

A Na(t)ive Paradise: John Richardson's *Tecumseh*

by Wanda Campbell

Because interest in John Richardson has focused on his colourful career as a soldier and on his novels, especially *Wacousta*, his long poem, *Tecumseh*, has been largely ignored in the century and a half since it was published. If mentioned at all, it is dismissed as a historically interesting but poetically insignificant work: "*Tecumseh* displays too close and un-original a copying of classic models, and it is too uniformly mediocre and conventional to merit anything more than a mildly favourable comment" (Riddell 200). Dennis Duffy refers to *Tecumseh* as Richardson's "lurid, turgid epic" which is interesting only in so far as its "pseudo-Miltonic horrors, its dire prophecies, and bizarre combats presage the melodrama of *Wacousta*" ("John Richardson" 107). Elsewhere he writes that "Richardson's first published work...is written in near doggerel" ("Dream World" 22). Michael Hurley briefly mentions the poem's status in Richardson's literary output as the first of many works to explore the "regional myth of origins," one of Richardson's central concerns (30), but, like most recent critics, Hurley focuses entirely on the fiction. In 1828, the poem's earliest reviewer praised the "skill...candour and zeal" of its author (qtd. by Ballstadt 27) but few since have agreed.

In 1992, the publication of a scholarly edition of the poem introduced and edited by Douglas Daymond and Leslie Monkman proved to be a significant advance over any previous commentaries, and one to which the following study is indebted. In their thirty page Introduction, Daymond and Monkman identify Richardson's debts to Walter Scott, Lord Byron, the Italian Renaissance epic, Thomas Campbell, the Homeric tradition and, of course, John Milton. The *Tecumseh* chapter of D.M.R. Bentley's *Mimic Fires: Accounts of Early Long Poems on Canada*, published in 1994, further illuminates Richardson's imaginative historicism, or "imaginative shaping of historical information for honorific purposes" (145) and elaborates upon other sources including the writings of Isaac Weld. Building on the work of these critics, the essay underway argues that in *Tecumseh* John Richardson explores the classic epic theme of "Heroic Martyrdom/ Unsung" (PL 9.32-33), and also reveals the tragic extinction of a way of life and the loss of a newly-found Paradise. A close analysis of the poem reveals how Richardson uses the conventions of classical

epic, the symbolic structure of *Paradise Lost*, and the peculiar conditions of Canadian history to create "Things unattempted yet" (*PL* 1.16) in the colonial literature of his day. Derivative though it may be, *Tecumseh* is rooted in a Canadian context by the choice of an indigenous hero through whom Richardson can explore epic themes.

In *Tecumseh*, Richardson sheds light on one of the first and darkest chapters in Canadian history. He reminds his readers that while the early settlers believed they were discovering Paradise, they were, in fact, participating in its destruction. On the surface, Richardson's epic theme appears to be the same as Virgil's in the *Aeneid*: "*Arma virumque cano*: I sing of arms and the man" (3). The poem's subtitle "The Warrior of the West," the dedication "To Captain Barclay and other officers..." from "their companion in arms" (v), and the Preface in which Richardson asserts "[t]he following Poem is the production of a soldier" (xi), all prepare the way for a military tale of a heroic warrior who "swore to fall, or set his country free" (1.280). However, all three of these elements are absent from the Canadian edition (1842), which is introduced simply as *Tecumseh, a Poem in Four Cantos*. If Richardson's poem is to receive the re-evaluation it deserves, critics must follow the lead of Daymond and Monkman and respect the changes Richardson made in the Canadian edition of 1842 and consider how they serve to strengthen his epic design.

Tecumseh; or The Warrior of the West was first published in London in May of 1828, and was then republished in 1842 in *The New Era or Canadian Chronicle*, the Brockville paper of which Richardson himself was the editor. A reprint by the Golden Dog Press appeared in 1978, but, curiously, its editor chose to return to the original London edition, rather than to the Canadian edition which Richardson had substantially revised. William Morley defends the choice in his Introduction to the 1978 reprint by saying that the Canadian Edition is "a greatly abridged version, nineteen stanzas being omitted" (ix), though five years earlier, he had written the following about the two editions:

Whether or not [Richardson] consulted the original *Tecumseh* manuscript, fourteen years after its first appearance in print (and nineteen after the poem was composed), the poet's style and taste must have changed.... Numerous verbal substitutions are introduced without much changing the sense (though improving the art perhaps)....

