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## The Vanishing of Indian Princesses, or The Sentimental Transformation of the Pocahontas Myth

"The result is this: that I am fitter for *this* world than you, you for the *next* than me - that's the difference."

Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*

My concern in this essay is with the persistence of sentimentalism, and of one of its recurring figures, the Indian princess, in those early American fictions termed "historical" by the minimal definition of narratives that connect the story of past events to the present. Such "historical fictions" combine, as we know, party or clan conflicts with sentimental plots, war scenes and love scenes, heroic and domestic traits of nationalism. From Georg Lukacs to George Dekker, the sentimental clusters of these novels have been considered secondary, stereotypical, and even annoying, an intrusion in the grand drama of history. Walter Scott himself in the closing comments to one of his most dramatic historical tales, *Old Mortality*, justified the quasi-happy sentimental ending with the need to appease the forceful expectations of female readers well versed in "the whole stock of three circulating libraries," and whose taste was formed by such sentimental post-Richardsonian writers as Henry MacKenzie or Fanny Burney. Still, sentimental plots and characters live on as a recognizable strategy for bringing "private" life to the core of historical dramas. Private lives, or the lives of the ancestors of the Republic, were an obvious concern for proudly democratic young America. This may explain the heavily sentimental story line of many early novels, but does not entirely account for the presence of the Indian sentimental heroines who haunt these ancestors' lives, and who themselves

turn away from the Pocahontas's myth of interracial encounter to embrace the common fate of the "vanishing Indian" in novels such as Charlotte Rowson's *Reuben and Rachel* (1798), Elisabeth Cushing's *Saratoga* (1824), Nicholas M. Hentz's *Tadeuskund, or the Last King of the Lenape* (1825), the anonymous *The Christian Indian* (1825), Catherine Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* (1827), Charles Sealsfield's *Tokeah or the White Rose* (1829), or Joseph Hart's *Miriam Coffin, or the Whale Fisherman* (1834).

Early American historical narratives were bound to celebrate the birth of a post-colonial nation in the name of the "difference" of republicanism, a virtuous attribute that would counteract the ever present ghost of the family feud with the mother-country, or in a gendered sentimental metaphor, the ghost of daughter Columbia's rebellion against her parental country. Sentimental novels could indeed provide the referential ground for such a metaphor: their story line would tell us of the loss of female virtue, of social future, of life itself, as the dire consequence to filial rebellion. Within this story line, the Indian girl may represent a version of sentimental rebellion, functionally denying the Anglo-Saxon daughter's rebellion without denying its politically virtuous principles. Transposed in tales of conquest, of white-Indian strife, of colonial and post-colonial struggles, female sentimental otherness may consequently convey a post-revolutionary concept of national virtue and its gendered specification, the "new American female", a construct which, Carrol Smith Rosenberg contends, connects sexual and republican discourses between the 1780s and the 1830s (Rosenberg 1988).

Dark and often androgynous, these other young women appear to be eminently virtuous, both as chaste females and as republican icons, passionately loving freedom and their country, highly valuing justice and clan loyalty, while their actions show how body purity may reinforce republican virtues, even if to keep oneself pure may involve celibacy and the ultimate sacrifice, death or disappearance. Such a harsh destiny willingly courted through a self-sacrificial escalation is of course the trademark of the vanishing Indian, both male and female. As Roy Harvey Pearce remarked in his landmark study *Savagism and Civilization* (1965), this figure is

born from the necessity of combining historical facts (the killing of the natives) with the white man's "sense of civilized mission," and is inherently shaped by the workings of both guilt and pity. The workings of guilt and pity do indeed characterize the texts of sentimentality, as Richardson's *Clarissa* most famously proves. In Leslie Fiedler's own classic interpretation, the vanishing Indian is linked to the Americanization of the English sentimental tradition, the "Sentimental Love Religion," within which his Pocahontas type of woman stands for the incarnation of the dogma that "not Jesus Christ but a Good Woman is the saviour of sinful man," and the captive white woman assumes the role of the "Persecuted Maiden" (Fiedler 1978, 68, 97). In a revisitation of Fiedler's insights I would argue that the vanishing Indian, both in its male and female incarnation, is a figure that "Americanizes" sentimentalism by "feminizing" race with the political purpose of drawing a new spectrum for interpreting difference, racial as well as sexual, and for offering a modified version of female virtue as chastity that is made to include racial purity, a necessary foundational value for the new Republic. For Fiedler class struggle (or class redefinition) - which in its eighteenth-century version was often told as a tale of virtue preserved or of virtue lost - is turned either into "the Battle of the Sexes" or into race conflict: both may be read in the "Indianization" of gender within the sentimental code of historical fictions.

