Cry of the Native Children

By Robert Cole

Based upon
"Pocahontas, or The Settlers of Virginia,"
by George Washington Parke Custis, published in 1830.

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DEDICATION
For David Henry Hwang

STORY OF THE PLAY

Pocahontas, her father, friends, and others in the Powhatan tribe are forced to face a gravely uncertain future when the English enter their village. Led by Capt. John Smith, the explorers discover that the Natives have been taught English by a survivor from Roanoke, David Barclay. Having married into the tribe, Barclay feels affection for both parties and is set in the middle. As the intrigue, plotting, and ensuing conflicts arise, our sympathies and affinities also switch back and forth between these two very different peoples. This is America's first culture clash, and its outcome will determine no less than the fate of future generations. A ceremonial dance by the Indian women highlights one scene. Can be produced as a historical period piece or with very modern elements. Approximately 60-75 minutes.

Premiere Performance
Pinson Valley High School Fine Arts Center,
Pinson, AL, February 10, 2011.

Setting: Virginia, around 1607. The lands and villages of the Powhatan tribe, including the woods, the shores, the hut, and the longhouse. The original production featured only three rotating periaktoid towers, that when placed together could indicate the various areas.

Notes on Casting: If casting Native American actors is a possibility for any company, then it should be utilized. If not, however, the play might be best served by an all-around racially blind casting, with the "English" performing with Standard British and British-North Country accents and the "Natives" performing with American accents.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(11 m, 4 w + Chorus of indeterminate size and all women.)

The English

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH: 27; English captain and explorer; overt sense of entitlement; playful and instinctive.
LIEUTENANT GEORGE PERCY: 27; English lieutenant and reluctant explorer; snide and full of himself; not strong.
JOHN ROLFE: 24; English businessman; intelligent and reserved; romantic but practical.
THOMAS WEST: 16; English; energetic and brave, though also eager to please and make a name for himself.
DAVID BARCLAY: 35; an Englishman among the Natives; jaded concerning colonization; smart and humbling.
HUGO DeREDMOND: 58; an English seaman; a soldier's soldier; gutsy and assured.

The Natives

POWHATAN WAHUNSENACAWH: 62; leader of the Powhatan confederacy of tribes; trigger-happy and retiring.
MATACORAN: 28; high councilor to the Powhatan; wise and fastidious; deeply connected to his people.
SELICTAZ: 23; a second to Matacoran; a skilled hunter and warrior, but less wise and more prone to mistakes.
NAMONTAC: 27; a warrior who has been to England and seen other worlds; tired in his young age.
OPECHANCANOUGH: 53; Wahunsenacawh's brother; easier on the English than others; keen and troubling.
AMUNOTE *(POCAHONTAS)*: 14; Wahunsenacawh's daughter, who is known for a fascination with the English.
OMAYA: 14; Amunote's close friend and companion; prone to fits of speaking out of turn.
MANTEA: 30; Barclay's Native wife; cunning and quick to indifference; she is a matron.
YAAMAYDEN: 32; a high priestess of the confederacy; ministerial link to Okee, the primary god.
ENSEMBLE OF NATIVE WOMEN: Group of women who observe and dance.

NOTES

Scene 5 Choreography: Any pulsating drumming music will do for the piece. The dance should be formal, ritualistic, and, if choreographed in a Native American style, should be respectful of traditions. In studying powwow dances, we discovered straight backs, with bending only at the knee. The women should stay in one or two large groups, no solos. Occasional shouts are appropriate. Remember the dance is partially a ceremony to the Powhatan god, Okee, and so it could consist of arm movements in deference to the god. When the play was performed at the 2011 Alabama Thespians Festival, the dance was one of the most admired aspects of the production, with students learning the dance moves in the auditorium lobby following the performance.

Sources: The Powhatan words are taken from public domain sources, attempting to piece together this Algonquin language. The Biblical portions are modern English transcriptions of the Geneva Bible translation.