(63)

Obviously, the poem does not rank with *The Prelude* in meriting an ongoing debate over the value of the earlier and later versions, but it is surprising that Canadian scholars, with the exception of Daymond and Monkman, should be so unwilling to accept Richardson's revised offering, published in his own paper in Canada. A close examination of the two versions indicates that the changes were

neither artificially imposed nor accidental, but rather deliberate artistic improvements. In addition to making numerous verbal substitutions, Richardson omitted five stanzas from his introductory portrait of Tecumseh in Canto I which give a side to Tecumseh's character that counteracts what appears to be Richardson's intended design. These stanzas turn a Messiah with righteous wrath into a bloodthirsty monster boiling with vengeance and hatred. In the omitted stanzas Tecumseh chases his victims "like the fierce monsters of his native wood,/ Till gorg'd with victims and with human blood" (I.xxxvi.7-8; 1828). He departs from the slaughter "in triumph.../ Leaving despair and harrowing grief behind" (I.xxxviii.5-6; 1828). Only a passage referring to the way in which the dead bodies of white men "fertiliz'd the bosom of that land/ They came to conquer with unpitying hand" (1.287-88) remains. All references in the discussion that follows are to the Canadian edition of 1842 as edited by Daymond and Monkman, unless otherwise indicated.

It could be argued that in his Canadian edition, Richardson may at last have recognized that his true theme was not war but the disappearance of peace. *Tecumseh* begins:

It is in truth as fair and sweet a day
As ever dawn'd on Erie's silvery lake,
And wanton sunbeams on its surface play
Which slightest breeze nor rippling currents break.
(1.1-4)

Richardson's poem begins in peace with a dawn like the first dawn. The world is paradisaical until the "break" at the end of the fourth line sunders calm into chaos:

Yet Devastation's voice her friends obey,
And stern Bellona loves e'en here to slake
Her quenchless thirst in streams of human gore,
Which soon must dye that lake and distant shore.
(1.5-8)

The tragedy of the entire poem hinges on the words "e'en here;" even the distant and beautiful garden of Canada will soon be shadowed by death and destruction. The pun on "dye" reinforces the impending doom; this distant shore will soon be stained with the *dye* of blood, and the *dying* of a world and its way of life. Thus, within the context of the opening stanza, what might initially appear as a conventional description of battle becomes a traumatic portrait of nature's first scarring. The details given are not those which might be expected from a soldier who was there. The combatants are not introduced with triumphant fanfare, but rather with the question: "And who are they who, fierce defying, dare...?" (1.17). Richardson describes the American warships that emerge from the mist with language that echoes Milton's description of the fallen angels in *Paradise Lost* (1.376) and reinforces the unprecedented nature of this event: "Nor seen, nor

known, nor understood before" (1.22). Explaining the surprise of the Canadian forces, Richardson notes that "a few months prior to this unfortunate engagement, the trees of which the American flotilla was formed were actually standing in their native forests" (1.22n). Though Richardson drastically reduced the footnotes for the Canadian edition, he saw fit to retain the following: "Captain *Finnis*, who commanded the Queen Charlotte, and Lieut. *Garden* of the *Newfoundland* Regt., (acting as Marines) were both killed by the same ball" (1.132 emphasis added) perhaps because the horticultural and New-World resonances of the names reinforced his theme.

Nature is "startled" and "shrinks quailing back" from these "fearful scenes of death, which darkly stain/ The spotless bosom of the silvery plain" (1.63-64). The opening line of Stanza 9, "And oh! by Heaven it is a glorious day," must be read ironically because of what follows. Richardson goes on to describe how the smoke of the guns hides the sun "Which beautiful and bright that morning rose/ Upon the surface of the clear smooth wave—/ Now ruffled first to form the warrior's grave" (1.70-72). A shadow has fallen over the land. The din of battle fills nature with "one general cry" of agony (1.79) that echoes "along the troubled lake,/ Startling the storm-bird in its wonted route" (1.93-94) when it reaches that once-protected shore.

The lament that follows resembles Adam's response to his first vision of Death (*PL* 11.461): "Alas! a day so fair/ Was doom'd to close in agony and woe" (*Tecumseh* 1.139-40). The language that Richardson uses to describe nature's agony in these stanzas cannot help but remind us of Milton's evocative description of the moment in which Eve eats the forbidden fruit:

Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat
Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe,
That all was lost.

(*PL* 9.782-84)

Similarly, Richardson's description of the fighting men in these opening stanzas recalls Milton's Satan and his followers: "A haughty and an upstart band they are" (I.iii.6; 1828) who boldly dare to take on a foe stronger than themselves. The mists become "sulphureous" and "thick" (1.57) as their "engines vomit through the air/ Fresh streams of carnage" (1.107-108) like those devised by Hell's darkest angels.