In this perspective, the semantically doubly charged "Indian"/"Princess" figure confirms class as an attribute of the past: the vanishing Indian is an aristocrat who has lost the right to feudally own the land. Aristocracy projects its obsolete quality over "Indianness" and even more so when the plot line stages the Indian female exclusion from prospective marriage. The landless status of the Indian as female calls for a redefinition of marriage contracts for the new Republic - the romantic-love versus arranged-marriage pattern, as Werner Sollors has argued (Sollors 1986). It also makes intraracial marriage a "natural" prohibition. On the other hand, the female as Indian is charged with values which concur in shaping notions of "true womanhood" for the present and the future. In the figure of the Indian princess, both

"Indianness" and "femininity" are constructs containing racial and sexual conflicts: her "vanishing" may appear as a ritual of atonement as well as the sentimental solution of a discursive practice based on the semantic exchange between sex and race. The "white woman's Indian" is not only identifiable with the bad Indian as rapist, but also as a good female Indian with whom she shares a fine sensibility, and a difference, both sexually and racially connoted. As her best friend, Miss Anna Howe, writes Clarissa after the disclosure of her shame and the evidence of her elevated soul searching, "I am fitter for *this* world than you, you for the *next* than me - that's the difference." By vanishing the Indian princess confirms the difference, but the origin of this difference has been changed from sexual shame to racial shame by the power of its Americanization.

### ***Better dead than married...***

In a recent essay on sentimental fiction, Nancy Armstrong has developed a provocative reversed genealogy of Anglo-American sentimentalism. Richardson could not have written *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, Armstrong suggests, without the by-then-expendable codification of Indian captivity narratives, without the ready-for-use type of the kidnapped white woman obsessively defending her virtue from the assaults of the savage Indian, helped in more than one case by ruffians under the shape of Indian hags (Armstrong 1992). "Better dead than married to an Indian", the captive woman's categorical imperative, does indeed find its echo in Clarissa's stubborn refusal to marry a repentant Lovelace while yearning for delivery from her troubles through a speedy death. Such a refusal of a happy ending through marriage may reinforce one of the most powerful motifs of sentimental fictions, the fear of illegitimacy or of bastardy. This was a fear that white women plausibly faced during their captivity and was widely shared in their community of origin. On the other hand, no such fear is attributed to the Indian side, as is made imaginatively apparent in the Pocahontas lore. This archetypal Indian Princess, the rescuer of Captain Smith, did become the wife of the Anglo-Saxon future

tobacco-planter John Rolfe. History records her also as the mother of Anglo-Indian Thomas Rolfe. Historical fictions in early Republican America, however, do not explicitly refer to Pocahontas. Only an Englishman, John Davis, published in Philadelphia in 1805 a short novel based on her story and entitled *Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas*, which he dedicated to Thomas Jefferson.

Still Pocahontas, the mother of legitimate children, was a natural candidate for fulfilling the basic tenet of conservative "true womanhood" - the "accustomed and grateful office" that "woman" is made to perform in the new nation - since, according to James F. Cooper, a virtuous female is instrumental in bringing about "family unions" to "cement the political tie which had made a forced conjunction between people so opposite in their habits, their education, and their opinions" (*The Prairie*). Conservative "true womanhood" and lawful family unions, however, no longer seem to include racial difference, not even when represented by such a mythic commodity as Pocahontas. Cooper in fact expressed his surprise in *Notions of the Americans* (1832) on finding that many contemporary Southern gentlemen proudly claimed to be descendants of the Indian Pocahontas, while he sided with a version of Republican America as a pot melting people of different descent, identified as descent from European immigrant parents.

Once legitimate descent is identified in immigrant parents, the native, male and female, is cast as a figure of the past, and the native woman's function as wife and mother which originated in the Pocahontas story - in the lawful passage of land through marriage - is declared obsolete. It appears that Republican legitimacy shuns continuity with the past of the country, its colonial times and its myths of conquest since, it may be surmised, continuity would mean acknowledging the illegitimacy of the right to own the land, even if the past dowry of Pocahontas was legitimately acquired, as proud Southern descendants would testify. "Better dead than married to..." appears to stress the contradiction between legitimacy and illegitimacy in these post-revolutionary tales, both as related to "owning" the land and "descending" from intermarriages.

Indeed, the future in the past of these fictions is so obsessed

with the acceptance-denial of possible descent from the Indian that in his novel, *Tadeuskund, the Last King of the Lenape*, Nicholas M. Hentz makes the Indian princess, Elluwia, turn out to be, in the end, an "Indian-proved-white", with Anglo-Saxon father and ancestors, adopted in her infancy by the Indian chief of the title. Logically, the eventual discovery of her European descent should remove the obstacle to her marriage with the beloved white hero. But it does not: her story reverses the common captivity narrative formula of the white female rescued back to her own natural kin, since to Elluwia legitimate, pure descent means nothing because she has adopted Indianness as a way of life. She is denied marriage because she is stained by a symbolic Indian-white bastardy, and eventually she courts death as a speedy resolution for her conflicting identity, while her sacrifice does not immediately bring about the happiness of anyone involved.

