of white civilization. This is the fourth major ingredient in the nineteenth century's view of the Indian. The Indian must act as a standard by which the progress of enlightened civilization can be measured. Again, Diaz and Gomara must first be consulted as to their opinion of the conquest itself. Diaz, although he wrote to obtain remuneration, felt that he should relate "the good effects of our exertions for the service of God and his Majesty."⁵³ He then proceeds to enumerate the positive aspects of the conquest, among which are included the purging of paganism from Mexico, the dissolution of religious rites involving human sacrifice, and the establishment of trade with Castile. In describing some of the religious rites, Diaz expresses his opinion that they were "abominable practices" involving "idols, devils, and diabolical figures."⁵⁴ Throughout the section on the good of the Conquest, Diaz continually uses

⁵³Diaz, p. 543.

⁵⁴Diaz, p. 543.

the words, "good effects of our exertions," or words with similiar connotation. As far as Diaz is concerned, the conquest was entirely justified because of these results. Yet Diaz was an adventurer first and went on the conquest of Mexico for land and spoils, not to advance his civilization. The advancement of the European way of life was not for him the major motive in the conquest.

Gomara, however, sees religion as a chief purpose of the conquest. In the dedication to his work, Gomara says, "The conquest of Mexico and the conversion of the peoples of New Spain can and should be included among the histories of the world, not only because it was well done but because it was very great. It was great, both in time so much as in the fact that many and powerful kingdoms were conquered with little bloodshed or harm to the inhabitants, and many millions were baptized who now live, thanks be to God, as Christians."⁵⁵ A priest himself, Gomara could hardly justify a conquest for spoils. Yet, in writing his history of the conquest, Gomara is so objective that hardly any motive at all is given for the conquest. Gomara's writing style is that of short, concise sentences which do not readily lend themselves to lengthy moral explanations usually found in attempts to justify.

Yet in lengthy asides Prescott announces that the

⁵⁵Gomara, p. 4.

demise of the Indian is a legitimate indication of civilization's progress. In explaining the Spaniard's attitudes toward the conquest, Prescott, at one point writes, "But the Spaniard came over to the New World in the true spirit of the knight-errant, courting adventure. . . . With sword and lance, he was ever ready to do battle for the Faith; and as he raised his old war-cry of 'St. Jago,' he fancied himself fighting under the banner of the military apostle, and felt his single arm a match for more than a hundred infidels!"⁵⁶

If the Spanish army felt that they were ready for the infidels, Prescott felt that the infidels were ready for civilization. In a section entitled "reflections," in Book VI, chapter iii, Prescott expresses his opinion concerning the fall of the Aztec empire: "The Aztec monarchy fell by the hands of its own subjects, under the direction of European sagacity and science. Had it been united, it might have bidden defiance to the invaders. Its fate may serve as a striking proof, that a government, which does not rest on the sympathies of its subjects, cannot long abide; than Human institutions, when not connected with human property and progress, must fall,--if not before the increasing light of civilization by the hand of violence; by violence from within, if not from within, then from without.

⁵⁶Prescott, CM, III, 341.

And who shall lament their fall?"⁵⁷ Certainly not Prescott.

From the beginning of the book Prescott trades upon the opposition of the Aztec nation to that of the Tezcucan civilization. Prescott describes the Tezcucan civilization as a "golden" society. Not only did it have its own code of laws, but the Tezcucan society also worshipped the "unknown God" or one true God like that which the European conquerors worshipped. All in all, the Tezcucan society is portrayed by Prescott as one of great knowledge and humanity. The Aztec society, is similar to that of the Tezcucan except for the barbarity of its religion. The Aztec society is marked by human sacrifice and the darkness of blood-stained temples and priests who hover like birds of carrion over the sacrificed victim. As Prescott relates the events of the conquest, the detailed descriptions of slaughter in the name of religion serve only to juxtapose the darkness of ignorance against the light of the Tezcucan society and the brilliance of Aztec scientific achievement. Far advanced in mathematics, the Aztecs conceived a calendar so accurate that it was off only two minutes and nine seconds by modern computations. Yet, because of the barbarity of the Aztec religion, Prescott casts doubt on the actual level of advancement which the Aztecs achieved. Prescott intentionally contrasts the dark area of Aztec life with the light of its

⁵⁷Prescott, CM, IV, 119.

supposed knowledge in order that sympathy might be gained for the conquest of this pagan civilization. The contrast of the dark religion with that of the Tezcucan civilization as well as the enlightened achievements of the Aztecs themselves, creates the necessary justification for the conquest. The Aztec society must fall, for its darkness or barbarism far outweighs its more civilized and enlightened accomplishments. Thus, symbolically, the Aztec nation's fall implies the advancement of European civilization. Symbolically and physically, the story of the conquest is one of constant advancement against a pagan nation just as stories of early American literature reflect the constant advancement of European colonists against the pagans of Northern America.

Prescott's work, one can say, reflects the prevalent attitude of the nineteenth century toward the Indian. Prescott highlights the physical characteristics of his Indian characters, even idealizing them in the manner of Cooper's Indians. He emphasizes the struggle of Montezuma and Guatemozin to save their race. In the minor character Xicotencotl, Prescott emphasizes the futility of this struggle. All three Indian characters die well in the struggle. Their struggle and death then mark the progress of European civilization. Although history lays the groundwork in the chronicles of Diaz and Gomara, Prescott enriches their tales with his own interpretations and with legends which reflect his interpretations. By filling his book with

subjective interpolation Prescott makes his work reflect his romantic attitude and from this attitude he can truthfully say that he has suggested "the circumstances and the period in which they lived"⁵⁸ as well as the circumstances and period in which he lived.