As the enemies advance "To waste and havoc yonder World" (*PL* 10.616-17), *Tecumseh* first appears. His introduction, like those of the white soldiers, is also phrased as a question: "Say, who that moveless Warrior, who reclines,/ His noble form against the craggy steep...?" (1.209-10). Richardson claims to be true to the historical *Tecumseh*, a historical objectivity he defines in his Preface as a "strict adherence to the wild poetry of his character" (185). As Richardson's oxymoronic statement makes clear, the task of objectively portraying a character

who had already attained legendary status would be a difficult one. Tecumseh was, as Hurley puts it, Richardson's "lifelong hero" (183) and he looked back upon shaking hands with him during the War of 1812 as a highlight of his life (*Eight Years in Canada* 130). Carl Klinck describes Richardson's Tecumseh as "a noble savage and a Byronic hero" (156). Though these descriptions are not incorrect, Richardson undoubtedly wished his readers to perceive Tecumseh as a Christ figure. Daymond and Monkman suggest that Richardson found "a model for the four-part structure of his own 'brief epic' in *Paradise Regained*" where Christ is depicted as an epic hero, but go on to articulate the difficulties of trying to portray "the warrior of the west" as the "Shawnee embodiment of Miltonic passive fortitude" (xxiv).

If Richardson's Tecumseh is angry, his is the righteous wrath of Christ driving the money changers from his father's house. If he is torn by grief, it is for the sufferings of his tribe. If he is sacrificed, his death is a ransom to redeem his people. He knows through sad experience the "faithless vow" and deceptive ways of his destructive but powerful enemy (1.272). His acceptance of the dark task before him is expressed in the simple phrase, "They come" (1.334), words that echo those of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:42).

The first Canto closes with the arrival of young Uncas, Tecumseh's "sole born, and his Nation's pride" (1.292) in whom Richardson presents a brave son who shares his father's vision. Apparently, this positive portrayal is historically inaccurate; the son of Tecumseh was Pugeshashenwa, "who is represented as having none of the virtues of his father" (Colquhoun 43). Nevertheless, Richardson deliberately chose to give Tecumseh a noble son in keeping with his design. It could be argued that Uncas fills the role of the first Adam. He seeks out his father amid the "plaintive sounds from rustling leaf" (1.310). There he hesitates to speak and feels "a dark foreboding of some agony" (1.323). As his father bids him arm against the coming foe he understands that something new and dark has entered "his native grove" (1.354). His father's image vanishes in the gloom as his canoe slides away from the shore. The frailty of his craft foreshadows the fact that he will be the first to face the dark consequences of the fall of his world. Here, as elsewhere, the skilful melding of native life with Christian allegory lends the poem much of its power.

Canto Second opens with sunset on the lake, "With golden sunbeams quivering in the West" (2.2). The cycles of the sun are worthy of particular attention because they serve as effective barometers of the poem by paralleling the action to follow. By subtly altering his language, Richardson turns conventional descriptions into magnificent backdrops painted in richly symbolic shades. As night approaches:

All—all is chang'd, and desolate, and wild;
Each quay, where late the gallant ships were moor'd
Laments a Brother from its arms beguil'd,

The lake appears a Bride who mourns her Lord;
The port, a Mother who has lost her Child;
(2.17-21)

In this precarious calm after war, this hiatus between battles, a song begins. Eighteen stanzas of Canto Second are dedicated to a lament for the passing of a world. This song within a song begins with an invocation to Erie and the classical device of *ubi sunt*: "Oh! Erie, where are now those cherish'd hours/ Which saw thee happy in thy children's joy...?" (2.41-42). What follows is a beautifully evocative recounting of the Native way of life. Here, portrayed with nostalgic gentleness, we see the Brother, Bride, and Child before they are torn asunder by war.

The stanzas leading up to the song strongly echo another poem about individuals being evicted from a garden world, Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*:

These were thy charms, sweet village; sports like these,
With sweet succession, taught e'en toil to please;
These round thy bowers their cheerful influence shed,
These were thy charms—But all these charms are fled.
(*DV* 31-34)

How gay were now those sights,—those sounds, how
sweet,—
For ne'er does man so well desire to hail
The soothing charm which hover'd o'er his head,
As when reflection tells that charm is fled.
(*Tecumseh* II.iv.5-8; 1828)

