

"A PARCEL OF WHELPS"

Alexander Mackenzie among the Indians

Parker Duchemin

ALEXANDER MACKENZIE'S FAMOUS VOYAGES of exploration in 1789 and 1793, in search of a commercial route to the Pacific Ocean, are part of the education of every school-child in Canada.¹ His account of these adventures, entitled *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Laurence, through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans*, was an immediate success when it was published in London in 1801. It gained its author a knighthood, went through many new editions in England and America, and was quickly translated into French and German. More recently, it has been admitted to the canon of Canadian literature, in company with several other important exploration narratives, and already a body of critical literature has taken shape around it.

Two main themes have dominated the critical discussion of what is called "exploration literature" in Canada: the encounter of the European mind with the Canadian landscape, and the heroism, or supposed heroism, of the individual explorer's "quest." Explorers are doubly heroic in the eyes of critics: both as historical figures, and as protagonists in their own books. The heroic point of view on Mackenzie was expressed most vividly by Roy Daniells, who saw this North West Company fur trader both as Jason, "the adventurous far-seeker," and as

a veritable Odysseus in the skill and craft of his voyaging and his ability to endure and survive; doing better than Odysseus, in that he never lost a man, or forfeited a loyalty or harmed an Indian. Every sordid aspect of the trade withers away out of the picture; the commercial and imperial motives retire into the wings; Mackenzie's return to Athabasca is like the clasping of a necklace strung with the real and shining jewels of courage, hope, resourcefulness and fair dealing.²

It is interesting to reflect on the role of literary criticism in Canada which has made it possible to inflate commercial ventures like Mackenzie's to such Homeric proportions. Despite these high claims, however, there has been almost no serious attempt on the part of critics or historians to analyze Mackenzie's relationship with

the Indians he encountered on his journey.³ Yet this relationship is one of the most important aspects of his narrative. Mackenzie was the first European to establish contact with many of the Indians in the regions he explored, and he left an extensive record of these encounters. His *Voyages from Montreal* played an important part in forming the public image of these peoples, both in Canada and abroad, an image which continues even to the present time.

My essay, therefore, will focus on this oddly neglected aspect of Mackenzie's writing. Because of the form usually taken by explorers' narratives, it is divided in two parts: the first examines his encounters with the Indians and his method of representing these encounters to us, and the second analyzes his attempts to describe and classify their various cultures. This division is somewhat arbitrary, since Mackenzie freely mingles his descriptions with his narrative of action, but it allows us better to understand the context of his mingled roles of explorer, trader, and writer, and to see the influences which shaped his statements about the Indians. *Voyages from Montreal* is part of a widespread and brilliantly self-validating discourse about native peoples which served the interests of the European colonial powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is also, we must remember, a narrative of action in the "real" world and part of a historical process which has had real and bitter consequences for the native people of Canada.

Voyages from Montreal was based entirely on Mackenzie's journals, with the exception of a "General History of the Fur Trade," which is thought to have been written by his cousin Roderic. In preparing his manuscript for the press, he sought the help of William Combe, editor of several other important British exploration narratives.⁴ Combe polished Mackenzie's prose and improved his fluency, but wherever possible retained the wording of his original journals. This essay will treat the text as if Mackenzie, by approving the changes, were responsible for the printed words in the final version.⁵ The complex relationship between author and editor must be borne in mind, however, and on occasions where it has been possible to compare Mackenzie's manuscript with the printed version, this has been done. Whatever different shades of meaning Combe's changes may have contributed to *Voyages from Montreal*, they do not diminish its value as a cultural document.

I. Encounter

MACKENZIE'S FIRST ATTEMPT to reach the Pacific Ocean from Lake Athabasca in 1789 was a failure. Accompanied by a small party of voyageurs and native hunters, he travelled by canoe down Dehcho (known to most Canadians today as the Mackenzie River) through Denendeh, homeland of the

Dene nation for thousands of years, to the shores of the Arctic Ocean. He encountered different family bands and "tribes" every day, and frequently several times a day.⁶ These included various groups known to the English as Chipewyan, Yellowknife, Dogrib, Slavey, Mountain, and Kutchin. Mackenzie was the first white man that many of them had ever seen, and although they already possessed a variety of European trade goods, they were initially quite fearful of him and his party.

On his second expedition, in 1793, he succeeded in reaching the Pacific and returning in a single season, accompanied by seven voyageurs and two native hunters and interpreters. On the eastern side of the mountains, he travelled over land inhabited from ancient times by the Beaver, already active in the fur trade, and the Sekani; in the mountain regions, he traversed the country of the Salish, the Shuswap, and the Carriers; and finally on the coast, he found himself among the Bella Coola and the Bella Bella. Most of these people were not yet familiar with white men, but they had heard about them and had already acquired some European trade goods. Mackenzie's relationships with them were significantly more complicated than before. They were present in larger numbers, exhibited greater initial hostility, and, on the whole, appeared less easy to intimidate than the Dene. The inability of his interpreters to understand their languages led to more frequent misunderstandings.

Mackenzie needed to establish peaceful relationships with all these peoples. Like most explorers, he tried to gain their confidence by distributing gifts, tempting samples of the traders' wares, and by promising lavish benefits which would come to them in the future if they helped him. As a fur trader, he also needed to gain as much information as possible about their customs, their material needs, and the state of their technology. Armed with this knowledge, future traders could supply their wants and needs more efficiently. In the process, this would create new wants and needs, and lead increasingly to dependency on British manufacturers, and their suppliers.⁷ The large trading companies, with their headquarters in Montreal and London, could begin to formulate policies of management and control. The accumulation of knowledge was everywhere an essential element in the domination of the "subject races" by the European imperial powers, and their agents, the traders.⁸

Like most of the early explorers, however, Mackenzie was more dependent on the Indians than he was usually willing to acknowledge. On both expeditions he had to rely on them continually as guides, interpreters, and suppliers of food. In the mountains and the coastal regions, messengers from each village went before him to assure their neighbours that his party was not hostile. From village to village, they conducted him along their ancient trading routes. The success of his expeditions depended mainly on the goodwill of the local inhabitants, who greatly outnumbered him wherever he went. His situation was frequently precarious, but

he was confident that, as a European and hence the representative of “civilized” men among the “savages,” it was his duty to establish his authority over these peoples.⁹

While philosophers could debate the merits of natural man and the “savage” way of life, to most explorers and settlers the superiority of European civilization, and hence of white men, was a self-evident truth which was rarely questioned. Theories of the noble savage in the eighteenth century, concocted for the most part by European philosophers and men of letters with little first-hand knowledge of the Indians, rarely survived for long in the so-called “New World,” except in a literary context.¹⁰ From the initial period of contact, the fundamental assumption in dealing with the Indians was the idea of European superiority. “It can be argued,” writes Edward Said, “that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures.”¹¹ Eighteenth-century theories of social progress held that while human nature remained everywhere the same, mankind advanced historically through different levels of savagery and barbarism, from hunter, to shepherd, to farmer, until at last it attained the pinnacle of development, which was, of course, civilization — represented in its highest stage by modern Europe and its inhabitants.¹² These levels of development were seen as analogous to the main phases in the life cycle of an individual human, from childhood, youth, and maturity, to old age. It was widely agreed that the most immature phase in the development of mankind as a whole was represented by hunting societies like those of the North American Indians. The theory gave shape and meaning to the observations of explorers and travellers, which in turn strengthened the theory. From this firm “knowledge” of their superiority, derived the justification for their claims to authority over the Indians.

