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Saving Pocahontas: a Conversation on Gender, Culture, and Power in the Storied Saving Moment

Claire Ehr

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by

Claire Ehr

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Advised by Professor Burow-Flak

College of Arts and Sciences

Valparaiso University

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Chapter 1

Pocahontas: Storied

Introduction and Overarching Thesis, Methods

Pocahontas is a figure with much cultural capital, even today, and her influence was historically important to Native and European agendas alike. Pocahontas as a person indeed had a life that seemed to influence political relations between Native and European (specifically Powhatan, specifically English). However, the storied construct of Pocahontas has had significantly more cultural sway, influencing (or at least representing changes in) everything from gendered power dynamics to the interplay between the European Colonizer and the Indigenous Other.[1] Pocahontas' image has been re-appropriated over and over throughout time to further political agendas and to represent the female and the Other. To this end, Pocahontas has been variously represented as the innocent, the "little wanton" rebel, the oppressed Native woman, the erotic exotic, the empowered political powerhouse and combinations of all of these archetypes. To focus this project, I will analyze four plays in the first half of the 19th century, each of which present Pocahontas as various even in her identities as female and Native.

These four plays, J.N Barker's *The Indian Princess, or La Belle Sauvage*,[2] George Washington Parke Custis's *Pocahontas, or the Settlers of Virginia*,[3] Robert Dale Owen's *Pocahontas: A Historical Drama in 5 Parts*,[4] and Charlotte Mary Sanford Barnes' *The Forest*

1 Brown, Kathleen M. *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia,* 1996.
2 Barker, J.N. *The Indian Princess, or La Belle Sauvage*, 1808.
3 Custis, George Washington Parke. *Pocahontas, or The Settlers of Virginia*, 1830.
4 Owen, Robert Dale. *Pocahontas: A Historical Drama in 5 Parts*, 1837.

Princess, or Two Centuries Ago,[5] have both commonalities and discrepancies in their representations of the Pocahontas character. My project is manifold: to elucidate the commonalities that, by their reiteration, contribute to Pocahontas' surviving character and cultural archetype, to examine how the differences between these plays speak to the individual author's intentions with the Pocahontas character, and to illuminate how the intra-, inter-, and extra-textual dynamics influence the (Western) audience's relation to the concept of the Native in general.

Some Considerations

When taking on this project, it is important to recognize the standpoint and identity of the writer, and how that interacts with the texts and the interpretations presented. Descendants of European stock and beneficiaries of the systems they put in place must be particularly careful not to doubly "colonize" the narratives they interpret. From a perspective of activism, this would entail perhaps taking a backseat in this endeavor altogether, and letting Native voices do the talking. However, more academic endeavors such as this require a multiplicity of voices to understand the whole subject, including voices considered problematic. Since narratives (particularly the ones we will encounter throughout this essay) are understood across cultures, the examination of how they may have come about is open territory for academic exploration, regardless of background. That being said, a writer still must be politically aware of how her own identity may frame her interpretations and must always work to write responsibly about other cultures.

[5] Barnes, Charlotte Mary Sanford. *The Forest Princess, or Two Centuries Ago*, 1848.

First, we must consider the question of terminology. Throughout the years, scholars and laypeople alike have talked about Native people in many different ways, some pejorative or misleading. It is obvious to most that some terms are highly inappropriate, but we get into murkier water when we come to a term like "Indian." While the name is predicated off the famous Colombian misunderstanding, it has been adopted by many Native people to describe themselves. However, this does not necessarily allow outsiders to use this term as well. The most obvious issue with this name is its potential geographical confusion, but it also has a universalizing aspect that lumps varied cultures all throughout the Americas together, erasing cultural variance. In order to combat this issue, modern writers have found it wise to use specific names of tribes as much as possible. When the writer is making a grander statement about the category of the Native, terms such as First Nations, Indigenous, and Native are usually interchangeably acceptable.

However, in the world of the 19th Century dramatic narratives, authors predominantly use the term "Indian" to refer to the Native. To avoid confusion, I shall similarly use the term Indian when performing literary analyses of the texts themselves. This means that I shall be using different terms when discussing different aspects of culture inside and outside of these plays. When discussing political dynamics between the specific cultures, I will likely term the Native with the specific title of "the Powhatan Confederacy," and will in turn refer to the Westerners as "English." This is predominantly because in a political arena, the characters involved are representing their sovereign states. When discussing archetypes and wider cultural values, I will likely then use the terms "Native," and "Western" to understand the wider communities and influences that may be relevant.

Historical Background and the Question of Veridicality

In 1608, a young Powhatan girl apparently saves an established English Captain and leader of a colony from seemingly certain death at the hands of her own people. Eight years later, the English Captain records this extraordinary event and shares it with the world. Hundreds of years on, the story of Pocahontas, as an Indian Princess, sweeping in, full of compassion, to save Captain John Smith, a white man she hardly knows, has made its way into our historical and societal consciousness. This story has proliferated so widely and deeply that Pocahontas has become an archetypal figure for the Native Woman.

To understand how this story proliferated in the West, we may understand its origins. In his *Generall Historie of Virginia (1624)*, Captain John Smith wrote about many things he encountered in the strange new world of America, and particularly in Virginia.[6] This narrative included Pocahontas rescuing him from her father in 1608. However, John Smith was not just a soldier, an adventurer and a writer; he had immense leadership responsibilities from the moment he set foot on American soil. After the Virginia Company received its charter from King James I, Smith boarded one of the first vessels bound for Virginia and took a leadership role as one of the seven councilors of the colony. Even further, after the hardships and starvation that plagued the early years of the Jamestown settlers, Smith stepped forward as its primary leader. For the first years of the Jamestown colony, the colonizers for the most part looked to John Smith as the

[6] Smith, John. *Generall Historie of Virginia by Captain John Smith, 1624; The Fourth Booke,* 1624. Edited by J. Franklin Jameson. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907. (289-408)

primary source of authority, a label that was (according to Smith's writings) communicated to the Powhatans upon first contact.[7]

As administrator, Smith had many responsibilities and perhaps saved the entire Virginia colony from extinction, but as adventurer and writer of said adventures, Smith performed many different functions. As adventurer, he came in contact with many members of the Powhatan Confederacy, and as the leader of the Jamestown settlement, he had a duty to set up respectful trade relations with the Native peoples. However, that Smith wrote down his experiences in detail gave him much more reach and influence beyond the scope of the immediate area surrounding his settlement. Not only have his writings survived to the modern day, but they also garnered contemporary fame back in England. The *Generall Historie*, compiled from Smith's on-the-ground observations, was first printed in England in 1624. To speak to its success, the volume went through many editions, at least six from its original publication till 1632. Evidently, the English were excited to hear word from the New World and were ready to imbibe John Smith's narrative.

However, modern white and Native historians[8][9] alike cast doubt upon the veridicality of his narrative, for several reasons. First of all, Smith was encountering an entirely different culture and thus was understandably inaccurate in his interpretations of several moments of cultural contact, including the episode of Pocahontas saving him, which becomes the cornerstone for the Pocahontas character. However, we cannot blame Smith entirely for his misunderstandings. Smith seems to have made a concerted effort to understand the Powhatans,

[7] Smith, John. *A True Relation, by Captain John Smith, 1608*. Edited by J. Franklin Jameson. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907. (44)

[8] Allen, Paula Gunn. *Pocahontas: Medicine Woman, Spy, Entrepreneur, Diplomat*, 2003.
[9] Custalow, Linwood and Angela Daniels. *The True Story of Pocahontas*, 2007.

studying their language and culture as best he could.[10] Even so, it is likely he misinterpreted his "escape from death." While there are no written contemporary histories from the Powhatan side providing critique of John Smith's interpretation, scholars have reliable input from the modern members of the tribe that has been passed down orally from the time of contact with John Smith which directly contrasts Smith's testimony.

Secondly, John Smith's writings were not simply and completely historical in nature. By writing about his experiences and publishing them in England, Smith was already creating a narrative to attract adventurers to join him in the exploration of the New World. There was still much more of the New World to explore and colonize, but life in the New World was by no means an easy existence. Smith's narratives then served to persuade others to join him in the colonization project, and thus there was a market and productive use for outstanding tales of adventure. In this project, it seems that Smith often inflated his role within the narrative even at the risk of inconsistencies within his separate accounts.[11]

Furthermore, one cannot rule out the possibility that as his narratives were gaining traction back in England, John Smith did not want to pass up his opportunity to construct and disseminate a personal legend for a chance at fame. It is also interesting to note that the first iteration of the "Pocahontas Saving John Smith" narrative was published as Pocahontas was in London, being received by royals and being celebrated in the public eye as a cultural phenomenon and ambassador. This story was also first addressed directly to Queen Anne, who met with Pocahontas personally. Some scholars find the timing of this narrative suspicious, a last

[10] Price, David A. *Love and Hate in Jamestown: John Smith, Pocahontas, and the Heart of a New Nation*. New York. Alfred A. Knopf, 2003. (7)
[11] Lewis, Paul. *The Great Rogue: A Biography of Captain John Smith*, 1967.

ditch (an ultimately successful) attempt to attach John Smith's name to the extraordinary figure of Pocahontas.[12] In this case, though, the Powhatan tribes' ancestors' testimony describing rituals like the one Smith described (although uninformed) is sufficient evidence to state that some ritual contact between Smith and the Powhatan Confederacy occurred.

However, the importance of this exploration is to establish that although Smith's narrative is viewed as historical (even by the authors of the theatrical narratives), it too is a storied imagining that sought to present specific gender and cultural dynamics to a Western audience. Despite its lack of veridicality Smith's account grew in dominance and became the basis for the Pocahontas of the stage, which brought these dynamics back into the public eye once more.

Smith to the Stage

In order to analyze these plays in an economical and focused fashion, I will center this essay on three main story beats. These are as follows: Pocahontas as she is introduced, Pocahontas in the Saving Act, and Pocahontas afterwards and into her final state in these plays. These moments allow us to explore (in order) who the character of Pocahontas is, how she interacts in the midst of fraught and complex power dynamics, and how she fares in the aftermath of the cultural meeting. I shall be looking at all these moments throughout the ensuing chapters: first through a feminist lens, then with reference to the cultural dynamics (post-colonial lens), then utilizing both together for a total and comprehensive view of the Pocahontas character.

[12] Ibid.

I have first applied the separate feminist lens because Pocahontas is often seen as and indeed can be read as a feminist figure, yet some texts, particularly *The Forest Princess* do more to establish Pocahontas' agency. Furthermore, none of these texts represent a perfectly free feminist agent in Pocahontas. Regardless of any playwright's particular agenda, Pocahontas' femininity is a crucial part of the narrative, especially the examined narrative beats above. The gender dynamics are clear to see not only in her rebellion against her father with the Saving Act, but also with Pocahontas' interactions with the English men in the saving moment and after.

