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INKLE AND YARICO: THE CONSTRUCTION OF ALTERITY
FROM HISTORY TO LITERATURE¹

First related in Richard Ligon's *True and Exact History of the island of Barbadoes* (1657), the narrative of Inkle and Yarico immediately held English readers' imagination with its strange captive power.² For at least another century and a half, this troubling image of New World innocence and beauty crassly commodified by Old World greed and deceit stirred their consciousness to the profound philosophical issues involved in European expansion into the Americas and Africa. But while Ligon's history provided the original from which subsequent versions were derived, the tragic plot of an Indian maid betrayed and abandoned by an English traveller may be traced to a much earlier source.

The earliest analogue of this story appears in Jean Mocquet's *Voyages* (1616), where the Indian woman, outraged by the Englishman's desertion, dismembers her child and flings parts of its body after his departing ship. Ligon's account follows next in chronological order, but differs radically from its antecedent, in that Ligon offers his as an authentic historical narrative, with the historian himself as eyewitness (Ligon lived in the Barbados household where Yarico served as a slave) and the Indian woman and her familiars as informants.

Adding a considerable amount of narrative detail and emotional colour, Sir Richard Steele exposed an even larger audience to the motive power of Yarico's plight in the eleventh paper of the *Spectator*, published March 13, 1711.³ That periodical's estimated circulation of sixty to eighty thousand readers at the time played no small part in boosting the narrative's popularity.

Some three quarters of a century later, the enduring power of this story's appeal translated into phenomenal success for George Colman the Younger. His three-act operatic play *Inkle and Yarico* opened at the Haymarket on 4 August

1787. Five weeks later, at the end of the season, the play had seen some twenty performances, and thirteen years later, at century's end, it had registered a total of 164 performances, divided between runs at the Haymarket and at Covent Garden. Its obvious audience appeal was reflected in this 1795 characterization by Thomas Bellamy: "The tale is known to all: Simplicity has placed its stamp on *Yarico*! The stage receives her. Colman's classic pen has raised the interesting scene, to last till time and Nature close and ALL IS STILL."⁴

Successive generations of English audiences obviously responded to the stirrings of Enlightenment liberal ideology that intensified as the century proceeded; Inkle's civilized cynicism and materialistic motivations are sharply counterpointed against *Yarico*'s simplicity and innocence. The story's plot provided authors a fitting context in which to prosecute the reformations of historiography legitimized by the defined procedures of institutions like the Royal Society and supported by scholars and thinkers like Bacon, Hobbes and Bolingbroke in England, and Voltaire, Montesquieu and other *philosophes* in France. As the Inkle and *Yarico* narrative evolves from historical source to literary artifact, it exemplifies certain distinctive transformational processes that were taking place in the domain of letters, shaping the philosophical discourse about Self and Other.

This article proposes to examine how the principal narratives of Ligon, Steele and Colman provide a basis for studying the textualization and transformation of private history into public myth, and how the implicit issues of alterity – of race, gender and authorial differences – are constructed into a discourse on value and the triumph of a new, emergent sensibility.

Abstracted from its larger historical frame of reference, Ligon's narrative of Inkle and *Yarico* reads like a strange and troubling vignette eliciting only a transient sympathy from an audience still largely unpoliticized by anti-slavery propaganda. Restored to its proper referential context, however, the account unfolds gradually and naturally from a developing discourse on the comparative racial value of each human factor (Blacks, Indians, Englishmen) in the Barbados colonial equation. As an intimate of the slavocracy, Ligon expresses no particularly strong ideological animus against the moral basis of plantation slavery. Instead, he takes advantage of his peculiar privileged status to observe and record his impressions of New World plantation economy. As a primary source for the early history of Barbados, his text provides us with a valuable resource for appreciating the nature of that colonial society's social, economic and political arrangements.

Ligon's substantive object seems to be the production of a factual, reliable history that would authentically represent the exotic human factors in this equation (Africans, Indians) without fundamentally altering their contemporary

images and values. The explicit order Ligon adopts in delineating the island's diverse racial groups corresponds to an implicit assumption about their relative moral and human value in the colonial universe. Starting with African slaves, proceeding through Indians and culminating with white masters, his discussion stresses differences in physical appearances, intellectual capabilities, nutrition, work and personal habits. The general tenor and tendency are always to conceptualize Africans and Indians in terms of their aptitude for and adaptability to the purposes of white survival and profit, his comparisons almost always slanted to the advantage of the whites.

