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Rene Francois de Chateaubriand

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Chateaubriand, Rene Francois de, "Atala" (1801). *Early Visions Bucket*. 45.
https://digital.usfsp.edu/early_visions_bucket/45

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Early Visions of Florida

Poetry • Stories • Chronicles from an American Borderland

Francois-René de Chateaubriand, *Atala*

*Atala was a milestone in French romanticism, the origin of a globally successful, enduring romantic male archetype. Along with its twin, Rene, this once-famous novella is set in the American Southeast and is part of a longer, semi-autobiographical epic called Les Natchez. Chateaubriand had never visited the United States, but read some early accounts, and the region in which the events take place, mostly northern Florida, is a fantastic projection of exotic ideals. Chateaubriand was exiled from France following the French Revolution, while the world in which he was raised was crushed by evolving attitudes toward monarchy and government. Over-dramatically conceived as the ultimate alluring escape, the intense, painterly detail of the natural world in *Atala* served to titillate and attract the melancholy zeitgeist of French society.*

*Outrageously popular, and widely copied in print and in style by dejected, sullen Frenchmen, the story is told using the frame story of a recollection shared by the protagonist with the main character of Rene, himself seeking redemption in the liminal wilderness of the Americas. Rene, the shorter of the two stories and later paired intentionally with *Atala*, delved indirectly into unrequited incestuous desire between brother and sister. Ambiguous strains of this theme appear in *Atala*, but the passionate romantic adventure, laced with somewhat awkward biblical symbolism, dominates the plot. *Atala* is not just the typical Indian princess, redeemed by the love of a noble, civilized man, she is a Christian herself, and Chactas, the protagonist, is a mixed race gentleman of the frontier, capable of living with the civilized Spanish, or among vast, and imagined, French holdings on the new continent, but for his enduring desire to return to the wild life.*

Atala anthropomorphizes the bosom of the "New World," from the idyllic hills to the sacred swamps, and the fabulist style of excruciating detail later writers utilized was inspired by Chateaubriand's romantic blueprint. The male lead, a reflective, self-absorbed poet, thinks only of his love, viciously denied, and his own personal suffering. Humbled by awesome interactions with murky native cultures, and gripped by undeniable, insatiable, and impossible desire for the noble, converted maiden, Chactas inhabits a romantic archetype that endures still.

Edited by Keith Lewis Simmons, University of South Florida St. Petersburg

Further Reading

Bouvier, Luke. "How Not to Speak of Incest: Atala and the Secrets of Speech." *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 30: 3&4 (Spring-Summer 2002). 228-242.

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François Auguste René, vicomte de Chateaubriand. *Atala; ou les amours de deux sauvages dans le désert* [1801]. Translated by A. S. Kline (2011).

The Hunters

.... "It is a singular destiny my dear son, that unites us. I see in you the civilized man who chooses to become a savage; you see in me the savage, whom the Great Spirit (I do not know for what purpose) wished to civilize. In the course of our lives, through opposing aims, you have come to occupy my place, and I am seated in yours: so we must inevitably possess a totally different view of things. Who, between us, has won or lost most through this change of position? That, the Spirits alone know, the least knowledgeable of whom has more wisdom than all of mankind put together.

At the next 'moon of flowers' (*May*), it will be seven times ten snows, and three since my mother gave birth to me, on the banks of the Mississippi. The Spaniards had recently settled Pensacola Bay, but no white man yet inhabited Louisiana. I had scarcely counted seventeen falls of leaf, before I advanced with my father, the warrior Outalissi, against the Muscogee, a powerful nation of the Floridas. We joined our Spanish allies, and the battle was fought on a branch of the Mobile River. Areskoui (*the war-god*) and the Manitous were not favourable to us. Our enemies triumphed; my father lost his life; I was twice wounded in defending him. Oh! If only I had descended then to the land of souls I would have avoided the misfortunes that awaited me on earth! The Spirits commanded otherwise: I was carried by the fugitives to St. Augustine.

In this city, newly built by the Spaniards, I risked being sent to the mines of Mexico, when an old Castilian, named Lopez, moved by my youth and my innocence, offered me sanctuary, and introduced me to his sister with whom he lived, as he lacked a wife.

