

## United Irishmen in Canada: Adam Kidd's *The Huron Chief* Reconsidered

by Michele Holmgren

Adam Kidd (1802–1831) is a minor but colourful literary figure in the Canadian canon, known best for *The Huron Chief* (1830), one of the earliest long poems published in Canada. While Mary J. Edwards links *The Huron Chief* “indirectly through language and form to his ‘oppressed Ireland’” (376), and D.M.R. Bentley notes Kidd’s debt to Thomas Moore’s portrait of North America and the thematic impact of Kidd’s frequent allusions to *Lalla Rookh*,<sup>1</sup> few readers have appreciated how greatly *The Huron Chief and Other Poems* is indebted to Moore’s moderate Enlightenment-inspired nationalism, which he shared with both the Patriot and early United Irish movements.

Kidd tells of being born in a “straw-roofed cottage” in the “romantic” Londonderry townland of Tullynagee in the parish of Desertlyn (Edwards 375), as if choosing to emphasize the picturesque aspects of his upbringing that demonstrated how the literature, myths, music and folklore of his region had contributed to a sense of Irish distinctiveness. He received his schooling in the nearby town of Moneymore from “good old Lawrence McGuckian,” who taught him Latin and Greek, and, fatefully, introduced him to the poetry of Byron and Moore (Edwards 375). While he probably studied English literature and the classics, Kidd may have also learned about his own culture through the layers of history preserved in Irish place names. Tullynagee comes from the Irish for “hill of the wind,” and his village lay nestled at the foot of Slieve Gallion, a seventeen-hundred-foot-high peak, at the extreme edge of the Sperrins, themselves part of a mountain range that winds through two Northern Irish counties, Tyrone and Londonderry. “Gallion” is the Irish name for a standing stone or pillar (Joyce 35, 44, 343). While walking on the slopes of Slieve Gallion, Kidd would no doubt have encountered its eponymous stone-age cairns and chambered grave, reminders of a millennia-old culture. That this feature of the landscape was closely tied to Kidd’s own identity is suggested by the fact that he signed the name “Slievegallin” to several poems and letters published in Canadian newspapers.

Ulster had attracted the attention of Irish antiquaries and writers, and many of these early cultural nationalists were also active politically.<sup>2</sup> Some of the organizers of the Belfast Harper's festival of 1792 were United Irishmen, and the festival helped bring the music of the region to the attention of musicologists such as Edward Bunting, who provided musical notation for many of the traditional Irish tunes used by Moore in his *Irish Melodies* (Leerssen, *Remembrance* 173–74). The history, poets and musicians of Kidd's region also figure regularly in many of his occasional poems in *The Huron Chief, and Other Poems*. Often these people or events are presented as part of a culture that Kidd portrays as dying out, suggested by his preoccupation with the grave sites of local poets and singers in "Apostrophe to the Harp of Dennis Hampson" and "Ranglawe, the Roving Bard." His elegiac tone in poems about his homeland was hardly surprising, for Kidd was one of the thousands of young men and women who came of age at the end of the Napoleonic wars. Many were pushed off the land at the end of the wartime economic boom, which struck modest farmers and farm labourers particularly hard. Even as a child, he would have witnessed the slow death of villages like his own, which he memorializes in "My Brother's Grave," and he may have already known that his own eventual migration was inevitable. His family apparently lacked wealth or influence to guarantee him a future much more promising than subsistence on a small farm. As susceptible as his Catholic compatriots to falling agriculture prices, bad harvests, and rises in rents, Kidd ultimately chose "a scanty pittance in a foreign land" over a "hopeless and sinking situation" in a country that nourished his poetic imagination, but little else (Edwards 375).

Kidd emigrated to America, where he may have travelled before settling in Montreal around 1824. Initially, he studied to be a Church of England clergyman, but he was pronounced an unsuitable candidate by the Venerable Archdeacon George Jehoshaphat Mountain (Edwards 375). He later made it into the newspapers as a participant in at least one brawl, in which he demonstrated a preference for settling political and literary disputes with "a stick of no slight dimensions" rather than a pen (Steele 120). His sympathies lying with radical political figures such as the United Irish leader Lord Edward Fitzgerald and Romantic poets such as Moore, whose own defences of Ireland were frequently branded as seditious (Leerssen, *Remembrance* 82), he took up journalism and poetry, contributing to several Quebec papers, especially ones with a pro-Irish editorial policy, such as the *Canadian Freeman*, the *Irish Shield*, and the *Irish Vindicator* (renamed *The Vindicator* in 1829).

Kidd dedicated *The Huron Chief and Other Poems* to Moore, “The most popular, most powerful, and most patriotic poet of the nineteenth century” (2). An uncharitable reviewer noted that his “pretty considerable debt” verged on plagiarism (Steele 110), but Kidd would have recognized Irish culture and history, much from his own region, transformed into popular verse in Moore’s poetry, rendering it a powerful source of rhetoric and imagery for nationalist writers and artists. He had further reason to refer to Moore throughout his writing, for Kidd’s departure around 1820 suggests a disillusionment that he may have shared with Moore, whose own nationalism and politics became increasingly complex in the wake of the disastrous United Irish uprisings and the Act of Union. Joep Leerssen traces the development of literary representation of Ireland and the gradual evolution and increasing radicalism of Irish nationalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and suggests that Moore’s poetry illustrates this transition; he “had made his debut, as a young poet, in the Patriot-oriented *Anthologica Hibernica*” and his “*Irish Melodies* continued, not only moderate, even conservative Anglo-Irish Grattanite ideals, but also...the United Irish tradition of political verse” (*Remembrance* 20). The aftermath of the United Irish rebellions and the Union, continuing sectarian conflict, agrarian unrest, and debate over Catholic enfranchisement continued into the 1820s, a time during which Moore “seems ... to have come to remember with increasing intensity his radical Patriot origins, his friendship with Robert Emmet and with the United Irishman Lord Edward Fitzgerald” (79). Kidd not only shares with Moore a mutual interest in the antiquarian value of his region of Ireland that Leerssen claims the *Melodies* drew upon (80), but also was prompted to emigrate as a result of the same political and economic upheavals alluded to in Moore’s writings.

