Myth, Symbol, and Colonial Encounter
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CHAPTER THREE

THE SHROUDING OF AMBIGUITY

Why is it that the British colonial language of inclusion (paternalistic and morally degrading though it was) was at such variance with colonial practice? The answer may lie in the British assertion of cultural purity that sought to create the colonial human being and Acadia itself, and that, paradoxically, constituted the foundation of calls for the civilization of aboriginal peoples. The claim to be firmly British was clearly problematic. These peoples' European identity had been transformed in the process of becoming colonials. Western Europeans, for instance, were not scalpers; the British in eighteenth century Acadia were. After announcing in 1749 that the Mi'kmaq were "Rebels of His Majesty's Government or as so many Banditti Ruffians," the Nova Scotia Council instructed all colonists to "annoy, distress, and destroy the Indians everywhere," and proceeded to place a bounty of "ten guineas" on native prisoners or their scalps. Eight months later, it was raised to fifty pounds.¹

Among Acadia's colonial population, many other changes also occurred, the most obvious being the disintegration of European class structures. The British government's attempt to establish a planter colony in Prince Edward Island, by granting twenty thousand acres of land each to sixty proprietors, failed to produce the society for which they had hoped. With the option of claiming free grants of property in other British North American colonics, few immigrants had any inclination to become tenant farmers.² The availability of land throughout the col-
onies altered the social character of immigrants and their children in ways that were most striking to European visitors. Joseph Gubbins, a British officer stationed in New Brunswick between 1810 and 1816, reported:

The value of land in this part of the world may be said to consist in the labour which the proprietor can bestow upon it... rather than from its own intrinsic worth. The sons of the officers of rank and of other gentlemen who took refuge here after the American war... are certainly inferior to their parents in every respect that relates to manners and good society... There hardly exists any class of Society on this side of the Atlantic. The poor are not educated to respect the rich as in Europe... It is remarkable that amongst the immediate descendants of the English, little of British manners or customs are to be found... The habits of the people are adverse to subordination, the price of labour is... high.\(^3\)

This became a society in which for whites of every rank and degree, the road to wealth and distinction is [free].... There are no favoured classes—no exclusive privileges no absurd or depressing monopolies—no checks nor hindrances to landable ambition—no station unattainable by patient industry and honest worth. With nothing to cramp his energies or chide his hopes and aspirations, the intelligent European who seeks this country for a home, may reasonably look forward to comfort, if not wealth and position.\(^4\)

While the hierarchical structure of English society was becoming unfastened in Acadia, recognized sites of cultural authority were also undergoing transformation. Nova Scotia had been consciously constituted by the Crown as an Anglican colony when, in 1758, the Church of England was granted legal privilege with the financial support of the home government. In the wake of the American Revolution, a commitment to solidifying the alliance between church and state in the remaining British North American colonies was reinforced with the intention of securing the loyalty of Acadia's population. Charles Inglis thus became Britain's first colonial bishop in 1787, with a charge to administer church affairs in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island for the remainder of his life, and in New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Canada until such time as another appointment was deemed necessary in those colonies.\(^5\) Church and state were to function hand in hand in British North America so that the strong sense of allegiance to England that had crumbled in the American colonies might be sustained. For the eighteenth-century English, an Anglican and British identity were necessarily contiguous, and the Church of England faithfully served the principles of order and society recognized as English. So, for instance, Charles Inglis maintained that
a state of Society is the natural state of man; and by the constitution of his mind and frame is fitted for it... as nature has thus made us members of Society, without any choice or will of ours; so, whatever happiness or perfection we are capable of, can only be attained in Society.6

In respect to the role of the church in society, Inglis confirmed that

Government and Religion are therefore the pillars, as it were, on which society rests, and by which it is upheld; remove these, and the fabric sinks into ruin... there is a close connection between that duty which we owe to God, and the duty we owe to the King, and to others in authority under him. So intimate is this connection, that they can scarcely be separated. Whoever is sincerely religious towards God, from principle and conscience, will also, from principle and conscience, be loyal to his earthly Sovereign, obedient to the laws, and faithful to the government which God hath placed over him.7

Acadian colonials by and large did not share this understanding of their identity. They came, rather, to regard themselves in a very different manner, as people who were ineradicably British while remaining markedly autonomous of the Church of England. Despite the fact that the church was legally established in the colonies, it ultimately represented only a minority of the population. In Nova Scotia, for example, this amounted to about twenty percent of the population in 1816, and about twenty-eight percent of all Protestants in 1827.8 Overwhelmingly, the Anglican Church became identified with the colonies' political elites during this period.9 This had been the case in New Brunswick from the colony's inception,10 and had been graphically affirmed in Nova Scotia after 1808, when the bishop was granted a seat on the legislative council.11 Aside from this elite class, the general British population had little difficulty imagining themselves as British without an identification with the authority of the Church of England. As an Anglican clergyman noted in 1812, "I do not think the people of this colony are as religious as they are loyal. I think there is much more loyalty than religion among us."12

