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Everglades Adventure Literature**

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概要 (Abstract / Short Outline)

The Florida Everglades has frequently captured the American imagination as a place of wonder, enchantment, and adventure. However, the Seminole Indians who were its inhabitants for many years have played a more problematic role in the American popular imagination. Through a close analysis of four examples of early 20th-century Everglades adventure literature, I will examine: (1) how descriptions of Seminole Indians used ideas of racial separation as means of promoting cultural superiority; (2) conversely, how similar ideas were used as a means of critiquing dominant American ideals, especially commercial expansionism and white racial superiority; and (3) how narratives offered the possibility for a more egalitarian relationship with Native Americans.

フロリダのエバーグレイズは、驚きと魅惑と冒険に満ちた場所として、アメリカ人の想像力を掻き立ててきた。その一方で、そこに長年居住したセミノール・インディアンの、アメリカの大衆的な想像世界における位置づけについては、未だに多くの議論が残されている。本稿では、20世紀初頭に書かれた4編のエバーグレイズ冒険文学を詳細に分析し、セミノール・インディアンの描写は、(1)文化的優位性を強調する手段として、どのように人種分離の考えを用いたか、(2)逆に、類似した考え方は、支配的なアメリカの理想、とりわけ重商主義と白人至上主義に対する批判にどのように用いられたか、(3)ネイティブ・アメリカンとのより平等な関係の可能性をどのように示したか、の3点を検証する。

Keywords

Everglades literature; Seminole Indians; depictions of race

1. Introduction: The Varied Portrayals of Seminole Indians in Everglades Literature

The Florida Everglades has long captured the American and especially the Floridian imagination as a place for adventure. Geographically, the Everglades is a tropical wetlands, a slow-moving river that includes mangrove forests, swamps, pinelands, and a rich ecology of plants and wildlife. At its most pristine, the Everglades covered an area of 4,000 square miles. Today it is only half that size.

Though the Calusa and other tribes were originally the most prominent in the area, the Seminole Wars of the early 19th century forced the Seminoles further south into the Everglades (Behringer and Cooper 9-11). Despite the ecological destruction the Everglades has suffered and the decimation of Seminole Indians' people and culture, representations of the Seminoles and their culture live on in the pages of adventure stories.

Representing Native Americans has never been a simple matter. Portrayals of Native Americans in early 20th century American literature carried with them the baggage of earlier contentious relations. Land disputes, wars, and other political conflicts marred U.S. relations with Native Americans, leading to their stigmatization in the popular imagination. Depictions of Native Americans often reflected commonly held values, including promoting positive views of racial hierarchy through the degradation of Native Americans as the "other." Native Americans were frequently stigmatized as "primitive," "savage," and "ancient." These descriptions were often the product of racially deterministic ideas. However, as Sherry Smith writes in her book *Reimagining Indians*: "such ideas did not constitute the sum total of Anglo-American thought" (Smith 7).

By the conclusion of the nineteenth century, however, assumptions of Indian inferiority were undergoing serious revision just as doubts about capitalism, competitive individualism, and materialism grew—at least in some camps. Consensus was always a rare phenomenon in American thought, but turn-of-the century contestants over the meaning of Indianness seemed particularly splintered. (Smith 6)

As my examination of portrayals of the Seminoles in Everglades adventure literature will show, early twentieth-century American culture allowed for an eclectic mix of representations of Native Americans.

This essay examines four books written between 1902 and 1933 that I have broadly defined as Everglades adventure literature.

- Bessie Marchant's *The Secret of the Everglades: A Story of Adventure in Florida* -- a fictional adventure novel published in 1902.
- Wilmer Ely's *The Boy Chums in the Forest or Hunting for Plume Birds in the Florida Everglades* -- a juvenile adventure novel published in 1910.
- Hugh Willoughby's *Across the Everglades* -- a nonfiction account of the author's canoe trip across the Everglades, published in 1910.
- Bernard Borchart's *The White Heron* -- a historical romance novel published in 1933.