Marrying an Indian princess (even one of pure white descent), is to marry a hybrid: a figure that contains aristocracy and landless status, legitimacy and illegitimacy, white ways and Indian ways, similarity and difference. The marriage impossibility is such a pervasive motif that it is claimed alike by conservatives and progressives. A liberal text such as Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* sets it at the core of its historical plot. The white male hero, Everell Fletcher, has to choose between equally worthy white and red maidens. Everell - a young man isolated by the Puritan community because of his modern - that is, anachronistically enlightened ideas - of freedom and independence - is presented with three possible matches, two white girls and one Indian princess. Of the two white girls, one is pale, submissive, parent-abiding, and is discarded because of her outmoded notions of womanhood; the other, Hope Leslie, is a post vindication-of-the-rights-of-women character: future-oriented, independent, spirited, eager to realize self-assertiveness, and to be instrumental to the communal welfare. The Indian princess, Magawisca, shares the same traits, and besides she teaches Hope by her example the value of "natural" fierceness, of her warrior-like sense of honor. Like Pocahontas at an earlier stage of New World history, she asserts her will by acting as a mediator between the two races, and heroically proves it by

saving the life of captive Everell, with whom she falls in love. Yet, even if white Hope and red Magawisca are characterized as equally worthy, Everell, though grateful and admiring, does not consider the Indian a possible match. As the following dialogue between himself and a good friend shows, there is a "natural" insurmountable barrier preventing it:

"...It is odd what vagaries come and go in a body's mind; time was, when I viewed you as good as mated with Magawisca; forgive me for speaking so, Mr. Everell, seeing she was but a tawny Indian after all".

"Forgive you, Digby! You do me honour, by implying that I rightly estimated that noble creature; and before she had done the heroic deed, to which I owe my life. Yes Digby I might have loved her - might have forgotten that nature had put barriers between us."

*(Hope Leslie, 214)*

"Nature" both divides and unites along racial lines, individual merits notwithstanding, and "liberal" Everell righteously claims his affinity with the white "new woman", Hope Leslie (Goethe's affinity is referred to in the text). While in Elluwia's case Indianness as an obstacle to marriage is defined by culture, habits, and subsequent loyalties, in Sedgwick's treatment Indianness is "naturally" different from whiteness. In fact Magawisca's characterization relies on the extra-textual understanding of the natural unsuitability of race mixing, since textually her renunciation of Everell is not "personally" motivated. She is instead made to utter generalizing statements such as "the white man cometh, the Indian vanisheth", and "the Indian and the white man can no more mingle, and become one, than day and night", which are at odds with the many "good" individual traits composing her character. What may appear as a paradox or a sloppy treatment, is a pre-determined narrative logic: once the Indian is believed to be naturally excluded from the future American family, he or she can fictionally become an individual provided with an array of worthy qualities, whose pathetic fate (disappearance) may enhance the message of the "natural" superiority of the other race, and of other marriages. Within the sentimental code, moreover, Magawisca behaves like Clarissa who refuses to marry her seducer because a

"tainted" woman would stain the "honor" of the family she marries into. The difference between the white and the red sentimental heroine is that both taint and honor are transposed from a discourse of sexuality into a discourse of race. Curiously enough such a transposition does not work in the intermarriage that is featured in the subplot of *Hope Leslie*: Hope's very sister, Faith, abducted by the Indians as a child, chooses to remain with her Indian husband, Oneco, Magawisca's brother, and with him disappears in the woods, while Hope mourns her fate in sympathy and grief. To Hope, as well as to Magawisca, her Indianization has gone too far for her womanhood to be claimed back by her natural kin. Faith's second identity is the racial shame that binds her womanly self to the fate of the vanishing Indian. Legitimacy of marriage is not an issue when the "natural" law has been broken, and the white-woman-marrying-an-Indian pattern confirms both the denial of intermarriage from the point of view of the white female, and the sentimental truth of the "natural" barrier introjected by the Indian princess.

Still Sedgwick's plot is centered on the choice of a wife, and reminds historical fiction readers that Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) was a possible model for shaping the sentimental plot line in fictions on racial conflicts (Fiedler 1967, Cagidemetro 1989). The *Ivanhoe*/Rebecca/Rowena triangle, and the hero's matrimonial choice between the dark Jewess and the fair Saxon are the essential turn-of-the-screw to the Saxon and Norman conflict, to be solved by the novel's ending. Saxons and Normans mainly define themselves by purity of descent, while such a notion is challenged by a hybrid "third party" which combines the reasons of different allegiances: descent versus culture, conservatism versus progressivism, monoracialism versus transracialism. Rebecca is the figure that contains the strain of these opposites: she is a Jewess by descent and yet "belongs to England", she is part of the old world of chivalry and yet she is modern in her ideas of domestic happiness, and, finally, she is neither convinced that she should marry within her own race, nor seduced into marrying outside of it. The ending of the novel, highly unsatisfactory as it was deemed, envisions a solution in exonerating *Ivanhoe* from choosing a bride,



and letting Rebecca choose for him, by favoring his union with Rowena. The beautiful Jewess voluntarily disappears from the scene, renews an allegiance with her Fathers, and devotes herself to good deeds and spinsterhood.