Kidd’s continual allusions to Moore’s writings, especially his satires, advertised his views on Irish politics and religion to a Canadian audience. His poetry and journalism kept Irish affairs in the minds of his readers, while at the same time acknowledging British rule in his new home. Moore had walked a political and literary tightrope throughout his career; he managed simultaneously to be the darling of the Regency court while remaining loyal to the memory of his United Irish friends. Kidd himself courts controversy by referring to Ireland as “the land of Fitzgerald” (*Huron Chief, and Other Poems* 203); certainly many people in his own part of Ireland had been receptive to the radical views of the United Irish leader, who had even fantasized about “training a regiment of northern Irish dissenters who since the days of the American Revolution had been

noted for their radicalism and sympathy for republican causes” (Tillyard 115).

It is impossible to know if Kidd read, or even knew of, Moore’s 1831 biography, *The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* before his own untimely death that year; if he had, he would have probably been delighted to learn that Fitzgerald’s adventures in Canada resembled those of the narrator of *The Huron Chief*. During his travels in Canada, the British officer and titled aristocrat nevertheless admitted that “the equality of everybody and of their manner of life I like very much” (*Life and Death* 79-80). He was given permission to travel through Ontario and Quebec in the company of Aboriginal guides, with whom he was fascinated, seeing in them evidence of an uncorrupted society. “I would really join the savages,” he wrote to his mother in 1789, “and, leaving all our fictitious, ridiculous wants, be what nature intended we be” (*Life and Death* 91). Joseph Brant befriended him, and through Brant’s influence, Fitzgerald was adopted into the Bear Tribe by David Hill, Chief of the Six Nations at Michilimackinack on July 9, 1789 and given the ceremonial name *Eghnidal* (*Life and Death* 147-48). Kidd would later idealize aboriginal democracy by making his narrator a guest of the Huron in *The Huron Chief*.

Kidd’s poems depicting Ireland’s landscape and culture are also idealized and often elegiac. By the time Kidd was born, Ulster had endured civil unrest in 1797, followed in 1798 by the United Irishmen’s disastrous attempt to make Ireland a French-inspired republic. While the mortally wounded Fitzgerald died slowly in a Dublin prison, insurrections took place in Down, Armagh and Tyrone, resulting in the execution of the leaders and heavy casualties, including hangings and torture, suffered by their followers. In 1803, a year after Kidd was born, more disaster befell Ulster following insurrections organised by United Irishman Thomas Russell in Down and Antrim that coincided with the failed rebellion led by Robert Emmet in Dublin. Emmet was hanged and dismembered in Dublin; in Downpatrick, Russell was hanged and then beheaded outside the town’s jail gates. It is possible that Kidd, when writing in *The Huron Chief* of atrocities committed against Amerindians by men “of Christian feeling!” (1638), was remembering the actions committed by his countrymen and co-religionists. His own region’s experience with sectarian conflict may have made him receptive to Moore’s Enlightenment-inspired views on religious bigotry, as expressed in one of Moore’s Irish melodies, “Come, Send Round the Wine”:

Shall I ask the brave soldier, who fights by my side  
In the cause of mankind, if our creeds agree?

Shall I give up the friend I have valued and tried,  
If he kneel not before the same altar with me?  
From the heretic girl of my soul should I fly?  
To seek somewhere else a more orthodox kiss?  
No, perish the hearts, and the laws that try  
Truth, valour, or love, by a standard like this!

(*Poetical Works* 188)

Kidd also rejects arbitrary sectarian divisions as unnatural in *The Huron Chief* and in a letter in defence of Catholic Emancipation published in *The Vindicator* on January 20, 1829:

Man is naturally kind to his fellow creature, unless poisoned by bigotry and ignorance. The Indian ... contends not for superiority over the brothers of his tribe—every man stands on an equal footing, until he has signalised himself by some noble achievement, which entitles him to distinction; and then, as a matter of right, he becomes the elevated of his nation.... [T]ell me if you do not feel ashamed of your imaginary superiority, and of your right to disqualify your fellow-subjects, on account of their religious profession. (Steele 127)

Kidd's attitude may help explain his failed career as a minister in a specific creed, and why he opposed any incident where he believed that merit was unjustly denied, as when the Dean of Westminster refused to allow Byron to be buried in Westminster Abbey. Archdeacon Mountain, the man who rejected Kidd as a Church of Ireland minister, publicly supported this decision (Edwards 375). In *The Huron Chief*, Kidd's narrator deplores the "whining cant," and "Churchman's rant" as characteristic of a bigot who "nothing loves, but what's his own, / Or some *thing* else that wears a gown" (519-16). The anti-sectarian imagery and diction in *The Huron Chief* that Kidd shares with Moore can be traced in Irish nationalist verse beyond Moore to the poetry of the moderate United Irishman William Drennan (1754-1820). In Drennan's most famous poem, "Erin" (1795), a "Milesian" Eden was destroyed by the "demon of bigotry" (4), a fiend that Kidd sees at work in both Ireland and Canada.<sup>3</sup> Religious bigotry, rank without merit, sexual prudery, a petty fear of genius or unconventionality: all assume infernal forms in Kidd's private life and his politics. Not surprisingly, "the 'Mountain Demon' becomes the devil in Kidd's wilderness Eden" (Bentley xviii).

After his fortunate "fall from the cloud-capped brows of a dangerous Mountain" (*Huron Chief* 4), Kidd writes that he travelled through Upper Canada, collecting material for *The Huron Chief* and then for a planned

volume on the “*Tales and Traditions of the Indians*” of North America, perhaps unknowingly covering some of the same ground that Fitzgerald covered. He also became a regular contributor to the *Vindicator*, the *Canadian Freeman*, and other radical and pro-Irish Canadian newspapers. Another emigrant from Ireland, Dr. Daniel Tracy, originally founded *The Irish Vindicator* to support the Friends of Ireland societies, which promoted Daniel O’Connell’s non-violent Catholic Emancipation movement throughout the British Empire (Verney 38–39). Drennan’s injunction against violence likely appeared very relevant, when Montreal readers encountered “Erin,” published without acknowledgement (perhaps at Kidd’s suggestion), in the *Vindicator* on December 19, 1828:

Yet, oh! when you’re up, and they down, let them live,  
Then yield them that mercy that they did not give.