The Indians were hence intellectually relegated to the infancy of the human race, and expected to submit to the wisdom of their elders, the Europeans, who obviously knew what was best for them. The habit of addressing them as children, which resulted from this situation, persisted in treaties and speeches from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Throughout his narrative, Mackenzie employs the traditional language for dealing with natives. On the Peace River, for example, at the beginning of his second journey, he camps among a band of Eastern Beaver Indians who had, as he viewed it, misbehaved:

My tent was no sooner pitched, than I summoned the Indians together. . . . As they had been very troublesome to my predecessor, I informed them that I had heard of their misconduct, and was come among them to inquire into the truth of it. I added also that it would be an established rule with me to treat them with kindness, if their behaviour should be such as to deserve it; but, at the same time, that I should be

equally severe if they failed in those returns which I had a right to expect from them. I then presented them with a quantity of rum, which I recommended to be used with discretion. . . . They, in return, made me the fairest promises; and, having expressed the pride they felt on beholding me in their country, took their leave. (243)

Mackenzie speaks with the voice of a stern but impartial father, assuming his right to summon the Indians, to inquire into their misconduct, to administer rewards and punishments, to be kind or severe as he sees fit. They respond, as he reports the incident, like dependent children who have received a well-deserved chiding, accepting the admonitions of their self-appointed father with “the fairest promises” of good behaviour in the future. It is impossible to miss the notes of mingled pleasure and self-congratulation in this exercise of his imagined authority over them. What these people really thought about his speech, or how great was their “pride” at finding him in their country, may only be surmised, but it is probable that they carefully disguised their true feelings. They had been active in the fur trade for many years, and were by now thoroughly familiar with the language of white paternalism. Recent scholarship has proved that the Indians were by no means passive or unthinking dupes who quickly surrendered their independence to the traders.¹³ Acquiescence was a game they were willing to play, if it seemed to satisfy the white men’s demands, and would advance their own interest.

TO ESTABLISH HIS AUTHORITY, Mackenzie set about trying to impress the newly encountered Indian nations with the “superiority” of white men. This was not only to ensure the success of his own mission, but to reinforce the whole trading and colonizing effort which had been undertaken by his society. There was remarkable solidarity among the British traders and explorers on this issue. Having defined their relationship with the Indians, and set its terms, the problem for the white men was to convince the Indians to see it in the same way as they did. First impressions were important. As a European, Mackenzie had the upper hand by virtue of his technology, and he needed to keep the odds of power in his favour. When a Carrier Indian raised doubts about his god-like omniscience on the second journey, he realized that an important principle was at stake, and he formulated his answer carefully. He had been interrogating them for the second day about his route, when, he wrote,

I was very much surprised by the following question from one of the Indians: “What,” demanded he, “can be the reason that you are so particular and anxious in your inquiries of us respecting a knowledge of this country: do not you white men

know every thing in the world?" This interrogatory was so very unexpected, that it occasioned some hesitation before I could answer it. At length, however, I replied, that we certainly were acquainted with the principal circumstances of every part of the world; that I knew where the sea is, and where I myself then was, but that I did not exactly understand what obstacles might interrupt me in getting to it; with which, he and his relations must be well acquainted, as they had so frequently surmounted them. Thus I fortunately preserved the impression in their minds, of the superiority of white people over themselves. (323)

Mackenzie's reply was very much to his own satisfaction, and, no doubt, it pleased most of his British or European readers in 1801. This Indian and his friends, he assumed, accepted his claim to superiority without question. The essential thing for the white man was to be — or to appear to be — master of the situation.

As new nations were encountered, Mackenzie's authority had to be established over and over again. A charade of white omniscience and omnipotence was therefore played and replayed for the benefit of the Indians. Samuel Hearne had written that it was "absolutely necessary . . . [to] profess something a little supernatural to be able to deal with those people."¹⁴ Like many an explorer, Mackenzie found that the talismanic value of his scientific instruments helped to create an impression of awe, and they were therefore demonstrated to the Indians as signs of his shamanic or magical powers (378). This act contained an implied threat which the natives could not miss: the powers could obviously be used against them. Fear of iron, much to Mackenzie's joy, helped to speed him on his way among the coastal nations, because they were afraid that the salmon would be frightened away (366, 369-70). When a few articles were stolen by Carrier Indians with whom he was anxious to avoid a quarrel, he told them, "without any appearance of anger," of the white men's strange and threatening ability to control the forces of nature:

they had no idea of the mischief that would result to them from taking our property. I gravely added that the salmon, which was not only their favourite food, but absolutely necessary to their existence, came from the sea which belonged to us white men; and that as, at the entrance of the river, we could prevent those fish from coming up it, we possessed the power to starve them and their children. To avoid our anger, therefore, they must return all the articles that had been stolen from us. This finesse succeeded. Messengers were dispatched to order the restoration of every [item] that had been taken. (397)

Mackenzie's bold lie restored him to complete mastery of the situation, and he departed, with the Indians, who had no reason to doubt his claims, begging his forgiveness.

Demonstrating firearms at a dramatically chosen moment was one of the most effective means by which European explorers established their initial authority over native peoples. Very quickly during the first voyage Mackenzie discovered the effect of terror it created (206-07, 215). Among nations unfamiliar with fire-

arms he seemed to have unleashed a supernatural force. To those who understood the nature of these weapons, he had declared the brute reality of his superior technology. Mackenzie was well aware of the strategic advantage he enjoyed. A brief encounter in the second journey, with a remote nation of Carriers, shows with what skill and deliberation he played his hand:

I distributed a few presents among them, and left my guides to explain to them the object of my journey, and the friendliness of my designs, with which they had themselves been made acquainted; their fears being at length removed, I gave them a specimen of the use to which we applied our fire-arms: at the same time, I calmed their astonishment, by the assurance, that, though we could at once destroy those who did us injury, we could equally protect those who shewed us kindness. Our stay here did not exceed half an hour, and we left these people with favourable impressions of us. (317-18)

In this passage, Mackenzie's gifts and professions of friendship are reinforced with a thinly veiled warning: co-operate and we will protect you, resist and you will be destroyed. The bitter pill of domination is sweetened by an appearance of benevolence. Certainly, he had created a powerful impression in that brief half hour, but how favourably it was received must be open to doubt. Mackenzie seems to have had a well-developed capacity for self-flattery in his relations with the Indians. The real meaning of these tactics can scarcely have been lost on his audience, who could understand as well as anyone the implications of power politics.

The equivocal sense in which the Indians accepted Mackenzie's assumed superiority and authority is suggested when a newly acquired Sekani guide, from a band which had never before encountered white men, was encouraged "to maintain his fidelity to me, and not to desert in the night," as so many others had done. Flatteringly the Sekani replied: "How is it possible for me to leave the lodge of the Great Spirit! — When he tells me that he has no further occasion for me, I will then return to my children" (293). They had to take turns watching him, however, and he fled at the first opportunity, a few nights later (303). Perhaps he did believe that Mackenzie was endowed with magical or supernatural strength. Nevertheless, acceptance of the white man's authority was a role which had been thrust upon him, and which he played until he could most conveniently manage an exit.

Mackenzie's attempts to accomplish his ends by what might be called the technique of mastery required that he reveal no weakness and make no compromise. A less imperious method of dealing with the Indians, like that practised by David Thompson, his younger contemporary, would have required a more refined understanding of their way of life than Mackenzie possessed. Like many another explorer, he developed a bold method for gaining the upper hand. Mastering his own fear, he approached them with an air of complete confidence, making stylized gestures of friendship, and doing his best to ignore their signs of defiance. When this

had the effect, as it usually did, of restoring calm to the situation, he distributed "trinkets" to the adults and sometimes "treated the children with sugar" (314).