Both of them showed me the most tender of feelings. I was raised with great care; I was taught by all kinds of masters. But after spending thirty moons in St. Augustine, I was seized by disgust for city life. I was visibly wasting away: sometimes I remained motionless for hours, gazing at the summits of the distant forest; sometimes I might be found sitting by some river-bank, sadly

contemplating its flow. I imagined the woods through which its course had passed, and my soul was lost in the solitude.

Unable to resist the urge to return to the wilds, I presented myself before Lopez one morning, dressed in the clothes of a savage, holding my bow and arrows in one hand, and my European clothes in the other. I gave them to my generous patron, at whose feet I fell, shedding torrents of tears. I called myself odious names, I accused myself of ingratitude: 'But,' I said, 'O my father, finally you must see for yourself: I will die if I do not adopt the life of an Indian.'

Lopez, struck with astonishment, tried to dissuade me from my purpose. He represented to me the danger that I would run, by risking my falling into the hands of the Muscogee once more. But seeing that I was determined to adventure all, bursting into tears and hugging me, 'Go,' he cried, 'Child of Nature! Resume that manly independence, of which Lopez has no wish to deprive you. If I were younger myself, I would enter the wilderness with you (of which I too have sweet memories!) and return you to the arms of your mother. When you are deep in your forests, think now and then of this old Spaniard who gave you shelter, and remember, so as to attract the love of your fellow men, that the first experience you acquired of the human heart, was all in its favour.' Lopez ended with a prayer to the God of Christianity, a religion I had refused to embrace, and we parted tearfully.

The punishment for my ingratitude was not long delayed. My inexperience led me astray in the woods, and I was taken by a party of Muscogees and Seminoles, as Lopez had predicted. I was recognised as Natchez, by my clothing and the feathers that adorned my head. They bound me, though lightly, because of my youth. Simaghan, the head of the band, wanted to know my name, I replied: 'My name is Chactas, son of Outalissi, son of Miscou, who has taken more than a hundred scalps from Muscogee braves.' Simaghan replied: 'Chactas, son of Outalissi, son of Miscou, rejoice; you will be burned to death in the Grand Village.' I replied, 'That is well,' and I sang my song of death.

Wholly captive as I was, I could not, during the first days, restrain my admiration for my enemies. The Muscogees, and above all their allies the Seminoles, breathe out cheerfulness, affection, and contentment. Their step is light, their aspect open and serene. They speak often and volubly; their language is harmonious and smooth. Even age can not deprive the Sachems of their joyful simplicity: like the ageing birds of our woods, they still blend their old songs with the new airs of their young offspring.

The women who accompanied the band, showed a tender pity for and kindly curiosity towards my youth. They questioned me about my mother, about the early days of my life; they wanted to know whether my mossy cradle had been hung among flowering maple branches, whether the breezes rocked me beside the nests of young fledglings. A thousand other questions followed concerning the state of my heart: they asked me if I had seen a white doe in my dreams, and whether the trees in the hidden valley had counseled me to love. I answered those mothers, daughters and wives, in all innocence. I told them: 'You are the graces of day, and the night loves you like the dew. Man comes from your womb to hang at your breasts, and on your lips; you know the magic words that lull all pain. That is what she who brought me into this world told me, she who will never look upon me again! She said further that virgins were mysterious flowers found in solitary places.'

Such praise gave the women much pleasure; and they smothered me with a host of gifts; they brought me coconut milk, maple sugar, *sagamite* stew, bear hams, beaver pelts, shells to adorn myself, and moss for my bed. They sang, they laughed with me, and then they took to shedding tears, when they thought of my being burned to death.

One night the Muscogee had set up camp on the edge of the forest, I was sitting by the *war-fire*, with the hunter committed to guarding me. Suddenly I heard the whisper of a garment over the grass, and a woman partly-veiled came to sit beside me. Tears flowed from beneath her eyelids; in the firelight a small gold crucifix shone at her breast. She was uniformly beautiful; in her visage could be seen unknown degrees of virtue and passion, whose appeal was irresistible. To this she joined more tender graces; extreme sensitivity, combined with a profound melancholy, breathed in her eyes; her smile was heavenly.

I thought she was the *Virgin of Last Love*, that virgin sent to prisoners of war to bring enchantment to their grave. Persuaded that this was so, I spoke to her, haltingly, yet with a confusion that did not arise from fear of the pyre: 'Lady, you are worthy of a first love, and are not created to be the last. The movements of a heart that will soon cease to beat would only respond sadly to the movements of yours. How can life and death mingle? You will make me regret the daylight far too deeply. Let some other be happier than I, and a long embrace unite the liana and the oak!'