The echo in the Canadian edition is less obvious, though still apparent. Richardson then proceeds, like Goldsmith, to give an idyllic vision of village life, complete with bashful virgins and dancing on the green; however, he transposes the scene to a Canadian context by incorporating details of Native life with which he was familiar through personal observation. These stanzas are suffused with authentic, if idealized, detail: fishing by torchlight, hunting by bow, hoary chieftains and glowing maidens, face paint and moccasins "work'd in many a wild, but fair design,/ With vari-color'd quills of porcupine" (2.119-20). Like the English Goldsmith, Richardson offers a portrait of pre-lapsarian Eden, a joyous time of moonlight and music, preening and play. But Erie, like Auburn, is soon to feel the hand of desolation. Both the land, "in nature's simplest charms at first array'd" (*DV* 296), and "nature's simplest child" (*Tecumseh* 2.96) will be betrayed; this New-World pastoral is inevitably doomed to shatter with the end of peaceful days. The sun has set on the West, both literally and figuratively.

In the second half of the song, the world as the Natives knew it has been

turned upside down. The courting dance becomes a dance of war, and the weapons once used for hunting wild animals are turned against human foes. The animals turn vicious like those in Milton's Eden after the fall, and man is more vicious still. The parallels between this song and *The Deserted Village* ally *Tecumseh* with the tragic vision of *Paradise Lost* while evoking nostalgia and sympathy for a threatened way of life. "The pastoral episode of Canto II depicts a paradise decisively lost, and Richardson could find no adequate substitute in American myths of new Edens to justify the destruction of the old" (Daymond xxv). The passage that follows must have seemed a startling assertion to Richardson's first readers:

The white man terms us cruel, while his blade
Alone leaps thirsting for some victim's blood;
He hunts the peaceful Indian from his glade,
To seek for shelter in the pathless wood.

(2.169-72)

This passage has been changed from a third-person narrative ("The white man terms *them* cruel...") in the English edition to the more dramatic first-person in the Canadian, a change which enhances the immediacy and pathos of the scene by signalling that the singer is himself an Indian. At the end of the song the singer is revealed to be an aged Chief "Beneath the weight of many winters bent" (2.188). Perhaps Richardson delays the revelation of the singer's identity because he does not wish to prejudice his audience against the content; possibly, he could not trust his readers to accept an Indian as a reliable narrator. The delay also allows him to use the vocabulary and diction of epic's "grand style" without raising questions of authenticity. In any event, Richardson's description of the old chief associates him not only with the old woman left behind in *The Deserted Village*—"She only left of all the harmless train,/ The sad historian of the pensive plain" (135-36)—but also with the poet himself. The English Goldsmith closes his poem with the hope that Poetry will find a home in a hostile New World. Richardson asserts that Poetry does not have to be imported, because it already exists. Though the strains may be "simple" and the "accents wild and brief," they are sufficient to express the "hopeless and devoted soil's lament" (2.190). The old Chief is a creator in his role as singer. He offers a verbal artifact that tells the tale of the tribe. He grieves for the land and its people, because he has seen the beginning and the end. He has seen his people seduced and betrayed by an enemy that will never be satisfied. He has witnessed death entering his garden, and "His still full black, though half-expiring eye [I]" reflects a setting sun (2.191). Although the aged Chief, Tecumseh, and Uncas form a kind of trinity, Tecumseh as the hero is himself a trinity. In the first and second Cantos he fills the role of the Mighty Father in his relationship to his tribe and his son who is sacrificed. His wrath resembles that of the Old Testament Jehovah, harsh yet just. In the third Canto he becomes the Adam who is banished from Eden, and in the final Canto he fulfils his destiny as the second Adam who is sacrificed to redeem the first.

The comparison of the New World with Eden is, of course, not original with Richardson. But Richardson is unique in his choice of Adams. The one who is tragically driven from this Western Paradise is not the settler, but rather the Native, "nature's simplest child" (2.96). *He* is the "first parent" seduced and betrayed. Milton, in fact, anticipates the connection made by Richardson when he compares the "first naked Glory" of Adam and Eve to "th' *American* so girt/ With feather'd Cincture, naked else and wild/ Among the Trees on Isles and woody Shores" (PL 9.1115-18). The fall is doubly tragic because the Indian is, in a sense, a part of the garden he inhabits. In contrast to the white men, who are associated by Richardson with machines, the Natives share a unity with nature, and are usually described in organic terms. The aged chief is likened to an old pine "Beneath the weight of many winters bent" (2.188) and Tecumseh is described as a "spirit of the forest" (1.211). Both Tecumseh and his father refer to the "devoted soil" (2.190), a curious phrase suggesting that even the soil shares a loyalty to its offspring.