The narrative presents a curiously alternating pattern of statements prejudicial to African character:

They are a people of timorous and fearful disposition, and consequently bloody when they find advantages. If any of them commit a fault, give him present punishment; but do not threaten him; for if you do, it is an even lay, he will go and hang himself to avoid punishment. (Ligon 1673: 50).

and statements like the following that moderate and balance the harsher vision of demoralized subhuman masses:

Let others have what opinion they please, yet I am of this opinion that there are to be found amongst them, some who are as morally honest, as conscionable, as humble, as loving to their friends, and as loyal to their Masters, as any that live under the Sun; and one reason they have to be so, is, they set no great value upon their lives. (Ligon 1673: 54).

Next in precedence, the Indians are described not so much on their own merits but, significantly, in comparison to Blacks: "They are very active men, and apt to learn anything sooner than Negroes; ... their women have very small breasts, and have more of the shape of the Europeans than the Negroes ..." (Ligon 1673: 54). The Inkle and Yarico story follows these comments and is succeeded by an extended description of the master class.

Ligon's *True and Exact History* exhibits a dialogical narrative strategy that mixes the older traditional modes of moralized history with an emergent new realistic historiography whose object Rachel Trickett (1967: 186) describes as "authenticated truth". As indicators of developments in historical writing, these mixed modes reflect expanding options and transitional values which implicate the narration of events and the construction of meaning from the narrative. Typically, Ligon shifts into the mode of moralized history when he feels he can safely indulge the public appetite for *noble savage* mythology, without threatening the security of slavocratic values. In a section describing the distinctive traits of Indians in general, he constructs Yarico as a female image of primitive heroic virtue who bravely chooses to suffer the throes of childbirth

in solitude and without assistance of any kind, returning triumphantly after three hours, delivered of a "Lusty Boy, frolick and lively", properly washed and wrapped in swathing clothes. In recounting this part of her personal history, Ligon does not identify her as the victim of Yarico's calloused greed. Instead, he portrays her as a noble savage figure within an idealized narrative context that enjoys comparatively greater spatial privilege than the tragic and celebrated plot itself.

By contrast, the central Inkle and Yarico narrative occupies just a single paragraph at the end of the preceding relation. From the moralized reflections that invested the factual events of Indian childbirth with mythic values, Ligon switches to a narrative mode that is unornamented, lucid and precise. After the highly sentimentalized colouring of the preceding account, the tale of Yarico's betrayal is produced with conscious ironic restraint and dispassion.

These two markedly differentiated narrative strategies display Ligon as a historical writer at once challenging and mediating his own discourse. And this ambivalent relationship to his text seems to arise as much from the specific procedures by which his history was created (i.e. his on-the-spot eyewitness participant observation) as from the issues arising from the identity/difference dichotomy that defined his relationship to his subject. Ligon's bivocal strategies dissolve the fiction of detached objectivity that holds Other in a space exterior to and remote from Self. On the one hand, the rhetoric of myth ennobles Yarico, minimizing the values attached to gender difference. On the other, a rhetoric of parsimonious judgment rehumanizes her, transforming racial difference into shared identity with the historian. Ligon expresses a muted sympathy for Yarico in this terse philosophical summation: "And so poor Yarico for her love lost her liberty" (Ligon 1673: 55). Taken together with those instances cited earlier where he mediates and challenges his own judgments concerning Indians and Blacks, this statement reveals a progressive dissolution of the boundaries between Self and Other. Such instances are effective proofs of Rimbaud's philosophical theorem "Je est un autre"; they represent Ligon's discovery of Self in Other. They also aptly illustrate Todorov's modern revisioning of the process and meaning of discovery and conquest. As Todorov (1984: 3) writes: "We can discover the other in ourselves, realize we are not a homogeneous substance, radically alien to whatever is not us ... Others are subjects just as I am, whom only my point of view ... separates and authentically distinguishes from myself."

The comparatively greater freedom and flexibility afforded by imaginative literary form permits the *Spectator* to exploit more fully those possibilities that Ligon could raise but which historiographical rules constrained him from exploring at greater depth. Steele shifts Ligon's focus and produces the story in

the context of a battle-of-the-sexes debate on female fidelity, appropriating the inherent potential of the Inkle and Yarico narrative to dramatize complex issues of race and gender. The design of the *Spectator* version is an equally complex narrative structure constituted of three narrative personae: the presiding consciousness of the *Spectator* himself, a male, identified only by the generic denomination of a "Common-Place Talker", and a female named Arietta.