The third chapter will utilize a post-colonial lens to parse out the cultural dynamics that reveal themselves in the saving moment and beyond. Pocahontas' Nativehood is integral to her character but is presented with varying levels of intensity and loyalty to her home community. In her intercultural actions Pocahontas interacts as either a political actor or instrument (or some combination of the two!) throughout the plays. Furthermore, Pocahontas' character undergoes an explicit or implied shift in cultural identity from Native to (at least more) English which warrants further exploration in light of Pocahontas' status as a cultural archetype for the Native as a whole. With this lens, the texts that perhaps converse the most are Custis' and Owen's plays, which we shall examine in depth.

The final chapter will extend the exploratory work of the previous two chapters by combining the feminist and Postcolonial lenses. Not only are both lenses necessary for proper examination, but they are necessarily inextricable in the figure of Pocahontas herself. However, only after giving each lens its due separate examination can the two modes of examination come together to impart a clear image of the whole complex dynamism of the Pocahontas character in representation, in situ, and at conclusion.

Play Interactions

As previously discussed, the plays that I will examine have individual voices that converse with each other and the original source material (Smith's writings). These plays were written close in time to each other, all during the early to mid 1800s. The chronologically first play to tackle the Pocahontas character, Barker's *The Indian Princess or, La Belle Sauvage*, was first performed in 1808. Custis' play, *Pocahontas, or the Settlers of Virginia*, was written in 1830, followed shortly after by Robert Dale Owen's *Pocahontas: A Historical Drama in 5 Parts* in 1837. Finally, Charlotte Mary Sanford Barnes' *The Forest Princess, or Two Centuries Ago* premiered in 1848. Not only do these plays have a contiguity with each other, but most were performed around the same geographical area. Barker, Custis, and Barnes all premiered their plays in Philadelphia[13][14] while Owen's premiered in New York.[15] Since the plays were all displayed in the same theatrical scene (though Owen's less so), it does not seem unlikely that each later playwright would be aware of the earlier plays. This seems especially the case when it comes to Barker's play, which garnered extreme popularity and kickstarted the trend of plays centered around Pocahontas.[16] It is highly likely that all of these playwrights would have been familiar with Barker's work.

Indeed, there is some evidence that bolsters the assumption of familiarity between the other texts, particularly where the play penned by Charlotte Mary Sanford Barnes is concerned.

[13] Hitchcock, H. Wiley. "An Early American Melodrama: The Indian Princess of J. N. Barker and John Bray". *Notes*. 12(3). 1995. pp. 375–388.
[14] Jaroff, Rebecca Dunn. "Charlotte Barnes: A Life in the Theatre". In Miriam López Rodríguez (ed.). *Women's Contribution to Nineteenth-century American Theatre*. Universitat de València. 2011. pp. 59–70.
[15] Abrams, Ann Uhry. *The Pilgrims and Pocahontas: Rival Myths of American Origin*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1999. (129)
[16] Scheckel, Susan. "Domesticating the Drama of Conquest: Barker's Pocahontas on the Popular Stage." *American Transcendental Quarterly*, 10(3), 1996.

Barnes came from a theatrically driven family; both her parents were actors and Barnes herself debuted on the stage at the age of three alongside her mother.[17] Her mother, Mary Greenhill Barnes, was a distinguished actress, who likely not just forged Charlotte Barnes' connection to theatre, but her connection to Pocahontas as well.

Barnes was intimately familiar and had an emotional stake in the Pocahontas narrative because her mother, Mary Greenhill Barnes, played Pocahontas in Custis' version of the narrative. In the introduction to Custis' play as written in *Representative American Plays*, editor Arthur Quinn writes that "It is probable, therefore, that The Forest Princess written afterwards […] was inspired by Custis' play, since she undoubtedly witnessed the performance, in which her mother took the part of "Pocahontas." (168-9) However, while there may be some instances of inspiration for Barnes, I would argue along with Rebecca Jaroff that the young Charlotte Barnes was writing more against Custis' imagining of Pocahontas than extending Custis' vision.[18] In Barnes' introductory notes to her play, she argues against and sets herself apart from other "precedents illustrious in literature […exist] where the acts of historical personages have been misrepresented to embellish romance." (322) Here, she is likely referring to Custis' play specifically wherein she saw her mother playing a romanticized Pocahontas. Furthermore, due to Barnes' reference to "precedents illustrious" in the plural, she could also be referring to Barker's very popular play as well as Custis', as both precede her own and were known for their romantic

[17] Jaroff, Rebecca Dunn. "Charlotte Barnes: A Life in the Theatre". In Miriam López Rodríguez (ed.). *Women's Contribution to Nineteenth-century American Theatre*. Universitat de València. pp. 59–70.

[18] Jaroff, Rebecca. **"**Opposing Forces: (Re)Playing Pocahontas and the Politics of Indian Removal on the Antebellum Stage**."** *Popular Entertainment and American Theater Prior to* 1900. pp. 483-504.

elements. In this way, Barnes' connection to some former plays is in part informed by her political beliefs: her hope for a female character that is not simply driven by romantic emotions.

Owen's play also connects to his predecessor via his political motivations, in particular his political work as an abolitionist. In contrast to Barnes, Owen did not have much of a familial or lifelong connection to theatre, as he spent most of his professional time as a career politician in rural Indiana. However, as he writes in his introduction to the play, Owen believed that theatre should have "good taste and useful influence" (16) on the morality of the audience at large, which is likely why he was inspired to write a play which encoded his political beliefs. In his political career, Owen spent much time writing treatises for abolition and rights for racial Others. Indeed, the writing of his play (the first and only play he wrote) was tied up in his political identity such that he first published it under the pseudonym "A Citizen of the West" to avoid political controversy. In order to see how Owen's political identity may have put him in conversation with other texts, we must turn to George Washington Parke Custis, author of Pocahontas, or The Settlers of Virginia. Custis, as a plantation owner was perhaps Owen's political opposite, and thus Owen may have written his play to in part be in conversation with Custis' thoughts on racial Others.

In order to promote his play over Custis', Owen constructed a strict emphasis on historicity. In his introduction, Owen insists that "The characters […] are strictly historical; and every principle event […] occurred, if Smith's own history may be trusted, with very little variation." (21) While Owen acknowledges (unlike any other playwright examined here) that Smith's history may be flawed, he still draws from the most historical documents he can find for inspiration. Furthermore, his play contains twenty-three further pages of endnotes detailing the historical groundings for many of his geographical, cultural, and dramatic creative decisions.

It is this strictly documented adherence to the historical which allows us to make a connection from Owen to Barnes. In Barnes' introduction, she too elevates and claims the historical Pocahontas by writing that "The particulars of her biography are confirmed by relatively distant and unimpeachable testimony." However, Barnes also writes that "It would appear only an affectation of pedantry to name the works (at least twenty in number,) which were consulted previous to the writing of this ephemeral production." Given that Owen meticulously categorized and presented his historical sources for very many moments within his play, it is quite possible that Barnes found Owen's fastidiousness off-putting. Barnes' particular distaste for such an "affectation of pedantry" adds credence to the idea that she was familiar with Owen's play.

In looking at the authors of the plays and their writings outside of the text of the plays in depth, we have established that these plays can be seen as being in true conversation with one another. This conversation is not simply due to their common ancestor in Smith's writings, but to Barker's popularity, playwrights' political leanings, and other extratextual evidence for playwrights' familiarity with Pocahontas plays other than their own. From here, we can move to examine how these conversations shape the character of the Pocahontas presented in each play.

Through examining these plays in conversation, I will examine how and why the texts differ in their presentation and actuation of the Pocahontas character. The differences that the texts of the plays reveal may speak to the author's individual political agendas. Furthermore, I aim to show how some aspects of Pocahontas are reiterated, and thus are instrumental in constructing the surviving Pocahontas character as both female and Native. This common-denominator Pocahontas character, as iterated through these plays helps create the Native archetype for the eyes of the 19th century English public. Finally, I will postulate how the

represented and reiterated Pocahontas character constructed by these authors and others plays into the wider politics of the Western/Native dynamic. As archetype, the Pocahontas figure sets the scene for how Western audiences view the Native, how they may interact with the Native, and the scope of Native agency in the world of the 19th century and beyond.

Chapter 2

Pocahontas: Feminist?

What is a feminist character?

Indeed, Pocahontas' survival as a cultural archetype in our modern society is heavily due to her perception as a feminist character. This perception holds in the early 1800s, at least when perceiving the main story beats that are iterated throughout. However, in order to assess whether Pocahontas is a feminist character, we must properly to define the standard to which we are holding her. For the purposes of this essay, I will posit a definition that may not be as nuanced as a current definition of feminism, but lends itself to nuanced analysis through these texts. To be a feminist character, Pocahontas must have agency to act independently from the men of the narrative. Not only this, but her independent action must significantly impact and further the narrative plot. Finally, since Pocahontas is the heroine, her independent act's impact must be positive (at least viewed as positive by the audience).

Pocahontas as titular protagonist

A useful shorthand for understanding the emphasis of a narrative is the work's title. Characters whose names appear in titles are assumed to be and often are the focus and protagonist of the play, and thus are more likely to have independent agency and affect the plot. Pocahontas is the title character in all these dramatic narratives, whether explicitly or by description. The play that began the series of Pocahontas plays in the early 1800s was J.N. Barker's *The Indian Princess, or La Belle Sauvage*. Here, Barker relies on a description of Pocahontas rather than her actual name. Perhaps this is because he is reintroducing Pocahontas to

the American stage: the audience may not recognize her name but would understand the interest and importance of her stature as "The Indian Princess." Regardless, as in many other of these narratives, Pocahontas is the titular character.

After Barker's play's popularity put Pocahontas back onto the stage and into the imaginative eye of America[19], George Washington Parke Custis entitled his play with direct homage to Pocahontas in *Pocahontas, or The Settlers of Virginia*. Here, Pocahontas shares the title in almost equal part with "The Settlers of Virginia," hinting at a balance or even a choice between the two. While the balance on the cover page seems to be an even split, Custis' title lets Pocahontas loom large, first in the title and the only individual alongside a whole crowd of "Settlers." Robert Owen's play *Pocahontas: A Historical Drama in 5 Parts* also mentions her by name, but this time Pocahontas stands alone, situated as the primary protagonist and focus of the narrative. In this title, "Pocahontas" is the only lure the audience receives: if they come to see this play, they can only really expect it to be about Pocahontas herself.