⁵⁸Prescott, CM, I, xxxii.

CHAPTER III
DE LA VEGA, XERES, DE LEON, PRESCOTT
AND THE CONQUEST OF PERU

Unlike The Conquest of Mexico, The Conquest of Peru presented problems for Prescott as romantic artist and historian. In his preface to the work, Prescott wrote that the conquest as a subject, "notwithstanding the opportunities it presents for the display of character, strange romantic incident, and picturesque scenery, does not afford so obvious advantages to the historian, as the Conquest of Mexico."¹ Prescott wrote to General William Miller on November 3, 1844, that he was "up to the elbows in Peruvian antiquities. I am amazingly well provided with paper ammunition for my campaign. The story is a brutal one, however, and the Peruvians did not die game like the Aztecs. And I am afraid that I can't make a preux chevalier out of Pizarro. A hero that could not even write his own signature! But it will go hard if I can't find stirring and romantic incident in the Conquest and the picturesque country."² It was, then, a subject that Prescott

¹References and quotations from Prescott's histories are from the Montezuma edition, ed. Wilfred Harold Munro, 22 vols. (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott & Co., 1904). All subsequent footnotes will be denoted by Prescott, CP, volume number and page number. This quotation is from volume I, page xv.

²Roger Wolcott, The Correspondence of William Hickling Prescott (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1925), p. 513.

relished for its romantic air. Like that of Mexico, the story of Peru holds interest for the reader primarily because of the adventure involved. Stanley Williams has written that Prescott "was again entranced by kings in feathered scarlet turbans and by delicious valleys, with their voluptuous baths."³ But Prescott felt that his material was not equal to that of Mexico, for he wrote in his memoranda "the astonishing contrast presented by the Mexicans in the extremes of civilization & barbarism produced a striking & picturesque effect, which I shall not get from the uniform, tame, & mould-like character & institutions of the Incas."⁴ Yet, because he was enchanted by the romance of the subject, Prescott wrote, "It has been my object to exhibit this same story, in all its romantic details; not merely to portray the characteristic features of the Conquest, but to fill up the outline with the coloring of life, so as to present a minute and faithful picture of the times."⁵ Again, upon close examination, Prescott's work should reflect a faithful picture of the influences upon his own idea of the Indian. The four characteristics of the nineteenth century's

³Stanley T. Williams, The Spanish Background of American Literature (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), II, 115-116.

⁴C. Harvey Gardiner, The Literary Memoranda of William Hickling Prescott (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), II, 120.

⁵Prescott, CP, I, xvii.

view of the Indian (the idea of the Indian as physically unique; the idea of the struggle of the race; the noble death of the Indian resulting from this struggle; and the idea that the death reflects the progress of the white civilization) discussed in connection with the first two chapters of this paper are central to an examination of the concept of the Indian in The Conquest of Peru.

A further complication in Prescott's treatment of the Peruvian conquest was that, while he had two principal Indian characters to focus on, he had to fashion their portraits from several different major sources. In place of Montezuma and Guatemozin he had to depict Atahualpa and Manco Inca. And instead of the two principal sources--Diaz and Gomara--he had to draw on Garcillasso de la Vega; the account of Francisco de Xeres, secretary to Pizarro; the letters of several persons involved in or affected by the conquest; and on the journals of Cieza de Leon. De la Vega was his chief source. A study of the two principal Indian characters is therefore the most appropriate point at which one can compare Prescott's portraits with those provided in the original sources. The amount of elaboration by Prescott thus becomes a reflection of his nineteenth century view.

According to the nineteenth century view, the Indian must be physically unique. He must be god-like in his appearance. Garcilasso de la Vega, in his royal commentaries, describes Atahualpa as "a well-built man (who) lacked neither

experience nor courage. He was also frank, always carefully groomed, and extremely clean."⁶ He also relates that Atahualpa "possessed a very sharp mind and knew how to be extremely clever as well as tactful in the unusual circumstances in which he was to be placed."⁷ These few words are the entirety of de la Vega's description of Atahualpa. Not one of the other three sources bothers to describe Atahualpa physically.

Prescott, on the other hand, embellishes this description: "Atahualpa, as elsewhere noticed, was at the time, about thirty years of age. He was well made, and more robust than usual with his countrymen. His head was large, and his countenance might have been called handsome, but that his eyes, which were bloodshot, gave a fierce expression to his features. He was deliberate in speech, grave in manner, and towards his own people stern even to severity. . . ."8 In a footnote subscribed to this passage, Prescott notes Xeres' account of the conquest. Yet, upon examination, Xeres' only contribution to this description are Atahualpa's fierce eyes and jovial manner with the Spaniards. Prescott later describes Atahualpa as having "a handsome countenance,

⁶Garcilasso de la Vega, The Incas (New York: Orion Press, 1961), p. 361. All subsequent footnotes will be marked, Vega, Incas, page number.

⁷Vega, Incas, p. 322.