A related shift occurred in the period that signified an equally, if not more, profound re-interpretation of what constituted ultimate authority in the colonial Acadian's life. To the dismay of the Anglican clergy, a proliferation of dissenting churches occurred from the late eighteenth century onward. Adherents of dissenting Protestantism were disparaged as "enthusiasts" by their Anglican critics who regarded the dissenter as

one who vainly and without grounds, believes that he has such revelations, calls or commission [from the Deity]. In general this
proceeds from a heated or disordered imagination; the suggestions of which are mistaken for luminous communications from God.\textsuperscript{13}

The enthusiasts were also perceived as posing a threat to the social order:

Swarms of teachers who are ignorant, low & fanatical to a degree that is scarcely credible, infest every district. . . . Their wild notions are imbibed, which militate against Order both in Church & State. The minds of people are hereby perverted & prejudiced against our excellent Church.\textsuperscript{14}

In spite of these dire predictions of social ruin, colonial society did not fall victim to the rejection of the Church of England in Acadia, though another locus of authority was rather critically redefined in the process of rejection—that of the colonial relationship to God.

The New England colonies were the initial source of immigration in the region, and these settlers were by and large associated with dissenting churches. The majority of New Brunswick's early immigrants, for instance, were Congregationalists descended from the English who had arrived in New England in the 1630s.\textsuperscript{15} Most who arrived in the two decades prior to the revolutionary war came from areas that had participated in the Great Awakening of the 1740s, and they tended to be evangelical Congregationalists\textsuperscript{16} who espoused a firm Puritan morality. It has been noted that with this population religion was a stern affair, the Puritanism of New England but little softened in pass into Nova Scotia. Dancing and card-playing were condemned, and Sabbath observance was strictly enforced. Heads of families who did not attend church were fined.\textsuperscript{17}

These Yankees initially identified strongly with their New England roots. A Congregational meeting house built in Halifax in 1749, for example, was known as "Mather's," in honour of Cotton Mather and the immigrants' Boston heritage.\textsuperscript{18}

Throughout the numerous revivals that characterized the period between the 1770s and the 1810s, links with New England's Puritans remained overt. During the initial revival brought about substantially by the preaching of Henry Alline and his contemporary William Black, many older members of the settler population recognized the recurrence of a phenomenon through which they had lived in the New England Great Awakening forty years earlier. Following a sermon that Alline preached in February of 1783, one of these older settlers recorded in his diary, "This is a wonderful day and evening. Never did I behold
such an appearance of the Spirit of God moving upon the people since the time of the Great Religious Stir in New England many years ago.\textsuperscript{19} The churches instituted during this first Nova Scotia awakening were not structurally distinct from their New England forerunners,\textsuperscript{20} and even the sense of charge underlying the identity Alline offered his contemporaries—to become "the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and as CITIES ON HILLS"\textsuperscript{21}—was essentially an extension of the Puritan mission articulated by John Winthrop one hundred and fifty years earlier: "For wee must Consider that wee shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us."\textsuperscript{22} Likewise, Nova Scotia's second Great Awakening of 1790-1812 was not an isolated event, but was influenced by a wider contemporary movement sweeping through New England and beyond during the period, and the preachers involved in this revival travelled circuits that were relatively oblivious to the international border.\textsuperscript{23}

There was an obvious continuity between the Acadian and New England traditions. Yet, the particular foundations laid by the work of Alline and Black influenced the Protestant profile of the region throughout the colonial period, and these signified a shift in both the language and experience of God within the Acadian British community. Both the New Light churches that emerged from Alline's revival and the evangelical Methodism launched by Black contributed to the development of Maritime Baptist and Methodist churches,\textsuperscript{24} and influenced the Protestant profile of Acadia for a century after their deaths.\textsuperscript{25} As late as 1858, a Presbyterian churchman still asserted that Henry Alline "did more good by his labours than any minister that ever lived in Nova Scotia."\textsuperscript{26} This legacy was constructed on a theology that not only assailed the authority of Anglican ritual but the Calvinist substratum of the Puritan vision of God.