His method required, at times, great personal discipline and courage, in attempting to convey an appearance of confidence in his own safety which he did not always possess. On one occasion it had to be reinforced by means of a sniper carefully hidden in the woods (313). Mackenzie "knew," however, that he was superior to these "savages," both culturally and materially, and this "knowledge" enabled him to play his role with greater conviction. His scorn for what he called their "outrageous antics" is revealed in the language of his descriptions (285-89; 307-08; 312-16; 317-19). The effect of his performance was to establish himself, psychologically, as their master in the negotiations which followed. The Indians, who were also playing a role to disguise their fears, had been out-bluffed, and they accepted the relationship on Mackenzie's terms for the time being.

Mackenzie treated all cases of theft as a direct challenge to his authority, and in dealing with them he refused to compromise. Some of the acts which the explorers interpreted as theft resulted from a conflict in attitude between the white men, with their concept of private property, and the natives, who shared many things in common, and for whom trade took place in a complex social and ceremonial context of gift exchange.¹⁵ On the West Coast this problem was compounded by the white men's unfamiliarity with customs of the potlatch.¹⁶ Mackenzie had learned about the nature of gift exchanges from his work among the Cree and the Chipewyan, peoples with a long history in the fur trade and considerable knowledge of the white men's habits. Among the very different cultures of the West Coast he began to run into unexpected difficulties.

IN AN IMPORTANT EPISODE at a Bella Coola village, Mackenzie had been generously welcomed by the chief, feasted and supplied with food for his journey. At the moment he was about to depart, however, an axe was found to be missing.

I immediately applied to the chief, and requested its restoration; but he would not understand me till I sat myself down on a stone, with my arms in a state of preparation, and made it appear to him that I should not depart till the stolen article was restored. The village was immediately in a state of uproar, and some danger was apprehended from the confusion that prevailed in it. The axe, however, which had been hidden under the chief's canoe, was soon returned. Though this instrument was not, in itself, of sufficient value to justify a dispute with these people, I apprehended that the suffering them to keep it, after we had declared its loss, might have occasioned the loss of every thing we carried with us, and of our lives also. My people

[his French-Canadian voyageurs] were dissatisfied with me at the moment; but I thought myself right then, and, I think now, that the circumstances in which we were involved, justified the measure which I adopted. (370)

In the view of the Bella Coola, Mackenzie may not have presented them with gifts in sufficient quantity or quality to repay their hospitality or to satisfy their sophisticated code of gift exchange. Mackenzie saw the theft as a challenge, however, and he negotiated, as usual, with his own form of gunboat diplomacy. His position as a European, he assumed, had to be defended from any suspicion of weakness. His tactics, which clearly astonished the Indians and which even his crew believed to be misjudged, provoked a very frosty reception on his return a week later (387-89). Their chief, and with him the whole village, had suffered a grave indignity. Mackenzie attributed the cause of their altered mood, not to his own aggressive and calculated policy of domination, but to fundamental deficiencies in the character of the Indians themselves: "these people are of so changeable a nature . . . that there is no security with them" (388). His basic preconceptions about "savage" nature were confirmed.

The remaining weeks of his visit to the British Columbia coast were beset by encounters with a small group of natives who refused to accept his authority or to trade with him on terms which he could dictate. Mackenzie was infuriated by their show of "indifference and disdain." Among them was a man with "an air of insolence" who, by his own account, had been fired on and beaten by Captain George Vancouver earlier that year (376-77). This "troublesome" Indian and his friends appeared several times along Mackenzie's route and the explorer grew increasingly nervous and resentful of their interest in his activities. A scuffle broke out at their village and Mackenzie again resorted to the threat of firearms "to make these natives feel the impropriety of their conduct towards us" (381). Later along his route he attempted to seize one of their canoes as the owners were preparing to depart, under the mistaken impression that they were making off with his own (385). With time running out and supplies at a low ebb, Mackenzie's hostility and fear are understandable. But his aggressive actions only compounded the danger. Resistance to his authority as a white man needed to be punished, he believed, and for this reason he was even willing to risk his "darling project" (328) of demonstrating the existence of a commercial route to the Pacific. The broader colonial purpose, which required him to establish his authority clearly, was at stake.

The limits to Mackenzie's authority were demonstrated in his relationships with his guides, who usually disappeared after they had experienced a taste of his travelling methods. "The travelling day," observed W. Kaye Lamb, "usually began at three or four A.M. and lasted fifteen or sixteen hours, or more upon occasion."¹⁷ To the Indians, accustomed to the more leisurely diurnal rhythms of a hunting economy and with no burning personal ambition to find a route to the Pacific, this must have appeared the sheerest madness. The normal patterns of their lives

were marked by irregular periods of intense hunting activity, with a high degree of personal independence and generous amounts of free time.¹⁸ "The Indians complain much of our hard marching," Mackenzie wrote in the journal of his first expedition, "that they are not accustomed to such hard fatigue" (180). He was reduced to watching his guides day and night, to prevent them from slipping away unobserved. Sometimes, he found it so difficult to attract guides on the great river that he resorted to the technique of seizing them by force: "our Conductor deserted. Could not find him, embarked one of the others against his will, and took his paddles from the one that remained that he might not follow us, at which he that was in our Canoe got quite enraged, jumped at the Paddle threw it on shore, but we embarked it again and pacified him" (192). Such effrontery may have been one of the reasons he found the Dene so elusive on the river when he made his return. News of the white invaders spread fast among these closely related peoples.

On the second voyage Mackenzie was somewhat more tactful about using force, partly because the Indians were much more numerous and less fearful of white men. Nevertheless, most of his guides attempted to proceed at their own pace, or quickly grew uncooperative, refusing to help carry the white men's heavy packs or beat the bushes for them (340-41, 342). Mackenzie could only fulminate helplessly against their refusal to do his will. Sometimes he suspected the native interpreters he had brought with him of being in collusion with the local guides, withholding information which they feared might have prolonged the journey or have taken them into dangerous territory (214, 218, 341, 349). He complains constantly of "desertions" and of threatened desertions, of having to watch them day and night, of receiving deliberately misleading information (300, 303, 324, 325-26, 328, 333-34, 335-36, 349, 357).

Mackenzie gives no indication, however, of understanding that his high demands and imperious manner might have created this behaviour. Even his French-Canadian voyageurs were frequently driven to the limits of their endurance and to the brink of mutiny. The native guides' behaviour appeared to him as "disloyalty," "infidelity," or "desertion." These terms are significant: they indicate that in his mind he had transformed the Indians into rebellious political subjects or mutinous soldiers who owed their loyalty to him. Their desertions resulted, he believed, from such well-known defects of the "savage" character as laziness, capriciousness, and irrational love of independence.¹⁹ Nevertheless, he remained unable to control them to his own satisfaction, no matter how cleverly he tried to impose his will on them. Although they might co-operate in certain circumstances, these Indians, who were not as yet involved in the fur trade, could see no reason to submit to his authority unless it clearly served their own interests. They were experiencing for the first time, in their contacts with men like Mackenzie, the incursions of a foreign colonial power into their country, and as a result, they were rapidly developing their own sophisticated techniques of resistance.

II. *Ethnography*

IF MACKENZIE COULD NOT CONTROL the Indians completely to his satisfaction in reality, the pen nevertheless proved to be a valuable tool for mastering them in his journals. By writing about them, defining them and explaining them, he could assert to himself and to his readers that he, as a white man, was ultimately in control, that his authority, or, at the very least, his superiority, remained intact. Information about the Indians, as we have seen, was necessary for the development of the fur trade, and, in a broader sense, for the process of extending European hegemony into every part of the globe. The Royal Society, since its inception, had encouraged travellers to make systematic observations on the different peoples they encountered, to add to the rapidly expanding body of information about the world.²⁰ By the accumulation of such information, remote or “savage” nations could better be understood; one result of this was that their behaviour could be anticipated, policies could be formulated for dealing with them, and they could be subjected, more effectively, to whatever other agenda Europeans had in store for them. In addition to “adding new countries to the realms of British commerce” (57), as he boasted, Mackenzie hoped that his work would be “worthy the attention of the scientific geographer” (60). He made it a priority, therefore, to write down as much information as he could about the Indians, despite the limited amount of time at his disposal and the constraints of his situation.