The Common-Place Talker sets out to prove the historical infidelity of the female sex by resorting to potted history. The *Spectator* describes him as having "repeated and murdered the celebrated story of the Ephesian Matron" to justify his fatuous disparagements on female character in general. By deploying key ironic constructions around the Common-Place Talker's discourse, Steele undercuts the Talker's credibility and calls his judgment and motives into question by ridiculing his style and the rhetorical ornaments he flaunts to embellish his performance. The *Spectator* contemptuously describes his subject as the "Old Topick" of constancy in love, discredits his sources as "arguments and quotations out of plays and songs which allude to the perjuries of the Fair", and exposes his motivation as an effort "to shine more than ordinary in a Talkative way", in order to humiliate the *Spectator* and win the favour of Arietta, his other audience, shortly to become his disputant. Placing his own specious constructions on Petronius' narrative, the Common-Place Talker strives to serve deliberately narrowed, sexually biased ends, thus constructing the very kind of historiography Ligon's text was repudiating, and which Voltaire and the whole school of Enlightenment historiography were striving to supplant. The Common-Place Talker's is history designed to promote a narrow individualist (partisan) interest, Whiggish, one might say, strikingly antithetical to the Royal Society's method: "he strove to shine more than ordinarily".

Responding to her male disputant's calumnies on female virtue and constancy, Arietta counterpoints the Inkle and Yarico story not only to refute unfair (because narrowly based and sexually biased) generalizations about female character, but also to expose here male interlocutor's doctrinaire postulations as the effects of women's unequal access to literary and historical institutions, and to propose instead a revisionist historiography that would affect the forms and methods of female portrayal in literature and history. Although she clearly assumes Yarico's voice and adopts a distinctly feminist point of view, she also signals, from the outset of the narration, her intent to proceed after a wholly different philosophical method from that of the Common-Place Talker and kindred 'historians': "Let us take Facts from plain People, and from such as have not either Ambition or Capacity to embellish their Narrations with any Beauties of Imagination" (*Spectator*: 49).

Arietta's ironic preface suggests the low estimate she places on the Talker's original, expropriated blindly and without any attempt at imaginative revalu-

ation. "When I consider how perfectly new all you have said on this subject is, and that the Story you have given us is not quite Two thousand Years old, I cannot but think it a Piece of Presumption to dispute with you". (*Spectator*: 48). Her principal and principled objections are to history that draws conclusions from broad generalizations and arbitrary examples. She challenges the credibility and reliability of Petronius, suggesting that his aspersions on female character proceed from misogynistic motives, associating him with those "Authors who leave behind them Memorials against the Scorn of particular Women, in invectives against the whole sex" (*Spectator*: 49). Her allusion to the fable of the lion and the man clearly signifies her appreciation of the disadvantages suffered by those subjects, Others, (women and lions) whose ontological value is constantly being misrepresented, distorted or ignored because they suffer from limited or no access to the writing of history; and she means to explode the pretensions of a historiography produced from precisely those conditions of exclusion.

Arietta takes particular pains to identify and establish the authority of her source, characterizing Ligon as an "honest Traveller", and citing the specific page ("the fifty-fifth") of the referenced text. The ensuing narration is about eight times the length of Ligon's original; its greater textual volume does not challenge any of the substantive facts of Ligon's version – indeed it proceeds with the same attention to specificity of detail and particularized plot development. But where Ligon appears conflicted by the twin tensions of primitivistic mythology and exact, authenticated historiography, Steele repudiates the moralized subjective methodology and emphasizes the exact disinterested values of the new historiography. Still, by Arietta's own admission, her version is aimed at inventing a plausible voice for Yarico by appointing herself Yarico's historian and legitimizing Yarico's selfless devotion towards Inkle by giving those relevant actions higher profile in the narrative. The effect is to redress the gender imbalance among history writers and to expunge from the history of female consciousness those negative calumnies perpetuated by Petronius and the Common-Place Talker: "You men are Writers, and can represent us Women as Unbecoming as you please in your Works, while we are unable to return the Injury" (*Spectator*: 49).

