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ABSTRACT

Universal concepts and globalization in literature has created new areas of literary studying. American Indian's literature has a great deep root which its traces can be followed in modern and postmodern American literature. Although most of the American Indians' oral literature and their universal concepts have not recorded, there are many literary evidences that their culture, rites and ceremonies have extensive influence on the American culture, literature and globalization of literature and has created a kind of multicultural literature that reflects universal concept and globalization which can be studied based on new historical criticism.

Keywords: American Indians- Literary Globalization- Universal Concept- Oral Literature- American Literature-New historicism

1. Introduction

The term *Indian* is based on Christopher Columbus's mistaken belief that he had reached the West Indies, and many people object to it on those grounds; it also has a history of being used derogatorily. *Native American* came into use a few decades ago as a remedy, but it raises objections as yet another example of an enforced label. The primary questions are as follows: Should Native American Literature be defined, categorized, and analyzed in the same way as other literature? Are there linguistic and cultural differences which influence interpretation? What does the term Native American Literature mean?

In the first place, as one expects, English literature is written in the English language. Is, then, American Indian literature written in the American Indian language? No, it is not. There is no American Indian language in the same sense that there is an English language. The languages of the Native Americans include more than fifty language families and hundreds of distinct languages. These Indian languages of different family groups are not mutually intelligible. Geographic proximity and even cultural similarity does not necessarily correspond to linguistic affiliation.

American Indian oral tradition and teachings are used to transmit culture and preserve the history of American Indians. The study of American Indian oral tradition will assist students and critics in understanding the culture and recognizing the importance of oral traditions and literature. American Indian oral traditions, which include storytelling, teachings, family and tribal history as well as contemporary Indian literature, lie at the heart of tribal culture. It is largely through oral tradition that American Indian cultures have been preserved and transmitted through the generations. American Indian stories, teachings and oral histories are rich in cultural context. They provide great insight into the world view, values and lifestyle which are an integral part of the heritage of American Indians. For American Indians, the oral traditions must be treated with respect.

The oral literatures passed down to American Indians by their ancestors are very important because they express what American Indians value and believe. In addition, the stories help people to understand the meaning of their existence, and the existence of other things in the world. From these oral literatures, young children learn how

people came to be; they receive explanations of why things are the way they are and instructions on how to live properly. American Indian oral literatures should not be trivialized by referring to them as myths, tall tales or fables.

American Indian oral tradition expresses the truths, wisdom and humor of human existence. The themes are universal. Oral literature and tradition tell how the Earth was created. There is much for all students to learn from the oral tradition of American Indians. American Indian Literature is coming to mean, for most people, the works of literature written in English by Native American authors. Novels by Native American authors are different from one another in some ways. Each novel presents a very specific view of a very specific place. Physical setting and cultural setting are extremely important in understanding the story. Even though there are unmistakably unique characteristics, there are also similarities. A number of the well-known novels by Native American authors are built around the common theme of alienation and cultural conflict. Novels in this category have characteristics of the "initiation story." The cultural conflict is revealed and described, but seldom solved. At best, the hero learns to accept his fate and at worst, he dies.

2. Postmodernism in American Literature

While few scholars and critics are likely to dispute the significance of Postmodernism in contemporary American literature and culture, it remains a vexed term about which there is much debate. Some critics argue for a temporal definition: Postmodernism is the art and literature that come after Modernism, both extending and reacting to the principles that infused that movement. More useful definitions of Postmodernism are those that describe it in terms of a set of philosophical assumptions and approaches to art and culture. One of the most influential of these definitions is that by Jean-Francois Lyotard in *La Condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir* (1979; translated as *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, 1984). Lyotard says that the basic premise of Postmodernism is a lack of belief in the overarching, all-encompassing explanations that he calls "metanarratives"; this stance maintains that there can be no **absolute truth**. Other critics conceptualize Postmodernism in political and economic terms. In his influential *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) Fredric Jameson argues that Postmodernism describes the kind of cultural artifacts that are created in "late capitalism," a period characterized by multinational and multicultural corporations and mass consumption. Consumer culture and the "Information Age," according to Jameson, have created a superabundance of disconnected images and styles, resulting in a sense of fragmentation and depthlessness. Art reflects that commodification, blurring and even erasing the distinction between "high" art and popular culture. The Postmodernist skepticism regarding grand narratives and ideas of progress, rationality, and scientific objectivity grows in part out of the fact that those ideas historically failed to take cultural differences into account. Until well into the 1990s, however, most criticism treated Postmodernism and multiculturalism as parallel but separate manifestations of contemporary American literature.