The young girl then said: 'I am no *Virgin of Last Love*. Are you a Christian?' I replied that I had never betrayed the Spirits of my hut. At these words, the Indian girl made an involuntary movement. She said: 'I pity you for being no more than a wicked idolater. My mother made me (*sic*) a Christian; I am named Atala, the daughter of Simaghan, who wears the gold bracelets, and is leader of this band of warriors. We go to Apalachucla where you will be burned.' As she uttered these words, Atala rose and walked away."

Here Chactas was forced to interrupt his story. A crowd of memories weighed on his spirit; his dimmed eyes inundated his faded cheeks with tears: so two hidden springs, in earth's deep night, might be revealed by the water they let fall among the rocks.

"O my son!" he said, at last, "You see that Chactas is in no way wise, despite his reputation for wisdom. Alas, my dear boy, men can see no more than this: that they are still able to weep! Several days rolled by; the daughter of the Sachem returned each evening to speak with me. Sleep had fled from my eyes, and Atala was in my heart, like the memory of my ancestral cradle.

On the seventeenth day of our march, about the time when mayflies emerge from the water, we entered the Great Alachua Savannah. It is surrounded by hills, which, rising one behind another, in ascending towards the clouds, bear tiered forests of sweet gum, citron trees, magnolia and live oak. The chief, on arriving there, uttered his cry, and the warrior band made camp at the foot of the hills. I was removed to a distance, near the edge of one of those *natural wells*, so renowned in Florida. I was tied to the foot of a tree; a warrior watched me closely. I had scarcely spent an instant in this place, when Atala appeared beneath the sweet gum trees beside the spring. 'Hunter,' she said to the Muscogee brave, 'if you wish to pursue the deer, I will guard the prisoner.' The warrior bounded for joy at these words spoken by the chief's daughter; he leapt from the summit of the hill and strode off over the plain.

Strange contradiction of the human heart! I, who had longed to say things of mystery to one whom I already loved like the sun, was now tongue-tied and confused. I think I would have preferred to have been thrown to the alligators in the river than to find myself alone thus with Atala. The daughter of the wilderness was as troubled as her prisoner; we maintained a profound silence, the Spirits of Love had stolen our words. At last, Atala, making an effort, said this: 'Warrior, you are very lightly bound; you could easily escape.' At these words, boldness returned to my tongue, and I answered: 'Lightly bound, O woman ...!' I did not know how to end my words. Atala hesitated a few moments then said: 'Save your self.' And she released me from the tree. I seized the rope; I placed it again in the hands of the girl, previously a stranger to me, forcing her beautiful fingers to close on my bonds. 'Take it! Take it up once more!' I cried. 'You are mad,' Atala said in a trembling voice. 'Wretch! Do you not know that you will be burned to death? What are you thinking of? Do you not realise that I am the daughter of a formidable Sachem?' 'There was a time,' I replied with tears, 'when I too was carried in a beaver skin, on my mother's shoulders. My father had a fine hut, and his deer drank the waters of a thousand torrents; but now I wander without a home. When I am no more, there will be no friend to place a little grass on my body, to screen it from the flies. No one cares for the body of an unfortunate stranger.'

These words moved Atala. Her tears fell into the spring. 'Ah! I replied earnestly, 'if only your heart spoke as mine does! Is not the wilderness free? Have not the forests corners where we may hide? Do those born in huts need many things to be happy! O daughter fairer than a husband's first dreams! O my beloved! Dare to follow my footsteps.' Such were my words. Atala replied in a tender voice: 'My young friend, you have learned the language of the white man, it is easy to deceive an Indian girl.' 'What!' I cried, 'you call me your young friend! Ah! If a poor slave...' 'Well!' she said, leaning towards me, 'a poor slave ...' I resumed eagerly: 'Let a kiss assure you of his loyalty!' Atala heard my prayer. As a fawn appears to hang on the pink flowers of the lianas it seizes with its sensitive tongue, on the steep slopes of a mountain, so I remained suspended on the lips of my beloved.