Using four examples of Everglades adventure literature, I will identify how various writers used portrayals of Seminole Indians to:

- (1) espouse the superiority and industry of white Americans
- (2) critique American commercial expansion, greed, and illusions of racial superiority
- (3) and create a sentimental moral narrative for an egalitarian relationship across racial divides

2. Racial Inferiority and Superiority: Separating Red from Whiteness

A common trope in the depiction of Native Americans is to both separate them from mainstream American society and closely associate them with nature. On the one hand, this narrative strategy could be used to promote Native Americans as an idealized alternative to the American mainstream. On the other hand, this same strategy could be used to promote ideas of white racial and national superiority.

Throughout Everglades adventure literature, Seminole Indians often appear as components of nature. Helen Carr writes about portrayals of Native Americans as natural agents: “in the examples at which I have looked…ideas of the Native American as natural man have much more to do with promoting an elitist bourgeois image than deflating an aristocratic one” (Carr 55).

Bessie Marchant’s fictional adventure novel, *The Secret of the Everglades*, is an example of a novel that promotes an “elitist bourgeois image.” In one passage of the book, Marchant describes the commercial-minded American’s attitude toward the land.

A certain steady prosperity attended their endeavours [sic]; the egrets and the otter-skins brought back from the Everglades proved valuable articles of commerce, for which there was an unfailing demand, and life, though rough, lacked no essential comforts. (Marchant 18)

To the dynamic American entrepreneur, the Everglades is a gallery of potential commodities. Animal life is rendered dead, then changed into an object suitable for human consumption. The novel suggests that this is the ideal relationship between man and nature. While the Seminole Indians are sustained by a chaotic natural world, Millicent, the novel’s main character, is sustained by an “unfailing” living market, whose design provides for all her “essential comforts” (Marchant 18). The relationship between the free market and nature, white and Seminole, is represented as harsh competition.

But enterprise laughs at obstacles, and grows strong in surmounting them. So that by slow but sure degrees the land of flowers became the home of civilized people, whilst the remnant of the warlike and aggressive Seminoles were forced backward upon their ancient fastnesses, the Everglades, where passing years found their numbers less, and their boasted battle-prowess a vanishing quality. (Marchant 17)

In the passage, the Seminoles are grouped with nature as part of the terrain targeted for domination. Although Marchant portrays Native Americans as part of nature, she suggests that “civilized” people are the proper inhabitants of the “land of flowers” (Marchant 17). The novel implies that the market economy is the best medium for categorizing what qualities of nature have value, which qualities must be shaped to be valuable, and which elements should be exterminated altogether. The Seminole Indians seem to fall into the latter category. This passage quickly glosses over the history of the Seminole Wars and the misfortunes of the Seminole Indians as they were forced to retreat to the Everglades, subsuming this complicated history beneath the relentless course of American progress.

Wilmer M. Ely’s *The Boy Chums in the Forest*, in contrast, presents a more ambiguous depiction of the Seminole Indians. The book is a young adult fiction novel that narrates the adventure of a group of children as they venture into the woods to hunt white egrets and blue herons for their plumes. The boys quickly uncover the plot of a band of escaped criminals to rob the Seminole Indians of their valuable plumes. Though the gang of criminals is almost entirely white, a renegade Seminole Indian leads them.

In a crucial scene where Charley, the leading Boy Chum, is trying to explain the history of U.S. and Native American relations, Walter, another boy, interrupts to ask, “What kind of race are they?” (Ely 28). Charley answers, “The finest race of savages I ever saw…tall, splendidly-built, cleanly, honest, and with the manners of gentlemen” (Ely 28). The Seminoles are portrayed as the “finest race” within the larger category of “savage.” The Seminoles, as a distinct “race,” are admired for their athletic prowess and physique: “In the bottom lay a magnificent specimen of savage manhood…His body sloped away gracefully to a slim waist and straight, muscular limbs—the ideal body, striven for by all athletes” (Ely 107). Though the characters express admiration for the Seminoles, this admiration is limited to physical attributes, their knowledge of the landscape, and their courage.

In one scene, the Indians are surrounded by criminals who are well sheltered from a counterattack by the forest. Charley says, “[The Indians are] heroes…they are as good as dead if they stay, and yet they will not flee” (Ely 102). The group shares a deep admiration for the courage of the Indians; however, this admiration never extends beyond the limits of “savage manhood.” This admiration only endorses certain commonly held American values: images of courageous American frontiersmen and healthy laboring male bodies. What these portrayals neglect are positive interpretations of Seminole morality, intellect, and culture.