In her play *The Forest Princess*, Charlotte Mary Sanford Barnes uses the same descriptive device as Barker before her. However, her title does not necessarily need the description that Barker employs to draw in audiences to see a play about a previously unstaged character. By the time Barnes wrote her play in 1848, the theatrical scene had already witnessed many plays revolving around the Pocahontas character. Furthermore, due to Barker's *The Indian Princess'* extreme popularity[20], the audience were likely assuming Barnes' title to also be about Pocahontas. Thus, Barnes purposely leaves out the name of Pocahontas, putting the full emphasis

[19] Bak, J. S. (2008). "James Nelson Barker's *The Indian Princess*: The role of the operatic melodrama in the establishment of an American belles-lettres". *Studies in Musical Theatre*. 2 (2): 175–193. 175.
[20] Ibid.

on the description of the titular character rather than her name. Her decision emphasizes three aspects of her personhood: the titular character has an affinity with nature, she is female, and she is royalty.

Therefore, even if audiences were unaware of any previous Pocahontas plays, all of these titles lead the audience to expect a narrative driven by, or at least surrounding, a female character. In light of this, we may say that these narratives lead the audience to recognize Pocahontas (or at least a female character) as a protagonist from the title, imbuing the play with the potential of a feminist female character.

Pocahontas as Victor

Yet the meat of the narrative does not come from the title but from the main story beats. These beats (as consistent throughout most of the plays) can be seen as moments of feminist action. Pocahontas enjoys many instances where she stands up to her father, often winning out over an overt patriarchal force. Powhatan is not just her father; he stands for the strength of masculinity and political power in the community. Thus, any action his daughter takes against him is not just personal, but political, and can be seen through a feminist lens as a woman making a case against a patriarchal authority. The dominant act that we see Pocahontas take against her father's will is the saving of John Smith, which seems to be a constant in the narratives of the time.

Barker's Smith rescue shows Pocahontas placing her body in between the executioners and Smith, "press[ing] Smith's head to her bosom." In this moment, she explicitly states that if Powhatan attempts to kill Smith, "Thy child will die with the white man." Her stated act of

bodily sacrifice and emotional resolve and persuasion of Powhatan are successful, as he relents and lets Smith go.

Custis' Pocahontas also "throws herself on the body of Smith" (190) and dares the executioners to strike. At her resolve, Powhatan admits defeat: "I am subdued, unbind the prisoner. My child, my child." (190) Pocahontas also rebels religiously, stating in the company of Powhatan that she no longer worships her father's "senseless gods," in a dual direct rebellion.

Owen's Pocahontas rushes between Smith and his would-be executioner, putting her own life on the line to rescue Smith. At her statements "Then take my life too!" (91) and "fearest thou a woman? Strike!" (91) Powhatan relents, stating specifically that "Thou [Pocahontas] hast redeemed" Smith's life (91). Here, Powhatan responds to her strength of action; it is only because Pocahontas has gone so far as to put her life in danger that Powhatan accepts her plea. Pocahontas triumphs over her father's will in this iteration: it is "At a sign from Powhatan" (91) that Smith is brought to the Executioner's block, and it is at the word of Powhatan that Smith is set free. Pocahontas' free action is the only thing that changes Powhatan's mind, positively influencing the direction of the narrative.

Barnes' Pocahontas wins over Powhatan with her bodily resolve. Once she puts her body in the way of the execution, Powhatan says "*with surprise and admiration*: Thou art a worthy daughter of thy race - / A warrior's spirit in a Woman's form. […] Release the pale-face!" (334) Here, Pocahontas not only wins Smith's life, she also wins the express admiration of her father. Powhatan proclaims Pocahontas "a warrior's spirit" (334), not even viewing her in her feminine aspects, but as a strong, even manly, character. Pocahontas triumphs over her father's will but in the process earns his respect as an independent person.

Pocahontas' anti-patriarchal triumph is iterated consistently in all of the narratives, and through this repetition, her strength of character in the face of her father becomes an integral part of her constructed character. Pocahontas constantly triumphing over her father's will establishes her as a feminist character, at least on the surface.

Pocahontas as Political Agent

Yet another argument for her feminist free action can be made in her political action. In some of these plays, Pocahontas is a political ambassador between the Powhatan Confederacy and the English Colonists. Furthermore, Pocahontas is often the primary driver for political alliance and friendship, sometimes in spite of Powhatan.

In Custis' play, Pocahontas performs an act of familial bonding between the two cultures by pledging herself to John Rolfe in marriage. Through marriage, Pocahontas unites the English and the Indian by blood, and both sides approve and sanction the union. Powhatan explicitly states the marriage's cultural meaning, saying: "let their union be a pledge of future union between England and Virginia." (191) Thus, Pocahontas' marital union with John Rolfe is a political act which leads to long-term friendship between the cultures, accepted by leaders of both sides (Powhatan and Smith, respectively).

In Owen's play, Pocahontas does not have the permission of her father to forge a political alliance between the English and the Indian. Pocahontas has been told by her father to be secretive, untrusting, and to hide her true name from the white men for fear that "with their wicked spells, these strange white men / Strike whom they will, provided they discover / The victim's real name." (62) When Pocahontas insists on being called by her true name, Matokes (Matoaka), her sister/companion is suitably shocked: "What! Cross our father's will, his strict

command?" (62) In her reaction, we can see that such outright flouting of Powhatan's rules was by no means common, especially from someone like Pocahontas.

However, this is just the beginning of Pocahontas' expressed intent on political action. After rescuing Smith, he invites her to the "Yengeese [English] lodges" (93) and she accepts, on her own, forming a bond of trust between their cultures. Furthermore, Pocahontas forms a familial political pact between the English and the Indians by asking Smith: "Wilt thou be / my father?" (125) After Smith accepts, she clarifies that she is not substituting her own father for Smith: "I've two fathers; one my Indian father, / And one my Yengeese." (128) Pocahontas makes the familial tie an explicit bonding of the two families through her. This does important work to tie together the families and thus the cultures that they represent.

In Barnes' play, Pocahontas is instrumental in ensuring a treaty between the English and the Powhatan Confederacy. Not only does she create a bond of friendship between the two parties, but she also is involved in the talks leading up to the signing of the peace treaty. Furthermore, she helps establish the treaty without having to enter into a marriage. As she enters the place where treaty talks are being held, Powhatan asks her: "Why came my child among the pale-faces?" (349) At this question, Pocahontas "*lays her hand upon his tomahawk* [… and says:] To blunt the tomahawk." (350) Both her physical action and her words suggest that Powhatan may have continued the fighting between the English and Indians had it not been for Pocahontas' intervention here. She states, in clear words, that her purpose in connection with the English here was to make and ensure peace. Pocahontas then argues the virtues of two of her English companions, which likely swayed the mind of Powhatan as soon after he agrees to the treaty. Pocahontas, though not the one who signs the treaty herself, is integral to the political talks. Not only this, but she is not tethered to a man in marriage to effect political change.

Not Entirely Feminist

However, upon further close reading, neither the saving of John Smith nor Pocahontas' political acts can be seen as purely feminist actions. In the saving moment, Pocahontas is often captive to her romantic womanhood as a tool of and reason for her persuasion of her father. Furthermore, this romantic womanhood is often exclusively tied to another man, to whom she becomes subordinate. In her political action, Pocahontas is sometimes only a passive instrument of political friendship orchestrated by the men around her. Not only this, but when Pocahontas does seem to act of her own will, sometimes this will is seen as belonging to a man, as Pocahontas acts out of romantic compulsion towards said man. In this way, Pocahontas does mostly not act truly independently for political purpose.

Pocahontas' Feminine Argumentation

The saving moment is not wholly the feminist revelation that one may perceive from the main story beats. In Barker's narrative, Pocahontas' womanhood is the vehicle and reason for saving John Smith. Barker's narrative was based predominantly on John Smith's actual writings, from which he gleans the moment of Pocahontas saving John Smith. However, Pocahontas' womanhood is certainly more overtly stated in *La Belle Sauvage* than in Smith's writings. While John Smith casts her more as a child, whose girlish pity is still gendered, Barker's Pocahontas has nigh-adult womanhood at the forefront of her character. While Pocahontas here still is an untouched innocent, one cannot escape Baker's emphasis on her womanly features (e.g. her bosom, to which she presses Smith's head in a maternal fashion). Her body as coded womanly makes for an emotional argument rather than a rational one. The emotional argument accompanied and accentuated by "Plaintive music" stands in stark contrast to Powhatan's

rational and numeric deliberation. Powhatan reasons that Smith "must prepare for death. Six of our brethren fell by thy hand. Thou must die." (594) This detached equivalency serves as both a punishment for Smith and a symbol of triumph and rebalancing for the community. The threat to the Indian way of life is symbolically killed. Pocahontas, however, engages him on an emotional dimension, which, while triumphant, is seen as below the rational realm.[21] This is presumably why men have control of this rational realm while women are often allocated to the emotional realm. Here, Pocahontas is not allowed access to the dominant rational male realm of argumentation.[22]

In contrast, Barnes' play shows Pocahontas engaging in rational debate with her father over John Smith's fate. Taking on "the voice of mercy," (333) Pocahontas makes the argument that adhering to a cultural value of mercy is more important than the imminent physical slight Smith has committed against the community. Here, Pocahontas is engaging in the same argumentative dimension as Powhatan, sharing the male space. However, this discourse is not, and is not perceived as, fully rational. At Pocahontas' argumentation, Powhatan says "Is Powhatan a woman, to be moved / by tears? The stranger dies." (333) Not only is Powhatan overruling Pocahontas' challenge to his domain of rationality, he exposes the emotive aspects of her statements, commenting that her words are more like "tears" designed to make an emotive argument. Furthermore, he explicitly relegates emotions to the realm of undesirable womanhood.

[21] Frevert, Ute. "Emotions in History – Lost and Found." *The Natalie Zemon Davies Annual Lectures*, 4. 2011.

[22] In Seba Smith's *Metrical Romance*, Pocahontas wholly inhabits her emotional womanhood in the saving of John Smith, so much so that she is rationally mute. "A sudden shriek bursts through the air, / a wild and piercing cry, / And swift as light a form is seen / Across the hall to fly." (98) Here, Metoka (Pocahontas) flies into the scene, accompanied by emotive and disruptive "shriek[s]" and "cr[ies]." As she settles, "her gentle arm […] round [Smith's] head, / Her tearful eyes upturn'd," (98) her emotional outburst calms to quiet. Pocahontas' entire defense of Smith is utterly wordless; she uses only emotive expression to state her case.