Mackenzie usually composed his journals during the evenings or as his crew made preparations to leave in the mornings. He performed this activity in the presence of the Indians themselves, who found it strangely mystifying and probably attributed a magical significance to it. Mackenzie was fully aware of the impression he was making, and the enhanced authority his writing gave him in their eyes. At the same time, writing about them increased his own sense of the height he occupied above them as a “civilized” European. He was the possessor of a secret code which they could not understand; he “knew” them in a way in which they could never know themselves. The act of writing about people in their very presence has the distinct effect of increasing the psychological distance between the observer and the observed. Mackenzie regarded them, without much fellow-feeling, as mere specimens for study: “My men and Indians went to rest. *I sat up to observe the Natives motions.* They wanted to know why I went not to Bed, and being busy writing this they had a Curiosity to see and know the meaning of it” (207; emphasis mine). Mackenzie remains, throughout his narrative, a detached “scientific” observer, with no reason to get any closer to the “savages” than the conditions of his voyage required.

His detachment is marked by the fact that he shows almost no interest whatever in the Indians as individual men or women. The lively portraits and character

sketches which enliven Samuel Hearne's narrative are completely absent from Mackenzie's *Voyages from Montreal*. Even their names elude him. His text does not distinguish one from another, frequently leaving the reader in a state of confusion about what is happening. His native companions, who accompanied him from Fort Chipewyan to hunt and interpret, disappear from the reader's view almost completely. Apart from occasional use of their English nicknames, he gives no hints about their appearance, their private lives, or their character.²¹ Mackenzie appears to regard the behaviour of Indians, in almost every case, as generic; when an individual Indian performs an action which either obstructs or advances his ends, he takes it to be characteristic of his "tribe." One effect of this is to absolve the author from responsibility in awkward situations: if the Indians persist in behaving like "savages," then he cannot be held accountable for their hostility. It is just the way the Indians *are*. Another effect is to dehumanize them, by robbing their behaviour of its individual meaning, transforming it into what we would call today instinctive or biological patterns of behaviour. This process, as Frantz Fanon has demonstrated in his classic study, *The Wretched of the Earth*, is essential both for colonizing native people, and for keeping them in their colonized position.²²

A CHARACTERISTIC EXAMPLE of Mackenzie's observations takes place on the Parsnip River during his second expedition, when he encountered a band of Sekani who had never before seen white men. After two days of questioning them intensively about his route, his men prepared to depart, and Mackenzie began to write the following description of the Indians, coldly observed as they stood around him:

They are low in stature, not exceeding five feet six or seven inches; and they are of that meagre appearance which might be expected in a people whose life is one succession of difficulties, in procuring subsistence. Their faces are round, with high cheek bones; and their eyes, which are small, are of a dark brown colour; the cartilage of their nose is perforated, but without any ornaments suspended from it; their hair is of a dingy black, hanging loose and in disorder over their shoulders, but irregularly cut in the front, so as not to obstruct the sight; their beards are eradicated, with the exception of a few straggling hairs, and their complexion is a swarthy yellow. . . . The organs of generation they leave uncovered. . . . [The women] are in general of a more lusty make than the other sex, and taller in proportion, but infinitely their inferiors in cleanliness. A black artificial stripe crosses the face beneath the eye, from ear to ear, which I first took for scabs, from the accumulation of dirt on it. (289-90)

This description, like many others in his book, has a deceptively impartial appearance, skilfully blending a selection of "facts" and value judgments. The implied standards of measurement are, of course, Anglo-Saxon concepts of beauty and adornment. The "round faces" and "high cheekbones" of the Sekanis would have

seemed exotic, and slightly disturbing to the British reader of 1801. “Low stature,” “meagre appearance,” “small” eyes, and a “swarthy yellow” complexion are ugly and repulsive by the standards of Mackenzie’s society. However, these images do not constitute a merely aesthetic judgment: they strongly impute qualities of cunning, deceit, and treachery to the unfortunate Sekani. Even worse are the moral qualities implied in his images of their “dingy black” hair, “hanging loose and in disorder over their shoulders,” and their beards, eradicated except for “a few straggling hairs.” By European standards, women ought to be small and fastidious, but among these people, Mackenzie implies in richly suggestive imagery, the normal distinctions of gender have been inverted, the women being “of a more lusty make than the other sex,” and “infinitely their inferiors in cleanliness.” The text seems to invite the question: what can be expected of a people so “meagre,” dirty, disordered, and with such unnatural sexual differentiation? Their physical appearance (which he constructs) is a mirror of their moral condition (which he also constructs). While appearing to be neutral, Mackenzie’s language and imagery is in fact highly evaluative and judgmental. His British reader, responding to it, would conclude that a more villainous collection of “savages” was scarcely to be found anywhere.

When Mackenzie describes what are to him their more identifiably “savage” customs, his language becomes, surprisingly, more impersonal and “objective”: “the cartilage of their nose is perforated, but without any ornaments suspended from it”; “the organs of generation they leave uncovered”; “a black artificial stripe crosses the face beneath the eye, from ear to ear.” These details are calculated to provoke the scorn of his readers, violating so clearly their English notions of decorum, common sense, and reason. The careful, almost scientific, “objectivity” of his language intensifies the impact. It distances the Sekani more effectively, Mackenzie senses, than explicit outrage or moral judgment. The effect depends, to a large extent, on an agreed set of aesthetic, social, and moral standards, which Mackenzie shares with his readers. The message, assumed or implied, is that these customs are grotesque, primitive, and reprehensible. This is a judgment fully anticipated and mutually acknowledged by writer and reader; in an important sense, it exists already before it is stated, since it is, in reality, based on their shared cultural experience.

Mackenzie’s language suggests that the Sekani are not, like the English, free agents; they are fixed, by their culture and their environment, and they exist in a kind of timeless ethnographic present, where everything that he has noted about their appearance — their exposed genitals, their tatoos, their dirt, their swarthy skins, their straggly beards, their disordered hair, their small eyes — defines them for all time. They have been captured in Mackenzie’s words at a particular moment of their own complex history, but the text expresses his belief that this is what they *are*, and what they have always been. Their past and their future are equally

irrelevant. A variety of stresses could have accounted for their appearance at this instant, but whatever the reason, to Mackenzie their appearance *is* meagre and their hair *is* dirty and disordered.²³ These facts define and formulate their character as a people, in his mind.

Mackenzie resembles the King of Brobdingnag in the Olympian detachment with which he observes and judges these people from his own unassailable height. They appear, for the reader, like some "pernicious race of little odious vermin," brutal and dangerous, at best to be examined, from a careful distance, as if under a glass. Although nowhere does he explicitly deny their humanity, his descriptions consistently diminish or call it into doubt. Be careful, the sub-text warns, these little creatures may bite. At the same time, their appearance and behaviour provoke laughter and scorn in a joke, at their expense, which is shared privately between writer and reader.

Like the King of Brobdingnag, Mackenzie's own sense of moral and cultural superiority is confirmed by his observations. Unlike the King, however, he is in their own country, surrounded and outnumbered by them, and in many ways dependent on them. The stability of his crew, who are only too willing to sleep with native women, may be threatened by the dangerous allure of "savagery"; perhaps it secretly threatens even his own belief in the natural order. His only hope, for the accomplishment of his mission, and the preservation of his "civilized" values, is to remain distant, detached, and to assert, wherever possible, his authority over them.