New England's Puritans, according to Richard Slotkin, envisioned God as one "whose authority was absolute and arbitrary," and the human being as "utterly depraved and dependent; but through the infusion of divine grace, God might purify man, make him a visible saint."\textsuperscript{27} Thus every human being was irrecoverably bound by the will of God to an eternity of either salvation or condemnation.\textsuperscript{28} Alline and Black each assailed this fundamental notion of predestination. In his hymn, "Free Grace," Alline told the faithful,

\begin{center}
Awake O Guilty World Awake  
Behold the Earth's foundation shake  
While the Redeemer bleeds for you  
His Death proclaims to all your race  
Free Grace, Free Grace, Free Grace, Free Grace  
Too all the Jews and Gentiles too.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{center}
Black likewise claimed,

It is affirmed, that "man has nothing at all to do; that if he lift a hand towards his own salvation, he will be damned." But is not this contrary to the words of St. Paul,—"Work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling." If indeed by "towards salvation," they meant, towards purchasing it, they would affirm nothing but the truth; but if they refer to our obtaining salvation, the assertion is utterly false. For though Christ has died for us, he has neither repented nor believed for us; still, therefore, if we repent not, we shall perish—if we believe not, we shall be damned. The Scriptures urge us to turn, seek, knock, strive, wrestle, run, &c. And is this, I would ask, doing nothing? absolutely nothing? Is it not for salvation that we are to seek, ask wrestle and run? Does the sinner repent that he may perish, or believe that he may be damned? or rather does he not do both in order to gain salvation?30

The revival movements and churches spawned by these preachers were founded in theologies in which salvation became the choice of the human being, not God. And not only was the onus for salvation placed upon the human, but in some sectors the experience of God itself came to be recognized as humanly generated. Stewart and Rawlyk have suggested that nineteenth-century Baptist preachers, for instance, increasingly regarded the revivals they oversaw as events that they had "willed" into being.31 For these colonials, the authority of the Church of England was no longer a necessary condition of a British identity. The "absolute and arbitrary" authority of the Calvinist God was an equally needless postulate for being a dissenting Protestant.

Changes in warfare, social distinctions, church structures, and theology all pointed to the fact that the Acadian British were clearly part of a world that was not England. Over time, it also became a world whose problems the British government did not perceive as its own, so that by 1842, when a group of representatives of the Mi'kmaq of New Brunswick arrived in London to personally present the Queen with a petition, they were politely asked to go home. The colonial officer told them,

Her Majesty has not been able to grant you an interview, but Her Majesty has signified Her Pleasure that you should each be presented with a Medal in token of the Interest which Her Majesty takes in your welfare. I am further desired to acquaint you that a Dispatch has been addressed to the Governor of Canada recommending you to his protection, and that in future any application which you may have to prefer should be made to that officer, or the Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, by whom your claims will, if necessary, be communicated to the Set. of State.

The colonial government was subsequently directed to make certain that its problems with the native community did not, in future, cross the Atlantic.32
Although the colonials spoke of their unbending British identity, in reality they had become very different from Europeans. Yet the need for continuity nourished their denial of a change, and substantial effort was expended upon demonstrating the continuity that they sought. Books were written that extolled the merits of the colonies in order to convince Englishmen of the colonials' thoroughly British identity. Abraham Gesner, for instance, wrote in the opening pages of *New Brunswick, With Notes for Emigrants*, "The colony is one of great importance, with regard both to its intrinsic value and the steadfast loyalty of its inhabitants, and to place it in its true light before the British public, will be the chief object of the following pages"; and Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia* was written to counter what he regarded as popular English conceptions that pointed to the fact that "this valuable and important Colony was not merely wholly unknown, but misunderstood and misrepresented. Every book of geography, every Gazetteer and elementary work that mentioned it, spoke of it in terms of contempt or condemnation."

In day-to-day colonial life, the British strove to keep the potentially ambiguous Mi'kmaq apart from themselves and the European-styled society they were creating. They denied the existence of a relationship between the white and native communities, and from earliest contact avoided situations that contained the possibility of mutuality. When the British government created the colony of Halifax in 1749, local native peoples immediately promised "friendship and assistance" to the colonists, and proceeded during the first winter to supply the newcomers with fish and seafood. Despite the fact that they initially made no hostile overtures toward the British immigrants, Governor Edward Cornwallis had a thirty-foot strip cleared and fenced around the settlement; in anticipation of native violence, he built a fort and announced, "if the Indians do begin [hostilities] we ought never to make peace with them . . . [but] root them out entirely." We might note that Cornwallis's stratagem for dealing with the aboriginal population appeared to constitute a form of denial of the possibility of community that harkened to an English model for colonization first set out by George Peckham in the late sixteenth century. In *A True Report, of the Late discoveries . . . of Newfound Landes*, Peckham had cautioned prospective colonizers, suggesting

if after these good and faire meanes used, the savages nevertheless will not be herewithall satisfied, but barbarously wyll go about to practice violence either in repelling the Christians from theyr Portes and safe Landinges or in withstanding them afterwards to enjoye the rights for which both painfully and lawfully they have adventured themselves thether; Then in such a case I holde it no
breache of equitye for the Christians to defend themselves, to pursue revenge with force, and to doo whatsoever is necessary for attayning of theyr safety.37