Arm of Erin! Prove strong; but be gentle as brave  
And, uplifted to strike, still be ready to save;  
Nor one feeling of vengeance presume to defile  
The cause, or the men, of the EMERALD ISLE.

(4)

“Erin” aptly reflected O’Callaghan’s and the Friends of Ireland Society’s intent to assert Irish Catholic rights without desiring to “disturb that religious harmony which exists among all classes of Christians” (“Friends of Ireland in Quebec” 3). The *Vindicator*’s goals were furthered by both political and cultural activity, and Drennan’s early United Irish rhetoric seemed appropriate in a new society that was anxious to avoid the religious conflicts that had plagued Ireland. O’Connell’s ability to mobilize hundreds of thousands of Irish Catholics through peaceful demonstrations impressed Kidd, who views O’Connell as an eloquent heir to the beliefs put forward by early Patriot orators, moderate United Irishmen, and Moore (Steele 115).

Kidd’s poetry used nationalist symbols and rhetoric that had already been well established by Drennan and other United Irish writers. Moore was the most famous conduit for much of moderate United Irish philosophy, and his poems and Fitzgerald’s biography helped install the rebellion leaders in a pantheon alongside his Patriot heroes, Grattan and Curran. Jeffrey Vail offers evidence that Moore not only admired, but joined the United Irishmen around 1798 (“Thomas Moore” 49-50). Even if Kidd did not condone the later United Irish commitment to violent revolution, he seems to have shared Moore’s view of rebellion as the final action of a

patriot provoked by repeated English injustices. Moore described United Irish rebels as “victims of that very ardour of patriotism which had been one of the sources of my affection for them, and in which, through almost every step but the last, my sympathies had gone along with them” (*Life and Death* 303). Downplaying Fitzgerald’s radical views and militancy in his biography, Moore viewed Fitzgerald as a tragic figure who belongs with the Patriots of an earlier, more moderate period of Irish nationalism (Tillyard 301).

Even while praising English statesmen, Kidd slips in subtle allusions to United Irish leaders in “Monody on the Death of George Canning,” when he declares that “the land of FITZGERALD [will] soon flourish again/Mong the nations of earth...” (*Huron Chief, and Other Poems* 203).<sup>4</sup> Moore had used “between-the-lines allusion in order to hint at the political radicalism” in “Oh, Breathe Not His Name” when recalling the legend that upon being sentenced to death, Emmet had made a speech which forbade his supporters to write his epitaph “until my country has taken its place among the nations of the earth” (Leerssen, *Remembrance* 80-81). By alluding to United Irish martyrs in the same breath as moderate British ministers, Kidd makes them seem equally patriotic, much as Moore presents “Irish violence as a mode of resistance and reaction triggered by bad government” in his biography of Fitzgerald and in his poetry and political satire (Leerssen, *Remembrance* 85).

His contributions to the debates surrounding Catholic Emancipation in the *Vindicator* reflected Kidd’s ongoing preoccupation with Irish politics, while the memories of his birthplace formed the bridge that allowed him to move to Canadian concerns. In contrast to his Derry poems, Kidd’s Canadian poems present the absence of physical reminders of his Irish identity as harrowing and poignant. In “Lines Written on Visiting the Falls of the Chaudiere,” a scene of natural Canadian beauty prompts a “vision of the past / Reflected from our boyhood’s prime / Where memory’s eye is backward cast” (*Huron Chief, and Other Poems* 141). The Derry landscape had provided Kidd with a ready supply of creative materials, and, like Moore’s political poetry, his poems often focus on individual and cultural memory. Remembrance was a complex and emotionally perilous action in both Moore and Kidd’s poetry because it was used not only to present an idealized pre-Christian past, but also the simmering, rancorous sectarian resentments that arose from Irish humiliations and defeats in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Leerssen notes that in Moore’s poetry, “historical consciousness is cultivated, not ... out of antiquarian or explanatory interest, or as a marker of Irish separateness and particularism, but

for purposes of agitation” (*Remembrance* 81). In Kidd’s poem, “Cathleen,” the narrator’s sympathy for a fellow-Irish emigrant causes him to break off his narrative to answer charges that by referring to British oppression in Ireland, his “pen, too oft, has freely strayed from ... allegiance” to “England’s king,” and resolves in future “to restrain its open willingness, / And check its *blamed* impetuosity” (*Huron Chief, and Other Poems* 173). Kidd’s use of italics suggests that unpredictability and rebelliousness are labels assigned by Ireland’s English critics to avoid taking part of the responsibility for the political situation in Ireland. The poem carries a warning that the British refusal to grant the Irish their religious and constitutional freedoms will cause natural human desires for justice to erupt uncontrollably:

Deep, deep, unseen like Bakou’s ardent fire,  
Lie all the sympathies that merit praise  
In man’s proud breast, till sadly once he sees—  
Too true an image of his country’s fate  
The child of impulse weep, and drag the chain—  
Then all the soft emotions of his heart—  
As spirits flash resentment on the foe—  
Quick swell to rage--he strikes, and takes revenge.  
(*Huron Chief, and Other Poems* 174)

Nineteenth-century readers would be expected to recognize “Bakou” or Baku, as an allusion to Moore’s *Lalla Rookh*. Baku’s fires are described in nearly identical phrases in “The Veiled Prophet” and “The Fire Worship-pers,” “two long tales that, taken together, constitute a defence and attempted rehabilitation of the idea of revolution at a time when the defenders of revolution had fallen silent or were in retreat” (Vail, “The Standard of Revolt” 1). “The Veiled Prophet” features rebels, including those “from Badku, and those fountains of blue flame” (*Poetical Works* 377) who unite with persecuted Zoroastrians against a Muslim ruler. In “The Fire Worshipers,” Moore has an Iranian rebel claim,

