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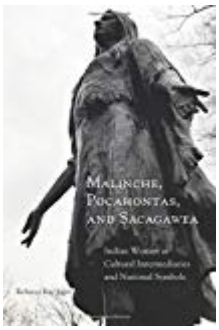

Rebecca Kay Jager. *Malinche, Pocahontas, and Sacagawea: Indian Women as Cultural Intermediaries and National Symbols.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015. 368 pp. $29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8061-4851-9.

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In 1492, the concept of the world as it had been up to then was shattered, and new realities gradually made their way into the European consciousness. The New World presented a multitude of unheard-of experiences and the people who lived there soon became a source of intense interest. The first impressions that Europeans had of the Native Americans upon their first encounter were complex and biased, as they were inevitably colored by their own prejudices as well as by their expectations regarding what they sought to find. Their ideas of the Natives ranged from heathens to children in need of instruction (especially religious). If Europeans' conceptions of Native Americans in general were fraught with a multilayered set of implications, even more so were their perceptions of Native American women, gender adding an extra layer of complexity.

Europeans' view of Native American women was mostly negative. For instance, Jean de Léry explained that "I have concluded that they have the same master; that is, the Brazilian women and the witches over here were guided by the same spirit of Satan; neither the distance between the places nor the long passage over the sea keeps the father of lies from working both here and there on those who are handed over to him by the just judgment of God."[1] Europeans saw Native American civilization according to their own values. First, they did not realize the complexity of Native American gender roles. Second, they failed to observe (and, therefore, to record) those aspects of Native American life that were irrelevant for their purposes or that clashed with their own worldview and opinions. As a result, in describing Native Americans, they accorded women scarce importance and, for the most part, chose not to record Native American women's doings or even names. Exceptions to Europeans' blindness or omission of Native American women are Malinche, Pocahontas, and Sacagawea, who stand out in the historical record, from which, otherwise, Native American women are missing. These three exceptional Native American women are the focus of Rebecca K. Jager's work, ***Malinche, Poca-***

hontas, and Sacagawea: Indian Women as Cultural Intermediaries and National Symbols.

In unearthing the truth about these women, we have to see through the omissions (deliberate or not) and bias of contemporary chroniclers recording the initial encounter between Europeans and Native Americans. What is worse, "the lives of Malinche, Pocahontas, and Sacagawea were obscured by centuries of deliberate mythic abstraction" (p. 157). Jager undertakes the daunting task of recovering these women's lives. Their actions were only recorded when they suited European interests and were made to fit when they did not. Not only that, centuries later we have seen how they were used for a number of goals and agendas (from the creation of a glorious national past to women's suffrage), mythologizing them for better or worse. The way in which Jager interrelates the twofold role of these women is very interesting: first, in life, as go-betweens for the European newcomers, and later as national symbols. If in life they had a crucial part, in death they have continued to perform equally important cultural work.

Malinche, Pocahontas, and Sacagawea all played a vital role (not always acknowledged and more often than not misinterpreted) in brokering relationships between Europeans and Native Americans in times marked by lack of reliable knowledge and immense distrust on both sides. In these complex times, "successful female intermediaries made the cultural divide navigable and collaboration possible" (p. 3). Without Malinche, Pocahontas, or Sacagawea, the relationships between the Europeans and the Natives would have been far more complicated. However, the motivations for these women to act as intermediaries have been much discussed, questioned, simplified, romanticized, criticized, and downright vilified. Why did they choose to aid these strange newcomers? For Europeans, the answer was a simple one: these women were dazzled by a superior culture that they immediately recognized as better and that they embraced wholeheartedly, partially inspired by the love they professed to European men. This, however, is far from the truth, and Jager's work sets out to dispel the persistent belief that they were "smitten young girls, enamored with non-Indian men and cultures" (pp. 91-92).

The European mental framework and morals inevitably colored the Europeans' perceptions of Native American habits and customs. Thus, the Native American practice of sending their women to the Europeans to work as intermediaries was seen as an example of the Natives' lack of morals and sexual restraint. Europeans failed to realize that these women "had feminine responsibilities to assess European potential, to indoctrinate the outsiders into indigenous systems, to assist in communication, and to work toward a rewarding coexistence" (p. 19). Because "European men [were] unaccustomed to the power of the feminine in Native religions, societies, and sexual intercourse" (p. 92), for the most part, they presented a rather negative and pejorative image of Native American women. In their view, Indian women were often "mistreated slaves or drudges," while they fashioned themselves as "chivalrous rescuers" of these oppressed women (p. 119).

These women's vital contribution was not always acknowledged and at times purposefully omitted. For instance, it did not suit Hernán Cortés to have Malinche's vital role overshadow or diminish the image he wanted to present of himself as a hero carrying out a one-man conquest of the Americas. Therefore, he rarely mentioned her in his letters to the Crown. This was part of a larger pattern in which "incoming European men ... typically portrayed female intermediaries as helpful and interesting, yet peripheral to the heroic of European expansion" (p. 3). If Cortés felt compelled to ignore his soldiers' contribution, he felt even less of an urge to mention Malinche. Similarly, Sacagawea's contribution to the Lewis

and Clark expedition was later considered exaggerated and not so crucial.