It was perhaps within the language of treaties that the eighteenth-century British most blatantly articulated their aversion to mutuality. As already noted, no reference to the Mi'kmaq had been made in the Treaty of Utrecht, so that from the outset of the British colonial period, the aboriginal population was presumed to be a non-entity. Of course, in reality, it was not so, and for the British to exploit the resources of Acadia or to colonize, the presence of aboriginal peoples had to be reckoned with in some way. The diplomacy employed in earlier French-Mi'kmaq relations was not considered an option by Englishmen who had acquired the territory under the impression that indigenous peoples would somehow melt into the landscape; so they entered, somewhat reluctantly, into a process of treaty negotiation that aspired to effectively alienate the native population from the white community by removing the Mi'kmaq from land that appeared to have potential for settlement.38 Treaties, which were negotiated only in times of political or military crisis,39 had an air of finality about them, as they created boundaries that were intended to keep native peoples from further interaction with whites and their governments, and it came as a surprise to British colonials when the process did not transpire as neatly as anticipated. In a letter to the governor of Nova Scotia in 1760, an apparently exasperated Colonel Frye at Fort Cumberland wrote,

On the 30th of January last, Mr. Manack, a French Priest who has had the charge of the people at Miramichi, Richibucto, and Bucktouche, and a number of the principal men in those places, arrived here. ... With the French Priest came two Indian Chiefs, Paul Lawrence and Augustine Michael. ... I have received their submissions, for themselves and for their tribe, to his Britannic Majesty, and sent them to Halifax for the terms by Governor Lawrence. I have likewise received the submission of two other Chiefs, who I dealt with as before mentioned, and was in hopes I had no more treaties to make with savages; but he told me I was mistaken, for there would be a great many more upon the same business, as soon as their spring hunting was over; and upon my inquiring how many, he gave a list of fourteen Chiefs ... most of which he said would come. I was surprised to hear of such a number of Indian Chiefs in this part of America ... and that they were all of one nation.40

These treaties were not "negotiated" in the sense that they involved firm long-term contributions from both interested parties. The Treaty of Boston, for instance, was signed by the British, Abenaki, Malecite, and Mi'kmaq in 1725,41 and was resurrected sporadically for half a century; yet, even while the St. John River Mi'kmaq were ratify-
ing the agreement in 1749, in Halifax Cornwallis was suggesting to the home government that any native resistance to British settlement should be met with a policy of extermination. The practice of treaty negotiation was ultimately abandoned by the late 1780s, when the colonial population was of sufficient magnitude to withstand Mi'kmaq resistance against appropriation. Essentially, from this point onward, the colonial population base proved capable of repelling the native community with far more efficiency than could the structure of treaties.

The possibility of mutuality was assaulted in other arenas as well. Beginning in 1713 and lasting for sixty years, the British government offered bonuses for any colonial who married a native man or woman. In 1719, for instance, Governor Richard Philips of Nova Scotia received instructions from the British government saying,

And as a further mark of His Majesty's good will to the said Indian Nations, you shall give all possible encouragement to intermarriages between His Majesty's British subjects and them for which purpose you are to declare in His Majesty's name, that His Majesty will bestow on every white man being one of His Subjects, who shall marry an Indian woman, native and inhabitant of Nova Scotia, a free gift of the sum of 10 pounds sterling, and 50 acres of land, free of quit rent for the space of twenty years, and the like on any white woman being His Majesty's subject who shall marry an Indian man, native and inhabitant of Nova Scotia, as aforesaid.

Not one of these bonuses was ever claimed, and, in fact, the notion of white-Mi'kmaq marriage revolted colonials well through the nineteenth century. In a retrospective discussion of French-Mi'kmaq unions of this sort in early Acadia, Gesner scathingly noted that the French "adopted their mode of living, and even some of their barbarous customs. Their Government offered rewards to any who would marry a native, until the two races were so blended together that they could not be separated."

The structure of gift exchange also acquired meanings with the British that undermined human relationships rather than solidified them. For the colonials, gifts became interchangeable with various forms of violence, including threats, hostage taking, and war. In 1793, Nova Scotia's lieutenant-governor wrote to his Superintendent of Indian Affairs, ordering him to mount an investigation into reports of Mi'kmaq-white tension around Windsor. The letter began by ordering that "troublesome" Mi'kmaq were to be taken hostage and held in nearby Fort Edward, but the instructions were subsequently altered within the same dispatch and—in consideration of a current fear of French invasion in which the Mi'kmaq might become allies of the French—Lieutenant-Governor Wentworth suggested that gifts and
food be distributed among the disaffected native population in order "that the peace of our scattered inhabitants may not be disturbed by them, and also that they will join us in case of an invasion." A few years earlier, Lieutenant-Governor Carleton was advised that he might "at a cheaper rate secure their friendship, than repel their hostilities... [and] presents should be more considerable, before any new concessions of land, so that they may be entirely satisfied with the transaction." For the British, giving gifts to the Mi'kmaq was a means of controlling them in order to keep them at a distance from whites. In 1752, for instance, the Nova Scotia Council renegotiated the Treaty of 1725 with representatives of the Mi'kmaq at Shubenacadie. The Council promised to keep settlers away from reserved Mi'kmaq hunting grounds and to give gifts to the community on the condition that colonials were permitted to go about their business of settling without resistance from the local native population.