⁸Prescott, CP, II, 124.

though with an expression somewhat too fierce to be pleasing. His frame was muscular and well-proportioned; his air commanding; . . ."9 All in all, Prescott paints quite a striking portrait of Atahualpa. One is reminded of the description of the middle-aged Uncas in Cooper's The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish (1829). As Uncas steps forward to receive a prisoner, Cooper describes him as "a warrior of middle age, of just proportions, of a grave though fierce aspect, and of an eye and countenance that expressed all those contradictory traits of character which render the savage warrior almost as admirable as he is appalling."¹⁰ Although the descriptions of the two Indians are not identical, they have such matching elements, as the contradictory traits of character reflected in the paradox of Atahualpa's apparently severe yet jovial manner. The descriptions are similar enough that one can easily see that both Indians spring only from the best of races. Both Indians have that unique body build which makes them stand out in bas-relief against the backgrounds of their own people. Considering Prescott's purpose it seems appropriate that the major Indian characters of Prescott's works should be so physically outstanding and apparently drawn from the same mold and that they should resemble fictional Indians of Cooper.

⁹Prescott, CP, II, 185.

¹⁰James Fenimore Cooper, The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), p. 386.

Yet, the portrait of Manco Inca, Atahualpa's successor, presents more of a problem for Prescott. In his account of the conquest, Xeres does not mention Manco Inca nor does de la Vega in his accounts of the conquest. Although de la Vega mentions Manco Inca in his Royal Commentaries, he never describes him except to say that he was the rightful heir to the Inca empire after the death of Huscar Inca.¹¹ Even in a major source, the works of Pedro de Cieza de Leon, Manco Inca is mentioned only in connection with the rebellion and never in any way physically described. Thus, Prescott's sources presented him with almost nothing on which to base his physical characterization of Manco.

With no hint of Manco's physical appearance, Prescott can hardly create a body for Manco Inca. In this case, Prescott has not been influenced by any attitude to the point that he would create something which does not exist. Here, Prescott shows himself completely in the role of the historian, true to his sources and thus to history itself.

Remaining true to historical events supplies Prescott with the basis for the second characteristic of the nineteenth century's concept of the Indian, that of the aborigine caught in a struggle for the survival of his race. Historically, the

¹¹Garcilasso de la Vega, Royal Commentaries of the Incas (New York: Burt Franklin, 1961), p. 526. All subsequent footnotes will be marked Vega, Royal, and page number.

fact of the conquest itself places two races at odds with each other. And historically, the Indian is not the victor. Therefore, the attitudes of the historian toward the events should reflect any sympathy for the conquered race if the historian is as romantically inclined as Prescott was.

Again, the original sources must be considered before Prescott's view of the two Indians as combatants for their race can be determined. Xeres offers no real judgment of Atahualpa's actions during the conquest. Writing as Pizarro's secretary, Xeres often attempts to justify Pizarro's actions, but he offers no opinion or justification for the actions of Atahualpa. He reveals the cruelty of Atahualpa's reign and the atrocious murder of Huscar Inca by Atahualpa's followers. Even then, Xeres neither chides nor rebukes Atahualpa. Xeres sees the opposition, if there is any, solely from a soldier's viewpoint. There is no sympathy for a conquered race, only the attitude that the ends justified the means on the part of the conquerors. As for resistance, it was merely a natural thing to be overcome. In fact, there is no indication that Xeres ever saw the conquest in moral terms as a struggle between two civilizations for the supremacy of one over the other.

Garcilasso de la Vega does offer some judgment of Atahualpa's actions. When reading de la Vega, one must

remember that he avidly despised Atahualpa.¹² In spite of his dislike for Atahualpa, de la Vega says that "he possessed a very sharp mind and knew how to be extremely clever as well as tactful in the unusual circumstances in which he was to be placed."¹³ As he relates the actions which occur, such as the attempted ransom of Atahualpa, de la Vega exhibits little, if any, emotion. Then in retelling the death of Atahualpa, de la Vega says, "The chastisement of heaven is such that it always punishes those who have sided with tyranny and cunning against justice and reason, for God has willed that they should be overthrown and end the victims of their own snares, unless it be of those that are still worse . . ."¹⁴ As far as Garcilasso de la Vega is concerned, Atahualpa was a man of little virtue and even less loyalty. He does not credit Atahualpa with any attempt to save the Peruvian empire or the Peruvian people. Nor does he ever admit any rebellion on the part of the Incas represents an attempt to save a culture, a way of life. De la Vega sees the conquest in military terms only and never in terms of self-determination for the Peruvian people. Instead, he actually calls Atahualpa

¹²Garcilasso de la Vega was a member of the royal Inca family. His mother was the neice of Huscar Inca. De la Vega, though, is Spanish and avowedly hates Atahualpa for the murder, not only of his Inca relatives, but also for rebelling against the Spanish.

¹³Vega, Inca, p. 322.

¹⁴Vega, Inca, p. 357.

a traitor to his people. This is hardly the background material that Prescott needs for his picture of the doomed Indian struggling against the everflowing forces of destiny and fate.

Likewise, Atahualpa is never portrayed in the sources as participating in any active rebellion. Like Montezuma, Atahualpa succumbs to what he believes to be religious fate rather than participating in any active battles. Like Montezuma, Atahualpa is always seen in a motionless position. He too is carried as though he cannot stand upright alone. This view of Atahualpa presents quite a problem for Prescott if he is to portray a man struggling to save his own people.