He turns then, almost with relief, to an account of their material culture, which occupies by far the greater part of his description. The range and type of his concerns, and their mind-numbing effects, are well represented in the following quotation:

They have snares made of green skin, which they cut to the size of sturgeon twine, and twist a certain number of them together; and though when completed they do not exceed the thickness of a cod-line, their strength is sufficient to hold a moose deer: they are from one and an half to two fathoms in length. Their nets and fishing lines are made of willow-bark and nettles; those made of the latter are finer and smoother than if made with hempen thread. Their hooks are small bones, fixed in pieces of wood split for that purpose, and tied round with fine watape, which has been particularly described in the former voyage. Their kettles are also made of watape, which is so closely woven that they never leak, and they heat water in them, by putting red-hot stones into it. There is one kind of them, made of spruce-bark, which they hang over the fire, but at such a distance as to receive the heat without being within reach of the blaze; a very tedious operation. They have various dishes of wood and bark; spoons of horn and wood, and buckets; bags of leather and net-work, and baskets of bark, some of which hold their fishing-tackle, while others are contrived to be carried on the back. (291-92)

In the course of this description, and in others like it, the Indians' tools acquire a

significance of their own while becoming oddly disconnected from the people who employ them. The people themselves, who manufacture their tools with infinite pains, and who use them to hunt, fish, cook and eat, have almost vanished from his narrative. Their possessions now appear to be the most important things about them. The sub-text is a clear message to the "civilized" English reader, furthermore, that despite the ingenuity of these devices, "savage" technology is primitive, awkward, and labour-intensive. Its inferiority to the products of European civilization is self-evident to the reader and needs little commentary beyond his telling descriptions.

This fascination with material culture frequently dominates Mackenzie's accounts of the Indians he encountered. Often he gets lost in the details: pages are devoted to describing the buildings of the Western Coastal nations, with their contents, without ever managing to convey an idea of what they looked like. A good example is his description of a Bella Coola village (366-68). The information he provides is invaluable to the modern ethnohistorian. In his own time it served the fur trade in addition to the objectives of "geographical science" and the Royal Society. An inventory of their material possessions and their technology was also a guide to their "needs," and so helped to open up their society for commercial exploitation. The Sekani, for example, described in the quotation above, are potential customers for English rope, snares, fishhooks, kettles, buckets, dishes, spoons, cloth and ironwork. Yet Mackenzie is more thorough than other explorers or traders, and he records more of this kind of information than was necessary merely for commerce. At times, he resembles one of the eighteenth-century virtuosi whose cabinets were stuffed with costumes, utensils, ornaments, and other ethnographical curiosities from around the world, divorced from their social context.²⁴ Essentially, Mackenzie is a materialist, interested in things for their own sake, seldom questioning his own assumptions about them, and preferring wherever possible to restrict his observations to what he could see, touch, and measure.

The effect of this is to lend powerful support to his textual strategies of domination. As we have seen, the Indians repeatedly found ways to resist his authority. He could not obliterate this evidence of their stubborn human complexity, but to a certain degree he could subdue it, textually, by minimalizing its importance. He defines their cultures primarily in material terms, and shows that they differ from each other in primarily material ways. This reduces them to manageable dimensions within the pages of his journal, despite their intractable behaviour in reality. The Indians may be treated, like all "savages," as essentially the same, differing from each other only in externals. Such a stratagem eases the process of knowing and understanding them. Mackenzie's terms of reference for his "ethnography," therefore, as well as his language, tend to diminish and dehumanize the objects of his description.

Consistently with these tactics, Mackenzie ignores or trivializes almost everything which suggests that the Indians may have had a meaningful life beyond the merely physical level of their existence. Almost all aspects of life for Canada's native people, for example, were infused with their spiritual beliefs; their essentially religious and spiritual understanding of reality was perhaps the most important single quality which differentiated them from the Europeans.²⁵ Throughout his narrative, however, Mackenzie shows no curiosity about native spiritual beliefs, and he tends to belittle evidence which he could not avoid.²⁶ He records nothing whatever about myths and legends, although he had ample opportunity to hear them, especially during the five months he spent among the Eastern Beaver at the beginning of his second voyage. He comments off-handedly, for example, on "a curious example of Indian superstition" which he encountered among some Beaver Indians (251), and on "an extreme superstition" held by the Bella Coola (362), but he interprets both cases merely as specimens of savage ignorance or folly. Shamanism, or "conjuring," he mentions very rarely, and always with scorn, as a cruel or foolish imposition, despite its widespread significance in native society (191, 341, 368-69). Dancing and singing, the most fundamental expressions of Indian spirituality, are described, in the first voyage, as grotesque displays of "antic shapes," "pranks," "howling," and "jumping" (183, 214). On his second voyage, with a single exception (340), he makes no mention of such activities. Simon Fraser, whose expedition fifteen years later travelled through some of the same territory, repeatedly described how his crew were entertained by singing and dancing throughout their journey.²⁷ Mackenzie, however, who must have witnessed similar displays on many occasions, omits them from his narrative.

Mackenzie finds almost nothing of beauty to admire, either in the individual lives or in the various cultures of the Indians, although on one rare occasion he goes so far as to pronounce the decorations on a dress to have "a very agreeable effect" (363). When he sees for the first time the magnificent carved and painted images of the Western Coastal nations, he neither wonders at their beauty and strangeness, nor does he speculate on their religious or social significance. They violate his preconceptions about the arts of uncivilized peoples, and as if to reassert European superiority, he proceeds immediately to pass judgment on them: "They were painted with hieroglyphics, and figures of different animals, and *with a degree of correctness that was not to be expected from such an uncultivated people. . . .* The posts, poles and figures, were painted red and black; but the sculpture of these people is superior to their painting" (367; emphasis mine). Such curiosities were not yet valuable commodities, they were not easily transportable, and they offered nothing which could be exploited in the fur trade. Without economic value, and with nothing in Mackenzie's view to recommend them intrinsically (except for the unexpected degree of artistic "correctness"), they merited little attention.

The cumulative effect is to make the Indians appear to live their lives without pattern or meaning, to reduce, in his text, the few bare remnants of their religion to superstition, and of their art to mere decoration. This strongly reinforces the fundamental belief in European superiority, shared by Mackenzie and his readers, and functions as part of the process by which European authority and power over these people were legitimated. Mackenzie, like many of his fellow traders and settlers, needed to believe in the idea of the Indians leading lives which were narrowly limited, without the complexities and enrichments which made the lives of civilized people, he believed, essentially more human and of greater value. The commercial agenda of trader and settler, in what they were pleased to call the "New World," was thereby justified, and it could take precedence over all other considerations.

MACKENZIE'S "ETHNOGRAPHY" distinguishes implicitly between two types of culture he had encountered in his travels. This distinction is based on the theory of progress which, as we have seen, underlay much of the writing about non-European societies in the eighteenth century. The nations of the Western Coastal region, Mackenzie believed, were more advanced than the nomadic Dene in the subarctic, and it is clear from his narrative that he was less contemptuous of them. They were materially richer than the Dene. They lived in villages and built large houses. Among the inhabitants of one community, which he named the "Friendly Village," he detected hereditary ownership of property. The chief also appeared to possess a degree of authority over his people which was lacking among the Athabascans. These features (390-94) suggested to him that they were advancing from the "primitive" state of equality and shared resources, so common among the hunting societies of the north, to something resembling modern European civilization, with its distinctions of rank and of property. "Of the many nations of savage people whom I have seen," he wrote, "these appear to be the most susceptible of civilization. They might soon be brought to cultivate the little ground about them which is capable of it" (394).