No—she has sons, that never—never—  
Will stoop to be the Moslem’s slaves,  
While heav’n has light or earth has graves;—  
Spirits of fire, that brood not long,  
But flash resentment back for wrong;  
And hearts where, slow but deep, the seeds  
Of vengeance ripen into deeds....  
(*Poetical Works* 413)

According to Mary Helen Thuente, Moore in turn is following an earlier United Irish tradition: “The structure of *Lalla Rookh* recalls similar combinations of verse and prose in several United Irish satires. Its Oriental mode suggests the several ‘Oriental’ works in the *Northern Star* that the United Irishmen used to comment on contemporary events” (*Harp Restrung* 190). The historical parallels between the conflicts become obvious if *Iran* is read as “an evident pun on Erin” (*Harp Restrung* 188) and the allusions seem especially appropriate to “Cathleen,” since in “The Fire Worshipers,” the later reference to “the poor exile . . . cast alone / on foreign shores, unlov’d unknown” (*Poetical Works* 412) are apt descriptions of Kidd’s homesick female emigrant.

The tension between remembrance and rebellion is also evident in Kidd’s longest and most accomplished work, *The Huron Chief*. In a footnote to the work, Kidd notes the aboriginals’ extraordinary capacities for memorizing and expressing their history in “long and dismal” accounts of “the ingratitude and injustice of the Whites. They love to repeat them, and always do it with the eloquence of nature, aided by an energetic and comprehensive language, which our polished idioms cannot imitate” (65n.). As with Moore’s use of the Irish past, Kidd’s very repetition of the Huron’s recent history is subversive because it rehabilitates aboriginal figures who have been marginalised, or even maligned, in the written histories of Britain and America. “During my visit to [an] old Chief . . . he willingly furnished me with an account of the distinguished warriors, and the traditions of different tribes, which are still fresh in his memory, and are handed from father to son, with the same precision, interest, and admiration, that the Tales and exploits of Ossian and his heroes are circulated in their original purity, to this day, among the Irish,” Kidd writes in another footnote to *The Huron Chief* (25n). Consequently, it is no surprise that the epigraph of *The Huron Chief* is taken from an Ossianic fragment appropriate for both cultures: “Where are our Chiefs of Old? Where our Heroes of mighty name? / The fields of their battles are silent—scarce their mossy tombs remain!” Although suggesting that Huron is also a pun on Erin is perhaps going too far, the resemblance between Celt and Huron is immediately evident in this quotation. But could Kidd not have had the silent martyrs of recent Irish history in mind when he chose this quote? Thuente notes that as a student, Moore had adopted Macpherson’s melancholy style and published Ossianic “effusions” in support of United Irish nationalism;<sup>5</sup> likewise, Kidd’s Huron characters share similarities with antiquarians’ portraits of the ancient Irish (Holmgren 56-57). Many Irish nationalists, including Drennan, drew from Celtic legends to portray the Milesians as members of an

honourable warrior society in order to fuel a revival in national pride, much as Kidd's Huron use oral history to instil a sense of national identity among the young (Hutchinson 124). As Kidd observes in a footnote to *The Huron Chief*, "Nothing seems to afford the Indian so much pleasure as the relation of his noble exploits in war. The young men gather round the old warriors, and listen to their stories with all the delight of a proud enthusiasm" (1234n). Kidd is at pains, however, to challenge the stereotype of the bloodthirsty and vengeful "savages," even if he replaces it with another stereotype, the Noble Savage.

In his preface to *The Huron Chief*, Kidd chooses to portray a culture whose "remaining nations are daily dwindling away," he believes, "and in a few years hence will scarcely leave a memorial to perpetuate their names, as the once mighty rulers of the vast American regions" (27-30). One of the most serious accusations the Huron make to their Christian captives is that white invaders not only "seek the Indian to destroy" but also wish to "blot away his name and nation" (1493-94). Just as it had with the Irish, memory becomes a form of cultural resistance for the Huron, whose history of interaction with Europeans has been distorted by lack of understanding or respect for aboriginal culture and "monuments." Significantly, the poem is structured around "a journey during which the narrator...hears an oral history of the 'glories of the Huron race' from the late seventeenth century to 'this very date in life'" (Bentley, "Introduction" xxvi). This period is also significant for the Irish, encompassing the Reformation, William III's victory over the Catholic James II, the Penal laws, sectarian violence, rebellion, and eventually Catholic Emancipation. Just as Kidd may have first become aware of a very old culture with unique traditions while exploring his region of Ireland, his poem's narrator learns the oral history, and an alternative version of colonial history, from his Amerindian hosts while accompanying them on a tour of the land where that history took place, and, presumably, through learning the Huron place names that contain the history.

Kidd's poem occupies an ironic universe in which the "savages" are honourable, cultured and civilized, and the poem's continual repetition of the phrase "Christian" has the unsettling effect of making the word synonymous with betrayal by the end of the poem, "as under the name of that religion, and from those who professed it, ... [the Amerindians] experienced all their wrongs and sufferings" (1255n). Where in Drennan's poem, "Erin," religious bigots "inverted [God's] plan,/ And moulded their God to the image of man," Kidd's notes to *The Huron Chief* cite a number of authorities who demonstrate the natural civility and generosity of the

native peoples of North America, and imply that any violence or vengeance attributed to them has been taught by Europeans. He portrays Christianity being turned into a weapon used against the Amerindians:

The missionary evils brought  
By those who first Religion taught  
Forgive the phrase—had more of hell—  
And all the crimes with it connected—  
Than ever yet were known to dwell  
With those oft called the *lost*—neglected—  
The barbrous Indian—Savage race—  
The outcasts of the human race!

(1371-78)

In continually denouncing the harmful effects of “jarring *Creeds-men*” who destroyed the “social tie of friendship,” and “in Religion’s pathway threw/ sectarian seeds, which rankly grew” (1250-53), Kidd also seems to allude to Moore’s “Intolerance: A Satire,” which decried the transformation of Ireland from “such a blooming part / Of the world’s garden, rich in nature’s charms, / And fill’d with social souls and vigorous arms” into “the victim of that canting crew,” who “Make *this* life hell, in honor of the next!” (*Poetical Works* 138).