Prescott, however, does solve the problem. In describing the first meeting of Pizarro and Atahualpa, he marks Atahualpa as a cunning and worthy opponent of the Spaniards: "He was a crafty and unscrupulous prince, and, if the accounts they had repeatedly received on their march were true, had ever regarded the coming of the Spaniards with an evil eye. It was scarcely possible he should do otherwise. His soft messages had only been intended to decoy them across the mountains, where, with the aid of his warriors, he might readily overpower them. They were entangled in the toils which the cunning monarch had spread for them."¹⁵ Atahualpa realizes the problems involved in

¹⁵Prescott, CP, II, 103.

the comings of the Spaniards and, although he leans toward the religious explanations as Montezuma had done in Mexico, he lays plans for rebellion against the Spanish hordes.¹⁶

It is in Prescott's account of Atahualpa's confrontation with Pizarro's priest, Fray Valverde, that the Inca most resembles the proud and rebellious Indian of nineteenth century literature: "I will be no man's tributary. I am greater than any prince upon earth. Your emperor may be a great prince; I do not doubt it, when I see that he has sent his subjects so far across the waters; and I am willing to hold him as a brother. As for the Pope of whom you speak, he must be crazy to talk of giving away countries which do not belong to him. For my faith, I will not change it. Your own God, as you say, was put to death by the very men whom

¹⁶In The Conquest of Mexico, Montezuma's inaction is credited to his belief in the legend of Quetzalcoatl. God of the air, he had been expelled from Mexico by one of the principal gods and as he departed, legend says, he prophesied his own return with many of his followers. Because he had a long flowing beard and white skin, many of the Mexicans felt that the Spanish were Quetzalcoatl and his followers finally returning to their native land. Thus, they offered little if any resistance to the Spaniards. According to Prescott, Montezuma believed in the legend of Quetzalcoatl to the extent that he withheld any rebellious acts until it was too late to save his own country.

Likewise, in The Conquest of Peru, Atahualpa is given to superstitious belief which makes his actions hard to justify. Shortly before his death, Atahualpa sees a comet in the skies and takes it as an omen of his death. A comet had appeared shortly before the death of his father, and Atahualpa, because of the Peruvian worship of heavenly bodies, determines that this comet foretells his downfall. After seeing the comet, Atahualpa merely resigns himself to his fate and thus makes it very hard for Prescott to credit him with a noble death resulting from his struggle to save his race. After he sees the comet, he cares less for his people.

he created. But mine, my God still lives in the heavens and looks down on his children. . . . Tell your comrades that they shall give me an account of their doings in my land. I will not go from here till they have made me full satisfaction for all the wrongs they have committed."¹⁷ Garcilasso de la Vega credits this speech as a fairy tale. Xeres does not even mention the episode. The fact that Prescott would use the story suggests that he saw Atahualpa as a king attempting to save his empire and his people. In his description of Atahualpa's reaction to the attack upon his own person and upon those in his retinue, Prescott engages in subjective interpolation. Prescott describes Atahualpa as he watches the riot, "and he gazed on the overwhelming ruin, like some forlorn mariner, who, tossed about in his bark by the furious elements, sees the lightning's flash and hears the thunder bursting around him with the consciousness that he can do nothing to avert his fate."¹⁸ Atahualpa, like Montezuma and Guatemozin, can do nothing to deter the fate which engulfs his people. Prescott's use of the legend and his embellishing image of the storm-tossed mariner create the Indian in the tradition of Matacoran of Custis' play, an Indian unwilling to yield to the fate which he knows is his.

Likewise, Manco Inca is treated as an Indian involved

¹⁷Prescott, CP, II, 115-116.

¹⁸Prescott, CP, II, 119-120.

in the struggle to save his race. Of the original sources only Pedro de Cieza de Leon treats the rebellion of Manco Inca in a document entitled "The War of Quito." Garcilasso de la Vega only mentions that Manco Inca was the rightful heir to the Inca Empire after the death of Huscar Inca and that any rebellions occurring after the death of Atahualpa were too insignificant to be dealt with in any manner. Xeres also passes off the rebellion in Quito as too inconsequential to affect the conquest. Thus, the only major source with which to compare Prescott's work is that of Cieza de Leon.

Cieza de Leon portrays the rebellion as one against the new laws levied by the Spanish. According to de Leon, "the majority" of the people were "disposed to take any course rather than obey the new laws."¹⁹ Yet, Cieza de Leon says that Manco Inca was prompted into rebellion by the Devil: "Prompted by the Devil, and without the knowledge of the Spaniards who were with him, the Inca sent some of his captains, with as large a force as they could muster, to advance towards Cuzco and kill all the Spaniards they could find, burning and destroying the villages."²⁰ Nowhere in his text does Cieza de Leon try to create sympathy for Manco Inca or try to embellish the fact that he was in rebellion

¹⁹Clement Markham, The War of Quito by Pedro de Cieza de Leon and Inca Documents (London: Cambridge University Press, 1913), p. 64.

²⁰Markham, p. 123.

against the Spaniards. In this account, Manco Inca does not symbolize the last of a race fighting desperately to save that race. He is merely a man opposing unfair government practices, not an unfair government.

But, for Prescott, Manco Inca represents the last of a great line of kings fighting to save his heritage and his people. Prescott first shows Inca deserting the camp of the Spaniards who had given him a crown legally his by birth-right: "He left his obscure fastnesses in the depths of the Andes, and established himself with a strong body of followers in the mountain country lying between Cuzco and the coast."²¹ Thus, Manco Inca declares his independence. In summing up his estimation of Manco Inca, Prescott expresses the concept of the Indian in the nineteenth century. His opinion of Manco Inca is that "he was the last of his race that may be said to have been animated by the heroic spirit of the ancient Incas. Though placed on the throne by Pizarro, far from remaining a mere puppet in his hands, Manco soon showed that his lot was not to be cast with that of his conquerors. With the ancient institutions of his country lying in a wreck around him, he yet struggled bravely, like Guatemozin, the last of the Aztecs, to uphold her tottering fortunes, or to bury his oppressors under her ruins . . . He chose rather to maintain his savage independence in the mountains, with

²¹Prescott, CP, II, 361.

the few brave spirits around him, than to live a slave in the land which had once owned the sway of his ancestors."²² One is reminded of Matacoran who fought bravely in his country's last battles and who fled to the plains rather than submit to the chains of a conquered slave. Thus, Prescott often adheres to this aspect of the nineteenth century's theory of the Indian when his sources give only a scarce basis for such an attitude. That Prescott would embellish fact proves that his view of the Indian had been colored, at least to some extent, by the world in which he lived.