Learning to cultivate the soil, Mackenzie believes, is the first step in attaining civilization. This idea, which derives ultimately from the philosophy of John Locke, was already widespread throughout the English-speaking world in the eighteenth century. In North America, the programs for "civilizing" the "savages" which were emerging at this time were founded upon it.²⁸ If the Indians could be made to leave their nomadic ways and commence farming, the argument went, they would begin to value private property and material possessions like the white men and eventually make the transition from their primitive condition of savagery to the "higher" stage of civilization. "Agriculture," wrote Mackenzie's cousin Roderic

in his introductory essay on the history of the fur trade, “attaches the wandering tribe to that spot where it adds so much to their comforts; while it gives them a sense of property, and of lasting possession, instead of the uncertain hopes of the chase, and the fugitive produce of uncultivated wilds” (67). The Bella Coola, it seemed to Mackenzie, were already advanced enough, because of their stable way of life and their social institutions, to take the step. Redeemed from their “savagery,” they might also learn to accept white culture and authority without too much resistance.

The Dene, however, were beyond the pale. They had little private property and appeared utterly lacking in the sensibility which accompanied ownership. As nomadic hunters, all their wealth had to be carried with them as they followed the seasonal cycles of the game. “Mobility and property are in contradiction,” Marshall Sahlins has written; real affluence among hunters consists in having only a few, highly portable possessions.²⁹ Furthermore, the homeland of the Dene appeared remote to the Europeans, unsuitable for agriculture, and cursed with a cold and forbidding climate. It did not occur to Mackenzie, or to most later visitors, that they might have been living there in a meaningful human condition, content, at least for the time being, with their few possessions and well adapted to their nation’s environment.³⁰

Mackenzie’s descriptions of them, therefore, the first in a long line of similar portraits of the Dene, are filled with reproach. He represents them as painfully eking out their wretched lives in cold and misery, lacking the barest essentials of human comfort. Everything convinces him of the barrenness of their lives. When, in their dances, they strive to imitate the animals they hunt, Mackenzie responds in language charged with scorn and loathing: “As soon as we left them they began their fav’rite and only amusement (except Jumping) Dancing in which Young & Old, Male & Female join’d & continued as [long as] they could hold out. They try to imitate the Rein Deer Bear & Wolf in their Pranks or howling” (214).³¹ Frequent animal images suggest their lowly position in the great chain of being. A group of hungry Kutchin, without blankets to keep them from the cold, slept around the fire “like a parcel of whelps” (207). When, according to their own customs, they helped themselves to some meat which the white men were cooking over a fire, Mackenzie immediately ordered them to desist, writing, at the same time, with a sneer, that it was “the first instance I saw of any of them wishing to take what was not their own; but I suppose they think provision should be common Property among all People” (207). Sharing resources is clearly one of their “savage” notions, all too frequent, in his view, among nomadic hunters.³² Physical distaste accompanies moral disapproval. He does not like their appearance, and the reason, he implies, is their own fault. The women of one band “are not very tempting objects, for they are as ugly and disagreeable Beings as can be” (215). Another group “are all an ugly meagre ill made People particularly about the Legs which are very clumsy & full of Scabs by their frequent roasting them to the fire. Many of them

appear'd very sickly owing as I imagine to their Dirty way of living" (183). Viewing them as too witless or ignorant to improve their condition, Mackenzie implies that they have only themselves to blame for their destitution and misery. They are a people without hope, degraded, in his view, below the level of the human. Their lives have been diminished, objectified, and emptied, in his text, of all happiness, dignity, and meaning.

Mackenzie's fullest "ethnographic" portrait of an Indian people is his account of the Eastern Beaver, Dene people of the Peace River district who are closely related to the Sekani and the Chipewyan. Mackenzie's opportunities to observe most of the Indians he encountered were limited by his need to complete each voyage in a single season. A few hours or days was the usual extent of his contact with individual bands or villages. Among the Beaver, however, he spent a full five months before attempting to cross the mountains on his second voyage. Closer acquaintance did not soften his judgment. Despite their hospitality, no affection for the Beaver warms his Hobbesian portrait of their lives as nasty, brutish, and short (240-57). All members of their society, according to his account, are equally to blame for their degraded condition. Anecdotes are carefully chosen to illustrate what he views as their insensitivity to the plight of women in labour, their violence and vengefulness, their superstition, and their fierce jealousy (250-53). Although Mackenzie himself was plying them with rum, he denounced their susceptibility to it: "they are passionately fond of liquor, and in the moments of their festivity will barter any thing they have in their possession for it" (253). Gambling is a passion like drink, he claims, to which they will sacrifice their families and their fortunes: "they will pursue it for a succession of days and nights, and no apprehension of ruin, nor influence of domestic affection, will restrain them from the indulgence of it" (255). Domestic and sexual relationships are especially vicious. The women are lecherous, even from "the age of eleven or twelve years," and as wives, are seldom without a lover despite the "vigilance and severity" of their husbands. The men, on the other hand, "are very subject to jealousy, and fatal consequences frequently result from the indulgence of that passion." Nevertheless, the women are "the slaves of the men," and, "except for a few small dogs, they alone perform that labour which is allotted to beasts of burthen in other countries" (254).³³ Their religion, he argues, is "of a very contracted nature," and completely borrowed from the Cree (254). In grief, their women "cry and howl" and mutilate themselves in a bizarre fashion. Joy seems totally absent from their lives.

BY THE LATTER HALF OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, the idea of the contradictory nature of "savages" was widely accepted among European, American and, we should add, Canadian observers.³⁴ Mackenzie emphasizes these

contradictions in an especially subversive way, by the rhetorical stratagem of allowing the Indians to have, among their vices, a few virtues, which he proceeds at once to qualify severely. Although the Beaver are “excellent hunters,” the physical demands of this activity reduce them “to a very meagre appearance” (254). They are liberal and generous when they have plenty, but when their means are exhausted “they become errant beggars.” They “appear” to be fond of their children, but they are “as careless in their mode of swaddling them as they are of their own dress” (255). The effect of these qualifications is to give an appearance of balance to his portrait while at the same time preventing it from conferring on them a full measure of humanity. He softens some of their vices, too, but in a way which keeps them firmly in the straitjacket he has constructed. They are “more vicious and warlike than the Chipewyans, from whence they sprang, though they do not possess their selfishness.” Although “they are very susceptible of anger” — one of the principal vices attributed by white men to the Indians — “they are as easily appeased.” Can anything be said, without qualification, in their favour? They are “remarkable for their honesty” (among savages, of course) and they are “a quick, lively, active people, with a keen, penetrating, dark eye” (254-55). Truly, this is damning with faint praise. The Beavers’ lives are drawn out, as Mackenzie describes them, without love, happiness, or meaning. They exist, scarcely above the level of beasts, in a world empty of spirit, governed by contradictory and repulsive customs, where drunkenness, cruelty, violence, and passion prevail.

It need hardly be said that no real people ever did — or could — exist in such conditions, or that this is an ideologically distorted picture of what life was really like among northern hunting peoples. Now that the Dene and other native groups have begun to tell their own stories in English, it is possible for Euro-Canadians to see the other side of the picture more clearly.³⁵ Mackenzie’s Indians have only slightly more humanity and social structure than Swift’s Yahoos; they are about as accurate a portrait of native people, furthermore, as Yahoos are of Europeans. Swift as satirist, however, had turned the tables on travellers like Mackenzie, who unquestioningly affirmed the values of their own society.

Like most explorers, Mackenzie found himself involved in a process, first, of attempting to establish his authority over the Indians whose lands he was invading, and then, of maintaining that supposed authority whenever it was threatened. Far from the remotest outposts of European power, his situation was precarious. Writing about the Indians — representing them as childlike, primitive, lazy, unreliable, improvident, drunken, contradictory, deceitful, jealous, treacherous, cruel, irrational — helped to assert and to validate his authority, both to himself and to his readers. It rendered the ugly side of the colonial enterprise in which he was involved more acceptable. The supposed brutality of the Indians’ natures, and the conditions in which they lived, were proof of how far Europeans have advanced since the world’s first infancy. Only their ignorance and lack of reason could explain their

frequent attempts to resist his authority. And so, systematically, the Indians were “known,” contained, and ultimately rendered powerless, in the imaginary world of his narrative.