Powhatan states that it is “woman [who is] moved / by tears,” (333) implying that he, as a man, would not stoop so low. Thus, as an entire rhetorical move, Powhatan dismisses Pocahontas’ claims as emotional and beneath him to engage with. While Barnes makes the argument that Pocahontas as woman can engage on the rational realm, she then falls in line with the accepted and reiterated narrative: Powhatan only relents once Pocahontas puts her body in the way of the execution.

Owen’s Pocahontas plays with her diminutive womanhood, using how she is perceived as an argument in itself. As she stands between the executioner and Smith, she dares him: “fearest thou a woman? Strike!” (91) In the explicit mentioning of her womanhood, Pocahontas firstly recognizes it as a perceived weakness. It seems unheard of that someone would fear a woman, and thus she can use it to shame Powhatan. This weaponized womanhood works to Pocahontas’ individual advantage; Powhatan succumbs to her, redeeming Smith’s life. However, her argument can only function as a result of her womanhood being inferior and weakening by association. In order for Pocahontas to succeed here, she must allow her gender to continue to be perceived as lesser.

In all these instances, the audience sees that Pocahontas’ womanhood plays an integral role in saving John Smith. With Smith and Barker, Pocahontas’ emotional womanhood wins the day, but it operates on a lesser plane than the rational male. Barnes and Owen evolve the narrative to focus on the perception of the female as weak, rather than emotive weakness being the integral reality of womanhood. However, both Barnes’ and Owen’s Pocahontas only succeed because the perception of womanhood in total (as lesser) holds: Barnes’ Powhatan does not want to be a woman moved by tears and Owen’s Powhatan

Pocahontas' Feminine(?) Motivation

In all the above instances, we have seen that the saving act always entails the potential bodily sacrifice of Pocahontas' life. This act in itself undermines the female salvation's feminist overtones and prompts the audience to ask questions about Pocahontas' motivations for such an extreme act.

By putting her life on the line, Pocahontas does not just put her life at the mercy of a man (Powhatan), but tethers her life to Smith's life, tying herself to another man. One may argue that putting her life at the mercy of Powhatan is not a particularly consequential statement; as Powhatan's daughter and as a subject of his realm her life is already subordinate to his law. However, Pocahontas explicitly ties her life to Smith's, a man to whom she has no previous subordination. By tying her fate to his, Pocahontas prepares for the potential of sacrificing her freedom on his account, for being collateral damage that comes along with sacrificing this man. Fortunately, Powhatan recognizes her life's value and she is not deemed expendable. However, Pocahontas is prepared to risk her life, showing that her life can be used and potentially lost.

Pocahontas' daring action necessitates strong motivation which the authors of these narratives must explore. The authors imagine Pocahontas' motivations in ways that either give her a sense of independent action or show her under the romantic influence of a man.

In Barker's play, Pocahontas is not acting as a truly free agent. When Pocahontas first sees Smith, she "expresses peculiar admiration" for him, and further elevates his status. She exclaims to her companion "O Nima! Is it not a God!" even as Smith enters bound for sacrifice. While in the moment of rescue, Pocahontas appeals to a virtue of mercy, the audience has seen her particular wonderment over Smith's power and bravery. With such "peculiar admiration" and stated wonder foregrounded so explicitly, Barker tells the audience that Pocahontas' motivation

to save Smith is primarily Smith's doing. By being the figure by whom Pocahontas is enthralled, Smith is his own salvation: Pocahontas is merely the instrument by which his rescue is put into effect. Here, Pocahontas' rescue is framed as a woman under the quasi-romantic influence of a powerful male figure.

This dynamic is iterated much more explicitly romantically in the second instance of rescue, which comes at the end of the play. Before this moment, Pocahontas and Rolfe have fallen in love, a moment which I shall examine in more detail later on. In the second instance of rescue, Pocahontas saves the entire adventuring party from being slaughtered by the Powhatans while at dinner. The event is rather ironic as the dinner is prepared in honor of the friendship between the Powhatans and the Englishmen. Powhatan (Wahunsenacawh) himself is in the middle of delivering a speech wishing for long-lasting friendship between the two peoples while simultaneously readying to give the hand-signal order for the warriors that would lead to the massacre of white men. Pocahontas rushes in, warning of treason against the white men, making a scene and disrupting the codified ritual dinner that would have in other circumstances perhaps signified proper peace and friendship between the peoples. Once again, Pocahontas defies her father, yet in this interruption (as in that of the execution of Smith) she does not seem to do so for a political good or moral imperative. Directly after issuing her warning, Pocahontas "flies to the arms of Rolfe," who shelters her from the ensuing subduing of her people. This immediate action heavily implies that again Pocahontas is acting for and because of her emotional (in this case explicitly romantic) attachment to another man. Through the gendered lens, Pocahontas cannot be seen as a completely free agent. She does not twice deny her father to make a case for strong womanhood, but to submit again to other strong male patriarchs.

Cutsis' play also casts Pocahontas' rescue of John Smith as influenced by a man, but this time it is John Rolfe who is the romantic interest. Early in the play, Rolfe saves Pocahontas from an ambush by her own people. As "Indians rush forth to seize Pocahontas […] Rolfe comes from the tree, fires a pistol, [and the] Indians run off screaming." (182) Impressed by his gallantry, Pocahontas remarks that she owes him "gratitude and regard," (182) and this interaction adds to their increasing romantic interplay. Later, Pocahontas admits that her heart belongs to Rolfe (189) and she consents to marry him at the close of the play (191). This interaction has direct implication for Pocahontas' saving of John Smith. By saving the Englishman who heads Rolfe's party, she is effectively only returning the favor of saving to John Rolfe. Pocahontas is, in effect, copying Rolfe's heroic action rather than being intrinsically heroic on her own terms. If Pocahontas had not been first saved by an Englishman (as in all the other plays) her saving act and character would be more exceptional and her motivation could be seen as more detached from male influence. Furthermore, she may have been further influenced by her romantic feelings for Rolfe to save Rolfe's leader and organizer from harm. The romantic nature of her connection to Rolfe muddies the waters of Pocahontas' motivation.

In contrast to an other-motivated Pocahontas, Barnes casts a Pocahontas who is explicitly not motivated by romantic impulse. Barnes was likely influenced directly by Barker, but more specifically Custis' romantic understandings of the Pocahontas character. This conversation between the two plays is most evident in the discussion surrounding Pocahontas' motivation for saving John Smith, both inside and outside the text itself.

Barnes explicitly states her intention to cast Pocahontas as a non-romantic character in her self-written introduction to *The Forest Princess*. She writes that other "precedents illustrious in literature […exist] where the acts of historical personages have been misrepresented to

embellish romance." Here, she is likely referring to Barker and Custis' plays, both of which precede her own and were known for their romantic elements. Instead of praise, Barnes writes a ringing indictment of the romantic element. Along with this essay, Barnes argues that romance "would detract from the disinterestedness of a woman's fame." In other words, romantic motivation does not allow for the woman to be an independent actor. By writing against this established view of Pocahontas as romantic, Barnes is making a case for a feminist Pocahontas who rightly garners fame because of her self- or morally motivated acts.

Barnes desire for a non-romantic Pocahontas makes itself evident within the text of the play itself. After she saves Smith, Rolfe asks Pocahontas about her potential sacrifice: "your life! / for [Smith] you risk it?" (338) In his questioning, Rolfe seeks confirmation of Pocahontas' assumed romantic intentions towards Smith. This is not only for Rolfe's benefit, but for the audience's benefit, as they (through the iteration of Pocahontas as a romantic figure) have come to expect romance from her. Pocahontas answers Rolfe directly, stating that she saved Smith "Not for *him*, young brave / but for peace and mercy's sake alone." (338) She leaves no room for romance towards any character; her act was "alone" for moral ideals. While in this play Pocahontas does marry Rolfe, this does not undermine the saving act as it does in Custis' play, nor does their relationship accentuate its romantic elements. In this way, in the absence of romantic motivation, Pocahontas' saving of John Smith can be independent from male influence, allowing the audience to give Pocahontas her full due for embodying the ideal of disinterested mercy.

Pocahontas' Continued Role

The saving act is perhaps the most prominent part of Pocahontas' character. As discussed in the previous chapter, the saving act is how Smith defines Pocahontas' historical character, and thus becomes the centerpiece for the creative imaginings of her character. Because the saving act is so central, the playwrights return to its themes and Pocahontas' character in that one scene for the rest of the play.

For Barker, the saving act is so central that he repeats it in another form. The second time around, Pocahontas saves all the Englishmen from being slaughtered by the Indians. Though the saving act is repeated (Pocahontas stands up to her father and community to save other men), the themes of Pocahontas' dynamic established from the act do not continue. Barker ends the play before we can see the ramifications of Pocahontas' actions for herself, for the others around her, or for a womanhood that stands up to a patriarch just long enough to be swept into the arms and submitted to another patriarch.

In Custis' play, Pocahontas' saving act is not repeated, but the theme of Pocahontas submitting to the romantic influence of a male character continues through to the end of the play. Towards the end of the play, Pocahontas submits in marriage to Rolfe. However, this is not a marriage of equals. Pocahontas says that "She will most cheerfully submit to wear the chain which binds her to the honour'd master of her fate." (191) While Pocahontas assures the audience that her submission is "cheerful," the imagery of the chain belies a strict dynamic where the "honour'd master of her fate" is not questioned nor challenged in the same way as she challenged her father in the past. Furthermore, after this line Pocahontas becomes mute for the rest of the play as Powhatan, Smith, and Rolfe discuss what the union between Pocahontas and

Rolfe means for the two cultures. From the moment of strict marital submission, Pocahontas no longer stands as independent nor does she affect decision-making, either by her voice or action.

Owen's Pocahontas also (following the historical Pocahontas' life) becomes bound to Rolfe, but in a marriage that seems more equal and desired by both parties. Earlier, Pocahontas seems to draw the idea that "Woman was made to be the friend of man, / To share man's confidence – win his respect - / To be – to be - his EQUAL?" (149) from Rolfe himself. Pocahontas' wonder at this concept indicates that she desires this equal relationship with Rolfe as part of his appeal. Furthermore, the end of the play follows through with Smith describing Pocahontas and Rolfe's relationship as equals. Smith says that Rolfe's "heart and Pocahontas' heart are one. / They have joined hands and hearts. So let it be / With Red men and Yengeese. Let them sit down / Within the lodge of peace, and let their hearts / Henceforth be one." (204) Here, as opposed to Custis' imagining, Rolfe and Pocahontas now act as one unit, as a constant "they," "them," and "their." Pocahontas and Rolfe also illustrate their mutuality in physical affection onstage: at the closing of the play "Rolfe springs to [Pocahontas]; she drops her head on his shoulder." (207) Both parties physically express their coming together in mutual fondness and action. While in this play Pocahontas is no longer an entirely free agent, she only submits emotionally to a relationship, rather than submitting herself under the power and rule of a man.