Steele's version portrays Inkle as an unrepentant capitalist, singlemindedly bent on turning every opportunity to his personal profit and advantage. Its import is to affirm that treachery, infidelity and disloyalty are not gender- or race-specific. In resisting the Common Place Talker's rhetorical style, in ridiculing his unexamined use of potted history to defame Other and elevate Self, Arietta rejects that kind of history as unreliable and incomplete. The *Spectator*'s coda at the end of Arietta's narrative is characteristically understated: "I was so touched with this story (which I think should be always a Counterpart to the *Ephesian Matron*) that I left the Room with tears in my

Eyes ...” (*Spectator*: 51). Yet, it emphatically suggests the need for continuous historical revisions by means of dialogic interventions like Arietta’s, and for the exercise of vigilance to purify and perfect the human record.

George Colman’s theatrical dramatization of this history continues the process of narrative structuration by adapting Ligon’s basic plot and Steele’s substantive amplifications to the formal requirements of sentimental comedy (Colman 1983). The result of all these diverse levels of transformation is a text that displays the original history’s capacity to accommodate itself continuously to the invention of new histories, both public and private.

For Colman, the play’s immense popular success translated into rich monetary reward, securing him financially and assuring his place in theatrical history. Mrs Inchbald (1908, XX: 5) records that this operatic drama was performed in “every theatre of London and in every theatre of the kingdom with the same degree of splendid success”. In reinventing Inkle for his dramatized history, Colman posits that Inkle’s pursuit of personal history in the New World was but an extension of notions, formed during his London youth, about the invention of Self at the expense of Other. Then, he viewed women largely as predatory animals who devoured men’s fortunes, or, in those rare cases where they possessed wealth, as prey a man might snare to enhance his personal history. “In London [I] laughed at the youngers of the town, and when I saw their chariots with some fine, tempting girl, parked on the corner, would cry ‘Ah, there sits ruin, there flies the green horn’s money!’, then wondered with myself how men could trifle time on women or, indeed, think of any women without fortunes?” (Colman 1983: 101).

It is perfectly reasonable, then, that Inkle should define the New World and its contents – from his central utilitarian ethic – as Others, readily available for his commodification. His first thoughts on seeing the American Indians are about the price they would fetch in West Indian slave markets. The circumstances that occasioned his separation from the rest of the foraging crew and brought him to Yarico’s attention were partly his own obsessive calculations on the profit he might make from this new land. Chided by his uncle Medium for risking his safety and endangering the lives of his companions, Inkle retorts: “Do you think I travel merely for motion? Travelling, uncle, was always intended for improvement, and improvement is an advantage, and advantage is profit, and profit is gain” (Colman 1983: 69).

Colman combines these signifiers of Inkle’s private ideology to invent a metaphor for the broader moral history of growing capitalist and slavocratic economies, and for other kinds of history that will attend and emerge from Inkle’s further adventures in the New World. The interaction of such private and

public ideologies create and sustain the alterities of race, gender and authorial difference illustrated in the subsequent plotment of events.

In the light of Inkle's thoroughgoing materialistic ethics, his attitudes and actions towards Yarico in America and in Barbados unmask his protestations of love as calculated deceit. While she is showering him with unselfish attentions and pouring out her ideal love and devotion, he is constructing her as an object *alterior* to his identity, and therefore susceptible to commodification at the first available opportunity. Similarly, his valet Trudge, who falls in love with Yarico's female companion Wowski, exploits his cosmopolitan experiences to inflate himself in Wowski's eyes and win her trust and protection. Both Inkle and Trudge oblige Yarico and Wowski to communicate with them in English. Predictably the advantages of language in this context of difference are all on the Englishmen's side – and they exploit them shamelessly. Inkle overwhelms Yarico with extravagant promises of silks and horsedrawn carriages. Trudge, in his pursuit of self-invention in the eyes of Wowski, emphasized the differences between Indians and English by claiming all the advantages of beauty, wealth and civilization for all of his kind, those identified with Self, over the perceived unenlightened primitivism of Wowski's, all those different from himself, Others: "All the fine men are like me: as different from your people as powder and ink, or paper and blacking" (Colman 1983: 85).