Although because of historical limitations Prescott is able to partially fulfill the characteristics of the nineteenth century Indian, he is able to recount noble deaths for his heroes. The question is, how noble were the deaths suffered by Atahualpa and Manco Inca in the original sources? If they died well in the original manuscripts, how can Prescott be influenced by current literary vogue in portraying his Indians? Again, only comparison to original manuscripts will reveal the answers to these questions, first in the case of Atahualpa and then in the study of the Manco Inca.

Of the sources considered, Xeres and Garcilasso de la Vega deal with the death of Atahualpa. Although Xeres declares Atahualpa "died with great fortitude, and without

²²Prescott, CP, III, 102-103.

showing any feeling," . . . he undermines the implication of nobility with the attitude of the people who "with one voice, declared that he was the greatest and most cruel butcher that had been seen among men . . . so that he was very heartily detested by all the inhabitants."²³ This passage hardly reflects sympathy for the murdered Indian king. If anything, Xeres seems to agree with the attitude of the people that Atahualpa's death was no apparent loss to anyone. Only when he mentions that Atahualpa died without showing any feeling does Xeres indicate that Atahualpa died as an Indian should die, in stoic silence. To Xeres, Atahualpa's silence and fortitude are merely coincidental and do not result from the fact that Atahualpa is an Indian, an aborigine of South America.

Similarly, Garcilasso de la Vega presents Atahualpa as a grieving victim, believing that his fate had been foretold by a comet which passed through the skies only days before his trial and death. De la Vega copies Gomara's account of the death of Atahualpa and says merely that "Atahualpa denied everything to the very end, arguing that he would have been quite incapable of plotting, as they accused him of doing, in his prison cell. . . . He reproached Pizarro bitterly for accepting to put him to death. . . . He was

²³Clement Markham, Reports of the Discovery of Peru (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972), p. 103-104. All subsequent footnotes will be entered as Markham, Reports, page number.

baptized, then garroted on a stake driven into the ground, . . . Atahualpa died a hard death."²⁴ As far as de la Vega is concerned, Atahualpa was "an idolatrous Indian," guilty of great cruelty. Even though de la Vega records some Spanish opposition to the death of Atahualpa, he never regards Atahualpa as having died in a noble manner. In fact, he expresses some distaste for the fact that Atahualpa was baptized before his death, implying cowardice and treachery toward his own heritage on the part of Atahualpa. For de la Vega, as for Xeres, Atahualpa was not a symbol of the death of a nation and he did not die nobly, as do Cooper's Indians, in the struggle against the wave of destiny which was engulfing his people.

For Prescott, though, Atahualpa dies with great reserve and dignity after having momentarily lost his poise. Prescott admits that Atahualpa pled for his life with tears in his eyes and pity in his voice. Recounting the episode, Prescott writes that "the overwhelming conviction of it unmanned him, and he exclaimed, with tears in his eyes,--'what have I done, or my children, that I should meet such a fate?' . . . In the most piteous tones, he then implored that his life might be spared. . . ." ²⁵ Yet, before Atahualpa dies, Prescott says, he "recovered his habitual self-possession, and from

²⁴Vega, Inca., p. 361.

²⁵Prescott, CP, II, 182.

that moment submitted himself to his fate with the courage of an Indian warrior."²⁶ None of the original sources imply that the courage which Atahualpa might have displayed was unique to the Indian warrior as does Prescott. Likewise, Prescott excuses the harsher portraits of Atahualpa and his death by saying that 'the pencil of an enemy would be likely to overcharge the shadows of the portrait. . . . His exploits,' says Prescott, "had placed his valor beyond dispute."²⁷ No matter what the original source maintains, Prescott adheres to the concept that the Indian must always die well no matter what the circumstance. Perhaps, in the case of Atahualpa, one finds one of the clearest examples of nineteenth century influence on Prescott's work in The Conquest of Peru.

And yet, the example of Manco Inca's death goes even further in showing the influence of the nineteenth century's perception of the Indian on Prescott's work. Of all the original sources, only one major source reveals the manner of Manco's death and that source is Cieza de Leon. De Leon ascribes Manco's death to a Spanish soldier named Diego Perez and attributes the place of the event to a skirmish occurring in Viticos.²⁸ According to de Leon, Manco is

²⁶Prescott, CP, II, 182.

²⁷Prescott, CP, II, 185-186.

²⁸Markham, pp. 125-26.

murdered after he orders an attack against some Spanish soldiers. Even in this erroneous account of Manco's death, no valor or nobility is ascribed to his death. The death of Manco Inca is reported in a totally objective manner with no allusions to nobility or to standards of dying. As far as de Leon is concerned, the death of Manco Inca was merely the death of another Indian and nothing more. This fact is also true of the account of the Inca's death written by his own son, Titu Cusi Yupanqui. According to Yupanqui, his father was playing a game and "just as my Father was raising the quoit to throw, they all rushed upon him with knives, daggers, and some swords. My Father, feeling himself wounded, strove to make some defence, but he was one and unarmed . . . he fell to the ground covered with wounds, my Father lived for three days."²⁹ Although Manco is clearly unjustly murdered, the only judgment passed concerning how well he died or how noble that death is the fact that he struggled against his slayers. There is no romantic idea of the Indian facing his slayers with cool reserve or dignity, only the simple facts of a death.