Like *Lalla Rookh*, *The Huron Chief* could be enjoyed by a reader without a particular knowledge of the recent history of Ireland, but it contains a commentary on it nonetheless. “The Fire Worshipers” focuses on a people driven to rebellion when their religion is oppressed by their Muslim ruler. The tyrannical Emir’s daughter Hinda falls in love with the Gheber rebel Hafed, whom many critics view as “a heroic but doomed rebel in the tradition of [Robert] Emmet” (Thuente 189). Moore claimed that it was not only Emmet’s willing sacrifice, but also his eloquence that set him “above the level of ordinary men. On no occasion was this more peculiarly striking than in those displays of oratory with which...he so often enchained the attention and sympathy of his young audience” (*Life and Death* 304). In *The Huron Chief*, Hafed’s role is reprised by several equally doomed but eloquent Aborigines engaged in “defensive war” against Christian invaders and missionaries. In fact, Kidd’s narrator first stumbles upon a grove in which an Indian woman is privately mourning “her hero gone” (80). The recent history of political martyrdom in Ireland finds correspondence in the events that immediately precede the opening of *The Huron Chief*.

But the hand of the white man has brought desolation—  
Our wigwams are plundered, our homes are no more,—  
And MORANKA, the glory and pride of the Nation,  
Died bravely defending the Indian's shore.

(65-68)

Kidd's portrait of Moranka's bereaved widow may recall the fallen defenders of other "nations," or the doomed love of Hafed and Hinda, and perhaps even Sarah Curran, the fiancée of Robert Emmet, celebrated in Moore's melody, "She is Far from the Land." As Bentley has noted, Moranka's widow's lament follows the ballad rhythm of other Moore melodies, including the lament for Robert Emmet, "Oh, Breathe Not His Name" ("Introduction" xviii).

The Mingo leader Logan is presented as another recent martyr-hero in Kidd's poem. Like Moore, who played down Emmet's and Fitzgerald's violent action while attempting to install them in a nationalist pantheon alongside Henry Grattan, Kidd has his Amerindian guides tell the narrator about all "the Indian's wrongs and sorrows, / But most of LOGAN, lately gone" (685). Logan had turned against white settlers, whom he had previously defended. What appears to be a betrayal from a white point of view is justified when Kidd recounts the Amerindian version of events:

Logan was... long distinguished as the generous friend of the whites, until his wives and children... were basely murdered in the spring of 1774 by Colonel Cresap and his Christian followers, whom he had long befriended. Logan was so deeply enraged at this unprovoked cruelty, that he determined to seek revenge, and nobly signalised himself in a decisive battle ... between the collected forces of the MINGOES, SHAWANESE, AND DELAWARES, and the VIRGINIAN Militia. (27n.)

Logan's transformation from "advocate for peace" (710) to the leader of a coalition united against a colonial oppressor suggests that like Moore's poems and political writings about the United Irishmen, *The Huron Chief* is consistently informed by a pervasive sense of betrayal—in his case, by the whites, who "will say to an Indian, 'My friend—my brother.' They will take him by the hand, and at the same moment destroy him" (26n.). Logan's rebellion is ignited by "perfidy" (721) and, like the Irish and Persian rebels portrayed by Moore, he is branded a traitor by the very people whose broken promises force him to take up arms. However, Logan's final speech in *The Huron Chief* presents him as a martyr rather than rebel, much

in the way that nineteenth-century admirers of the United Irish movement transformed their failure into a moral victory:

The weakest elements in United Irish history were now seen as its major strength; attention was concentrated on the idea of the just struggle by the few noble spirits against the powerful tyrant, their martyrdom hailed as some kind of national catharsis, their failure a form of triumph in itself. (Elliott 366)

In *The Huron Chief's* versification of an actual speech Logan was reputed to make, Logan dies content in the belief that he is sacrificing his life to a larger cause:

Yet, for the happy beams of peace,  
And for my country's good alone,  
I now rejoice at this release  
From evils—though untimely gone.  
(741-44)

Just as Moore's writings recalled Emmet's eloquence by alluding to the speech he was reputed to have made from the dock in *Irish Melodies*, Kidd's commentary on Logan's death establishes further the centrality of misunderstood rebels to Kidd's and Moore's writing. Moore mourned the gifts and talents of the citizens Ireland lost through rebellion, concluding that Emmet, "in heart and mind, was another of those devoted men, who with gifts that would have made them the ornaments and supports of a well-regulated community, were yet driven to live the lives of conspirators and die the death of traitors" (*Life and Death* 305). In *Lalla Rookh* he writes "in a moving commentary about the United Irishmen" that "Rebellion! foul, dishonouring word...so oft has stain'd/ The holiest cause that tongue or sword/ of Mortal ever lost or gained" (Thuente 190). He calls attention to the fickleness of historical judgement when he asks,

How many a spirit, born to bless  
Has sunk beneath that withering name,  
Whom but a day's an hour's success  
Hath wafted to eternal fame!  
(*Poetical Works* 413)

Kidd's narrator also observes that the customs of so-called advanced nations such as Britain and America can make people's natural aspirations towards freedom and justice appear treacherous, when he comments upon the story of Logan, as told from the point of view of his Huron hosts:

Such was the tale—and such the man,  
Designed to show that noble plan,  
Which Nature formed for one and all,  
    When Freedom—first her gifts bestowing—  
Had summoned at her magic call  
    Proud hearts, with noble ardour glowing,  
To worship at her holy shrine,  
And share the cup of bliss divine.

(753-60)

Readers alert to the Irish political commentary embedded in Moore's poem would possibly see the spirits of Robert Emmett and even Lord Edward Fitzgerald animating the rhetoric of Kidd's aboriginal speakers.