Europeans saw Native American women's domestic role while being oblivious to their more powerful role as intermediaries. Malinche, Pocahontas, and Sacagawea were not as naïve or innocent as they had been depicted; they were active agents, aware of what was happening and the role they were performing. Jager suggests that "Pocahontas likely used the English-imposed identity [of her being a princess] to her advantage during her work as an intermediary. Some mythmakers suggested she chose to remain among the English because of their royal treatment toward her" (p. 39). Sacagawea and Malinche also benefited from their role as intermediaries, gaining respect and a higher status. They were "not hapless feminine victims caught in a whirlwind of masculine aggression and adventure" (p. 92). They were not working for the Europeans because they were blinded by love or gullible admiration of their so-called superiority, but they were "working on behalf of a mutually productive international relationship" (p. 103).

Central to the portrayal of these women was the alleged mistreatment (if not downright abuse) they had suffered among their people. To prove the Native Americans' brutality and mistreatment of their own women these women's previous stories were invaluable. That Malinche's own mother had sold her, that Pocahontas had supposedly been abandoned and forgotten by her people, and that Sacagawea was kidnapped by a rival tribe and then given to her French husband meant for the Europeans that Native Americans did not care for women's well-being and treated them as disposable property. All this helped chroniclers to support their depiction of Native American societies as cruel toward their women.

That Malinche, Pocahontas, and Sacagawea had been mistreated by their peoples or that they had been blindly in awe of European superiority were useful explanations but too simplistic; moreover, they "deny the women's intelligence, skill, agency and cultural obligations" (p. 121). Being an intermediary was a prestigious and influential role. They were presented with chances to leave the Europeans and return to their peoples, chances they did not take. A fact that has been very conveniently overlooked by those who insisted on defining these women as traitors who helped bring about the annihilation of their people is that "none of these women lived to see the eventual devastation that Indian people endured during colonization" (p. 121). Furthermore, their stories were simplified as a heterosexual love story between the conquered and the conquerors. It is a fact that all these women had children by European men. However, whether this was consensual or forced sex is an issue that will never be successfully established.

It is crucial to recognize that "interpretations have been deliberately crafted to support contemporary social agendas and shifting goals for the future" (p. 159). For the Indians, Malinche was a mediator whose role was central; the Spaniards interpreted her as an Indian willing to be converted and depicted her role in a peripheral way. Later, she was seen as a traitor to her people, given the destruction caused by the Spaniards. With the independence of Mexico, she became a Mexican Eve, tempting her people to abandon their way of life and ultimately causing their doom. Creole writers chose not to mention Malinche at all, whereas early nationalist writers were reluctant to present a nation created at the expense of the Native Americans. Malinche's figure was periodically rehabilitated and denigrated by a number of writers, until she was recovered as a much more positive figure by Chicana revisionists.

Pocahontas, in contrast to Malinche's constant presence, was neglected for two centuries after her death. When interest in her reemerged, substantial changes were made, though. Most notably, the Pocahontas who rescued John Smith was an eleven-year-old but later representations

see her as a "sexualized symbol" (p. 220). At the same time, her marriage to a Native American warrior, Kocoum, was hidden to preserve the image of Pocahontas as a virginal Indian princess. By the second half of the nineteenth century, "the Pocahontas narrative was so ingrained in the American consciousness that authenticity was no longer relevant" (p. 225). Real or not, Pocahontas's rescue became central in US history. William Strachey's less flattering portrayal of Pocahontas (and in some instances, closer to the truth) was forgotten, aided by the fact that his book remained unpublished for 234 years. Pocahontas's life was examined by Native American and non-Native American scholars, and then reinterpreted by Disney and in Terrence Malick's film *The New World* (2006).

Sacagawea has been "reimagined to illustrate female commitment and service to the nation" (p. 251). Moreover, she has been used to address contemporary social issues, including "Manifest Destiny, suffrage for women, taboos against miscegenation, racial justice, modern feminism, and the inclusion of Indian voices in the telling of western history" (p. 252). Detractors of her importance discovered only scant information about her in the journal of the expedition, but, despite this, "Sacagawea's legend was strategically crafted to legitimize feminist demand during the women's suffrage movement" (p. 269). Romance novels also dealt with the relationship between Sacagawea and William Clark, characterizing it as a platonic love story.

Jager creates a compelling and vivid picture of a world on the brink of transformation, "an international environment that was swirling with change" (p. 110), with powerful women (even if Europeans at times failed to see female Indian power and misidentified it) acting as go-betweens. These women have often been accused of selling out to foreigners, among whom they chose to live, but they might well have realized the inevitability of the upcoming changes and tried to contribute to a common future. For some, they were traitors to their people, who did not mind collaborating with the invaders in seeking the destruction of their own people if they could save themselves. For Jager, they saw the inevitability of change, as they grew up in a world that was far from being as monolithic or stable as the Europeans saw it. In seeing the inevitability of change, they sought to minimize the changes and work out an agreement that would be beneficial for their people. Additionally, Jager warns about the dangers to try and interpret these women through contemporary sensitivities and values.

This book is a comprehensive examination of the lives of these women and how, after their death, they have been used for a number of purposes and agendas. It is particularly useful that the bibliography is divided into four sections (Malinche, Pocahontas, Sacagawea, and general works). All in all, Jager offers a compelling picture of a most fascinating period and the no less fascinating women who played an essential role in it.

Note

[1]. Quoted in M. Carmen Gomez-Galisteo, "Subverting Gender Roles in the Sixteenth Century: Cabeza de Vaca, the Conquistador Who Became a Native American Woman," in *Gender and Sexuality in Indigenous North America, 1400-1850*, ed. Sandra Slater and Fay A. Yarbrough (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 15.

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