Alas, my dear son, pain touches closely on pleasure. Who would have thought that the very instant when Atala granted me the first token of her love, would be the very one in which she would destroy my hopes? White-haired old Chactas, what was your astonishment, when the daughter of Sachem pronounced these words! 'Sweet prisoner, I foolishly yielded to your desire; but where can this passion lead us? My religion separates me from you forever ... O my mother! What is it you have done?' Atala ceased suddenly, and stifled some fatal secret that almost escaped her lips. Her words plunged me into despair. 'Well!' I cried, 'I will be as cruel as you; I will not flee. You will see me framed in fire; you will hear my groans, and you will be filled with joy.' Atala seized my hands in both of hers. 'Poor young idolater,' she cried, 'you truly stir my pity! Do you wish me to weep with all my heart? What torment that I cannot fly with you! Unfortunate was your mother's womb, O Atala! Why not throw yourself to the alligators in this river!'

At that moment, the alligators, at the approach of sunset, began to grunt and bellow.' Atala said: 'Let us leave this place.' I dragged Simaghan's daughter to the foot of the hills that formed leafy depths in thrusting their promontories into the savannah. Everything was calm and beautiful in the wilderness. The wood-stork was clattering on her nest, the forest echoed to the monotonous call of quails, the whistling of parakeets, the bellowing of bison and the neighing of the mares belonging to the Seminoles.

Our passage was all but silent. I walked at Atala's side; she held the end of the rope, I had forced her to take up once more. Sometimes we shed tears; sometimes we attempted to smile. A glance, sometimes towards the sky, sometimes fixed on the ground, an ear attentive to the song of the bird, a gesture toward the setting sun, a hand tenderly clasped, a breast in turn throbbing or tranquil, the names of Chactas and Atala softly repeated at intervals ... Oh, love's first walk together, the remembrance of you must be truly powerful, since, after so many years of misfortune, you still stir the heart of old Chactas!

How incomprehensible are mortal beings agitated by passion! I had just abandoned the generous Lopez, I had exposed myself to every danger in order to be free; yet, in an instant, a woman's glance had altered my preferences; my resolutions; my thoughts! Forgetting my country, my mother, my home, and the terrible death that awaited me, I had become indifferent to everything that was not Atala! Without the strength to cling to human reason, I had suddenly retreated into a species of childhood; and far from being able to do anything to save myself from the evils that awaited me I almost needed help in sleeping and eating!

It was in vain therefore that after our walks in the savannah, Atala, throwing herself at my feet, asked me once more to leave her. I protested that I would return to the camp alone, if she refused to bind me to the tree again. She was obliged to satisfy me, hoping to convince me at another time.

On the following day, which was to decide my fate, we halted in a valley near Cuscowilla, the capital of the Seminoles. These Indians unite with the Muscogees to form the Creek Confederacy. The daughter of that land of palm-trees came to find me in the middle of the night. She led me into a large pine forest, and renewed her entreaties to persuade me to escape. Without answering her, I took her hand in mine, and forced this enchanted doe to wander with me in the forest. The night was delightful. The Spirit of the breeze shook her azure hair, fragrant with the scent of pines, and one breathed the faint smell of amber exhaled by the alligators lying beneath the tamarinds of the river-bank. The moon shone in the midst of a spotless blue sky, and its pearl-grey light fell on the indeterminate summits of the forest. Not a sound was heard, except some distant unknown harmony that reigned in the depth of the trees: it seemed that the soul of solitude sighed throughout the whole extent of wilderness.

Among the trees, we saw a young man who, holding a torch in his hand, resembled the Spirit of Spring, traversing the forest in order to re-animate nature. It was a lover who was off to learn his fate at the hut of his mistress. If the virgin extinguishes the torch, she accepts the vows offered, if she veils herself without extinguishing it, she rejects him as a husband. The Warrior, slipping through the shadows, chanted these words in a low voice: 'I outrun the sun's footsteps on the mountain-summits, to seek my lonely dove among the forest oaks. I have hung at her neck a string of cowrie-shells; see, three red for my love; three purple for my fears; three blue ones for my hopes; Mila's eyes are like an ermine's, her hair light as a field of rice; her mouth a pink shell garnished with pearls, her two breasts are two little spotless kids, born to one mother on the same day. Let Mila quench this torch! Let her mouth cast upon it a voluptuous shade! I will render her womb fertile. The hope of the nation will hang at her fecund breast, and I will smoke my peace-pipe beside my son's cradle! Oh! Let me outrun the sun's footsteps on the summits, to seek my lonely dove among the forest oaks!'