Like *Lalla Rookh*, *The Huron Chief* contains a romantic sub-plot in which the lovers are doomed by the religious and cultural conflicts in which they are caught. As Bentley notes, Kidd's allusion to Hinda, the Moslem heroine of "The Fire Worshippers," "presages disaster for" Tapooka and her Sioux lover, Alkwanwaugh ("Explanatory Notes" 90). Kidd notes that the Indians compared everything that was beautiful to "the unfortunate TA-POO-KA.... She was the idol of the Nation—every young heart worshipped her" (821n). Kidd may have chosen the story, which is not an Huron legend,<sup>6</sup> because Tapooka recalls the heroine of Kidd's lyric, "Cathleen," in which the faded beauty of a careworn, sunburned emigrant is emblematic of "her woes/ and hopes of other times, which never more/ Can wake one spark of joy in her dark soul" (172). Cathleen's lost beauty may symbolize the loss of Ireland itself. While Tapooka's exile has been brought about through romantic, rather than political "woes," Kidd also describes her as having lost through sadness much of her legendary beauty, so that "Her faded form so blighted seemed ..." (1009). Kidd also seems to project his own feelings of homesickness onto Tapooka, whose exile is characterized by solitary pilgrimages to a "mountain's brow ... Because it looked so like the same, / On Huron's banks from whence she came" (1011–18). Kidd, for whom every hill in Canada seemed to recall his beloved Slievegallin, describes Tapooka's nostalgia as a similar attachment to familiar landscapes.

Because Kidd claims that the Huron are free of bigotry, aboriginal sense of honour separates Tapooka, who has been promised to "an aged chief," from her Sioux lover. But after they are re-united at the poem's climax, her bridegroom Alkwanwaugh is killed defending the Huron wedding party against marauding "Christian foe-men" (1357), and Tapooka dies of heart-break. In choosing this story, Kidd provides symmetry for his poem; it both

begins and ends with women mourning their nation's defenders. The symbolic union between two aboriginal nations is also disrupted, just as Drennan's vision of harmony among *all* Irishmen was shattered by defeat of the United Irishmen. Kidd's nineteenth century Canadian poem follows a pattern established in eighteenth-century Irish writing, including *Lalla Rookh*, where "the tragic outcome is inevitable, as it nearly always is in Irish tales of Catholics and Protestants embarked on inter-communal adventure or passion" (Vance 113). That Tapooka's death involves the destruction of a national heroine suggests Kidd's continuing frustration with Irish politics, as well as his moral outrage over the treatment of North America's aboriginal peoples.

But Kidd's poem also contains evidence of his faith in the cultural regeneration of a colonized nation. The most influential of the aboriginal speakers is, of course, the Huron Chief, Skenandow, a national hero whose prowess was "once known afar / When first the White man knew the rage / Of Indians in defensive war" (190-92). Significantly, Skenandow's introducing himself to the narrator as "the Chieftain of this mountain" (141) foreshadows his own death defending "the remnant of his tribe" from Christian invasion at the close of the poem, since the phrase is a direct allusion to Moore's Hafed, the mortally-wounded leader of the Fire Worshipers who retreats to his religion's final holy site and wins renown as "the Chieftain who died on that mountain" (*Poetical Works* 319). Skenandow does not merely defend his land; he is also the guardian of Huron religion and culture, and resembles not only Hafed, but also the early Irish *ollamhs*, who were portrayed in early nationalist writing as Ireland's original poets, rulers, and lawgivers. Uncharacteristically, Kidd, who takes care in finding appropriate indigenous emblems and imagery for his portraits of aboriginal characters (Bentley, "Introduction"), describes Skenandow through terms more commonly associated with Irish than aboriginal culture. Appearing to the narrator as both "sage" (157) and "saint divine" (160), Skenandow thus has several parallels with figures in Irish history who were adopted by nationalists wishing to re-imagine Ireland as the "Isle of Saints and Scholars," a popular phrase that looked back to both pre-Christian Ireland and to monastic Christian Ireland before the introduction of sectarianism.

Skenandow may have been modelled on the Huron chief Skenandoa, who was born in 1696 (Bentley, "Explanatory Notes" 77), and was reported to be still living in 1816. Skenandoa's extreme old age would put him in the position of being the only living link with an older tradition barely influenced by European culture or by sectarian division. Kidd's

poet-narrator also draws on the oral tradition of the Huron to create his poem, after he discovers that the earlier “glories of the Huron race” are still carried in the heads of the “remnant of the Nation,” and that all the young men can “well [recount] every name / On mem’ry’s page—stamped in succession” from historical past to present date (670–76), which suggests again that he is thinking of the rehabilitation of Irish culture and history, and attempting to undertake a similar project with the Huron.

Kidd’s poem works by establishing imaginative and emotional parallels between the two cultures, as his narrator’s perceptions of the landscape are altered by his encounter with the Huron, whose previous encounters with Christians provide a grim explanation for the silence of the Canadian woods. During the time that Kidd’s narrator is “pleasingly detained” (1027) by Tapooka’s wedding preparations, what first appeared to be a blank and unoccupied space (Bentley, “Introduction” xviii) becomes filled with historical and cultural associations as he learns more about his hosts. Kidd’s ability to find common ground between his narrator’s Irish past and Huron history is the first step in securing the reader’s sympathy for a culture often dismissed as violent and primitive. As Kelly McGuire observes, he

astutely reasons that the extinction of a people whose history extends further back into the recesses of time than the colonist’s own might prove less acceptable to the encroaching nation than that of a people perceived to be cultureless and lacking any palpable history. (17)

Kidd may be thinking of the similar rehabilitation of Irish culture and history by Irish and Catholic antiquarians, who were often supported by the Patriots and United Irishmen. He may have thought it possible to undertake a similar project in Canada, inspired by cultural nationalist programs in which Irish oral and written literature was translated or adapted into English to show the antiquity and complexity of Irish culture. Moore was pleased with rumours that parts of *Lalla Rookh* were being sung in Persian marketplaces, and Kidd’s preface boasts that *The Huron Chief* “has made such an impression on the Indian warriors to whom it has been communicated, that it will shortly be translated into their respective tongues, by SAWENNOWANE, and other Chiefs, equally celebrated and intelligent, who speak and write several languages” (4).