Prescott, on the other hand, implies nobility by stating that "The death of Manco Inca, as he was commonly called, is an event not to be silently passed over in Peruvian history. . . . Though foiled, in the end, by the

²⁹Markham, pp. 165-66.

superior science of his adversary, the young barbarian still showed the same unconquerable spirit as before."³⁰ Prescott calls him a "formidable warrior" later in the same passage. As to the actual events of the Indian's death, Prescott passes over them with the curt term, "massacred," and then proceeds to glorify the young Indian king. Perhaps stating that what Prescott has written implies nobility of death is stretching Prescott's work beyond the point of belief. Yet, if he did not feel that Manco Inca's death was notable, why devote as much to the noble character of the Indian as Prescott so obviously does? The very use of the term "massacre" implies the young warrior steadfastly standing against the Spaniards. Adding his evaluation of the Inca's noble character to the implications of the description of the death scene allows Prescott to evoke the sympathy and sentimental feelings in the reader associated with the idea of the noble savage dying in opposition to the onslaught of white civilization. And what fate could be more noble?

The fates of Atahualpa and his successor, Manco Inca, lead to a consideration of the fourth characteristic of the nineteenth century's view of the Indian, that of the passing of the Indian and his civilization as indicative of the progress of the European or white civilization. Physically, of course, any conquest indicates the dominance of one

³⁰Prescott, CP, III, 102.

civilization over another by sheer force. The passing of the Indian must be replaced by some aspect of white civilization. Where there were once Indian institutions, there must now be European or White institutions. Only in supplanting elements of one civilization by elements of another can progress be measured.

Of the original manuscripts used for reference in this chapter, all seem to be in agreement that the conquest was a good thing to happen to Peru and the Inca empire. Of course, the men who wrote these documents were committed to justification of the conquest. Xeres, as Pizarro's secretary, wrote to justify Pizarro's actions and to clear his name, a feat not easily accomplished. Xeres says that his narrative "will give joy to the faithful that such battles have been won, such provinces discovered and conquered, such riches brought home for the King and for themselves; and that such terror has been spread among the infidels, such admiration excited in all mankind."³¹ Xeres takes the view that the conquest existed only for the spoils which could be attained from it. To Xeres, the end of Peruvian civilization meant only more gold and riches for Spain. In a manner of speaking, attaining the gold was a measure of monetary progress. However, Xeres does not mention any progress in the sense of government replacing government. This is

³¹Markham, Reports, p. 1.

partially due to the fact that he left Peru at the time Atahualpa died and was not there to evaluate the remainder of the conquest.

Likewise, Garcilasso de la Vega's account of the history stops at the death of Atahualpa. De la Vega justifies the conquest by saying, "The insatiable thirst for conquest that marked the Spaniards, as soon as they discovered the New World, is only too well known. Nothing discouraged them, nothing repelled them, nothing exhausted them. Neither hunger, nor danger, nor wounds, nor sickness, nor bad days and even worse nights, could keep them from pushing constantly forward, over land and sea, in search of the unheard-of feats that, for all time, have left a halo of glory around their names."³² Where Xeres saw the demise of the Indian as a way of filling the coffers, de la Vega saw the conquest in terms of religious progress for the Peruvian natives: "However, the good fortune of those who possess it today was beckoning, and it even forced them to challenge what was then the unknown. But above all, God, in his infinite mercy, had decided that His gospel should pass through them to these new gentiles who were living in Peru in the gloom of idolatry; a thing that is proven by all the miracles thanks to which this mad undertaking succeeded."³³

³²Vega, Inca, p. 305.

³³Vega, Inca, p. 307.

Thus, "this mad undertaking" as de la Vega calls the conquest, is viewed in terms of monetary and religious expansion but not in terms of real progress, of replacing one institution by a supposedly better one. Prescott sees the conquest as a conflict of civilizations with the better civilization as the victor. In Book I, Prescott reflects on the philosophical import of the conquest. As in The Conquest of Mexico, Prescott portrays the Inca civilization at its height, in its golden age of intellectual, scientific, and military prowess. Then he depicts the civilization in its downfall, as its government becomes wealthier and less democratic. Prescott discusses the centralization of power in the office or personage of the Inca whose power in comparison was beyond that of the Pope in Europe. In pointing out this consolidation of power and the allegiance of the Peruvian people to such power, Prescott writes that "never was there a scheme of government enforced by such terrible sanctions, or which bore so oppressively on the subjects of it. For it reached not only to the visible acts, but to the private conduct, the words, the very thoughts, of its vassals."³⁴ Moving onward in his discussion, Prescott points out that while the Incas lived in a welfare state under the subjection of the Inca, "They were never made the victims of public or private extortion; and a benevolent forecast watched carefully

³⁴Prescott, CP, I, 184.

over their necessities, and provided for their relief in seasons of infirmity, and for their sustenance in health."³⁵ Yet, in order to justify the conquest Prescott must prove the Peruvian government unworthy and this he does on a moral basis,

Yet in this there was nothing cheering to the dignity of human nature. What the people had was conceded as a boon, not as a right. . . . The power of free agency--the inestimable and inborn right of every human being--was annihilated in Peru. . . . Where there is no free agency, there can be no morality. . . . If that government is the best, which is felt the least, which encroaches on the natural liberty of the subject only so far as is essential to civil subordination, then of all governments devised by man the Peruvian has the least real claim to our admiration.³⁶

Thus, Prescott prepares the way for the clash of the two political systems.