So sang the young man, whose accents troubled the depths of my soul, and made Atala's visage pale. Our hands trembled in each other's grasp. But we were distracted from this scene, by a scene no less dangerous to us.

We passed a child's grave, which served as a boundary to two nations. It had been placed at the edge of the road, according to custom, so that young women, going to the stream, might draw the soul of the innocent creature into their breast, and return it to its homeland. We saw, at this moment, newly-wed brides who, desiring the fulfilments of motherhood, sought, with parted lips, to gather to them the soul of the little child that they conceived as wandering among the flowers. The true mother arrived next to lay a wreath of maize and white lilies on the grave. She watered the earth with her milk and, seated on the moist grass, spoke to her child in a tender voice:

'Why do I mourn for you in your cradle of earth, O my newborn? When the fledgling has grown, it must seek its food, and finds many a bitter seed in the desert. At least you did not know weeping; at least your heart has not been exposed to the devouring breath of mankind. The bud that withers in its sheath passes with all its scent, as you, O my son, with all your innocence! Happy are those who die in the cradle, who have known only a mother's smiles and kisses!'

Already captivated by our own hearts, we were overwhelmed by these images of love and motherhood, which seemed to pursue us in these enchanted solitudes. I carried Atala in my arms deep into the forest, and I spoke words that today I would seek for in vain on my lips. The south wind, my dear son, loses its heat in traversing the icy mountains. Memories of love in the heart of an old man are like the light of day reflected by the tranquil orb of the moon, when the sun has set and silence hangs over the huts of Savages.

Who could save Atala? Who could prevent her succumbing to nature? Nothing but a miracle, no doubt, and that miracle was achieved! Simaghan's daughter had recourse to the Christian God; she threw herself on the ground, and uttered a fervent prayer to her mother and the Holy Virgin. It was at this moment, O René, that I gained a marvelous understanding of that religion, which, in the forest, amidst all the hardships of life, can fill the wretched with a thousand blessings; of that religion which, opposing its power to the torrent of passion, alone suffices to defeat them, when all favours them; the secrecy of the woods; the absence of men; and the fidelity of shadows. Oh, how divine she seemed to me, the innocent Savage, the ignorant Atala, who kneeling before an old fallen pine, as at the foot of an altar, offered to her God prayers for an idolatrous lover! Her eyes, raised to the orb of night, her cheeks, shining with tears of religion and love, were of an immortal beauty. Several times it seemed to me as if she were about to take flight towards the heavens; and several times I thought I saw Spirits, descending with the moon's rays, and heard them among the branches of the trees, those Spirits that the God of the Christians sends to hermits among the rocks, when he is disposed to gather them to him. I was distressed, fearing that Atala had only a little time to spend on earth.

Yet she shed so many tears, she showed herself so wretched, that I might perhaps have consented to leave, if a war-cry had not echoed through the forest. Four armed men hurled themselves on me: we had been discovered; the warrior chieftain had given orders to pursue us.

Atala, who resembled a queen in the nobility of her carriage, disdained to speak to these warriors. She gave them a proud glance, and went to Simaghan's side. She could obtain no mercy. They redoubled my guard; they multiplied my bonds; they sent my lover away. Five nights passed, and we reached Apalachucla situated on the bank of the River Chata Uche. I was promptly crowned with flowers; they painted my face with azure and vermilion; beads were attached to my nose and ears, and they placed a chichikoué (*gourd rattle*) in my hand.

Thus prepared for the sacrifice, I entered Apalachucla, to the repeated cries of the crowd. All was over with me, when suddenly the sound of a conch was heard, and the Mico, or head Sachem of the nation, ordered them to gather round.

You know, my son, the torments to which the Indians subject prisoners of war. Christian missionaries, at the peril of their lives, and through tireless acts of charity, had succeeded, among several nations, in achieving the substitution of a milder punishment, that of slavery, for the horrors of the stake. The Muscogee had not yet adopted this custom; though a significant number had declared in its favour. It was to decide on this important matter that the Mico had summoned the Sachems. I was led to the place of their deliberations.