Not unlike Rebecca, her New World counterparts, such as Magawisca, are Indian by descent and absorb Anglo-Saxon culture, while living in Anglo-Saxon disputed territory: Magawisca is taught to read the Bible while a captive of the good Puritans. She too belongs to the past - both Scott and Cooper believed in the equivalence between the American Indian and the medieval knight - and yet, like Hope, she stands for new values of womanhood. Like Rebecca she is sentimentally linked to the "white" hero, and does not consider marrying within her own race. Unlike Rebecca, however, the Indian princess does not acknowledge the English-white side of her character as part of the conflictual forces that ultimately drive her towards disappearance. On the contrary, it is legitimate Indianness, "purity" of descent that constitutes natural difference, and is privileged as a conclusive (and unexplained) motivation for self-sacrifice. This is apparent in Magawisca's case, but also in Elisabeth Cushing's *Saratoga*, in Charles Sealsfield's *Tokeah or the White Rose*, or in the anonymous *The Christian Indian*. And it is proved by the opposite instance of Hentz's *Tadeuskund*, since pure Elluwia's fate is sealed by what appears to be a tragically stubborn defense of wrong loyalty to "cultural" Indianness, which prevents her from seeing purity of descent as her legitimate birthright to matrimonial happiness.

Moreover, whereas Rebecca's exclusion from marriage both sets the limits of Jewishness within the Anglo-Saxon world, and asserts its continuity as an asset in the contemporary world, for her Indian counterparts there is a formulaic stress on self-sacrifice and an intensification of their role as magic helpers: they act not only as nurses and rescuers of beloved white heroes, but also substantially help in bringing about the happy-marriage solution for the monoracial couple. Eventually their destiny is harsher than that of the beautiful Jewess because their self-sacrifice is finalized in a voluntary pursuit of death. In this pursuit, Indian females behave with "male" heroic obstinacy and perform

resounding deeds, which, by making them different from sentimental domestic characters, suggest a possible destabilization of gender roles. Femininity joined to Indianness may evoke a new spectrum for interpreting sexual difference. Male Indians are themselves "feminized", and not only because they are self-sacrificial. De Paw's long-standing definition of their type as beardless and with milk in their breasts is proved true by the "good" Indian's "softness", and male Indians are derogatively called "women" by their "bad" red and white antagonists. Female Indians, on the other hand, are often referred to as "warrior-like", and share with the males a spirit of independence, loyalty, a sense of honor, pride, even fierceness. Androgyny or gynandry appear to characterize the gendered Indian, he or she can be distanced as a "natural" freak, where "natural" pertains primarily to the orderly distinction of sexual difference. While Scott's Rebecca is resistantly "feminine" and her exclusion from marriage, her self-sacrifice, are counterbalanced by the womanly future of a life of philanthropy among her kin, the vanishing Indian's exclusion and self-sacrifice are also the natural atonement for an "unnatural" being, both male and female, a potentially frightening hermaphrodite who might "taint" the order of a sexual political economy centered on the role of the "virtuous" white female.

"Better dead than married to an Indian" may be read again within the politics of sexual discourse as a prohibition protecting gender roles, characteristically conveyed through a displacement, race or Indianness, a figure which contains both the cry for purity, and the essence of sexual disorder. The process of choosing a wife cannot but reinforce the necessity of "purity" because it is silent about "disorder". The good Indian is never associated with lust or seduction, and is banned from sexual encounters; at the same time, the good Indian is fashioned as a sexual hybrid, thus turning sexual disorder into an *a-priori* difference, into a thing of "nature".

### ***Virtuous bodies and tainted beings***

If the female post-Declaration-of-Independence (domestic) "pursuit of happiness" is fictionally determined by happy endings

in marriage, the Indian princess is excluded from it. Still, this dramatically "different" being is a "guardian angel", and represents "heroism and romance in their ideal purity" (*Tadeuskund* 63). By sentimental standards femininity is strongly characterized by virtue, in its more essential trait, chastity, whose preservation is to be rewarded with married and class status, and whose loss is to be punished with social ostracism and illegitimate offsprings. Virtue as female chastity is also attributed to the Indian heroine, yet her "virtue" is extended beyond the limits of the "domestic" female, since she can also be virtuous like an Indian warrior, proud, uncompromising, valorous, generous to others, ready to assume a leading role. "In a word," writes Hentz, "she had the noblest beauties of our forms, united to the loftier lineaments of the savage tribes," she had "firmness and strength softened by a persuasive expression of sweetness and placidity, deep penetration, playful innocence." Androgynous traits in such a woman are neatly divided by coupling "female" with white, and "male" with Indian. Strategically this woman's body is both "female" and "male". With clear intertextual reference to the sentimental code, such a body, Elluwia's body for instance, is insistently, voyeuristically displayed as an object of desire. On her first appearing to the white hero, Livingston, she is described in a manner reminiscent of such descriptions as that of Lovelace lustfully beholding a disrobed Clarissa (*Clarissa* letter 225; *Tadeuskund* 54-5). Yet the same body may appear to the same voyeur as a male body, fascinating because menacing, phallus-like. "His" (Livingston's) Elluwia - or "Miss Elluwia", as she is called by a comic character - is metamorphosed from the desirable female form shown through veils, into a form that provides continuity with the sword and "Indianness":

Elluwia held a sword in her hand, and seemed to guide and direct those who followed. Her countenance and her form, in that light, had no longer the appearance of a terrestrial being; like a superior spirit, she seemed in her elevated movements to command, and to command with power, an enterprise of high import.