Antipathy toward a relationship between the native and white communities contributed to an inability to realistically perceive native peoples. For the majority of colonials, the Mi'kmaq failed to exist as autonomous beings apart from the British imagination. Consequently, they were frequently depicted in contradictory terms, as well as in terms that obscured their distinctiveness from other colonized peoples the world over. In Acadia—to use a phrase suggested by Eleanor Leacock—the Mi'kmaq were contained by whites in a structure of images that rendered them "a jumble of opposites." In the late eighteenth century, they were described by one writer as having copper-coloured skin, black hair, and black eyes, as well as being stout. In the next century, writers often saw people with similar physical attributes—copper-coloured skin and black hair, though sometimes with dark brown rather than black eyes. Yet, during the same period, other writers saw very different people. Moses Perley, for instance, described the Mi'kmaq community at Restigouche as one in which blue eyes and brown hair were increasingly common, as were individuals with skin so pale they could pass as white. We might wonder at the various shades of glasses these men wore as they peered out at Acadia's native peoples.

Many other contradictory images abounded throughout the period. From the 1840s onward, commissioners presented colonial legislatures with ambivalent assessments of the state of Mi'kmaq "civilization." At times they assured their colleagues that progress was slow but that it was certainly occurring, and at other times they reported that native peoples were absolutely resistant and that very little "civilization" had been achieved. Perley reported in 1841 that "the Indians have already by their own unaided exertions, and their constant inter-
course with the whites, made very considerable advances in civilization,5 while in 1861, Charnley informed his colleagues that the Mi'kmaq “seem destined to live a roving life, almost wholly dependent on charity.”54 Writers also contradicted one another in their analyses of what they perceived to be problems in the native community. Huyghe bemoaned the fact that native men had become drunks as a result of a lack of strong guidance and education from the white population, and the Acadian Recorder grumbled over the fact that each summer “small groups of Indian men and woman, in various stages of intoxication, bearing unfortunate squalid infants, and followed by half-starved dogs, were continually to be met in our streets.” Yet, during the same period, Haliburton defended the Mi'kmaq, saying white Cape Bretoners (with the exception of two communities) were more given to bouts of intoxication than their native contemporaries.55 Even within single works, writers often engaged in such contradiction, as in the case of a promotional book, Advice to Emigrants, that described Acadia’s aboriginal peoples as friendly, trustworthy, selfish, and dishonest.56 Gesner described them similarly, suggesting that “in all their negotiations there is little sincerity,” and yet, “they are now a harmless people and ... an honest people.”57 He also believed they were a people with an “unalienable right” to the land that providence had permitted whites to appropriate for the progress of humanity.58 The inability to perceive the Mi'kmaq as coherent historical agents was perhaps most sharply illustrated by various references to the native community that blurred its distinction from other communities of the colonized. In the eighteenth century, the Mi'kmaq were said to share common physical features with “every Indian in North America.”59 In the 1840s, and within the context of considering how the native population might be sufficiently assimilated, so as to bring “all distinctions between the different races [to] an end,” Moses Perley noted,

A recent writer on India maintains, that instruction in the arts is far more likely to effect the intellectual improvement of an uncivilized people, than scholastic education; and he says that it is an aphorism “that an improved plow is an excellent missionary, and a chest of Carpenter’s tools worth a dozen School masters,” because the value of education ... cannot be appreciated by the uneducated unless its connexion with material improvement be distinctly shewn. He says that a perception of the vast benefits of knowledge in a material point of view ... would in the natural course of things, introduce a higher order of civilization, and promote the cultivation of knowledge for its own sake.60

A letter published in the Christian Messenger in 1850 represented Mi’kmaq spoken English of the period as a form of near gibberish that sounded strikingly similar to contemporary depictions of other colo-
nized peoples: “No neber see me one man, all same like dat man.”61 For these men, it was obvious that the Mi'kmaq were not fundamentally distinguishable from other non-Europeans. “Uncivilized” peoples appear to have been uncivilized peoples—in appearance, language, and inclination—and their distinctiveness overwhelmingly lay in the counter-image they provided in respect to the British identity.

Despite the many voices that called for the entry of the Mi'kmaq into civilization, the drive toward a purity of identity negated the possibility. The indigenous population remained arrested at the peripheries of a re-created Acadia, and they were both experienced and perceived by whites as shadows. Like many humans who are relegated to the margins of social patterning, they were at times feared and at times endowed with magical qualities.62 In “The Song of the Micmac,” Joseph Howe asked (in the present tense),

Who can follow the Moose, or the wild Cariboo,
With a footstep as light and unwearied as he?
Who can bring down the Loon with an arrow so true,
Or paddle his bark o'er as stormy a sea?