Barnes' Pocahontas also performs a more equal agreement to marriage than is portrayed in Custis' play. In this play, it is Pocahontas who makes the decision outright to marry Rolfe not due to persuasion from another, but from "Such happiness and joy." (352) Only after Pocahontas says "thy wife / Will Pocahontas be" (352) does Powhatan consent to "give [Rolfe] here my daughter's hand," showing that while Pocahontas' decision to marry Rolfe does have political implications, she is the driver of the decision.

Within this marriage, Barnes reiterates the saving act. Pocahontas and John Rolfe move to London, where Rolfe is accused of treason, and Pocahontas saves him from being persecuted. As in the first instance of saving, Pocahontas states her case in a political sphere (appealing to Queen Anne and Prince Charles) with poise and a call to "Mercy, / the brightest gem in royal crowns." (362) While Pocahontas here has a very overt romantic attachment to Rolfe, she refers to the concept of mercy rather than an appeal to emotions. As before, she triumphs, but Pocahontas' success is not directly beneficial to her, only to Rolfe's situation (as with Smith). Not only does only Rolfe gain from Pocahontas' bravery and argumentation, but Pocahontas suffers for it. Due to Pocahontas' exhaustive action and the intense emotional stress of Rolfe being under trial, she becomes "slow [, … her] enfeebled frame […] shattered," (365) and ultimately dies as a result of her action (368). Therefore, while Barnes' reiteration of the saving act reasserts Pocahontas' strength, it also reveals Pocahontas as a potential disposable instrument for male betterment. In the first saving act, Pocahontas threatened the loss of her life, but here her sacrifice comes into fruition: the woman sacrifices her life so the man can be saved.

Conclusion

The iteration of the saving moment within each play and throughout the multiple plays allows the reader to see how the Pocahontas character is constructed and acts with respect to her gender. On the surface, the titular insistence of Pocahontas as protagonist leads the audience to believe that these plays may be rather feminist in substance. Furthermore, each of the plays does include the saving moment where Pocahontas, a woman, stands up to a patriarch and has triumphs through her will. Furthermore, this triumph does good within the narrative and sometimes leads to strong political alliances. These beats signify the lowest common

denominators of these four plays, and this reiterated sense of Pocahontas is feminist. Therefore, it is no small wonder that today, as in the early 1800s, some may think on Pocahontas as a feminist character.

However, there is another common denominator to the Pocahontas character in these plays that sometimes turns against the feminist angle: in all of these plays, Pocahontas becomes romantically attached to a man, indicating that she can no longer be an independent actor. This romantic attachment has different levels of interfering with reading Pocahontas as an early feminist icon. In the plays by Custis and Barker, Pocahontas' romantic attachment definitely interferes with and may be seen as the catalyst for her saving actions. This reinterprets Pocahontas' action as not independent, perhaps meaning that she herself may not necessarily be praised for her bravery. However, in Barnes' (and Owen's?) play(s), Pocahontas' saving actions are explicitly and intentionally aromantic, as she speaks against a romantic imagining of Pocahontas inside and outside of the play's text. Barnes allows Pocahontas to take full, independent responsibility for her saving action.

Other differences between the plays further elucidate Barnes' intention to put forward a gender-conscious Pocahontas play against a backdrop of less feminist gender representation. Barker, Custis, and Owen display Pocahontas' saving action as a more gendered argument, using emotion to play up Pocahontas' femininity and engage the characters' and audience's baser sympathies. In contrast, Barnes shows Pocahontas engaging in an agendered (and thus leveled) rational debate with an appeal to moral ideals such as mercy. However, in both the instances of Pocahontas engaging in impressive action, she does so in a way that casts aside her emotions (which are coded female) and her gender itself. Barnes wrote Pocahontas to make a feminist argument, and in doing so displayed Pocahontas as casting aside her femininity (at least

temporarily) to make daring, independent, and narrative-affecting decisions. In this way, even Barnes' Pocahontas is not always advocating for a feminist stance of womanhood as a strength, but for strength in spite of womanhood. The audience may receive a muddied argument that does not completely support womanhood while supporting an independent, narrative-affecting female character.

Furthermore, none of these plays allow Pocahontas to remain a wholly free feminist character. Due to Barnes' (and others') adherence to the 'historical' source material, Pocahontas still submits to a man in marriage and ends up the worse for it. Thus, while she does independently enact positive change in the eyes of the audience, the positive change made mostly affects the men of the play, and leaves Pocahontas spent.

With these consistencies and inconsistencies in mind, the reader can see that none of these plays present the perfect feminist Pocahontas. However, Barnes overtly attempted to create an independent, narratively-affecting female protagonist against a backdrop of plays that lacked genuine feminine agency. It is important to realize, however, that Barnes' play was not entirely opposite to the other plays, as Barker, Custis, and Owen also acknowledged feminist moments and aspects of female agency throughout their narratives.

Chapter 3 - Post-Colonial Chapter

Introduction

Pocahontas is not only involved in a feminist power dynamic; she is also implicated in the intercultural dynamic between her home community of the Powhatan Confederacy (perceived as the "Indian") and the new English forces. Pocahontas' Nativehood is central to her character and is presented as such on the stage. As a cultural archetype, how Pocahontas is represented is not only an iteration of the Native archetype, but a construction of how English audiences view and interact with the Native. Pocahontas displays Native power by being a protector for the white men in the saving moment and beyond, against both the powers of nature (which are intimately connected with the Native archetype) and the Powhatan community itself. The English do not just survive as a result of Pocahontas' actions; they are shown to benefit from the saving act physically, politically, and ideologically. Pocahontas, in choosing to rebel against her home community for the benefit of the English holds the English way of life up as superior to the Powhatan Confederacy and Native culture. In Pocahontas' onstage interactions with the English in her capacity as Native Other she shows her submission to the English way of life through the ways she changes. As a result of the intercultural exchange, Pocahontas becomes more culturally English, often at the expense of her Nativehood.

"Pocahontas?"

When discussing a figure, the name one gives to describe her can go a long way as to how she is perceived. Pocahontas had many different names during her life and was referred to in many different ways. Within her community, she was variously known as Matoaka, Pocahontas, and other secret names that are unknown. Interestingly, the primary name we know

her as today, Pocahontas, means “little wanton,” an image of innocence and free-spiritedness, with a hint of rebelliousness. However, once Pocahontas married John Rolfe, she took on the English name Rebecca Rolfe. Furthermore, in her tour of England in 1616, she was presented at times as Pocahontas, Matoaka, Rebecca Rolfe, as well as the title “The Indian Princess” (by which she was introduced in court and to the upper classes of England).

Authors of the plays surrounding Pocahontas name her variously. Most plays refer to Pocahontas as such, focusing on her Native identity and the idea of a diminutive but rebellious figure. While most of the time in the play Pocahontas is referred to as such on stage, Barker’s play terms her “Princess” to indicate the lines she speaks. This particular affectation would not have been something that audiences would have heard on stage, but actors may have been influenced by this change via the script. Even if this were not the case, Barker evidently thought it important to maintain Pocahontas’ stature as an important political figure. However, the title “Princess” only carried meaning in a Western context, and so was only an important signifier to those in the West. Perhaps, by terming Pocahontas as Princess rather than by her Native name, Barker was setting up a narrative where Pocahontas’ royal identities and ensuing Western identities were both important to her character.

Pocahontas Presented Native

In order to properly explore the saving moment, we need to understand how the authors portray Pocahontas culturally. These authors have different styles of portraying her: some show Pocahontas as more of the Indian Other, and some show Pocahontas as already inhabiting and primed to accept Western culture and sensibilities.

When Pocahontas is first introduced, both the authors attempt to signal Pocahontas' Nativehood through her environment, appearance, and acts. Playwrights must do this work in part because Pocahontas (and the other Indians) were played by white actors. Since there was no inherent racial markers to differentiate the Englishmen and the Indians, actors needed to be introduced with overt Native symbolism to signal to the audience their Otherhood.

In Barker's play, Pocahontas exhibits her Nativehood from her very first entrance. Barker's stage directions describe the viewer's first look at Pocahontas thus: "Enter Pocahontas, from the wood, with bow and arrow, and a flamingo (red bird)." This is an image rife with symbolism to be unpacked piece by piece. First of all, Barker marks Pocahontas' Nativehood through the environment she inhabits. Pocahontas emerges from the wood, which for the audience symbolizes unmarked territory. This unknown from which Pocahontas emerges not only grants her an air of mystery, but hints to a secret mastery of and/or harmony with nature. The audience, at very first blush, understands Pocahontas to be a woman tied to and comfortable within nature, with mysterious knowledge of the yet-to-be-discovered (by white men).

Secondly, Barker's Pocahontas is shown as the Native Other by her connection to specific violence. Pocahontas brandishes a bow and arrow, a choice which explicitly maps her on to a well-established archetype. The image of the Native with bow and arrow proliferated English society, people in England would have recognized portrayals of Native people through distinctive weaponry like the bow and arrow. Images like the one depicted here (from Smith's map of Virginia) may have been popular in part because they portrayed the Native as combative (and thus violence against them is justified) and as primitive (at least compared with the weaponry of the white men). This further cemented the dominance and civilization of Western culture over Native cultures like the Powhatan Confederacy. With this image in mind, the

audience can immediately recognize Pocahontas as Native, replete with all the most recognizable trappings that would lead them to that conclusion, even if she were (likely) played by a white woman.

Thirdly, Barker's Pocahontas is accompanied by a symbol of mystery and exoticism. Pocahontas enters accompanied by a "flamingo (red bird)," which would strike the discerning reader as rather odd. Those familiar with Virginian (or even north American) wildlife will primarily recognize that the flamingo is not native to Virginia and would not have been a geographically accurate bird to choose as Pocahontas' companion. Furthermore, while a modern reader of this stage direction may be well aware of what a flamingo is, Barker makes certain to clarify, slightly misleadingly, that it is a "red bird." This confirms that neither the actors nor the audiences would have likely recognized the bird and understood much about it at all. This leads us to ponder why Barker chose to include an animal companion for Pocahontas, let alone one that is geographically inaccurate and an enigma for most theatre-goers. This bird seems to act as

a symbol for Pocahontas' connection to nature and mystery. The flamingo is the unknown exotic Other, exciting and flashy with its red hue, but not a symbol to be understood. Similarly, the Native Other (here understood in Pocahontas, bird and all) is an exotic and enticing enigma, but the audience do not have a duty to understand her or by extension, her culture.