Playwright's Notes: Custis's *Pocahontas, or The Settlers of Virginia* is one of the most significant "Indian" plays which were in vogue in early American drama. Custis was our first President's adopted son and was raised at Mount Vernon. After a successful career in the military, he became a playwright and a sought-after lecturer. At best, *Cry of the Native Children* is a loose adaptation of Custis's work. Historically, this play and Custis's take many liberties. Critics of early American drama point out that most Pocahontas plays were weak because the major dramatic moment—her saving Smith—came too early in the play. Custis smartly kept this for the end of the piece. But, Pocahontas' salvation for Smith is not believed to be a true event. There is no historical relevance to Barclay, and Rolfe did not go to Virginia until 1609, making it impossible for him to have been on the maiden Jamestown voyage. Still, the dramatic events, and our legendary re-telling of the myth, are essential in portraying the first great story of culture-clash in America.

PROLOGUE: GENESIS

(AT RISE: Bare stage. SFX: Screeching birds. In BLACK LIGHTING, with MUSIC underneath, MATACORAN, SELICTAZ, and OPECHANCANOUGH enter. They are decorated in face and body paint, which glows in the lighting. They kneel downstage center as the POWHATAN enters slowly and moves to upstage center, with POCAHONTAS, OMAYA, and five members of the ENSEMBLE OF NATIVE WOMEN trailing behind. The MUSIC intensifies as YAAMAYDEN and MANTEA bring in an unpainted BARCLAY, center stage to the Powhatan. Barclay's hands are bound with rope and his eyes are blindfolded. MANTEA joins the younger women as YAAMAYDEN takes out a simple blade. At first, she motions as if she will cut his throat, but instead, cuts his hands free and removes the blindfold.)

BARCLAY: *(Seeing the POWHATAN.)* Are you going to kill me, Great One?
YAAMAYDEN: *(Nearly screaming.)* DO NOT SPEAK, WHITE MAN!
POWHATAN: Bring me the book.
YAAMAYDEN: *(Producing a Bible, gesturing with it in the air.)* The book of the white man's God.

(The ENSEMBLE OF NATIVE WOMEN shudder and begin to chant.)

ENSEMBLE:
Nekut nimatew...
Attemous...
Nekut nimatew...
Attemous...
Cummeish yoowah
Ahone Okee.
POWHATAN: If it were not for me, you would be dead along with every other man from your tribe.
BARCLAY: I know, Great One.
POWHATAN: Silence!

(The MEMBERS OF THE TRIBE shudder.)

POWHATAN: *(Cont'd.)* Then, in exchange for our protection, bringing you into this tribe, you swore to teach us the ways and words of the English. But, let me remind you that when you swore your allegiance to the Powhatan, you swore to give up your God.
BARCLAY: The Bible is the only book of the English I had. It is how I have taught you.
POWHATAN: This book is a danger to us all!
BARCLAY: Imagine—a book having that much power.
POWHATAN: Yaamayden...
YAAMAYDEN: Brother.
POWHATAN: Destroy this Bible in the fire as a sacrifice to Okee.
ENSEMBLE: Cummeish yoowah Ahone Okee.

(YAAMAYDEN exits with the Bible.)

POWHATAN: If any man of this tribe has any reason why this Barclay should not be killed for his crimes, speak now.

(MATACORAN looks to the OTHER MEN, whose heads remain bowed. HE stands.)

MATACORAN: Great Powhatan...
POWHATAN: Councilor Matacoran.
MATACORAN: The white men will come again. When they do, we will have Barclay. Our knowledge of the white man's ways is as precious as the food we eat.
POWHATAN: *(Thinks. Then to BARCLAY.)* Stand.

(BARCLAY stands. POWHATAN motions to POCAHONTAS.)

POWHATAN: *(Cont'd.)* Pocahontas...

(SHE brings a bowl to BARCLAY, turning him downstage.)

End of Freeview

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