And if the wild war whoop ascends on the gale,
Who can with the Micmac the Tomahawk wield?
Oh! when was he known in the combat to quail?
Whoe'er saw him fly from the red battle field.63

The Guardian echoed Howe’s fear of the Mi’kmaq when, in 1839, it reported that,

The spirit of revenge is still smothering in their bosoms and although they make their canoes, and their snowshoes, and their baskets . . . and are indebted to the inhabitants in whose neighbourhood they live for the sale of them it is only the lack of opportunity, or the settled conviction that their hostility in unavailing, which prevents that spirit from breaking forth in all the fury of its wonted cruelty.64

Writers also suggested that the Mi’kmaq were possessed of uncanny facilities, such as the ability to “travel seventy miles in a day without any apparent fatigue,” with feats such as this “often performed under heavy burdens, and without any kind of food.” It was also said that “the acuteness of the Indian is almost supernatural; he can follow an animal by indications imperceptible to even an American backwoodsman.”65 Campbell Hardy referred to this greater than human capacity for negotiating the wilderness in his Sporting Adventures, when he declared,

In creeping on moose, too, the Indian displays a thorough knowledge of the method of working the “yard,” which is incomprehend-
sible to the white man. . . . The powers of woodcraft in all its branches appear, in the Indian, to amount to an instinct not belonging to, and never capable of being attained by, the white man. 66

Although the British largely avoided interaction with these peripheral figures, in one critical respect they accepted the Mi’kmaq—indeed, welcomed their presence. There was a place in colonial society for the entertainment value that native culture provided by virtue of its marginal status—its “otherness”—since the fact of its marginality served to affirm British purity. There was a European tradition that incorporated the figure of the wild man into English pageantry (popular particularly in the sixteenth century) and it provides a useful context for considering the role ascribed to the Mi’kmaq in nineteenth-century Acadian public celebrations. In Europe, the wild man was historically absorbed within the notion of wilderness, and he was incorporated into public shows and royal entertainments in England as a figure representing the forces of nature controlled by the Crown. He was placed in relief, as it were, to the power of the monarch; and he appeared dressed variously in animal skins, oak leaves, or ivy. 67

Despite the fact that British colonials generally evaded contact with the Mi’kmaq of Acadia, they put substantial effort into securing a native presence in their parades. In anticipation of the arrival of the Prince of Wales in Halifax in 1860, the following appeal was placed in the Halifax Recorder:

The Committee for procuring Subscription and managing the affairs of the Indians in the Reception of the Prince of Wales, beg to solicit the contributions of Nova Scotians. The Indians are entirely destitute of suitable National Costume, and without the means to purchase material to make it. 68

Interestingly, the “national costume” of the Mi’kmaq during the period was often enhanced a little, as when Chief Louis-Benjamin Peminuit Paul and his wife were placed “in a gentleman’s carriage, decked with evergreens,” at the Halifax celebration of Queen Victoria’s wedding. 69 The image of the green-decked carriage is more than faintly reminiscent of the wild man of sixteenth-century English pageantry.

In literature, too, the “otherness” of the Mi’kmaq came to play a role in the nineteenth-century. They were, on occasion, created as “exotic set pieces” within narratives. In Mary Eliza Herbert’s 1859 novel, Belinda Dalton, for instance, the portrait of a nineteenth-century wedding was brought into sharp relief by the author’s insertion of a graphic account of the massacre of New England settlers by eighteenth century “savages.” As Leslie Monkman has pointed out, the massacre had no relationship to the story itself, and appeared as no
more than a "sensational digression." Native characters were also at times fabricated as instruments of self-criticism. Huygue's Argimou, for instance, employed Mi'kmaq characters to criticize colonial society, drawing on a tradition of primitivism that had been popular in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. European primitivism had concerned itself with the possibility of perfecting society, and native American cultures had been imaginatively explored for models on which a happier human community might be constructed. The actual character of these cultures mattered little, as they were imagined to be peopled with beautiful and virtuous "noble savages." The triumph of primitivist modes of critique was perhaps in their successful crossing of the Atlantic, and their re-emergence as American literary forms in a context that contained actual aboriginal peoples whose viability was undermined by colonial interests.

In Argimou, Huygue assumed the inevitability of the cultural destruction of the Mi'kmaq. Nonetheless, he extolled their precontact culture as virtuous and simplistic—qualities that contact with Europeans had eroded:

I love the Indian. Ere the white-man came  
And taught him vice, and infamy, and shame,  
His soul was noble. In the sun he saw  
His God, and worshipped him with trembling awe,  
Though rude his life, his bosom never beat  
With polished vices, or with dark deceit.