These three aspects of Pocahontas are often iterated in later introductions to the character. In Custis' *Pocahontas, or The Settlers of Virginia*, Pocahontas is connected to the Native and natural environment, and exhibits an element of mystery, but is not violent. She enters her father's halls with her companion "Omaya, [and] with baskets of shells." (175) Pocahontas' environment, that of the home of Powhatan, marks her squarely as one of the Indian community. She enters without fanfare or shock, as one at home. Also, Pocahontas still emerges from the environment of the natural realm, bringing the symbols of nature (the shells) with her into the interior. One may argue, too, that the shells may hold some element of mystery: we do not know why she has collected them or what they are for. The mystery element may be further compounded by Pocahontas' affinity with nature: if the land is by nature mysterious to the white man, then Pocahontas' connection to this nature makes her by extension mysterious. However, there is no overt symbol of mysterious exoticism as in Barker's flamingo. Also unlike Barker's Pocahontas, Custis' Pocahontas does not carry a bow and arrow, and thus does not have the perceived Native connection to violence.

Owen's Pocahontas displays all three elements of nature, mystery, and violence. Owen writes her introduction thusly: "In a meadow, near the source of the river Chickahominy. Pocahontas and Nomony are discovered shooting at a mark. As the curtain rises, Pocahontas shoots." (61) Firstly, Pocahontas is introduced in an explicitly natural and mysterious

environment. Pocahontas is at home in the meadow, perfectly comfortable in her natural environment.

The place of her introduction, “near the source of the river Chickahominy,” (61) is a place that Owen shows us to be mysterious to the white men (and the audience). Earlier in the play, the English colonizers were going to “explore the Chickahominy / Up to its source.” (57) However, they did not reach the source, because according to the testimony of one of the exploratory group “the Indian tribes / mustered in numbers, wore a hostile bearing / In sooth, ‘twas dangerous.” (58) This previously unexplored and therefore mysterious piece of land is the setting for Pocahontas’ introduction, explicitly tying her to the mysterious, unexplored, and potentially dangerous.

The element of violence is also present in Pocahontas’ first actions: “As the curtain rises, Pocahontas shoots.” (61) Owen gives no time for the audience to become accustomed to Pocahontas before he introduces the violent element to her character. Like Barker’s play, the bow and arrow lend their symbolic Nativehood to Pocahontas and class her as potentially dangerous, but primitively so.

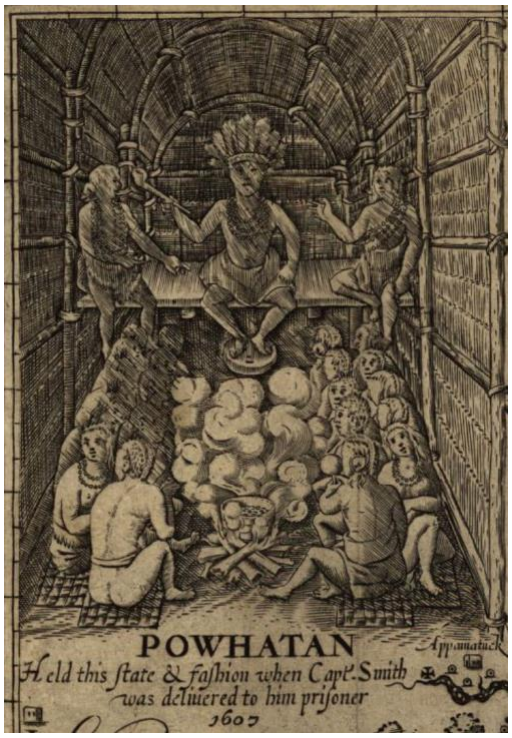
Political Sacrifice as Beneficial for the West

Now that we have established (through Pocahontas’ introductions) what the Native is in the eyes of the audience, we must then see how the Native Other interacts with the European Colonizer.

First of all, there is some acknowledged anxiety about the Western project from the Indians in the narratives. In Barnes’ play, Powhatan rightly worries that “The pale brethren come to spy, to seize / His lands, to make his tribes their slaves, to bow / Him down with tribute.”

(332) This dynamic is acknowledged too in Custis' play, where "many do inform [Powhatan] that your coming hither is to invade my people, and possess my country." (179) Both of these instances show the potential for the English to gain "lands […and] slaves" (Barnes 332) or other such treasures from their interaction with the Native, peaceful or no. Through this expectation, the audience sees the Native as one rich in natural resources which the English may want to take for their own.

Pocahontas' main saving act is coded to be seen through a political lens. This is not simply because there was an interaction between two different cultures; we see such intercultural interactions happen in less political venues onstage at other points in the narratives. This moment is particularly set up to be a politically prescient moment. Stage productions of Pocahontas' rescue all showed Powhatan onstage at the time of rescue, a figure of not just gendered, but political authority. In Owen's play, Powhatan specifically dons symbols of status: "Bring my Council robe / Of rarowcan," (84) which we can understand from the stage directions is a "with a robe of racoon skins, which Powhatan puts on, and then ascends his throne." (84) The audience, though potentially mystified, is told implicitly that this is an important occasion (the donning of a particular garment) and explicitly that it is a political occasion (the garment is a "Council robe.") Furthermore, Powhatan immediately ascends to a seat of political power, the throne. This throne was featured historically in Smith's original narrative, seen most presciently in Smith's map of Virginia. In it, Smith features an illustration of Powhatan at the execution where he sits in a place of power, surrounded by political symbols of authority. It is clear here that Powhatan's presence at the execution is a display of his political power as the leader of the Confederacy, making this an overtly political moment.



This seat of political power is echoed in other plays: when Pocahontas first pleads with Powhatan in Custis' play, she "rushes to the feet of the king," (190) who is elevated on the stage, in a physically domineering position. When Powhatan finally relents, Custis writes that "Powhatan descends" (190) to the execution area to embrace his daughter, further emphasizing his elevated position.[23] Thus, since the sacrifice was to be political, the audience can view Pocahontas' intervention as politically relevant. Regardless of Pocahontas' personal motivations for the act, it happens in a decisively political space and has political ramifications for the interactions between the Powhatan Confederacy and the English.

Within the political saving act, there is no doubt that an English man benefits from Pocahontas' actions. Powhatan relents, and in all narratives Smith is saved. Here, Smith benefits through receiving back his life. In some narratives, however, Smith benefits further from

[23] Seba Smith's *Metrical Romance* casts this moment in precisely political terms. He writes that at the moment of relenting, there "yields / The monarch to the man," (99) telling his audience that before relenting, Powhatan was in his role as the political power.

Pocahontas' saving act. As I have previously discussed, Pocahontas sets up a political relationship with the English: In Owen's play Smith's status elevates as Pocahontas asks her to be his father. (125)

The Saving Dynamic Reiterated

Within this and other saving acts that come out of this politicized act, all the English as a politic whole benefit. As Pocahontas saves John Smith, she establishes a political relationship which benefits the English. First of all, the English gain a protector from Native violence. In Barker, Custis, and Owen's plays, Powhatan plans to kill the English, but Pocahontas intervenes, warning Smith or the English as a whole of the imminent betrayal (Owen 172; Custis 186; Barker 625). Thus, Pocahontas' saving actions further benefit all the English people who colonized Powhatan's land for their own. Furthermore, in Custis' play, Pocahontas dons her own politicized title, constantly referring to herself as "friend of the English" (175, 185, etc.). In this capacity the English gain another benefit because Pocahontas protects them from the violence of the land. In Barnes' play, Pocahontas also saves the English from famine, (341) thus becoming their protector against all ills the English may face in the land of Powhatan

In both of these situations, the English gain a protector who, through being Other, saves them from the Other. Pocahontas is only able to warn the English of Powhatan plots to kill them as a trusted member of the Powhatan confederacy, and Pocahontas is only able to bring the English food to eat because she is intimately connected to the land, even as a part of her very character (as I have previously discussed). Thus, Pocahontas' Nativehood becomes an instrument of use to the English, rather than just being a happenstance of her character. While this instrumentality may be seen as primarily exploitative (particularly in Pocahontas' actions against

the will of her own people, represented by Powhatan's will), Pocahontas' Nativehood still gives her a power that the English lack. This is most evident in in stances of Pocahontas saving the English from famine, as this act may also be interpreted as elevating Native intelligence with the land.

Long-Term Ideological Power Dynamics

However, the most long-lasting benefit that the English gain is an ideological benefit, whereby Pocahontas *chooses* to support the European project. Pocahontas, the untamable Indian and little wanton submits to the European, even as he is vulnerable, in chains. In the previous chapter, this essay has already speculated as to why Pocahontas as a woman may have stood up to her father and submitted to another patriarch, but now we must ask how Pocahontas performs the same submission to an English man when she is a member of the Powhatan Confederacy, an Indian.

Pocahontas as Indian submits to Smith as European because of the English hard power of violence. In all of the narratives, the English display their superior firepower, which often terrifies the Indians (Barnes 331; Custis 175, 181; Owen 62; Barker 594). In Custis' play, Pocahontas describes the firepower of the English, awed by "those great canoes which bear the English, from one of which a white cloud arose; it seem'd as tho, it contain'd the spirit of sound, it floated awhile majestically in the air, and then disolv'd away." (175) The white cloud of smoke from the firing of a ship-board cannon is the signal by which Pocahontas first sees the English, and she becomes "amaze[d…] with their glory." (175) This awe over the perceived English hard power is present in other narratives, such as in Barker's play, where both Powhatan and Pocahontas confer on Smith the status of a powerful war God. (593)

In Custis' play, Native submission to the English is a natural consequence of the English superior firepower. At the end of the play, Powhatan concedes that "experience makes even an Indian wise. We cannot resist thee as enimies, therefore, it becomes us to be thy friends." (191) It is only because the English have substantial and superior hard power that Powhatan submits to Smith, that the Native submits to the English. Thus, the element of choice is significantly depleted in Custis' narrative; the Powhatan Confederacy "cannot resist" any further against the English, and Pocahontas' submission to the English in marriage comes part and parcel with this lack of resistance.

In most of the plays, Pocahontas as Indian also submits to Smith as European because of the English soft power[24] of morality and technology. In Owen's play, we see some Indians doubting the decision to sacrifice Smith at all. Nantaquas argues this point because Smith "is a gallant brave," (72) he is morally exceptional and thus should be kept alive. Smith's moral exceptionality among the Natives is grounded in Barker's narrative, where again Nantaquas argues for Smith's life on his behalf: Smith "became his brother" (594) and further believes that "the white man is beloved by the Great Spirit." (594) Smith then has a spiritual connection to a moral authority higher than Powhatan, and thus should be saved.