The book depicts a compassionate relationship between two distinct races. The distinctness of the Seminoles and the Boy Chums is reinforced by the reciprocation of racially segregating language: while the Boy Chums refer to the Seminoles as “redskins,” the Seminoles refer to the Boy Chums as the “paleface race.” The act of drawing distinctions comes from both parties.

At the end of the book, the Boy Chums help the Seminoles overcome the criminals; nevertheless, the characters cannot move past a vague, generalized bias they have against the

Indians. The Captain, the adult figure among the Boy Chums, says at the end of the book, “they are savages still in their loves and hates” (Ely 301). As this is the last word on the Seminole Indians, the book ends with a generic condemnation of the Seminole Indian value system.

Although many narratives used Native Americans as a foil to demonstrate white racial superiority, others used them for critique. In the tradition of books such as Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*, Hugh L. Willoughby uses his trip through the Everglades, and more specifically his portrayal of the Seminole Indians, as a way of outlining problems with the moral character of the American people, especially “whites.” When Willoughby represents relations between the “whites” and the Seminoles, he depicts “whites” as the agents of moral corruption (Willoughby 16).

The Indians bear witness to the healthfulness of this region. The men have fine, stalwart figures; the women are strong and in many instances beautiful; the children are fat and chubby. They suffer less from the diseases that Indians are apt to have, and are content in their simple wild life so long as the “lying” white man lets them alone in the one little spot which they have hoped might ever be inaccessible to him.

Over these watery wastes the Seminole still paddles his cypress dug-out canoe, hunts the deer and the otter, and observes the rites and ceremonies of his tribe, unmixed with and uncontaminated by the whites. The occasional visits which he makes to the trading-stations do him no good, as there he finds the “white man’s fire-water,” which he is tempted to imbibe too freely by those who think themselves of a superior race, but who, in reality, are far inferior to the “untutored Indian” in every moral trait. (Willoughby 16)

Like the *Boy Chums* novel, Willoughby’s writing portrays the Seminoles as models of physical beauty; however, in Willoughby’s account, the Seminole Indians are also depicted as the moral superiors of the “white” race. White goods and white values are equated with pathogens: an “untutored Indian” is the same as an uncontaminated Indian. The “white man’s fire-water” is also the cause of moral impurity. Further, the moral purity of the Seminole Indians is equated with an ecological “healthfulness.”

When Willoughby does use the word “savage,” it is only through the perspective of exasperated government soldiers: “This was quite a bonanza for the soldiers, as previously the whites, exasperated by their want of success in dealing with these savages, had resorted to many cruelties” (Willoughby 18). Through an account of the history of warfare between the United States and the Seminoles, the Seminoles are portrayed as cunning warriors who, despite their limited numbers, tactically outsmart government troops. The word “savages” is a sarcastic reversal of racial representations: the term no longer makes sense in a context where the supposedly “superior” race has been outsmarted and must resort to “cruelties.”

As Helen Carr argues in her book *Inventing the American Primitive*: “Native American

society exists as a critique” (Carr 16). If Willoughby’s narrative is an exploration of the Seminole society “as a critique,” then the two fiction novels, *The Secret of the Everglades* and the *Boy Chums*, are the opposite: a refusal or inability to explore difference in anything other than limited, culturally-bound perspectives. Both novels embody a distinctly American perspective, relying on popular images of Native Americans to provide caricatures instead of complex characters. In the case of the *Boy Chums*, stereotypes are employed of Native Americans as rapacious drunks, possessing backward values. In the case of *Secret of the Everglades*, Seminoles are represented as dark and sinister, a threatening menace to commercial order. However, as we will soon see, at least one work of fiction from this period dared to imagine a more egalitarian possibility.

3. A Tale of Redemption: Foreshadowing the Possibility for an Egalitarian Relationship with Native Americans

The novel *White Heron* by Bernard F. Borchardt follows a Spanish family through three generations. Each section of the book is set in a different historical period, with a member of the Ortiz family falling in love with a Seminole Indian in each section. Each character plays an important role in their relative historical setting. The narrative outlines Indian/Western relations through the framework of three cross-racial love stories from the first Spanish expeditions to Florida, to the Seminole Wars following the Removal Act, to the Florida Land Boom.