Although Huygue ultimately asserted that the British and the noble Mi'kmaq were absolutely incompatible at the level of society, he also believed that on a personal level Europeans could learn something about simplicity from interaction with native peoples. That it took until the nineteenth century for an Acadian writer like Huygue to adopt the primitivist mode of critique popular in Europe a century earlier might be explained from two perspectives. First, in their quest for identification with English culture, nineteenth-century British colonial writers tended to adopt outdated European literary forms; but second, and perhaps more importantly, Huygue's Argimou reflected the assurance with which he and his contemporaries regarded the gulf between colonial society and the Mi'kmaq.

Yi-Fu Tuan has argued that in Western culture, wilderness has generally been the object of a certain level of ambivalence. Although the reaction to wilderness has been primarily negative, it has often been viewed quite sentimentally when it has become less threatening, and when those peering out at it have considered themselves safely within the protection of civilization. Since Acadia's Mi'kmaq were regarded as part of the wilderness, it is likely that the tendency to become somewhat sentimental over them and their culture at a moment
in time when the native population was approaching extinction was a product also of this sort of attitude toward landscape.

In the attempt to sustain a sense of continuity of place, British colonials imagined—and endeavoured to create—Acadia in the image of the Old World. Those human beings who inhabited the real Acadia were displaced to the peripheries of the colonial re-creation, for as Tuan has noted, “purity . . . requires protection. Fences must be built and guards hired to keep the sacred places pure.” The Mi’kmaq remained far from view save for when the colonials sought to relieve a nebulous sense of transgression or when they wished to remind themselves of their European identity. The boundaries they constructed between the two communities were highly effective in allowing the British to believe they and their society were culturally pure.

When a delegation of chiefs arrived in Halifax in 1849, the local press afforded some attention to these men whose parents and grandparents had been interacting with those of the British for a century and a half. They were described as “novel and interesting.”

One might think they were speaking of strangers.

Notes

1. PANS, RG1, vol. 209, October 1, 1749; Miller, “The Decline of the Nova Scotia Micmac,” 109–110; Reid, Six Crucial Decades, 37; Guillemin, Urban Renegades, 52. How many bounties were claimed remains somewhat uncertain. Miller says there was only one instance of such a claim, but records of the Nova Scotia Council show that on April 15, 1753, John Conner and James Grace arrived in Halifax harbour with six scalps between them. See Haliburton, An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia, 154.

2. MacNutt, The Making of the Maritime Provinces, 15. MacNutt notes that the granting of the island to absentee proprietors had been an experimental measure on the part of the British government, aimed at staving off potential difficulties similar to those that were occurring in the increasingly rebellious American colonies. The presence of a “landed aristocracy” was considered to be a possible safeguard in this context.


4. Burtis, New Brunswick as A Home for Emigrants, 30. Monro, New Brunswick, 377, noted: “Here every man possesses a high degree of independence; so much so that, especially among the native born, all aim at being masters; few are willing to remain servants, and none think of continuing in that capacity for more than one or two years.”


34. This was the first permanent British settlement in Acadia, as well as the first colony that Britain established as part of public policy. See MacNutt, *The Making of the Maritime Provinces*, 7; MacNutt, *The Atlantic Provinces*, 53-54; Upton, *Micmacs and Colonists*, 47; Naylor, *Canada in the European Age*, 137.

35. Thomas Akins, in *History of Halifax City*, noted that an unnamed British periodical referred in October of 1749 to a Halifax settler's report, "We have received the like promise of friendship and assistance from the Indians" (12). In his *History of Nova Scotia or Acadia*, Beamish Murdoch referred to a letter written by one of the early Halifax settlers in which he informed relatives in England that "when we first came here, the Indians, in a friendly manner, brought us lobsters and other fish in plenty, being satisfied for them by a bit of bread and some meat" (vol. 2, 185). Cf. Miller, "The Decline of the Nova Scotia Micmac," 109.


43. See Kaplan, "Historical Efforts to Encourage Indian-White Intermarriage," 128.

44. Ibid.

45. Gesner, *New Brunswick*, 113. The ease with which the early French and Mi'kmaq married or entered into amorous affairs with one another is considered in chapter four. We might note here, however, that under Louis XIV, French settlers were encouraged to "dispose them [native Americans] to come and settle them in community with the French," and to take native American spouses "in order that . . . they may form only one people and one blood." See Nash, *Red, White and Black*, 105. The French Minister of Marine, in 1713, suggested, "The French and Indians of Acadia must look up to the Sun and the Stars from the same land; they must stand shoulder to shoulder on the battlefield . . . live together in peace and harmony, and when the time comes, sleep side by side beneath the same sod of their common country." Minister of Marine to Baron de St. Castin, April 8, 1713, MGI, series 2, B series, transcripts, 35: 3, 188-189, PAC, cited in Upton, *Micmacs and Colonists*, 32.

46. Joel Martin's discussion of gifts in respect to the relationship between the United States government and the nineteenth-century Muskogee community is useful for comparison. Martin argues that white America "was determined to force on the Muskogees an ideology that not only repressed the logic of gifts and the egalitarian society
that it nurtured but also asserted that the Muskogees could become 'civilized' only by becoming identical to Anglo-Americans" [Sacred Revolt, 84].