Kidd’s portrait of aboriginal leaders who are able to argue their independence in “several languages,” suggests a culture that is on the verge of cultural regeneration and adaptation rather than extinction. While McGuire notes that “Kidd’s poem anticipates the trend in colonial attitudes to regard

the Natives as relics of a dying nation” and so is assisting in the colonist practice of turning living cultures into museum pieces (16), it is possible that Kidd is instead following the program of cultural recovery, initiated by the United Irishmen and Patriots, that popularized both the past and present Irish culture in order to stress Irish distinctiveness. It is important to remember that while McGuire notes that the poem’s speaker reveals that he lingers in the territory of the Chippewa “to gather all / Their deeds of war, and feats of glory,/Till [he] had heard their rise and fall” (17), Kidd actually writes, “we loved to trace / and from the SACHEMS gather all/ their deeds of war, and feats of glory...” (emphasis added) (1020-23). The gathering of traditions and history is presented as a cooperative and communal effort between two cultures trying to understand each other, much as Irish nationalist movements before and after Kidd had relied on co-operation between native musicians and storytellers, Catholic, Irish-speaking scholars such as Charles O’Connor and Theophilus O’Flanagan, and Protestant antiquarians.<sup>7</sup> In asking aboriginal leaders to read and translate his poem into their “respective tongues” (4) and by collecting stories for a proposed “*Tales and Traditions of the Indians*,” Kidd may have tried to initiate a program of Huron cultural nationalism that was not unlike the cultural activities of the United Irishmen.

Kidd not only portrays Huron leaders as teaching their culture to the young warriors in the teeth of white invasion, but also reminds his readers of the contributions that aboriginal people made to British security and Canadian history. Consequently, one of the most important aboriginal leaders to make an appearance in the poem is Tecumseh (c.1768-1813). His introduction complicates the poem’s chronology, as Bentley has observed (“Introduction” xx-xxi). Like Skenandoa, who supposedly died in 1816, Tecumseh’s presence works best in the context of Kidd’s preoccupation with the recent Irish past. Both men are chosen as leaders on the strength of their rhetorical skills, and their lack of political self-interest. For instance, Kidd notes that Tecumseh argues against the election to council of his own son “when put in competition with the happiness and safety of his Country” (1317n.). Moreover, if Skenandow resembles the pre-Christian Celts, whose music and culture survived in some form well into Kidd’s childhood, then Tecumseh’s service may recall that of the many Irish who served the British empire: “men,” Kidd writes, “whose magnanimous and noble spirits have proved, in every emergency, that they are, and ever have been, the unshaken defenders of the British Throne” (Steele 127).

In a footnote, Kidd reminds the reader that Tecumseh died after British soldiers fled the battle, “leaving the flag of Great Britain alone to be

defended by the brave, but unsupported Indians, against the overwhelming numbers of a powerful enemy” (1315n), and this betrayal colours his presence in the poem. Tecumseh’s timely arrival in the battle between Skenandow’s party and the Christian invaders helps to deliver the Amerindians from their demonised enemies. Then, after a long recital of the historical wrongs endured by aboriginals at the hands of Europeans, Tecumseh, like Skenandow, urges his followers to spare the lives of their white captives (1547). The Irish desire for religious freedom and harmony that had been envisioned by Drennan and Moore is reflected in the portrait of Kidd’s Amerindian heroes, who throughout the poem restrict their deadly skills to “defensive war” (191). After the whites’ attack on the wedding party, the young men of the tribe debate with the Huron elders the fate of three captives, who are now “fast pinioned to that bas-wood tree/ To wait the tomahawk’s aimed blow” (1460-61). The tone of the debate moves from the revolutionary and self-immolating rhetoric associated with the United Irishmen to Daniel O’Connell’s more conciliatory attempts to peacefully mobilize Irish Catholics. Arguing that the shades of Tapooka and Alkwanwaugh demand an offering of white blood,

each youth’s keen eloquence,  
his Nations evils would recount—  
Whose soul would be her bold defence,  
Or, perish in that Nation’s fall,  
When ruin had encircled all.  
(1526-30)

The narrator recounts that when the young warriors’ rage had subsided to a partial rest,

TECUMSEH spoke the words of peace  
With full persuasion, to release  
The captive foe.—He would not shed  
A tyrant’s blood, when conquered—standing  
In chains, like those who bend the head  
In sadness here—with grief commanding  
The finer feelings of the heart,  
To let them now unhurt depart.  
(1532-54)

While rejecting revenge for present and past wrongs, Tecumseh is guided by Skenandow’s knowledge of Huron history and tradition to defend Huron rights, and he allows Skenandow to remind the captive white men

of the repeated betrayals of treaties, marked by ceremonies involving the planting of the “tree of peace” and the “chain” of friendship. Skenandow then releases the white men, “an act which symbolically reasserts the significance of the tree as a metaphor of ‘peace’ (427n) rather than destruction, ‘liberty’ (1596) rather than bondage” (Bentley, “Introduction” xxix). The expressive and metaphoric language which Kidd claims is so characteristic of aboriginal speech recalls the “Tree of Liberty” of French republican rhetoric that was adopted by the United Irishmen and modified into O’Connell’s “Constitutional Tree of Liberty” (O’Connell 1); as well, the scene recalls the moment in Drennan’s “Erin” when the oppressors are “down” and the erstwhile rebels resist the temptation to take revenge.