As the last strains of the old Chief's song fade away, a new "wail/ Of lamentation" (2.211-12) is heard. Uncas is dead. The news destroys the Grandsire, and the two bodies are laid before Tecumseh, who grieves over the "last sad promise of his fallen name" (4.170). In the "eye for an eye" tradition of the Old Testament, "the noblest of the hostile band" (2.306) is slain in retribution. Death has found its way across Chaos into Paradise. Faced with "innate cruelty too shocking and almost too incredible to be detailed" (1.297n), Richardson struggles with his task of justifying the ways of the Indian to his listeners. He achieves a balance by making the woman who slays the white chief into a demon rather than an Indian. In addition, he asks where Tecumseh was, indicating that had he been there, the murder would never have been committed. Historians confirm Richardson's conviction that Tecumseh, though a dedicated warrior, was not without mercy (Colquhoun 27). Significantly, both of the young warriors are described as flowers struck down, Uncas as "a blighted flower,/ Cropp'd in the bloom of beauty and of power!" (2.263-64) and the white soldier as "a scarcely budded flower" that "strew[s] it blossoms o'er a distant glade" (2.315-16). Richardson acknowledges that war entails suffering for both sides. Canto II closes as a scout arrives to remind Tecumseh of his mission. Dawn has come and the "morn's first rosi-colour'd streaks" (2.398) not only echo Homer's "rosy-fingered" Dawn (*Odyssey* 2.1) but are reminders of a night of blood. While Cantos I and II concern the Fall of the New World through the entry into it of war and death, interrupted by episodes describing the prelapsarian Paradise, Canto III concerns the banishment that follows. The coming day is to be one of numbing heat, not unusual for a Canadian summer, as Richardson explains to his British readers in the 1828 edition: "Notwithstanding the severity of the winter in Canada, the heat of July and August is intense; insomuch that the lassitude and debility occasioned by the weather is often little inferior to that experienced during the hotter months in the

Richardson skilfully uses the realistic detail of climate to suggest the conditions of Paradise. "The forest-deer wends fearless to the tide" (3.25) because the wolf "Lies tame and spell-bound" (3.30). Even the "scaly serpent.../ Basks near the drooping warbler" without striking, "tho' the victim felt it not secure" (3.33-34,40). Richardson's portrait of nature paralysed by heat curiously approximates pre-lapsarian nature: "All nature owns the universal charm" (3.49), and echoes Milton's description of the animals in Eden before the Fall: "Sporting the Lion ramp'd and in his paw/ Dandl'd the Kid..." (*PL* 4.343-44) and "close the Serpent sly/...of his fatal guile/ Gave proof unheeded" (*PL* 4.347-50). In both poems, the presence of the serpent reminds the reader that the repose is only temporary, and "*Eden* were no *Eden* thus expos'd" (*PL* 9.341).

Richardson manages to instill historical reality with symbolic significance not only in his depiction of the weather, but also in his description of the hall in which the soldiers meet to discuss strategy. The hall is at once a barracks and a chapel, a duplicity that is conveyed through lines of immense auditory power and texture: "warriors' muskets, ringing as they fall,/ Or hymns to High Jehovah..." (3.85-86). In the 1828 edition, Richardson explicitly condemns the forces that he feels are trying to conquer the New World: "that too-devoted realm/ Which craft, and Christians leagued to overwhelm" (I.xxxii.7-8; 1828). However, in the Canadian edition these lines have been changed to "that too-devoted soil/ Which Guile and Rapine banded to despoil" (1.256). Perhaps Richardson recognized that he could not assign guilt directly to Christianity if he intended to found his epic on its symbolic structure. Instead, he suggests that the enemy can use scriptures to tempt and seduce.

At Fort Malden on the shores of Erie, the furnace of the day gives way to words of fire—those of Tecumseh's famous speech urging the English to hold their ground, rather than retreat inland up the Thames. Finally, against his better judgement, Tecumseh is persuaded to leave the banks of the lake he loves and the men are commanded to put fire to their own shelter, so nothing remains for the enemy. This example of scorched-earth policy stands in sharp contrast to the fires used in the arduous process of clearing the land in early Canadian settlement poems where conflagrations are seen as a triumphant conquest of wilderness and chaos to make room for the creation of a garden, a shelter, a home. In Canto III of *Tecumseh*, the fire is lit not to create, but to destroy, a devastation that is reinforced by the negative language used to describe the scene: "clouds of smoke pollute the spotless sky" (3.331). Similarly, in Canto I, blood stained the "spotless bosom of the silvery plain" (1.64). Destroying with their own hands the home they shared, the soldiers remember and grieve: "Alas! how oft within those precincts gay,/ The laugh has echoed to their joyous bands" (3.315-16). Intratextual echoes carry the reader back to the song of the aged Chief, and the time of joy and innocence he celebrated. Stanza Forty-One begins, "It is in truth a joyless sight to view..." (3.321), a line that also takes us