Furthermore, Owen's Pocahontas becomes morally enlightened by her time among the English, where she begins to think about gender equality. Pocahontas muses to her friend: "thinkest thou / Woman was made to be the friend of man, / To share man's confidence – win his respect - / To be – to be - his EQUAL? That's the word. / Are not these strange – strange thoughts?" (149) Pocahontas ponders these things as if coming across them for the first time. Pocahontas' multiple starts and stops as indicated by the dashes as well as her confusion about

[24] Nye, Joseph. *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. Basic Books. 1991.

the word “equal” (149) implies the novelty of these concepts to her. Since the concept of an equal marriage seems new to Pocahontas, the audience is told that equality among genders does not exist among the Powhatan tribe (and even among the Native as a whole). Furthermore, it becomes explicit that Pocahontas understood this moral value from the English, as her friend replies that “It is not good for Indian maids to dwell / Among these Yengeese.” (149) Thus, Owen’s play shows that the English impart a moral value that Pocahontas admires and perhaps becomes enamored by. The new English morality becomes part of Pocahontas’ draw to English culture, and is viewed as superior to that of the Native.

Owen’s play also shows that English technology is also superior and enchanting to the Native. In Pocahontas’ time among the Yengeese, Pocahontas is shown the operation of writing. Pocahontas, amazed by such a “speaking leaf” (141) which can impart information without verbal words being exchanged. Pocahontas is enthralled by the English technological magic and yearns to learn how to write. Pocahontas’ wonder at this technology further implies that the English way of life (writing instead of having an oral tradition) is to be exalted above others. While Rolfe teaches Pocahontas to write, the audience is reassured that their technology and culture is superior to that of the Native.

All of these aspects of Smith’s (and by extension English) character are perceived as beneficial to the Native who submits. Barker has Nantaquas say that Smith “comes from a land beyond the wide water, to make us wise and happy!” (594) Here, the Native makes the argument that if Powhatan submitted to Smith and accepted both the morality and technology of the West, the Native standard of living would improve. In this way, the audience is shown time after time that is a good thing that the Native accepts the English firepower and ideas as superior to their own.

Pocahontas' Cultural Evolution

Pocahontas' submission to the European which we first see in the saving act continues to be echoed throughout most of these narratives. This is shows by Pocahontas electing to integrate herself in English customs and community, sometimes at the expense of her own. Pocahontas' long-term choice to submit to the English alters her identity over time, a concept which is illustrated in these plays

In Owen's play, Pocahontas' allegiance with the English severs her relationship with her home community. Angry that Pocahontas warned smith and betrayed him, Powhatan disowns her "To a vile, pale-faced stranger! She – my own! / Mine! I've no daughter. None. I spurn her from me!" (174) Pocahontas' rebellion of favoring the English over the Powhatan Confederacy's decision has direct consequences for Pocahontas' cultural identity. While other members of her tribe stay alongside Pocahontas for the rest of the play, the political representative of the tribe as well as her father has cast her aside. Instead of a Native father figure, then, Pocahontas calls only Smith "My father" (207) at the end of the play. While Pocahontas was content to act as a bridge between the two cultures with "two fathers; one my Indian father, / And one my Yengeese," (128) her father does not allow her to be truly a part of both cultures. Pocahontas here must assimilate to the culture of her new father, her family tie.

In Barker's play, Pocahontas' assimilation to English culture is illustrated by her speech pattern. Early in the play, the audience encounters a Pocahontas who speaks in free verse alongside her Native brethren. However, by the end of the play, particularly through her connection to Rolfe, Pocahontas begins to speak in the metered iambic pentameter of the important Englishmen. Pocahontas' linguistic journey from unmetered to metered speech belies

her cultural motivations for assimilation. Firstly, when Pocahontas first meets Smith in the court of Powhatan, he makes his case in iambic pentameter, but she Pocahontas continues to speak in free verse. (595) It is only after Pocahontas falls in love with Rolfe that she begins to emulate the English speech pattern. (611) Thus, we can speculate that her union with Rolfe encourages Pocahontas to adopt his method of speaking, and in so doing, his culture.

Barnes' Pocahontas shows her dedication to the English culture by electing to travel to England instead of staying in her home community. Interestingly, only Barnes' play depicts Pocahontas having left the Powhatan Confederacy for England, even after promising that she "will ne'er desert her father's autumn days." (351) Even though she expects her time in England to be brief, Pocahontas takes steps to integrate into British society. First of all, she takes on a new name "Rebecca Rolfe," by which she is called almost constantly. Furthermore, Pocahontas becomes aware enough of the political structure of England to make a case to the royals for Rolfe when he is accused of treason. (362-363)

Finally, Pocahontas' death gives the audience a rather confusing view of Pocahontas' final cultural identity. Firstly, Pocahontas' death reinforces that she has changed her cultural identity to become more English. Not only does her death perform a final separation from Pocahontas' home land and culture; it also shows a Pocahontas that has conformed to a Protestant understanding of the afterlife. In her final moments, and as her very last lines, Pocahontas reassures her husband that "we shall meet – above!" (368) pointing towards heaven in a moment of encoded Christianity. Barnes' introduction confirms this moment to be a Christian death, as she writes that Pocahontas' "beautiful, godly, and Christian death was a theme of praise to all beholders." (322) In choosing Christianity over the religion of her home community, Pocahontas reveals her changed personhood.

However, Barnes' Pocahontas still retains links to and joy for her home community. Moments before her death, Pocahontas states that her "eyes behold Virginia's grassy turf. / I hear my father." (368) In her final moments, Pocahontas is looking back to her home culture and connecting emotionally to the people there. By envisioning her father, Pocahontas is also implicitly referring to her bloodline, to the culture she was born into rather than the one she adopted. This evokes a sense of the uncanny at the moment of her death, as it reinforces that Pocahontas is in a country and culture foreign to her. As such, Barnes introduces the implication that this cultural transplant and separation from her family may have ushered on her death. With this lens, Pocahontas' decision to go to England as a symbol of political friendship also becomes a saving act: Pocahontas is prepared to die in order to experience English culture, but further there is a sense that doing this cross-cultural work may be the thing that kills her. Barnes then also reinforces Pocahontas' love for her home country as she is excited to be called by her Native name. When John Rolfe calls her "Pocahontas," (368) she returns "*With a faint smile of joy*: That name! My own!" (368) Her joy at hearing and connecting to her Native name rather than her English name shows that Pocahontas still values her home community and wishes to be connected to it further.

Yet even these moments of connection with the Native side of her culture are muddied by her subservience to the English. Directly after she "hears her father," Pocahontas' attention is refocused on Rolfe, as she dedicates her last lines to him. As previously discussed, these last lines end the play on a decidedly Christian (and therefore Western) note. Furthermore, Pocahontas' rejoicing in being called Pocahontas is shown to be tied entirely to the English Rolfe, as it is "the first [name] by which thou knew'st me, love!" (368) This statement recontextualizes Pocahontas' joy at hearing her Native name from feeling joyful because it

connects her to her home culture to being joyful because it connects her to a romantic time with her English husband. Through this close reading of Pocahontas' death, we see that Barnes illustrates that even as the English culture leads to her death, Pocahontas' original cultural identity has become overtaken by the dominant English society in which she finally lives and dies.

Chapter 4

The Dual Lens and Political Implications

Feminist and Postcolonial Lenses Together

Both culture and womanhood are not separate concepts. To illustrate this, we must understand that womanhood is not a fixed capacity that stands alone but a culturally constructed phenomenon. In Judith Butler's seminal work *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*,[25] she outlines a now widely accepted theory of gender which states that one's gender is "constituted and, hence, capable of being constituted differently." (520) This potential for different constitutions of womanhood is crucial when examining a figure such as Pocahontas. Pocahontas' womanhood, if not a fixed facet of her identity, is influenced by the cultures around her, and must be viewed with those cultures in mind. Thus, we cannot constantly look upon Pocahontas' womanhood as only Western and cannot look at her cultural interactions as simply through the lens of the colonizer/colonized dynamic. The conceptual lenses of feminism and postcolonialism are inextricably tied together in this way, and most glaringly so in the figure of Pocahontas.

As a Native woman, Pocahontas exhibits both facets of her identity simultaneously, and it is important to recognize both of these aspects of her character to understand some specific scenes as a whole. Barker's play opts to engage with one of these scenes directly after introducing the Pocahontas character. After her stage direction introduction, Barker gives Pocahontas an unexpected first act: out of overwhelming compassion for the flamingo,

[25] Butler, Judith. *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, 1988.

Pocahontas casts her bow and arrow aside, vowing to “no longer use [her] bow.” This gesture may act in two ways: firstly, it signals to the audience recognizable characteristics of Western womanhood. Like the ideal Western woman, Pocahontas is compassionate, and does not (at least now) partake in violence. Thus, her gesture allows the audience to see something that they understand, a more typically Western version of a woman as opposed to something more Othering.

Secondly, but along the same vein, Pocahontas sets aside her bow and arrow, the very symbol understood earlier in this paper to be that which signifies her cultural status as an archetypal Native. Perhaps this foreshadows her eventual (at least surface) shedding of her Native identity in favor of assimilation into English society, or within the context of the play, shedding her allegiance to her father, chief Powhatan and ultimately forsaking her own people in favor of various beset Englishmen. Regardless, in this act, Pocahontas softens her image as archetypal Native woman by rejecting some of recognizable Otherness and donning some recognizable Western womanly characteristics.

Barker’s moment wherein Pocahontas casts aside a symbol of Nativehood in favor of Western Womanhood is reminiscent of Pocahontas’ historical reeducation, whereby Pocahontas assimilated into English society. As shown in the figure below, the historical Pocahontas donned symbols of Western Womanhood while in London, appearing for portraiture in a ruff and stylish hat. While the prominence and amount of feathers in this portrait may have signaled Pocahontas’ Nativehood, she is still in predominantly Western clothing, making her more recognizable as typically female and more integrated into Western society.

Furthermore, the dynamics illustrated in these plays do not solely operate within the texts themselves, but in the world of the authors and audiences. When examining the Pocahontas character we must bear in mind that all of the examined narratives are written by white Americans, primarily from European descendants. None of the authors claim Native affiliation. In this light, we may wonder why Pocahontas' reeducation is so often portrayed and hailed as beneficial. In portraying the English as dominant in both areas of hard power and soft power, showing Pocahontas electing to pursue Western culture, and lifting her up as an icon of cultural friendship or even feminism, these authors are implicitly supporting a politic of reeducation. While the authors may not have had the express intention of maintaining and contributing to this particular political agenda, their narratives support the idea that the Native can be reeducated and by being so becomes useful to Western society in the various ways outlined in the previous chapter.