In a sense, then, Mackenzie is indeed a “hero,” if by that term we mean someone in literature or history who is admired for representing, in an exceptionally forceful way, the fundamental impulses of his own society. Mackenzie is ruthlessly dedicated to European commercial expansionism, and with it, the colonial exploitation of the Indians in the fur trade. His caricature of native life served these processes, obviously, more effectively than sentimental or idealistic notions of the Noble Savage, or even a view of the Indians, like David Thompson’s, which would have made them more equal to Europeans as human beings. It lent strong support to traders, settlers, and administrators for their policies of intervention and control. There is nothing original, or even particularly idiosyncratic about his position. The concept of savagism is an invention of the European mind in colonial encounter, and Mackenzie is merely one of the many people who shared in its creation. What makes Mackenzie’s work particularly valuable to the critic is the single-minded consistency with which he makes his case. Many of his attitudes may be found, in greater or lesser degree, even among observers who express a more sympathetic or humanitarian point of view. Mackenzie’s narrative must be seen, in the final analysis, as a product of his own culture and the relationship which it had long before established with the natives of North America. It represents an important strand in European thinking about non-European peoples, which originated in ancient times, emerged strongly in accounts of the so-called “New World” during the earliest period of contact, and which persisted in a variety of forms until the present. Eventually, ideas of the kind we have observed here were incorporated in theories of “scientific racism,” which declared the Indians, with indigenous peoples all over the globe, to be both culturally and biologically an inferior species. Many thinkers challenged them, but in Canada, as elsewhere, they formed the politically operative point of view on native peoples throughout the nineteenth century and well into our own times. Already in Mackenzie’s day, an ominous new world was being prepared for our First Nations.

APPENDIX A

In his Preface, written nearly eight years after his second expedition, Mackenzie gives the impression of a vast and nearly empty country, peopled only by scattered and insignificant “tribes”:

These voyages will not, I fear, afford the variety that may be expected from them. . . . Mountains and vallies, the dreary waste, and wide-spreading forests, the lakes and rivers succeed each other in general description; and except on the coasts of the

Pacific Ocean, where the villages were permanent, and the inhabitants in a great measure stationary, small bands of wandering Indians are the only people whom I shall introduce to the acquaintance of my readers. (58)

The text of his narrative, however, quickly dispels this illusion. The frequency of his contacts with the Indians, and the sizes of the bands he encountered, make it evident that these lands were utilized to the full capacity of the native economies. Their numbers are striking to any modern non-native reader who has been taught to believe in the myth of vast uninhabited spaces in the north. Nomadic use of land, however, has not traditionally been recognized as genuine “inhabitation” in European thinking. Vattel’s *Law of Nations* (1758) argued that Europeans could justly seize Indian territory because “the peoples of those vast tracts of land rather roamed over than inhabited them.”³⁸ The inconsistency between Mackenzie’s Preface, where he was reflecting on the significance of his voyages, and his text, based on his actual travel diaries, is a good indication of how ideology colours perception. One of the purposes of Mackenzie’s voyages, as he wrote in his Preface, was to add “new countries to the realms of British commerce” (57). Thinking of native land as vacant, or under-utilized, eased the process of Empire by which it became “ours,” not “theirs.” Despite the testimony of his own diaries, in his Preface Mackenzie serves the broader colonial purpose.

APPENDIX B

Only two of Mackenzie’s native followers are identified by name. “The English Chief,” a Chipewyan formerly of Matonabee’s band, was employed as his interpreter and hunter on the first voyage; he was accompanied by two wives and “two young Indians” who remain anonymous. On his second voyage, there were two Indian guides and hunters. One of these is anonymous, while the other is identified by his nickname, “Cancre” (“dunce”), which he had acquired from the French-Canadians for supposed idleness in his youth (257). Although these Indians were essential to the success of his expeditions, Mackenzie makes no mention of their real names, if he knew them, or of their nationality. From their ability to converse with other Athabaskan-speaking people, it is probable that all of them were, like The English Chief, Chipewyan. Most of the time, however, he refers to them collectively as “the Indians” or “my Indians,” to distinguish them from members of other tribes encountered along the way. The French-Canadian voyageurs are slightly higher on the scale of humanity than the Indians; they merit, at least on the second voyage, having their individual names recorded (257). Thereafter, they are referred to collectively as “my men,” or “my people,” an interesting unconscious distinction from “my Indians.” As a group they have a collective identity; the Indians and their families who accompanied him have none.

Despite this apparent disinterest in their identity, however, Mackenzie is not entirely without human feelings. On one occasion in the second voyage, he shows evidence of real concern when an individual, identified only as "the sick Indian," becomes incapacitated for a short time. He makes careful arrangements for the man's care, and personally carries him across a river on his back (383-84, 395). Mackenzie may have possessed somewhat more warmth, in reality, than his narrative usually reveals. On the other hand, it must be observed that a good deal of self-interest was at stake. A sick crew member was a danger to his expedition, and could reveal the weakness of his position to the local natives. Abandoning him might create cynicism and distrust among his own men as well as among the strangers.

NOTES

- ¹ For Mackenzie's career and the background to his voyages, see Arthur S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1973), 408-11; E. E. Rich, *The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967), 178-80; W. Kaye Lamb, introduction to his ed., *The Journals and Letters of Alexander Mackenzie* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970), 4-14.
- ² Roy Daniells, "The Literary Relevance of Alexander Mackenzie," *Canadian Literature* 38 (Autumn 1968), 22-23. See also his *Alexander Mackenzie and the North West* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), and A. J. M. Smith, ed., *The Colonial Century: English-Canadian Writing before Confederation* (Toronto: Gage, 1973), xviii-xx. More balanced views of Mackenzie which nevertheless retain the idea of his heroism are presented by James K. Smith, *Alexander Mackenzie, Explorer: The Hero Who Failed* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1973); T. D. MacLulich, "The Explorer as Hero: Mackenzie and Fraser," *Canadian Literature* 75 (Winter 1978), 61-63; "Canadian Exploration as Literature," *Canadian Literature* 81 (Summer 1979), 80-81; and "Alexander Mackenzie," *Profiles in Canadian Literature*, vol. 5, ed. Jeffrey M. Heath (Toronto: Dundurn, 1986), 17-24. See also Victor Hopwood, "Explorers by Land," *Literary History of Canada*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), 19-53, and Germaine Warkentin, "Exploration Literature in English," *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, ed. William Toye (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983), 242-49.
- ³ An exception must be made for MacLulich's brief but acute observations in *Profiles in Canadian Literature* 5: 19.
- ⁴ For the composition and publication of *Voyages from Montreal*, see Lamb, *Journals and Letters of Alexander Mackenzie*, 32-36, 47-48. A manuscript copy of the first expedition's journal has survived among the Stowe manuscripts, making it possible to study Combe's treatment of the text. This essay follows Lamb's edition, which prints Mackenzie's manuscript version of the first voyage, together with Combe's emended — and sole extant — version of the second. Page numbers in the text of the essay refer to this edition.
- ⁵ The extent and effect of Combe's editorial changes have been much discussed and debated. See Lamb, *Journals and Letters of Alexander Mackenzie*, 33-34; Franz Montgomery, "Alexander Mackenzie's literary assistant," *Canadian Historical Review* 18 (1937), 301-04; Daniells, "The Literary Relevance of Alexander Macken-

zie," 19-20; MacLulich, "The Explorer as Hero," 61-63, and *Profiles in Canadian Literature* 5: 19-20. The fullest analysis, concentrating on Mackenzie/Combe's description of the Methye Portage, is I. S. Maclaren, "Alexander Mackenzie and the Landscapes of Commerce," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 7.2 (1982), 141-50. Maclaren makes it clear that Combe's additions to the text were the result of close identification with the author's purposes.