When she came near the ashes of her father's bones, she stopped, and her attendants stopped in respectful acquiescence; she looked for a time

fixedly on the dusky embers, as if to seek a bony relic of the hero; then slowly bowed her pallid, but calm brow to the pile, and having raised her stately head above, without a tear or an earthly sign, she twice waved down her glittering sword to the royal remains; when like one, who, unimpassioned, wills unchangeably the accomplishment of a great design, she continued her progress towards the captives.

(*Tadeuskund* 263-4)

Elluwia's body hosts virile virtue, characterized by "the intrepidity of a hero", confronting "so many dangers" (*Tadeuskund*, 265), while pursuing the "accomplishment of a great design" by point of sword. She is both the desirable virgin and the relentless warrior. In fact, Indian princesses are often referred to as Clelias and Camillas, thus partaking of the general spirit of the Republican founding fathers in likening themselves to Roman heroes. Icon-like, the female body contains both the allures of the virtuous sentimental heroine and the progressive assertion of the new times. Discarding a concept of virtue for the female as citizen based only on female chastity, such a radical proto-feminist as Mary Wollstonecraft had expressed the hope that "the true heroism of antiquity might again animate female bosoms" (*Vindication* 258). Still, the radical cry for Roman virtue within a female bosom, is hidden/exposed in Indian garb: Elluwia's "white" form persistently recalls chastity, modesty, spiritual superiority, and, while she dies as a fierce "Indian", her white lover, once again contemplating her body, only sees "the bright unearthly dreams of virtue, disinterestedness, and elevation, which he wished to find in the female character" (273). "Indianness" may project radical meanings of womanhood, while whiteness assumes its conservative sides; jointly, Indianness and whiteness help to define the notion of female Republican virtue as loyalty to family, chastity and modesty, spirit of sacrifice, but also "all the noble train of virtues, on which social virtue and happiness are built" (*Vindication*, 250).

Gendering Indians may both reinforce domestic notions of womanhood, and allow for emancipation strategies; on the other hand Indianizing gender, the female body may assume an aspect of deformity, and suggest the possibility of its being sexually "tainted". The body of these Indian princesses, though beautiful, is

characterized by diminution, infertility, or a dis-ability for reproduction. Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* stages a symbolic amputation of this female body. Magawisca's arm is amputated while (and because) she rescues, Pocahontas-like, her beloved Everell from the axe of her father's executioners. This amputation is reminiscent of the Amazon's sacrifice of one breast for war-like purposes, and of its punishment: by losing her arm Magawisca loses the ability to fight like a warrior, and, at the same time, her femininity is mutilated forever. Thus her amputation marks her as irreparably and tragically different from Hope Leslie, and provides a warning both against the excesses of male heroic behaviour, and against the excesses of female "tenderness", those same excesses which were responsible for the loss of virtue and "unhappy" fate of many a sentimental heroine.

No Indian princess would ever "fall" by the standards of racial purity, still the Indianized female body is "tainted" in analogy to the tainted bodies of sentimental "lost" women. This "natural" taint, their "unworthiness", is stylized after the unworthiness of sexually impure females, without ever being exposed to the "pollution" of sexual encounters against nature, or exposed to the menace of sexual violence. These heroines introject their difference, support the intraracial sexual barrier, and are never forced to break it, while white female characters are often menaced by rapists in Indian garb. They are born "tainted", and remain so. The crucial "tainting" event in narratives of female virtue, rape, is carefully omitted, and yet "rape" is consistently a sign of Indianness, both in the narratives of discovery and conquest, and in captivity narratives, both as a white-man-raping-red-woman story, and as a red-man-trying-to-rape-white-woman story. The rape/Indianness combination does not seem to apply to the female Indian, most startlingly when she is characterized, in part at least, as one of Clarissa's countless descendants. But, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued, distinguishing between black and white sexual definition, when the racial fracture is recorded in society and by society, "*rape and its meaning circulate in precisely opposite directions*" (Sedgwick 1985, 10): to the white woman's obsession with rape corresponds the silence about her Indian sister.

In my readings of early historical American novels on the Indian-white conflict, however, I have come across one narrativized instance of the successful seduction of an Indian princess by a sneering libertine, in *Miriam Coffin or the Whale Fisherman* by Joseph Hart; and one narrativized instance of rape at the origin of this corpus, in the 1798 novel *Reuben and Rachel* by the sentimental writer Susanna Rowson.

*Miriam Coffin* is a singularly racist text, which thus summarizes the motif of the vanishing Indian:

The presence of the whites seemed, of itself, to blast the Indian with mildew, and to seal up the source of procreation to his sable race. The command "to increase and multiply" applied no longer to the savage. A deep and abiding, though unwritten curse, appeared to rest upon them - it was the curse of inherent self extermination - gradually but surely, drying up the springs of prolific vitality, until the last vestige of Indian originality, and every lineament of the American aboriginal should fade away into nothingness.