3. Indian Oral Literature and its Influence on American Literature

We are now aware of the wealth of oral literary traditions already existing on the continent among the numerous different Native American groups. Nineteenth-century Native American literature is a literature of transition, the bridge between an oral tradition that flourished for centuries before the arrival of Europeans and the emergence of contemporary fiction in the 1960s, known as the Native American Renaissance. Unlike the preceding oral tradition, nineteenth-century Native American literature was increasingly text-based and composed in English, the result of missionary schools that taught Indians the skills believed necessary to assimilate into white society. Nineteenth-century Native American authors employed Euro-American literary genres like autobiography and the novel, often combining them with traditional narratives like the trickster tale or creation myth to create hybrid forms. Although the early texts exhibit the struggle of Indian authors to find a voice within American culture, they foreshadow elements of later Native American literature such as the refutation of stereotypical depictions of Indians all too common in American literature.

All Native Americans felt the impact of the new reservation policies, which sought to isolate and contain Indians to make room for an expanding American nation. At the same time that Native Americans were being excluded from the nation, white Americans began to look to them as the source of a unique national identity and literature, distinct from European traditions. Literature from the period depicting Indian characters was incredibly popular, and many works are still celebrated as classics, including James Fennimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826),

Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* (1827), and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* (1855), to name only a few. These texts employ the trope of the "disappearing Indian," which represents the deaths of Indians as natural, similar to the changing of the seasons or the setting of the sun, rather than the result of political exclusion or social discrimination. Thus the disappearance of Indians from the American social landscape was not only depicted within this body of writing but also *implicitly approved of*.

Representations of American Indians in nineteenth-century American literature were seldom culturally relative. Instead, the author often encoded in the American Indian caricature ("caricature" because these are rarely well-developed *characters*) his or her assumptions based on racial stereotypes, making the caricature a metonym for all American Indians.

For example, Mark Twain's menacing Injun Joe in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is commonly referred to in the narrative by pejorative racial terms such as "that murdering half-breed." When Joe kills the body-thieving doctor in the cemetery, he makes the following revealing assertion: "Five year ago you drove me away from your father's kitchen one night, when I come to ask for something to eat, and you said I warn't there for any good; and when I swore I'd get even with you if it took a hundred years, your father had me jailed for a vagrant. Did you think I'd forget? That Injun blood ain't in me for nothing. And now I've got you, and you've got to *settle*, you know!" (75) Instead of simply acting as the evil antagonist of the narrative, Injun Joe calls on his "race" as the reason why he performs evil deeds. Through Joe's caricaturization, Twain manipulates the common nineteenth-century stereotype that Indians have an overly developed sense of vengeance, which they are eager to wreak at any possible moment. Through these narrative techniques, Injun Joe became a standard by which many nineteenth-century Indians were measured. Twain failed to substantiate a more "realistic" view of Native Americans; instead, he demonized Native Americans by making them reflect only the negative traits. Ironically, even though he maintained vehement criticism against Cooper's unrealistic narratives, Twain reinscribed similar patterns.