Not far from Apalachucla, the council house stood on an isolated mound. Three circles of columns formed the elegant architecture of this rotunda. The columns were of carved and polished cypress; they increased in height and thickness, and decreased in number, as they approached the centre, marked by a single pillar. From the top of this pillar ran strips of bark, which, passing over the top of the other columns, covered the pavilion, in the shape of a fan.

The Council assembled. Fifty aged warriors, in beaver cloaks, sat on tiers facing the door of the pavilion. The great leader was seated in their midst, holding the peace pipe, freshly painted to indicate war, in his hand. To the right of the old men, were seated fifty women wearing robes covered with swans' feathers. Warrior chieftains, tomahawk in hand, feathers in their hair, arms and chests stained with blood, sat on the left.

At the foot of the central column, the council-fire burned. The leading medicine man, surrounded by his eight sacred attendants, and dressed in long robes, adorned with an owl trophy on his head, poured sweet-gum resin into the flames, and offered a sacrifice to the sun. These triple ranks of aged men, mature women, and warriors; the priests; the clouds of incense; the sacrifice; all served to give the council an imposing appearance.

I stood there, tightly-bound, in the midst of the gathering. The sacrifice completed, the Mico began speaking, and delivered a simple explanation of the matter that had brought them together. He threw a belt of blue *wampum* beads to the floor, as a witness to the authority of what he had just said.

Then a Sachem of the tribe of the Eagle rose, and spoke thus:

'My father the Mico, Sachems, Women, Warriors of the four tribes, of Eagle, Beaver, Snake and Turtle, do not waver from the customs of our ancestors; let us burn the prisoner, not soften our

hearts. The white-man's custom that they propose to you, would only prove pernicious. Accept the red *wampum* that represents my words. I have spoken.'

And he threw a belt of red beads onto the ground.

A woman now rose and said:

'My father the Eagle, you have the mind of a fox, and the cautious slowness of a turtle. I would polish the bond of friendship with you, and together we will plant the tree of peace. But let us alter our ancestral customs, in as much as they have proved fatal. Let us have slaves to cultivate our fields, and hear no more the howls of the captive, that trouble a mother's heart. I have spoken.'

As we see the waves of the sea breaking during a storm, as the dry leaves in autumn are lifted by the whirlwind, as the reeds of the Mississippi bow and rise again at a sudden flood, as a group of elk stags bell in the depths of the forest, so the Council murmured and sounded. The Sachems, warriors, and women spoke alternately or all together. Interests conflicted, opinions were divided, the council was nearly dissolved; but finally ancient custom prevailed, and I was condemned to the stake.

Circumstance caused my punishment to be delayed; the *Festival of the Dead* or the *Feast of Souls* was due. It is the custom not to put to death any prisoner during the days devoted to this ceremony. I was closely guarded; and doubtless the Sachems removed Simaghan's daughter, as I saw no sign of her.

Meanwhile, the tribes from more than three hundred miles around were arriving in droves to celebrate the *Feast of Souls*. They had built a long-hut in a remote place. On the appointed day, each clan exhumed the remains of their fathers from their individual graves, and the skeletons were suspended, by rank and family, from the walls of the *Chamber of Communal Ancestry*. The winds, (a storm had risen) forests, and cataracts roared outside, while the elders of the various nations concluded treaties between themselves of peace and alliance beneath the bones of their fathers.

They celebrated funeral-games; foot-races; the ball-game; five-stones. Two girls tried to capture a willow-wand. Their breasts touched, their hands fluttered over the wand which they raised above their heads. Their lovely bare feet intertwined, their lips met, their sweet breath mingled, their hair flowed down and interwove; they looked towards their mothers, blushing: the crowd applauded. The medicine man invoked Michabo, the Great Hare; god of the waters. He told of the Great Hare's battles against Matchi-Manitou, the spirit of evil. He spoke of the first man, and the first woman Atahensic, cast down from heaven for loss of innocence; of the earth red with fraternal blood, her son the impious Jouskeka slaying his brother the righteous Tawiskaron; the flood descending at the command of the Great Spirit; Masso alone saved in his bark canoe, and the raven sent out to discover land; he spoke too of the beautiful Enda, rescued from the land of the spirits by her husband's sweet songs.