(*Miriam Coffin*; 70)

This statement serves as an introduction to the appearance of the Indian princess, Mantua, the future victim. She is not warrior-like, and appears to her vicious seducer as particularly alluring because of "her parentage", her sort of "kingly paternity", and because of her being "the last representative of the princesses of her tribe." Her aristocratic descent is an enticement to humiliate by seduction, while her Indianness makes her an easy victim. There is no redeeming quality in an Indian who forgets, as Mantua does, to preserve not only female chastity, but racial purity: "How foolish," she is made to say, "not to know that the dark skin of the Indian maid would prove the impassable barrier to my happiness" (*Miriam Coffin*, 223-4). Abandoned, and voluntarily vanishing to death, Mantua's doom is thus commented upon by her seducer: "Poor Mantua..was ever being so devoted - the love of Pocahontas was nothing to it" (*Miriam Coffin*, 247).

*Miriam Coffin* may provide evidence for the fact that only a novel with an explicit racist message could tell the story of the successful "violation" of an Indian woman. Mantua's seduction

brings forth an equivalent double horror, that of bastardy and that of intraracial generation. Mantua, the sentimental heroine, knows that her child is illegitimate, both according to her father's law and to that of the white community; she also knows that her offspring cannot live because he is the outcome of a crime against nature. In fact, her seducer appears morally responsible for this crime against nature and God (who has revoked the command "increase and multiply" as far as the Indians are concerned), and less so for inducing the woman to renounce chastity. Thus seduction is detestable because it may interrupt "vanishing", or because it may show an analogy between the strategy of vanishing and the preservation of virtue, or female chastity. Such a strategic analogy between vanishing and preservation of female chastity relies on the political postulate that only if "Indianness" vanishes can sexual roles be respected, and legitimate order established, while if "Indianness" persists, "increases and multiplies", sexual disorder, and its dreaded consequence, bastardy, may follow. Mantua's sexual "taint" is real enough to support, unconditionally and brutally, the killing of herself and of her descendant (or her race). In the name of race her sexually disordered conduct can be rightfully punished, and in the name of sex her racially disordered offspring rightfully perishes.

Mantua's character does not show any androgynous trait: she limits herself to crying, and she is not even remotely mentioned in connection with swords. It is not so with Bruna, the raped virgin in *Reuben and Rachel*, by Susanna Rowson, the well-known author of *Charlotte Temple*. Rowson's declared intention is to match history and sentimentality and to address the reading public of sentimental novels, those young females with untutored minds who would profit by the perusal of works dealing with 'the history of their native country' (*Reuben and Rachel*, III). Since "the generality of books intended for students (of history) are written for boys," this work, Rowson maintains, is to appeal to "my own sex only" (*Reuben and Rachel*, IV). In fact Rowson's novel, as William Spengemann suggests, feminizes the epic of the conquest and colonization of the New World (Spengemann 1994). Feminizing epic, Rowson addresses the problem of female virtue,

with an interesting distribution of meaning along racial lines, and an equally interesting treatment of rape, as the foundational act for Republican discourse.

*Reuben and Rachel* is a pre-Scott genealogical novel featuring a number of intermarriages. It tells the story of a family of mixed ancestry, proceeding from 1492, from the marriage of Columbus's adopted son, Ferdinand, with a Peruvian Princess, down to their descendants in the eighteenth century and in pre-revolutionary Philadelphia.

Rowson attempts to re-write foundational ancient epics, in which male conquerors marry conquered females, but up to a point: Orrabella, the Peruvian Princess, marries Ferdinand, Columbus's adopted son, and their anglicized descendant of the sixth generation marries Oberea, the daughter of a North-American chief. This happens around 1674. From their union Reuben is born. Little Reuben, left an orphan, is transferred back to England, where he is forced to abandon his claim to English title and estate because of "his dark complexion, the nature of his father's marriage to Oberea, which in law would have been termed illegal" (*Reuben and Rachel*, 168). His male descendant, the Reuben of the title, repeats his grandfather's adventure among the Pennsylvania Indians, and is taken prisoner by them. Eumea, daughter of the Indian chief and of a French woman, repeats the Pocahontas pattern, and rescues him from certain death. Like Pocahontas, but also like Rowson's founding mother, and the intermediate Indian ancestress, Eumea falls in love with Reuben. All this obsessive repetition has to come to an end. And it does: Reuben, destined to be the pre-revolutionary patriarch, is different from his ancestors since "he knew too much of Indians" to entertain the idea of intermarrying again. The same applies to Eumea, the first voluntary vanishing Indian princess: she knows that loving Reuben is a "crime" and renounces him, who happily marries a fair English lady. Yet Eumea cannot stifle her passion (a result of her French/Indian blood combination?) and un-characteristically seeks her death in water.