White Heron reverses traditional American ideas of political and social progress through capitalist productivity. In place of conventional stereotypes of Native Americans as “savage,” “ancient,” or “uncultured,” a caricature of colonial greed is substituted. In the book’s first story, the Spanish are represented as greed-filled monsters, spouting the phrase “gold! gold! gold!” (Borchardt 11). A benevolent princess, Ulelah, is contrasted with “the sail of the hated white man” (Borchardt 10). The representation of the Indians is singularly that of a pristine race, at one with nature. The opening story of the book, set in the early colonial period, foreshadows a tragic event: the “simple, trusting Indians” (Borchardt 12) will be ravaged by the Spanish monsters who are driven by an insatiable lust for gold.

Again, like the novels previously examined, the Indians are represented as part of the natural landscape. “Like a pleading woman the country laid a soft hand on his arm but the mad man [conquistador] brushed it aside. “Gold! Gold” he snarled, “Give us gold!” (Borchardt 12). The metaphor of nature as a gentle woman sets the conditions for a tragic rape. In contrast to the pristine victim is the portrayal of the Spaniard as a “mad man.” The depiction suggests a state of lost reason—a reversal of the same standard that is often projected on Seminoles through words such as “savage.” The implication is that the Spanish are less human, more like animals, and fosters an easy dichotomy: the Seminoles are good / the Spanish are evil. The stage is set for tragedy: fragile nature will fall to the unreasonable “mad man.”

The story’s first story details a relationship between the Seminole princess Ulelah and a

captured Spaniard named Juan Ortiz. As the story progresses, the Spanish characters gradually become more humanized. Ulelah saves Ortiz from death at the hands of her father, one of the Seminole Chiefs. Ulelah then helps Juan escape. At the end of the first story, Juan becomes the translator for Hernando De Soto. Because of Ulelah's selfless act, Juan is able to help de Soto establish a temporary peace. The ending is hopeful; and yet, the two lovers are forced to remain in their respective cultures despite their fondness for one another.

The first story's message is ambivalent: the loving relationship and cultural exchange between Ulelah and Juan are what allow the Seminoles and Spanish a measure of peace; nevertheless, in the end, both characters are denied each other's love by their respective cultures. The story is at once tragic and hopeful. An egalitarian ideal is hinted at, but this ideal is marred by social norms that restrict interracial relations.

The second story takes place during the Seminole Wars with the United States government. The main character of this section is Louis Ortison, a descendant of Juan Ortiz (the main character has changed his last name to make it sound more American) and a soldier fighting the Seminole Indians. He and his commanding officer, the Colonel, share an anxious feeling about the war against the Indians and its implications. The Colonel, at a dinner party, says about Indian-American relations:

"Patronage," he was saying, "the severest strain a dominant people can put on the friendship of a weaker one, is the curse of our expansive Americanism. Yes, Suh, the Indians of Florida have been treated badly, it has to be conceded, Ortison, and to it we add the arrant insult of superiority. Now, on our part, neither Mavis nor I have any difficulty in dealing with the red folks and even finding a basis on which we have built some genuine friendships. One runs across a strain of nobility, reflected in action, poise and speech, that plead eloquently for the deference due from caste to caste. Am I not right?" (Borchardt 69-70)

At the beginning of the passage, the Colonel uses the word "dominant" to characterize the American people in contrast to the "weaker" Seminoles. However, this evaluation is not a moral judgment. The Colonel says later in the passage that along with "expansive Americanism...we [America] add the arrant insult of superiority" (Borchardt 69-70). This suggests that the Colonel does not believe that American civilization or culture is "dominant" in any way other than military power. He then suggests that he is able to connect culturally through a reverence he has for Indian aristocratic practices.

Although the main character shares similar reservations over the war with the Seminoles, Louis Ortison's attitude toward the Indians is fundamentally different from the Colonel's. His attitude toward the Indians is based, at least partially, on a reverence for the Indians and their connection with nature.