back in the poem, this time to the first line and the opening invocation to "truth." Now the tale has come full circle and the cycle begun by death is complete. The poem began with Paradise, and now the men, both Native and white, are forced to take part in their own banishment: "Others may rise upon their site more new..." writes Richardson, but "They come as strangers, and without a name!" (3.325-28). Richardson recognizes that the name, as a repository of identity, is at the root of memory, history, and inheritance. It is worth recalling the goal of the poem as stated by Richardson in the Preface to "rescue the name of a hero from oblivion" (185). The "work of melancholy waste complete" (3.337), there is a gathering on the plain of

The different stragglers of the little band;
Each heart with various images replete,
As still they mark the fiercely flaming brand
Feed on those scenes, which, ere the morrow's dawn,
Must be, forever, from their gaze withdrawn.
(3.340-44)

The furnace of the day culminates in this holocaust of a world gone forever, and foreshadows the sacrifice to come. This climactic epic moment suggests the burning towers of Troy, but more closely resembles Milton's account of Adam and Eve leaving Paradise behind:

They looking back, all th' Eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late thir happy seat,
Wav'd over by that flaming Brand, the Gate
With dreadful Faces throng'd and fiery Arms.
(*PL* 12.641-44)

The scene of banishment in *The Deserted Village* is also echoed in Richardson's description:

Good Heaven! what sorrows gloom'd that parting day
That called them from their native walks away;
When the poor exiles, every pleasure pass'd,
Hung round their bowers, and fondly look'd their last,
And took a long farewell....
(*DV* 363-67)

Tecumseh makes one last visit to the grave of his son, itself a small garden covered with the flowers and sweet grasses gathered by Indian maidens. The tomb is illuminated only by "the fire-fly lingering near" (3.359), a last tiny but exquisite reminder of the day's tragedy of flame. Tecumseh's moment of private sorrow by his son's grave reveals that his expulsion from Paradise is, in a sense, doubly tragic because, unlike the first Adam, he has no one to accompany him out into the wide world, and his genealogical line is dead. His son is gone to the

land of spirits, and he has no Eve.

In his Preface, Richardson notes that he had been encouraged to include a female character in the poem, but defends his decision not to: "this would have been in violation of that consistency [the author] has been anxious to preserve..." he writes, because "the *sentiment* of love is almost wholly unknown among the Indian tribes" (185). But what, one might ask, is Eden without Eve? It is possible to argue that, within the context of Richardson's poem, Erie is Tecumseh's Eve. Daymond and Monkman draw attention to "a puzzling misogyny evident earlier in the poem in the casting of Murder and Devastation as female abstractions" (xxx). In contrast, the lake is characterized throughout the poem as feminine, both beautiful and pure. If Tecumseh is associated with the land, then, in a sense, the lake is "flesh of his flesh" emerging from his side, and she also has an Indian name. She is the site of the first skirmish and the first defeat, holding within her bosom the first grave: "The Lake appears a Bride who mourns her Lord" (2.20). In keeping with the Miltonic pattern of hierarchy, Tecumseh "shines/ Pre-eminent above the silvery deep/ A monument of strength" (1.211-13). Erie graces the opening stanzas of the first three Cantos with her radiant beauty, and she is the muse to whom the aged Chief addresses his song, recalling the time when "Plenty smiled upon [her] blooming bowers" (2.43). The Natives who participate in dances and games of peace are her noble sons. She is the mother of them all, a mirror to the unclouded sky. But these peaceful days are "for ever gone, and banish'd from [her] shore" (2.125) when she becomes a spirit divided. Richardson's description of Erie echoes Goldsmith's description of Auburn and the sexual language that informs it; both are vulnerable to betrayal. For Tecumseh, the banishment is complete when he is convinced "Against his better knowledge" (*PL* 9.998) to leave Erie's shores and head inland. He argues that he will have a better chance against the foe if he stays by the lake, but his eloquence is ignored and he finally yields. After this decision is made, Erie's weakness is revealed:

The lonely harbour, of her strength divest,
No fire repulsive warms within her womb;
While on the fortress' weaken'd sides there rest
Faint means to throw the round shot or the bomb.
(3.249-52)

Lake Erie, like Eve from succour far, is vulnerable to attack. If the role of Eve is assigned to Erie, the assignation of guilt for the Fall becomes more complex. Without an explicit act of disobedience on the part of Eve/Erie, the blame rests solely on the shoulders of the greedy and deceptive Enemy. Richardson apparently absolves the Natives of responsibility for their own decline, and points the finger instead at those who sought to exploit the new land. The implications of this historical truth transform Richardson's flawed poetic effort into a relevant and continuing reminder for us, the inheritors of both the land and the guilt of those who seized it.