Rowson attempts to bridge the two halves of the genealogical story, the before and after the acceptance of intermarriage - but



also the before as conquest-story and the after as pre-revolutionary story - by attributing race pride, not to the whites, but to a "natural" native female trait at the time of discovery and conquest. The Indian servant woman, Cora, disapproves of her mistress Orrabella's marriage. As she tells Orrabella's granddaughter, aptly named Columbia, her Indian female progenitor is responsible "for her own wretchedness, the ruin of her father, the slavery of his people, and brought destruction on the heads of her adored husband and his respected parent". Forgetting the essential command to keep race pure, Orrabella brings destruction and conflict into her own family and to her own land. The Pocahontas-type myth of origin is told as a double-edged tool: the preservation of female virtue is not sufficient to counterbalance a crime against race, and therefore racial purity is stylized as a stronger precept than that of female chastity, or female chastity is taken to imply racial purity.

As a reinforcement of the exchange of value between female virtue and race purity, Columbus tells his version of the beginning of his own fortune reversal, and of the insurrections of the natives, as dependent on the unforgivable rape of an Indian princess. The proud virgin Bruna is raped by a Spanish villain and sent back to her already dispossessed father (he is a chief left without any riches). The shameful and dishonored Bruna kills herself in front of Columbus, her father and her people, a symbol of dignity and despair:

The poor girl stood for a moment the image of mute despair; then raising her hands and eyes to heaven, cried, "Home! No! Never! Bruna is the daughter of the chaste Lilah, and was instructed by the wise precepts of her father to prize her honour above her life. Their mansion was the dwelling of innocence, piety, and virtue; and never will their wretched daughter carry pollution thither." Then turning toward her father, she made as though she would have embraced him; but with a kind of involuntary shudder, shrunk again from him, and drawing a dagger she had concealed in her bosom, plunged it in her heart .... The bleeding form of the lovely Bruna, the agonizing sorrow of her father, acted like a talisman on the minds of the people; and in a few hours the whole settlement was in a state of insurrection. Justice! Justice! was the cry.

*(Reuben and Rachel 32)*

Is it the call of Bruna that the countless Indian princesses respond to with their warrior-like androgynous behavior, without ever again being so offended? Is the figural equivalence between rape and land possession at the origin of the other equivalence, that between female chastity and racial purity?

Bruna's cry for justice is not followed by reparation, but by the spreading of injustice and prevarication. Columbus himself is arrested by the villain's followers and sent back to Spain as a traitor. Columbus's dream of possessing the land through virtuous integration is shattered: those villanous Spaniards "proceeded from one step to another, till neither sex nor age became a safeguard from their cruelties. The chaste wife and the pure virgin were violated in the presence of their parents and protectors, who, confined by these inhuman monsters, had not the power to rescue or to avenge them" (*Reuben and Rachel* 45). The horrors of the politically incorrect Spanish conquest are exemplified by violent loss of chastity, and brutal denial of the preservation of female virtue as a political value. Bruna's rape is the original act that binds the female body to the liberal body politic, and through rape the woman's body is racially identified and politically announced as dispossessed, dishonored, robbed of land and status. The Indian princess's body thus becomes the vehicle of revolution, in the name of justice, independence from tyrants, respect for the rights of man.

Bruna's manner of dying is reminiscent of the mythical suicide of Lucretia, the Roman matron raped by her family's enemy and whose death stands for a call for revenge and for virile virtues to counteract offended purity. Lucretia was a frequent referential model for Richardson's *Clarissa*, as Ian Donaldson has amply shown (Donaldson 1982). To *Clarissa*'s mind, Lucretia stands for the unbearable pain of the loss of chastity, her body violation and consequent impurity, its doom of death. In Richardson's plot there is no room for the classic coupling between disruption of female honor and the prevarication of a budding republican spirit. Richardson does not remind his readers that it was on Lucretia's dead body that Brutus claimed justice for the Romans, thus inaugurating the first republican revolution in history (this is the

reason why the Lucretia legend was revived by eighteenth-century liberal dramatists in anti-tyrannical plots, such as the one by Vittorio Alfieri, whose *Bruno Primo* (1787) is dedicated to G. Washington). Lovelace gives voice to the English novelist's divergent agenda when he thus comments on Clarissa's piety:

Her innate piety (as I have more than once observed) will not permit her to shorten her own life, either by violence or neglect. She has a mind too noble for that; and would have done it before now, had she designed any such thing, for, to do it like the Roman matron, when the mischief is over, and it can serve no end, and when the man, however a Tarquin, as some may think him in this action, is not a Tarquin in power, so that no national point can be made of it, is what she has too much good sense to think of. (letter 371)

There is no apparent "national point" to be made about Clarissa's rape, and Lovelace is no Brutus. As a consequence Clarissa cannot voluntarily kill herself, she has to be "sacrificed" by Time and Life and God. Not so with the Indian princess: self-sacrifice, or race-sacrifice, becomes a rite both for atonement (for the loss of chastity or of honor) and for passage to the better order (sexual and political) of the post-revolutionary Republic. Between the high figure that the Lucretia myth projects upon Bruna and the realization of the ideals her dead body cries out for, however, there is an action gap to be filled with the evidence of disorder and sexual promiscuity (including intermarriages), to be redressed in a future that Reuben, as a pre-revolutionary Pennsylvanian, is anticipating with his return to America from England. The motivation for Reuben's return is to claim the lands of his ancestors, both red and white ancestors. Such a claim is not enforced by the acceptance of intermarriage, but by a strong denial which includes the silence on the mixed blood of Reuben himself. Having acquired the land by submitting a new deed, the young man can be reunited with his English bride-to-be.