In discussing the conflict which ensued, Prescott writes, "It is not easy to comprehend the genius and the full import of institutions so opposite to those of our own free republic, where every man, however humble his condition, may aspire to the highest honors of the state,-- . . . not as in Peru, where man seemed to be made only for the government. The New World is the theater in which these two political systems, so opposite in their character, have been carried into operation. The empire of the Incas has passed

³⁵Prescott, CP, I, 186.

³⁶Prescott, CP, I, 186, 190.

away and left no trace."³⁷ Prescott thus suggests that the passing of the Inca empire is a step forward in proof that the government of the white man is more capable and more absolute in principle than that of the Inca empire. In his preface to the work, Prescott says that "the conquest of the natives is but one first step, to be followed by the conquest of the Spaniards,--the rebel Spaniards, themselves,--till the supremacy of the crown is permanently established over the country."³⁸

In relating this tale of conquest and establishment of supremacy by the European government, Prescott depicts the demise of the Indian and the conflicts brought about by the change in governments. Yet, this change in government, according to Prescott is a good change. Pedro de la Gasca, emissary from Phillip II, is the man who replaces the Inca king as head of the Peruvian government. Governmental policies established by de la Gasca proved that the European government could bring peace and prosperity to Peru after the cruelty and tyranny of Atahualpa as well as after the turmoil and insurrections of Manco Inca. According to Prescott, "the troubles of the country were renewed on the departure of Gasca. The waters had been too fearfully agitated to be stilled, at once, into a calm; but they gradually subsided

³⁷Prescott, CP, I, 190-191.

³⁸Prescott, CP, I, xvi.

under the temperate rule of his successors, who wisely profited by his policy and example . . . and Peru, hitherto so distracted, continued to enjoy as large a share of repose as any portion of the colonial empire of Spain. With the benevolent mission of Gasca, then, the historian of the Conquest may be permitted to terminate his labors,--with feelings not unlike those of the travellers, who, having long journeyed among the dreary forests and dangerous defiles of the mountains, at length emerges on some pleasant landscape smiling in tranquility and peace."³⁹

No doubt the idea of tranquility, peace, and progress is essential to the concept of the superiority of the white man's way of life over that of the Indian in the nineteenth century. Unlike his source authors, Prescott views the conquest in long-range, all-inclusive terms. The passing of the Indian is sad and quite romantic, yet necessary because the two civilizations cannot coexist. The movement forward of white civilization is thus marked by the backward movement of the Indian civilization. Although both the Mexican and Peruvian empires had attained a level of sophistication beyond that of the North American Indian, the White or European civilization far surpasses them in Prescott's eyes. Thus, the nineteenth century's view of the inferiority of the Indian way of life as compared to the European way of

³⁹Prescott, CP, III, 297-298.

life is demonstrated in Prescott's work. Atahualpa and Manco Inca join the ranks of the conquered along with Uncas, Metamora, Sanutee, and Montezuma. The Indian has once again passed away to make room for the white man. One might well quote Tamenund, Cooper's wise old Indian, when he says, "The pale-faces are masters of the earth and the time of the redmen has not yet come again."⁴⁰

⁴⁰James Fenimore Cooper, Last of the Mohicans (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), p. 586.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

David Levin's In Defense of Historical Literature notes that "historians who do become known as good writers are likely to be respected rather as narrative stylists than as original interpreters of their subject, and they are likely to be praised for qualities resembling the self-consciously 'literary' historical writing of the nineteenth century."¹ Such a statement defines precisely the style of Prescott, for Prescott was a narrative stylist of the nineteenth century. His books are landmarks in historical interpretation and perhaps the most intricately researched of all the histories of the nineteenth century. Yet, in spite of his devotion to his sources, Prescott could not help but be influenced by the poetry, drama, and fiction popular in his own time.

As a historian, Prescott's first obligation is to the accurate recounting of his sources. In both books, Prescott prefaces his work with statements which reflect his concern over this obligation to both his sources and to his readers. In The Conquest of Mexico, Prescott writes, "I have conscientiously endeavored to distinguish fact from fiction, and to

¹David Levin, In Defense of Historical Literature (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 2.

establish the narrative on as broad a basis as possible of contemporary evidence; and I have taken occasion to corroborate the text by ample citations from authorities, usually in the original, since few of them can be very accessible to the reader."² Similarly, he prefaces The Conquest of Peru: "By copious citations from the original authorities, and by such critical notices of them as would explain to him [the reader] the influences to which they were subjected, I have endeavored to put him in a position for judging for himself, and thus for revising, and, if need be, reversing, the judgments of the historian. He will, at any rate, by this means, be enabled to estimate the difficulty of arriving at truth amidst the conflict of testimony; and he will learn to place little reliance on those writers who pronounce on the mysterious past with what Fontenelle calls 'a frightful degree of certainty,'--a spirit the most opposite to that of the true philosopher of history."³

While Prescott does adhere to the veracity of his sources, he embellishes, embroiders, or ornaments these accounts on occasion in an effort to present the spirit of

²References and quotations from Prescott's histories are from the Montezuma edition, ed. Wilfred Harold Munro, 22 vols. (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott & Co., 1904). All subsequent footnotes will be denoted by Prescott, CM, volume number and page number. This quotation is from volume I, page v.