More than this, he had tried to think of himself as blood brother to his red friends, such was his intense love of nature and its denizens. To his sorrow he found his soul was not far enough advanced in evolution to dissolve the sense of racial differences which hung as a pall before him. (Borchardt 55-56)

The second story demonstrates a progressive step: Louis attempts to connect to his “red friends” but finds himself not far enough evolved. The word “evolution” suggests that an egalitarian relationship can only be accomplished through a spiritual transformation. When Louis meets the Indian princess Maunee, he trades in “the insignia of an unjust war” for the “leggings and doeskin of an Indian” (Borchardt 80). The transformation implies that the evolution of the soul is a process that can take place through moral bravery. The end of the second story, however, much like the end of the first story, is tragic. Maunee relocates to the west. Louis follows her, only to discover that she has married an Indian man before he arrives.

The third story is set in the Florida land boom of the early twentieth century. The setting suggests an antagonistic relationship between nature and the commercial drive of South Floridians: “The sun smiled down, certainly with a touch of cynicism in its rays” (Borchardt 85). Capitalism, specifically “speculation,” is the source of community in South Florida.

Everywhere avarice was in the air, the unquenched thirst for gold was burning in the breast of man and woman alike of all walks of life. Business man, artist, student, ascetic, messenger boy, crusty woman of society had all found a common meeting ground—real estate. (Borchardt 85-86)

The Spanish conquistadors’ unquenchable hunger for gold from the first story is associated with the greed of modern land speculation in the third. “Real estate” is the “common meeting ground.” Market processes are equated with a biological illness: the people are “caught by a fever of speculation” (Borchardt 85).

The third story’s main character is Raymond Ortison, a young man who leads a life of leisure, engaging in various mystical practices. Raymond “wrestled with a discontent, a recurrent spiritual malady which he was never able to diagnose” (Borchardt 87). Raymond begs his father to give up the real estate trade so they can go on adventures like they used to. Raymond’s father refuses, and then addresses Raymond’s “spiritual malady” ; he prescribes the “game,” i.e. real estate trade, as a cure for his discontent, along with abstinence from what he calls “mystical and astral trash” and “psychic rot” (Borchardt 90). His mother, for her part, is worried because Raymond is not yet married, or on track to be married. Further, she worries that his choice of a bride might not fit a preconceived standard of who he ought to marry: “she pleaded shrewdly, fearing that her son’s democratic tastes might someday bring a bride from outside her ‘set’” (Borchardt 92).

Raymond dreams of an Indian girl with whom he is in love. The reader soon discovers that

the Indian girl is Ulelah, the Indian princess from the book's first story. A white heron appears throughout the book representing Raymond's dream girl. As the book ends, Raymond rushes out into a storm to find the white heron. When Raymond's friends find him, he has the dead body of Ulelah in his arms.

Although the main character ends the book by proclaiming "LOVE IS STRONGER THAN DEATH" (Borchardt 110), the final story ends on an even more pessimistic note than the first. The first story ends with a peace between the Indians and the Spanish. The Indian princess, Ulelah, through her act of kindness to Juan, plants the seed for a possible egalitarian relationship. Regrettably, this original seed is destroyed by the end of the book.

The third story violates the basic structure established in the preceding two. Instead of engaging in a forbidden relationship with a Seminole woman, Raymond finds that his Seminole partner is only the disembodied spirit of a previous love, inhabiting a metaphorical physical shape. When the object of Raymond's love eventually materializes, she is a lifeless corpse. What begins as a hopeful tale of interracial love ends in tragedy.

4. Conclusion: Exploring a Silence

In the various stories and portrayals of Seminole Indians discussed in this paper, I have shown the diverse impulses of American writers at the beginning of the 20th century.

Various writers sought to:

- (1) espouse the superiority and industry of white Americans
- (2) critique American commercial expansion, greed, and illusions of racial superiority
- (3) and create a sentimental moral narrative for an egalitarian relationship across racial divides

Though the four stories examined in this paper do not represent all the depictions of the Seminole tribe, they do reflect the diversity of intents and narrative strategies of American writers from this period.

What these stories do not do, obviously, is express the experience of the Seminole Indians in their own voice. Though narratives written by the Seminole Indians are sparse, they are no doubt worth finding and reading. Certainly, this would be a worthy follow-up project that would add to our understanding of the Everglades, the Seminole Indians, and American literature.

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