It is clear, then, that Yarico, Wowski and all her tribe were consigned to alterity long before they reached Barbados. So that, on their arrival in that colony, it is not surprising that a planter makes Trudge an instant offer for Wowski: "Is that young Indian of yours going to our market? ... Is she for our sale of slaves? ... At how much do you value her?" By this time Wowski's innocent good-nature and her utter dependency on him have won Trudge's loyalty and devotion. The abuse heaped on him by the planters whose offers he rebuffs sets his face firmly against their moral system. He commences to subvert their values and to rethink his own. The underside of this facetious jest aimed at a planter reveals his newly illuminated consciousness that Self may exist within Other: "If your head and heart were to change places, I've a notion you'd be as black in the face as an ink bottle" (Colman 1983: 87).

With his master Inkle, things go otherwise, at least for a while. When his relationship to Yarico threatens to ruin his chances of marrying Narcissa the Governor's daughter, and of improving his opportunities for principal and profit, he promptly offers Yarico for sale to the Governor himself (neither man is aware of the other's identity at this moment). The scenes to follow place Inkle's constancy to Yarico and his constancy to profit and principal in pronounced tension. But Colman redeems the legacy of tragic history inherited from Ligon and Steele by making the Governor the instrument of a dialogic intervention which effects the reversal of moral chaos. Uncharacteristically, the Governor

summons his political will power to force Inkle to abandon his pursuit of profit and marry Yarico. In so doing, he also forces Inkle to renounce the precepts of self-interest instilled by his father, "Oh, curse such principles, principles which destroy all confidence between man and man, principles which none but a rogue could instil and none but a rogue could imbibe" (Colman 1983: 109). Inkle's private history suffers a momentous alteration. On the personal level, the Governor discovers an instinctive sympathy for Yarico that moves him to oppose Inkle's cynical materialism with his own blundering and selective sentimentalism. Prior to this decisive exercise of political and moral authority, the Governor had distinguished himself as little more than a befuddled parody of slavocratic leadership. It is ironic, then, but strategic to the purposes of Colman's sentimental comedy, that this figure should become the voice of self-love, that fashionable eighteenth-century ethical idea by which the Other is identified with the Self. The governor's criteria for human value, though stated in the exclusive terms of racial bias, are persuasive enough to melt Inkle's heart and preserve Yarico's human integrity. Addressing Yarico, he discloses the terms of his championship: "As you say, she is a delicate girl, above the common run, and none of your thick lipped, fat nosed, squabby, dumpling dowdies" (Colman 1983: 103). Though this action merely alters the single case of Yarico and leaves intact the wider historical context of Barbadian slavery, Colman appears to imply that the transformation of political history must necessarily begin with transformations in private histories. Colman's bold experimentation with mixed modes (comic and sentimental) may have alienated the critical establishment but it took to new heights the role of the theatre in legitimizing the history of "other" voices and "other" sensibilities.

From Ligon's history to Colman's comic opera, all these versions of the Inkle and Yarico narrative demonstrate artfully nuanced representational strategies and altered terms of emplotment and characterization. As each text proclaims its self-conscious dissociation from the limited methodologies of traditional history, it chooses thereby to indulge the pleasure of its own textual difference. That self-indulgence enacts a characteristic procedure of Enlightenment intellectual inquiry. It disentangles the arts of writing both history and literature from the encumbrances of cultural and ideological preconceptions, freeing each author to study and shun what Francis Bacon (1937: 172) called the "distempers of learning" which breed false methods and flawed science. The construction of alterity in these texts therefore becomes a complex metaphor for three acts of invention. Insofar as each text documents its author's capacity to construct himself, it represents its author as a reinventor of language's power not so much to reveal truths but to create meaning. In this way, the text signifies the alterity of its creative consciousness. Insofar as each text illustrates the Todorovian

affirmation that the discovery of the other unfolds by gradual degrees, it may be understood to legitimize the rather more problematic but not unrelated alterities of race and gender.

NOTES

1. This article is the revised version of a paper originally read at the annual meeting of the Midwestern Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies held at Notre Dame University, South Bend, Indiana, October 7-9, 1988.
2. Ligon repeats the story with virtual exactitude in the 1672 edition of his *True and Exact History of Barbadoes*. All quotations from Ligon refer to that edition.
3. Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator* (edited by Donald F. Bond, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1965, 5 vols) I. All quotations from the essay, *Spectator* No. 11, will be cited within this article's text as *Spectator*, followed by a page number.
4. Thomas Bellamy, *The London Theatres* (London, 1795); quoted in *Plays by George Colman the Younger and Thomas Morton*, ed. Barry Sutcliffe (London, Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 53, n. 59. All textual references to Colman's *Inkle and Yarico* are drawn from the Sutcliffe edition.

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