Tecumseh may ask with Adam: "Must I thus leave thee Paradise? thus leave/ Thee Native Soil, these happy Walks and Shades,/ Fit haunt of Gods?" (*PL* 11.269-71), but for him there can be no "paradise within..." (12.587). He has nothing to look forward to except immediate fulfilment of the vision shown to Adam by Gabriel: "Concourse in Arms, fierce Faces threat'ning War" (*PL* 11.641). His reverie by his son's grave is interrupted by the hum of marching feet (3.380). As the Canto closes, Tecumseh returns through the forces and "join [s] his Warriors ere the troops defiled" (3.384). The choice of this last word is no accident. It means "to march in file" (*OED*) but also implies that the soldiers go forth to desecrate the land.

In a reprise of the old chief's song, Richardson digresses to fondly recall the life of the warrior, the brotherhood of men who understand the ways of the wild. The masculine nature of Richardson's vision is emphasized by his Whitmanesque affection for men "Whose youthful years no mildewing sorrows blight" (4.51) because they prefer nature's "checker'd scenes" to the "crowded room" of "social man" (4.62-63). Richardson repeatedly uses Milton's "thrice happy" to describe these young men who, like the Natives, have learned to survive where "the north wind along the ice-lake skims" (4.24). The catalogue of Native warriors that follows is also rich with authentic and colourful detail. Prayers are rising both to God and Manitou.

Alone on the eve of battle, Tecumseh grieves for the slaughter of his people who were "Reckless of harm, nor conscious of the guile/ Which lurk'd un pitying in the guest's dark smile" (4.151-52). The solitary spot where he stands is described as a garden shaded by a huge Magnolia tree in bloom. This is no longer Eden, but Gethsemane. The first Adam has been banished from the first garden. Now the second Adam awaits his destiny. Though he gains a certain strength from nature's loveliness, and from memories of gentler days, Tecumseh is haunted by despair because "naught of Indian life or growth remains/ Along the vastness of those conquer'd plains" (4.159-60). Richardson reveals Tecumseh's sad knowledge that there will indeed be sacrifice, and this time there can be no resurrection: "For him again that moon may never rise..." (4.185). When the fateful day arrives there are "coruscations in the Eastern sky," a glittering in the east that foreshadows the white man's flashing weapons and his "glittering casque" (4.221). Curiously, this "glittering few" (4.282) with their scarlet uniforms are particularly vulnerable to the enemy rifles, while those who "match their costume with the wood's dark grey" (4.279) have a much better chance of survival.

Tecumseh is slain by "the Chief who leads the foemen to his shore" (4.302) and many rush to "bear the fallen hero's scalp away" (4.332), like the Roman soldiers gambling for Christ's garment. The dead hero then figuratively descends to Hell as "wild hell-fiends" revel in his destruction (4.335). (In his note to this passage, Richardson's loathing for the Kentuckian Americans who reportedly

"tore the skin from off his bleeding form, and converted it into razor-straps!!!" is made overwhelmingly clear). Tecumseh is left on the battlefield "pierc'd with wounds" (4.339), and bereft of honour. The poet's indictment of those who destroyed the Warrior of the West is severe:

May they who left him thus e'er howl, and creep
As vile through life, as cruel in that hour,
Which gave the first of victims to their power.
(4.342-44)

Richardson's language recalls God's curse upon the serpent in the Garden and Milton's description of Satan's followers reduced to loathsome hissing. The next stanza extends the snake imagery as Richardson warns whoever has done this that the memory will "Like adder stings recoil upon his heart..." (4.351). Richardson cannot hope for a resurrection, only revenge in the form of a verbal visitation of the sins of the fathers on their sons; those who destroyed the warrior will hear his praises sung by their own children, and be overcome by a nightmare of guilt. The last words of the four Cantos—"gloom," "bled," "defiled" and "shame"—are all contained within this final dark scene that brings the tragic cycle to completion. The English Goldsmith could not hope to avenge the banished villagers, but the voice of Poetry "prevailing over time" (*The Deserted Village* 422) preserves their tragic tale for posterity. Similarly, Richardson takes a historical reality and fashions an epic that is far-reaching in its implications. The white man is guilty for having removed "nature's simplest child" from Nature's garden. The old story repeats itself, but this time without redemption, only remembrance. In *The Story of a Trip to Walpole Island* written two decades after *Tecumseh*, Richardson expresses the tragedy in prose:

As I contemplated this scene, and contrasted the really native dignity and simplicity of these interesting people, with the loathsome hypocrisy of civilized life, I could not but deeply deplore the fast approaching extinction, as a race, of the first lords of this soil— gentlemen of nature, whose very memory will soon have passed away, leaving little or no authentic record behind them, of what they once were--must have been from the earliest epoch of the existence of man.