After these games and songs, they prepared to grant their forefathers an eternal burial place. On the banks of the River Chata Uche, stood a wild fig tree consecrated to the popular religion. The

young girls were accustomed to wash their bark cloaks in this place and expose them to the breezes of the wilderness, under the branches of this ancient tree. It was there that a huge grave had been dug. They left the funeral chamber, singing a hymn to the dead; each family carrying some sacred relic. They reached the grave, and lowered the relics into it, which were spread out in layers, separated by bear and beaver pelts. The grave-mound rose steadily, and on it was planted the *Tree of Tears and Sleep*.

Let us have pity for mankind, my dear son! These same Indians whose customs were so touching; these same women who testified to so tender an interest in me, now, with loud cries, demanded punishment be exacted on me; and entire tribes delayed their departure for the pleasure of seeing a young man suffer dreadful torment.

In a valley to the north, some distance from the Grand Village, a grove of cypress and pine trees rose, called the *Grove of Blood*. It was reached via the remains of one of these monuments of whose origin we know nothing, being the work of a people now forgotten. At the centre of this wood, lay an open space, where they sacrificed prisoners of war. They lead me there in triumph. All was ready for my death: they had planted there the stake dedicated to Areskouï (*the war-god*); pines, elms, and cypresses fell beneath the axe;

the pyre rose higher; the spectators constructed an amphitheatre from branches, and trunks of trees. Each devised a torment: one proposed taking my scalp, another to scorch my eye sockets with heated hatchets. I commenced my death chant.

'I do not fear torture: I am brave, O Muscogees, I defy you! I despise you as less than women. Outalissi, my father, the son of Miscou, drank from the skulls of your most famous warriors; you will draw not one sigh from my heart.'

Provoked by my song, a warrior pierced my arm with an arrow; I said: 'Brother, I thank you.'

Despite the efforts of the executioners, the preparations for my sacrifice could not be completed before sunset. They consulted the medicine man who forbade their disturbing the Spirits of the shades, and my death was therefore delayed until the next day. But in their impatience to enjoy the spectacle, and to be ready all the sooner at daybreak, the Indians did not quit the *Grove of Blood*; they lit great fires and began feasting and dancing.

I, however, was stretched out on my back. Ropes extending from my neck, legs, and arms were attached to stakes driven into the ground. Warriors lay down on the ropes, and I could not make a move, without their being warned. The night advanced: the songs and dances ceased by degrees; the fires gave off no more than a reddish glow, before which could be seen the shadows of various Savages as they passed; all slept; as the noise of men died away, that of the wilderness increased, and to the tumult of voices succeeded the moans of the wind in the forest.

It was the hour when a young Indian woman, who has just become a mother, wakes with a start in the middle of the night, because she thinks she has heard the cries of her first-born demanding sweet nourishment. Eyes fixed on the heavens, where a crescent moon wandered among the clouds, I reflected on my fate. Atala seemed to me a monster of ingratitude. To abandon me at the

moment of my execution, I who had devoted myself to the flames rather than leave her! And yet I felt that I still loved her, and would die joyfully for her.

There is in extreme pleasure, a pang that awakens us, as if to warn us to enjoy the fleeting moment; in the greatest pain, on the contrary, some heaviness sends us to sleep; eyes wearied with weeping naturally seek to close, and the goodness of Providence makes itself evident in the midst of our misfortunes. I yielded, despite myself, to that heavy sleep which the wretched sometimes taste. I dreamed that the ropes were removed; I seemed to feel that relief one experiences when, after being strongly bound, a helping hand loosens our chains.

This sensation became so intense, that it encouraged me to raise my eyelids. By the moonlight, a ray of which escaped between two clouds, I saw a tall white figure bending over me, and occupied in silently unravelling my bonds. I was about to cry out, when a hand, which I instantly recognized, closed my mouth. A single rope remained, but it seemed impossible to cut, without waking a warrior who covered it entirely with his body. Atala reached out her hand to it, the warrior half-awakened, raised himself from the ground. Atala was motionless, watching him. The Indian thought he was dreaming of a ghost among the ruins; he lay down again, closing his eyes and invoking his Manitou. The knot was untied. I rose; I followed my deliverer, who placed the tip of a bow in my hand while grasping its other extremity. But what dangers surrounded us! Sometimes we were near to striking against sleeping Indians; sometimes a guard challenged us, and Atala replied in an assumed voice. Children were crying, dogs barking. Scarcely had we emerged from the fatal enclosure when howls shook the forest. The camp woke, a thousand lights were lit; Savages with torches were seen running from all sides; and we flung ourselves headlong on our way.