Pocahontas: Tamed and Reeducated

Pocahontas' cultural change towards the European makes an argument for political reeducation of the Native. Pocahontas' real and fictional re-education cemented the "European advanced, Native primitive" dynamic set the standard for the native re-education.[26] On its own, Pocahontas' historical fame as a Native figure who assimilated into English society shows the English that it is possible to reeducate the Native. Yet when this narrative is put onstage, the audience sees reeducation exalted. Furthermore, when put into a romantic dynamic (as Pocahontas falls in love either as a catalyst to or result of her reeducation) reeducation is romanticized. As previously discussed, perhaps Pocahontas is the savior of the English because she already accepts that the English culture is dominant and is willing to assimilate.

The topic of Pocahontas' reeducation is not complete without an exploration of her gender presentation. Pocahontas is not just tamed culturally but is tamed within a romantic (or at least marital) dynamic. Pocahontas as Native Woman submits to the English Man. Literature has often reinforced the marital dynamic of one that tames the rebellious feminine,[27] and this dynamic is further reinforced in the Pocahontas plays. Pocahontas' name as "little wanton" presents her as diminutive, "little," but also rebellious, "wanton," and we see both of these aspects play out in the saving act. Pocahontas uses her status as the daughter of Powhatan to seek pity from him; she plays up her womanly diminutive aspects to elicit sympathy. At the same time, by standing up to her father and the leader of the community, Pocahontas is decidedly wanton and rebellious. It is then remarkable that the rebellious one becomes tamed by English

[26] Crestani, Eliana. "James Nelson Barker's Pocahontas: The Theatre and the Indian Question." *Nineteenth Century Theatre* 23(1-2) 1995. pp 5-32.
[27] Vasvári, Louise O. (March 2002). "Examples of the Motif of the Shrew in European Literature and Film". *Comparative Literature and Culture*. 4 (1).

culture. Pocahontas' previously rebellious streak becomes demure and husband-serving; the English culture has succeeded in taming the little wanton who rebelled (and triumphed) so easily against her own Native culture.

The audience sees this taming as both of the female and of the Native. The marriage between Pocahontas and John Rolfe is particularly telling of the inferior status of the Native. The marriage, which in the plays is emblematic of the union between the Powhatan Confederacy and the English, is between a Native woman and English man, thus already constituting a dynamic where the Native (as female) is subordinate to the English (as male). Not only this, but Pocahontas as effective royalty consents to marry an ordinary man, in a match that is deemed appropriate. If a marriage between a Native royal and an English commoner is appropriate in terms of their social stature, how much further above the average Native would the average Englishman be? Thus, this marriage in itself implies that the English is superior to the Native.

This superiority is evident in the plays, where Pocahontas is explicitly placed below her husband. In Custis' play, Pocahontas' last line shows her role in her marital dynamic. She consents to marry Rolfe by saying that "She will most cheerfully submit to wear the chain which binds her to the honour'd master of her fate, eve tho' the chain were of iron instead of gold." (191) This line makes explicit that Pocahontas is "submit[ting…] to the honour'd master of her fate," that Rolfe becomes her undisputed master as the male in the relationship. Furthermore, the cultural element is heavily at play here as she acknowledges that "the chain were of iron instead of gold." (191) The iron of this chain firstly signals to the audience the strength of this bond and the rigidity of the dynamic: this is not a necklace chain made of the aesthetic gold, but a captivating chain of strong iron. Yet also, the iron chain evokes imagery of slavery, whereby Pocahontas becomes the necessary inferior to her husband not just because of her gender, but by

virtue of her race. After these aspects are signaled to the audience, Pocahontas falls silent for the rest of the play: both the female and the Native have been subdued by the chain of submission.

An Alternative Pocahontas?

As we have seen, Western interpretations of the Pocahontas character in the early 1800s show her submission to the male English culture as a choice, freely and often joyfully taken. While Pocahontas' agency is sometimes cast into doubt (due to her romantic connections or the power of the English) these narratives generally establish that Pocahontas chooses to save Smith and chooses to integrate into English society. However, Native sacred oral narratives present an alternative version of the Pocahontas narrative. While these oral narratives have historically been unavailable to those outside the Powhatan community, recent authors such as Paula Gunn Allen (*Pocahontas: Medicine Woman, Spy, Entrepreneur, Diplomat* (2003))[28] and Linwood Custalow and Angela Daniels (*The True Story of Pocahontas* (2007))[29] have written book-length Native American versions of her life. The *True Story of Pocahontas* claims to come directly from Mattaponi sacred oral history. As the Mattaponi tribe is a direct descendent of the Powhatan Confederacy, it is quite possible that this narrative offers an insight into Pocahontas' reality. However, its historical veridicality is similarly questionable, and so I shall be viewing it as more of a narrative than a history.

The *True Story of Pocahontas* illuminates the Western play texts through an examination of its differences. On the surface, the sacred oral narrative seems to be constructing a decidedly less feminist Pocahontas than any of the Western narratives. First of all, the main political figure

[28] Allen, Paula Gunn. *Pocahontas: Medicine Woman, Spy, Entrepreneur, Diplomat*, 2003.
[29] Custalow, Linwood and Angela Daniels. *The True Story of Pocahontas*, 2007.

highlighted by the sacred oral narratives is Wahunsenacawh (called Powhatan in the play narratives), not his daughter Pocahontas. According to Custalow and Daniels, Pocahontas would not have been involved in political talks, and would not have even been present[30] at the ceremony which became the saving act in Smith and the playwrights' narratives. Thus, the only political power we encounter in this narrative is male, and Pocahontas does not have any defining political act wherein she is an agent. Therefore, Pocahontas does not have the feminist action that she enjoys in some of the Western narratives.

In *The True Story of Pocahontas*, she does not have agency of any kind, stripping Pocahontas of any independent action. In this narrative, Pocahontas is entirely an instrument in the hands of the English. According to the Mattaponi narrative, Pocahontas was captured, (56) brainwashed, (59) raped, (62) forced to marry Rolfe, (65) and ultimately murdered (83-84) by the English. While the Pocahontas of the Western narratives may be seen as being an important and active participant in the cultural exchange, the sacred oral narratives treat Pocahontas as entirely inactive in her fate.

Pocahontas' Agency: The Political Creation

However, the sacred oral narrative's non-feminist view of Pocahontas does not intend to be anti-feminist. Rather, its focus is in the post-colonial realm. Pocahontas is treated ruthlessly by the English for English gain. As Pocahontas is seen as a stand in for the Native identity, the sacred oral narratives make an argument for European colonization having been ruthless and traumatic for indigenous people. Furthermore, in providing an alternative to the constructed (through the plays of the 1800s and beyond) image of Pocahontas' agency, the sacred oral

[30] Ibid. 19

narratives lead the audience to ponder why Western narratives may have shown Pocahontas as an active and even feminist figure. While we have already discussed individual Western authors' personal political agendas for constructing their particular Pocahontas' (as feminist or otherwise) the reiterated Pocahontas still maintains a sense of feminine (and Native) agency overall.

By giving Pocahontas agency, Western narratives fight against the argument that colonization was actively traumatic for Native communities. If Pocahontas consciously and freely integrated into Western society, she is not only an uncoerced agent, but a political symbol of peace and friendship between indigenous peoples and the English. With this mutual friendship established Europeans need not apologize for any wrongdoing through colonization.

Pocahontas' constructed agency also makes an argument for Western superiority. When Pocahontas, of her own free will, chooses to save an unknown English captain, she chooses the European culture over her own. Much of European colonization was founded (at least in name) on proliferating "advanced" and more moral European ideas and technology to the rest of the world. In light of this, it is useful to construct a character who, on some level, recognizes this and willingly chooses a Western lifestyle over her more violent, primitive brethren. Even in a moment of extreme vulnerability from Smith (as an injured captor), he is still more valuable and special to Pocahontas because of his European identity.

Furthermore, Pocahontas standing up to her father makes an argument for Native inferiority. Without Pocahontas' agency, Powhatan as a character is powerful, Other, an unknown force who commands a formidable military. Powhatan's political and violent power is clear to see in the narratives, where it is made clear that he commands a large army and can preside over the life or death of the representative white man (Smith). However, if Pocahontas can quell and control this same Powhatan, and then in turn be tamed and westernized by Smith

and Rolfe, then the audience learns that the Powhatan Confederacy (and by extension the Native) is nothing to be feared. Through the lens of her later re-education, Pocahontas' moment of power becomes lesser, lessening the power of her father by association.

Thus, we can see that Western texts systemically and ideologically benefit from Pocahontas' constructed Pocahontas' identity and agency. The reiterated story beats of the Western narratives construct a cultural mythos which has proliferated even to the modern day. When Western narratives show Pocahontas to be an agent, Europeans can feel free to continue colonizing without the guilt of the violence inherent to colonization. When Western narratives show Pocahontas using that agency to save John Smith, Europeans can continue to colonize, sure that they are bringing something better to the table. And, when Western narratives show Pocahontas using her agency against and triumphing over her father, Europeans can continue colonizing without fear of a masculine, Native Other who has political power and the independence to wield it against them.

Conclusion

The Pocahontas constructed by the text of the early 19th century is a complex figure. Her details are endlessly constructed and reconstructed by individual authors with particular political agendas. Staging these narratives allows for individual authors to speak in public fora, in full view of the masses. By expressing their own political beliefs through the Pocahontas character, these individual authors come in conversation with one another, emphasizing different facets with and against the other stage authors of the time.

However, since the texts use the figure of Pocahontas, they may be bound to the image of the "historical" Pocahontas as outlined by Smith. Furthermore, in marking their plays as

historical, the playwrights contribute to the public's historical imagining of Pocahontas, even though aware of the creative aspects of the play. By being tied to particular story beats, the playwrights implicitly reinforce Pocahontas' importance and agency, aspects which may not have existed in the historical Pocahontas' political life. The construction of Pocahontas' importance and agency reinforces a rhetoric of Western domination and superiority, as well as Native submission and inferiority.

It is only by contending with Pocahontas' dual identities as both female and Native that we can begin to understand of the complexities of Pocahontas' agency. Without employing both a feminist and a post-colonial lens to these narratives, we would miss just how Pocahontas' agency interacts with contemporary views of the Native and the Western, views which furthered the colonial project and still influence our perception today.

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