(71)

It is important to acknowledge that the stereotype of the noble savage as articulated in this passage can be as damaging as that of the ignoble savage, particularly since, as Hayden White points out, "this idolization of the natives of the New World occurs only *after* the conflict between the Europeans and the natives had already been decided and when, therefore, it could no longer hamper the exploitation of the latter by the former" (186). In his study of images of the Indian in English-Canadian literature, *A Native Heritage*, Monkman asks some

probing questions:

Is writing about the erosion of his culture simply an act of personal exorcism that also exploits a reader's sensitivity to this issue? Is using his myths or honouring his heroes simply an exploitation of symbols or a profound attempt to mediate between cultures through the discovery of a common past?

(163)

The answers to these questions are particularly vexed with regard to *Tecumseh* because Richardson uses Christian imagery to celebrate a hero destroyed by "Christian" foemen and the advance of Western imperial culture. He has clearly tried, particularly in the Canadian edition, to portray Tecumseh as a "noble" individual, despite some "ignoble" characteristics such as rage and a desire for revenge. This can be explained, in part, by the fact that the poem unfolds against a backdrop of war, and war brings out both the noble and ignoble in all contenders; in the heat of battle "the boundary between backwoodsmen and savages is tissue thin" (Bentley 145). According to Bentley, the complexity of Richardson's portrait of Tecumseh with all of its disquieting tensions and contraries is fitting for a poem written as "both a monument and a scourge" (153).

An effort to legitimize Richardson's appropriateness as a spokesman for a disappearing culture manifests itself in recent representations of him as a true border figure. As Daymond and Monkman point out, "The power of the urge to find a genealogical explanation for Richardson's interest in Indian cultures can be measured by the repeated assertion that his maternal grandmother was Indian" (xlvi), despite a complete lack of documentary evidence. There is no question that Richardson felt the hypocrisy of European society throughout his struggles as a soldier and a writer; he died impoverished and alone. The temptation to attribute the "social ostracism" he experienced during his lifetime to a Native ancestry, as David Beasley does (53), is a powerful one. Whatever his heritage, Richardson endures as a border figure because of his adaptation of European and classical models to Native material.

Most critics assert that Richardson's epic of the fall of a Native paradise is naive in the sense of being artless, but a close study of the poem reveals that it is in fact quite artful--perhaps overly so--in its combinations of the imported and the indigenous. Duffy contends that Richardson's attempt to use the *ottava rima* that Byron had "employed for supremely comic purposes" for tragic effect "resulted in little beyond bathos" (107). Though Richardson clearly did not have complete mastery of all the formal and thematic elements he employs, such an assertion proves, upon close reading, to be dismissively superficial. Bentley concurs that "Richardson erred once in choosing so playful a form for his 'stirring subject' and again in adhering too strictly" to it (141), but credits him

with considerable sophistication in other aspects of his craft. Richardson's true naiveté was not in his art, but in his optimistic belief that the descendants of the guilty would "loud proclaim/ That chieftain's worth" (4.359-60). As Hurley points out, Richardson's attempts to make "Tecumseh—as Riel and Big Bear have become—the stuff of our imaginative life, an important ancestor whom a white society that persists in seeing itself as a country without a mythology might consider adopting," have gone unheeded (11). In *The War of 1812*, Richardson writes: "In any other country, and governing any other men, Tecumseh would have been a hero" (154). Perhaps it is our current preference for peacemakers over warriors, or the ambivalences within the poem and within Tecumseh himself that have prevented the imaginative rescue that Richardson so desired:

Against reductive either/or formulations, Richardson's poem insistently argues for a both/and construction yoking savagery and civilization, martial prowess and passive fortitude, without attempting to impose facile reconciliations.

(Daymond and Monkman

xxiv-xxv)

One could argue that these very contradictions qualify Tecumseh as the quintessential Canadian hero who exemplifies the art of compromise. His tragedy casts shadows that reach into our own day. Perhaps the ones who are naive are those who persist in the imperialist dream of a paradise found, rather than Richardson's vision of a paradise lost and learning to find its way.

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I am indebted to D.M.R. Bentley for helpful advice during the early stages of this paper.

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