Both *The Huron Chief* and Kidd’s contributions to the *Irish Vindicator* suggest the mixture of fear, resentment, and hope he held during the late 1820s, the same mixed feelings that prompted Moore to publish his biography of Fitzgerald just after Catholic Emancipation against his friends’ advice (Vail, “Thomas Moore” 45). That O’Connell’s emancipation movement was also grounded upon historical experience, especially “the sense of historical injustice which centred principally on the ‘broken’ Treaty of Limerick (1691)” (O’Ferral 26), suggests a further link between Kidd’s portrayal of the Hurons and his observation, from afar, of Catholic Emancipation. The eloquence of the Amerindian elders, especially Tecumseh, who “possessed the very essence of persuasion” (1547n.) echoes both early United Irish rhetoric and the “oratory” of O’Connell; it is very likely that Kidd is attuned to even the most fortuitous similarities in the rhetoric of both cultures. What complicates any parallel drawn between Kidd’s sympathies for the Huron culture, and his approval of the move towards Catholic emancipation, is the poem’s tragic ending, in which the homeward-bound Skenandow is ambushed and killed in one final example of white, Christian betrayal, after the released captives rejoin a larger war party. Since much of the energy and sympathy of the poem appears to derive from Kidd’s own sense of dispossession and since, from a satirical point of view, Kidd’s guiding star throughout the poem is Juvenal, rather than Horace, the movement of the poem seems necessarily one towards bitterness and tragedy. Skenandow, after all, dies outnumbered and overwhelmed by his Christian ambushers who “around the warrior hero pour / Like demons of the raging storm” (1644-1645). The demons of bigotry and sectarianism that in Drennan’s ballad destroyed an Irish Eden continue to stalk through North America at the end of the poem, but Tecumseh and the narrator also survive the battle as examples of nationalists of different races who are committed to preserving not only Amerindian rights but also Amerindian

culture. While Skenandow may represent a people whose language and customs are “daily dwindling away” (3), Tecumseh may represent the accommodation that moderate nationalists such as Drennan tried to make for Ireland within the British Empire. There is also a place for poets like Moore, whose wildly popular *Irish Melodies* used traditional tunes and images to bring Irish politics into English drawing-rooms, and Kidd, the sympathetic outsider, whose writing portrayed the Huron and the Irish as nations, not colonies, perhaps as a modest attempt to create the type of cultural revival whose beginnings he may have witnessed in Ireland. The poem’s gloomy ending reflects, no doubt, Kidd’s own anxieties about the Irish future, and about whether his country could avoid the violence that might erupt when an Irishman “his Nation’s evils would recount” (1527). In spite of his remembrance of past betrayals in Irish and Amerindian history, Kidd asserts that as long as there are poets, Skenandow’s culture will not disappear completely, “Nor shall his name be e’er forgot” (1655), even if it remains only as an inspiration to “future bards, in songs of grief” (1656). Kidd’s Irish experience formed a bridge that allowed the “lonely exile” to become an advocate not only for Irish rights at home and in Canada but also for a people that he had learned to respect through his discovery of remembrance and history as common ground between cultures.

### Notes

- 1 D.M.R. Bentley has demonstrated, in “Thomas Moore’s Construction of Upper Canada in ‘Ballad Stanzas,’” how greatly Moore’s portraits of Canadian landscape and North American politics have influenced Canadian writers, including Kidd. His explanatory notes to *The Huron Chief* suggest the ways that Kidd’s allusions to *Poems Relating to America* and *Lalla Rookh* shaped his portrait of North America as both exotic and Edenic.
- 2 Many collectors of Irish music and folklore and translators of Irish manuscripts were closely associated with Irish political movements in the eighteenth century. Joep Leerssen looks in detail at the Patriot connections of folklorists such as Charlotte Brooke and Thelophilus O’Flanagan, in *Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael*, and Mary Helen Thuente provides a detailed analysis of the ways that United Irish political poetry and ballads adopted traditional Irish melodies, the bardic tradition, and literary and archaeological emblems in *The Harp Re-Strung: The United Irishmen and the Rise of Irish Literary Nationalism*.
- 3 Several of Kidd’s letters to *The Vindicator* ridicule both the attempts of American Methodist preachers to undermine the influence of British missionaries in Canada, and the credit taken in *The Christian Guardian* on behalf of “the Rev. Messrs. Ryerson and Metcalf” for the “rapid conversion of the ‘neglected poor of Ireland’” (Steele 128).
- 4 Kidd’s reasons for choosing to commemorate George Canning are complex. Canning,

like Pitt, had advocated Irish union with Britain in 1800 to protect the western flank of the Empire, but also argued that the resulting security against the French would finally enable the Irish to “receive ‘the real, inspiriting and enlivening sunshine of English liberty’” that he felt had so far been denied them by sectarian discrimination in pre-union Ireland (Jenkins 20). As Prime Minister, Canning formed a Tory-Whig coalition government, but the alliance’s Emancipation bill for Catholics was defeated in 1825. Nevertheless, until his death in 1827, Canning continued to keep the Catholic emancipation question in the forefront of Parliamentary affairs, in the face of royal opposition from George IV and the Duke of York. In his “Monody to the Memory of the Right Hon. George Canning,” Kidd portrays Canning as a statesman to whom “nations where liberty stands now confest” (*Huron Chief and Other Poems* 203) are indebted, through Canning’s recognition of independent European states, including Greece, and reminds the reader of Canning’s Irish ancestry in a footnote. Moore did not share Kidd’s high opinion of Canning, and declined an offer to write his biography.

- 5 In *The Harp Re-Strung*, Mary Helen Thuente discusses Moore’s early interest in Macpherson’s “translations” of Ossian, and quotes examples of his “effusions.”
- 6 According to Bentley, Kidd’s story is based not on what he would have learned from Huron storytellers, but on anecdotes drawn from Henry Schoolcraft and from James Athearn Jones’s, *Tales of an Indian Camp* (1829). Other legends in *Tales of an Indian Camp* may have also provided Thomas Moore with one of his North American ballads, “The Lake of the Dismal Swamp” (“Explanatory Notes” 78–79).
- 7 Eighteenth-century cultural movements in Ireland had sought to re-appropriate Gaelic history, culture and literature in the service of an idealized national self-image (*Mere Irish* 357), an experiment that Kidd may have been duplicating in Canada by using Irish poetry and Irish subject matter to promote the activities of the Friends of Ireland society before turning to Canadian subject matter. In many ways, he anticipated by several decades the romantic nationalism of Thomas D’Arcy McGee, whose work in the Young Ireland movement laid the groundwork for his promotion of “that best fruit of nationality, a new and lasting literature” in his *Canadian Ballads* (iii).

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