Not everyone enthusiastically accepted Cooper's representations of American Indians. From 1870 to his death in 1910, Mark Twain developed several texts which challenged Cooper's Native Americans. His argument was basically one of genre distinctions, for Twain, a staunch Realist, reacted against Cooper's popular Romanticism that also marked the hated Sir Walter Scott texts that Twain parodied in works like *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

Ever since westward expansion and the rapid decimation of Native Americans in the nineteenth century, an interesting phenomenon has occurred in terms of American society's approach to Native American culture. A loose movement of people embraced Native American "spirituality" as a solution for what was wrong in society. Some individuals equated Native Americans with Nature that was threatened by industrialism's rise. Because the Indian's political and societal structure was alien to the individuals, they assumed that the Indian did not possess these structures, and therefore was not inhibited by them. The Native American possessed the "freedom" that the individuals were denied within the stringent mores of civilization; the Indian became a metaphor for the individuals' desire.

Cooper has long been hailed by literary critics as creating one of the most enduring images of the Native American in American literature. In *The Indian in American Literature*, Albert Keiser states that "the writer who more than anyone else impressed his conception of the Indian upon America and the world at large is James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851), in eleven of whose books the red man plays a prominent part" (101). These eleven books are the five Leatherstocking Tales, *The Chainbearer*, *The Oak Openings*, *The Redskins*, *Satanstoe*, *The Wept of Wish-ton-wish*, and *Wyandotte*. While Cooper's Indians undeniably made an important impact on American fiction, they have been the subject of much literary debate. In *Savagism and Civilization*, Roy Pearce states, "Cooper was interested in the Indian not for his own sake but for the sake of his relationship to the civilized men who were destroying him. So far as we can tell, Cooper had little personal contact with Indians. In fact, Cooper told his friend Sir Charles Augustus Murray, 'I never was among the Indians. All I know of them is from reading, and from hearing my father speak of them'" (qtd. in Pearce 200)

Faulkner was fascinated with indigenous storytelling traditions and grew to love the area for its dense forests, which seemed to him to represent Indian culture. He was particularly enthralled by the story of Jack's sickly infancy, when Indians helped to get him well enough to hunt by feeding him "bear gravy" (234-5). Faulkner intended to create just such a "Golden Book" of Yoknapatawpha, which would outline the county's origins in American Indian societies. Faulkner planned to collect several Indian stories that he had already written and to include some new ones, ultimately tracing the history of Jefferson, the town based on Oxford in his works, back through the history of the Indians who lived there originally (1187). Faulkner reveals Indians' importance to his conceptions of his Mississippi world and its history. Ultimately, Faulkner's stories illuminate a broader reality in American literature, that of diverse

cultures in contact on the American frontier, a theme in which boundaries among races, as well as between nature and civilization, become blurred. Many critics, including Galloway, take issue with Faulkner's Indians because they are not modeled on actual people that Faulkner knew:

. . . his Indians are constructions, stage properties, not modified portraits of real individuals or individual types whom he knew personally and cared for, as was the case with many of his white and black characters. In Faulkner's Mississippi there were very few identifiable Indians, and his approach to portraying them was an amalgam of received stereotypes and modernist orientalism. (13)

4. Conclusion

In Elias Boudinot's speech "Address to the Whites" (1826), he describes the accomplishments of the Cherokee people, proudly boasting of their civil society, religious devotion and oral literature. He concludes the speech, however, by acknowledging that the survival of the Cherokee rests little with that oral literature of this people and instead is determined by white America.

The importance of influence of American Indian's oral literature, culture and symbols in American modern and postmodern literature cannot be neglected. As Vizenor writes, "Native American Indian identities are created in stories, and the names are essential to a distinctive personal nature, but memories, visions, and the shadows of heard stories are the paramount verities of a tribal presence. . . . Tribal consciousness would be a minimal existence without active choices, the choices that are heard in stories and mediated in names; otherwise, tribal identities might be read as mere simulations of remembrance." Language and narrative have tremendous power to create community. Indeed, it may be that the People may not have life outside of stories, their existence contingent upon the telling and hearing of communal stories. Faulkner, Morrison and other great American writers mostly used and alluded to American Indian names, traditions and oral literature.

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