³References and quotations from Prescott's histories are from the Montezuma edition, ed. Wilfred Harold Munro, 22 vols. (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott & Co., 1904). This quotation is from volume I, page iv.

the time surrounding his subject. Yet, he also reflects the spirit of his own time concerning the Indian. Although the Indian was no longer the noble savage in the true sense of the term in the historian's treatment of him as well as in the treatment of him by other nineteenth century writers, by the time Prescott wrote, he became a sentimentalized, idealized version of the Indian. Too often, Prescott saw the Indian as the vanishing race dying with the stoic calm of a Lucretius while attempting to curb the flood of white men engulfing his native land. As Prescott writes in The Conquest of Mexico, "The subversion of a great empire by a handful of adventurers, taken with all its strange and picturesque accompaniments, has the air of romance rather than of sober history."⁴

Since Prescott emphasized romantic characters, it was in the romance of the Indian character that Prescott most reflected his own time. As stated earlier, there are basically four major components of the romantic attitude toward the Indian: (1) he must be physically unique, set apart from the white race by some noticeable physical attribute; (2) he must be involved in a struggle for the survival of his race; (3) because of that struggle, he must die well; (4) his death must reflect the progress of the white or European civilization over his own. Prescott adheres to these four concepts with great resolve.

⁴Prescott, CM, I, iv.

First of all, three of the four Indian characters are depicted by Prescott as physically attractive and almost god-like in their physical build. None of Prescott's Indians is overweight or the least bit homely. They are all of a darker skin color than that of the conqueror, yet in the case of Montezuma and Guatemozin, lighter in color than their own race, a fact which again makes them unique. This contrast in skin color serves to enhance the contrast of other elements of the conquest such as those of religions and governments. Since Atahualpa far outshines Manco Inca in relative importance in the story of Peru, only Atahualpa is hinted at as being of a darker skin color. Manco Inca, however, is well-built. Is there any other way for an Indian warrior to be built? Levin has written that "it is wise to remember that the less space he devoted to the description of a character, the more heavily he must depend on a few typical epithets or details that will suggest an entire personality."⁵ Because he cannot describe Manco Inca's appearance from his sources, Prescott does substitute epithets or detail he can infer in order to suggest the noble savage.

These descriptions only heighten the apparently futile struggle in which these four natives are involved. In the cases of Montezuma and Atahualpa, Prescott is hard pressed to portray them as actively involved in insurrection. While

⁵Levin, p. 13.

they may lead some minor skirmishes, they too easily resign themselves to their fate in the original sources. Yet, Prescott, because of his method of depicting character through personal reflection, is able to absolve them of cowardice and portray them like many of Cooper's Indians, involved in a desperate combat to retain their own way of life. With the characters of Guatemozin and Manco Inca, Prescott is aided by history itself and finds no problem in depicting them in physical revolt against the new society which threatens their race.

Similarly, all four Indians die well as a result of this struggle. Montezuma and Atahualpa according to Prescott face death with a fair amount of courage and resolve. In their last moments they are still rebuking their conquerors. Prescott stretches his point on occasion in order to make his characters die in the grand manner attributed to the North and South American aborigine. It seems to be very important to Prescott that his Indians die well. This could only be due to the fact that he thought all Indians had to die well, for history clearly opposes Prescott on certain occasions as in the case of Atahualpa and Manco Inca. When in doubt, Prescott often places more emphasis on the bits of legend or fairytale which he needs in order to be faithful to his concept of the Indian.

To remain true to his concept of the Indian, Prescott must see the triumph of the European as the triumph of an

intellectually, morally, and religiously superior civilization over a degraded and inferior civilization. Like Cooper, Prescott could admire the past civilizations represented by the Indian but could see the obvious progress in the spread of European civilization. For some reason, Prescott cannot bring himself to declare a conquest unjust, and in The Conquest of Peru this proves to be one of his major problems. Levin has also pointed out that Prescott was troubled by "right of conquest" since the Indians of Central and South America had been artisans and industrious farmers. Their only resemblance to North American Indians lay in their consistent cruelty. Absolution of this problem often produced confusion and self-contradiction in Prescott's work.⁶ Yet, in the end, Prescott declares that the surging forward of white civilization has brought peace and prosperity to these conquered peoples. Thus, for Prescott, the end of Indian civilization marks the beginning of new maturity for white civilization because it can be successfully applied to a people other than that people who conceived it.

While Prescott did not actively attempt to dispute his sources, he seems at times to have perhaps twisted his major sources. Only his major sources for each of his two works have been considered in the content of this paper. Perhaps

⁶David Levin, History as Romantic Art (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), p. 151.

this works an injustice against Prescott because of the fact that he used sundry minor sources. Logically, the major sources should be the primary sources for a literary look at Prescott's work. Although his characters bear resemblance to some of the major fictional characters of the nineteenth century, they were real men and Prescott does his best to depict them as such. For that reason his concept of the Indian is not quite as stylized or idealized as that of Cooper and other contemporaries.

Yet, his concept of the Indian is instrumental in aiding Prescott in his justification of the conquest and in his creation of romance as well as history. Harry Thurston Peck has written that "Prescott never wrote a sentence that can be remembered. His strength lies in his ensemble, in the general effect, and in the agreeable manner in which he carries us along with him from the beginning to the end."⁷ The general effect of Prescott's concept of the Indian is one of sympathy and pathos for the passing of one so noble and picturesque. The general idea is that Prescott unknowingly reflected the spirit of his time and for his achievement, he may justly be praised for his artistry and genius in the creation of his characters.

⁷Harry Thurston Peck, William Hickling Prescott (New York: Macmillan Co., 1926), p. 127.

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