When dawn broke over the Appalachians, we were already far away. What was my happiness when I found myself once again in the solitude with Atala, Atala my deliverer, Atala who gave herself to me forever! Words failed my tongue; I fell to my knees; and I said to Simaghan's daughter: 'Men are such little things, but when the Spirits visit them, then they are less than nothing. You are a spirit, you have visited me, and I can not speak before you.' Atala gave me her hand with a smile: 'I had to accompany you', she said, 'since you could not escape without me. Tonight, I won over the medicine man with gifts, I made your tormentors drunk with fire-water, and I must venture my life for you, since you were ready to relinquish yours for me. Yes, young idolater,' she added in a tone which frightened me, 'the sacrifice will be reciprocal.'

Atala gave me the weapons she had taken care to bring; then she bandaged my wound. In cleaning it with a morsel of papaya, she moistened it with her tears. 'This is a balm,' I said 'that you apply to my wound.' 'I fear lest it may not prove a poison,' she replied. She tore one of the veils from her breast, from which she first made a compress, fastening it with a lock of her hair.

That intoxication which incapacitates the Indians for some length of time, and is for them a kind of illness, doubtless prevented them from following us at first. If they sought us later, it is likely they did so towards the west, convinced that we had tried to reach the Mississippi; but we had followed the direction of the Pole star, directing our path by the moss growing on the tree-trunks.

We were not long in realising that we had gained little by my deliverance. The wilderness now revealed its immeasurable solitudes to us. Inexperienced in forest life, diverted from our true path, and moving at random, what would become of us? Often, in gazing at Atala, I remembered that ancient story of Hagar, that Lopez had read to me, she who had wandered in the desert of Beersheba, long ago, when men lived three times as long as the oak-tree.

Atala made me a cloak from the inner bark of an ash-tree, since I was virtually naked. She embroidered moccasins of muskrat skin, using a porcupine bristle. I took care in turn of her adornment. Sometimes I would put on her head a wreath of the blue mallows we found on our route in abandoned Indian cemeteries; sometimes I made her necklaces from the red seedpods of azaleas; and then I would take to smiling, in contemplating her marvellous beauty.

When we encountered a river, we would cross on a raft or by swimming. Atala would support herself with a hand on my shoulder; and like two wandering swans, we traversed the solitary waves.

Often in the intense heat of day, we sought shelter under the mossy cedars. Almost all the trees in Florida, especially cedar and live-oak, are covered with a white moss (*tillandsia usneoides*: *Spanish moss*) that reaches from their branches to the ground. When at night, by moonlight, you see on the bare savannah an isolated oak clothed in this drapery you might imagine it to be a ghost, trailing its long veils behind it. The scene is no less picturesque in broad daylight; for a host of butterflies, brilliant flies, hummingbirds, green parakeets, and blue jays, cling to these mosses, which produce the effect of a white wool tapestry on which some European weaver has embroidered insects and glittering birds.

It was in the shade of these smiling inns, prepared by the Great Spirit, that we rested. When the winds descended from heaven to sway our great cedar, so that the aerial castle built among its branches was set afloat along with the birds and travellers sleeping in their shelter; so that a thousand sighs rose from the corridors and vaults of our moving edifice; not even the wonders of the ancient world could approach that monument of the wilderness.

Every night we lit a large fire, and we built a shelter, of bark raised on four stakes. If I had killed a wild turkey, a pigeon, or a wood-cock, we suspended it before the oak-wood fire, at the end of a thin pole planted in the ground, and we gave to the wind the task of turning the hunter's prey. We ate the lichens called *tripe-de-roche*, the bark of sweet birch, and may-apples, which have a peach and raspberry taste. Black walnuts, maples, and sumach, provided wine for our table. Sometimes I would seek, among the reeds, a plant (*sarracenia flava*; *the yellow pitcher plant*) whose flower, an elongated cone, contained a glass of the purest dew. We blessed Providence which, in the soft stem of a flower, had placed this clear spring among the noisome marshes, as it had set hope in the depths of hearts sickened with grief, as it had made virtue spring from the breast amidst the miseries of life.