⁶ See Appendix A.

⁷ As Mackenzie's cousin Roderic lucidly wrote, the North West Company's "expenditure in Canada ultimately tends to the encouragement of British manufactory, for those who are employed in the different branches of this business, are enabled by their gains to purchase such British articles as they must otherwise forego" (*Journals and Letters of Alexander Mackenzie* 82).

⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979), 7-15, 31-49. Writing about Lord Cromer's essay on the "subject races," Said argues: "knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control" (*Orientalism* 36).

⁹ Mackenzie is treated in this essay as a representative, in the broadest sense, of European culture and its values. Obviously, this is to put in abeyance specific questions about his Scottish background on the Isle of Lewis. The term "European" was used by eighteenth-century British writers to distinguish themselves racially and culturally from the natives of North America. This essay reflects their usage.

¹⁰ See Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1965), chap. 5 et passim; Hugh Honour, *The New Golden Land: European Images of America from the Discoveries to the Present Time* (New York: Pantheon, 1975), chaps. 5, 8.

¹¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

¹² In the words of William Robertson, the eighteenth-century Scottish historian, "in every part of the earth, the progress of man hath been nearly the same; and we can trace him in his career from the rude simplicity of savage life, until he attains the industry, the arts, and the elegance of polished society" (*The History of America* [1777], in *The Works of William Robertson*, vol. 6, book 4 [London 1827], 255). This discourse is the subject of Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976). See also Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, 82-91; Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Random House, 1978), 44-49; Ronald V. Sampson, *Progress in the Age of Reason: the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1956).

¹³ See, for example, such recent studies of the fur trade as Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, *Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1983), 166-71, et passim; Arthur J. Ray and Donald Freeman, "Give us Good Measure": *An Economic Analysis of Relationships Between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company Before 1763* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1978). See also Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's Heroic Age Reconsidered* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1985).

¹⁴ Samuel Hearne, *A Journey to the Northern Ocean*, ed. Richard Glover (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958), 143n.

¹⁵ Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Indian in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 66-80.

- ¹⁶ For Bella Coola potlatch practices see T. F. McIlwraith, *The Bella Coola Indians*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1948).
- ¹⁷ Lamb, *Journals and Letters of Alexander Mackenzie*, 16.
- ¹⁸ For the society and culture of the people of these regions, see Hugh Brody, *Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier* (1981; rpt. Pelican Books, 1983), 35-37, et passim and *Living Arctic: Hunters of the Canadian North* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1987); for work and leisure in a hunting economy, see Marshall Sahlins, "The Original Affluent Society," in his *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine Atherton, 1972), 1-39.
- ¹⁹ Cf. William Robertson: "The strongest feeling in the mind of a savage is a sense of his own independence. . . . He pursues his own career, and indulges his own fancy, without enquiring or regarding whether what he does be agreeable or offensive to others, whether they may derive benefit or receive hurt from it. Hence the ungovernable caprice of savages, their impatience under any species of restraint, their inability to suppress or moderate any inclination, their high estimation of themselves, and their contempt of other men" (*Works of William Robertson*, vol. 6, book 4, 386-87).
- ²⁰ Robert Boyle's instructions to travellers were published in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society in 1666. They were later printed separately under the title *General Heads for the Natural History of a Country . . . for the use of Travellers and Navigators*. See P. J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: Dent, 1982), 45-46, 60-61, et passim.
- ²¹ See Appendix B.
- ²² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (1965; rpt. Penguin, 1967), 190.
- ²³ It was just after spring breakup, and the Sekani may have endured a winter of scarcity because of periodic fluctuations in the numbers of the game, which were becoming increasingly common as the fur trade pushed west. They were also in a state of hostility with the better armed Beaver and Cree on one side, and the Shuswap on the other, whose raids put them under considerable social pressure. On the other hand, Mackenzie may have merely encountered them, in a temporarily dishevelled state, on a protracted and difficult hunt at the worst time of the year. See Glenda Denniston, "Sekani," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 6 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1981), 433-41.
- ²⁴ See Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, 58-60.
- ²⁵ See Martin, *Keepers of the Game*, 69-93, 113-29, 150; Diamond Jenness, *The Indians of Canada*, 7th ed. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977), 167-99.
- ²⁶ The "General History of the Fur Trade," which appears at the beginning of Mackenzie's *Voyages from Montreal*, contains descriptions of the Knisteneaux, or Cree, and the Chipewyan, and it demonstrates a much greater familiarity with the religious practices of these nations. The authorship of this chapter is in dispute; David Thompson reported that it had been written by Roderic McKenzie, Alexander's cousin, and most critics and historians have accepted this theory (Lamb, *Journals and Letters of Alexander Mackenzie*, 33). James K. Smith, however, argues that there is no reason to doubt Alexander Mackenzie's authorship (*Alexander Mackenzie, Explorer*, 2-3). Whatever its origins, the chapter treats these matters in primarily material terms, and is entirely consistent with Mackenzie's views of the Indians.
- ²⁷ W. Kaye Lamb, ed., *The Journals and Letters of Simon Fraser, 1806-1808* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960), 61-120.

- ²⁸ See Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, 66-75.
- ²⁹ Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, 12; Brody, *Maps and Dreams*, 51-55, and *Living Arctic*.
- ³⁰ Recent Dene publications testify eloquently to their sense of the "affluence" of their traditional way of life, and to their deep love for a land and a climate which are neither remote nor forbidding; see, for example, Dene Nation, *Denendeh: A Dene Celebration* (Yellowknife: Dene Nation, 1984), and Margaret M. Thom and Ethel Blondin-Townsend, eds., *Nahecho Keh: Our Elders* (Fort Providence: Slavey Research Project, 1987).
- ³¹ Combe very slightly softens this and other negative judgments, in his revisions of the text. Compare entries for July 5 and July 27 (183, 214-15) with Combe's versions, in Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal*, ed. John W. Garvin (Toronto: Radisson Society, 1927), 164-65, 210-12. This does not affect the general distinctions I have made between his views of the nomadic hunters in the first voyage and the western coastal tribes in the second.
- ³² See Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, 68-74; Washburn, *The Indian in America*, 31-33.
- ³³ The division of labour among the nomadic peoples of the north required women to perform much of the packing and hauling. This freed the men to hunt for food while the group was on the move. Mackenzie, however, like most of his fellow countrymen, believed that women were incapable of hard physical labour and fundamentally dependent on male protection. Consequently, he failed to grasp the necessity of this important custom for survival, and he poured his scorn upon it. In reality, the Indian women held more power in their own society than the protected women of Europe did in theirs. See Sylvia Van Kirk, "*Many Tender Ties*": *Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1980), 17-19; Eleanor B. Leacock, *Myths of Male Dominance, Collected Articles on Women Cross-Culturally* (New York: Monthly Review, 1981), 163-80.
- ³⁴ See Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, 76-104, et passim.
- ³⁵ See, for example, Dene Nation, *Denendeh: A Dene Celebration*; Thom and Blondin-Townsend, eds., *Nahecho Keh: Our Elders*; and Brody, *Living Arctic*.
- ³⁶ Emmerich de Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, vol. 3, trans. Charles G. Fenwick (Washington: Carnegie Inst., 1916), 37-38. The idea goes back to the period of earliest conquest. See Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, 66-73, and Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 119-26.

PAKASHGOOGAN

Denis Stokes

Some in the village
are calling your two sons
dumb Indians.