Rowson's fictional strategy is consequently deployed to "preserve" gender and to "taint" race. As a prototype of the gendered vanishing Indian, Bruna is both a woman of sensibility, meant, as Orrabella or Pocahontas are, for a virtuous sexual

"compact", even if she is an Indian. Thus considered, the function of the Indian woman works within the eighteenth-century reconstruction of a plot of conquest, or rather as the agent of the myth of origin in the "encounter" between Old and New World. Yet Bruna is raped, not married, and she is raped - as Mantua is seduced - because she is an Indian. The shift from the discourse of conquest to that of the new nation is matched by a reversal from the acceptance of lawful marriage to the denial of intermarriage, and, in this perspective, Bruna's raped body is a polluted body by the standards both of female chastity and of racial purity. Polluted racial purity is linked with rape both in the Amazon and in the Lucretia myth: an Ethiopian conqueror raped and polluted the Amazon matriarch in one version of the myth, referred to by Heinrich von Kleist in his *Penthesilea* (1808), and, in Servius's version of the Lucretia story, the Roman lady chooses to be raped since she cannot face the alternative offered her by the villanous seducer: to be killed and laid in bed beside the dead body of a black slave. Shakespeare's own treatment in "The Rape of Lucrece" divides the blood flowing from her dying body into three parts: her still chaste blood is red, while the adulterated blood of her seduction is black, and the issue of their combination is a watery liquid:

About the mourning and congealed face  
 Of that black blood a wat'ry rigol goes,  
 Which seems to weep upon the tainted place;  
 And ever since, as pitying Lucrece's woes,  
 Corrupted blood some watery token shows;  
 And blood untainted still doth red abide,  
 Blushing at that which is so putrified. (vv. 1744-49)

Body pollution by rape implies blood pollution and the issue is a watery liquid, "which seems to weep upon the tainted place", the woman's sex, but also the locus of pure generation. Thus rape is indeed allied to the female Indian, as an impure genitrix: Bruna becomes the figure of this impurity, and dies voluntarily a sacrificial victim for the re-instatement of her own race's honor, the purity of its blood, thus becoming simultaneously the figure of the

necessity of preserving female chastity and of relinquishing polluted "Indianness".

Race pollution also marks the white descent line in Reuben's family, even if he is the descendant of what appear lawful intraracial marriages: yet Reuben doubts their legitimacy, and his own story is marked by the parallel story of suicidal Eumea, like him the descendant of a mixed couple. The "original guilt" overrules her actual chastity and she "vanishes", at the same time that Reuben tightens his allegiance to his new country. His choice of settling in America is characteristically linked to the immigrant "start anew", in a space cleaned from feudal rights to the land, from tribal allegiances, from polluted ancestry. A deep introjected shame, the actual rape of Indian women, and its association with land dispossession, may account for the difference between Eumea's and Reuben's fate, still Rowson's novel is the first to establish the relation between "vanishing" and preservation of racial purity that a later text such as *Miriam Coffin* so blatantly exposes.

The inability of Bruna's race to avenge her by overthrowing the Spaniards, makes her unanswered revolutionary cry a plea for the legitimacy of the American rebellion. Indeed, and this is the implication for Rowson's readers, in historical reality, Bruna as offended female, as a landless individual, is to be avenged by the American revolution. The shift from Indians to whites as the avengers of Bruna's honor appears motivated not only by the need to address sexual disorder, but also by the necessity of curbing another republican excess, rebelliousness in the name of clan loyalty. Bruna's rape dooms her Indian fictional descendants to change the field of honor, from that of sexuality to that of family or clan: her Roman sense of honor privileges a passionate allegiance to "race", over her personal sexual offense. Many vanishing Indians later, Magawisca states that anything can be asked of her but to betray her father (*Hope Leslie*, 55), and Anglo-Saxon Elluwia dies because of her excessive loyalty to the chief's sense of honor. Sense of honor as clan loyalty is ultimately responsible for the Indian princess's rebelliousness, or "vanishing" can be read as the "national" figure of the irreconcilability between clan loyalty and revolutionary ideals: the red sentimental heroines' sense of honor

is a thing of the past, related to patriarchy, aristocracy, dependence, and was lost, unvindicated, in a primal rape scene, of which they have no memory. To their miserable yet elevated fictional destiny might be applied Mary Wollstonecraft's comment on Richardson's *Clarissa*: "When Richardson makes *Clarissa* tell *Lovelace* that she has been robbed of her honor, he must have had strange notions of honor and virtue. For, miserable beyond all names of misery is the condition of a being, who could be degraded without its own consent." (*Vindication*, 166). Sexually degraded without her own consent, but consensually made to appear malely proud of her honor, the Indian princess is destined to be both "sentimentally" admired for her "womanhood" and "naturally" condemned for her "Indianness", and we may assume that her white, virtuous, domestic readers, male and female, were confirmed, by her death in the wilderness, of the republican propriety of being democratically different.

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