47. Letter of Wentworth to Monk, October 18, 1793, PAC Monk Papers, 295-298, quoted in Upton, Micmacs and Colonists, 83.


49. Upton, Micmacs and Colonists, 54.


53. Patterson, The Canadian Indian, 117.


55. Huyghe, Argimou, 4. The Halifax newspaper is quoted in Upton, Micmacs and Colonists, 131. Haliburton, An Historical and Statistical Account, 250. Haliburton noted, "intoxication is not general, a fact that cannot be affirmed of the population of Cape Breton generally, whose chief enjoyment appears to be derived from the latter source, with the honorable exception of the St. Ann's settlers, and in some measure of the French."

56. Atkinson's Advice to Emigrants is cited in Upton, Micmacs and Colonists, 137.


58. Gesner, New Brunswick, 2: "their final release of the land of their forefathers, and their almost utter annihilation, are among those momentous events permitted by Providence for the extension of human industry and happiness... it is [our] bounden duty... to lessen their pains, and to bring into peace and contentment the Remnants of the tribes [we] have dispossessed of their unalienable rights."

59. Hollingsworth, The Present State of Nova Scotia, 76. Hollingsworth was pointing to a common colonial perception of non-Europeans.


61. From a letter to the missionary Silas Rand, printed in the Christian Messenger, October 25, 1850. Cf. Upton, Micmacs and Colonists, 131. We might compare this with Haliburton's attempt at representing African Canadian speech during the same period: "only tink old Scippy see you once more. ... How's Massy Sy, and Missy Sy. ... Oh I do lub em all." See Winks, The Blacks in Canada, 295.

62. Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, 26, noted, "An individual or group that does not have an immediate right, by birth or through socially acquired attributes, to enter a particular house... is in a state of isolation. This isolation has two aspects, which may be found separately or in combination: such a person is weak, because he is outside a given group or society, but he is also strong because he is in the sacred realm with respect to the group's members... In consequence, some people kill, strip, and mistreat a stranger without ceremony, while others fear him... For a great many peoples a stranger is... endowed with magico-religious powers."

63. Lochhead and Souster, 100 Poems of Nineteenth Century Canada, 2.
64. The Guardian, January 30, 1839, quoted in Upton, Micmacs and Colonists, 138. This tendency among colonizers to vilify those who are displaced and abused by the colonial process is considered by Michael Taussig, in Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man, 217. Taussig refers to a work entitled Voodoo in Haiti, in which Alfred Metraux suggests, "Man is never cruel with impunity; the anxiety which grows in the minds of those who abuse power often takes the form of imaginary terrors and demented obsessions. The master maltreated his slave, but feared his hatred. He treated him like a beast of burden but dreaded the occult powers which he imputed to him. And the greater the subjugation of the black, the more he inspired fear" [15].


66. Hardy, Sporting Adventures, 36-37.

67. See White, "The Forms of Wildness," 7. Cf. Vaughan and Vaughan, Shakespeare's Caliban, 65-66: "Wildmen shot fireworks on the Thames during Anne Boleyn's 1533 coronation procession and frequently appeared in entertainments for Queen Elizabeth. In spectacles designed to celebrate the monarch's power, wisdom, and beauty, the wild man represented the natural forces she controlled. Her civilizing presence could tame the savage beast, just as her armies could tame the wilderness and her scamen could tame Spain's fleets." Robert Withington noted in the early part of this century that the figure of the wild man was a common participant in sixteenth-century drama and seventeenth-century Lord Mayor's shows in London. He was "dressed up to excite the interest which is provoked by a combination of terror and amusement" (English Pageantry: An Historical Outline, 72-74). For a description of the wild man's attire in public shows, see Strutt, The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England, 203.


71. See Pearce, Savagism and Civilization, 136, 138. Henri Baudet provides an excellent and extensive discussion of the development of the noble savage in the European imagination, in Paradise on Earth. He notes, for example, that in the eighteenth century, "the good savage was regarded not so much as a wholly 'noble' creature . . . as instead the absolute criterion, a perfect example to be emulated" (43). Interestingly, the tradition of primitivism continues even today in "hobby clubs" of some European countries such as Germany, Italy, and Poland.

72. Pearce noted that in the American transcendentalist tradition, the destruction of aboriginal culture was regarded as inevitable, while, at the same time, the "natural life" of native peoples remained something to be upheld as valuable (Savagism and Civilization, 136, 147).

73. Huyghe, Argimou, 1.

74. Huyghe, Argimou, vi.

75. See Cogswell, "Literary Activity in the Maritime Provinces," 104.

76. Tuan, Man and Nature, 34.

77. Tuan, "Sacred Space," 92.

78. Acadian Recorder, February 24, 1849, quoted in Whitehead, The Old Man Told Us, 239.